

a man who served two masters, and then some

in the morning mail a magazine arrives
including a debate upon the possibility
of one who is employed within the system
ever turning out real, gut-level, double-barreled,
two-balled poetry.

and that evening, preparing for my class
in survey of english literature, part one,
i read that geoffrey chaucer,
son of a wine merchant,
was variously employed
as apprentice vintner,
page to Lionel of Antwerp,
valet and soldier of Edward III,
beloved servant of John of Gaunt,
trade-envoy to the Genoese,
matchmaker in France on behalf of Richard II,
Controller of the Customs and Subsidies in Wool,
Justice of the Peace and Knight of the Shire,
Clerk of the King's Works (which involved
the construction of grandstands for their equivalent
of our Rose Parade),
Deputy Forester of the Royal Somerset Preserve,
and that he still found it necessary
repeatedly to petition
the patronage of the court.

thank god the guy had to work for a living
or there wouldn't be time to read anyone else.

reverse psychology rules all

watching that great john updike television adaptation,
all of a sudden it occurred to me
that if our nation truly wants to strengthen marriage bonds
all that it has to do
is make a law forbidding intercourse
between a man and wife.
or, better yet, mandate divorce
after a year or two together.

you won't be able to tear the beasts apart.
they won't sell out their love
for money, immunity from torture,
or for a guarantee of helen of troy
or robert redford.

i say the place for prohibition
is within marriage, not outside it.
i promise you four hundred million instant
romeos and juliets;
all over america couples will be curled for coupling
in the only corner of the condominium
into which big brother's prying eye cannot quite
penetrate.

you won't be able to drag them to a porno flick,
but bootlegged prints of happy families
around the breakfast table
will be all the rage.

similarly, if you want to clean up the country's language
make it a capital offense to employ a word
of more or less than four letters.

are you really sure i'm crazy?

another light goes out

for years i've left her funny notes,
but then one day i noticed
that she'd saved a stack of them.
when i asked her why, she said,
"so that after you're dead
i can prove you loved me,
even though you always say
you hate me in your poems."

i didn't mind that,
and i was actually flattered
to have a few of my dumb-ass, would-be witticisms
preserved,

but then i got to thinking about
some of the truly dumb and even ugly things
i'd also written,
and of some of the ethnic jokes i'd made,
which i wouldn't want anyone at any time
to think i had meant seriously,

so one day when she was out
i went through the stack
and removed a few of the more offensive sheets.

of course when i confessed to her
we had an argument