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Cast swine before pearls: Comedy, shamanic rage, and poetry

Tony Hoagland

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Abstract

In contemporary poetry rage and anger are no longer cool. Instead poets confront and critique society through cool, verbal wit and ironic whimsy. Yet anger often makes poets funny. How, then, can poetry, which relies so heavily upon nuance and ambiguity, achieve the volume, resonance, and inflection necessary to express a sense of defiance and rage? Poets like Kenneth Rexroth and Seidel demonstrate this technique in poems such as “Thou Shalt Not Kill” (Rexroth, *The collected shorter poems*, New Directions, 1966: 267–273) and “To Die For” (Seidel, *Poems 1959–2009*: Frederick Seidel, Pearson, 2009: 90) using rage and humor to overcome pessimism as their anger crescendos. Often times sardonic, incongruous, or terse the humor-rage of these poets is perhaps more fearless and clear-eyed than the cool wit of other contemporary, humorous poets. Whereas comedy provides detachment and perceptiveness, rage provides an occasion for forcefulness and outcry.

Keywords:: [Frederick Seidel](#); [humor](#); [Kenneth Rexroth](#); [poetry](#); [rage](#)

About the article



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