Facetious Fiction



By John Paul Campbell III

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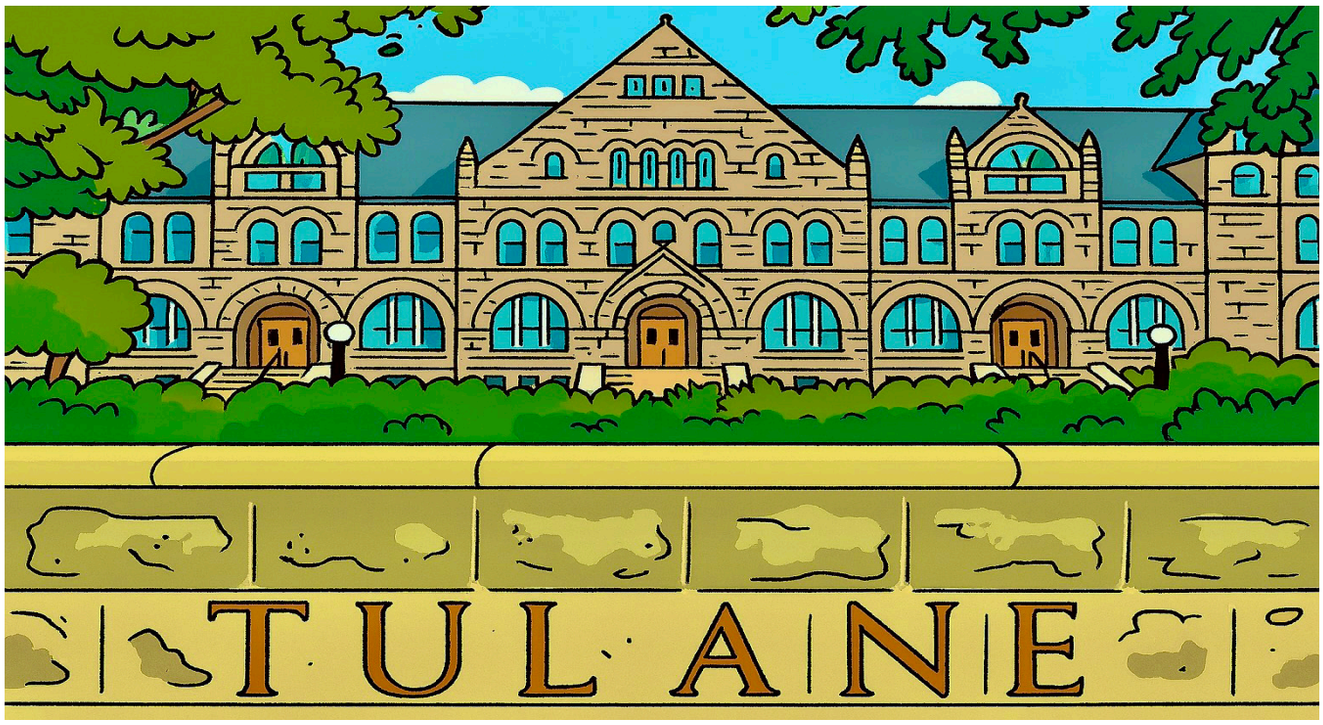
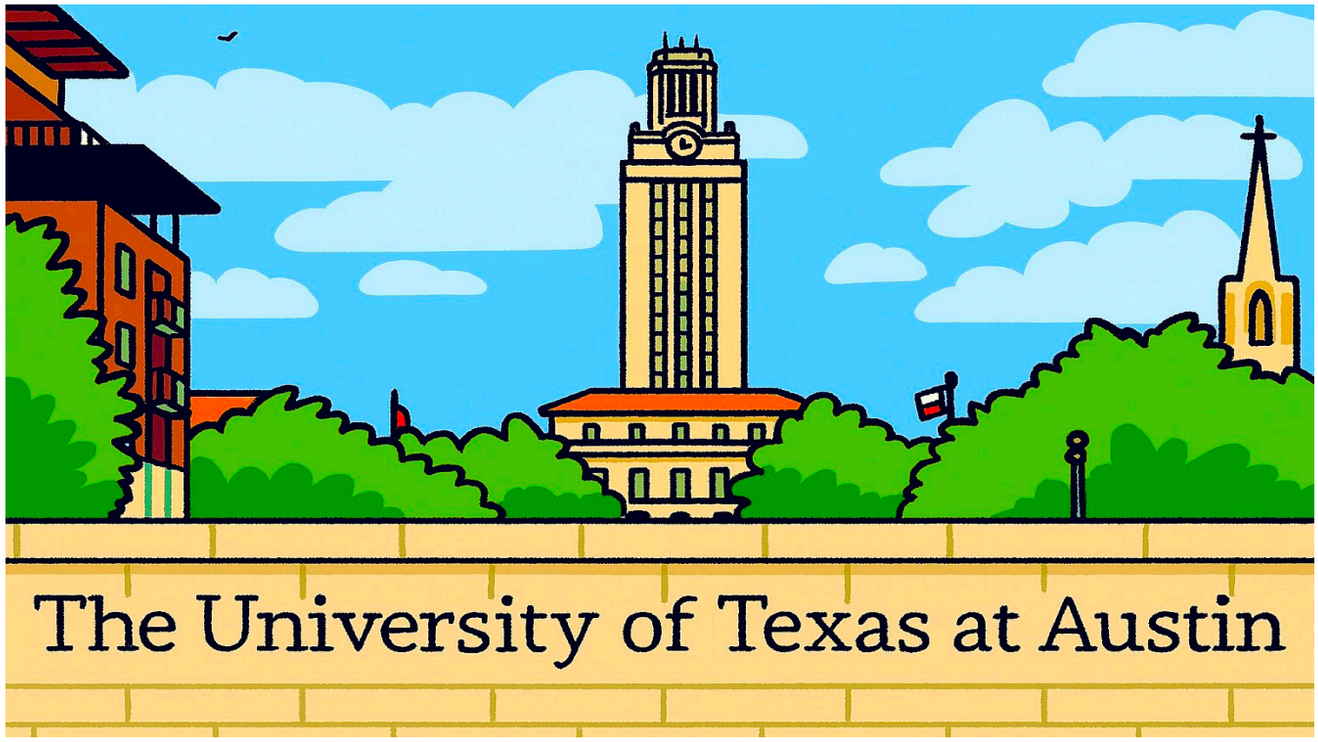


Facetious Fiction

1968–1972

by

John Paul Campbell III



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INTRODUCTION

During my university days at Tulane University in New Orleans and the University of Texas at Austin, I often amused myself by writing humorous stories and poetry in the style of various literary genres taught in my literature classes. I rediscovered these texts in a storage box from 50 years ago. The stories in this book reveal my sardonic youthful humor during those wild days of college life during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The current era of computer book design and AI creation of fantastical images has finally allowed me to present these old musings in motifs appropriate to the youth culture of the 1960s in which they were created. For a modern viewpoint, I have included AI critiques of these stories.

Enjoy!

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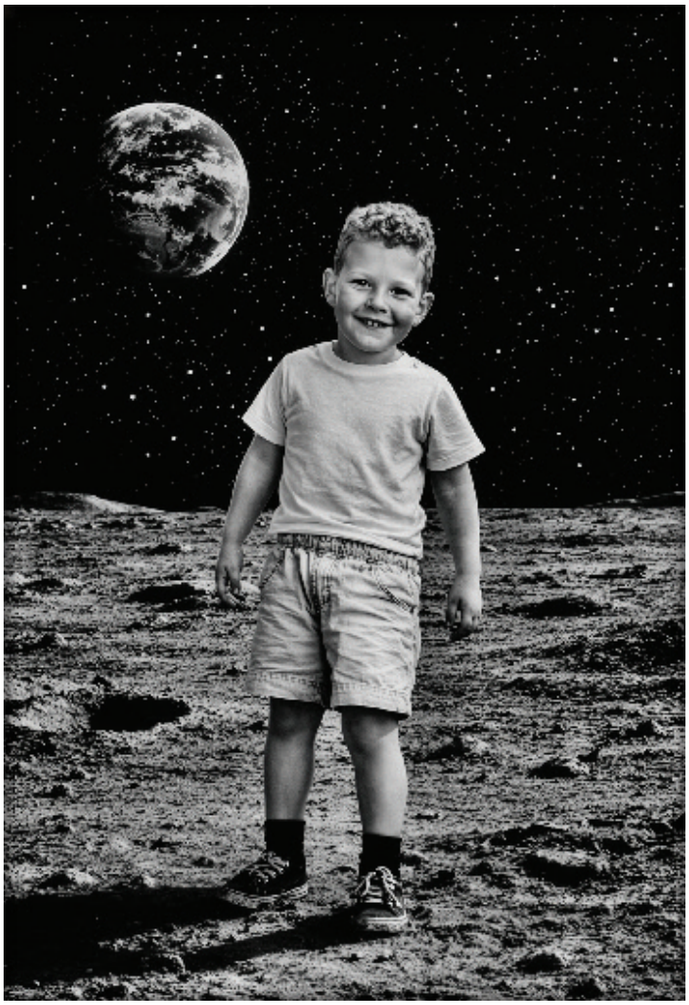

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Star Child

Written 1968, New Orleans

Review by AI ChatGPT, April 2026

"The poem ***STAR CHILD*** is lush, surreal, and evocative—its language and imagery evoke both the introspective interiority of being alone and the expansive, almost cosmic sweep of imagination. It blends sound, sight, and touch in a synesthetic way, giving the reader a rich multi-sensory experience. The opening's pairing of Mozart's music with a physical room immediately sets a mood that's both intimate and elevated. The poem has a clear internal cadence, with a mix of longer, winding lines and short, declarative ones—mirroring the ebb and flow of the music being described. Some passages, however, are so layered that the reader may lose the thread. While these lines are vivid, the rapid-fire surrealism can overwhelm without some tether to an emotional or physical anchor."

Review by Google AI Gemini, April 2026

"***STAR CHILD*** is a work of Cosmic Lyricism written in 1968 in New Orleans. It weaves together classical music, quantum physics, and celestial imagery to explore the intersection of human consciousness and the vast universe. The poem establishes a deep connection between the narrator's immediate environment and the far reaches of space. The poet experiences sound as a physical and visual medium, with a profound sense of scale and belonging. The poem concludes with a warning that this cosmic experience is dependent on an absolute focus; if one looks away from the "alluring visions," the music ends. Campbell utilizes scientific concepts as tools for artistic creation with the 1960s counter-cultural themes of awakening and human expansion."

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Star Child

Mozart's Quintet in G Minor is adrift in my room,
The repetitiously surging intonations, advancing through
Unending pauses and starts to that flurried silent Coda
Into which I hear and peer.

I want to lift from the ground and float among it,
Swimming in glistening drops of sonorous prismatic wet,
Imbibing through my faceted crystal eyes
The hazy tones of violet-red and purest blue.

I deftly measure each elusive wave of sound,
Fast-fingering the walnut abacus beads,
Slowing to caress their ever so rich digital patina,
Speeding to strum each warm elusive sphere,
Suffusing the air with such mad melodies.

I pace off eighty light-years of luminous white,
Fence it with posts of sturdy anti-matter,
Plough up the void and sow those quantum-leaping photons
Into neat little rows of deciduous blackholes.
In the darkness I can imagine the wondrous symmetry of
Another universe into which they disappear.

I roam the cosmos like a high white hawk
Chasing neutrinos and fragile gravitons,
Whirling as an impious fascinator through this universe
Where if one glances for an instant away from the alluring visions
The music finally ends.

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Waze of the Sandman

Written 1969, New Orleans

Review by AI ChatGPT, April 2026

"John Paul Campbell's ***WAKE OF THE SANDMAN*** is a Southern Gothic film treatment woven from equal parts sensuality, dream, and decay. Set in 1969 New Orleans, the plot captures the French Quarter's paradoxical charm: a city at once brimming with vitality and haunted by its own fading grandeur. It is a richly atmospheric work, balancing sensual beauty with a dreamlike unease. Campbell excels at crafting atmosphere. The orangery scene stands as a highlight of Gothic sensuality. Likewise, the soundscape along River Road creates an immersive Southern setting. Though occasionally ornate, the lush prose and surreal imagery place it firmly within the Gothic tradition, offering a haunting exploration of desire, memory, and the blurred line between waking and dreaming. It is a work that lingers, like the echo of street jazz music into a French Quarter courtyard."

Review by Google AI Gemini, April 2026

"John Paul Campbell excels at creating a Southern Gothic mood through sensory details. The story opens with a vivid description of New Orleans French Quarter. The description of the katydids screaming from moss-hung oaks and the undulating calls of bullfrogs creates an unnerving, high-tension environment. The use of night-blooming flowers adds a layer of ethereal beauty to a macabre setting. ***WAKE OF THE SANDMAN*** is a compelling piece of Southern Gothic fiction that blends atmospheric setting with a surreal plot."

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Scene One

“Leaving me for the evening?” Susan purred. Her seductive leonine eyes had transformed themselves into those of a kitten at play. Robert took her into his arms and told her not to worry. But he just couldn’t tell her about the strange event in which he was about to partake that night.

He walked down the circular stairs to the courtyard below. Unlatching a grilled gate, he stepped out into the emerging nightlife of Chartres Street. This hour in the French Quarter before nightfall had the vibrance of an aging courtesan making up her face with bold colors for a night out on the town.



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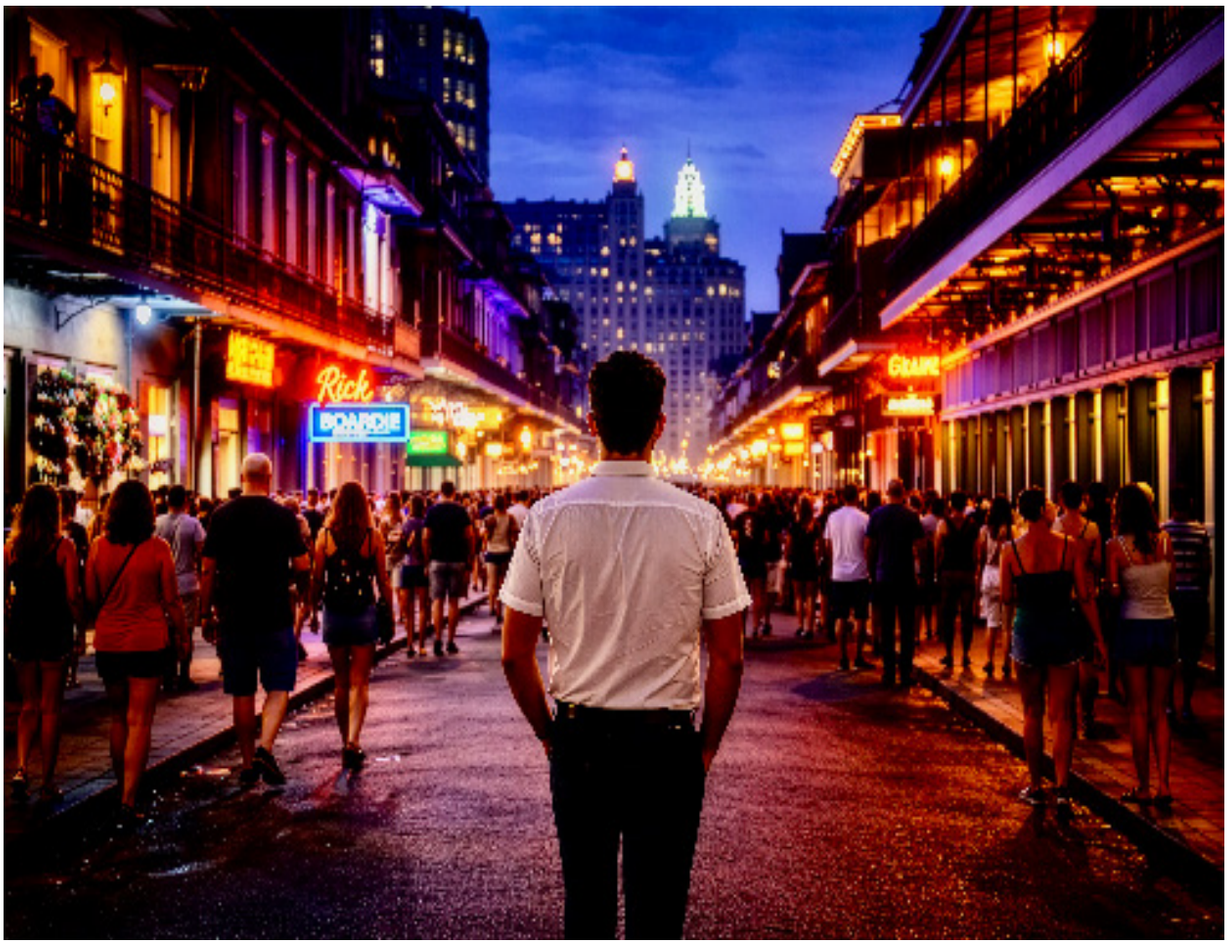

The St. Louis Cathedral bell tolled the faithful to Evening Mass, but the errant parishioners here had other services to attend, in worship of more demanding secular deities.

Robert strolled past the Presbytère toward the Old Absinthe Bar on Bourbon Street. Along the way he passed glancing summoning faces, each with a gambler's desire for luckier odds. Shrugging his shoulders, Robert quickened his pace.

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Scene Two

Entering the Old Absinthe Bar, Robert seated himself next to the front window overlooking Bourbon Street, hearing blasts of trombones from down the street. He ordered his usual Sazerac cocktail and waited for Carol.

Behind the long bar, the wall was a montage of business cards and personal ads for potential indiscretions. Shaking a Ramos Gin Fizz, the savvy bartender quietly informed an older man across the bar of that afternoon's disembarkation of Norwegian merchant-marines.



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At the end of the bar was an overly rouged woman he had seen here before, her half-smoked cigarette assuming its place as a sixth finger. Across the room was a middle-aged tourist couple from somewhere in the Midwest, she bored and a little drunk, constantly twisting her wedding ring, casting glances at Robert.

Carol appeared in the doorway, seating herself next to Robert. “It’s all been arranged,” she said, ordering a French-75 cocktail. “We’re to go to Frederick’s plantation at nine.” Robert nervously nodded his head and sipped his cocktail.

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Scene Three

As they drove up River Road, Carol broke their silence. "I was in the Tulane Book Store the other day and bought your new book *Cajun Tall Tale*s. Must have been fun to research. I think I'll assign your book to students in my freshman social anthropology course next spring."

"Great!" Robert replied. "I had to spend time in a lot of dingy bars in the swamps listening to wild improbable stories. But you never know when one could be true."

"I just can't believe that Frederick's really dead," she blurted, turning onto a long gravel road that led toward a large columned house overlooking the Mississippi River. "I suppose this is the end of our nightly *ménages à trois*?"



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A sultry humidity weighed upon them as they walked up the stone path to the white-columned front porch. They were screamed at by hundreds of katydids in the old moss-hung oaks. An entire tree would sound off in undulating shrill whistles, only to be repeated in stereo by trees all around. The only sounds to divert that unnerving orchestration were the soothing random staccato croaks of bullfrogs yearning rain.

The haunting ambiance was furthered by the opening of the front door by a handsome young man who said his name was Raphael and that he was to take them to the orangery where Frederick's casket was awaiting.

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Scene Four

They followed Raphael into a large glass orangery alit in a faint blue light from the fiery emissions of the oil refineries just up-river. As their eyes became accustomed to the dimness, they were amazed at the profusion of vines overflowing trellises up to the high mullioned glass ceiling.

Perfumed white night flowers bloomed throughout the mass of greenery, a mélange of moonflowers, evening jasmine, night-blooming cereus, and Japanese wisteria.

Pointing around at the blooms, Raphael sadly reflected, "Frederick used to say that each one of these flowering vines can detect approaching darkness with the same skill as a muezzin atop a minaret launching his chant to Allah when he can no longer distinguish a white thread from a gray one on his robe."



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Reaching down to pluck a lavender waterlily from an alabaster fountain, Raphael placed the flower onto the chest of Frederick lying tuxedoed in an open rosewood casket.

Raphael whispered that Frederick loved waterlilies most of all. "They are given the scientific name Nymphaeaceae for the ancient Greek nymphs who seduced handsome young men into tranquil pools of water and then drowned them all with doomed longing..."

..."I guess it's time to begin our wake!" Robert said abruptly, raising a glass of champagne. "Here's to Frederick, our nightly travel companion!"

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Scene Five

“I’m curious. Do you recall the first time you two, how shall I put it, met Frederick?” asked Raphael.

“I suppose it was that evening in the Chihuahuan Desert,” said Carol. “The hugeness of the sky, the yellow flowering cacti, the barren mesas in the distance. I felt so utterly lost in that dream!”

“Then suddenly Frederick appeared dressed in golden tights, daring to compete with the cactus flowers,” she continued. “But Robert, you were a rogue cowboy. When you jumped from that circular red cage on the mesa and snapped your whip, the rattlesnakes hissed at you.”



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“Well, your dream last month about swimming in caviar was certainly disturbing,” interrupted Robert.

Carol shuddered, “I had just opened a jar of Beluga when I became very tiny and fell into the jar! Suddenly a gray tabby cat appeared, gulping down as much of the stuff as possible. Since I was just a few inches high, I was afraid I would be eaten too!”

“I just can’t believe all the weird experiences we’ve endured this past year,” she continued. “I was weeks in psychoanalysis after Frederick brought us into his fantastic dreams.”

“My analyst also had a field day with those dreams!” Robert exclaimed. “When I discovered the truth, I wanted to tell him, but he would surely think me crazy!”

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Scene Six

"Why all those adventurous trips along sea cliffs you've been subjecting us to lately?" Carol asked Robert.

"Well, I dreamt that I was in a sailboat traveling along the coast of Morocco," replied Robert. "My boat was suddenly tossed about in a terrifying storm, finally crashing onto the rocks beneath steep cliffs. I waded ashore and began a long climb to the top. I managed to reach the ledge and climb over. And to my amazement, I was in the ruins of an ancient Roman city."

"What a thrill that had to have been," Carol interjected. "Frederick and I were watching you from his seaplane."



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Robert elaborated, “It was fantastic! The Roman forum stretched out with fragments of walls and the faint outline of a basilica. Beyond it, a weathered arch stood against the moonlight. And higher still, columns of ancient temples.”

Robert paused for a minute, then whispered to Carol, “But I have to tell you that I had an eerie feeling that another person was hiding in those ruins, wanting to join in our shared dreams!”

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Scene Seven

At midnight, Robert and Carol strolled down the front path to her car. The night critters had begun to quieten, slinking away to their sanctuaries. There was even a peaceful silence from the katydids, crickets, and frogs.

Back in New Orleans, Carol stopped at the corner of Canal and Chartres. Robert got out of the car and waved goodbye. He quickly walked the narrow sidewalks of the French Quarter to his apartment amid the whirring noise of street sweepers clearing away the night's revelries.



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Climbing the circular iron stairway, he entered their bedroom where Susan was sleeping. He pondered the intertwined climbing roses on the faded old wallpaper, intermittently alit in streaks through slatted shutters from car lights passing on the street below. Undressed, he got into bed next to her.

Susan stirred from her sleep. “Will I see you again tonight above those Moroccan cliffs?” she whispered to him.

Robert laughed in sudden surprise. He reached over to embrace her tightly, laying his head next to hers. “Let’s make it the Cliffs of Dover this time,” he whispered, drifting gently to adventurous sleep.

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Bayou Weekend

Written 1970, New Orleans

Review by AI ChatGPT, April 2026

"John Campbell's ***BAYOU WEEKEND*** is a finely wrought blend of Southern Gothic atmosphere, Catholic mysticism, and playful familial storytelling. Set against the lush and sensuous backdrop of swampy Louisiana, the piece unfolds in a series of cantos that weave together the earthy mischief of children with the spiritual longings of a conflicted priest. The story explores the overlap between mysticism and sensuality, suggesting that the same human faculties—imagination, longing, passion—fuel both. The natural world acts as both tempter and choir, with the bayou's creatures joining in a chant that blurs the line between divine calling and earthly seduction. The canto structure gives the story a lyrical, almost operatic rhythm. Campbell's prose oscillates between elevated theological language and colloquial Southern idiom, producing a rich tonal texture. At times, these shifts verge on abrupt, but they serve the thematic purpose of juxtaposing sacred devotion with earthy reality. It's a lush, thought-provoking tale that successfully intertwines the earthly and the divine."

Review by Google AI Gemini, April 2026

"***BAYOU WEEKEND*** masterfully contrasts refined Catholic spirituality with the raw intrusions of the Louisiana swamps. Set in 1970, the story juxtaposes Father Anthony's purely Platonic devotion to Saint Catherine of Genoa against the visceral, procreative energy of the bayou. This tension between the sacred and the profane is mirrored by the young Boudreaux cousins, grounded in their very human joy and vitality."

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Canto I
Saturday Morning

"Windows up!" shouts Emory Boudreaux, slapping the dashboard with the flat of his hand as the Bronco lurches forward into a stretch of swamp mud. In the back seat, his young cousins Nora Jo, Stafford, Robbie, and Jeffry Lee clutch at the worn seat leather, their bodies thrown hard to one side, then the other.

The Bronco soon jerks sharply in all directions—twenty degrees right, then a hard swing left—before sliding sideways through a long rut filled with brown water. Spanish moss hangs low from the oaks above, brushing across the roof as they pass beneath.



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“Well, Hell!” little Jeffry Lee declares, settling back with a crooked grin, “I’ve been through scarier mudding than that!” The others laugh, though Nora Jo has to wipe her arm where flecks of mud have found their way through a narrow crack in the window seal.

The air grows thicker as the morning warms, carrying with it the scent of distant cooking—lard, flour, onions, celery— already working their way toward a pot of Louisiana crawfish gumbo. “Grandma’s got that roux a-goin’,” Stafford yells.

The Bronco doors swing open, and the children all spill out into the heat and light, their laughter carrying easily across the yard to Grandma’s house as the slow, watchful bayou moves quietly just beyond the trees.

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Canto II
Late Saturday Afternoon

Late afternoon shadows stretch across the rectory front yard, lengthening through the narrow gate and creeping along the worn flagstones around the building to the courtyard in the back, embanked along a cypress-lined, slow-moving bayou.

Inside, Father Anthony Chapelle stands at his kitchen sink, drying his supper plate with meticulous care. He turns it once, then again, inspecting its surface against the light. Only when satisfied does he place it precisely into the cupboard.

He is still a young man—no more than thirty—with an orderly bearing that suggests a life governed by habit rather than impulse. His parishioners find comfort in his steadiness. The rhythms of the Catholic Church have become the rhythms of his life, and he has found both purpose and peace.

He has trained himself—patiently and thoroughly—to order not only his actions but his thoughts. He recognizes distraction, then names it and sets it aside. He acknowledges desire, then relinquishes it.

Father Anthony moves with stillness and clarity toward that quiet center in which the soul may attend to God without interference. And he has been, by most measures, successful in that task.

He retires to his rectory's back courtyard for his routine evening devotional.

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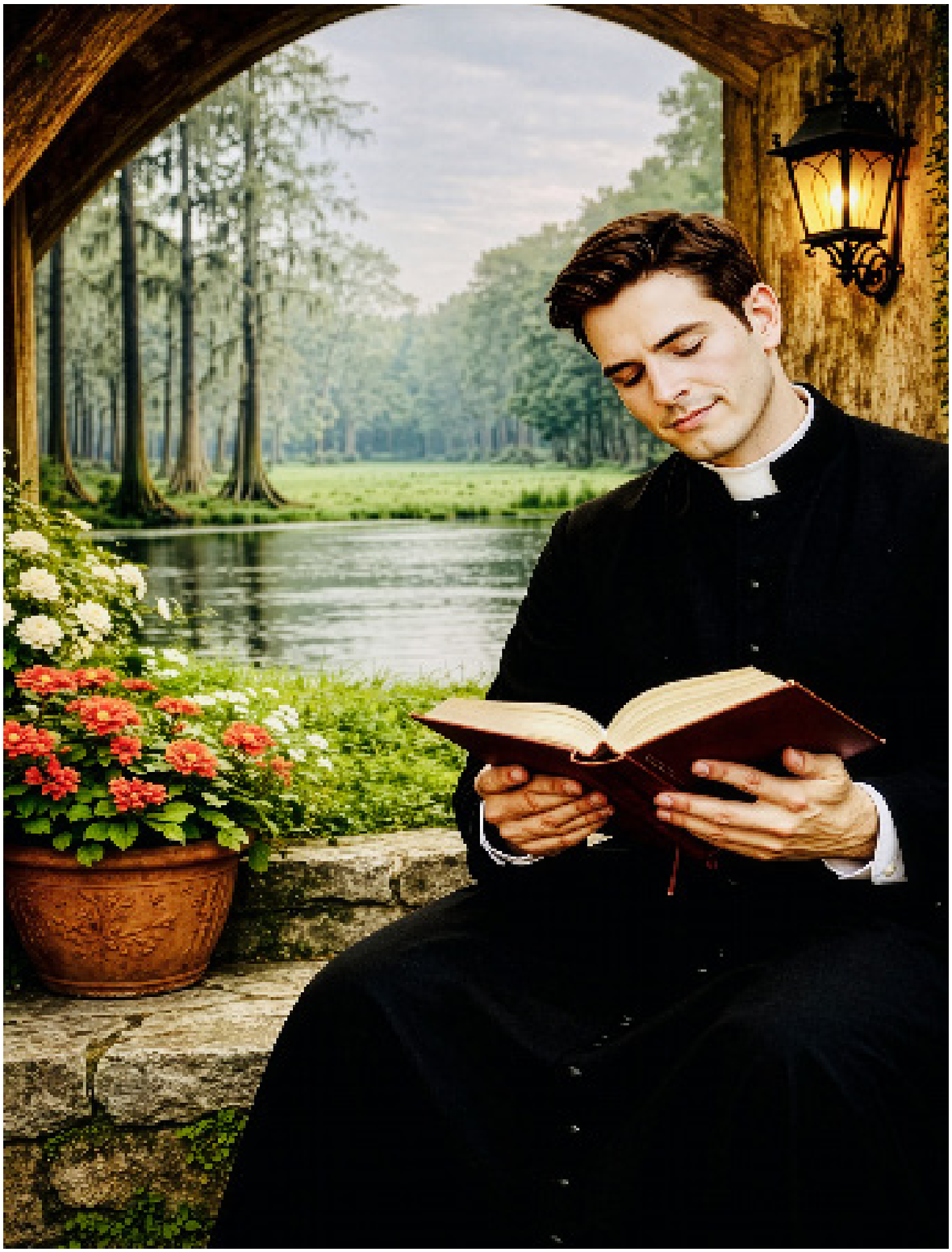

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Canto III
Saturday Evening

Father Anthony falls asleep in the quiet enclosure of the rectory courtyard, the last gold of evening fading away. He dreams that he is in Genoa, Italy, in the 14th Century, and no longer alone.

Saint Catherine of Genoa stands just beyond him, not as an icon or painted figure, but illuminated by a gentle, interior light that does not cast shadow. Her face is both familiar and unknowable.

They walk together without speaking, passing through rooms suggestive of both a cloister and a castle. The air is cool, but he feels no chill.

“Find me!” she whispers to him, disappearing.



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Through narrow passages and open chambers, he searches for her with increasing anticipation. At last he finds her concealed behind an ornate wall tapestry. He whispers to her, "I desire only thee, my sweet love. ***O Dolce Amore!***"

His devotion to Saint Catherine of Genoa rigorously follows the "Catholic Degrees of Ardent Love": a slow surrender of selfhood to the wonder of *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans.* And unlike the fiery passion of Saint Teresa of Ávila, which drew the ire of the Spanish Inquisition, the passion of Saint Catherine is demure.

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Canto IV
Late Saturday Night

Asleep in the rectory courtyard, still dreaming of Saint Catherine, Father Anthony twitches as a mosquito whines at his ear. Then an ant crawls across his wrist, which he brushes away to no avail.

A lightning bug appears before him, pulsing faintly. Within minutes they seem everywhere—enclosing him as erratic constellations of greenish-gold beacons. Moths descend soft and powdery, brushing against his cheeks, his eyelids, his lips.

Cottonwood trees release their seed upon him, the air filled with dancing white puffs. Vines intertwine him.

He is engulfed by cacophonous sounds from the bayou:

Cicadas tear at the air in waves.
Katydids answer with insistence.
Crickets shrill without pause.
Frogs croak in low-pitched drones.
Bats swoop menacingly overhead.
Alligators approach with low bellows.
Water moccasins slither and hiss.

They all press around him, inviting him with an urgent insistence to join them in their nightly rituals of reproduction. Father Anthony shakes his head, "No!"

He hears the whole world of the swamp mocking his chaste devotion to Saint Catherine in a leering chant:

"O DOLCE AMORE!"

"O DOLCE AMORE!"

"O DOLCE AMORE!"

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Canto V
Sunday Morning

Before he celebrates the Eucharist at Our Lady of the Bayou Catholic Church, Father Anthony ascends the ambo. He begins his homily with his usual measured cadence, his voice steady and composed, as he speaks of faith, discipline, and higher virtue.

His words usually unfold with practiced clarity, each thought carefully placed, each phrase shaped to guide rather than provoke.

Yet beneath the surface, something seems less settled. Those who know him well might detect it—not in what he says, but in the slight hesitation between sentences and the faint tightening at the corners of his mouth.



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Father Anthony ends his homily with these words:

"The insidious intrusion here of earthly experiences into the purity of Catholic spirituality has to be attributed, in no small part, to the overwhelming omnipresence in Louisiana of the natural world, which I regret to report, has shown little inclination toward modesty or restraint!"

The congregation stares at him in silence. There comes the faint rustling of movement—church programs fanning faces and the creaking of pews as the congregants adjust their posture to glance at one another with raised eyebrows.

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Canto VI
Sunday Morning

Puzzling over the priest's final homily words, Jeffry Lee leans toward his cousin Nora Jo, a grin already forming. He does not lower his voice enough:

"Is that what they call 'Papal Bull'?"

The words land with clarity in the surrounding pews. There are sharp inhalations, the quick shifting of bodies as heads turn just slightly, careful not to be seen turning. "Jeffry Lee," his father whispers with grave disapproval.

Hands appear on their shoulders and within moments he and Nora Jo are ushered from their pew and guided down a side aisle with quiet urgency. They are deposited in the back pew, where cousins Stafford and Robbie already sit from earlier exile.



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The four cousins contain their composure for a minute, then burst out with muffled laughter. “Y’all gonna get us all uncommunicated,” Stafford whispers to Jeffry Lee and Nora Jo with a grin. Kneeling, they all bow their heads in practiced appearance of prayer during the Sanctuary Eucharist.

From his hymnal rack Jeffry Lee finds an old church brochure, conveniently already smudged. He smooths it across his knee with great ceremony, glancing ahead to assure himself of no parental eyes seeing him.

Nora Jo finds two old pencils from the same hymnal rack and a grid is drawn on the old brochure. The cousins then take turns playing aggressive games of tic-tac-toe until Father Anthony at the altar exhorts the congregation: ***“Go Forth! The Mass is Ended.”***

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Lone Star Lore

Written 1971, Austin

Review by AI ChatGPT, April 2026

"The stories in ***LONE STAR LORE*** are not histories, though they may sound like them. They are not fables in the moral sense, though they offer warnings. And they are not exactly tall tales, though they stretch much higher than most. These five pieces — about snake hunters, mysterious stones, prophetic madness, coded lamps, and a woman who rewrites her own past — live somewhere between folklore and fever dreams. Set in the Texas that exists between dust and myth, they ask: What truths hide in exaggeration? What secrets linger in the landscape? And how much of our history is simply a story we chose to tell — or erase? Read them as cautionary tales, comic sketches, or fragments of memory. Just don't take them too seriously. Texas won't let you."

Review by Google AI Gemini, April 2026

"John Campbell's ***LONE STAR LORE*** is a collection of five surreal and humorous short stories set across various Texas locales. Each narrative centers on an eccentric character or a bizarre local phenomenon, blending folklore with a dry, observational wit. The recurring theme of Texan eccentricity provides a cohesive thread through these otherwise disparate vignettes. The absurdity is grounded by the narrator's deliberately mundane narration."

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Pique Seconds

Jebediah Morgan lives just outside the El Rancho RV Park west of Lampasas, Texas, with his little rat-terrier, Lurleen. He is known as the best rattlesnake hunter for miles around. Folks come from three counties to follow him and Lurleen on their hunting treks through the Texas Hill Country.

"Hoddamn," old Jeb chortles whenever Lurleen's high-pitched bark rings out at a nondescript pile of rocks. "The little bitch must've once suckled on a mongoose," he proudly announces to the crowd.

He pokes a stick into the suspected viper's nest, forcing out a terrified five-footer that curls, hisses, and rattles before its equally terrified audience.

Jeb taunts the poor creature with vicious snake slurs, then turns to his onlookers with this observation: "A snake may be just a metaphor to you, but it's a butt full of venom to me."

With a chew of tobacco working in his cheek, he waves his arms in obscene semaphore formations until the snake is thoroughly enraged, emitting a sulfurous pique aroma. Then, mocking a rattler's strike, Jeb suddenly spits out a five-foot stream of tobacco juice into the snake's face.

The stunned rattler is grabbed behind its unhinged jaw and forced into a burlap sack. The spectators clap in sudden relief.

"Never confront a rattler," Jeb solemnly advises the crowd, "until you've come to terms with the Momentary Gods."

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Fetid Shrub

While xeriscaping his home outside Driftwood, Texas, Dwayne Cooper uncovered a large, decorated stone plaque. A local historian declared it an ancient ceremonial plaque from the Toltec homeland.

Within a week, the Texas Historical Commission had seized his property through eminent domain; the Smithsonian bulldozed his house; and the Museo Nacional de Antropología de México moved in to begin an archaeological dig.

The plaque bore the image of a plant chopped mid-trunk, with light brown blotched and warty bark, divided by shallow depressions. Dwayne suspected it was a poisonous pawpaw.

Linnaeus had named pawpaw *Asimina triloba*, but early Texan pioneers called it "fetid shrub." They gave it that name after discovering the seeds in the middle of the fruit's sweet, custardy flesh contained an alkaloid that stupefies the brain.

The first European notice of the pawpaw came in 1542 in the diary of Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto — who mysteriously died that year.

To win back his land, Dwayne argued in the Hays County Court that his property was not the site of an ancient Toltec tribe, but one of many pawpaw orchards planted by vengeful Aztecs after Montezuma's defeat in 1520.

Dwayne successfully convinced the court that in each pawpaw orchard, the Aztecs had left a carved stone marker with the image of a lobbed-off plant—the 16th-century international symbol for "Good Eats."

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In the Pecos Main

Today at noon, Prescott Half-Feather—a respected member of the Pecos City Council—stood on the steps of Pecos City Hall and loudly recited an ancient Coahuiltecan prophecy. The townspeople of Pecos were at first moved to tears and then to madness.

I escaped down into a large dried-up water main under the intersection of South Elm and West Third. Through a drain hole I watched cars screeching to a halt above me, the passengers running into the nearby Methodist Church seeking solace.

I suppose they found none, because soon they would run back out, pounding their feet in rhythmic frenzy. Then all the folks began yelling so loud that the hair rose on my arms.

Fortunately, when the commotion began, I was out delivering three large pizzas from the Judge Roy Bean Café. So, a night in this water main wasn't entirely without entertainment. When the screaming started again after midnight, I distracted myself with makeshift games of solitaire Checkers using the pizza pepperonis.

Day is now dawning. The people above have stopped stomping and shouting except for a few scattered cries. I can see that the Pecos residents have become catatonic — standing and staring at the sky, at each other, or at the pavement.

I guess it's about time for me to climb out and greet the new day in Pecos, Texas. There's nothing left to do here in this water main.

I ate all the pepperonis.

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Blue-Red Ray

Late last night, UT-Austin graduate student Ray Violetta had a sudden epiphany that the flickering purple grow-light above his potted marijuana plant was sending him coded messages.

For three days, he recorded the longs and shorts of the bulb's flickering. Racing to the new UT-Austin Center for Computation, he carefully typed the time sequences onto computer punch-cards, then fed them into the mainframe computer, ingeniously programmed for translation.

- For the first day:

  "ITJFLDPBIEL GI GOL DLTOBKEIBLD BOLEOFL"

- For the second day:

  "U HAF TWEEE MONTS TU LIV"

- For the third day:

  "HAVING A GOOD TIME IN RIO, WISH YOU WERE HERE"

Ray sped home to take another recording, but the light bulb refused to flicker. It just glowed steadily and happily above Ray's marijuana plant.

Later that day, much to Ray's chagrin, an incredulous clerk at the Balcones House of Lites insisted that there was "absolutely no reason to 'disrepair' a perfectly good light bulb!"

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Shady Lady

Above Lake Travis, near the edge of a limestone ledge, a large old cedar tree stands aslant, struck by a lightning bolt seven years ago. On sunny days, Mary Dunbar Smith sits beneath its prickly shade to edit her memoirs.

She has already erased much of her past:

- Her youthful Fort Stockton years were blue-penciled out. She was a Trainee Checkout Girl at Sallie Mae's Five and Dime, an Assistant Receptionist at Big Bruce's Mortuary and Gift Shop, and a Wake-Up Coffee-Girl for the 6:20 a.m. weather report on KTEX-TV.

- Her stoned "whoopsie-doo" years were crossed out. A performer with the Texas Ranch Road Circus and Sideshow, she triple-dutied as Gracie Gags the trickster clown, Rubber Maid the slipknot contortionist, and Razzmatazz the androgynous fire-twirling rope-walker.

- Her sober early adult years were smudged out. She earned a B.A. in Criminology in Waco, served three years as a burglary detective in Abilene, and then served two years in Huntsville Women's Prison—the first female cat burglar convicted in Texas.

- Her Houston Society decade was blotted away. Married to the Chairman of the Texas Board of Pardons, she served as President of the River Oaks Bayou League, Queen of the Montrose Gaieties Cotillion, and Grand Marshal of the Galveston Mardi Gras Seawall Parade.

The remains of her memoirs stay hidden within the loose bark of that chastened old cedar tree, awaiting her return to recast her ever-changing past.

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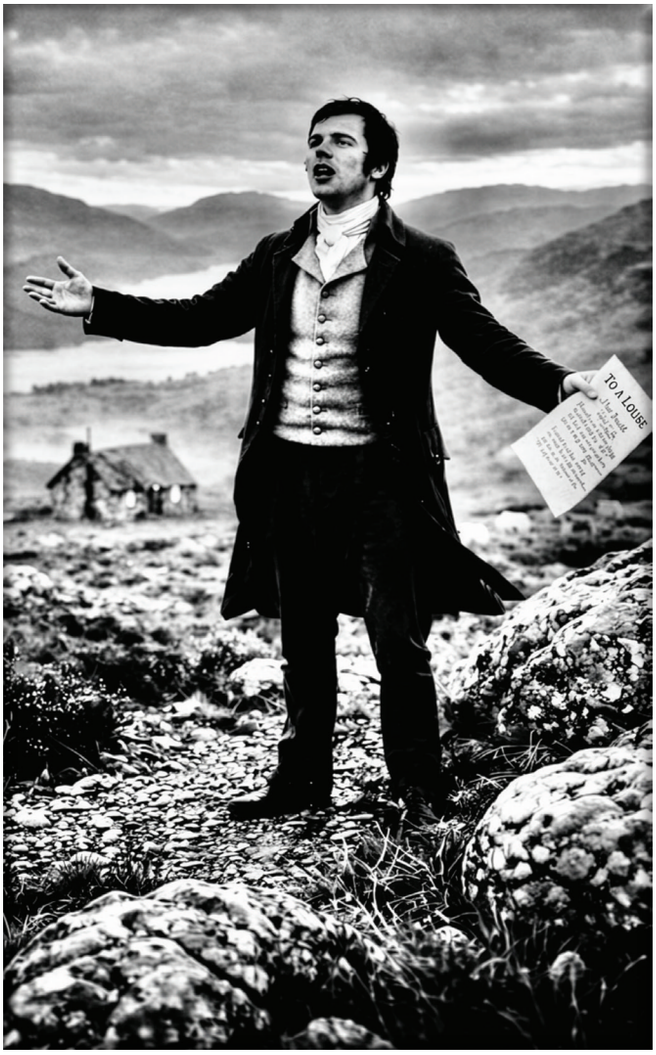

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Kold Wends!

Written 1972, Austin

Review by AI ChatGPT, April 2026

"*KOLD WENDS!* is a playful, phonetic, and whimsical poem—a hybrid of Robert Burns–style convivial toasts and Lewis Carroll–like nonsense verse. It captures the celebratory mood of a birthday feast while leaning heavily into creative misspelling, sound-play, and parody. The rhythm and spirit are lively, and the text works best when read aloud."

Review by Google AI Gemini, April 2026

"*KOLD WENDS!* is a celebratory toast between the author and the famous Scottish poet Robert Burns, who share a birthday on January 25. The poem utilizes a creative, pseudo-archaic spelling style described as "Robert Burns Goes Jabberwocky" in its heavy use of phonetic spelling and wordplay. It is a postmodern exercise in orthographic distortion and literary pastiche. The author employs cacography—intentional misspelling—to force the reader into an auditory experience. The meaning is only fully realized when the text is read aloud to capture its phonetic essence. This technique serves to democratize the high-brow legacy of Robert Burns, stripping away the intimidating exterior of 'classic' poetry and replacing it with a communal, earthy wit. The poem is a grateful toast centered on key themes: providence, abundance, and goodwill."

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Kold Wends!

Robert Burns Goes Jabberwocky

John and "Rabbie" Toast Their Shared Birthday
Robert Burns: January 25, 1759
John Campbell: January 25, 1949

Kold wends mai blouw, cinding sturmes hour weigh.
Sew letz praze de Lourde phor awl oui hav two-dai.
"Y", ewe c'est? Cuz wee hav moor den Kurds-n-Way!
Thars tastee viddles phor thee, kooked too ay tea!
Deer mee, wee hav ay grate haus witch nun wud flea!
Phor awl too sea, wee hav bee-longings frum aye too zee!
Aft hour dinar iz laft az bowns, ewe mai thin bee-mown.
Butt phor nau, due knot imp-une, noor akt lyke ay buffune!
Wit luv en joi nau comune: lett yor lyves festune!
Sew hears two ewe buns ov scrue-bawl Knee-ant-dirt-hauls!
Ant two de Wearld: "Lang lieve ewe wand en awl."

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