

## A Carpenter to a Carpenter

Your trade was mine; your craft, I lay no claim to.  
I make my dealings square, which may suffice  
to brace as Austyn bit: plain, free from vice,  
I keep my spirit level, or I aim to;  
to hold at length my temple from my bank,  
I render unto Caesar what is Caesar's,  
the splinter in my eye, excise with tweezers,  
and do the same, or try to, with the plank.  
One job alone has robbed me of my slumber,  
ordained by one I can't refuse a task,  
a simple job: just two plain posts of lumber,  
no inlay—no fine lacquerwork—no gilt.  
I've never asked much of you. Now I ask,  
by whose hands—God or man—the Cross was built?

## George Auriol to a Patron at Le Chat Noir

*Auriol invented a guidebook to the bar claiming distinguished provenance for everything in it.*

Come in, come in! Here, have a glass of beer:  
the best in France—so says the Pope, you know.  
I'll seat you where he sits when he sups here,  
beneath these poker-playing dogs (Van Gogh).  
Don't touch, the paint is fresh! I knew the model:  
lovely gal. Alsatian, I recall.

Her only vice, a weakness for the bottle;  
poor dear! Not drink—the bottle, that was all.  
These lamps were looted from the sack of Troy  
aboard the pirate Pinkbeard's twelve-mast scow.  
Our beer, which I can see you quite enjoy,  
is brewed by tight-lipped monks who take a vow  
never to speak a lie—I, as a boy  
was in the order. (I have left it now.)

## Robert B. Staver to Wernher von Braun

*After World War II, Staver recruited Nazi scientists to build the U.S. Space Program.*

The road to Hell is paved with good intentions,  
but what of the reverse? Just like some un-  
expectedly benevolent inventions  
(the Hug Bomb, or the Penicillin Gun),  
ill will can double-cross itself: a power  
of wild destruction, terrible and terrific  
like spoiled wine into water may unsour,  
begrudgingly prove—*utile*—“optimific.”  
The steps to Heaven glint with evil's glamour,  
salvation being merely an award  
for those who, stoking fires of Götterdämmer-  
ung, before the raging forge grew bored,  
until they, fumbling blindly with a hammer,  
banged a ploughshare from a bungled sword.

## Parmenides of Elea to Doris Day

What? “What will be will be?” But what will be  
but what will be? What won’t be? No siree,  
for what will not be will not be, you see,  
and what will what will be do if not be?  
See, what is not is not what is and nor  
is what is what is not. Or is it? For  
what is not seems, and what seems is not, or  
at least, seems not to be. What seems not, nor  
is either, isn’t. Although, not all that seems  
not is not, nor all that which doesn’t. Dreams  
are and are not, like forms, or sunlit beams,  
which aren’t and are. A paradox—it seems.  
And, paradoxically, quite clear, I think.  
Or *think* I do. Zeno, pour me half a drink.

## Death to Donne

*After John Donne: “Death, be not proud....”*

I have no pride. I have no vice! Which sin  
could I commit? Would you suggest I lust?  
Your flesh is putrid—presently, but dust.  
Do I wax wroth? This face can’t help but grin.  
No shepherd ever slew so many sheep

as I my flock: does that make me a glutton?

Well, peek beneath this robe—I'm *rather* thin

(I must confess, I've never cared for mutton).

Perhaps it's sloth? I have been called "like sleep"

(in fact, we're twins). But day and night are twins

(my mother and my aunt). And I contend

that greed and envy, though two top-rate sins,

are concepts that I cannot comprehend—

how could I? See, it's *all* mine, in the end.