

Throughout my writing life, I have been haunted by a character called “God,” feeling compelled to recount his fantasies, adventures, and mishaps. Whether shrewd observer or feckless spectator, shady ventriloquist or seedy voyeur, omnipotent invalid or crass Boss, he is a protean figure whose transformations reveal “a universe riddled/with insatiable sinkholes and inexhaustible sources.”

The two poems that appear in the current issue of the *Notre Dame Review* are recent additions to this series. “The Gig,” which appears below, is an earlier “God” poem.

The Gig

Attired in a tuxedo, God
Stood with the microphone snaking into
His hand and a mane of blow-dried hair
Crowning His countenance, and crooned
Unctuous love-songs to the vast
Audience while His brilliant cuffs
Kissed the air like the wings of angels
And waiters circulated, abiding
Always by the Second Law.
It had been like this since the beginning
Of the gig—just once had He spurned the mike,
Dropped the bullshit, and sung like Caruso,
Whose voice He had always wanted to be.
Otherwise it was Las Vegas tempo,
With the audience being born and dying,
Kids collapsing from fatigue
And marrying a few years later,
And always the cheap love-songs plying
Their ears—so ubiquitous they didn’t
Even listen, said there was no singer,
Claimed not to be an audience.
After all, the back-up band was less
Manifest than the woodwork, muter
Than the music of the spheres. So people
Habituated God’s pleading insistence
Haplessly camouflaged under this organized
Disorganization called nature.
And who is God anyway? He has been
Around as you can see by the bulge
Under the cummerbund, and His face
Radiates the false and gorgeous
Glow of perpetual middle-aged youth,
His song a seduction which disavows

Itself in the singing. I can imagine
Him at the end of the show pretending
To be gratified, coming out for the last
Curtain call while a gaggle of ladies
Clap the joke to oblivion.

[from *Early/Late: New and Selected Poems* (Salmon, 2011)]