

Yes You Can--Buy My Book of Bad Poetry

by Con Chapman

America has given birth to many great poets--Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Muhammad Ali--but why should talented people have all the fun? Isn't there room on this nation's overcrowded book shelves for poetry that is merely middling, as former Nebraska Senator Roman Hruska might suggest? He famously said of a Supreme Court nominee who had been criticized as "mediocre" that mediocre people "are entitled to a little representation, aren't they, and a little chance?"



Roman Hruska, Champion of the Mediocre Man

I say heck yeah! And how about bad poetry--I mean genuinely, truly awful poetry? Look at it this way: Beautiful poetry, to paraphrase John Keats, is a joy forever. Sort of like nuclear waste--where are you going to store it? Nevada doesn't want it anymore, nor does Washington. Try Nebraska, maybe Roman Hruska will take it. Bad poetry, on the other hand, is biodegradable. Toss it out your

car window and you can be fairly certain that it will decompose before anyone puts it in an anthology.



John Dryden, sitting in chair at Supercuts

You might be surprised to learn that bad poetry occupies a respectable place in the house of the English language. John Dryden, no slouch in the poesy department, said in his preface to *The Spanish Fryar* that he knew his verses were "bad enough to please, even when I wrote them." There are at least two very good poems about bad poetry, Yeats' *To a Poet, who would have me Praise certain Bad Poets, Imitators of His and Mine*, and A.E. Housman's *Terence, This is Stupid Stuff*. Ogden Nash famously (at least to me) said he'd rather be a good bad poet than a bad good poet.

A.E. Housman

My bad poetry (sounds like something a poet might say after throwing a simile out of bounds at a pickup poetry slam) is, like so much bad poetry, by a man about women. Something there is, as Bob Frost might say, that does not love such poetry. Just as the male fruit fly looks rather ridiculous doing his courtship dance for the female, there is nothing so absurd as a moonstruck male wooing a woman by rhyming "moon" and "June."



"When I said 'bad,' I didn't mean as in 'Santana is one bad guitar player.'"

But if you *know* you're writing bad poetry when you write it, as Dryden did, you may have a shot at producing something--passable. Of course bad poetry has one--among many--drawbacks for you, the consumer of poetry. It's less readable than good poetry, unless you're talking about the sort of verse that the poetry-industrial complex agrees is good because it's obscure. For those of you who balk at reading bad poetry, I've thrown in pictures by artist Sage Stossel--talk about customer service!



The Girl With the Cullender on Her Head (drawing by Sage Stossel)

The book--*The Girl With the Cullender on Her Head and Other Wayward Women* (Perma Press) is currently available in Kindle format on amazon.com, and should soon be available there (and on Barnes & Noble's web site) in print format. It may even, if Jupiter aligns with Mars, be available in B&N's bricks-and-mortar outlets,

although this is less certain. Poetry long ago reached what an aesthetic sociologist might call the "Maypole Dancing Tipping Point," by which I mean the stage in the progress of an art form at which the number of participants exceeds the number of spectators. It is thus not a genre that booksellers long to stock on their expensive shelf space.



Maypole dance: Participants outnumber spectators.

To help you avoid the hassles of finding a parking space outside your local bookstore or dragging your mouse over its pad to put the cursor in the "Add to Cart" box on your computer screen, I'm offering the direct purchase option favored by indigent poets and public corporations who want to avoid hefty underwriter's and legal fees (the corporations, that is, not the poets). Send me your address and \$12.50 and as soon the green eyeshade types down in my accounting department tell me your check has cleared, I'll send you your copy, autographed by me. For an extra \$2.50, I'll have one of my cats autograph it.



The accounting department: They won't let me ship until the check clears.

Many of the poems in *Cullender* first appeared here on Fictionaut, so look at it this way. You *could* have printed them out back then and saved yourself some money. But we can only pronounce a poem truly, genuinely bad when it has failed the test of time.

