

PARODY POEMS

CAMILLE ARNETT

Granger, Indiana

For my project I wanted to do a small collection of parody poems. It was based originally on the fact that Lewis Carroll included multiple parody poems and original nonsense poems in *Alice in Wonderland*, and I wanted to, like him, take famous works and put my own unique twist on them. The prospect of writing nonsense poems is rather daunting, and eventually I decided rather than try to write nonsense, which is actually quite difficult, I would try to make some sense of the works while still parodying or modifying them in ways I found to be unique and meaningful.

Taking a poem and modifying it requires purpose: Why am I changing what I am changing? What am I keeping the same? In general, I felt that keeping the structure, meter, and rhyme scheme of the original was important, so that there was obvious resemblance between the original and the modified version. Specifically, with my take on “The Lady of Shalott” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, I wanted to keep the same structure and rhyme scheme to the stanzas: four lines of A, one line of B, three lines of C, one line of B, and so on, keeping the B the same throughout the whole piece. “The Lady of Shalott” has a unique structure that was both difficult and fun to work with.

As an English major I deal frequently with poetry, but I’ve never been an especially talented at writing it. I more often focus on prose and essay writing, because it is what I am better at and what I have more experience with. However, I really love reading poetry, and I wanted to get more practice writing it since it’s an area in which I am a greenhorn. I also have read a lot of great classic poetry thus far in the semester that I wanted to spend more time with in a creative way, not just a critical one.

This project relates most directly to *Alice and Wonderland* and Lewis Carroll, less so Martin Gardner or John Tenniel. The parody poems in *Alice*, specifically “How doth the little crocodile” draw from classic poems that were taught to children to teach them to remember their manners and fight,

“Against Idleness and Mischief.” Carroll takes popular, well-known children’s literature and makes it absurd.

In a similar vein, I wanted to take famous, widely-taught poems in the classic English canon, and write them differently. I do not want to make fun of them or render them completely absurd, because they are great, meaningful poems, and also because I am not particularly funny. However, borrowing from them stylistically and telling a different, potentially contrasting story, is a fun exercise, and follows in the tradition of Carroll’s parodies.

Lady of Shalott
Alfred, Lord Tennyson

[That poem is quite long, there's a link to it here
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45359/the-lady-of-shalott-1832>]

Lady, Lady, Lady

On either side the river lie
Tall fields of barley and of rye,
On one were tinged with purple dye,
The other the color of the sky
Of a stormy inkblot.
She had a reason not to go,
"The world is unkind, don't you know?
Protect your heart and sit and sew."
She did not care a lot.

Without the walls, aspens shivered
Streams of water flow and quivered
In the sweeping gray that ever
Ate the air and blades and river.
South was the town; north, the apricot
Tree. It never bloomed in spring
So she spent all day dreaming, sewing,
But when asked she deflected, saying,
"I do not care a lot."

She said her mantra every hour
Watched the gray land from in her tower—
Until one day there grew a flower,
Then a second, then a shower
Of blooms of apricot.
Feeling she was no longer trapped
The ablation 'tween her ribs was rapt
Yes, something within her had snapped—
She chased the apricot.

The curse had been hard to ignore
But descending the tower, she bore
A capacity to now adore
Like she never adored before—
For this she cared a lot.
She ran to the apricot tree
And picked a blossom wild and free
And grey devoured it, and the whole tree.
"I do not care a lot."

The chance was taken and was gone.
She believed no more good was on
Its way to her. The ablation drawn,
The mantra came, she was foregone:
 "I do not care a lot."
How could she know that hope is true!
 Don't take that lonely avenue!
 But—she fell into the river blue
 Dead as the apricot.

When life becomes too hard to fight
And statues crush the land and blight
All large and lovely things like mites;
 In this fervent field of fright—
 I cannot bear the thought.
 To watch the land collapse within,
 To hear forever the betrayed din;
The last chance lost; last, had it been?—
 I do not care a lot.

I watch her drift here gracefully
The southern wind pulsed lazily
'Gainst her hair—live, it seemed to be
No air passed through her lips—Lady,
 Why did you take your lot?
The hand that sewed, the heart that bled,
The mind that wanted, needed, plead—
 The curse a million times was said:
 "I do not care a lot."

The Red Wheelbarrow
William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

The Red-White Burrow
Camille Arnett

so much depends
in

a red-white
burrow

glazed with
sugar

shining the sun's
sheen.

Ozymandias
Percy Shelley

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

The Ozzy King Parable
Camille Arnett

I met a traveler from this antique land,
Who said—"There once stood some great statues here,
A smiling man, his kind extended hand.
Thinking of my sweet likeness, I'm near tears."

"This land was lush," I said, "not long ago."
"Yes, child! And I, Ozzy, made bloom far!
Great men like me do not die in one go.
Our lifetimes stretch beyond farthest star."

"But friend, if you were wonderful, then why
Did all your statues fall from violent blows?"
He said, "Well, no one understood what I
Wished to fix about their culture, so low."

I took a piece of ruin, wound, and hit,
Pleased the king could rot in the hell he writ.