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## Golliwogg

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# ***GOLLIWOGG***

**BY ALAN FREER**

## **SENIOR HONORS PROJECT**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
2 JUNE 1995**

## *REVELATION*

*We make ourselves a place apart  
    Behind light words that tease and flout,  
But oh, the agitated heart  
    Till someone find us really out.*

*'Tis pity if the case require  
    (Or so we say) that in the end  
We speak the literal to inspire  
    The understanding of a friend.*

*But so with all, from babes that play  
    At hide-and-seek to God afar,  
So all who hide too well away  
    Must speak and tell us where they are.*

*--Robert Frost*

**POETIC VOYEURISM:  
PEEKING BEHIND THE PAGES OF *GOLLIWOGG***

**ALAN FREER**

**SPRING 1995**

Thesis Advisor:  
Kenneth  
Brewer

When reading a poem, one often wonders what prompts the poet to use a certain word order, to break the line at a specific point, or to even use that particular topic as the subject of the poem. Although there are those literary critics who assert that a poem should be read entirely out of the context, there is much to be gained by looking at the poem with the additional background information about the author, particularly what the primary influences of the author are. Such is the intent with this essay in providing a behind-the-scenes look at what shaped and created the *Golliwogg* collection

Golliwogg first shuffled into my life around the fall of '89 when I was searching for a topic to use as a poem for my high school English class. Searching frantically through the dictionary, I stumbled across the word "golliwog, " defined as "an ugly or grotesque person." With this definition, I wrote my first Golliwogg poem entitled "The Golliwogg." After this, it wasn't until the winter of '92 that I re-awakened the idea when I took the word and scripted a new poem, this time for my poetry writing class with Ken Brewer. Within a few hours, I had written three poems with Golliwogg as the central character: "Golliwogg," "The Birth of Golliwogg," and "The Judas Tree."

At that point, I did not know what I intended for the future with Golliwogg (or Wogg as I like to call him), only that I had fun with the character and it helped to fill the number of poems that I needed for the course. Professor Brewer suggested that I explore the theme further and that perhaps I should incorporate the poems into a series. After penning a few more poems, I then decided to

submit it as an Honors project. In preparation for the proposal, I researched the word and found that it began as a character in a children's book.

The word "golliwog" originated from a group of children's picture-books entitled *Two Dutch Dolls and a Golliwog* written by Bertha Upton during the Civil War era. I discovered that the only library in this area which has a copy of the book is at the University of Utah. I went there to review the manuscripts, which are located in the Locked Special Collections section. After reviewing the manuscripts, I discovered that the main character is a small black rag doll who encounters misfortune and maltreatment from other dolls, and is meant to be a racial parody on negroes. From this information, I decided that it would be appropriate to create a series of poems which deal with prejudice, and expounding upon the one-line title poem, "Flesh is merely a cocoon."

Within the context of prejudice, there were several philosophical ideas which I wished to develop. I wanted to deal with prejudice in the forms of religion, self, and fellow beings. Within the realm of religion, I wanted to address the notion that although many organized religions claim that religion is developed to help the sinner, they often turn away and castigate the ones whom they espouse to help. In correlation to this, I wanted to explore how a major religious crisis, could lead to a type of self-prejudice where the individual begins to doubt himself and question his self-worth, especially in comparison to his peers. This leads to the last section of prejudice which I wanted to address, where the character experiences the prejudice of his fellow beings, either because of looks, or because of prior actions.

The whole concept of this prejudice is to create a character which is not a protagonist, but rather an anti-hero who is by no means beautiful, yet somehow attracts the sympathy of the reader.

Because of the fact that I was dealing with the subject of prejudice in the collection, I found myself being influenced by several sources which I have thought of as being provoking in a prejudicial sense. Of these influences, I found that I was affected most by the Bible, Ted Hughes' "Crow" poems, the monster from Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, and John Milton's, Satan, from *Paradise Lost*. I liked these characters because they did not feebly accept their predicaments, they fought for what they wanted, even if they did not win in the end. Another thing which I admired in these characters is their underpinning conflicts with theology and morality. These characters each experience different types of religious crises, and I felt that this could be a theme which I could have my character address as well. These works provided me with characters which were not perfect, yet they were able to inspire the sympathy of the reader.

In addition to the aforementioned literary sources, I was also influenced by the works of Nietzsche, especially those dealing with the aspect of the "superman" figure and his declaration in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* that "God is dead." From this, I tried to determine how a character would act if it was given the initial disposition of the characters mentioned above with the tutelage of Friedrich Nietzsche himself. This element of the collection helped to tie in a unifying link of theological prejudice with the fellow-being prejudice.

I worked with these two controlling ideas for a while within the series until about the spring of '93, when a friend of mine was discovered missing. He was nineteen at the time, experiencing some pressure from problems he had with his family, religion, and himself because he did not know what he wanted to do. Soon after his disappearance, the family discovered a poem he had marked as his favorite, Robert Frost's "Revelation." Because I was about his age, the family asked me to interpret the poem to see if it could give them a hint as to what he may have been thinking. It was then that I decided to incorporate Frost's poem into the collection because it dealt with a search for self, and I chose to end the series with the poem entitled "Revelation II," which is dedicated to my missing friend.

While I tried to deal primarily with these subjects, I found myself incorporating a number of ideas and characters into the actual poems themselves. It seemed that with every new idea which emerged, a new character would come in contact with Golliwogg. The eclectic nature of the series began to grow, and I found myself adding Morrigan, the mythological Celtic deity of death and war who could shape-shift into a raven. I also added the Mongrel character from Ken Brewer's *Mongrel*, and adopted Goethe's Homunculus in the form of Patchwork, taken from his work *Faust II*. It soon seemed that I had created my own universe in which Golliwogg interacted with everyone from deities, to philosophers, to even other literary figures in an attempt to discover who exactly he is.

In addition to the goals which I tried to achieve with the poems in a



philosophical sense, I also had some technical/literary ideas which I wished to explore, namely in the areas of humor and accessibility, the inter-connectedness of the collection, and the idea of "flash" poetry. My goal with the Golliwogg series was to create a group of poems which are fun to read, yet have underlying substance to them. While the poems appear humorous on the surface, I tried to delve deeper in order to create meanings within the poems so that they might be able to be read on multiple levels. The main idea is that the majority of the poems can be read in under a minute and enjoyed instantly, after that the reader can ponder the significance of the poems. I feel that this may lend some accessibility to the work, in the hopes that people who generally do not like to read poetry, will enjoy these poems. Additionally, I tried to create snappy titles for the poems in order to draw the reader's attention. One of my most voiced complaints about poetry is that a great poem can often-times be overlooked because it has a title which does not attract the audience. I felt that my poems would be more enjoyable to the reader, if the titles were unpredictable and drew upon the absurdities of the English language.

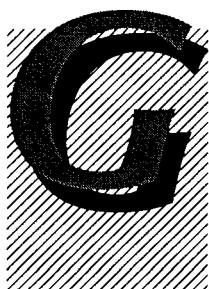
In continuing with the idea of making the poems more accessible, I tried to pare down the poems to the bare essentials, leaving poems which do not appear intimidating on the page. The poems are brief and terse, often ending with a "kicker" or "punch-line" which can lend shock value to the poem. I actually got this idea from watching commercials on television, and decided to fashion a sort of "poemercial," where the poem can be read in under a minute with immediate

gratification. The idea was to create a type of "flash" poetry that can be read and appreciated by just about anyone.

The final thing which I attempted to do with the collection was to interweave the poems, so that the strength of the work was not derived from the individual poems, but from the collection as a whole. While the individual poems may appear somewhat shallow on the surface, it is within the complete collection that I tried to instill the philosophical aspects of the poems. Ideally, I wanted the collection to read somewhat as a fictional work, with each poem constituting a "chapter" in the over-all work. This has proved challenging because with every new idea and addition of poems, I have had to alter the complete collection in order to get the differing ideas to mesh. The major flaw with this however, is that it can lead to gaps in the group, where the reader may get confused in the order of the ideas being presented.

Given the goals which I have set for the work, I feel confident about the way the series turned out. Although it may not be a masterpiece work, or even suitable for publication, I feel that I have accomplished what I have set out for in exploring different philosophical ideas in the form of technical and literary devices. Overall, I have enjoyed writing the poems, and feel that much of the time, Golliwogg ran away with me, leaving me only to write down what he did of his own accord. To me, it seemed as if he had developed a life of his own, and I was the one who was fortunate enough to witness his actions. The one wish I have now is to see how the reader will view the work, and whether he or she can see

and appreciate the things I set out to create.



**PROLOGUE**  
**(*PRO-LOGOS*)**

In the beginning was the Word  
And the Word was with Golliwogg  
And Golliwogg scribbled the Word.

The same was in the beginning  
with God.



## GOLLIWOGG

Flesh is merely a cocoon.



## THE QUICKENING

"Shall not our limbs then feel the quickening?"

--*Faust*, Part I

Golliwogg stirs within  
God's bowels,  
startles His sleep  
with rubbing thighs  
and restless feet.



## THE BIRTH OF GOLLIWOGG

God fartS  
and Golliwogg dropS  
steaming--  
like a pile of dung.





## GINGERBREAD-WOGG

God scrapes up Golliwogg,  
throws him on the pottery wheel  
to mold in likened image.  
Fires Golliwogg in His kiln  
to bake out sin.

With heat singed soul,  
a glazed Golliwogg  
bursts truculent from the oven--



## DIVINING THE WORM

Golliwogg searches himself--  
masturbates his mind:  
discovers charred-stick blackened soul  
seething with worms.



## OEDIPUSWOGG

Golliwogg beholds the mother of Crow--

Morrigan the Raven:

The wrinkled face

The Time-sagged skin

The shriveled dugs

bloats his penis.



## SQUISH

God turns to Crow  
                    and says:  
Squish Golliwogg's soul  
sticky  
like a wad of gum  
stepped in  
on mid-August asphalt.



**CROSSTITCH**

76 mph religious crisis  
hurtles toward  
Golliwogg:  
a Texas cyclone of perdition.  
Golliwogg clasps to a death-repentant God;  
lashes down his soul  
like wrists  
stitched to a bloody cross.



## MONGREL

--for Ken Brewer

Golliwogg gazes into the mirror  
and beholds  
Mongrel  
staring back at him.

"You and I are one,"  
Golliwogg says.

Mongrel lifts his leg  
and pisses  
on Golliwogg's shoe.



**SPUTTER**

No wind,  
          the water glass:  
in imitation,  
Golliwogg  
steps off the bow of the boat  
to tread in Jesus' steps--  
splashes  
inhales ocean;  
bobs up  
sputtering sea.



## WAGGLES

Golliwogg lumbers atop Mount Zarathustra,  
spies Nietzsche stroking Mongrel.

Queries,  
"Great Prophet, can you help me,  
I have trouble with religion--"

Mongrel barks, bears fangs,  
Nietzsche waggles a finger at Golliwogg:

"Ahhhh, you're the one  
running cursed from God.  
Don't worry about Him,  
follow me now:  
Mister,  
God--He's dead;  
I killed Him."





## TOTEM

Golliwogg gapes:  
What *if* God is no more?  
Who shall grant my vision--  
what shall I worship?

The universe?  
a cross?  
a prophet?  
a woman?  
a demon?  
a crow?  
a raven?  
a mongrel?  
a tree?  
a worm?  
a rock?  
myself.



## BACKSEAT DARWINISM

Peering over Nietzsche's shoulder  
Golliwogg glimpses the *Book of Life*:

"Ahhhhh, THIS IS KNOWLEDGE!"

thinking superior,

Golliwogg asks

"So man really was begat from apes?!"

Nietzsche turns--  
castigates

"Shut up Golliwogg, you don't know shit."



L---

Golliwogg looks at Nietzsche  
tender eyed;  
opens his mouth:  
"i L---

Crow swoops down  
tears out Golliwogg's tongue;  
wings away  
cackling.



## NIETZSCHE-CHOW

Seeking guidance,  
Golliwogg hikes the Mount  
searches for the Prophet.

Golliwogg aghast,  
spies Mongrel  
chowing Nietzsche's corpse,  
picking his brain.



## SIGNS

"I need a spiritual experience,  
how do I pray for a sign?"

Faith lacks:

Golliwogg ponders spirituality;  
searches the sky for a miracle--  
squints niggard wings high above,  
hears a caw--

Crow swoops down  
pelts golliwogg  
with a stub  
of tongue.



## SNAP

Life becomes too brittle for Golliwogg--  
stress, pressure, prejudice, and failure  
weigh upon him heavily. . . .

Golliwogg's nerves  
snap  
like a man's neck  
lynched from a 7-foot 1-inch rope.



## ROADKILL

Blasting its diesel horn,  
an 18 wheeling nervous breakdown  
mauls Golliwogg--  
splats his mind  
leaves the intelligence  
of a dead skunk  
on the roadside.



## WASTED FORESKIN

A feeble-minded Golliwogg drools  
down a rumpled straight jacket.  
The sterile walls of a padded room  
entertain thoughts  
of winged ponies, pink elephants and God.  
Golliwogg lies slumped alone,  
cast out  
like an infant's wasted foreskin.





## WERE-WOGG

Rat bite festers--

pink and puss-white scabrous skin  
delivers pain and horror  
revealed by full moon.

Wogg dizzies under silvered light  
feels bones crackling like microwave popcorn  
nose to snout  
hands to claws  
hair to fur  
man to rat

Golliwogg sniffs the air with twitched whiskers  
eeks away slippery in shadows.



## NIBBLE

Werewogg regains control  
lips smack w/ blood  
claws tattered with skin  
remembers the beserk  
tastes the death  
squeals in rage  
nibbles his tail  
in frustration.



**VISION I:****THE JUDAS TREE**

In dream-fever,  
Golliwogg dreamt he was Judas:

"I spiked my Master to the cross;  
betrayed him for a sack of silver."

In dream-sleep, Golliwogg finds a tree,  
dangles his guilty form from a limb  
with a piece of hemp.

Golliwogg wakens with a gasp  
and a stiff neck.



**VISION II:****SCOURGE**

In Bethany at Synagogue  
Golliwogg the Savior beheld  
the rumpus roar of barter;  
the hoarse slurs of "for sale," "sold!"

It stoked Golliwogg's wrath  
to view caged doves and bleating lambs  
peddled for sheckeled sacrifice

It churned Golliwogg's anger  
to overturn the littered tables  
of jewelers, money changers, and lenders

*"My house shall be a house of prayers,  
you have made it a den of robbers"*

But it scourged *Golliwogg's* soul  
to lift and lash the flail  
to purge  
the merchants  
out,



**VISION III:****BLAZE**

Blind & shorn  
between the pillars  
in fetters of brass,  
as Samson, Golliwogg  
hears the taunts of the crowd  
and accepts his destiny.  
Bowing his head,  
Golliwogg pleads with God  
to grant the gift of suicide:  
"Oh God, give me strength  
to let me die with the Philistines."

Golliwogg tenses once,  
yanks and tugs the stones  
to raze Dagon's temple;  
sealing a tomb of darkness  
amid the blaze of noon.



**WOGG**

The sleeper must awaken.



## VIABILITY

Reality prods Wogg's comatose  
uncomfortably--  
like crouching  
upon  
a wet toilet seat.



## QUAKER-PSYCHOLOGY

Like instant oatmeal,  
sanity coagulates around Wogg.  
Wogg stirs,  
wakens  
mushy-headed.





**BORN AGAIN**

Wogg  
passes  
within--  
emerges  
blood/blue  
scream/squirm.



## THE SECOND COMING

Crow circles  
Mongrel growls  
Morrigan laughs

Wogg skulks toward Bethlehem  
to sup on Christian afterbirth.



## WOGG'S INVOCATION

"When you look long into an abyss,  
the abyss also looks into you."

--Nietzsche

The Poet has fled  
and buried His soul.

And now, before which muse shall I kneel  
and supplant my will  
to beg revelation from the wreckage of a toppled cross  
where the Prophet proclaimed,  
"God is dead!"

How shall I delve the inner-self--  
dredge the spirit-heart-mind-whatever  
and breathe life into my creation,  
arising from the rubble ashes  
of Good and Evil.

Implore the Ravenous Goddess,  
Morrigan, the ebony bird:  
Oracle of Death and War,  
to instill apocalyptic visions  
for the fate which awaits.  
Or beseech the mangy wisdom  
of a Mongrel Dog  
to grant a metaphysical glimpse  
into the future-past-present

Finding parentage and inspiration  
in the spawn of Raven & Hound--  
to beget a bastard child  
destined to shuffle humped  
through the static pages  
of my imagination:

A Patchwork-Wogg  
Godless here for evermore.



## WOGG'S OFFERING

Someone take these dreams away.

Banish these demons gnashing within  
to embody them in a Patchwork Frame  
as dark as its name:  
Forsaken here for evermore.

Dismantle and deconstruct  
these self-inflicted nightmares  
to stew in Morrigan's Cauldron  
burning upon an alter of fur and flesh and bone.

Grant me an offering of redemption--  
And to love  
a God.



## PATCHWORK

"Remember that I am thy creature"  
--*Frankenstein*

In Faust's laboratory  
Wagner and Mephistopheles  
birthed homonculus--  
Golliwogg watched All.

With god-like ignorance  
Golliwogg attempts Creation:

measures

pours

stirs

mashes flesh to bone  
as play-dough to sticks;  
steals human features  
like silly-putty lifted from Sunday Comics.

Begets Patchwork  
who grubs in hunger.



## THE SUPERMARKET JESUS

"Take heed that no man deceive you."  
--Matthew 24:4

Wogg spies Jesus in the supermarket  
at two in the morning  
in the produce section  
fingering watermelons with dismay.

Checking for bee stings,  
and with a thump  
He turns and asks,  
"Are these ripe?"



## PATCHWORK EATS CROW

Crow spies Wogg huddled  
over a small writhing shape;  
curious  
Crow juts down.

Wogg remembers the black-blue-blur,  
scampers away cowering;  
leaving Patchwork sprawled  
on the ground.  
Crow lands atop the fuzzbaby head,  
pecks the scalp with a questing beak.  
In annoyance,  
Patchwork grabs a tuft of feathers  
and stuffs Crow into his gaping maw;  
burps a muffled caw.



## NAILS

Sighting rusty nails,  
Wogg  
remembers Christ's hands  
impaled.  
Cowering in shame,  
shuffles his humped back  
into the safety of shadow.



## PHOENIX

Passing through Arizona desert,  
Wogg looks through cactus spine  
at the sun  
swears he sees Crow--  
a feathery ball of flame.



**FED-EX**

Wogg receives a FedEx--  
and in it,  
a postcard which reads:

Dear Golliwogg,

Just wanted to let you know

*I am*

alive.

Don't worry about me

I'm doing quite well.

Oh,

by the way,

Nietzsche send his best.

--God.



## JABBERWOGGY

Gawking the burning bush,  
Wogg becomes entranced in flame:  
    gibbers  
    babbles  
    jabbers  
    prophecies.

Descends the mount  
with tablets of stone commandment:

"A little bit of philosophy is a dangerous thing."



## WOGG'S CAW

The dark flock flies overhead again  
to rest perched  
on telephone pole and wire.  
Crow or Raven?  
I don't know;  
they are black  
they have wings  
they caw.

In my mind's eye I see  
Morrigan the Raven  
Celtic goddess of war  
writhe into her shape-changed feathery form  
soaring above the doomed  
to spawn the death  
which awaits her wake.

Caw Caw

Hughes' Crow circles behind guiltily  
grubbing battle's afterbirth--  
a black mosquito  
glutting bloated corpses.

Caw Caw Caw

This is now a second lesson:

So much depends upon  
a black bird.



## REVELATION II

--For Paul

Huddled inside the pupa, Wogg  
writhes within his molting shell . . .  
tears skin-like leprous flesh--

bursts the cocoon

emerges mouldy wet.

Curious  
the mutated Wogg shambles  
to a mirror in Narcissus fashion  
gazes at alter-ego-reincarnate--

**breaks poet/speaker barrier:**

i am

the Golliwogg:  
the facade of my darkest self

through disguise i reach for help,  
but the mask camouflages too well  
that which should not be seen.

So here  
i hide within your breast

the i alone  
the i shall die

yet the mask remain  
the cocoon.



