

## ELF EYRIE

JAN ANDERSON

New York, New York

Back by popular demand, a big raise, and a high, windowed corner office with the Eames chair (just kidding about the chair, etc.), Scarfin' Fatback has suggested a more mature approach to wordplay. Instead of the erstwhile fledgling's ten puny playforms per issue, each Anderson contribution should concentrate on one type of wordplay. The parrot tease in this column is inspired by a Dave Morice suggestion: parody Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, a poem almost beyond compare...cool yet passionate, restrained yet tempestuous, insouciant yet demure, saucy yet significant...

Perhaps any poem worth writing is worth parodying, and parodies help ensure a poem's fame. Perhaps that's the real reason Gelett Burgess parodied his own bucolic-hazed bovine:

O yes, I wrote the Purple Cow.  
I'm sorry now I wrote it.  
But I can tell you anyhow,  
I'll kill you if you quote it.

Clement Moore didn't admit to "A Visit From St. Nicholas" until after the first few of hundreds of parodies. (After my version in the November 1996 Word Ways, perhaps he would have disowned it again.)

A good parody may be better than the original. Or as intriguing anyway, as Poe's "The Bells" gets flouted in a Nona Mousy contribution:

Of the flute, flute, flute  
With its tootle, tootle, toot--  
With reiterated tootings of exasperating toots.  
The long protracted tootelings of agonizing toots,  
Of the flute, flute, flute, flute,  
Flute, flute, flute,  
And the wheezings and the spittings of its toots.

In the May 1995 Word Ways, Dave Morice not only turned his skills on Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 but encouraged readers to do even worse. But now we're talking the kind of poetry that rates having the whole parrot works thrown at it! The first four lines of Sonnet 18 are:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

Dave proposed using the same words exactly, but in different order. Here's the Anderson Vocabularyclept version (its message, says the editor, is "Grab a brew, rent a lass--I guarantee you'll have a gas"):

The short rough shake of summer's Buds compare  
To lovely winds. A temperate art. Thou too  
May lease a darling summer's date. And more  
And more all day shall thee hath. I do.

If you like the words where they are, repunctuate; if you like the sounds, resound with puns or Anguish Languish. Then throw in Mrs. Malaprop and Reverend Spooner to get a four-way collaboration:

Shall I? Compare thee. To a summer's day,	Repunctuate
Thou: heart moral of liana Mortimer ate	Anguish Languish
Whiffed runs should ache the marlin duds of bay;	Rev. Spooner
Summarily Hathaway briefs are sedate.	Mrs. Malaprop

If you don't care for the words, the sounds, the punctuation or meaning of the original, but the letters are OK, just Anagram each line:

Aha! Creased, mousey. Hot armpit smell.  
A dull temper, over-merry too, a moth-eaten  
Mud-baked fish. Through long wars, I'd say; done.  
The loser! One sour madam: at that, sad as hell.

e poe, whom you saw re-immortalize "The Raven" in the August 1996 Word Ways using a broken typewriter, proposes qwerty words and numbers for Shakespeare as well:

Will I equ8 you low 2 twilit wilt?  
You're too pretty, yet you're proper, too.  
Roil will propel wee poppy, or tree top tilt;  
Yet torpor will too tritely quit 'er queue.

There's much more to do to old Willie still, so we should get on with the rest of Sonnet 18:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance of nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:  
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

It seems Shakespeare thought more of himself than of her, and (you guessed it) she left. Perhaps if he hadn't been so I-centered...We'll help him out with a Lipogram and take out all the i's:

One could compare thee to a summer's day.  
 But thou art less extreme and more to look at.  
 Rough gusts do shake the dearest buds of May,  
 And summer's lease runs out when too short book'ed...  
     [this is too easy--let's cut to the punch]  
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander among shades,  
 When ageless poetry ensures through years thou growest.  
     So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
     So long they'll read my words, remembering me (oops, thee!).

Dave Morice's second suggestion in May 1995 was a Word-Opposite parody, though his precise instructions were to move beyond Shakespeare and rewrite Paradise Lost (you first, Dave):

You have unlikened me with winter's eves.  
 I am as plain, yet just as chilled with cold.  
 Dull doldrums settle lorn December's leaves,  
 But winter leaves not; timeless, none's as old.  
 Never so cold a lid o'er darkened land,  
 Or seldom such hueless silvered glare could be;  
 Yet nothing ill to well can e'er ascend  
 Purposely, steadfast cut from divinity.  
 Though my brief mortal winter has still to shine,  
 And win whatever graspless ill I'm paying,  
 Til Life confesses a brighter course is mine,  
 From pasts unpenned, our days are few, and staying  
     More briefly than visions hid in angels' sighing.  
     More briefly passes all; yet leaves me: dying.

Such parodies keep the metre and the rhyme scheme, and should even be poetry (unless you're parodying doggerel like the Purple Cow). Watch out for keeping to exact opposites, or you'll end up with the same sense. For example, "less hot (or cold)" equals "more temperate."

Just as art smugglers conceal an Old Master under a worthless new original, so Crypto-Verse may hide a Shakespeare in every other word:

I shall discover I despair!  
     Compare between thee? what to choose:  
         a pleasant summer's quiet day? --  
 Or shall not I, dismayed, compare  
     what thee comparest to?: boo-boos.  
         A pick: summer's extremest day.  
 Retailiate, shall thou? I won't  
     compare if thee starts to berate.  
         A blasted summer's ghastly day

Certainly shall ensue! I don't  
 compare to thee, set to create  
 a nasty summer's tempest. 'Day.

In the August 1997 Fledge Ledge Edge, we were searching for the real author of Shakespeare's works, and one method was the Acrostic. Let's reveal the true author once and for all:

That's too silly--like a summer's day?  
 Half as hot. Exactly what's to eye?  
 Every other year, it snows in May,  
 And summer's hot as heck by mid-July  
 Nothing's worse than ever-blazing sun:  
 Downpours never come; we pray for drizzle.  
 Every time one starts, it's almost done;  
 Reliably, Ma Nature makes us sizzle.  
 Summer never ends, not soon enough.  
 Only when it's over, then we miss it:  
 Never satisfied--life's hell. And rough,  
 Endlessly to be still writing this. It  
 Lasts until I'm panting, my eyes sore, so  
 Folly to begin. Like summer. More so.

whose real identity is?

Farewell, romance! Aging nightfall comes.  
 Its snow brings augured cold; October numbs.

(Foolish reader, answer not  
 Capriciously; I've surely brought  
 A certainty. Observeth naught?)

Shakespeare may have had a good reason to use Crypto-Verse:

Some Shakespeare scholars theorize  
 Love's object here could well surprise.  
 Some others think that's just too silly,  
 And only rates a Little Willie.

A Little Willie? For younger readers, Little Willies are (1) quatrains, (2) familial, (3) nasty.

Little Will's wife Anne was old,  
 So he tried to have her sold.  
 The buyers said, "She's sure no girl--  
 But have you tried Southampton's Earl?"

The context of sonnets surrounding Sonnet 18 is fruitful for searching out Shakespeare's secret love, but so is Sonnet 18 itself. Take a look at the second accent in each of the first four lines:

Shall I comPARE...  
 Thou art more LOVE...  
 Rough winds do SHAKE...  
 And summeR'S LEASE...

You'll see why I included the R'S as beginning that last syllable when you work out the anagram (see Answers and Solutions).

Let's wind up with some Alphabetic Verse:

Any attempt at asking absolutes--  
 "Be best? Be better?" begs banality.  
 Comparing cyclones, cornflowers convolutes,  
 Despite dull dragging dog days' durability...

Even when Nona Mousy takes the credit, parodists can give themselves away by style. Besides Nona (or me), what five poets might have written the following (see Answers and Solutions)?

1.           Come care-calmed, comely-combed, compare July:  
 vv 1-4      Thou art to beauty, Beauty; reason's Reason.  
             Stir-scurried cowslip boughskip-skims asky,  
             And summer's summoned sunsome sum: short season.
  
2.           Beat, beat, beat. The hot high stare  
 vv 5-8      Winks. A-patter, acid droplets splatter.  
             Groan, oh grunting giant corpse of glare.  
             Proud and Wrong. Sure and Shy. Gayer. Sadder.
  
3.           Yet -- preternatural bane! -- her youth remains,  
 vv 9-12     Enchained by charmed enchantment's arms; the attic  
             Hides the blood-drained veins, the skeinless brains;  
             The old scribe slain, her mind, e'er since, erratic.
  
- 4a.          But eyes of poems shine stars whose wings are birds,  
 vv 13-14    Who breathe new songs of life from wombs of words.
  
- 4b.          If thou should'st leave the genius who'll inter thee  
 vv 13-14    In such majestic poesy, who were thee?

Shakespeare's lover was erratic, or at least inconstant, preferring a friend of the Bard, according to later sonnets. Will wrote a few more to her/him, but then he may have found a truer heart, temporarily. He seems not to have chased any of them as committedly as, say, Beatrice was pursued. He was sensitive about his age, and appalled by mortality. Thus, he's too petty to parody after all, and Dave Morice was right: do Paradise Lost. (Elf Eyrie will reconsider that advice in the May issue.)

Except where otherwise credited, all verses are by Jan Anderson