

Tarpley Greathouse: The Ridiculous Typewriter Man Goes to the Park

by [Pedro Blas González](#) (May 2025)



The Curious Cat (Ruskin Spear, 20th C)

Tarpley, the ridiculous typewriter man, went for a walk in a local park. Sitting on a bench, Tarpley took in the scene, small children playing, riding bicycles, and their parents enjoying parenthood. Tarpley reminisced about when his two boys were little. The cool breeze and light streaming through the opening in the tree branches reminded him of the fluidity of passing years. After several minutes of enjoying his surroundings, Tarpley brought out a 1946 Smith Corona Clipper portable typewriter out of its case. This is one of many typewriters that he owns.

Tarpley began to type:

*Cats are creatures of the night. Nocturnal? Not really.
Cats
are active during all times of the day. Creating their
brand
of mayhem on lizards, small birds and even squirrels. Not
long ago I saw a cat grab a squirrel by the neck, the
terrified
rodent screeching. The cat took the squirrel to a hideout
that
only the cat knew about. Poor squirrel, I thought.*

Tarpley enjoyed himself at the park. Like a roving camera eye, he looked around the park; people walking dogs, a runner passed him by, and many birds flying around in the cool autumn breeze.

From an early age, Tarpley thought of the world as a kind of circus, a carnival of sights and sounds that is best taken in by the senses. He reserved the mind for pondering metaphysical concerns.

Tarpley heard someone calling him. He looked up from his typewriter. Right in front of him, his neighbors, the overfed boy and his mother, were walking toward him on the grass.

Oh boy, Tarpley thought.

"Mr. Greatstreet," the boy called out.

Well, at least he calls me mister, Tarpley thought, waving.

"How are you?" the boy asked, before the mother could put in a word.

"Well, how do you do," Tarpley said, shaking the boy's hand.

"Good to see you Mr. Greathouse, the boy's mother said, now standing before Tarpley.

"And you, son," Tarpley asked, "how's school?"

"School is good. I don't have to do PE anymore, and Friday's they have ice cream in the cafeteria."

"School is fun. I always loved school," Tarpley said.

"Are you typing, Mr. Greatstreet? The boy asked.

"Mr. Greathouse, Matthew," the mother corrected the boy.

"Yes, that's what I said mother."

"Matthew, you like the park?" Tarpley intervened.

"I like this park. Mother says we should take more nice walks in the park. There are lots of birds and squirrels," the boy told Tarpley.

"Yes, this is a nice park. I used to bring my two sons here when they were little."

"Mr. Greatstreet do your sons fix typewriters?"

"Oh no. One is a teacher, the other a university professor."

"Mr. Greatstreet... "

The boy's mother interrupted him: "Matthew, his name is Mr. Greathouse."

"Mother, I know his name," the boy said, "Mr. Greatstreet you know what I like most about this park?" the boy asked, while his mother shook her head.

Tarpley looked at her and winked.

"What's that?" Tarpley asked.

"Over there," the boy said pointing, "by the entrance, there is a man who sells ice cream. The best ice cream."

"What's your favorite flavor?" Tarpley asked.

"I like chocolate. But I like all ice cream."

"Me too. I like ice cream."

"What are you typing?" The boy asked.

"Oh, little stories that I write for fun."

"Can I see?"

"Of course. Sit here," Tarpley said, motioning with his head to the bench. He placed the typewriter on the bench.

The boy began to read:

Cats. Cats. Cats everywhere and not a dog in sight.

"That's cool," said the boy.

"You read well," Matthew.

"These are easy words, Mr. Greatstreet."

"Go on. Read some more," Tarpley encouraged the boy.

Herds of cats ... everywhere...

"Mr. Greatstreet, what's a herd?" the boy asked, his mother shook her head and smiled.

"It means a lot," the boy's mother said.

"Can I read some more? I like this typewriter."

"Yes. Go on," Tarpley said.

So many cats. But where are the dogs? There are birds, and bird nests, and squirrels, but no dogs. The dogs are on holiday, it seems, while the cats are working.

"The End," the boy emphasized. "I like this story. It's funny. We have a black and white cat."

"Yes, Millie is her name," the boy's mother added.

"I'm glad you like the story, Matthew."

The boy nodded.

"Thank you Mr. Greathouse," the boy's mother said. "Matthew we have to go home now."

"Bring Matthew by the shop some time. We'll teach him how to

type," Tarpley addressed the boy's mother.

"Ok. Thank you Mr. Greatstreet," the boy said, getting up from the bench.

Tarpley looked around, contented. He watched the people in the park with the same gleam in his eyes he had when his father taught him to ride a bicycle.

That first fall was an eye-opener, he thought. It's one thing to marvel at the world while riding a bicycle, another to have your face in the neighbors small grass lawn, he remembered, smiling.

Tarpley took the typewriter and placed it on his lap and began to type:

*The rabid cat caught the squirrel rightly by the neck.
Well. Whether rightly or wrongly, I suppose we need to
ask the squirrel. If I were a squirrel, I would not find
the rabid
cat's action right with me. I'd denounce that feline
criminal
to the local police.*

Looking up from the typewriter, Tarpley saw a few mallards swimming in a nearby small pond, their iridescent colors amplified by the sun. A man and a small boy were throwing morsels of food at the birds. Tarpley continued typing:

*Variations on cats: Cleopatra's cat Tivali's piercing,
menacing
eyes. Was Tivali a Jungle cat? An African Wildcat, perhaps?
Tomcatting, Felix, Mrs. Blevin's red tabby Dolly, Calico*

*color fest, A mean looking Manx, Schrödinger's cat in a box,
Heretical medieval cats, Buick Wildcat, Beatnik jazz cats,
Catnip, Sun god Ra's cat napping in the sun ... Katmandu?*

Tarpley heard someone call out his name. He looked up. A man came up to him. It was Alfredo, a long-time client of Tarpley's typewriter repair shop.

"How are you Tarpley?" Alfredo asked, sitting next to Tarpley on the bench. "Beautiful day," Alfredo added.

"Beautiful alright."

"How's the shop going? Any new customers?"

"Yes, I'm often surprised how many people are buying typewriters these days. There's always hope, no doubt. Take your daughter, for example," Tarpley said.

"Yes, she loves her typewriter. I'm glad you inspired her that time she came with me to your shop. She loved the name of the shop: *Greathouse Typewriters*. It's a catchy name. She didn't know your last name back then. She loves her Smith Corona."

"That's good to hear."

"How's Margaret and your boys?" Alfredo asked.

"Margaret's doing well. She comes to help at the shop, mostly on Saturday's. She knows all the customers. The boys are well. We may go down to Florida in late summer and take the opportunity that Michael will be visiting Tony. We're thinking on taking the train down."

"That's right, you're a railroad enthusiast. Good idea taking the train. You can take a portable and work on your stories," Alfredo said.

"That's the idea. It will be a good time to just let the world come in through the train windows."

"I see you brought out a portable today. Still writing about michi, michi, meow, meow?" Alfredo joked.

"Of course. I ask little out of life, Alfredo. What little pleasures life gives me, I take with gratitude."

"That's good Tarpley," Alfredo said, "that's the best attitude. Well, I have to get these groceries home. I cut through the park on my way home. I'll come to the shop soon."

"Yes, come by. I'll make us coffee."

After Alfredo left, Tarpley looked at the mallards in the pond. The man and small boy who were feeding the birds left. A young woman took their place. The birds got as close to her as is prudent for wild birds to come to people. In a flash, the birds took off, flying away and scattering to nearby trees; a black cat ran up to the group from behind an oak tree. The young woman shoo shooed the cat away.

Tarpley watched. Placing the typewriter on his lap, he began to type:

*How fragile are men and birds. Having our feathers
ruffled by events, circumstances that spring unannounced.
Fragile constitution, ours is.*

When the woman who was feeding the birds left, some birds returned to seek out food. Tarpley watched. There were a few ring-necked doves, some rock pigeons and many house sparrows. Tarpley saw the black cat inching forward again from behind a tree.

Do these birds see the cat? Tarpley wondered and began typing again:

"The cat is my friend," said a house sparrow to another. "Are you sure?" the second bird, a female sparrow that had seen better days, questioned. "Well, considering that the cat does not attack our nests. Sure, I think he is a friendly cat," answered the first bird. "You forget the fact that our nests are in a high place, where the cat cannot get to it," the second bird reminded the first.

What does the cat think about these birds? Tarpley wondered. He continued typing:

The cat is going to triumph, no matter what. What would a first-person account of a cat stalking a bird look like? Tarpley asked himself. *The imaginary cat answered: "This is a first-person story of a cat. I mean, do all cats meow naturally? Or do some cats merely think they ought to meow?"*

Placing the typewriter on the bench, Tarpley thought: *Tarpley, you might just be a silly, ridiculous typewriter man after all.* He smiled, *Oh well, I've already experienced the serious side,* he thought.

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Pedro Blas González is Professor of Philosophy in Florida. He earned his doctoral degree in Philosophy at DePaul University in 1995. Dr. González has published extensively on leading Spanish philosophers, such as Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno. His books have included [*Unamuno: A Lyrical Essay*](#), [*Ortega's 'Revolt of the Masses' and the Triumph of the New Man*](#), [*Fragments: Essays in Subjectivity, Individuality and Autonomy*](#) and [*Human Existence as Radical Reality: Ortega's Philosophy of Subjectivity*](#). He also published a translation and introduction of José Ortega y Gasset's last work to appear in English, "Medio siglo de Filosofía" (1951) in [*Philosophy Today*](#) Vol. 42 Issue 2 (Summer 1998). His most recent book is [*Philosophical Perspective on Cinema*](#).

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