

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