PARODY

A parody is an imitation, somewhat like a caricature, in that it attempts to entertain by emphasising certain features of the original in a humorous way. The original is often serious in what it expresses; the parody sets out to achieve the opposite.

The following points are usually observed for poetic parodies:
- they keep the original stress pattern and rhyme
- they use similar words and phrases to the original
- they retain the subject matter of the original
- they exaggerate to gain maximum effect.

Any poem that has a strong rhythm and firm structure pattern lends itself to parody. The following poem, 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love', has frequently been parodied. It was written by Christopher Marlowe, who died in a tavern brawl in Deptford, London, about four hundred years ago. His feelings as expressed in this poem are no different from those of any young person today who believes that love will overcome all hardships.

The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

Come live with me and be my Love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and vallies, dale and field,
And all the craggy mountains yield.

There will we sit upon the rocks
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rives, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

There will I make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool,
Which from our pretty lambs we pull
Fair lined slops for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw and ivy buds
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me and be my Love.

Thy silver dishes for thy meat
As precious as the gods do eat,
Shall on an ivory table be
Prepared each day for thee and me.
The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my Love.
Christopher Marlowe

The stress pattern is iambic rhythm, four feet to each line—that is, iambic tetrameter.
The rhyme scheme is a a b b.
The following poem, ‘Come Live with me’, is a parody of Marlowe’s poem using the
same meter and rhyme scheme, borrowing words and expressions from the original,
retaining the same theme, and exaggerating for entertainment value.

Come Live with Me
Come live with me and be my love,
I’ve got the room, my flat’s above,
It’s not too big, but large enough,
For you and me and all our stuff.

Our love is free, won’t cost a cent,
And we’ll save up to pay the rent,
We haven’t much, but love’s a lot,
And we’ll get by with what we’ve got.

Perhaps we’ll get some curtains, though,
For all our love will be on show,
It’s not our wish to seek complaint;
Love may be blind, but neighbours ain’t.

So we will build our little nest,
’Twill be much better than the rest.
Come, give your life a gentle shove,
And live with me and be my love.

Making Connections

I Find some poems that you know have a strong rhythm and rhyme scheme. Choose one and create a parody, copying closely the original style and structure. Ballads work particularly well, but so do sonnets and dramatic monologues, once you master their patterns.