



## Some parodies an anthology



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### Clive James

#### Letter to myself

Dear Clive, I've meant to scribble you a letter  
For some time now. I know you like to get a  
Brown-noser now and then, and well who better

To do the honours than yours truly, Clive?  
Over the past few years I think that I've  
Proven myself the handiest hack alive

(Or even dead) at pumping up the egos  
Of my illustrious Grub Street *amigos*.  
It's sometimes said of me, 'Too bad that he goes

Over the top so often. Are his pals  
Really the *Goethes*, *Mozarts*, *Juvenals*,  
*Einsteins*, *Nijinskys*, *Chaplins*, *Bluff King Hals*,

*Elijahs*, *Pee Wee Russells*, *Leonardos*,  
*Jane Austens*, *Churchills*, *Platos*, *Giottos*, *Bardots*—  
This list could grow as as a *Mikado's*.

Great fingernail, if I don't stop it pronto—  
*Et cetera*, of his peer-group? I don't want to  
Malign the poor sap, but he sounds like *Tonto*

At times, whose quaint devotion to the Ranger  
I never understood. He runs the danger  
Of taking every passing *Percy Grainger*

For *Beethoven*; or seeing *Botticelli's*  
Mind-boggling artistry (or, say, *Crivelli's*)  
In some chum's doodle on a *Bertorelli's*

Table-napkin. Good God, where will it end?  
I like a fellow who sticks by his friend,  
But Clive's like *Don Quixote*, round the bend!

I've heard this stuff a zillion times before.  
Every great poet meets the kind of bore,  
Straight from the *Dunciad*, who feels as sore

As *Grendel* and *Beowulf* because  
He's not in on the act. As if I was  
A sort of literary *Wiz of Oz*,

Holding my court, but waiting to be rumbled  
By *Judy Garland's* pooch! I bet they grumbled  
When *Pope* flashed *Dryden's* name, or *Piero* mumbled

Something about *Veneziano*. Blimey!  
These runty characters were sent to try me,  
But I'm not *Gulliver* and they can't tie me

Down, sport. I'll lay off writing to my chinas  
For now—those *Schopenhauers*, *Kafkas*, *Heines*—  
And magic up some several-hundred-liners...

About myself The prospect's fairly heady!  
Make sure the old adrenal pump is steady:  
Not too much juice. Ready when you are... Ready

Actually, Clive, I must admit I'm nervous.  
I've never had to face the champion servers—  
Toe-amputators, any-which-way swervers—

But now I feel the terror of some boy  
Alone before the *Wimbledon polloi*,  
Waiting for *Hoad* or *Laver* to destroy

Him smash by smash. Will some allusion ace  
Me, as I flail about, *gauche*, in disgrace?  
Will metaphors bounce up and dent my face?

Or will...? But wait a tick; don't let's forget  
That's me as well the far side of the net.  
*Christ*, what a bummeroo! I'd better let

This metaphor drop like a hot potato  
And settle down to something a bit straighter,  
More in the style of *Horace*, *le grand Maître*.

Clive, you're the greatest poet in the business!  
To contemplate your talents brings on dizziness.  
Just as a *Bollinger* is full of fizziness—

The mark, I'm told, of any good champagne—  
Ideas appear to bubble in your brain.  
I'm baffled that your head can take the strain.

*Tchaikovsky* thought his bonce might topple off  
I don't think his mate *Rimsky-Korsakov*  
Suffered the same delusion, but some prof

Might put us right on that one. Anyhow,  
I like the splendid eminence of your brow  
(*Hokusai's Fuji*, *Mallory's Jungfrau*)

Seem the right names to drop in this connection).  
I like your well-used cricket-ball complexion.  
I like—and let's waive *Jamesian* circumspection

(I'm talking about me, not *Uncle Harry*)  
I like the whole caboodle. Yes, I'd marry  
Me If I could. On honeymoon in *Paris*,

In any other *chic*, *kulturni* city,  
We'd do the local *Hermitage* or *Pitti*  
And jot down names of painters for our witty

Verse letters to each other. Life and art?  
Both *Proust* and *Aristotle* said some smart,  
Quotable things about this, but apart

From them (the *Hobbs* and *Bradman* of their field)  
A fair amount remains to be revealed  
Which is where we waltz in. Art has appealed

To us for yonks. We've always nursed a pash  
For Russian Lit., Expressionist *gouaches*,  
The Blues, *Ming* vases, *Rosewall's* cross-court smash,

Early *Walt Disney*, madrigals, *Kung Fu*,  
*Homer*, French cooking, *Mahler's* no. 2,  
*Dame Sybil Thorndyke*, *Pascal's Pensées*, *Pooh*...

The names! The names! They give me such a thrill,  
I could run on till Doomsday in this shrill  
*Pindaric* fashion, and, dear *Clive*, no doubt I will.

### Christopher Reid