doggerel

a chapbook

matthew stokdyk

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a chapbook of bad poetry

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We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely.

All art is quite useless.

— Oscar Wilde, from the preface of
The Picture of Dorian Gray

Art is useless because its aim is simply to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct or influence action in any way. It is superbly sterile, and the note of its pleasure is sterility.

— Wilde's response when Bernulf Clegg asked him
to expound on the former statement

"The only artists I have ever known who are personally delightful are bad artists. Good artists exist simply in what they make, and consequently are perfectly uninteresting in what they are. A great poet, a really great poet, is the most unpoetical of all creatures. But inferior poets are absolutely fascinating. The worse their rhymes are, the more picturesque they look. The mere fact of having published a book of second-rate sonnets makes a man quite irresistible. He lives the poetry that he cannot write. The others write the poetry that they dare not realize."

— Lord Henry, in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

(so which am I to be?)

contents

memoriae

A poet dies in me—
(as Nero must have thought).
So little time to be
an emperor and god.

Though a god I never was,
nor emperor, oh no—
the gods all live above
where mortals cannot go—

and kings can rule their days—
though days are short in Rome,
'til you're damned and erased,
your pictures scrubbed from home.

Damnatio, the senate cries!
Qualis artifex pereo—
farewell to me
and all my lies.

spring

we were springtime,
     verdant, vernal,
awash in light
   I thought eternal;
but now my heart
    is cold and stone,
grown o'er with moss
     and weathered down.

we soared aloft
    through cloudy heights,
though soon to crash
     like Phaethon's flight.
and yet I long
   to fall again,
and if to fall
   to meet my end.

encomium for someone that will never read it

i.

I lavish much encomium
    upon beguiling eyes
(though never will you hear me speak
    and tell my pretty lies).

But are they lies?
                    Perhaps they aren't—
    I'm sure we'll never know,
for you will never look my way
    for I am far below.

ii.

I long for vanity in love
    (indeed, perhaps, *hevel*)—
the cruel look, the brutal voice,
    as fleeting as the swell.

iii.

But you who stand so quizzical,
    whose eyes I once heard laugh:
come smile at once, and with your grin
    now write my epitaph.

iv.

I know you know much more than me
    (and so I am afraid).
For often do I love a face
    before I love a brain.

v.

And, too, I never love someone
    until I've wrote a verse
that takes their eyes and calls them gems
    (though emeralds are a first).

But now I've done it all again
    (my heart is on my tongue);
forgive this verse, so saccharine
    (but recall that we are young!).

message to an online romance who said they didn't like poetry

And you, my faceless friend,
what will you say to this—
these dreadful words that I have penned,
this poet's fatal kiss?
I am no fool (I swear),
I know I will not sway your soul—
but this will be a most sad affair
if I cannot write at all.

on trying and failing to write a poem for a pretty boy

I cannot write of who I do not love;
forgive me, dear; I really tried
to write of you as if of God above,
but every word felt like a lie.

fragments from a longer poem called "sweet"

Would Eve have shared a bitter fruit?
I rather doubt she would have done—
for death must never have a bitter taste:
indeed, the curse of sin is sweet and cold
and whispers growth—not waste.

It was a heart what killed this beast   (my own),
a soul that burned with sin beneath their breast,
a stone that stung like ice
        and never knew rest.

But pain was sweet
        (and sweet still is)
and sin a plum
        so sweet and cold,
a pomegranate to keep me here
in Hades' house of souls.

medea

i would have killed our sons for you;
i would have held the blade upon their throats.
i know i had not revenue
to keep you clad in stunning foxskin coats.

but really, now, a princess bride?
how sad, pathetic, and cliché, my love.
though i suppose i ought not chide
your creativity—or lack thereof.

epitaph from venus and the boar

I planted ivy on his grave,
and up it grew across the stone.

the man I gored with love and words—
Adonis buried all alone.

kerosene

I doused the past in kerosene
    and struck a final match
        I watched
                I watched
                        I watched it catch

destroying what had been.

big elm

It seems I'm Ethan Frome,
and you are Mattie, dear;
so go ahead and sled with me—
I'll even let you steer.

cleopatra girl

My Cleopatra girl,
who dies and dies again,
with flesh as white as pearls,
who under death will always strain.

And who am I, your love,
clown as fool as the rest,
a raven to a dove,
who yet is asp upon your breast?

would

Would that I had loved you!
thou fair and darkling bird—
but still I burn you
your pleas I have not heard.

Would that I had lips to kiss
either you or someone else as fair—
would that I had had a human heart
and not one of mongrel despair.

And would my eyes were stabbèd out
on dress pins long and gold
that I would never see another face
like the one who rendered me cold.

abridged musings from a funeral over christmas

I wear my winding sheet tonight,
        my robe and swaddling cloth—

there is no grief in death
        (for I feel no more, my love—
          my heart is in the urn).

the teacher knows not if life goes on
        (is death reprieve?
          or still shall I forever burn?)—

press me to your neck once more,
                              casket violin—
oh make rise a song from death!
for I shall have no eyes to see the sun
or ears to hear the tune—
but in my bones I'll feel the beat;
and my ash shall be stirred by your breath.
the candle's dim,
                    but still a shadow casts,
and still a shadow moves within our hearts.
but light!
        oh light—so frail and weak—
            you still are there.
        and though I scorned your gleaming eyes
        I must admit, oh light—
                        I still do find thee fair.   14

lust

I never loved your soul,
                          I'm sure;
your body was too fine
with hair like honey   alabaster flesh
and eyes of cherry wine.

It really was a shame,
                       I know,
that never did I see
your sharpened wit   ambition burning clear:
the love you offered me.

some poems that didn't make the cut:

- a Wisconsin-themed parody of Marlowe's "Passionate Shepherd," except most of it was about Culver's
- a poem that, without knowledge of the Shakespearean pun on "dying," would sound like the confession of a serial killer
- a really melodramatic poem about being dumped that relied entirely on the imagery of *King Lear* Act II
- a whole slew of ballads and sonnets that are far too erotic to print
- more pieces to "christmas funeral" and "sweet"
- a poem about a "summer child" that I wrote entirely ignorant of what it meant in *Game of Thrones*
- a terrible piece in tetrameter couplets about Orpheus that ended with the exceptionally good couplet of "Forgive me please, Eurydice / for hell has closed its gates to me."
- the same as the last, except from a poem on the flight of Daphne: "So Daphne fell to littered leaves / and still today Apollo grieves."
- anything written with any semblance of seriousness (except for "christmas funeral"—I couldn't help but be serious there)
- an erotic elegy written after Marlowe with such beautiful Marlovian lines as "books full bound in hide"
- a pleasant but utterly forgettable poem that very obviously borrowed from Milton's "pendant world" description of earth
- a sonnet/suicide note where each quatrain described circles of Dante's hell I thought my soul would be appropriate for
- literally 95% of anything I've ever written; that's right, all this was somehow the best I could muster