A 3RDBESTIARY

A folder of THIRD best creature quatrains? How’s this *necessary*?

A review of the 2018 book *An Alphabestiary* claimed that however enjoyable it might be, I ran out of steam by the end. Why did I have to go through the alphabet four times?

For the 2022 update, *A Betabestiary,* I doubled down and added a 27 poem outtakes section, plus a dozen more quatrains that I’d written for *The Flap*.

*A Betabestiary,* like *An Alphabestiary* is a book for browsing, not for reading straight through—or running out of steam, as the reviewer did\* is pretty much inevitable. (\*It was not I who did! The poems were not written in the order in which they appear, so if the "end" quatrains are less steamy, it’s by happenstance.) Still, since some readers are *built* to binge-read—that’s how some of us do it—I got that I needed to cut the sweetness a little, and to root out what slackness I could identify. Because the reviewer had a point; some of the work did need more work.

So the revised book is stronger and more stringent. These 3rdBestiary pieces, however, are more variable in quality. Some I like but they didn’t fit the book’s parameters; some just missed the 27 poem cut; some fail, but not badly enough for me to erase them from my files. It’s more of an indulgence to archive them here than it is “necessary,” but it’s useful for my writer’s scrapbook: to keep bits and pieces that I may come back to, seeking to mine from.

The first quatrain here, the “A is for Aphid” piece, I use (in a revised version) in the 2022 book to talk about my website. I have kept this older draft in the 3rdbestiary folder because it was written expressly for such a purpose, as an intro to my excluded bestiary bits.

A IS FOR APHID

*Aphids are tiny bugs that feed on plant sap. They come in hundreds of species, reproduce with brisk vigor, and have catholic tastes—while each species may have its distinctive preferences, between them they have the vegetable kingdom pretty much covered. In this 3RDBESTIARY file you will find animal quatrains for every taste, presented from A-Z—some comic, some observational, some obscurely informative, some lightly lyrical. You are invited to browse upon them like the Aphids, taste-testing and moving on.*

On Petal Ridge

On Petal Ridge, the Aphids cluster,

Taste-testing leaves… Oh, *these* pass muster!

And this! Those too! What's wheat, what's chaff, it

Barely matters to an Aphid.

B IS FOR BONOBO

*Bonobos, who live exclusively on the south side of the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of Congo, share 99.6% of their DNA with chimpanzees, who live exclusively to the north of it. They’re each other’s closest relative, the only two members of the genus Pan, but they don’t interact. They are also the closest extant relatives to homo sapiens, with 98.7% shared DNA; but then DNA similarity, as this piece points out, is not intuitive. Except it’s not hard to believe that humankind is half bananas. It’s plantains that you’ll find in the DRC, by the way, cultivated for cooking; I’ve no idea if the fruit-eating bonobos can get at them. But they should! The words play so well together: bonobo, banana! And you’ll notice that this is not a one quatrain piece. I didn’t feel I could pare it to a single quatrain. There are other poems like that in the 3rdbestiary, ineligible for the A & B bestiaries on length alone.*

Bonobos, of the species *Pan*—

the closest extant breed to *Man*—

are timid homebodies. We’re hoboes

who’ll boldly trot where the whole globe goes.

Chimpanzees—*Pan* too—reside

on the same river’s other side.

Neither swims. They never meet,

like kids too small to cross the street.

The DNA we share—just shy

of 99 per cent—sounds high\*.

But isn’t that the family way?
So different, but for DNA?

(\*With slugs, it’s 70. Deliver us!

Bonobos, who are frugivorous,

don’t eat kinfolk. So well-meant!

Bananas and us? 50 per cent.)

C IS FOR CASSOWARY

*Cassowaries are big flightless birds native to New Guinea. “Well, duh,” once you’ve read the quatrain.*

Alberta Tour Group

Our flight to Papua from Grande Prairie's

Packed with Canucks—and Cassowaries!

They've booked a *plan*e home to New Guinea?!

(Well, duh! They're *flightless* birds, you ninny!)

D IS FOR DORMICE

*There's a dormouse called the glis glis which I was tempted to write about instead. Its common name is the edible dormouse, and the ancient Romans used to dip them in honey and eat them for dessert. Dormice do generally have a lifespan of about five years (if not eaten for dessert, etc.), do tend to be nocturnal (also arboreal), do often hibernate for six months or more, but I'm not sure how gently they go into their last goodnight. How many animals that hibernate, especially for so long, must slip away int their sleep, though.*

A Brief Meditation on the Half-Life of Dormice

Five years. All nights. Then goodnight, dormice.

Six months, all night, they feed, breed more mice.

Six months, all night, all day, they doze.

How gently their dark darkens; goes.

E IS FOR ECHIDNA

*Zoological echidnas are spiny anteaters; the mythological original was a cave-dwelling half-woman, half-snake. In my quatrain I've named only some of the notorious monsters Echidna is credited with birthing. She was one prolifically perilous mean mama.*

Mother of Monsters

Echidna, half-woman and half-snake,

Mother of monsters: if you'd baked cake

For your vile kids—Sphinx, Hydra, Cerberus,

Scylla, Chimera—would they still murder us?

F IS FOR FAUN

*It was Stéphane Mallarmé who wrote the great and difficult poem "L'Après-midi d'un faune" which inspired Claude Débussy's music. Either way, it seems to be about a faun—a creature, half-man, half-goat, out of Greek mythology—who wakes from an erotic dream of nymphs, or who wakes and ponders on a morning spent with those nymphs. One nymph is sensual, the other pure, and the faun can't handle either one of them. The faun, like Mallarmé, is confused by all this, but makes of it a beautiful symbolist music.*

L'Après-midi d'un faune

The Faun, that goat spawn of great Pan,

Unsure if he's god, beast, or man,

Has dreams of nymphs (explains Débussy)

Who'll spurn him, dancing a chaste watusi.

F IS FOR FIRE FISH

*The fire fish, or fire goby, is a kind of dartfish of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The biggest of them, at about 3 inches, are too small for eating, but they do swish themselves into difficulties: as aquarium fish, they will sometimes jump right out of the tank. Their fieriness is in their red tail and their yellow crown; the bulk of their body is white.*

Griddle Tune

Fire Fish! Savor the name.

Picture an ocean reef, aflame.

Picture so fresh a fry of fish

It swishes its own self to the dish.

G IS FOR GOBLIN

*Goblins have a bit of a mixed reputation in folklore. I picture them as dwarflike in size and shape, but uglier, and more dangerous—sometimes they’re darkly magical; usually they’re brutish. Who knows? They don’t stray out into my world much. But if they did, I would fear them for their name alone. It sounds so viciously, unhesitatingly hungry.*

Cannibal Rights

Gobbling Goblins, Goblins say,

is the God-given Goblin Way.

It's only, with a gobbled squawk,

when gobbled themselves, the gobblers balk.

G IS FOR GOBLIN: a Goblin response

*My preceding quatrain somehow went viral on Goblin social media. While some Goblin commentators applauded me (I knew of the cannibalism! Isn’t it just divine?) mostly they scoffed. Oh, they understood my intent, to call into question a fundamental HUMAN self-interested willful blindness to inconvenient truths; but the piece, they informed me, was false to the GOBLIN perspective. Which is practical, frank, unflinching. The gobbled Goblin’s squawk is not an indignant complaint; it is a psalm of reverence, albeit mingled with lament. Participants at the feast even claim to hear ecstasy in it, as the devoured one enters into Divine Union with the Goblin Oversoul. Allow the Goblin Poet Laureate to expatiate.*

To go, gobbled by *Goblins*, though?

By God! What greater way to go?

That swan song rattle in the throat?

That Goblin *squawk's* a glory note.

We fart and belch, we shit and piss—

for we are gross, and gross is bliss.

We roar, we rev our Goblin bodies

for revelry—to go where God is:

to lick and squeeze, to suck, be nibbled;

for God is rude and God is ribald—

to gobble, till we too are gobbled;

for that's the world our God has cobbled.

Be Goblins, brothers! Feast, and bloat!

So when *you’re* meat, and in the throat,

your Gobbler kin will raise a goblet

to toast your taste; to hail and gobble it!

We thank you, Uncle, for this meat

who squawks your good squawk as we eat.

We belch, and fart, to praise you, dish!

made piquant by your double wish

to serve the stew, devoutly bobbling,

and have it too—a Goblin, gobbling.

Well, down you go! To rise as what

will fill tomorrow's chamber pot.

You humans flinch. You get upset.

You dodge; disguise; pretend-forget.

It's sweet! We're not offering advice.

We're us; you're you. Cheat. Lie. Play nice.

I IS FOR IMPALA

*I used to love to do cryptic crosswords. I’ve never lost that love really; they're just not as common in the States as in the UK. I do try the other kind, sometimes, but they don't interest me as much. The first three here follow the rules of a cryptic crossword clue, breaking down the parts of the whole word and providing other ways to read the sequence of letters: I'm PA LA. Etc. Normally you would only do this once, then give a clue to the whole word. I do it four times, and I give two whole word definitions (Chevy, rooibok). “Rooibok” is the other name (from the Afrikaans) for this woodlands African antelope that can leap enormous distances and grow horns as big as the rest of its body.*

Cryptic Crossword Animal

*(1)* I'm Pennsylvania, then L.A.

*(2, 3)* I’m a lap back. I’m dad, some say,

with the French Chevy. *(4)* I’m, friend, a

*rooibok.* Bounding and slender.

I IS FOR INCUBUS

*This is a different Incubus quatrain from the one in "An Alphabestiary." I got its list of names by typing "incubus" into Wikipedia. They (and more) are given as regional variants. "Alp" is from German folklore, "boto" from the Amazon basin, Trauco from Chile; "lidérc" is Hungarian, and "mare" Swedish; tokolosh is Zulu and Xhosa, and impundulu is Xhosa;"pori" is from the Assam area of India. Some of these beings resemble incubi (demons who sleep with human women) more than others. The pori sounds more like a succubus. Actually, as spoken language, I'm not sure what any of them sound like—I speak none of these tongues. Nor can I swear that this quatrain rhymes well or comes close to scanning.*

Exotic Demon Lovers

Incubus types are everywhere!

Alp, boto, Trauco—lidérc—mare;

tokolosh; impundulu; pori:

that old let's blame the devil story.

K IS FOR KIWI

*Way back when, there were two species of flightless bird in what is now New Zealand. The Moa was much larger than the Kiwi, but it was the Moa, the once dominant bird, who went extinct centuries ago. Kiwis have survived, although they are still quite vulnerable. Kiwi fruit is doing well, though. It's also called Chinese gooseberry. Racist jokes used to be pretty universal. When I was growing up in London the rage was for Polish jokes, featuring Poles as archetypically dumb sad sacks. It’s astonishing to think, nowadays, how casually they were told and retold, with few people thinking anything much of it.*

Kiwi Jokes

In Moa jokes, Kiwis were fruits.

"How gay! He won't say *fart*—he *poots.*

His *prick?* A *weewee.* *Piss?* He *wees!*"

You think their breed's extinct? Oh, please.

L IS FOR LLAMA

*Llamas are humpless South American camels, related to alpacas, but larger. They’ve been domesticated for haulage—on Andean mountains, they're sure-footed and strong-backed—but they're not always crazy about the job. A displeased llama may lie down on the path, or it may spit stinky saliva in your face, or it may throw up on you. Nor, I'm guessing, do llamas much like being skinned for their hide or eaten. Single “l”* lamas*, native to the mountains of another continent, enjoy a safer and more elevated social status. But OTOH, does a single L lama ever get to orgle? Why there’s a special word for the sound made by a sexually aroused llama, I’ve no idea, but there is one, and it’s “orgle,” and aren’t you curious now?*

Llama Dharma

“Alarm my llama,” says the farmer,

“at your own risk: there will be drama.

He’ll sulk! He’ll spit! The pompous beast

will lose his head, think he’s a priest,

and bray, *Me llamo lama, pal!*

Are llamas calmer who can’t spell?”

L IS FOR LOBSTER

*Lobsters have ten jointed, armored legs, with claws about as long as their body attached to the front pair; and teeth lurking in the claws—blunt crushers in the heavier claw, sharp piercers in the lighter one. If you're having trouble counting the legs, it may be you're including the four antennae, or the two compound eyes, peering out from the tips of stalks. Periodically, lobsters molt, shedding their hard shell for a briefly soft one; it will thicken, though, if the lobster hides itself well enough from you—you who wish to boil it until it blushes red, then eat it.*

Lobster à la Topspin

The Lobster's a fierce tennis freak.

His serve is wild; his net-play weak;

He sprays his volleys like some mobster;

His *lobs*, though! Oh boy, what a Lobster!

N IS FOR NASOKIND

*The German poet Christian Morgenstern (1871-1914) invented the Nasobēm under the influence of English literary nonsense poetry; I studied him in high school, and this creature has remained with me. My quatrain paints the same picture as his original, except that I have tried to visualize and conjure the child ("Kind") whom the* *Nasobēm has in tow.*

A Small Step for Nosekind

Das Nasobēm von Morgenstern

Strides on long nose legs. His bairn,

The more stub-nostrilled Nasokind,

Trots in short pants, sneezing lint.

M IS FOR MOA

*Moas are extinct, and have been for centuries. But they were once the big boss birds of the New Zealand forests (before it became New Zealand): wingless herbivores who strutted their stuff in their, who knows, we think maybe millions. The Maoris settled the islands at around the turn of the 14th century. Within a hundred years the Moas were no Moa.*

So Lawn to the Moa

When Moas ruled the islands' forests

there were no predators. No tourists.

Nor one zookeeper or Noah.

Their ass is grass now. Came the Mower.

M IS FOR MUMMY

*This one, disclaimer, isn’t inspired by any kind of visit to see pyramids: I’m not much of a tourist (I prefer longer stays, in just one place), and I’d rather avoid tourist fast food food halls, if at Giza there are any. Mummies, whose internal organs have been removed, would have even less stomach for them, though.*

The Mysteries of the Giza Pyramids Food Hall

It's been millennia since their *last* food,

And still not *one* comes by for And *still* their tums won't touch fast food!

Divinities, once mummified,

Don't care what's "just so yummy" fried.

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O IS FOR ONETWO

*I've been asked how those who don't exist can become "old." The answer is simple: they have wanted to exist for a longer time than those characterized as "young." Such wanting is, essentially, what defines the OneTwos, and is how they are measured—regrettably, however, nothing can take them more than a couple of steps into the authentic and real.*

The Old OneTwo

Old OneTwo sighs. "If we existed,

We'd dance the two step! Fight two-fisted!

Write code! Rule the music biz!

We're *want* to’s, though. No OneTwo *is*."

O IS FOR OYSTER

*Oysters may frequent freshwater or salt water shallows, but they're most abundant in the sea deeps, clinging to rocks and feeding on whatever's pushed their way by the current. Pearls form inside all mollusks—they render parasitic worms less irritating by coating them in nacre—but very few species manage to produce pearls of any value, with good luster and durability. The finest are said to come from the pearl oysters of the Indian Ocean. But wild (or “natural”) pearls are extremely rare; most gemstone pearls are farmed, or “cultured.” Mud worms in oysters, by contrast, are commonplace. And it’s they who are the aggressors, not the oysters: they colonize the shell, and can weaken and damage the mollusk severely. (A single quatrain, quite variant version of this piece appears in “A Betabestiary.”)*

Oyster Warning

Oysters sift the ocean's swirls,

and coat a few stray worms in pearls.

Mud Worms sift for a stray Oyster

to swarm inside, and feed, and roister.

Slow death by pearls, for all its luster,

deters few worms; it’s mostly bluster—

their life’s more murderous, and moister,

outside of than inside an Oyster!

So on its own petard it’s hoisted,

as Mud Worms cluster to be cloistered:

to fatten, boisterously, unflustered,

coating the Oyster back like mustard.

P IS FOR PANDA

*Giant pandas, who are the pandas of pandas-for-short—there are also red pandas—are mostly Chinese. They like quiet bamboo forests, when they can get them—not easy, because in China that habitat is shrinking. Anyway, it's a bamboozling addiction, since bamboo's none too nutritious, and a giant panda must binge and binge to earn its descriptor. Eat some chicken with honey, big guy! Pandas are related to raccoons. Western scientists used to think them mythical.*

Panda Tantrum

We're pampered Pandas at the zoo,

And we demand BAMBOO! BAMBOO!

We trust that's what you've planned to hand us?

Come pander to your pampered Pandas!

P IS FOR PHANTOM

*Phantoms are Ghosts, but they’re also figments, and deceits, and illusions. Beware, Halloween kids and Halloween householders—they’re among us! (Oops! Sorry, real kid. SUCH a good costume!)*

How to Tell the Real Ghosts from the Kids Dressed Up for Halloween

Can you tell ghosts from sheets with eye slits?

To prove they're real, not a disguise, let's

Rip kids' sheets off, and unpant 'em!

If nothing's there, *that* one's a phantom.

P IS FOR PHOENIX

*The Phoenix is a one-of-a kind Arabian desert bird, who every half millennium or so feels old and burns himself to death, so as to rise, young and vigorous, from the ashes. The phoenix in this weird conversation quatrain is at the end of a life-cycle, and decides to go through his rebirth publicly, for a good cause. I hear that they sent him a nice thank you note.*

Same New, Same New

I saw him once, you know? The Phoenix?

A fundraiser. White wine and Brie-niks.

He rose from his ashes. Sang some Greek.

So I hear you were in Dubai last week?

P IS FOR POPCORN MONSTER

*In which we revisit old, rather too familiar friends, who just happen to be monstrously unkillable psychopaths. But with a tub of popcorn to comfort us, and at the safe distance of a flickering screen.*

Horror Movie Sequels Night

In twenty films, Freddie and Jason

strap their glove and goalie face on, `

to make folks pay! Cheap, shopworn thrills.

But man, fresh-buttered popcorn kills.

Q IS FOR QUAHOG

*The bivalve known as the hard clam, or the hard-shell, or simply the clam, is a different species from the ocean quahog. But it's this one that the coastal clammers clam, and call, in New England especially, "quahog"— the name taught us centuries ago by the Native Americans. Wampum beads come from its shells; tickled taste buds from its raw or its chowdered meat. There are, surely, somewhere, families who spread this meat with jam.*

Clam Jam Jam

Quahogs are these neat, cute clams

My family eats with sweet fruit jams.

At the beach, my piggy pa hogs

All the peach and half the quahogs.

Q IS FOR QUANGLE WANGLE

*A creature of the Edward Lear bestiary, the Quangle Wangle was no Jumbly, or Dong, or Pobble, or Owlycat power couple, but he did have that really great hat. And there they and all the rest of the great man's tribe could gather, making their goofy noise, as in these alphabestiaries. My favorite bit of Edward Lear nonsense, though, is his recipe for Gosky Patties: a perfect metaphor for the laborious creation of failed art; still the name I give to my own rejects folder.*

For The Quangle Wangle

For all us weird kids, Mr. Lear,

Whom his vast hat, his great good cheer,

Delighted with your jingle-jangle,

I say, “Long live the Quangle Wangle!”

R IS FOR… (A RIDDLE)

*He whose name must be guessed is famous via a tale collected by the Brothers Grimm, but its origins date back about four thousand years. The version I remember from my own childhood has the imp stamping the ground with such ferocious anger that he splits open the earth, falls in, and is never seen again. Which must have made for a pretty cool cave to discover, a couple of thousand years or so later. (Ooh, gross! Ooh, pretty!)*

Cave Riddle

Flecked in the walls, some say they glimpse

A rumpled, spilt skin—once, the Imp's

Whose stamped foot forged this cave. They claim

He burst into gold dust… Guess his name.

T IS FOR TOMOLIN

*My friend Tom O. concocted these magical animals, for the tales he told his kids. Tom loves the folklore and traditional music of Ireland, so I spun them into aes sidhe bugs. (The Sidhe or Sith are a supernatural race in Irish mythology.) In Tom's own tales there are two kinds of such beings: the snickeroodle (who are bad) and the pookadoo (good), and they get trapped in the rug patterns if they're seen or touched.*

The Tomolin Ceilidh

The Tomolin are *aes sidhe* bugs

Who mimic the swirl-shapes in your rugs—

Emerging at night, to Irish dance,

By torchlight, with shades of potted plants.

​T IS FOR TURKEY

*Here’s what I wrote for A BETABESTIARY: “The Turkey is a uniquely American bird, domesticated by the Mayans. Wild turkeys are ground feeders, but they roost in trees to sleep; farm turkeys, by contrast, are bred and fattened to stay placidly flightless. Farmers tend to cut off the snood, that fleshy bit on the forehead, because turkeys yank on each other's snood to fight—which to a wild turkey would be a humnilation. In the wild, the long-snood males snag the most desirable females, while the little-snoods must kowtow to the big ones: wild turkeys have a serious pecking order! A wild turkey would come right at you, for example, dear reader, seeing you as their obvious inferior. I mean, just look at your snood!”*

*So what’s a Turkey quatrain doing here, you ask? Well, it’s a fourth one, and quite different from the other three. What do I mean, “the other* three*”? Well, the Kindle version of A BETABESTIARY features a Wild Turkey quatrain; the paperback slightly modifies it and adds a second quatrain, on the “Well-Bred Turkey.” And AN ALPHABESTIARY had a Turkey quatrain that was neither of those other two. Also, isn’t “snood” just a particularly funny word?*

Let’s Talk Turkey

To irk your Turkey, jerk its snood.

Ours got perky. It got rude.

“Would one good tug,” we mused, “de-snood it?

What fun to try!” We were deluded.

W IS FOR WITCH

*In which I continue the Halloween theme established in the quatrains for the Phantom and the Popcorn Monster. (There are other examples in the book proper.) I get asked to read at Halloween events, and creature quatrains are useful seasonings for the poetry mix. Witches, of course, aren’t* all *wicked (“Wicca good, and I’ll be over here,” as Xander Harris sings to Willow Rosenberg and Tara Maclay, rapidly backpedaling), but at Halloween, watch out! They weigh the same as ducks, you know! And they bob like apples in the barrel instead of sinking. And they build cottages in the forest made entirely of candy to trap and eat wayward kids! So, yes, jab them with a broomstick, if you have no flying house to drop on them.*

How to Make Your Halloween Evil Witch More Evil

A pointier chin, a wartier nose,

A throatier cackle, gorier clothes—

They'll all help make a witch still wickeder.

But *not* like jabbing her own broomstick at her.

X IS FOR XYLOFOIL

*The Qwertyuiop (a night visitor of mine: see "An Alphabestiary" or “A Betabestiary”) came up with this creature. I'm not sure what he was thinking, but that's the subconscious for you.*

The Song of the Xylofoil

The Xylofoil's a rosewood poppet

Whose mouth draws breath when you unstop it.

Plonked on the ribs, he whistles notes

Like trees caught in the crosswinds' throats.

Z IS FOR ZEBRA

*There’s the reality and then there’s the metaphor. Or at least that’s my hope, in most of these little poems: that both aspects will be present, and that they will play off each other. In reality, what zebras are famous for is their stripes, and almost nothing else. Then I read that they have excellent vision, both day and night, and are one of the few mammals who see in color. I like how this shifted my view of them. And I also like how, with the second couplet, the metaphor shifts. How zebras look versus how they are; how zebras are versus how they think they are. It's neat! Just a bit untidy. And I’m not sure I like how the metaphor shifts: how I see things versus how I think I see things. I’ll have to think about it.*

 Some Judgment Calls

Zebras are famous for their stripes.

Skin-deep, they’re black, white, black, white types.

Their view of things, though—night and day—

Is perfect. Color. Shades of grey.

Z IS FOR ZORSE

*A true fun fact, but I don't think that uncommon: some animals of different species can mate, but will only bear young if they do so in the right gender mix. For zorses, it's not an absolute rule, though. A truer last line here would be "but she and he don't* generally *breed a brood." And the why of it is tricky. Zorses are mostly bred deliberately—they're hardy, useful animals, and even zoos have been known to breed them—but zebra mares are just more valuable as moms to actual zebras. What’s more, out in African nature, there aren't many wild horses around for the wild zebras to disport with. So the gender inequity MAY, in part, be a case of human socio-zoological engineering! Zorses, also called zebra mules, or zebroses, look like horses or like mules, but with stripes. They're infertile. Or so the socio-zoological engineers say.*

Gender Inequity

A he-zebra can woo a horse,

and do the deed, and breed a zorse—

a she-zebra can do the dude,

but she and he won't breed a brood.