



## **Section 1: A Survey of English Poetry**

### **Chapter 2: Parodies Regained**

## A Few Edgy Adages

*“Important writer”*: one good enough to become the model for the next generation's bad writers.

*Bad poetry is like bad cooking: Just add significance, heat and stir.*

*“Words fail me,” said a poet, failing words.*

*Poetry is often stilted, as each bard tries to stand tall above the runts of the literate.*

*Thou shalt not bear false wittiness, nor shalt thou bear false with-it-ness.*

*“Pen” from penna, a feather. We kill something that flies to make our implement for borrowed flight. (And it requires PLUCK!)*

*a poet is one who is too busy punctuating silences, dawns and twilights to remember to punctuate sentences*

*“Darted a look” — I remember that — used to be a metaphor!*

*Most poetry is environmentally sound, using only recycled words and ideas. My own words are particularly recycled — I've had to eat most of them.*

*Charging a machine gun — OK, sometimes that's necessary; but what's brave about walking blindly onto a busy freeway? Too many poets use words like “infinity” and “soul” that way. Such words are to be used heroically, against the odds, or not at all and definitely not just because the poet doesn't realize he's stumbled out onto millennia of heavy traffic.*

*Out of a poem drops with a CLUNK a heavy word — sounded like a “destiny” or “infinity” — but the poem grinds on in first gear, the only one remaining.*

*Infinity — a word spun of fine silver wire beaded with ice, slippery path for a desperate tight-rope walker over the abyss or for an abysmal poet.*

*Stock still, stark naked, dead right, 10 p.m. sharp, 10 p.m flat, flat out, bloody well, plum loco, high noon...Welcome to the land of lost metaphors.*

*It isn't true that recognition comes to a great poet only long after he's dead. Sometimes they kill him right AFTER they recognize him.*

*Confucius say, artist who use technique as protective shell becomes egg that must be broken to make omelet.*

## Chapter 2 Parodies Regained

*Our poems are plucked from the sky as in huge flocks ideas pass overhead.  
Sometimes we misfire or shoot down only a few dead leaves, often bring home  
a wooden sentiment, having mistaken for the real thing one of our own  
decoys.*

Now that you've completed the mini-horse-to-water-survey-of-English-lit course, here's a batch of parodies unconnected by theme. They do share an alphabet, a language, an author (me) and, I hope, a reader (you).

Satire (par-odious) is often confused with parody. They overlap, but parody is more often an affectionate gesture. We always mock the things we love. Or is it we always love the things we kill? But one reader DID ask me, isn't it possible that all these parodies are just sour grapes — my growing cynicism as my own serious poems fall upon deaf ears? I suppose it would be harder for a poem to fall upon someone's ear (deaf or not) if the poet didn't first put the listener to sleep, since a reclined head offers a much larger ear-surface to fall upon. But I digress. My answer to that reader was:

### **And You Can Put These Words In Stone — Or In Nickel!**

Readers are so finical —  
Here I've reached the pinnacle  
Of genius bold and unigual,  
Yet with quibbles quite rabbinical  
They're finding that I'm "cynical".  
I'm NOT — that's unequivocal!  
Reader, your case is clinical,  
Your ear for irony tinnical,  
To think — to *think ME* cynical!

However, satire is all too often acidified by a trace of sour grapes. Some satirists are, indeed, sour grapists:

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### **To a Young Satirist (Whose Youth Goes Harshly On)**

He has loosed the leerful fright'ning  
Of his terr'ble Swiftian sword;  
He is trampling out the vintage  
Where his sour grapes are stored.  
As he vies to make men silly,  
Let us try not to be bored:  
Uncouth, he crashes on.

Gory story, we out-grew ya.  
Hoary bore, we hardly knew ya.  
Sorry mores — what's it to ya?  
Half-truth goes marching on!

Can you make a living writing parodies? Palindromically speaking, the answer is: Parody? Do rap.

But enough about — uh — me. Here are some devious meddlings with poets who never should have entrusted their delicate devices to my evil ears. First: another variation on that anonymous 15th Century lyric, (Western Wind, when wilt thou blow — the small rain down can rain? Christ! If my love were in my arms and I in my bed again) (Or put the question mark after “blow” — it works both ways.)

### **Mid-Evil Earache**

Long-winded guest, when wilt thou blow?  
The small-talk out is talked.  
Christ! If my smile were off my face,  
And thou out my door had walked.

Next, a fresh look at Shakespeare's “Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?” This newly discovered version (with a much tighter rhyme scheme than his other sonnets, a felicity he was unable to sustain, apparently) may clarify the much discussed question of Shakespeare's sexual preferences. The title, which includes an allusion to “apples and oranges,” suggests that certain things are beyond comparison:

### **Apples And/Or Angels**

Shall I compare thee to a guy named Fred?  
Less hair hast thou upon thy floppier chest,

Thy calves, thy underarms and all the rest —  
Except the ropy stuff atop thy head  
(Not more, but merely longer, truth be said),  
And densely nestled in thy nether nest —  
There art thou more...or less? Which way is best?  
I cannot say which is the best in bed —  
Ne'er have I bedded Fred; I can but say  
That when dark shades have shut the eye of day,  
If I must lie with someone — all undressed,  
I'd rather bump the baldness of thy breast  
Than guzzle booze and burp with hirsute Fred.  
If this be error, who'll care when I'm dead?

The next sonnet is a medley, with line one taken from Milton's "On His Blindness," while the last eight lines toy with the end of Shakespeare's "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes": "Haply [by chance] I think of thee, and then my state,/ Like to the lark at break of day arising/ From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate:/ For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings/ That then I scorn to change my state with kings."

#### **Sonnet For Poets Who Write For Themselves Alone**

When I consider how my days are spent  
Considering how my days are spent, I wonder  
If I perchance should rather think to ponder  
How first my days were earned or perhaps lent  
Me to improve upon by interlarding  
Them with fine thoughts like these and thoughts of thought?  
Then my thoughts turn to thee — and so they ought  
If I'm to do a standard bit of barding —  
And then, like to the lark at break of day,  
I all alone behold my giddy state:  
There's no one list'ning; Why should I not prate  
Instead of ponder? Alone, I dare to say  
I think I am the one who thinks these things —  
But must risk scorn to state my trade with kings!

Next, just a friendly nod to Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins to Make Much of Time," which begins, "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,/ Old time is still a-flying:/ And this same flower that smiles today/ Tomorrow will be dying." It's a poem that's telling people to hurry, an easy horse-to-water conversion — TOO easy, for I'm a proud parodist.

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### Optimize Career Potential While The Sun Shines

Gather ye rosebuds as you may...  
But will it enhance your résumé?

Here are three parodies of John Donne's "Holy Sonnets," each followed by Donne's original. One of them, "Death be not Proud," is also among the victims of Horse-to-Water madness.

### Don't Let Hard Butter Get Your Goat

Butter your bread, impatient child, for you  
As yet but jab, scrape, clot — then slop on jelly,  
Little of which shall ever reach your belly,  
Dripping, instead, upon your shirt, your shoe  
From rents your earnest buttering tore through  
In your rough haste to get back to the telly  
Before commercial's end — poor loaf, from deli  
But this morning bought, whole, fragrant, new...  
Worse yet, your gelid butter clumps in chunks,  
Some bread bits slabbed and smothered, others bare.  
Rather would I, a savage, tear off hunks  
To sop up sauce, than taste such shoddy fare!  
O thaw thy butter that it gently spread,  
Nor gash nor rashly gouge thy willing bread!

### How Donne done it:

*Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine and seek to mend;  
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new.  
I, like a usurpt town, to another due,  
Labor to admit you, but Oh, to no end;  
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captived and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved faine,<sup>1</sup>  
But am betrothed unto your enemy:  
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.*

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<sup>1</sup> "Faine": fain or gladly, as in "Wouldst fain feign a faint, fair femme?"

**Not Goodbye, but Good Buy!**

Beth, be not cowed, though swept from bargain table  
By swarms of fellow shoppers — if you lose  
One blouse, find others; look long ere you choose:  
Buy not, poor Beth, 'til you have read the label;  
What though raw silk stir jealousy in Mabel  
If it won't fit? Buy only what you'll use:  
Who shops impatiently, at leisure rues.  
Hold thy heart calm and shrewd amidst this Babel.  
But no! Eyes glazed — and not with drugs, nor sleep,  
Which but the pictures be of shopper's lust,  
Deaf to your husband's pleas — in whims thy trust!  
No slave art thou to notions of dear and cheap;  
Patch not nor dye old frocks, but let them lie:  
For Beth shall dye no more; Beth, thou shalt buy.

Note: Bob Dylan later summarized the importance of getting your Christmas shopping done early as follows: He who is not born a busy bee is dizzy buying.<sup>2</sup>

For “Death Be Not Proud,” see the Donne section of the horse-to-water chapter. (p. 10).

**John Donne Sets The Corset Of Feminism**

At the round girth's imagined flatness, TUG!  
You strumpet handmaids, and arise, arise  
From dress, you numb, braless (infinite tease!)<sup>3</sup>  
Soft doves, popped upward by the corset's hug,  
You whom rude men dismiss as tit, boob, jug,  
You by whom knights, priests, boys with woeful sighs  
Claim to be slain, claim once you've filled their eyes,  
They've beheld God! OOF! pull those stays...OUCH! UGH!...  
But let them loll, girls, and me moon a space,  
For if, beyond my boobs, my buns abound,  
Unbound, they'll bound — a bun dance of my grace!  
Unstay me — why make flat what's jolly round?  
Touch me! I'll be unpent! Loose is not lewd!\*  
BURN corsets, bras! I'm in a muu-muu mood!

\* *Variant: Why pinch so tight when looseness is as good?*

<sup>2</sup> Actually, “He who is not busy being born is busy dying” from Dylan's Xmas song, “The Dimes, They are A-jangling.”

<sup>3</sup> “Infinite tease” — and in fine nighties.

**How Donne do'd it, and in valid diction, too,  
one forbidding morning<sup>4</sup>**

*At the round earth's imagined corners, blow  
Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise  
From death, you numberless infinities  
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,  
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,  
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,  
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you whose eyes  
Shall behold God and never taste death's woe.  
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,  
For, if above all these my sins abound,  
'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace  
When we are there; here on this lowly ground,  
Teach me how to repent; for that's as good  
As if thou'dst sealed my pardon, with thy blood.*

Thank you, John — we, too, have donne with you.

**Apathy**

They flee from me who only stand and wait.

That was a one-line collaboration between Sir Thomas Wyatt and John Milton. Wyatt's great poem begins "They flee from me..." (his women). Milton's sonnet on his blindness ends "They also serve who only stand and wait." That sonnet may be found in chapter one. Wyatt is especially known for his encounter with Henry VIII, who, as usual, was gorging himself and burping. Seeing the poet, he said, "Wyatt...URP!" which inspired that great TV theme song, "Wyatt...URP" (brave, courageous and bold...long may his story be told...).

One more shot at Milton's "On His Blindness" (p. 11)— this time the plaintive prayer of a girl afraid to surf (and win the guys) because she can't swim (not one of the swimmin' women):

**A Shallow Prayer**

"Dear Lord, I cannot swim. My surfer buddies  
Mock me, even Joe, who's such a stud — he's

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<sup>4</sup> Judgment Day, the subject of this sonnet, would qualify as a forbidding morning. A famous Donne poem is entitled "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning." A "valediction" is a goodbye, which shows that my parody of "Death be not Proud" is most aptly titled ("Not Goodbye...").

Really rad! But, Damn! My dullsville days  
Are spent in shallows or in catching rays!"  
"My child, be patient — someday you'll get laid:  
They also surf who only stand and wade."

A few lines that Richard Lovelace might have written, loved he not honor more:

### **Cellular Studies**

Stone walls do not a prism make,  
Nor iron bars a gauge.  
A scientist in prison seldom  
Makes a living wage.

### **Resolution And Independence**

*[A Wordsworth title, here borrowed to parody Burns]*

Or: **Fling Out The Old**

Should auld acquaintance be forgot  
And never brought to mind?  
Nay! I'll remember all that lot  
And leave them all behind.

I'll leave them all behind,  
And ne'er be taken blind:  
I'll spot their unkind mugs afar  
And cross the street in time.

### **Red Itch The Rashes, O**

My love is like a red red rose,  
Her days spent in a bed;  
Her thorns abound, for in her grows  
Many a prick, it's said.

Her hair's like petals — falling out;  
She sweetly sheds her clothes.  
Her reek draws buzzing bugs — no doubt  
My love is like a rose.

A nasty Take on Burns' song "A Red Red Rose," which is in chapter one. He who lies with such a woman may well exclaim, later, "It burns!"

Here's one inspired by S. T. Coleridge's lyrical fragment, "Kubla Khan." The title, "Kubla Befrands a Dolly," alludes to an old T.V. show called "Kukla,

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Fran and Ollie.” Fran was a pretty girl, Kukla and Ollie puppets. This has nothing to do with anything, but I do want to do my bit to keep future generations of grad. students busy.

### **Kubla Befrands A Dolly**

or: **Was His Mount A Bore — Ah?**

or: **I Think I Khan! I Think I Khan!**

Though you’d think one kind word from a glorious emperor would  
turn a maiden’s heart to pudding — or at least her  
pudenda,  
One word from Kubla Khan wouldn’t da,  
Because Kubla would always put his foot in’t,  
So the women agreed that Kubla Khan couldn’t,  
And though he begged and flattered and assailed them with gifts,  
prayers, raves and rants,  
He couldn’t get into their short thick pants;  
But after restoring his courage in taverns measureless to man  
(Where ceaselessly from bottles booze for sots with halph a  
scarred liver ran),  
He would try again, his pitch getting fulsomer and fulsomer,  
Until, though he never heated a single damsel to a full boil, he  
did at last get a damsel with a dull simmer.

Clearly, then, Khan of Xanadu was not a Khan-du sort of guy. In the preceding poem, “Mount A Bore — Ah?” refers to Coleridge’s Mt. Aborah; the “short thick pants” are actually in the original (but strangely changed in the process of transplanting them to my poem); “taverns measureless to man” are “caverns...” ditto; “halph [half] a scarred liver” is a miraculous reincarnation of Alph, the sacred river; and the “dull simmer” started out as a dulcimer. I hope I have properly insulted the intelligence of those of you (both of you) who knew all this already.

Now for two variants of the following passage from Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (no relationship to Silas Mariner<sup>5</sup>):

*Water, water, everywhere,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink.*

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<sup>5</sup> Silas Mariner is really Silas Marner, title character of a novel by George Eliot, who is really Mary Ann Evans, a great English novelist who is really rather boring. Rather, boring, describes a famous newscaster at work.

Here are the variants (the first of which is wildly incorrect, politically, but be assured that no actual Italians or obese women have been maimed, spindled or mutilated during the making of this book):

**Rime of the Ancient Marinara**

Who'd wed a wench wide as a mare  
Giuseppe could not think:  
"O Daughter! Daughter everywhere,  
Nor any Wop to Wink!"

**On Wishing I Could Hold One With My Eye<sup>6</sup>**

Waiters among the tables fare —  
Only from ours they shrink:  
Waiter, waiter everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink!

Now we turn over a new (or green) leaf, that is, John Greenleaf Whittier, whose old gray head shall not be spared here, alas (he said):

**A Whittier Version**

Penn, Brigham Young and M.I.T.  
Vie for Ben Franklin's library:

The Institute of Tech bids high —  
O hear the losing scholars cry:  
"The saddest words of Young or Penn  
Are these four words: 'MIT might have Ben.' "

A bit strained - doesn't work unless you pronounce it "M - I -T" in line one and "mitt" in line six. Well Damn MIT!  
Poe's raven made some shrewd political predictions:

**A Gory Tale — Not for the Craven**

On a midnight dark and dreary,  
While I pondered weak and weary  
Over many a quaint and curious column of  
spin-doctored lore —

<sup>6</sup> This is how the Ancient Mariner "holds" the wedding guest still long enough to tell the guest his story. An eye, beaming at you, can exert considerable force. In fact, eye-beams are used as girders in building construction.

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At last, grown sick of theory,  
To an expert I made query:  
“Say will ‘02’ be merry for the Democrats once more?”  
Quoth the maven, “Never Gore!”

Here’s a lovely Emily Dickinson poem, followed by the destruction...er, deconstruction thereof:

*I heard a fly buzz when I died.  
The stillness in the room  
Was like the stillness in the air  
Between the heavens of storm.*

*The eyes around had wrung them dry,  
And breaths were gathering firm  
For that last onset when the king  
Be witnessed in the room.*

*I willed my keepsakes, signed away  
What portion of me be  
Assignable; and then it was  
There interposed a fly*

*With blue uncertain stumbling buzz  
Between the light and me;  
And then the windows failed; and then  
I could not see to see.*

That’s what Emily said. Here’s what I said, feeling the fly deserved equal time:

### **No Flies on Emily!**

I heard a bard die when I buzzed.<sup>7</sup>  
The stilling of her yapping  
Was like the stilling of the air  
Before the swatter’s slapping.

My thousand eyes each lit with joy:  
“This lady isn’t napping!  
She’ll give my maggots a good home...”  
And then two hands came clapping!

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<sup>7</sup> Wanted: A one-syllable synonym for “bardess.” How about “byrd?”

I dodged the mourners, zipped away  
From hands hot to mishandle;  
The thunder fell behind — and then  
There interposed a candle

With blue-tinged flickering spear of flame  
'Twixt door and me, ungentle.<sup>8</sup>  
Then on singed back I twitched and knew  
No maggots would I dandle.

A friend suggested an alternate title: “Flies for Miss Emily” — aping Faulkner’s story title, “Roses for Miss Emily.” Since the fly in my poem “zipped away” until sternly stopped and turned by candle into a brown study, we could say that the candle unzipped a fly, something our Miss Emily, apparently, never did (unzip de doodah). (Did they have zippers then?)

No one seems to read Landor these days, but he’s pure gold for a parodist:

**Walter’s Savage Can-dor (based on “Rose Aylmer”)**

Ah, what avails the septic tank,  
Ah, what the new flush toilet!  
What though it swirl away what’s rank  
Ere oily *merde* can soil it!

Ah, what the pebbled window pane  
That greets the foiled gaper!  
Thy lush appointments — all in vain  
Without the toilet paper!

“Rose Aylmer” by Walter Savage Landor, begins “Ah, what avails the sceptor race,/ Ah, what the form divine!” and so on: See page 29.

It was Tennyson who said “’Tis better to have loved and lost than ne’er have loved at all.” Of course, what he *really* meant (like any true poet) was, ‘Tis better to have loved and lost than to have loved and *not* lost. (Count the poems, folks: It’s “lost love is sweeter far” by a landslide!)

Lust is nettles, ashes, dust,  
The shame of Adam’s fall,  
Yet better to have love and lust  
Than ne’er have love at all.

<sup>8</sup> For a niftier rhyme, the candle interposes “Between my genes and Mendel” but Mendel experimented with fruit flies, not big blue flies. Also with beans, but not human beans.

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This next poem is a famous quatrain from Ed Fitzgerald's "Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam" ("A loaf of bread, a jug of wine and thou...") as it might have been rewritten by Ogden Nash ("Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker").

### Ogden Khayyam

Paradise  
Is vera nice,  
But a jug of wine, a  
Loaf and Thou is fina.

*[I wrote a funnier version that includes an ancient early adolescent rhyme ("nothing could be fina than to be in your va..."), but I withhold it out of no-longer-so-common decency.]*

Shall we deconstruct Robert Frost? Press the defrost button:

### Stopping by Langley\* on an Autumn Day

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
The sign says "U.S. Government,"  
(Both Central and Intelligent)  
"NO TRESPASSING". But I must go...  
I hope no watcher thinks it strange  
To see me pause in spy-glass range  
To watch these woods fill up with leaves  
Behind which, covertly, who weaves  
What woeful webs? My little car  
Starts with a jerk. I can't go far  
Enough from here, to where the woods  
Do not conceal our neighbor hoods,  
Where we make promises we keep  
And at day's end serenely sleep,  
Miles from these men who cannot sleep,  
Miles from these men who cannot sleep.

\*Wooded home of the CIA

Here's another inspired by the same original (excerpted in the horse-to-water chapter):

### Whose Sleep is This?

So much I would do if I could —  
The promises that I would keep!

I would be slim! I would be good...  
The woulds are lovely, dark and deep.

Sleep and responsibilities await, arms akimbo and tapping their feet, but Frost is often tempted to stray into the deep and lovely woods, as in that other famous poem, beginning “Two legs diverged in a mellow mood...”<sup>9</sup>

Please, can I take another little jab at Prufrock — I mean, Eliot — just one?

### **Feathers Under the Light**

Because of the duck,  
because of the duck’s webbed feet,  
because you know the duck’s webbed feet  
are not for you,  
in the long agony of a pudding’s pout  
sunlight loses its name,  
and these eyes that meet your eyes in ducks,  
peeking or peeping perilously,<sup>10</sup>  
weaving in a waddling way among us  
in the room where we come and go,  
stalking raspberry Jell-O,  
eyes you have known in pigeons,  
button you up.

Oh! Just one more, I really mean it this time! — a really little one?

### **Diet Tribe**

In the room the women come and go,  
Talking of rye, kale and Jell-O.

Why do Prufrock’s women talk only of Michelangelo? Why couldn’t they suffer just a teensy from quinsy from shouting about Leonardo Da Vinci?

William Carlos Williams wrote a little poem that is supposed to be a note left in his host’s refrigerator explaining that he ate the plums and they were delicious. Would anyone read poems by Bill Williams? Or Bill Bills? W. C.’s (Water closet’s?) day job was doctor. His doctor bills were, therefore, Bill Bill’s bills. Williams was staunchly against un-American rhyme and meter in our poetry. They required too much care. He preferred to be Carlos. Here’s a variation on W. C.’s poem:

<sup>9</sup> Frost wrote, of course, about two ROADS diverging in a yellow wood, not a mellow mood. But we Freudians know what he was REALLY thinking of...

<sup>10</sup> When the Chinese shifted their spelling from Peiping to Peking, Peeping duck became Peeking duck. But Tom (Thomas S. Eliot?) still lives in Peiping.

### Why the Election is Canceled

Just a note to say that,  
finding the bag where you left it  
in the fridge, I, to be candid, ate  
the candied dates. What's left  
is the pits.

If you didn't see the word "candidate" twice in the above poem, please reread. And take two presidential aspirins (aspirants?) and call me in the morning.

Dorothy Parker alleged that men don't make passes at girls who wear glasses. I feel this needs qualification, as it depends on what sort of glasses they are wearing:

### On the Goggled Not Being Ogled

Men who don't make passes  
At girls who wear glasses  
Often commit sexist offenses  
Against girls who wear contact lenses  
And conduct panty raids  
Against cool chicks in shades.  
Though teachers with lenses frosted  
Are seldom hall-accosted,<sup>11</sup>  
Never spake a prince "Nay"  
To a dame in *pince nez*;  
But the fate of femmes monocled,  
Has not been chronocled.

The next 15 poems or so (it's late at night — the number changes with each count) pay tribute to a much maligned poem, "Trees", by Joyce Kilmer (excerpted in the horse-to-water chapter of this book). It's an easy poem to tear apart, but just as political cartoonists loved Ronald Reagan, so any parodist worth his or her salt or saltess must adore Joyce Kilmer (and Edgar Allan Poe, especially "The Raven"). To write badly is easy. To write MEMORABLY badly is a gift. The greatest bad poems are, indeed, greatly bad. Try, for

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<sup>11</sup> Every serious poet needs a Holocaust allusion or two. I shouldn't joke about such things. Even now, a spokesman for the Anti-Defamation League is issuing a statement that starts: "Auschwitz his head!" I can ALMOST get away with this because I'm Jewish. But not quite. To really get away with joking about the Holocaust, you have to have died in it first. Perhaps there are some things that should not be laughed at — that's possible. What's for certain is that people who tell people what can't be laughed at should be laughed at.

example, to write a line as luciously bad as “I think that I shall never see....” It has that twisty lilt (much like Keats’s “When I have fears that I may cease to be”), that somber modulation of the beat, and yet...and yet... — something there is in “Trees” that seduces the parodist in me.

First, here is an unnatural liaison of Joyce Kilmer’s “Tree’s” with Alan Ginsberg’s “Howl” (they alternate lines) — one poem where Mr. Kilmer gets to have the last word — in fact, the last 4 lines:

**There Be Howls In Them Trees**

I think that I shall never see  
The best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving  
hysterical naked ranting Plotinus and Zen disjointedly,  
For good minds do not get their kicks  
From dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn  
looking for an angry fix,  
Good minds who think it rather trite  
To burn for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo  
in the machinery of night,  
For even graduating has  
Less pretentiousness than poverty and tatters and, hollow-eyed  
and high, sitting up smoking in the supernatural darkness of  
coldwater flats floating across the tops of cities  
contemplating jazz;  
Good minds can end a poem or line,  
Not feeling impelled to ramble on endlessly as if waiting for a  
Muhammadan angel under the el to give them a Heavenly sign —  
For only TOUGH minds can go free,  
As even fools like me can see,  
And only an LSD-addled tripster  
Would ever confuse a good mind with an angel-headed hipster.

Who would have expected that crossing Ginsberg with Kilmer would give birth to Ogden Nash! Do poets breed true? Do our mongrel descendents all eventually become Nash hash?

Three years before publishing T. S. Eliot’s “Prufrock”, *POETRY* published that equally clarion call for a new poetry, “Trees”:

**To *POETRY*, In 1912 As Now**

I think that I shall never see  
So fine a line of poetry  
As this: “I think that I shall never  
See” — though often I endeavor  
To craft a line so coyly stilted

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(Whose bloom the decades have not wilted!) —  
A line that soars from humble “think”  
To proud “I shall” in half a wink,  
But pride must fall — how suddenly  
We’re plunged into dark “never see”! —  
A line from blue-veined marble hacked,  
So round, so firm, so fully packed!<sup>12</sup> —  
A line chock full of solemn twist,  
So pale of brow, so limp of wrist! —  
O Kilmer, shall we see a line  
Ever again as fine as thine? —  
O greater Joyce,<sup>13</sup> we thee implore!  
“I think,” quoth Kilmer, “never more!  
For only mocking comes from thee...  
Whose point I think I’ll NEVER see!  
Why should a fool be made of me?  
For such long notoriety  
Blame God, the age and *Poetry*.”

### Motive Force

I think that I shall never hear it —  
An engine that can run on spirit,  
Spirit that moves mysterious ways  
And even over ashen days,  
As sunlight veins the torrent’s maze,  
So spirit heightens where it plays;  
While oil’s an ooze of ancient creatures  
Crushed by earth like kids by teachers.  
Ah, fuels are made of fools like us  
While only spirit can raise up dust.

### Only God can Make a Tree, but any Mutt can Make Water

Though I write poems in every season,  
I think that I shall never see, Son,  
A poem as lovely as a tree, Son;  
And though poems prosper, yet there’s reason

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<sup>12</sup> “So round, so firm, so fully packed” was a slogan for Lucky Strike cigarettes, not for brassieres or Jockey shorts. What did guys and gals think they were smoking?

<sup>13</sup> The implied lesser Joyce is James Joyce. I’m assuming that genteel Joyce K., had he survived WWI to encounter rude and rollicking *Ulysses*, would have found it less lovely, even, than crab grass. I have Kilmer’s admirers here address him as the greater Joyce because I assume they share his tastes in trees and literature.

None dare call a poem a tree, Son,<sup>14</sup>  
For even scribbling fools like me, Son,  
Would not make what each dog pees on.

**Milton On His Blindness:**

I think  
that I shall  
never  
see

**This Poem Is Hip...NOT! (Ick!) [i.e., hypnotic]**

I think that I shall ever drone  
On endlessly in monotone,  
For poetry should make us sleep  
With its hypnotic steady creep  
That best can make us do and see  
What we are told agreeably.  
Thus hypnotism is my game —  
Each syllable more of the same.  
My voice is heavy, and your eyelids  
Start to droop like shrinking violids.  
Your minds can best be led like sheep  
When sunk in deep iambic sleep.  
For tomes I'm paid by fools like thee  
Whom, oddly, tone can make agree.

**To Your Behindness**

I think that I shall never find  
A gown as nice as your behind —  
Behind, whose muffled mouth is pressed  
Against a chair, stiff, uncaressed;  
Behind that hides from God all day  
And cannot spread her cheeks to play;  
Behind that may at bedtime sing  
Of silken softness to my thing;  
Who intimately lives with nylon;  
Against whose bosom prods my pylon.  
Gowns by tailors are designed,  
But only I know your behind.

<sup>14</sup> An allusion to Sir John Harrington's proverb: "Treason doth never prosper; what's the reason?/ For if it prosper, none dare call it treason!" And if the reviewers pan this book, will none dare call it pleasin'?

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[Note: The mixed metaphor (“behind” as mouth, bosom, etc.) is intentional to mime the mixed metaphors in the original, where the tree has its mouth sucking at the ground, its arms raised in prayer, etc. — a very difficult position! Probably the influence of French symbolists or sex manuals.]

### **I Think, Therefore I Shall Never See**

I think that I shall never see  
A tree as rare as poetry,  
For poems do not grow on trees —  
No groves of academe bore these;  
Nor do the poets *grow* on trees:  
They’re hanged there when they fail to please.  
What poet would stop at placid freedom?  
Our metric feet demand their freedom.  
Oh! any god can make a tree,  
But gods are made by poets like me.

The next poem was composed as an announcement for a poetry reading. Several people showed up, but I don’t think anyone actually read my clever announcement, so I’m inflicting it upon you here. Who reads announcements. After all, the seldom-mentioned reason why the number of poetry readings keeps increasing is that more and more people have to HEAR the poems read aloud, because they’ve never learned to READ. Marshall McLuhan (who considered the printed word a sort of tyranny) would have rejoiced. He *did* rejoice at the coming illiteracy, but he did so in print, so, soon, no one will know about it. (Is someone out there still getting this?)

### **POOR TREE! —**

By which I mean the little, airy  
Leafy friend that literary  
Folks pulped into reams of paper  
Worthy to serve a serious crapper —  
Instead filled up with silly poems,  
Then crammed in academic tomes;  
And though I think you’ll never see  
A poem as lovely as that tree,  
I *know* you’ll never know a tree  
As **SILLY** as our poetry,  
For writing which, we ought to be  
Hanged from a limb of that same tree —  
Alas! ’tis nevermore to be,  
Alack, poor poetry! Poor tree!

So come! Commemorate the dismembering  
Of that poor tree on Saturday  
(You'll never know a sadder day!)  
Which is the second day December,  
At 2 in our Community Center  
Where two tree-loving bards will render  
Their longings ludicrously audible,  
If not arboreally laudable.

### **Doggerel**

Quoth one James Kilmer, "Hark!  
A poem's not like a tree!"  
Yet has not his a bark  
As "O Bough — WOW!" raves he?

### **Raving On The Paving, Fools In The Schools**

Since golden days when Mr. Kilmer taught us  
That He who made the tree was surely not us  
And how we from a foolish poem may know a tree —  
Since then we've split into two schools of poetry:  
From T. S. Eliot come the Academics  
While Whitman's spawned a spate of Macadamics:  
Kerouac, Ginsberg — all who shun tight collars  
To be road scholars rather than Rhodes Scholars.  
Pedants who watch them avidly go packing off  
On wordy trips say they're just Kerouacking off.  
The sons of Walt reply: "At least we still know  
How to get it up! Go stroke your dildo!"  
Thus poets fart around, relieve no heart's ache:  
Both schools come down at last to "fart for fart's sake".

### **Pageantry of Page and Tree**

I think that I shall never see  
A poem tough as an infant tree,  
Nor shall I likely chance to see  
One sultry as an adult tree,  
Yet poems live on, while every tree  
At last is pulp, an in-dust tree.

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### NEA Nay-Saying<sup>15</sup>

I think that I shall never say  
The sort of stuff for which they pay,  
That trendy avant-gardish tripe  
That reaps rewards and reeks with hype.  
I rave my raves, rant many a rant,  
But ne'er shall win an NEA Grant.

My poems will do — some deep, some witty,  
But aimed at you, not some committee.  
Besides, a grant would just affront me  
Who write for love of God and country —  
Also to use up excess trees,  
Sip cheap chablis and nibble bries  
(O poetry-reading-evening bries!  
O tenderly caressed chablis!)

But pardon these, my jeers and japes,  
If they be only sour grapes  
That I'm not of that glittering crowd  
Of fresh new voices, well-endowed...

Yet they're not gods, just fools like me  
Who call their babblings poetry —  
If they can win, then why can't I?  
Perhaps someday...I may apply.

“O poetry-reading-evening bries!/ O tenderly caressed chablis!” Hey!  
What's the plural of chablis? I need a rhyme here. By the way, “Evening  
bries” and “tenderly caressed” is supposed to recall an old song that begins  
“The evening breeze/ Caressed the trees/ Tenderly...” (though when I was in  
high school we sang “The evening breeze/Blew through her knees...”).

### **Solution: Remove Trees**

I think one almost never sees  
The forest for the bloody trees.  
Poetry, too, we're apt to miss  
For all the foolish rhymes like this.

---

<sup>15</sup> This poem is pure sour grapes. They should give ME an NEA Grant if they give ANY a grant. (NEA/any a, get it?) But I've never asked for one. I'm waiting to be discovered. Here I ammmmm....

Enough Kilmer. Here are two more revisions of Dylan Thomas's memorable villanelle, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" ("Rage, rage against the dying of the light" — see Chapter one, page 63):

**Advice To A Lady Whose Gent Takes Her For Granted  
(As, Of Course, A Villain'll Do)<sup>16</sup>**

Do not go nightly in to that rude gent;  
Stay out till 4 a.m. Should he complain,  
Rage! Rage until he begs...and then relent.

Ladies don't grow on trees — they're Heaven-sent!  
His ass-grabs should be greeted with disdain.  
Do not go nightly in to that rude gent.

And if he says, "See here, who pays the rent?"  
Say, "Fine — I'll move out, since it's such a strain!"  
Then rage! Rage till he begs...and then relent.

This man's an island while you're continent<sup>17</sup>:  
Let "I'm not in the mood" be your *refrain*.<sup>18</sup>  
Do not go nightly in to that rude gent.

Headaches, fatigue, "It's sore!" — you can invent  
New reasons every night — his pain, your gain.  
Rage! Rage until he begs...and then relent —

With all that waiting, swiftly he'll be spent;  
Say, "My, My! Speedy Gonzales! John on the Wane!"  
Do not go nightly in to that rude gent!  
Rage! Rage until he begs...and then relent.

<sup>16</sup> That is, a villanelle do, though this poem might be entitled, "Let's NOT do it in a villanelle!" Both these poems, like the poem they parody, are villanelles. "Villanelle" is a verse form, not an ice cream flavor: 19 lines, only two rhyme sounds, six stanzas, the first and third lines of the poem are repeated alternately at the end of each subsequent 3-line stanza, then come together for the first time at the end of the final stanza (a 4-liner), like partners all formal at the start of an elaborate ballroom dance (separated by a chaperone line) who are whirled off in opposite directions to spin around with partner after partner until, having circled the room, at last they come together again, hot and sweaty from the exercise and relieved to meet without that pretense of formal distance. But my lines never learned to dance. Their iambic feet are sore from stepping on each other.

<sup>17</sup> This island and continent are borrowed from Donne's "No man is an island..." — and please, since we're all in the same boat, don't be incontinent.

<sup>18</sup> That is, it's her excuse to refrain. The question is, has anyone ever frained?

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### To A Gambler Up Against Loaded Dice

Do not go gentle with a light goodbye —  
You know this bozo's "luck" is a load of crap!  
Rage! Rage against the lighting of a die.

You've got a rep — you can't let this go by.  
If word gets out, your name is Mr. Sap!  
Do not go gentle with a light goodbye.

"Bad luck," he says, and "Sure" is your reply.  
You keep your cool and watch out for a trap...  
(Rage! Rage against the lighting of a die!)

You shrug, begin to stand, then with your thigh  
You tip the table CRASH into his lap,  
Not going gentle with a light goodbye.

He's clawing for his gat — you let him try,  
Then coolly loose your little thunderclap.  
Rage! Rage against the lighting of a die.

You take your bills and let the nickels lie.  
"Bad luck," you say, and leave him to his nap,  
Thus, gentle, going with a light goodbye —  
Why *rage* against the lighting of a die?

This reminds me of Browning's famous passage about human faith in the dice when shooting craps: "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's seven for?"<sup>19</sup>

Yet another version of "Do Not Go Gently," addressed to a Jewish mother who wastes time reasoning with her son instead of beating him, begins "Do not cogently yenta that nudnik!" ("Rage! Rage! With your strap give him a good lick!")

Now for a brief gentle *interlewd* with a variation of Ogden Nash's "Reflection on Icebreaking":

### A Reflection On A Reflection On Ice-Breaking

Candy  
Gets randy

---

<sup>19</sup> Yet another riff on "Andrea Del Sarto" where "Or what's seven for?" is "Or what's a Heaven for?" (To curse when the dice are cruel?) Some say Browning favored that other crucial-to-craps number, eleven, over seven and wrote "Or what's seven four?"

Quicker  
If you lick her.

There are certain people and things one may not mock, the current sacred cows of poetry. They include Rilke, Neruda, Lorca and Milosz. This sanctification seems to favor poets known to most of us only in translation, so I've mainly left them alone to concentrate on us Englishers. But I object to their sacred cowdom (for dumb is dumb). As discussed in chapter six, I once invented a poet of my own (called him William Parelli), created for him some ten pretentious, trendy, "vivid", "passionate", "mythically poignant" poems (It was hard work — must have taken all of two hours), and, at a time when my best work got mainly rejection slips (i.e., always!), got one of the Parelli's accepted by a reputable magazine on my first try. How had I written it? I thought of Rilke and wrote it by numbers — put in a lot of enigmatic, rather aloof and somehow bluely toxic angels, filled it with a dry, funereal urbanely resigned tone, etc. Sacred cows don't move very fast. It's very easy to mount them and ride along — though you won't get anywhere you haven't been before — and when you dismount, watch where you step!

I've taken a shot at one of these saints of the current cult of poetry, F. Garcia Lorca, not parodying a particular poem, but going after his idea that the heart of poetry is "*duende*", an obsession with a particularly pale and bull-fighter-stiff sort of death (blood on noble brow). Ah, the profundity of death. But even death is not immune to that far subtler destroyer, the spirit of CORN. Even Death can become a cliché. Dying, after all, is not very difficult. Any idiot can do it. Some of us, perhaps, do it again and again with undiminished relish.

The following poem tries to say this better. It's almost a serious poem (*mea culpa*). It's all about Lorca's own death — at the hands of Franco's forces during the Spanish Revolution. (Another definition of "*Duende*": Advice Peter Pan later regretted not having taken; i.e., Do Wendy.)

***Duende Others As You Would Have Others Duende You***

Had they not killed you, Lorca...

They stumbled you out  
of a country house  
blinking owlshly, though only  
at the moon and headlights  
(or so I imagine — crisscrossing  
beams scurrying not to miss  
your stern, blanched face).

Now I am supposed to mention  
wind in olive trees. But

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it must be a dark wind — or  
a blue wind? Black? Green?

Had they not killed you, Lorca...

They marched you to a car  
because they were supposed to,  
drove you “into the country”  
(so my book puts it)  
because they were supposed to

(drove you into the country  
as hammer drives nail  
into another country —  
or maybe not, maybe there’s  
only one world if  
you don’t create another),

drove metal pellets  
into your body because  
they were supposed to  
and the pellets, too,  
were impelled and did  
their duty and you  
too did what you were  
supposed to do,  
that is died.

Had they not killed you, Lorca...

Now I’m supposed to mention  
some sort of flower (but it will  
be bone-white or blood-red, your  
shirt an overgrown rose garden,  
or greening with decomposition or  
rooted in eye-sockets filled  
with the loamy residue of  
sunlight. Or I should name  
a dark Spanish river whispering  
in a library of hushed reeds or  
anything elemental and slightly  
non-sequitur, the warble of  
water over green-scummed stones,  
icy flashlight darts shivering  
the night, modesty of stars,

stench of rotten wood and sweetly  
decaying orange peels, wet earth, the  
shriek of engraved shovels,  
a memory of long-ago morning and  
the tenderness of coffee's  
never-more aroma.)

Had they not killed you, Lorca...

It must all convey  
our uniformly fatal destiny  
because poetry is supposed to  
be drenched in dainty *duende*, death's  
inconsolable beauty, death's  
inevitability...well of  
course it is inevitable, for  
we poets, too — gaunt solemn toreadors,  
hoping to distract the rush of time  
by waving our bright sad images  
at it — we poets do what we're  
supposed to do, which may be  
the only death there is —  
and ample at that.

(I am not supposed to say that.)

O had they not killed you, Lorca,  
I would do it now, but only  
here.

Sacred cows should be served rare: flay of soul. They deserve no less.  
The next two parodies lead us into another genre, the novel. Why not? Can't  
I escape from poetry for a moment? No? Vel...

### **Novels: Two Beginnings**

#### I

It all began when I discovered  
I was oddly unlike all the others  
because I saw what they could not:

for example, the underside of my eyelashes  
and the inner surface of my eyelids.

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And yet, how quickly I'd have traded it all  
to share their banal, mockingly casual view  
of the, for me, excruciatingly invisible  
back of my head.

### II

No one came to the door,  
but it swung open to my knock,  
so I went in. She was there all right,  
long raven hair, delicate features  
all ivory and rose, head hanging back  
off the sofa — but with an extra mouth  
above the wan upside-down smile,  
a sloppy red gash on the pale throat,  
crimson pooling on the carpet beneath...

“Come in,” she said.

### **You Should Write a Novel — That's Where The Money Is**

Maybe it's that damned sherry, he thought, turning over heavily in bed, letting the reader know that something's wrong, and surely not the sherry — damned sugary horse piss! — or “fucking”, etc., if it's to be a hit with the ladies, to whom a mere “damned” is condescending. Or more likely it's that today at last he'd have to tell her — there was no more putting it off (and the patient reader knows he'll be told what IT is, all in good time).

He threw off the remaining (fly-specked?) sheet (There follows a long descriptive passage, very droll and vivid, about what kind of machinery his head is throbbing like, how sour his tongue tastes [weird simile, please], maybe the rattle of a fan. In short, the reader learns what sort of an author he is dealing with).

Then he splashes cold water on his face and leans before the mirror for the obligatory wry self-appraisal scene (“Not bad,” he thought, pondered, chuckled, heard a gruff voice in his head remark — me, he realized...) — which gives the author a chance to tell the reader about the hard jaw, the cold, but smouldering, blue eyes, the scar, etc. [Isn't it fun to say “aqui-line”?] Later the female lead will be said to have less than perfect features because of excessively large eyes and full lips). Now bring in the career, somehow leaving him empty despite a facade of success (a bit of technical shoptalk, please, as he thinks about what he has to do today at the studio, bank, stock exchange, rodeo, race track...) — all without stepping outside the hero's (?) claustrophobic viewpoint.

It's time to start something — at least give the reader the illusion you might be going somewhere. For example, half his face is still foamy with

## Chapter 2: Parodies Regained

lather (in case a major Hollywood studio decides to adapt it — lather just hangs there forever in movies! — great for suspense) when the phone rings (or makes some more striking effect inside the still convalescent head — say, “a shrill explosion”), and a terse conversation ensues where we get only one side (because suddenly the author forgets whose head we are inside of?), and it’s just intriguing scraps — “I’ll be there...I SAID I’ll be there, OK, so I’ll be there!”

At this point the smoke curtain parts or coalesces into stale crystal, maybe he shuffles through yesterday’s mail and notices something odd just as he’s about to trash the crucial envelope — but you can take it from here, you’ve read it before a hundred times and seen the TV movie too. I’d take it further myself except I’m an old fashioned reader who just woke up and realized this has all been a dream. Then I turned over heavily in bed and went back to sleep happily ever after.

---

Now, one of the rare extant fragments from John Milton’s lost collection of parodies after which this chapter is named, a fragment which shows that Milton did, at length, learn how to end a sentence, once started. (*Paradise Lost* has led many readers to prayer: “How long, O Lord? How long!”)

### Paradise Remortgaged

O give me strength, sweet Muse, to lift this cross,  
For unto me now falls the cumbrous task  
Of taking up the tale where mighty Milton  
Himself ran out of breath, to tell how Satan,  
Surrounded by his retinue, grotesque,  
Of sooty demons and contorted imps,  
Bemoaned his new disgrace, his further fall  
From noble-in-damnation Lucifer  
To stooge and straight man for the Lord’s spoiled brat,  
And pondering how to counteract the glory  
New fallen o’er the world as Christ’s bequest  
To man, as when the dappled morn sheds stars  
On every blade of grass, pearls every leaf —  
Then arguing with his own despair, asudden,  
Like a black ember flaring up, arose  
Imperious Satan, countenance darkly glowing,  
And spake: “My loyal aeons-long-suffering crew,  
Be not distressed, for I begin to see  
How we may profit from Christ’s latest Shtick —  
‘Good Will To Men’ indeed! I see one hope  
For us: What we can’t beat, we’ll join — in spades!  
And with a vengeance — in more ways than one —

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We'll push GOOD WILL TO MEN with all our might,  
But give it our own twist to make it mean  
Gifts, money, commerce, social obligation,  
A source of venal pride moved by a fear  
Of scorn. From earliest puling infancy,  
I'll teach each human brat that Christmas means  
Fulfillment of material lust." "But Sir,"  
Asked Beelzebub on Satan's dexter hand,  
"How can you teach them now? They'll recognize  
In you a monster they've been taught to fear.  
They're wary of your name, your horns, hooves, tail,  
Your fiery aspect and your leering bray..."  
"Fear not — all that is comprehended in  
My master plan: I'll subtly change my name,  
My shape and manner. Hear my dark designs:  
For name, I'll simply shift the final 'n'  
Of Satan to become the softer 'Santa'.  
I'll add white trim to my hell-fire dress,  
Put on a jovial belly that my leering  
Laughter pass for cheer, and change my story:  
I'll say I hail from earth's most frigid zone,  
The North Pole! They'll never think of me  
In hellish heat. You, comrades, will be elves,  
My jolly helpers all. We'll spread the word  
That children must be good if they would get  
Material baubles; thus, we'll redefine  
The source of goodness, one more tool of lust.  
'Tis brilliant, if I do say so myself!  
And so I do. A long loose cap will cover  
My horns, nor tail nor hooves will ever show,  
Bundled as I'll be against the Northern night.  
And, hell, just to maintain my old trademarks,  
I'll be transported by horned, tailed and hooved  
Creatures," he said. "But," asked a shivering demon,  
"How will you visit long enough to teach?  
We've grown accustomed to our toasty realm  
And lost our taste for icy winds?" "Aha!  
I'll go from house to house and warm myself  
By entering and leaving through the chimneys,  
A merry devil making each home hell.  
They'll love me! When they think of Christmas, why  
'Tis ME they'll think of, jolly old gift-bringer,  
Ho HO, old Satan Santa, not that solemn  
Christ Jesus wimp with His mealy-mouthed 'Give all  
Thou hast to the poor and follow me'!" "In sooth,

'Tis brilliant beyond compare" cried all  
Those Pandemonic ranks in shrill uproar.  
There followed silence. Not a creature stirred  
All through the depths, as in demonic pates  
Sweet visions swam of new recruitment records,  
Of rising graphs and quotas met and beaten,  
Of bonus points and most of all the scent,  
the delirious scent of sizzling sinner flesh.  
At last, "Yum Yum — I mean, Ho Ho, indeed!"  
Cried Santa: "Merry Christmas to you all  
And to you all Good Night, for Santa soon  
Will have you in his claws! Farewell, Old Nick!  
Behold good old Saint Nick! Heh heh! Ho Ho!"



Now for a modern Miltonic (having the effect, rather, of a Milltown?): This next parody is generic (that is, I see no reason to insult with whatever small notoriety I may command the genial old gent whose poetry inspired it). It's unfair, really — why parody such obvious pomposity? Too easy. And yet...and yet, it's the sort of poetry (lush vocabulary, far-fetched euphemisms and inflated passions) that wins all sorts of local poetry contests, and it's such FUN to parody, like blowing up a paper bag to enjoy the POP! And scare oneself. The epigraph, besides alluding to "East is East...", refers to the first words of Hopkins' sonnet, "No worst, there is none." It also conceals, I hope, the name of the genial gent aforementioned. It's an old honored parodic device, applying a noble inflated style to banal scenes, here the acts of rising from bed ("the cadent catafalque"), breaking wind ("malignant trumpeting calliope" — and isn't "breaking wind" a fine phrase? I wonder why windbreakers [the jackets] aren't called "farters"?), entering the bathroom, stepping on the "scales that croak," going to the sink ("alabaster porch"), looking in the mirror ("coffin of lurid lucence"), experiencing being split in two — self and mirror image ("agony of mitosis"), using the water (described in the nine lines beginning "with this fierce pale tinct"), engaging in an epic encounter with the toilet (or "nether porcelain" which he doth bestride like a colossus), and combing his hair ("cultivate the hirsute furrows", etc.):

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**The 701<sup>st</sup> Poem of a Professor Proud of His 700 Noble Poems<sup>20</sup>**

“Yeast is yeast and wurst is no wurst, there is none.”

Poised, puissant,  
upon the cadent catafalque  
of the infinite, I  
emerge, malignant trumpeting calliope  
of the strenuous morning,  
tremulously arise,  
poet of nascent nakedness,  
from crevassed glacial creep  
of pillow, unrolling Alpine  
arabesque of sheets,  
emerge, mottled ivory,  
untuned by shallow dreams, stand  
in a frenzy of fluorescence  
on frail scales that croak  
at the gross injustice  
and am judged abundant  
in my nakedness, for am I not  
infinite, both bottomless and  
topless? Now inclined  
o'er the arid alabaster porch  
of my own dim agony,  
O agony of mitosis,  
as my image is taken from me  
and returned, recumbent in its  
coffin of lurid lucence,  
dappled with dots of dental-floss  
debris, flotsam and jetsam  
of my most feral mastications,  
laving, as I  
lave and dye,  
its mirrored lips and eyes  
with this fierce pale tinct  
of black-browed nimbi, columned  
cumuli (Alas, do I wax cirrus?  
O dire stratus!),<sup>21</sup>  
oceanic exhalation, ah, I plunge

<sup>20</sup> This poet could not read a poem to a group of poets without first explaining to them exactly what poetry is supposed to be, proudly citing his own 700 poems.

<sup>21</sup> Water, I'm told, comes from those curlicues in the sky, though I don't see what holds them up there if they are water. Anyway, they have names, like cirrus and stratus, cumulus and nimbus, so our hero gets into dire straits waxing serious.

my fevered immaculate brow  
into this bright brew, precise  
precipitate of nebular peristalsis,<sup>22</sup>  
pure cold mother of quenched levin,<sup>23</sup>  
touch of mourning fingers,  
liquid lament for the lost lambent lightning  
of dreams — but whence this  
tumulent<sup>24</sup> thunder? Hark! O odor  
of another inner air I sing,  
bestride like a pendent colossus  
the nether porcelain, seat myself,  
memorially Lincolnesque,  
dauntless o'er the watery void  
and loose the perilous music  
of my bowels. Now shall we know  
into what golden gobbledygook  
the Midas touch of intestinal avarice  
hath enchanted my dull dinner...  
but no, fear not, for I look  
no further than my delicate muse can stomach,  
poor moth of academe,  
I shall not look, but send  
this stertorous stew cascading  
into voids beyond voids  
where curious schools of fish  
will deliberate over my diet and excavate  
shards of, alas, not THIS paper,  
but a flimsier tissue stained  
with far more precious stuff,  
while I arise, O arise! Yet again  
(for have I not arisen, my choice,  
cadent words, lo! These 700 times?)  
arise to cultivate the hirsute furrows  
with horrid bristling implements  
of jellied elegance, arise  
to teach yet again our dreams  
to find their fluent tongues, teach dreamers  
the elocution eterne, the sweet sad

<sup>22</sup> Rainstorms are often accompanied by lightning, which can be a spark derived from clouds rubbing against each other or internally, a sort of peristalsis, right? And clouds are nebulous, right? And sunset is the angels cooking their suppers, right?

<sup>23</sup> Levin, besides being the hero of *Anna Karenina*, is a very artsy word for lightning.

<sup>24</sup> I coined this word, "tumulent," to refer to deep stomach growling and churning, knowing the poet I'm parodying would approve of it.

## Section 1: A Survey of English Poetry

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symphonies of our striving,  
the truth that, alone, can carry us  
from the moraine of glacial sleep  
to the imperious peaks of breakfast and,  
I dare say, beyond.

Breakfast will be, no doubt, Corn Flakes, for high drama is always based on cornflakes (i.e., conflicts ... sorry).

Last, a self-salute (it's a lute or I'm a lyre) to the poet/parodist (working against all of our migraines):

### **Going Against My Grain — the Qualities of a Parodist or As I Ape Gems**

*Abstruse*, my shtick is mystique.  
*Speculative*, my motif is the *mot* “if”.<sup>25</sup>  
*Imitative*, my name is myna-me.  
*Awed*, my saga/game is a gaga me.  
*Positive*, my humor is you, more.  
*Egocentric*, my theme is the me.  
*Gadfly*, my topic is to pique.  
*Expansive*, my thing is myth-ing.<sup>26</sup>  
*Monogamous*, my metier is my mate — yay!<sup>27</sup>  
*Satirical*, my stock in trade is me stuck in tirade.

In case you've never seen an angry blood-sucker, the above poem is, in fact, a cross tick (i.e., acrostic). If you encounter a REAL tick, knock on wood. You will then hear what is termed a “tick tock”. That joke may be obscure to many of you: Long ago, my children, in this very galaxy, before watches were digital and battery-operated, our clocks and watches and time-bombs would TALK to us, and this was called “tick talk” or tick tock. But we grew tick-tocksick (weary of toxic time), so had all our clocks detocksified *and exterminated all their ticks* (Don't you dig Ital?)<sup>28</sup>. It's time to move on.

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<sup>25</sup> For some reason the French word for “word” is “mot,” which looks like Jeff's partner, Mutt, but is actually from another comedy team, the Three Stooges, since it is pronounced something like Moe, because the French cannot pronounce most final consonants or it's against their religion or something — like stepping on one of the sidewalk cracks — “Oops! I pronounced a final ‘t’! Bad luck all week!”

<sup>26</sup> I mean that my thing (bag, preferred activity) as a poet is mything (myth-making). I do NOT mean that my thing (my you-know-what, crown jewel of family jewels, etc.) is among the mything.

<sup>27</sup> Meaning either that I am married to my avocation, in love with my muse — and, in formal works, I'm very pleased to meter — or that I love my wife, as, of course, I DO (she's reading every word of this).

<sup>28</sup> “Dig Ital?” — dig Italics or digital, a digital clock being a clock whose ticks have been exterminated. You aren't allowed to get PART of my punning here. You are expected to dig it ALL.