

Clerks Column

The other night, after browsing for more than an hour in the cornucopia of verse on the “Poets Against the War” website (<http://www.poetsagainsthewar.org>), I came away inspired—and I’m not even that much of a poetry fan. Among the many pages of poets’ names, several Friends turned up, and no doubt there were others that slipped past me.

This outpouring of peace-demanding verse burst out of thin air in early Second Month, after a White House poetry reading was first scheduled and then canceled, for fear that some of the invitees might spoil the desired gemütlich ambiance by reading an antiwar poem. This apprehension proved to be quite correct—the last time I checked, there were more than 8,000 poems on the site, and the volume continues to grow. It seemed to be a harbinger of the tremendous outpouring of public peace protest that has been seen since, and with antiwar poetry reading sprouting like cloned cleriheys, it’s now part of the broadening stream.

This phenomenon makes me imagine the kind of alarmed talk that must be flying around the nascent Department of Homeland Security in the wake of this outburst. Let’s listen in— it’s okay; I got a warrant from the Department of Homeland Metonymy:

Red Alert, Boss!
Look out the window—
What’s that? A fusillade of cruise missives?
And right behind them—
My god, right over there—
It’s a hail of incoming SCUDs
(Stanzas Calculated to Undo Destruction)
And behind us, all the mailboxes are stuffed with
unmarked envelopes full of powdered sonnets.

Christ! Call in the 82d Airborne Revision,
or it will be too late
To stop these rogue scriveners from launching their own TIA
(Total Imagination Awareness) Program.
And then where will we be—?

It's the nightmare scenario!
I think I'm gonna onomatopoeia my pants.
The Petrarchan Act won't help us now, with
Unmanned iambic pentameters droning everywhere.
And trucks smuggling cargoes of chemical limericks
and biologically active alliteration,
all over the country, speeding off at a moment's notice,
Always ten feet and a spondee ahead of the doggerel inspectors.

And when we run out of duct tape and plastic sheeting
to protect against the effects of
aerosol-dispersed terza rima,

Then, Boss, we can just kiss our assonance goodbye!

Even the sealed rooms won't keep out the
Laser-guided quatrains, and heat-seeking couplets
And if we somehow manage to get out, there's still the minefields of
dual-use haiku to pick our way through.
In fact, if they're not stopped soon,
one of these loose canons is sure to go nuclear,
figuring out how to rhyme
"irrelevant," "Condoleeza," or even "Poindexter."

Add it up, we confront the unmistakable and growing proliferation
of weapons of mass construction.

Let's face it, guys:
We're surrounded, and
This war just doesn't scan.

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