

# QUILL AND QUIVER

# Quill and Quiver

*Jason W. Moulder*



RIDGELAND • MISSISSIPPI

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ISBN 0-9748282-1-1

Privately-published Edition

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*To —*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the professional advice, editorial assistance and friendship of T. J. Ray of the University of Mississippi English Department, and Durr Walker, Ph.D., chairman of the Copiah-Lincoln Community College Department of Humanities, the author is truly grateful.

*“This is the age of science, of steel—of speed and the cement road. The age of hard faces and hard highways. Science and steel demand the medium of prose. Speed requires only the look—the gesture. What need then, for poetry?”*

*Great need!*

*There are souls, in these noise-tired times, that turn aside into unfrequented lanes, where the deep woods have harbored the fragrances of many a blossoming season. Here the light, filtering through perfect forms, arranges itself in lovely patterns for those who perceive beauty . . .”*

—ROY J. COOK

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK represents my first earnest attempt at self-expression through poetry. I have written most of the verse for my own pleasure, and therefore make no apologies, even though I concede some of it is rather poor. The poems have, however, been edited with a general audience in mind. If something I have written brings enjoyment to one who reads it, I will consider this book to have been well worth the expense and many long hours of preparation.

In this modern age where information is too readily available, and competition from literacy-discouraging “iconographic” media saturates, published poetry probably enjoys a circulation far less than it did a hundred years ago. Therefore I have taken great pains to adhere, wherever practical, to strict meter and appropriate rhyme-schemes, without modification, in my verse. I believe this produces poetry that is more readable, and consequently, more likely to be read. However, I also concede that my style may be too stuffy for the modern reader, and hope that by practical experience I may be able to write with that freshness which is the secret joy of the modern poet.

J.W.M.

3 MARCH 2002



## Sonnet

ON FINDING A DOG IN A CEMETERY

Among the many grey and marble stones,  
In fragments most, I walked from grave to grave,  
And pondered noble lives to whom the bones  
Belonged in days before their grassy pave.

Unmoved and weary thus, I quit my tour.  
“As I came in,” thought I, “shall I go out,”  
Beside a cottage, vacant and demure,  
Which entrance marked, as well the exit route.

The figure of a dog was by the door;  
Bowed head upon its paws as though in sleep.  
“A faithful friend will wait forevermore,”  
I sighed, now moved with grief and sorrow deep.

Where noble dead lie buried in the cold,  
There also rests a silent heart of gold.

## To A Writer

I know a budding writer who  
Is growing far and fast—  
As evidenced by brighter prose  
Than Summer's sunny cast.

That clever ingenuity  
(The seed of things to come),  
Bemixed with assiduity,  
A prodigy become.

With constancy and nurturing  
This author's words will bloom,  
And to each happy reader bring  
Delight at their perfume.

I know a writer who, withal,  
(And few beside, I praise)  
Will one day be admired by all  
In Summer's sunny days.

## A Toast

To you, Dear Friends, assembled here,  
This toast I give you best:  
Long life, with happiness sincere,  
And love above the rest.

If each of you I knew loved me  
With half that I love you,  
Then in my heart I know I'd be  
The most lov'd and true.

Though someday parted we shall be  
By unrelenting years,  
Tonight may gracious memory  
Record our happy cheers.

## The Night Desert

Dark and calm and mildly cold,  
Is the midnight desert bold,  
Where traverses pensive heart and mind and soul.

Here the silent flora stand,  
In the warm fluorescent sand,  
Reaching out to touch the transcendental moon.

All with arid air around,  
Scribing runes upon the ground,  
There an errant scarab scuttles to its den.

Convolute and duney drifts,  
Eerie-lighted by the shifts  
Of the singular and moving mystic moon,

With the silhouetted mesas  
Of a thousand craggy faces,  
Mark the monumental monolithic miles.

The horizon faintly glows  
In a spectral curtain close  
As the silent moon dissolves into the sand.

Now the colours blue and pale,  
Wrap around the empty vale  
Of a sparse and Spartan landscape in the round.

Balmy breezes bathe the cheeks  
Of the hidden mountain peaks,  
And the desert waits for morning in a shroud.

## My Quiet Cave

How oft a hermit I have wished to be,  
    In close reclusion from society.  
Vain fancy conjures-out a quiet cave,  
    From 'twixt my convoluted matter grave,  
Surrounded by a desert dark and vast,  
    Where deep inside my cavern, safe and fast,  
    Alone I contemplate humility.

Without, the sea comes crashing at the gate  
    Of fears and failures foaming out the grate.  
And mountains tall raise shadows of disgrace  
    Above the desert vast, till face to face,  
I with a voice as small as grain of sand,  
    Command the flood be still—where on dry land  
    Alone I stand and watch the tide abate.

## The Oasis

With weary heart and wander-worn  
I bent upon my knee,  
As sun foreshadowed life forlorn  
With each obtuse degree.

Upon the desert cold and still  
I took my shallow grave,  
And offered-up my spirit chill  
The peace of death to lave.

My conscience then perceived a sound,  
Of water clear and cool,  
That sprang from under sandy ground  
In starlight-dappled pool.

Above, from zenith darkest blue,  
The stars reflected down  
Upon the pool, and not a few  
Of palms with festive crown.

How sated then my burning lips,  
Which turn from dark despair  
To Hope had by its falls and trips,  
The water's lively fare.

There born were Joy and Peace among  
Those many stately palms,  
Who greeted me with silent song  
And freely gave their alms.

In gentle slumber, soft and calm,  
Unto those stars here told,  
I walked and waded in the balm  
Of comfortable gold.

The living waters of the fount  
Became a sweep of light  
That seemed the very stars surmount  
To rise into the night.

And with a sound so bright and clear,  
The luminescent throng  
Dissolved and fell upon my ear  
A sparkling seraph's song.

When I from reverie awoke  
And lifting up, my eye  
Beheld above the date-palm cloak  
A crescent in the sky.

That silver moon became a crown  
Unto the noble trees,  
Whose fruit was ermine hanging down  
And incense in the breeze.

At last the morning came again  
And when the sun fair shone,  
Decided I to there remain  
And never walk alone.

## To A Cactus

'Tis said a desert is made by sunny days without end.

Ah! but the brazen sands are where my dearest flourishes.

Harsh and cruel expanse where my dearest flourishes.

She has the water of life within her bosom.

## I Dreamed about the Yellow Sand

I dreamed about the yellow sand  
And breath of sultry wind that blew,  
About the desiccated strand,  
Erasing pathways I once knew.

I dreamed the forest midnight air  
Ran circles round my sober brow,  
Then lightly tousling with my hair  
Sped boisterously from leaf to bough.

And dying then away it left  
Me high upon a narrow hill.  
Of what the sultry wind bereft  
The sleeping silent earth has still.

The dreams of Man are often told,  
Though often more of them are not.  
The yellow sands like grains of gold—  
Elusive fortunes all forgot.

## Across the Blue and Bittersweet Expanse

Across the blue and bittersweet expanse  
Is draped the fabric of a shadow pall  
That fills each wrinkle in its long advance.  
The ever-spreading darkness covers all.

No ghost there walks bemoaning life of care,  
But thirsty hearts and spirits dry there be  
Who, crying out in living pain's despair,  
Seek comfort in the waters of the sea.

The tide is balm upon their burning skin,  
But naked they return unto their pain  
For prison is the waste they find therein  
From which escape is evermore in vain—

Except to those who find the *other* side  
And perish not therein of hope's surcease,  
For opposite the ocean's ebbing tide  
There is a meadow full and still with Peace.

## Soliloquy

My days are spent in solitude,  
While bliss resides above me:  
Unattainable, unkind, unhappy.

My own passion frightens me.  
I have no true ear to tell  
My secret thoughts and desires.

Where is there hope for a prisoner?  
Can a man love two women,  
Each in his separate ways?

Platonic love also requires its requite.  
To have that love recognized and shared  
Is intense joy.

Love is pain for the mind  
Is too weak to bar it from the heart  
And yearns for release.

I am in love with two women.  
My heart beats in solitude  
For fear of losing both.

## Second Spring

When I was young and Spring was in the air,  
I *wanted* to be young, to love and share  
That sweet clear voice which Spring had whispered to  
The heart of one who loved a one like you.  
I didn't know you then, but knew the glee  
You someday would inspire when found by me.

Then Summer came, and with its hearty song,  
My foolish heart did follow it along  
The sunny vales and hills that hid the face  
Of Autumn's sad and mellowing embrace.  
And still in vain I sought your waiting arms  
That needed me as I your tender charms,

Until I feared that life would pass away  
Without another Spring or Summer day.  
So blinded by the lie that Youth was dead,  
I took another for my wife instead.  
In haste did I resign myself to Age—  
A young old man in **Winter's** iron cage.

For many years forgotten was the bliss  
That once I felt in thinking of your kiss  
That never was. When suddenly you came,  
Like early April rain, to call my name  
And wake in me that light and youthful thing:  
The love which then began my Second Spring.

## A Valentine

Two lips as tulips brushed with dew  
Two eyes as iris burning blue  
As lithe as willow growing new  
So full as Spring am I with you

## Boy Romantic

boy romantic  
why do you let  
the beautiful ones  
step so heavily  
upon your heart  
do you not think  
you could be  
one of them too  
someday you will  
outgrow your boyish  
heart and be a  
breaker of hearts  
but for now  
you will look through  
the pane and see  
the world you want  
inside

## Pretence

boy do you see  
the people who  
pretend they are  
just like you  
see them wanting  
to be seen  
to be touched  
love them  
they want to  
be loved  
like you

## The Mutability of Literature

Someday this book will pass away  
And never more be read.  
The vital soul who breathed its say  
Shall with its words be dead.

The gentle smile or dewy eye  
These leaves of tree may bring  
Will fade from lip, will cease to cry  
On life's abandoning.

Remember whether joy or strife  
That all in life is vain—  
Or don't, for memory as life,  
Shall be not yours again.

This day some book has passed away;  
The latest was the last.  
Ten-thousand took its place, and may  
Become tomorrow's past.

## The Portrait in the Attic

In dark and dusty dormers at  
The top of attic stairs,  
Lay relics of a century  
Of ancient cast-off wares.

Though most of them are useless, and  
A few of them are trite,  
When shades of night pour in between,  
Each one becomes a fright.

But there one object stands apart  
From all the other things,  
Which keeps me turning in my bed  
At night when night-bird sings.

Behind the attic door there stands  
(Eight feet in gilded frame)  
The portrait of a woman, with  
Grave eye and unknown name.

The face is pale and seamless with  
Expression cold as ice.  
The image haunts me ever, though  
I've never seen it twice.

Just who she is or why she stares  
Behind my attic door  
Is something that I never dared  
Or thought to ask before.

## The Separation of Man

What separates Man from the animal rank?  
His soul from the fountain of immortals drank.

What separates him from uncivilized ape?  
Tobacco and tea, an umbrella and cape.

What separates him from cruelty and hate?  
A membrane so thin as to be permeat'.

What separates Man from a passionate heart?  
Ah, nothing there is to keep those two apart.

## Glorious Tea

Won't you please have a seat?  
Oh, this *will* be a treat!  
Let me pour out the tea.  
Have a biscuit or three.  
There are strawberries, cream;  
And these tarts are a dream.  
I'll have toast with a pat  
Of delicious milk fat.  
Now tuck in; don't be shy.  
Do you like wheat or rye?  
And some cheese is a must.  
Eat the rind with the crust.  
It's all fodder to me.  
What a glorious tea!

**one**

A burden of ice the tree bears without complaint,  
but each limb will groan

**two**

If you make bold to read a poem to the wind,  
you may warm its ear.

**three**

In summer, death is irony, but in winter  
it is a sharp pain.

# The Lost City

*a triptych*

I

## The City in the Sky

The city was made of pasteboard and glue,

Tape

String

All façade.

Stealing its sustenance from the outside world  
Through idle electrical outlets in public lavatories,  
It existed by extension cord like a half-formed foetus  
attached to an umbilical, but destined for abortion.  
Its foundations had no more substance than

Papier-mâché

Tissue

Discarded newsprint

Assembled with spittle and well wishes.  
Corrugated cardboard columns ascended to the heavens  
from Marbleized floors and Crêpe concrete.

At least, one could hardly distinguish the concrete  
from the abstract.

II

## The Bureaucracy

They set about building a city with high hopes  
and lofty ideals,  
But resources were soon overspent. So the work was left to  
inexperience;  
The powerful Voids of Reason; the witless.  
Over-educated men of mediocre vision (if such could  
be termed vision), who blind,  
lead those who can see clearly.  
Men with formalized brains—bereft of hindsight—cannot,  
and do not, care to comprehend such matters as

History,

Meaning,

Expression.

“A stitch in time saves nine”  
Ask any seamstress the meaning of that.

Conflagration

Flood

Pestilence

All is gone.

III

**Humility**

He spat upon the floor,  
demonstrating his wretchedness  
to all in the room.

Later—and prior to his destruction—  
all would pity him at the sight of his basest humility,  
and also because of their empathy of human suffering.

When one is stripped of all else—  
Vanity, pride, selfishness, cruelty, hatred—  
one is always reduced to the most basic and common man.

One is always humbled to the degree that All must pity.

All must pity because the very sight of humility  
humbles *All*.

We as human beings share  
this one link *only* among ourselves.

All else is the shell of personality.

All else is vanity and vexation of spirit.



## Love's Admonition

In truth, My Love, I say but this:  
    To err is human, but divine  
Is to forgive the one whose kiss  
    Once called itself your valentine.

But malice cold when meted out  
    For some and ancient injury  
Is unbecoming as a pout  
    On face of grey maturity.

So as you have been blest withal  
    Though to you cruel lot befell,  
Dwell not upon the temporal  
    Nor petty thoughts which lead to hell.

Our truth, My Love, is in good-bye,  
    Although it falls a bitter rain.  
To live and love and now to die;  
    But mourn, and live to love again.

*for Jillian and Susan Lura*

## Cassiopeia

Although constellar beauty she displays,  
Andromeda, her daughter, was more true.  
And still more beautiful than they are you,  
For you light both the nights as well the days.

So as in Perseus' triumphant story,  
Upon my wings I brave the serpent's breath,  
And saving you from out its maw of death,  
Win to myself the prize which is your glory.

Together you and I, as the earth dials  
To bring your mother stars once more above,  
Gaze inward to each other's perfect love.  
And Cassiopeia from heaven smiles.

## The Little Empty Box

My life I lived alone and free  
Upon the cupboard shelf,  
Till such a time as movèd me  
To move my little self.

I needed boxes big and small  
For all my worldly things  
Collected through my early call  
To endless wanderings.

As I took up a carton wee,  
Just right for shoes or clocks,  
I realized that it was me,  
That little empty box.

I turned the pages of my mind  
Back through the book of years  
Unto the day when love was kind;  
Untouched by pain or tears.

That day I looked outside myself  
To find I need not roam.  
I filled with friends my cupboard shelf,  
And made my house a home.

## **She Waits Alone**

She waits alone  
And in a while  
The telephone  
Rings out a smile.

Rings out a smile  
The telephone  
And in a while  
She waits alone.

## A Valentine: To Jane

To my dear friend across the sea  
Six-thousand miles away:  
I really wish that we could be  
Together just today.

I'd like to share a hug, a kiss,  
And smile a smile or two,  
And tell you how I'll always miss  
A special friend like you.

And though today we'll never know  
Each other's sound or sight,  
Within my heart I'll feel the glow  
Of friendship's warmth tonight.

## Golden Girl

I remember the first day I met you.

You seemed innocent and far away  
Like Leslie Caron in “An American in Paris”.  
So young and pretty I passed you by  
as just another silly girl.

But that day was the last one for passing you.

You cared, and showed me how  
to find a path outside myself  
into your sunlight.

I was ashamed for my pride  
at thinking you foolish  
when you kept your femininity  
and still were more clever than I.

You, who while yet afar off,  
touched me as the muse and  
became both object and inspiration  
of life, love, and poetry.

The day I touched the Golden Girl

I was consumed,

but from the ashes, reborn a man.

## The Blue China God

The blue China god sits on a shelf,  
collecting the offerings of dust and neglect.

It shares its thoughts with no one,  
commanding the courtiers of dead flies  
and forgotten things in dark corners,  
in all its terrible visage and determined stare.

It rules supreme for a time  
until swept away by a usurping broom.  
The army of cobwebs surrender without protest.

# Six Nights

**I**

Invisible rain falls through the blackness  
until the dim street-lamp exposes  
sheets of fleeting water  
rippling down  
tiles of my indifferent roof  
still down  
to rut and rile the cold mud into panicked chaos.

In my bed  
warm and dry  
I say my prayers.

**2**

At last the fireworks!  
Lights out then  
Pop . . . .  
Bright boom to light the sky  
It spreads like fire and bigger than anything imagined.  
Crackle and dark

Again. I feel the deep report in my rib cage.  
Bright, Pow, and dark.

Oh! here's another smashing one!

3

Standing on the pier just before the storm  
holding my umbrella but the wind  
is too much.

Summer, but I feel a shiver.  
Watch the waves step-up the pace  
Low clouds whisper the suspense

Boom! The thunder catches me napping.  
Oh! There goes the umbrella  
now on the choppy waves  
shuttles quickly away away

4

Through thin exit left by a closed wild wood  
I feel my way to the familiar

Lying alone in a field of hay  
the universe looks fine.  
Inferior to the benevolent scene,  
but my happy heart beats like a giant's

to smell and feel the solid earth and gentle grass  
listen to the warm sounds and gaze  
half-smiling into the very face of infinity.

5

On the warm midsummer lake  
last colours fade behind ranks of silhouetted trees  
as my canoe drifts

tranquillity and twilight mingle  
into sweet perfection

All in a moment  
there is nothing to be seen except  
a solitary gas lamp by my cabin  
on the far shore

6

I drive down lonesome roads to find  
she is waiting at a table drinking coffee.  
I pause outside the door.  
She has sad eyes; dark and intense  
knowing I'm there but afraid to look up.

So self-conscious  
we don't even see the other until we've been talking  
for a quarter of an hour  
Then courage to look into those eyes  
without saying a word

## Tree of Life

The fruits upon the Tree of Life  
Are free for all to eat.  
As many plucked as many rife,  
Though all are bittersweet.

## To Berkeley

If writing you has only been  
Excuse for writers' cramp,  
The envelopes would faith have seen  
A sight more swirl than stamp.

## Three Rowing Boats

*or*; THE OLD SCOTS RIDDLE

Three rowing boats upon a shore  
In cold and misty dawn  
Where land there none a day before  
And two days for'ard gone.

One comes to seek, and one to hide;  
Another comes to find,  
The setting sun of eventide  
Leaves not the one behind.

Three rowing boats upon a shore  
In cold and misty dawn  
Where land there none a day before  
And two days for'ard gone.

## All for One

There was a time my life was dull,  
For want of any friend.  
Each day became the vacant hull  
Which futile years portend.

But slowly through the march of time,  
I found a troop so true,  
That now I treasure as sublime  
The friends I found in you.

As one who for a long time slept  
Is slower to awake,  
So to my heart the warmth which crept  
Did slowly overtake.

Now ups and downs which rise and fall  
Are but a trifle done.  
But lasting be the love for all,  
And strong the All for One!

## I've Heard It Said

I've heard it said, I don't know where,  
That people fall in love six times.

Though I, perhaps, have two or three,  
And hope that four will come my way,  
Know one is all I'll ever need.

And one should be enough.

If suddenly the world was fair,  
And every lover perfect matched,  
There would be no more poetry.

Or so I've heard it said.

## **C**enophilia

The fragrant flower at my nose  
Doth signal that thy fruit  
Was Bizet's Carmen with her rose,  
Become Vivaldi's lute.

The bold vermilion of thy hue  
Yet clarity of grace  
Are Vincent's brush upon the rue  
With Mona Lisa's face.

The heady verses of each sip  
Are Omar's Rubáiyát.  
The play before my captive lip  
Shakespeare himself begat.

## Quill and Quiver

A rustle in the dark  
Draw back the feather in my bow  
Defensive and afraid  
My pen will make the blood to flow  
What arrow pierce my soul  
That I should quill and quiver so?

## The Stray

Fancy Pants, the other day,  
Regaled me with many feats  
Of cute cat tricks to stay  
Inside the house for laughs and treats.

Of course I let him have his way.

## Bibliophilia

The crowd of books are gathered there  
Upon the bustling bookstalled streets  
Whose words kiss ev'ry letter'd mouth  
Between the brittle linen sheets

A book is sensual delight  
Together let us read a page  
Beneath the cover's gilded edge  
Our lusty appetites assuage

The senses filled with rare perfume  
And countless rhapsodies unheard  
We'll find the fly-leaf thus inscribed:  
*For You: my love and ev'ry word*

