

MELODY MAUDLIN



Girl Drying Herself by Edgar Degas

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“Bad doggerel, bad doggerel! Down, boy, down!”

All poets sometimes write doggerel. Not all poets admit it. Sometimes, when entering a “bad poetry” contest or submitting a parody or light verse, I use the alias of Melody Maudlin. There is one notorious poetry scam publisher out there who is still sending periodic letters to Ms. Maudlin, begging her to sign a release of her beautiful poem so it can be included in the next breathtakingly beautiful, handsomely bound coffee-table anthology.

Here are a few I have not minded signing with my real name.

O DIVINE SNEEZER

A sneeze is such a mystical event,
bestowed alike on pope and popinjay,
who knows but that it may be heaven-sent?

It comes **At You!** with singular intent
to spread its **Message!** Therefore let us spray.
A sneeze is such a mystical event

My aunt believed it was a sacrament,
that sneezing cleansed the soul in some strange way.
Who knows? Be that as may be, heavy scent

evokes the miracle and so does lint,
so *carpe dustem* (translate: sneeze the day).
A sneeze is such a mystical event,

like some divine and random accident
that falls alike to hardnose and nose gay.
Whose nose but that? It may be heaven sent

that nose of Cyrano's, that eloquent
old luminary's nares. *He* would say
a sneeze is such a mystical event,
who knows but that it may be heaven-sent?

In September 2004 John Kelly of the *Washington Post* solicited poems expressing the woes of commuters using the Metro system. I offered the following sonnet, which was not used in the *Post*. I can't imagine why.

METRO SONNET

My mother tells me, "You're a big girl now.
You've got a job, you're bringing home a check.
I don't have time to drive you, anyhow,
so take the Metro, baby, what the heck?"

I live 'way out in Gaithersburg, you know,
and it's a long commute, but still I'm game.
I buy my ticket, and away we go—
one ride, and now I'll never be the same.

We're packed so close I think I'm gonna faint.
I'm breathing some guy's armpits and inhaling
somebody's garlic breath. Cologne it ain't.
I try to keep my distance, but I'm failing.

And now I find my trouble just begins.
My doctor tells me I'm expecting twins.

However, I did receive a note of thanks from John Kelly, who wrote, "Congratulations on the twins. Metro needs the customers."

SOME LIMERICKS

A stupid young kid from Menominee
Poured LSD over his hominy.
His tombstone is pretty—
The best in the city—
They even spelled out *Anno Domini*.

SIX OPERATIC LIMERICKS*

A tenor who sang to the gallery
Demanded an increase in salary.
Said the tough impresario:
“Now, listen up, Mario—
We pay by the show, not the calorie.”

The greatest Brünnhildes are Norse
And gallop onstage on a horse.
But the noblest of steeds
Must observe nature’s needs,
Which fouls up Valhalla, of course.

A sweet young soprano named Lori
Was signed up for *Il Trovatore*
But acute influenza
Cut short her cadenza
And ruined her *notte d’amore*.

A ravishing mezzo-soprano
Created a stir in Milano
When she dropped out of *Norma*
To sing *Nessun dorma*
While topless atop a piano.

There once was an old Rigoletto
Who couldn’t recall the libretto.
So they hired a castrato
Who sang it vibrato
And also, alas, in falsetto.

A deeply depressed Papageno
Ingested a shot glass of Drano.
It ruined his voice
But his claue thought him choice.
Because what the devil did they know?

*The first two of the above limericks were published in *Light* as
“An Operatic Duet.”

SOME TROUBLE DACTYLS

I thought I had written double dactyls, until an astute formalist pointed out to me that although I had the correct meter I had failed to follow some strict rules about names and words in certain lines. I therefore apologize to purists, and have renamed these “trouble dactyls.”

Oom-pa-pa, oom-pa-pa,
Who wrote *Die Fledermaus*?
Johann Somebody-or-
Other, it was.

Back composed liturgies;
Brahms composed rhapsodies.
Musta been Strauss who wrote
Those oom-pa-pas.

—

Hippity-hoppity,
Little Sue Daugherty,
Off to see Grandmama,
Meets you-know-who.

Lands a karate chop,
Watches his body drop.
Little Red Riding Hood
Isn't for Sue.

Jingle bells, jingle bells,
Three hundred sixty-five
Days until Christmas Day
Hits us again.

Throw out the Christmas cards,
Update the mailing list,
Rewrap the fruitcakes and
Freeze them till then.

—

Doctorate, schmoctorate!
Can you bag groceries?
Can you lift charcoal and
Big bags of flour?

We need somebody who
Works like a house afire.
Will you work weekends for
Six bucks an hour?

—

Golly gee whillikers!
Jimmy the soda jerk
Said we'd get married when
I turned eighteen.

Now he's gone gay and is
Dating my brother and
Running against me for
Homecoming Queen.

PARODIES

PLEASE!

When Kilmer thought he'd never see
A poem lovely as a tree

I wonder if he thought as well
Of all the forests we would fell.

I wonder if he stopped to think
Of all the vats of printer's ink

And all the tons of glue we'd waste
To reproduce the dismal taste

Of poets talking to themselves
On corners of "remaindered" shelves.

Poems are few and far between
But, God, the crap the world has seen!

THE RUBAIYAT OF HOMER BRYAN

1

Another Monday, and you're sick and tired.
The place has gone to hell since you were hired.
Today you're going to speak your piece and walk.
You check your morning mail and learn you're fired.

2

That's it, old boy. They've given you the axe.
The time has come for you to face the facts.
What better place than at the corner bar
Where you're already mortgaged to the max?

3

You try to drown your troubles in a beer
And wish you had a sympathetic ear.
Oh, how you want your baby here tonight!
She is—and with a civil engineer.

4

You hurry to the men's room like a flash,
Abandoning your suds and trailing cash.
You exit through a window in the dark
And hook your belt, and dangle from the sash.

5

You wrack your brain to find the perfect phrase
To break it gently: Babe, we're parting ways.
You brace yourself for tears, and dial the phone.
She isn't in. She hasn't been, for days.

6

A week goes by and still you haven't heard,
And then she calls, as chirpy as a bird,
And says she's missed you, won't you drop around?
That's all it takes; she knows the magic word.

7

You pick your outfit with a careful eye;
Your suit is color-keyed to shirt and tie.

 You make the perfect entrance, tip your hat,
And realize you didn't zip your fly.

8

You dump the bitch with fine, sarcastic flair.
Your words are suave, your manner debonair.

 You don't forget yourself and slam the door.
You do forget you're in your underwear.

THE END

SPREE FEVER

With No Apologies Whatever to John Masefield Who Can Drown in His Way, and I'll Drown in Mine

I must go down to the pub again, to McLafferty's Bar and Grill,
And all I ask is a cozy booth where I can swallow me fill
And some stout port that's the outport where I would aye be anchored
And a long arm and a strong arm and a twelve-inch tankard.

I must go down to the pub again for a rollicking all-night nip
And all I ask is a tall glass that bubbles over the lip
And a scarred bench that's a hard bench that will keep me bum from sinking
And a large loo with a deep pit as I go on drinking.

I must go down to the pub again, to the bottles that shine like jools
And all I ask is to keep me legs so I won't fall off the stools
And a long chug from a deep jug that will help me drown me sorrow
And a wee shot of the same rot to wake me tomorrow.

MRS. GRUNDY

Mrs. Grundy
Wondered on Monday
Supposed on Tuesday
Whispered on Wednesday
Eavesdropped on Thursday
Spied on Friday
Multiplied on Saturday
Tithed on Sunday.

There's never an end
To Mrs. Grundy.

MONDEGREENS

A mondegreen is the mishearing, (usually accidental), of a phrase in such a way that it acquires a new meaning [or, in my opinion, no meaning, just nonsense.—MM.]

The word “mondegreen” is itself a mondegreen. The American writer Sylvia Wright coined it in an essay “The Death of Lady Mondegreen,” which was published in *Harper’s Magazine* in November 1954. She wrote:

When I was a child, my mother used to read aloud to me from Percy’s *Reliques*. One of my favorite poems began, as I remember:
Ye Highlands and ye Lowlands,
Oh, where hae ye been?
They hae slain the Earl Amurray [sic]
And Lady Mondegreen.

The actual line is “And laid him on the green,” from the anonymous 17th century ballad “The Bonnie Earl O’Murray.”

My thanks to Wikipedia for the above information.

Back in the 1960s I didn’t know what a mondegreen was, but in those days a hilariously twisted Christmas carol, made popular by Walt Kelly’s comic strip *Pogo*, was on everyone’s lips:

Deck us all with Boston Charlie,
Walla Walla, Wash. and Kalamazoo.
Nora’s freezin’ on the trolley,
Swaller dollar cauliflower alley-garoo.
Don’t we know archaic barrel,
Lullaby, lilla boy, Louisville Lou.
Trolley Molly don’t love Harold,
Boola boola Pensacoola hullabaloo!

My friend, the late Jim Keefe, and I began decking our halls with Yuletide mondegreens. But we called them Pogo carols. Following is a sampling:

GOD BLESS YOU, HARRY WINKELMAN

God bless you, Harry Winkelman,
That's nothing new this May.
December's twice disfavored.
Was Barney's twist misplaced?
Touché, Vassar, from certain ports,
Where fever's run its race.
Oh, dry gin's a comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
Oh, dry gin's a comfort and joy.

HARRY COME A-WHISTLIN'

Harry come a-whistlin', a Mona Lisa grin.
Hurry cane a-swingin', Safari Toby's in.
Lovin' Joe can't yo-yo,
Auntie Lulu was ill too.
Anger, pleasure and censure
And Jackie Bouvier!
Adolph Menjo may happen through here.

AH, DUSTY FEET AIL US

Ah, dusty feet ail us,
Lay de tree upon us.
A neat day, Juanita, in breathless hymn.
Now Tom's wed eighty,
Brighams wrangle o'er 'em.
Anita's mad for Camus,
We need an Andy, Amos;
Weigh needles and you're famous,
Snowmen hum.

WE THREE SWING

We three swing with rented guitar.
Swearing thrift, we address the bar.
Field hand flouting, morals mouthing,
Hollering "Wunderbar!"
Oh-----
Stir us under, stir us light,
Sheriff Roy'll do tonight.
Esther's bleeding, Silver's eating,
Tie da shoe, the spur fits tight.

Walt Kelly himself was especially fond of the following one, and sent me an autographed original drawing of one of his comic strips for it. Unfortunately, in a fit of altruism, I donated it to a local school's circulating art collection and it was promptly stolen.

HOCK THE DEAR OLD RANGE TILL SPRING

Hock the dear old range till spring,
Go raise two the newsboy's kind.
Piss on her that's mostly wild,
Goddam sitter-wreckin' child.
Jostle Carrie Nation's rise,
John'll try 'n' up the price.
Myths and relics, old pros claim,
Tryst with Barney's baffled hen.
Hock the chair old age has seen,
Go raise two the newsboy's queen.

AWAITING A STRANGER

Awaiting a stranger, no kids are in bed.
Seattle loves cheeses, Daytona sees red.
We're starvin' those guys with Donner's delay
And it'll o'erreach us, us leapin' today.

The first two lines of the following one appeared in the Pogo strip, but to the best of my knowledge, Walt Kelly never wrote more than those two lines, so I finished it for him:

GOOD KING SAUERKRAUT

Good King Sauerkraut looked out
On his feets uneven.
Silas knows his roundup route.
Why did Chris stop breathin'?
Britney's thrown a moon at Knight,
Though her boss was cool.
Win a porno game on site,
Guessing when to fool.

BOY, CHOOSE A GIRL!

Boy, choose a girl! The largest one!
Give Bertha Reeves a ring!
That Effie's a tart, she wears cheap perfume—
And never let Rachel sing,
And never let Rachel sing,
And never, and never let Rachel sing.

WHILE SHEPHERDS WASHED THEIR SOCKS

While shepherds washed their socks by night,
The sheep were on the town.
The ancient overlord came 'round
And swore to mow them down,
And swore to mow them down.

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

On the first day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
A porridge in the pantry.

On the second day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Two dirty gloves
And a porridge in the pantry.

On the third day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Three fresh yams,
etc.

On the fourth day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Four naughty words,
etc.

On the fifth day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Five old meringues,
Etc.

On the sixth day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Six greasy crayons,
etc.

On the seventh day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Seven wanton women,
etc.

On the eighth day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Eight daisies wilting,
etc.

On the ninth day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Nine lays debating,
etc.

On the tenth day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Ten vipers griping,
etc.

On the eleventh day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Eleven lorries beeping,
etc.

On the twelfth day of Christmas my Lulu gave to me
Twelve mummers slumming,
Eleven lorries beeping,
Ten vipers griping,
Nine lays debating,
Eight daisies wilting,
Seven wanton women,
Six greasy crayons,
Five old meringues,
Four naughty words,
Three fresh yams,
Two dirty gloves
And a porridge in the pantry.

OTHER STUFF

THE CHEERFUL EXECUTIONER

The cheerful executioner
Performs without a fee.
His cold cut slicer, as it were,
He wields with grisly glee.

He keeps his blade in good repair
and stores it in a shed,
and when he parts somebody's hair
he gets to keep the head.

He's democratic, first and last,
and decent to the max.
He doesn't bow to class or caste
but gives them all the axe.

He's been collecting them for years.
He's proud of his display.
And when he's shaved between his ears,
he carries them away.

He lines them up against the wall
in six or seven rooms.
They look so grand, they stand so tall
on wooden-handled brooms.

From luckless lords to mountebanks
they're an impressive sight.
Each evening he reviews the ranks
and bids them all good night.

"Bon soir, Milady Anne Boleyn."
"Sleep well, Sir Walter Raleigh."
And to each common citizen,
"I hope your dreams are jolly."

He climbs the stairs and goes to bed.
His heart is light and glad,
and lovely dreams go through his head
of those he'd like to add:

The girl who says, "You guys OK?"
when she has served your eggs;
the friend who lets her housecat play
and shed upon your legs;

The talk show host with phony smile,
the preening weathercaster;
the newsman who keeps beaming while
he spouts a new disaster;

The wretch who brings you wide awake
from rare and restful slumber
because he's called you by mistake
for someone else's number;

The deadly chronic dropper-in
just at the dinner hour;
the subway passenger whose skin
is due its monthly shower;

The heiress in some jungle land
without a cent in pocket
who'll give you half her hundred grand
if you'll pay to unlock it;

The karaoke-spawned disgrace
who murders every ballad;
the mystic who beholds God's face
in Saturday's egg salad.

The happy headsman bides his time
and works without a salary
as, cutting short these lives of crime,
he adds them to his gallery.

PROVERBS

(Written in the form of John Donne's *Song*)

Pretty is as pretty does
Was my mother's constant air.
She is wrong, and always was,
But that's neither here nor there.
I have heard the blare of trumpets
As great kings wed comely strumpets
But known
No throne
Lost for the virtue of a crone.

Virtue is its own reward
Is the rule the clergy taught.
Thus it was I learned to guard
All my speech and all my thought,
Keeping every action proper,
Yet I go through life a pauper.
What jade
Would trade
Fortunes with any pious maid?

Penny saved is penny earned,
Never waste and never want
Is the lesson that I learned
From the grasshopper and ant.
While I hoard each sou and shekel
Mr. Hyde robs Dr. Jekyll
And Paul
Takes all,
Petering out my capital.

Pretty proverbs grace the page,
Mottoes make attractive verse
Yet have proved in every age
Less a virtue than a curse.
For each weak and willing victim
There's a platitude or dictum,
And no
Bon mot
But is the backbone of a woe.

SONG FOR MARTI'S BIRTHDAY

Marti is twenty-one today!
Marti can vote and drink and swear;
Marti can up and run away,
Marti can smoke or dye her hair.

Marti can wear black negligees
Or lounge in gowns of pink brocade;
She can go off for the holidays,
She can have gin in her lemonade.

Marti can bathe in exotic bikinis,
Marti can kick up her heels a-plenty;
She can make eyes over dry martinis
For she is no longer a mere child of twenty.

Marti can go to the most daring places!
Marti can be the life of the party.
She can raise eyebrows on hundreds of faces,
For this is the twenty-first birthday of Marti.

APOLOGY

You are a little silver bell
Which sends forth sweet, clear chimes,
And so, although I love you well,
I strike you oftentimes.

FWEETE THINGES COME IN FEVENS

Fayte to everye wyfe, I vowe,
Feven hufbands fhoulde allowe:
Onne to earne her daylye breade,
Onne to mayke goode sporte inne bedde,
Onne to dreff her charmynglye
And onne of rank, to tayke to tea.
Onne bothe strong inne mynde and limbe,
Thate she myte beare a chylde to hyme,
Onne who ryte goode jokes wylle cracke,
And onne, of courfe, to fcratch her backe.

The bottom of the heap has to be “refrigerator poems.” Here
are a few whatsits I created with the Magnetic Poetry kit:

once you loved the taste of the rain
but now you have drunk sweet cyber

—

in my summer garden
I have
beats
leaks
apparatus
rustybeggars
sweat please
time
cold rabbis
hot papers
and sordid red ashes

lettuce spray

—

bare in mind moon goddess
I am behind you all the way
butt don't outshine the daylight

—

there is no easy music
death must whisper winter language
we can only fiddle some mad symphony
and sing eternity together