

**1863**

**POETA FIT, NON NASCITUR**

**Lewis Carroll**

**Carroll, Lewis (pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) (1832-1898) - English novelist, poet, photographer, and mathematician, best known for his fantastical childrens' classics. He was a mathematical lecturer at Oxford. Poeta Fit, non Nascitur (1860-63) - One of Lewis Carroll's poems. Opening lines:**

**“How shall I be a poet? / How shall I write in rhyme:...**

## **POETA FIT NON NASCITUR**

“HOW shall I be a poet?  
 How shall I write in rhyme:  
 You told me once ‘the very wish  
 Partook of the sublime’.  
 Then tell me how! Don’t put me off  
 With your ‘another time!’”

The old man smiled to see him,  
 To hear his sudden sally;  
 He liked the lad to speak his mind  
 Enthusiastically;  
 And thought “There’s no hum-drum in him,  
 Nor any shilly-shally.”

“And would you be a poet  
 Before you’ve been to school?  
 Ah, well I hardly thought you  
 So absolute a fool.  
 First learn to be spasmodic-

A very simple rule.

“For first you write a sentence,  
 And then you chop it small;  
 Then mix the bits, and sort them out  
 Just as they chance to fall:  
 The order of the phrases makes  
 No difference at all.

“Then, if you’d be impressive,  
 Remember what I say,  
 That abstract qualities begin  
 With capitals alway:  
 The True, the Good, the Beautiful  
 Those are the things that pay!

“Next, when you are describing  
 A shape, or sound, or tint;  
 Don’t state the matter plainly,  
 But put it in a hint;

And learn to look at all things  
With a sort of mental squint.”

“For instance, if I wished, Sir,  
Of mutton-pies to tell,  
Should I say ‘dreams of fleecy flocks  
Pent in a wheaten cell?’”  
“Why, yes,” the old man said: “that phrase  
Would answer very well.

“Then fourthly, there are epithets  
That suit with any word  
As well as Harvey’s Reading Sauce  
With fish, or flesh, or bird  
Of these, ‘wild’, ‘lonely’, ‘weary’, ‘strange’,  
Are much to be preferred.”

“And will it do, O will it do  
To take them in a lump  
As ‘the wild man went his weary way  
To a strange and lonely pump?’”  
“Nay, nay! You must not hastily  
To such conclusions jump.

“Such epithets, like pepper,

Give zest to what you write;  
And, if you strew them sparely,  
They whet the appetite:  
But if you lay them on too thick,  
You spoil the matter quite!

“Last, as to the arrangement:  
Your reader, you should show him,  
Must take what information he  
Can get, and look for no im-  
mature disclosure of the drift  
And purpose of your poem.

“Therefore, to test his patience  
How much he can endure  
Mention no places, names, or dates,  
And evermore be sure  
Throughout the poem to be found

Consistently obscure.

“First fix upon the limit  
To which it shall extend:  
Then fill it up with ‘Padding’  
(Beg some of any friend):  
Your great SENSATION-STANZA  
You place towards the end.”

“And what is a Sensation,  
Grandfather, tell me, pray?  
I think I never heard the word  
So used before to-day:  
Be kind enough to mention one  
‘Exempli gratia’.”

And the old man, looking sadly  
Across the garden-lawn,  
Where here and there a dew-drop  
Yet glittered in the dawn,  
Said “Go to the Adelphi,  
And see the ‘Colleen Bawn’.

“The word is due to Boucicault  
The theory is his,  
Where life becomes a Spasm,

And History a Whiz:  
If that is not Sensation,  
I don’t know what it is.

“Now try your hand, ere Fancy  
Have lost its present glow-“  
“And then”, his grandson added,  
“We’ll publish it, you know:  
Green cloth- gold-lettered at the back  
In duodecimo!”

Then proudly smiled that old man  
To see the eager lad  
Rush madly for his pen and ink  
And for his blotting-pad  
But, when he thought of publishing,  
His face grew stern and sad.

**THE END**