

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

2008

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Stop Press - Pass the Port Extra (*With thanks to John Tomaro*)

One sunny day in February 2009 an old man approached the White House from across Pennsylvania Ave where he had been sitting on a park bench. He spoke to the Marine standing guard and said "I would like to go and meet President Bush." The Marine looked at the old man and replied "Sir, Mr. Bush is no longer President and no longer lives here." The old man says "OK" and walks away.

The next day the same old man walks across and asks the same Marine the same question and the Marine, a bit irritated, gives the same reply and the old man walks away. On the third day the same old man comes again and asks the same Marine "I would like to go in and meet President Bush."

Now the marine is even more irritated at the man and says "I told you yesterday and the day before that Mr. Bush is no longer President and no longer lives here. Don't you understand?"

The old man looked at the Marine and said "I understand. I just love hearing it."

The Marine snapped to attention, saluted and said "See you tomorrow sir."

Robert Middleton

Christmas Pudding is an anthology devoted essentially to aspects of the use of language, particularly in poetry but also in wit and humour. Poetry is a vehicle for sharing ideas and emotions and, as such, is a mark of our civilisation and collective intelligence: it also promotes an understanding of the nature and importance of language, man's highest natural attribute. I am concerned that few people read poetry today and that the contemporary dominance of the visual media poses a threat to our command (and even understanding) of language and to a decline in writing skills.

I was deeply influenced by the teaching and literary criticism of Yvor Winters at Stanford University in the early 1960s, by his rigorous insistence on the distinction between connotation and denotation in poetry and by his moral crusade against the decline of reason as a precept in art and literature (and life) since the end of the eighteenth century. The accompanying relaxation of content and meaning - and subsequent abandonment of form - that characterises verse for the last two hundred years is, at least in part, responsible for a breakdown in communication between writer and reader: today, 'anything goes' - much verse is obscure and, if it were not divided into lines, would be indistinguishable from prose. I share Winters' view that the late sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century was a golden age for English poetry and that the poets of this age developed a 'timeless' medium for poetic expression characterised by the clear communication of ideas and emotion, using words not only for their sound, rhythm and imagery but also to convey meaning. I recognise, however, that the poetry of this period may not be easily accessible to the general reader as a result of unfamiliar contemporary poetic conventions and shifts in the meaning of words. I also dissent from Winters' rather pessimistic view that not much of comparable quality has been produced since. While drawing on poetry of the 'golden age', *Christmas Pudding* aims to identify those later poems that, in my opinion, meet Winters' strict criteria.

In addition to the desire to entertain and amuse, *Christmas Pudding* has thus a serious intent: I aim to include poems that use language in a rational and comprehensible way, that have a clear meaning with a minimum of decoration and cliché and that express feelings we can share. My choice is intended to show that poetry can be (I would even say, should be) a means of communication between normal rational people.

The inspiration for *Christmas Pudding* is *Christmas Crackers*, an anthology of wisdom, wit and linguistic surprise collected by the distinguished scholar John Julius Norwich. I have tried to emulate his mixture of humour and erudition, although a significant part of my raw material is drawn from the more mundane spheres of e-mail and the Internet. My title seems to me apposite: a Christmas pudding is full of varied, interesting and sometimes surprising ingredients, is well-rounded, requires a considerable amount of stirring in its preparation, is still good a long time after the first serving and is not heavy if enjoyed sparingly. Moreover, a pudding is the least pretentious of dishes, acknowledging Norwich's superior recipe.



* *William Shakespeare*, Hamlet, Act II Scene 2

Laconic – pertaining to Laconia or Sparta: the Spartans were noted for their brusque and aphoristic speech. When Philip of Macedon wrote to the Spartan magistrates, “If I enter Laconia I will level Lacedaemon to the ground,” they sent back a single word, “If.”

Lapidary – pertaining to inscriptions. Since inscriptions were laboriously chiselled on stone, a *lapidary* writing style is crisp, accurate, formal, and condensed. Only the most accomplished can express themselves verbally in a lapidary style.

Long-winded writers I abhor,
 and glib, prolific chatters;
 give me the ones who tear and gaw
 their hair and pens to tatters:
 who find their writing such a chore
 they only write what matters. (*Piet Hein*, from *Grooks*)

Eschew obfuscation. *Bumper sticker*

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CHRISTMAS PUDDING 2008

From my grandchildren, I have got to know the French version of *Jingle Bells* – I think it improves on the original.

Vive le vent, vive le vent,
Vive le vent d'hiver,
Qui s'en va sifflant, soufflant
Dans les grands sapins verts, Oh !
Vive le vent, vive le vent,
Vive le vent d'hiver,
Boule de neige et jour de l'an
Et bonne année grand-mère !
Sur le long chemin
Tout blanc de neige blanche
Un vieux monsieur s'avance
Avec sa canne dans la main
Et tout là haut le vent
Qui siffle dans les branches
Lui souffle la romance
Qu'il chantait petit enfant.
Oh ! Vive le vent, vive le vent,
Vive le vent d'hiver,
Qui rapporte aux vieux enfants
Leurs souvenirs d'hier. Oh !
Vive le vent - Vive le vent
Vive le vent d'hiver
Boule de neige et jour de l'an
Et bonne année grand-mère.
Et le vieux monsieur
Descend vers le village
C'est l'heure où tout est sage
Et l'ombre danse au coin du feu.
Mais dans chaque maison
Il flotte un air de fête
Partout la table est prête
Et l'on entend la même chanson.
Oh ! Vive le vent - Vive le vent etc.

T T T T

The theme of Christmas Pudding 2008 is brevity in language, a virtue “more honoured in the breach than the observance”¹ – whenever you hear someone say in a meeting “Just a couple of words ...,” be prepared for a long speech and get close to the exit. Woodrow Wilson commented famously: “If I am to speak ten

¹ *Hamlet*, Act I scene 4.

minutes, I need a week for preparation; if fifteen minutes, three days; if half an hour, two days; if an hour, I am ready now.” A later US president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, gave even pithier advice: “Be sincere; be brief; be seated.”

Benjamin Franklin wrote of a hat maker who proposed to advertise with the sign “John Thompson, Hatter, makes and sells hats for ready money” (with a picture of a hat). But Thompson’s friends urged many deletions: “Hatter” and “hats” were redundant because of the picture; “makes” was unnecessary since customers would not care who made the hat; “sells” was implicit; and “for ready money” was unnecessary because selling on credit was not customary. What remained was the core message: “John Thompson.”

As I remarked in *CP 2001* in relation to the sonnet, the very constraint of the 14-line form of the sonnet compels concentration by the poet on conciseness and meaning. The same can be said of the short poem: whether lyrical or limerick, epitaph or epigram, humorous or *haiku*, *deihew* or comic, a good short poem contains nothing superfluous – it is concise, there is not much room for obscurity and its message is made more powerful by the economy with which it is delivered.

I have arbitrarily defined as short any poem with fewer lines than a sonnet and have divided my selection according to the types mentioned above.

T T T T

On the question of obscurity, a review of the poetry of Hart Crane (1899-1932) in *The New York Review of Books* of 17 April 2008 described an exchange of correspondence between Crane and Harriet Monroe, editor of the magazine *Poetry*, on his poem *At Melville’s Tomb*.

Crane set down his defense of his poetry and offered one of his most detailed explanations of what his lines actually meant, while making it clear that their meaning, while concrete and direct, was a dull business indeed compared to what we might call their force. The first stanza reads:

Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge
The dice of drowned men’s bones he saw bequeath
An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.

“Take me for a hard-boiled unimaginative unpoetic reader, and tell me how *dice* can *bequeath an embassy* (or anything else),” Monroe wrote. Crane in his reply admitted that “as a poet I may very possibly be more interested in the so-called illogical impingements of the connotations of words on the consciousness (and their combinations and interplay in metaphor on this basis) than I am interested in the preservation of their logically rigid significations at the cost of limiting my subject matter and perceptions involved in the poem.”

My sympathy is definitely with Ms. Monroe. The same edition of the *NYRB* contained a review by Brad Leithauser of *Straw for the Fire From the Notebooks of Theodore Roethke* that contained the following extract of a poem by Roethke:

A lively understandable spirit

Once entertained you.
It will come again.
Be still.
Wait.

The reviewer, who is on the faculty at Johns Hopkins and gives seminars on writing, concluded that “the beauty of *understandable* is that it ultimately isn’t understandable: it speaks to the mysteries of the soul’s communion with a spirit beyond itself.” Read this carefully and see if you understand what Mr. Leithauser is actually saying: for me it’s pure obscurantism – I hate to think what he is teaching his students about writing poetry

In a subsequent edition of the *NYRB* (29 May 2008), Al Alvarez, reviewing the poetic work of Geoffrey Hill (*1932), mercilessly sets out some of the real reasons for obscurity in poetry:

As in Pound’s later and lesser cantos, many of Hill’s recent poems hover defiantly on the edge of meaning, as though challenging his readers not to understand, while secretly confident that no one in the closed world that is his audience would ever admit to being baffled, for fear of being thought stupid.

Pound and Joyce were confident, or arrogant, enough to believe that their obscurity would somehow guarantee their immortality, if only because it meant that they had to be studied seriously. Joyce dreamed of readers who would devote their lives to deciphering *Finnegan’s Wake* and history duly obliged. Modernism is like Romanticism, a flourishing branch of the academic industry, and the key works now come fully annotated and with all the necessary scholarly apparatus.

Long live the short poem!

T T T T

Short Lyrical Poems in English

Sir Thomas Wyatt (?1503-1542)

Throughout the world if it were sought,
Fair words enough a man shall find,
They be good cheap, they cost right nought,
Their substance is but only wind,
But well to say, and so to mean,
That sweet accord is seldom seen.

Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) - *Written In Her French Psalter*

No crooked leg, no blearèd eye,
No part deformèd out of kind,
Nor yet so ugly half can be
As is the inward suspicious mind.

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618) - *Lines written before his execution*

Even such is time, that takes in trust
Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
And pays us but with earth and dust;
Who, in the dark and silent grave,

When we have wandered all our ways,
Shuts up the story of our days:
But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
My God shall raise me up, I trust.

William Oldys (1687-1761) - *On a Fly drinking out of his Cup*

Busy, curious, thirsty fly!
Drink with me and drink as I:
Freely welcome to my cup,
Couldst thou sip and sip it up:
Make the most of life you may,
Life is short and wears away.

Both alike are mine and thine
Hastening quick to their decline:
Thine's a summer, mine's no more,
Though repeated to threescore.
Threescore summers, when they're gone,
Will appear as short as one!

James Leigh Hunt (1784-1859)

Jenny kiss'd me when we met,
Jumping from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
Sweets into your list, put that in!
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say that health and wealth have miss'd me,
Say I'm growing old, but add,
Jenny kiss'd me.

Robert Browning (1812-89) - *Song from Pippa Passes*

The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn:
God's in His heaven—
All's right with the world!

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

The morns are meeker than they were --
The nuts are getting brown --
The berry's cheek is plumper --
The Rose is out of town.

The Maple wears a gayer scarf --
The field a scarlet gown --
Lest I should be old fashioned
I'll put a trinket on.

Charlotte Mew (1869-1928) - *From a Window*

Up here, with June, the sycamore throws
Across the window a whispering screen;
I shall miss the sycamore more I suppose,
Than anything else on this earth that is out in green.
But I mean to go through the door without fear,
Not caring much what happens here
When I'm away: --
How green the screen is across the panes
Or who goes laughing along the lanes
With my old lover all the summer day.

Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

I saw a man pursuing the horizon;
Round and round they sped.
I was disturbed at this;
I accosted the man.
"It is futile," I said,
"You can never---"
"You lie," he cried,
And ran on.

Anonymous

A man in the wilderness
Asked this of me,
"How many strawberries
Grow in the sea?"
I answered him
As I thought good,
"As many red herrings
As swim in the wood."

T T T T

"Brevity is the Soul of Lingerie" (*Dorothy Parker*)

The Guardian of 13 February 2008 carried the following article :

Wearing nothing but her best necklace, a wisp of gauze and a foxy expression, Venus has been delighting connoisseurs for almost 500 years - but she has been banned from the underworld, as London Underground has decided she is likely to offend rather than enchant the capital's weary commuters.

She was intended as the main poster for the Royal Academy's show on the German artist Lucas Cranach the Elder, noted for his sensuous nudes despite his close friendship with religious reformer Martin Luther. But the design has been thrown out as the poster, which was planned for display in scores of tube stations across London, was about to go to the printers.

"Millions of people travel on the London Underground each day and they have no choice but to view whatever adverts are posted there. We have to take account of

the full range of travellers and endeavour not to cause offence in the advertising we display,” a spokesman said.



London Underground advertising is vetted by a firm called CBS Outdoor, and Venus seems to have fallen foul of the guideline that advertising should not “depict men, women or children in a sexual manner, or display nude or semi-nude figures in an overtly sexual context”.

Six years ago the National Portrait Gallery - then headed by Charles Saumarez Smith, now chief at the Royal Academy - had to create a special, more modest poster for the underground of a 17th century painting by Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680) of the beautiful Countess of Oxford with one breast bared.



Detail of Lely's portrait of the Countess of Oxford

However, the academy doesn't have a Venus under wraps. “We don't have a version B where she's got her clothes on,” a spokeswoman said. “We're just hoping they change their minds and accept her.” [*They finally did.*]

On 5 August, *The Guardian* followed up with a similar story:

Many words come to mind when one thinks of Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi; “prude” isn't one of them. This is, after all, a man who built a media fortune partly on that simplest of concepts - TV shows featuring scantily dressed women.

Yet this week it emerged that his staff are so anxious about the public linking Berlusconi with the notion of bare breasts, that they have retouched the painting that hangs behind him at press conferences.

The copy of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's *The Truth Unveiled by Time* [unmodified original below] once featured the female figure of Truth unveiled in the literal sense. Now, the flick of a paintbrush has fashioned her a gauzy bra - and prompted outrage from those who consider this an attack on Italy's artistic tradition.



T T T T

More Short Lyrical Poems in English (20th century)

Robert Frost (1874-1963) - *Fire and Ice*

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To know that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Edward Thomas (1878-1917) - *Tall nettles*

Tall nettles cover up, as they have done
These many springs, the rusty harrow, the plough
Long worn out, and the roller made of stone:
Only the elm butt tops the nettles now.
This corner of the farmyard I like most:
As well as any bloom upon a flower
I like the dust on the nettles, never lost
Except to prove the sweetness of a shower.

Witter Bynner (1881-1968) - *A Sigh*

Still must I tamely
Talk sense with these others.

How long
Before I shall be with you again,
Magnificently saying nothing.

Sarah Teasdale (1884-1933)

They came to tell your faults to me,
They named them one by one;
I laughed aloud when they were done,
I knew them all so well before;---
Oh, they were blind, too blind to see
Your faults had made me love you more.

D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) - *Intimates*

Don't you care for my love? she said bitterly.
I handed her the mirror, and said:
Please address these questions to the proper person!
Please make all requests to head-quarters!
In all matters of emotional importance
please approach the supreme authority direct! -
So I handed her the mirror.
And she would have broken it over my head,
but she caught sight of her own reflection
and that held her spellbound for two seconds
while I fled.

Marianne Moore (1887-1972) - *I may, I might, I must*

If you will tell me why the fen
Appears impassable, I then
Will tell you why I think that I
Can get across it if I try.

Elinor Wylie (1885-1928) - *Venetian Interior*

Allegra, rising from her canopied dreams,
Slides both white feet across the slanted beams
Which lace the peacock jalousies: behold
An idol of fine clay, with feet of gold.

Ophelia

My locks are shorn for sorrow
Of love which may not be;
Tomorrow and tomorrow
Are plotting cruelty.
The winter wind tangles
These ringlets half-grown,
The sun sprays with spangles
And rays like his own.

Oh, quieter and colder
 Is the stream; he will wait;
 When my curls touch my shoulder
 He will comb them straight.



Ophelia – John Everett Millais (1829-1896)

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) - *The Gulf*

A Gulf of silence separates us from each other.
 I stand at one side of the gulf, you at the other.
 I cannot see you or hear you, yet know that you are there.
 Often I call you by your childish name
 And pretend that the echo to my crying is your voice.
 How can we bridge the gulf? Never by speech or touch.
 Once I thought we might fill it quite up with tears.
 Now I want to shatter it with our laughter.

Haniel Long (1888-1956) - *Lightning*

All evening I have watched the lightning:
 it crests an unseen cloud with snow and foam,
 veins it with fire, like a human hand, or a leaf,
 flushes it with sulphur and rose.
 And through my own body a vague trembling goes,
 As though I too were vapor.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) - *Passer Mortuus Est*

Death devours all lovely things;
 Lesbia with her sparrow
 Shares the darkness,--presently
 Every bed is narrow.
 Unremembered as old rain
 Dries the sheer libation,
 And the little petulant hand
 Is an annotation.
 After all, my erstwhile dear,

My no longer cherished,
Need we say it was not love,
Now that love is perished?

Mark Van Doren (1894-1972)

Why are my songs so simple,
Now that I know the worst?
Nothing should delight me
In times so cursed.

And nothing does but singing,
And best that it be brief;
About the length of a daydream,
Or fall of leaf.

Charles Reznikoff (1894-1976) - *Te Deum*

Not because of victories
I sing,
having none,
but for the common sunshine,
the breeze,
the largess of the spring
Not for victory
but for the day's work done
as well as I was able;
not for a seat upon the dais
but at the common table.

Robert Graves (1895-1985) - *Love Without Hope*

Love without hope, as when the young bird-catcher
Swept off his tall hat to the Squire's own daughter,
So let the imprisoned larks escape and fly
Singing about her head, as she rode by.

Louise Bogan (1897-1970) - *The Alchemist*

I burned my life, that I might find
A passion wholly of the mind,
Thought divorced from eye and bone,
Ecstasy come to breath alone.
I broke my life, to seek relief
From the flawed light of love and grief.

With mounting beat the utter fire
Charred existence and desire.
It died low, ceased its sudden thresh.
I had found unmysterious flesh —
Not the mind's avid substance — still
Passionate beyond the will.

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) - *Subway Face*

That I have been looking

For you all my life
Does not matter to you.
You do not know.
You never knew.
Nor did I.
Now you take the Harlem train uptown;
I take a local down.

Laura Riding (1901-1991)

Take hands.
There is no love now.
But there are hands.
There is no joining now,
But a joining has been
Of the fastening of fingers
And their opening.
More than the clasp even, the kiss
Speaks loneliness,
How we dwell apart
And how love triumphs in this.

The Sum

Hands touch.
Eyes too may meet
And transfer much
Of true love's heat.
Souls touch
Rarely. But then
The flow is such
That, even when
Absence divides,
The two become,
In all, two sides
Of one, the sum.

Robert Francis (1901-1987) - *The Pitcher*

His art is eccentricity, his aim
How not to hit the mark he seems to aim at,
His passion how to avoid the obvious,
His technique how to vary the avoidance.
The others throw to be comprehended. He
Throws to be a moment misunderstood.
Yet not too much. Not errant, arrant, wild,
But every seeming aberration willed.
Not to, yet still, still to communicate
Making the batter understand too late.

Ogden Nash (1902-1971) - *The Middle*

When I remember bygone days
I think how evening follows morn;
So many I loved were not yet dead,
So many I love were not yet born.

Countee Cullen (1903-1946) - *Incident*

Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.
Now I was eight and very small,
And he was no whit bigger,
And so I smiled, but he poked out
His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."
I saw the whole of Baltimore
From May until December;
Of all the things that happened there
That's all that I remember.

Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982) - *From The Love Poems of Marichiko*

Making love with you
Is like drinking sea water.
The more I drink
The thirstier I become,
Until nothing can slake my thirst
But to drink the entire sea.

Theodore Roethke (1908-1963) - *Root Cellar*

Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,
Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in the dark,
Shoots dangled and drooped,
Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,
Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical snakes.
And what a congress of stinks!--
Roots ripe as old bait,
Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks.
Nothing would give up life:
Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.

J.V. Cunningham (1911-1985) - *To Whom It May Concern*

After so many decades of ... of what?
I have a permanent sabbatical.
I pass my time on actuarial time.
Listen to music, and going to bed
Leave something at the bottom of the glass,
A little wastefulness to end the day.

Anne Porter (*1911) - *Winter Twilight*

On a clear winter's evening
The crescent moon
And the round squirrel's nest
In the bare oak
Are equal planets.

John Frederick Nims (1913-1999) - *How To Tell the Girls From the Flowers*

Both sway. Are fragrant mostly. Wells for dew.
Have their one season early. Tell the two
First by their gaze, half hid with lash or leaf:
Eyes of the girl go deeper. Wells for grief.

Denise Levertov (*1923) - *Living*

The fire in leaf and grass
so green it seems
each summer the last summer.

The wind blowing, the leaves
shivering in the sun,
Each day the last day.

A red salamander
so cold and so
easy to catch, dreamily
moves his delicate feet
and long tail. I hold
my hand open for him to go.
Each minute the last minute.

Maya Angelou (*1928) - *Passing Time*

Your skin like dawn
Mine like musk
One paints the beginning
of a certain end.

The other, the end of a
sure beginning.

Anne Stevenson (*1933) - *The Mother*

Of course I love them, they are my children.
That is my daughter and this my son.
And this is my life I give them to please them.
It has never been used. Keep it safe, pass it on.

Dorothy Doyle Mienko - *No Soliciting*

Fools
do not
rush in--
they wait
too long

for things
that never
come.

Opportunity
does not solicit.

Wendy Cope (*1945) - *Flowers*

Some men never think of it.
You did. You'd come along
And say you'd nearly brought me flowers
But something had gone wrong.

The shop was closed. Or you had doubts -
The sort that minds like ours
Dream up incessantly. You thought
I might not want your flowers.

It made me smile and hug you then.
Now I can only smile.
But, look, the flowers you nearly bought
Have lasted all this while.

C.E. Laine (*Christine Elaine Lennon* - *1960)

Only
This
Silken shroud
of my hair
clinging
to the swell
of my left
breast
grazing
the pink
of my nipple
I wear only
- this

T T T T

Pass the Port

Shortly after the Pope had apologized to Israel for the treatment of Jews by the Catholic Church over the years, Ehud Barak, the Israeli Prime Minister, sent back a message to the College of Cardinals. The proposal was for a friendly game of golf to be played between the two leaders or their representatives to show the friendship and ecumenical spirit shared by the Catholic and Jewish faiths. The Pope met with his College of Cardinals to discuss the proposal.

"Your Holiness," said one of the Cardinals, "Mr. Barak wants to challenge you to a game of golf to show that you are old and unable to compete I am afraid that this would tarnish our image to the world."

The Pope thought about this and - as he had never held a golf club in his life - asked, "Don't we have a Cardinal to represent me?"

"None that plays golf very well," a Cardinal replied. "But," he added, "there is a well-known Irish golfer named Padraig Harrington, who is a devout Catholic. We can offer to make him a Cardinal, then ask him to play Mr. Barak as your personal representative. In addition to showing our spirit of co-operation, we'll also win."

Everyone agreed it was a brilliant idea. The call was made: Harrington was honoured and agreed to play as a representative of the Pope.

The day after the match, Harrington reported to the Vatican to inform the Pope of the result. "I have some good news and some bad news, Your Holiness," he said.

"Tell me the good news, Cardinal Harrington," said the Pope.

"Well, Your Holiness, I don't like to boast, but even though I've played some pretty terrific rounds of golf in my life, this was the best I have ever played by far: I must have been inspired from above. My drives were long and true, my irons were accurate and purposeful, and my putting was perfect. With all due respect, my play was truly miraculous."

"How can there be bad news?" the Pope asked.

Harrington sighed, "I lost to Rabbi Tiger Woods on the last hole."

T T T T

Limericks

A limerick is a five-line poem with a strict form; they are frequently witty or humorous, and sometimes obscene with humorous intent.

The limerick packs laughs anatomical
In space that is quite economical,
But the good ones I've seen
So seldom are clean,
And the clean ones so seldom are comical.

One of the most famous limericks has also been translated into Latin.

P uella Rigensis ridebat Quam tigris in tergo vehebat; Externa profecta, Interna revecta, Risusque cum tigre manebat.	T here was a young lady of Riga Who went for a ride on a tiger; They returned from the ride With the lady inside, And a smile on the face of the tiger.
--	--

There was a young lady of Kent,
Who said that she knew what it meant
When men asked her to dine,
And served cocktails and wine;
She knew, oh she knew! – but she went!

When you think of the hosts without No.
Who are slain by the deadly cuco.,

It's quite a mistake
Of such food to partake,
It results in a permanent slo.

That fine English poet, John Donne,
Was wont to admonish the Sunne:
"You busie old foole,
Lie still and keep coole,
For I am in bed having funne." (*Wendy Cope*)

A minor league pitcher, McDowell
Pitched an egg at a batter named Owl.
They cried "Get a hit!"
But it hatched in the mitt
And the umpire declared it a fowl.

Variations on the theme – the *Limick* (inventor: Ogden Nash)

Two nudists of Dover,
Being purple all over,
Were munched by a cow
When mistaken for clover.

The *Nasherick*:

There once was a poet called Nash
Who didn't care very much whether his lines scanned, which most
other poets would have thought pretty rash.
But he got his way
And is famous today –
And despite what some people may try to tell you, I think you'll find
that most of what he wrote isn't trash.
At all.

Other alternatives:

There was a young man from Japan
Whose limericks just wouldn't scan.
When they asked him why,
He replied with a sigh:
"I always try to get as many words into the last line as I possibly can."

There once was a man from the sticks
Who liked to compose limericks.
But he failed at the sport,
For he wrote 'em too short.

There was a young man of Bellevue
Whose limericks stopped at line two.

...and by extension...

There was a young man of Verdun.

T T T T

Clerihews

A *Clerihew* is a very specific form of biographical humorous verse. The form was invented by and is named after Edmund Clerihew Bentley (1875-1956). Bentley worked as a journalist on several newspapers, including the *Daily Telegraph*. His first published collection of poetry, *Biography for Beginners* (1905), popularised the clerihew form; it was followed by two other collections, in 1929 and 1939.

Sir Humphry Davy
Abominated gravy.
He lived in the odium
Of having discovered sodium.

Daniel Defoe
Lived a long time ago.
He had nothing to do, so
He wrote Robinson Crusoe.

George the Third
Ought never to have occurred.
One can only wonder
At so grotesque a blunder.

Adam Smith
Was disowned by all his kith,
But he was backed through thick and thin
by all his kin.

T T T T

Epigrams

Although the term *epigram* can be used to define any very short poem, it normally refers to one that is witty or satirical. It is distinguished from an *aphorism* by use of the verse form. N.B. As the reader will see, there is – if at all – only a narrow dividing line between epigrams and short humorous poems.

The qualities all in a bee that we meet,
In an epigram never should fail;
The body should always be little and sweet,
And a sting should be felt in its tail. (*Edward Young 1683-1765*)

The diamond's virtues well might grace
The epigram, and both excel
In brilliancy in smallest space,
And power to cut as well. (*George Birdseye 1844-1919*)

What's an epigram? A dwarfish whole,
Its body brevity, and wit its soul. (*Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1772-1834*)

I am not a great admirer of the poetry of Coleridge but consider the following epigram one of the best in the language:

Swans sing before they die – 'twere no bad thing
Should certain persons die before they sing.

One of the earliest masters of the epigram was **Martial** (C.E. 40?-102?):

<p>Quid mihi reddat ager quaeris, Line, Nomentanus? Hoc mihi reddit ager: te, Line, non video. <i>Epigrammaton, Book II, 38</i></p> <p>Cur non mitto meos tibi, Pontiliane, libellos? Ne mihi tu mittas, Pontiliane, tuos. <i>Book VII, 3</i></p>	<p>You ask what I see in my farm near Nomentum, Linus? What I see in it, Linus, is: from there I can't see you.</p> <p>Why don't I send you my little books? Pontilianus, lest you send me yours.</p>
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I consider only self-standing poems as *epigrams*, although it could be argued that many aphoristic verses from the longer poems of Pope, Goethe, Schiller, Kipling, Busch, Belloc and others are so compact and self-contained that they deserve to be included. Examples would be:

Fondly we think we honour merit then,
When we but praise ourselves in other men. (*Pope - Essay on Criticism*)

Get place and wealth, if possible with grace;
if not, by any means get wealth and place. (*Pope - Epistles of Horace*)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) - From *Zahme Xenien* IV

<p>Mit seltsamen Gebärden Gibt man sich viele Pein; Kein Mensch will etwas werden, Ein jeder will schon etwas sein.</p>	<p>In strange and curious pranks We all together strive; No one wants to get there, All think they just arrived.</p>
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Wilhelm Busch (1832-1908)

<p>Vater werden ist nicht schwer, Vater sein dagegen sehr. (<i>Julchen</i>)</p> <p>Rotwein ist für alte Knaben Eine von den besten Gaben. (<i>Abenteuer eines Junggesellen</i>)</p> <p>Es ist ein Brauch von alters her: Wer Sorgen hat, hat auch Likör! (<i>Die fromme Helene</i>)</p> <p>Und die Liebe per Distanz, Kurz gesagt, mißfällt mir ganz (<i>Abenteuer eines Junggesellen</i>)</p> <p>Dummheit, die man bei anderen sieht, wirkt meist erhebend aufs Gemüt (<i>Spricker</i>)</p>	<p>Babies easy can be had - It's harder though to be a Dad. Red wine is, for good old boys, One of the best remaining toys.</p> <p>Whoever suffers pain of mind Should try a spirit of another kind.</p> <p>With absent love I'm held in thrall - It isn't any fun at all.</p> <p>Stupidity in others seen Makes one feel better than one's been.</p>
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If England was what England seems

An' not the England of our dreams,
But only putty, brass, an' paint,
'Ow quick we'd drop 'er! But she ain't! (*Rudyard Kipling - The Return*)

When I am dead, I hope it may be said:
His sins were scarlet, but his books were read. (*Hilaire Belloc - On His Books*)

Oh! let us never, never doubt
What nobody is sure about! (*Hilaire Belloc - The Microbe*)

The accursed power which stands on Privilege
(And goes with Women, and Champagne, and Bridge)
Broke--and Democracy resumed her reign:
(Which goes with Bridge, and Women and Champagne).
(*Hilaire Belloc - On a Great Election*)

May all my enemies go to hell,
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel. (*Hilaire Belloc - Lines For A Christmas Card*)

I make no apology for including so many of Belloc's splendid verse aphorisms,
but continue with a selection of self-standing epigrams:

Bad company is a disease;
Who lies with dogs shall rise with fleas. (*Rowland Watkins - 1610-64*)

Ovid is the surest guide
You can name to show the way
To any woman, maid or bride
Who resolves to go astray. (*Matthew Prior - Written in an Ovid*)

God bless our good and gracious king,
Whose promise none relies on;
Who never said a foolish thing,
Nor ever did a wise one. (*John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester - 1647-1680*)

Cibber, write all thy verses upon glasses,
The only way to save them from our arses. (*Alexander Pope - 1688-1744*)

*A summary of Lord Lyttelton's "Advice to a Lady"*²
Be plain in dress, and sober in your diet;
In short, my deary, kiss me, and be quiet. (*Lady Wortley Montagu 1689-1762*)

Written on a Looking-Glass
I change, and so do women too;
But I reflect – which women never do. (*David Garrick - 1716-1779*)

Waly, waly! Bairns are bonny;
One's enough, and twa's too mony. (*Scottish Proverb*)

Pub sign at Mortal Man Pub in Troutbeck Village, Cumbria.
O Mortal Man that lives by bread,

² A long and bland poem giving advice to "Belinda" on good behaviour in society and marriage.

What is it makes thy nose so red?
 Thou silly fool that look'st so pale,
 'tis drinking Sally Birkett's ale. (*Julius Caesar Ibbetson? - 1759-1817*)

Ma maîtresse est encore fidèle,
 Mais, si jamais je perds son cœur,
 J'irai, pour calmer ma douleur,
 Me pendre – au cou d'une autre belle. (*Foucaux - 19th century*)

The rain it raineth every day
 Upon the just and unjust fella –
 But mostly on the just, because
 The unjust's got the just's umbrella. (*Baron Charles Bowen - 1835-1894*)



On a Statue of Sir Arthur Sullivan (Victoria Embankment Gardens in London)
 Sorrowing nymph, oh why display
 Your beauty in such disarray?
 Is it decent, is it just
 To so conventional a bust? (*Sir George Rostrevor Hamilton - 1888-1967*)

On Sir Walter Scott's poem "The Field of Waterloo"
 On Waterloo's ensanguined plain
 Full many a gallant man was slain,
 But none, by sabre or by shot,
 Fell half so flat as Walter Scott. (*Thomas, Lord Erskine - 1750-1823*)

Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864): A sensible girl's reply to Thomas Moore's "Our couch shall be roses all spangled with dew"
 It would give me rheumatics, and so it would you.

Hail, ye indomitable heroes, hail!
 Despite of all your generals ye prevail. (*Landor - The Crimean Heroes*)

On the Lake Poets
 They live by the lakes, an appropriate quarter
 For poems diluted with plenty of water. (*Charles Townsend - 1789-1870*)

On Meeting a Gentlewoman in the dark
 To see such dainty ghosts as you appear
 Will make my flesh stand sooner than my hair. (*Anonymous*)

On Queen Caroline
 Most Gracious Queen we thee implore,
 To go away and sin no more,
 But if that effort be too great,
 To go away at any rate. (*Anonymous - early 19th century*)

Men seldom make passes
At girls who wear glasses. (*Dorothy Parker - 1893-1967*)

If, with the literate, I am
Impelled to try an epigram,
I never seek to take the credit;
We all assume that Oscar said it. (*Dorothy Parker*)

I'd rather have a bottle in front of me
than a frontal lobotomy. (*Celebrity Inebriety - Dorothy Parker*)

a politician is an arse upon
which everyone has sat except a man (*e e cummings - 1894-1962*)

When any mortal (even the most odd)
can justify the ways of man to God
i'll think it strange that normal mortals can
not justify the ways of God to man (*e e cummings*)

With Peter I refuse to dine:
His jokes are older than his wine. (*C.D.B. Ellis - 1895-1969*)

With Paul I have not lately dined:
My jokes were broader than his mind. (*C.D.B. Ellis*)

I see no reasonable doubt
That life, upon the whole, is hollow:
We seldom have our fun without
An aching head or heart to follow.
Yet, speaking broadly, I opine
That Love is worth it: so is Wine. (*C.D.B. Ellis*)

A bit of talcum is always walcum. (*Oglen Nash - 1902-1971*)

Many an infant that screams like a calliope
Could be soothed by a little attention to its diope. (*Oglen Nash*)

Commuter - One who spends his life
In riding to and from his wife;
A man who shaves and takes a train
And then rides back to shave again. (*Elwyn Brooks White - 1899-1985*)

This *Humanist* whom no beliefs constrained
Grew so broad-minded he was scatter-brained. (*J.V. Cunningham*)

When your client's hopping mad,
Put his picture in the ad.
If he still should prove refractory
Add a picture of his factory. (*The Advertising Agency Song - Anon. 20th C*)

When all else fails,
Try Wales. (*To a friend in search of rural seduction - Christopher Logie - *1926*)

This Englishwoman is so refined
She has no bosom and no behind. (*Stevie Smith - 1902-1971*)

Thrice armed is he who has his quarrel just,
But nine times he who gets his blow in fust! (*Anonymous*)

On an old revolutionary

This comrade was, in sixty-eight,
Both dissident and resolute.
His causes gone, he's now, of late,
Just resident and dissolute.

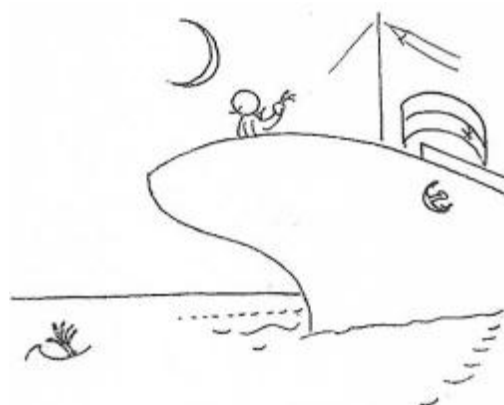
Piet Hein (1905-1996) was a Danish polymath (scientist, mathematician, inventor, author, poet). His short whimsical poems, *gruks* (or *gooks*), first appeared in the daily newspaper *Politiken* shortly after the Nazi Occupation of Denmark in April 1940 and were subsequently collected in book form. They are probably among the most successful collections of epigrams ever published.

Omniscience

Knowing what
thou knowest not
is in a sense
omniscience.³

Consolation Groom

Losing one glove
is certainly painful,
but nothing
compared to the pain,
of losing one,
throwing away the other,
and finding
the first one again.



Hint And Suggestion - Admonitory groom addressed to youth

The human spirit sublimates
the impulses it thwarts;
a healthy sex life mitigates
the lust for other sports.

Foretaste With Aftertaste

Corinna's scanty evening dress
reveals her charms to an excess
which makes a fellow lust for less.

The Road To Wisdom

The road to wisdom? -- Well, it's plain
and simple to express:

³ *df* "Если я знаю, что знаю мало, я добьюсь того, чтобы знать больше." (If I know that I know very little, I am on the way to knowing more.) *V.I. Lenin: quoted on Soviet school certificates.*

Err
and err
and err again
but less
and less
and less.

The Case For Obscurity - On Thoughts and Words I

If no thought
your mind does visit,
make your speech
not too explicit.

Thoughts On A Station Platform

It ought to be plain
how little you gain
by getting excited
and vexed.
You'll always be late
for the previous train,
and always in time
for the next.

Timing Toast - Grook on how to char for yourself

There's an art of knowing when.
Never try to guess.
Toast until it smokes and then
twenty seconds less.

Prescription

A bit
of virtue
will never
hurt you.

T T T T

Shortest poems in the world:

On the antiquity of microbes (Strickland Gillilan – 1869-1954)

Adam
Had 'em

Note on Feeding (Anonymous)

Breast
Is best

Love poem: "U!"

French love poem: "L!"

Erotic poem: "O!"

French erotic poem: "Q"

Romantic poem: "I!"

Nature poem "C!"

Moral poem "B!"

Tragic poem "Y?"

American poem "G...."

T T T T

Equal before the law?

In 2008 I was involved in court cases affecting three friends. The following (from *The New Yorker* of 2 July 2007) expresses my conclusions from this experience better than I could myself.



*"You have a pretty good case, Mr. Pitkin.
How much justice can you afford?"*

As Baron Charles Bowen (1835-1894), one of the wittiest British Law Lords, once said: "When I hear of 'equity' in a case like this, I am reminded of a blind man in a dark room looking for a black hat - which isn't there."

T T T T

Short Poems in French

Paul Scarron (1610-1660)

J'ai descendu dans mon jardin
Pour y cueillir le romarin:
Je n'en ai pas cueilli trois brins
Qu'un rossignol vint sur ma main;
Il me dit trois mots en latin,
Que les hommes ne valent rien,

Et les garçons encore bien moins;
Des dames, il ne me dit rien,
Mais des demoiselles beaucoup de bien.

Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855) - *La Cousine*

L'hiver a ses plaisirs ; et souvent, le dimanche,
Quand un peu de soleil jaunit la terre blanche,
Avec une cousine on sort se promener...

- Et ne vous faites pas attendre pour dîner,

Dit la mère. Et quand on a bien, aux Tuileries,
Vu sous les arbres noirs les toilettes fleuries,
La jeune fille a froid... et vous fait observer
Que le brouillard du soir commence à se lever.

Et l'on revient, parlant du beau jour qu'on regrette,
Qui s'est passé si vite... et de flamme discrète :
Et l'on sent en rentrant, avec grand appétit,
Du bas de l'escalier, - le dindon qui rôtit.

Paul-Jean Toulet (1867-1920)

Dans le lit vaste et dévasté

J'ouvre les yeux près d'elle ;
Je l'effleure : un songe infidèle
L'embrasse à mon côté.

Une lueur tranchante et mince
Échancre mon plafond,
Très loin, sur le pavé profond,
J'entends un seau qui grince...

André Spire (1868-1966) - *Matin*

Le gars balance la pompe
La fille balaye le seuil.
Le vent remue le rosier.

Le bon chien jappe, la porte s'ouvre.
Sur les branches du tamaris
La mésange craque son cri sec.

Les pots de la laitière sonnent.
Le boulanger pose son pain.
Un bras nu pousse le volet.

Dans le ciel déchiqueté d'arbres
Un nuage s'effiloche ...
Des gouttes tombent sur le jardin.

Valery Larbaud (1881-1957) - *Images I*

Un jour, à Kharkow, dans un quartier populaire
(O cette Russie méridionale, où toutes les femmes
Avec leur châle blanc sur la tête, ont des airs de Madone!),
Je vis une jeune femme revenir de la fontaine,

Portant, à la mode de là-bas, comme du temps d'Ovide,
Deux seaux suspendus aux extrémités d'un bois
En équilibre sur le cou et les épaules.
Et je vis un enfant en haillons s'approcher d'elle et lui parler.
Alors, inclinant aimablement son corps à droite,
Elle fit en sorte que le seau plein d'eau pure touchât le pavé
Au niveau des lèvres de l'enfant qui s'était mis à genoux pour boire.

Jean Follain (1903-1971) - *Dans tous pays*

Entre vie et mort
dans tous pays
il arrive qu'une fille
se déshabille pour se voir
quand elle quitte la chambre
sa beauté
laisse place au calme
parfois dans le même temps
les mains de celui qui craint sa fin
craquent dans le noir du silence
pour retenir l'espérance.

T T T T

And before we finally say goodbye to George Dubbya and consign him to a place well described by Trotsky in October 1917

JEEVES AND W. by Christopher Buckley - *The New Yorker*, 27 November 2007

I was lying in bed after a rather depressing night, listening to the birds twitter in the trees, when Jeeves shimmered into the room. "What ho, Jeeves."

"Good morning, sir."

"What's all this I hear about your heading up some Iraq Study Group? Have you been talking to my father again?"

"Might I suggest the blue suit today? Something about this November suggests blue."

Sometimes Jeeves can be evasive, which is when I apply the old iron hand that we W.s are known for. "Now, see here, Jeeves, I can handle this Iraq business myself."

"Yes, sir. But, if I may, there does seem to be something of a clamor for an exit strategy."

"Dash it, Jeeves, the only exit strategy is victory."

"Yes, sir. So Dr. Kissinger keeps insisting. And yet, as the Bard would suggest, ripeness is all."

"What are you talking about?"

" 'King Lear,' sir. A play by the late Mr. Shakespeare."

"Just spit it out."

"As you may recall, sir, I had suggested replacing Mr. Rumsfeld before the election,

rather than after.”

“Deuced good idea, Jeeves. See to it immediately. Walk him up the scaffold, and no blindfold. That’ll get us a few votes.”

We W.s are slow to anger, but, when the feeling comes, the ground around us trembles.

“If I may, sir?”

“What is it, Jeeves?”

“The election is over.”

“Oh. Dash it all, Jeeves, you might have told me.”

“I believe there was some mention of it in the newspapers.”

“Well, don’t be so mysterious. How’d we do? Another unqualified triumph?”

“Not as satisfactorily as one might have hoped, sir. One might even be tempted to say that we took rather a thumping.”

“Hmm. Wondered why there’ve been so many Democrats lurking about. Every time I look up from my desk, they’re tiptoeing about with tape measures. It’s deuced annoying, Jeeves. How’s a President supposed to concentrate?”

“I have spoken with the Secret Service about it, sir. I have asked them to limit Democratic visitors to no more than two per day.”

“That Pelosi woman. Sat there like a cobra. Froze my blood, Jeeves. Could hardly get up out of my chair.”

“I keenly regret it, sir. I shall ask the Secret Service to be on the lookout especially for her. Meanwhile, perhaps if you appealed to her maternal side? I believe the lady is a mother of five and a grandmother. Perhaps a tasteful arrangement of seasonal flowers, accompanied by an appropriate sentiment? ‘Every hyacinth the garden wears / dropped in her lap from some once lovely head.’ “

“What are you going on about now?”

“A poem, sir, by a Mr. Khayyam. A Persian person.”

“Well, stop it. You’re making my head spin. And that Reid fellow who was with her—good Lord, he could give the Grim Reaper a run for his money. Where do the Democrats find these people, Jeeves? In a funeral parlor?”

“I believe the gentleman is from the state of Nevada, sir. The ‘Battle Born’ state, as the state flag has it. Admitted to the Union during the Civil War.”

“I tried to jolly him up by giving him one of my nicknames. You know how I like to crack the old ice by giving people nicknames.”

“I am acquainted with your tendency toward the spontaneous assignment of the fraternal sobriquet. Might I inquire just what you called him?”

“Cactus Butt.”

“Doubtless a reference to the flora of his natal environs. And was the future Senate Majority Leader amused, sir, by your jeu d’esprit?”

“He just stared at me. Deuced uncomfortable, let me tell you.”

“Perhaps the gentleman is not inclined to persiflage. But, if I may, sir, with respect to Iraq?”

“All right, then. Give it to me straight up.”

“Might I suggest, sir, a regional conference?”

“Dash it, Jeeves, we’re at war. You can’t go conferencing with bullets flying all over the place.”

“Indeed, sir. And yet if we were to invite, say, Iran and Syria and some of the other affected countries to sit down for what is, I believe, referred to as ‘networking,’ it might take some of the pressure off yourself?”

“You mean the sort of how-d’ye-do where everyone sits at one of those huge U-shaped tables and makes endless orations all day?”

“That would be the general notion, yes, sir.”

“Now, steady on, Jeeves. You know I hate those things. You sit there with an earphone, listening to interpreters jibber-jabber about how it’s all your fault. I’d rather take my chances playing Blinky with Cobra Woman and Cactus Butt.”

“You wouldn’t actually have to attend personally, sir. Indeed, I could represent you, if that would be agreeable.”

“I say, would you, Jeeves?”

“Certainly, sir. Indeed, sir, it is my impression that you have been working much too hard as it is. Might I suggest that you winter at the ranch in Crawford? I believe the climate there this time of year is thought to be salubrious.”

“But what if the Vice-President wants to come down and go quail-hunting?”

“I have taken the liberty of speaking with the Secret Service, sir, and have asked that they replace Mr. Cheney’s shotgun cartridges with blanks.”

“Jeeves, you’re a genius. Pack my things. We leave immediately.”

“Thank you, sir. I endeavor to give satisfaction.”

T T T T

Humorous and Comic

Thomas Moore (1779-1852)⁴

“Come, come” said Tom’s father, “at your time of life,
There’s no longer excuse for thus playing the rake—
It is time you should think, boy, of taking a wife.”
“Why, so it is, father—whose wife shall I take?”

On T. Moore’s Poems - Anonymous

Lalla Rookh
Is a naughty book

⁴ Thomas Moore (1779-1852) was the author of a well-known romantic poem *Lalla Rookh* about an eponymous Mughal princess that was considered at the time to be rather *risqué*

By Tommy Moore,
Who has written four,
Each warmer
Than the former,
So the most recent
Is the least decent.



Lalla Rookh from the 1817 edition of Moore's poem⁵

Augustus de Morgan (1806-1871)⁶ - *The Fleas*

Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em,
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so ad infinitum.
And the great fleas themselves, in turn, have greater fleas to go on;
While these again have greater still, and greater still, and so on.

James Payn (1830-1898)

I had never had a piece of toast,
Particularly long and wide,
But fell upon the sanded floor,
And always on the buttered side.

George Strong (1832-1912) - From *The Modern Hiawatha*⁷

When he killed the Mudjokivis,
Of the skin he made him mittens,

⁵ See <http://www.classroomelectric.org/volume3/browner/lallarookh.html> for further illustrations from the original edition. Emily Dickinson's poem *He touched me, so I live to know* was supposedly influenced by Moore's poem.

⁶ Augustus de Morgan was a British mathematician and an important innovator in the field of mathematical logic. The system he devised to express such notions as the contradictory, the converse, and the transitivity of a relation, as well as the union of two relations, laid some of the groundwork for that of his friend George Boole (cf. *Boolean* logic). This poem is from *A Budget of Paradoxes*, a compendium of eccentric mathematics. De Morgan devised a decimal coinage system, an almanac of all full moons from 2000 BC to AD 2000, and a theory on the probability of life events that is still used by insurance companies.

⁷ I like this extract from Strong's splendid parody of Longfellow's awful *Hiawatha* so much that I have broken my rule about only including self-standing poems.

Made them with the fur side inside,
Made them with the skin side outside,
He, to get the warm side inside,
Put the inside skin side outside;
He, to get the cold side outside,
Put the warm side fur side inside.
That's why he put the fur side inside,
Why he put the skin side outside,
Why he turned them inside outside.

Matthew Prior (1664-1721)

No, no; for my virginity,
When I lose that, says Rose, I'll die:
Behind the elms, last night, cried Dick,
Rose, were you not extremely sick?

Canon Alfred Ainger (1837-1904)

When Reason's ray shines over all
And puts the Saints to rout,
Then Peter's holiness will pall
And Paul's will peter out.

John Collins Bossidy (1860-1928)

From a toast given at Holy Cross College alumni dinner in 1910

And this is good old Boston,
The home of the bean and the cod.
Where the Lowells talk only to Cabots,
And the Cabots talk only to God.

Sir Arthur Shipley (1861-1927) - Evolution

When we were a soft amoeba, in ages past and gone,
Ere you were Queen of Sheba or I King Solomon
Alone and undivided, we lived a life of sloth,
Whatever you did, I did; one dinner served for both.
Anon came separation, by fission and divorce,
A lonely pseudopodium I wandered on my course.

Gelett Burgess (1866-1951) - The Purple Cow

I never saw a purple cow,
I never hope to see one;
but I can tell you anyhow,
I'd rather see than be one.

Burgess became annoyed that he was known mainly for *The Purple Cow* and wrote a retraction in the *Purple Cow Suite*

Confession: and a portrait, too,
Upon a background that I rue!
Ah, yes! I wrote the "Purple Cow"--
I'm sorry, now, I wrote it!

But I can tell you anyhow,
I'll kill you if you quote it!

This "confession" was countered by the following anonymous verse:

I never saw a purple cow,
I never hope to see one;
But from the milk we're getting now,
There certainly must be one.

It also spawned imitations in the style of various poets, among which:

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dee;
A cow whom there were few to praise
And very few to see.

A violet by a mossy stone
Greeting the smiling East
Is not so purple, I must own
As that erratic beast.

She lived unknown, that cow, and so
I never chanced to see;
But if I had to be one, oh,
The difference to me. (*Caroline Wells*)

A cow of purple is a joy for ever,
Its loveliness increases. I have never
Seen this phenomenon. Yet ever keep
A brave lookout, lest I should be asleep
When she comes by. For though I would not be one
I've oft imagined 'twould be a joy to see one. (*Caroline Wells*)

Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953)

Would you like to sin
With Elinor Glyn⁸
On a tiger skin?
Or would you prefer
To err
With her
On some other fur?

Morris Bishop (1893-1973) - *The Naughty Preposition*

I lately lost a preposition.
It hid, I thought, beneath my chair.
And angrily I cried: 'Perdition!

⁸ Although her writing would not be considered scandalous by modern standards, Elinor Glyn pioneered mass-market women's erotic fiction. She coined the use of *It* as a euphemism for sexuality, or sex appeal. She had a long lasting affair between 1906 and 1916 with George Nathaniel Curzon, 1st Marquess Curzon of Kedleston (*Wikipedia*).

Up from out of under there!
Correctness is my *vade mecum*,
And straggling phrases I abhor.
And yet I wondered: 'What should he come
Up from out of under for?'

William Hughes Means (1875-1965)

Yesterday upon the stair
I met a man who wasn't there.
He wasn't there again today
Oh how I wish he'd go away.

A contemporary version of the above was quoted in *The Guardian* in March 2008, attributed to John Hutton, a political opponent of Gordon Brown.

In Downing Street upon the stair
I met a man who wasn't Blair.
He wasn't Blair again today –
Oh how I wish he'd go away.

Anonymous 19th century

They cannot be complete in aught
Who are not humorously prone;
A man without a merry thought
Can hardly have a funny bone.

Anonymous 19th century

Here is a riddle most abstruse:
Canst read the answer right?
Why is it that my tongue grows loose
Only when I grow tight?

Richard Armour (1906-1989) - *Good Sportsmanship*

Good sportsmanship we hail, we sing,
It's always pleasant when you spot it
There's only one unhappy thing:
You have to lose to prove you've got it.

Anonymous 20th century

There once were some people called Sioux
Who spent all there time making shioux
Which they coloured in various hioux;
Don't think that they made them to ioux –
Oh! No, they just sold them for bioux.

Dorothy Parker (1893-1967) - *One Perfect Rose*

A single flower he sent me, since we met.
All tenderly his messenger he chose;
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet-
One perfect rose.

I knew the language of the flowers;
"My fragile leaves," it said, "his heart enclose."
Love long has taken for his amulet
One perfect rose.

Why is it no one ever sent me yet
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?
Ah no, it's always just my luck to get
One perfect rose.

Adrian Mitchell (*1932) - *Celia, Celia*

When I am sad and weary
When I think all hope has gone
When I walk along High Holborn
I think of you with nothing on.

Wendy Cope (*1945)

Love, love, love
Love, love, love,
Love, love, love,
Dooby doo dooby doo,
All you need is love,
Dooby dooby doo,
All you need is love,
Dooby dooby doo,
All you need is love,
or, failing that, alcohol. (*Variation on a Lennon and McCartney Song*)

There follows a selection of poems by three of the masters of short humorous verse: Harry Graham (1874-1936), Samuel Hoffenstein (1890-1947) and Ogden Nash (1902-1971).

Harry Graham was an officer in the Coldstream Guards and wrote most of his dark comic verse (*Ruthless Rhymes for Heartless Homes* - 1899 - and *More Ruthless Rhymes for Heartless Homes* - 1930) under the pen-name Col. D. Streamer.

Billy, in one of his nice new sashes,
Fell in the fire and was burnt to ashes.
Now, although the room grows chilly,
I haven't the heart to poke up Billy.

"There's been an accident!" they said,
"Your servant's cut in half; he's dead!"
"Indeed!" said Mr. Jones, "and please
Send me the half that's got my keys."

In the drinking well
Which the plumber built her,
Aunt Eliza fell.
We must buy a filter.

Weep not for little Leonie,
Abducted by a French Marquis!
Though loss of honour was a wrench,
Just think how it's improved her French.

I had written to Aunt Maud,
Who was on a trip abroad,
When I heard she'd died of cramp
Just too late to save the stamp.

Samuel Hoffenstein also wrote some dark verse, but most is just witty, as can be seen from the titles of some of his collections of poems that appeared in various US magazines: *Poems to Break the Tedium of Riding a Bicycle*, *Poems in Praise of Practically Nothing*, *Year In, You're out*, *Poems of Passion Carefully Restrained So as to Offend Nobody* etc. He also wrote a parody of one of the poems in the canon that I like least, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, entitled (in my view appropriately) *The Moist Land*.

Babies haven't any hair;
Old men's heads are just as bare;---
Between the cradle and the grave
Lies a haircut and a shave. (From *Songs of Faith in the Year after Next*)

God's in his heaven
Painting things blue:
I'm on the thorn,
The snail is too. (*Good Morning Browning* - see page 4)

Hope that springs eternal in
The human breast, is fond of gin,
Or Scotch or beer or anything
Designed to help a hope to spring. (From *Songs about life...*)

Your little hands,
Your little feet,
Your little mouth --
Oh, God, how sweet!

Your little nose,
Your little ears,
Your eyes, that shed
Such little tears!

Your little voice,
So soft and kind;
Your little soul,
Your little mind! (From *Love-Songs, at Once Tender and Informative*)

I seldom mean a single thing
I say, or (as the phrase goes) sing;
But if it sounds both right and true,
I like to think I think I do. (From *Love-Songs...*)

When you're away, I'm restless, lonely,
Wretched, bored, dejected; only
Here's the rub, my darling dear,
I feel the same when you are here. (From *Poems of Passion ...*)

Oh, the first kiss is sweet--
Like a bud, like a wafer;
But the last, I repeat,
But the last kiss is safer.

The first kiss is sweet
With an innocent savor;
But the last is like meat
With some salt for its flavor.

Oh, with wonder I look--
You so fair, so capricious!
Say, whose goose did you cook
For a meat so delicious? (From *Poems of Passion*)

Ogden Nash needs no introduction. I have, however, included fewer of his short poems since they are still in print and hence more easily accessible than those of the previous two authors:

A word to husbands

To keep your marriage brimming,
With love in the loving cup,
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;
Whenever you're right, shut up.

The Kipper

For half a century, man and nipper,
I've doted on a tasty kipper.
But since I am no Jack the Ripper
I wish the kipper had a zipper.

The perfect husband

He tells you when you've got on too much lipstick,
and helps you with your girdle when your hips stick.

The Fly

God in his wisdom made the fly
And then forgot to tell us why.

T T T T

Pass the Port Again

It is reliably reported on the Internet that during the negotiations on Britain's first application to join the European Communities in 1961, the following exchange took place at a banquet given by De Gaulle for Harold Macmillan and his wife. The story is certainly apocryphal, *ma se non è vero, è ben trovato*.

Lady Macmillan was seated next to Mrs. De Gaulle, who did not speak much

English and was not renowned for her small talk. Lady Macmillan, who was, had distinct difficulty in keeping the conversation going and, during a rather obvious lull, asked Mrs de Gaulle in despair what it was that she considered most important in her marriage.

Mrs. De Gaulle brightened up and replied without hesitation, “A penis.” Not surprisingly the conversation flagged again immediately.

De Gaulle, who had been listening out of the corner of his ear to the conversation, leant over to Lady Macmillan and said: “She means ‘appiness.’”

T T T T

Wit And Wisdom

Je n’ai fait cette lettre-ci plus longue que parce que je n’ai pas eu le loisir de la faire plus courte. *Blaise Pascal*, “Lettres Provinciales”, XVI, 1656

Lo bueno, si breve, dos veces bueno. *Baltasar Gracian*, (1601-1658) “*Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*” (known in English as *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*).

It is with words as with sunbeams. The more they are condensed, the deeper they burn. *Robert Southey*

Je suis de ceux qui croient que tout est dans peu. L’enfant est petit, et il renferme l’homme; le cerveau est étroit, et il abrite la pensée; l’œil n’est qu’un point, et il embrasse des lieues. *Alexandre Dumas*

The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do. *Thomas Jefferson*

Omit needless words. Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. *William Strunk, Jr.*, “The Elements of Style”, 1918

Broadly speaking, the short words are the best, and the old words best of all. *Winston Churchill*

To get the right word in the right place is a rare achievement. To condense the diffused light of a page of thought into the luminous flash of a single sentence, is worthy to rank as a prize composition just by itself ... Anybody can have ideas – the difficulty is to express them without squandering a quire of paper on an idea that ought to be reduced to one glittering paragraph. *Mark Twain*

T T T T

‘The Awful German Language’

German is not renowned for brevity. For example, on a recent trip to Germany I saw a sign saying ‘Widerrechtlich abgestellte Kraftfahrzeuge werden kostenpflichtig abgeschleppt’ – which basically means ‘Tow-Away Zone.’ The use of compound concatenated words and ‘verschachtelte Sätze’ (literally ‘boxed phrases’) makes it possible to prolong a German sentence almost *ad infinitum*, without in most cases adding to its clarity. The following appeared in the

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 4 November 2007. I am not 100% sure what it means (nor are some native German speakers to whom I have shown it) but I have attempted a translation underneath.

Man muss der Medienöffentlichkeit schon eine bedenklich schlechte Schulbildung zubilligen, wenn man das intrigante Herumschrauben an einigen Sozialgesetzen für links und die Zustimmung eines hochkonditionierten Delegiertenklubs, den Medienvertretern im eigenen Saal im Verhältnis eins zu vier unterlegen, zu einem ohne Gegenkandidaten antretenden, bereits amtierenden Vorsitzenden für fortschrittlich verkaufen möchte.

(The incumbent Chairman attempted to sell to the media his intrigue-filled tinkering with bits of social legislation as being leftist and progressive. Its endorsement came from a well-trained club of delegates and he was unopposed for re-election: he must have assumed that the representatives of the media, who outnumbered the delegates four to one in their own hall, had a disturbingly low educational level.)

One of **Mark Twain's** less known works is his essay on 'The Awful German Language.' Although he famously claimed that "in Paris they simply stared when I spoke to them in French; I never did succeed in making those idiots understand their own language," he had a very good command of German, as can be seen from the following extracts.

Harris and I had been hard at work on our German during several weeks at that time, and although we had made good progress, it had been accomplished under great difficulty and annoyance, for three of our teachers had died in the meantime. A person who has not studied German can form no idea of what a perplexing language it is.

There are ten parts of speech, and they are all troublesome. An average sentence, in a German newspaper, is a sublime and impressive curiosity; it occupies a quarter of a column; it contains all the ten parts of speech – not in regular order, but mixed; it is built mainly of compound words constructed by the writer on the spot, and not to be found in any dictionary – six or seven words compacted into one, without joint or seam--that is, without hyphens; it treats of fourteen or fifteen different subjects, each enclosed in a parenthesis of its own, with here and there extra parentheses, making pens with pens: finally, all the parentheses and reparentheses are massed together between a couple of king-parentheses, one of which is placed in the first line of the majestic sentence and the other in the middle of the last line of it – AFTER WHICH COMES THE VERB, and you find out for the first time what the man has been talking about; and after the verb – merely by way of ornament, as far as I can make out – the writer shovels in "HABEN SIND GEWESEN GEHABT HABEN GEWORDEN SEIN," or words to that effect, and the monument is finished. I suppose that this closing hurrah is in the nature of the flourish to a man's signature – not necessary, but pretty. German books are easy enough to read when you hold them before the looking-glass or stand on your head – so as to reverse the construction--but I think that to learn to read and understand a German newspaper is a thing which must always remain an impossibility to a foreigner.

Yet even the German books are not entirely free from attacks of the Parenthesis distemper – though they are usually so mild as to cover only a few lines, and therefore when you at last get down to the verb it carries some meaning to your mind because you are able to remember a good deal of what has gone before. Now here is a sentence from a popular and excellent German novel – which has a slight parenthesis in it. I will make a perfectly literal translation, and throw in the parenthesis-marks and some hyphens for the assistance of the reader – though in the original there are no parenthesis-marks or hyphens, and the reader is left to flounder through to the remote verb the best way he can:

Wenn er aber auf der Strasse der in Samt und Seide gehüllten jetzt sehr ungeniert nach der neusten Mode gekleideten Regierungsräthin begegnet.... – “But when he, upon the street, the (in-satin-and-silk-covered-now-very-unconstrained-after-the-newest-fashion-dressed) government counselor’s wife MET,” etc., etc.

That is from *The Old Mamselle’s Secret*, by Mrs. Marlitt. And that sentence is constructed upon the most approved German model. You observe how far that verb is from the reader’s base of operations; well, in a German newspaper they put their verb away over on the next page; and I have heard that sometimes after stringing along the exciting preliminaries and parentheses for a column or two, they get in a hurry and have to go to press without getting to the verb at all.

The Germans have another kind of parenthesis, which they make by splitting a verb in two and putting half of it at the beginning of an exciting chapter and the OTHER HALF at the end of it. Can any one conceive of anything more confusing than that? These things are called “separable verbs.” The German grammar is blistered all over with separable verbs; and the wider the two portions of one of them are spread apart, the better the author of the crime is pleased with his performance. A favorite one is REISTE AB – which means departed. Here is an example which I culled from a novel and reduced to English:

“The trunks being now ready, he DE- after kissing his mother and sisters, and once more pressing to his bosom his adored Gretchen, who, dressed in simple white muslin, with a single tuberosa in the ample folds of her rich brown hair, had tottered feebly down the stairs, still pale from the terror and excitement of the past evening, but longing to lay her poor aching head yet once again upon the breast of him whom she loved more dearly than life itself, PARTED.”

Every noun has a gender, and there is no sense or system in the distribution; so the gender of each must be learned separately and by heart. There is no other way. To do this one has to have a memory like a memorandum-book. In German, a young lady has no sex, while a turnip has. Think what overwrought reverence that shows for the turnip, and what callous disrespect for the girl. See how it looks in print -- I translate this from a conversation in one of the best of the German Sunday-school books:

Gretchen. Wilhelm, where is the turnip?

Wilhelm. She has gone to the kitchen.

Gretchen. Where is the accomplished and beautiful English maiden?

Wilhelm. It has gone to the opera.

To continue with the German genders: a tree is male, its buds are female, its leaves

are neuter; horses are sexless, dogs are male, cats are female -- tomcats included, of course; a person's mouth, neck, bosom, elbows, fingers, nails, feet, and body are of the male sex, and his head is male or neuter according to the word selected to signify it, and **not** according to the sex of the individual who wears it -- for in Germany all the women have either male heads or sexless ones; a person's nose, lips, shoulders, breast, hands, and toes are of the female sex; and his hair, ears, eyes, chin, legs, knees, heart, and conscience haven't any sex at all. The inventor of the language probably got what he knew about a conscience from hearsay.

Now, by the above dissection, the reader will see that in Germany a man may **think** he is a man, but when he comes to look into the matter closely, he is bound to have his doubts; he finds that in sober truth he is a most ridiculous mixture; and if he ends by trying to comfort himself with the thought that he can at least depend on a third of this mess as being manly and masculine, the humiliating second thought will quickly remind him that in this respect he is no better off than any woman or cow in the land.

In German it is true that by some oversight of the inventor of the language, a Woman is a female; but a Wife (**Weib**) is not -- which is unfortunate. A Wife, here, has no sex; she is neuter; so, according to the grammar, a fish is **he**, his scales are **she**, but a fishwife is neither. To describe a wife as sexless may be called under-description; that is bad enough, but over-description is surely worse. A German speaks of an Englishman as the **Engländer**; to change the sex, he adds **in**, and that stands for Englishwoman -- **Engländerin**. That seems descriptive enough, but still it is not exact enough for a German; so he precedes the word with that article which indicates that the creature to follow is feminine, and writes it down thus: "**die Engländerin**," -- which means "the **she-Englishwoman**." I consider that that person is over-described.

T T T T

Short Poems in German

After the above, it may come as something of a surprise if I say that some of the best short poems I have read in preparation for this year's *CP* are in German:

Du bist mîn (*Anonymous, 12th century*)

Du bist mîn ich bin dîn des solt dû gewis sîn dû bist beslozen in mînem herzen verlorn ist daz slüzzelîn dû muost immer drinne sîn	You are mine I am thine of this you can be certain you are locked in my heart the key is lost you must stay there forever
---	--

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Ob ich dich liebe, weiss ich nicht. Seh ich nur einmal dein Gesicht, Seh dir ins Auge nur einmal, Frei wird mein Herz von aller Qual. Gott weiss, wie mir so wohl geschicht! Ob ich dich liebe, weiss ich nicht.	Do I love you? I don't know. If I see only once your face, Look only once into your eyes, My heart is free of all trouble. God knows how I got into this state - Do I love you? I don't know.
---	--

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), was the greatest master of the lyrical poem.

Immer wieder aus dem Spiegelglase
holst du dich dir neu hinzu;
ordnest in dir, wie in einer Vase,
deine Bilder. Nennst es du,
dieses Aufblühn deiner Spiegelungen,
die du eine Weile leicht bedenkst,
eh du sie, von ihrem Glück bezwungen,
deinem Leibe wiederschenkst.

Out of the mirror you continue
fetching fresh aspects of yourself;
and, within, arrange the images
as in a vase – and call this blossoming
of your reflections you; then quietly
contemplate them for a while
until – overcome by their success –
you pour them back into your frame.

Will dir den Frühling zeigen,
der hundert Wunder hat.
Der Frühling ist waldeigen
und kommt nicht in die Stadt.
Nur die weit aus den kalten
Gassen zu zweien gehn
und sich bei den Händen halten -
dürfen ihn einmal sehn.

I want to show you Spring
with its hundred wonders.
Spring belongs in the woods
And doesn't go into the town.
Only those who travel
far from the cold lanes
and walk together hand
in hand are able to see it.

Herbsttag

Herr: es ist Zeit. Der Sommer war sehr gross.
Leg deinen Schatten auf die Sonnenuhren,
und auf den Fluren lass die Winde los.

Befiehl den letzten Früchten voll zu sein;
gieb ihnen noch zwei südlichere Tage,
dränge sie zur Vollendung hin und jage
die letzte Süsse in den schweren Wein.

Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr.
Wer jetzt allein ist, wird es lange bleiben,
wird wachen, lesen, lange Briefe schreiben
und wird in den Alleen hin und her
unruhig wandern, wenn die Blätter treiben.

Autumn day

Lord, it is time. Summer was magnificent.
Lay your shadow on the sundials
and release the winds in the corridors.

Command the last fruits to fill to ripeness;
grant them two days more from the south,
force them to perfection and instil
the final sweetness in the heavy wine.

Whoever has no house now will not build
one. Whoever is alone will be so for a time,
will wake, read, write long letters
and wander anxiously up and down
the tree-lined paths when the leaves scutter.

Du musst das Leben nicht verstehen,
dann wird es werden wie ein Fest.
Und lass dir jeden Tag geschehen
so wie ein Kind im Weitergehen von jedem
Wehen
sich viele Blüten schenken lässt.

Sie aufzusammeln und zu sparen,
das kommt dem Kind nicht in den Sinn.
Es löst sie leise aus den Haaren,
drin sie so gern gefangen waren,
und hält den lieben jungen Jahren
nach neuen seine Hände hin.

Life can become a celebration
if you don't need to understand it.
Take each day just as a child
accepts the many blossoms blown by every
gust
and continues on her way.

The child would never think of picking
up and gathering all the petals.
She would shake them gently from
her hair, where they had gladly settled,
and then reach out again towards
the promise of the years to come.

Eduard Mörike (1804-1875) - *Septembormorgen*

Im Nebel ruhet noch die Welt,
Noch träumen Wald und Wiesen:
Bald siehst du, wenn der Schleier faellt,
Den blauen Himmel unterstellt,
Herbstkraeftig die gedämpfte Welt
In warmem Golde fliesen.

The world is resting in the fog,
Wood and meadows are still dreaming:
Soon you will see, when the veil falls,
Highlighted against the blue sky,
The power of autumn melt
The hazy world into warm gold.

In May and June 1953 thousands of workers demonstrated daily in East Germany against salary cuts and increases in production norms. The government of the GDR was unable to control these mass protests until the Soviet commanding officer in Berlin declared a state of emergency and – on 17 June 1953 – sent tanks against the demonstrators. **Bertoldt Brecht** commemorated these events in his poem *Die Lösung* (*The Solution*).

Nach dem Aufstand des 17. Juni
Liess der Sekretär des Schriftstellerverbands
In der Stalinallee Flugblätter verteilen
Auf denen zu lesen war, daß das Volk
Das Vertrauen der Regierung verscherzt habe
Und es nur durch verdoppelte Arbeit
Zurückerobern könne. Wäre es da
Nicht doch einfacher, die Regierung
Löste das Volk auf und
Wählte ein anderes?

Following the uprising of 17 June
the secretary of the Writers' League
had leaflets distributed on Stalin Allee
that said that the people had forfeited
the confidence of the government
and could only regain it
by redoubling their efforts.
Wouldn't it be easier for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another one?

T T T T

“We kehr for you”

Congratulations to the Berliner Stadtreinigungsbetriebe (Berlin city cleaning services) for their witty publicity campaign, featuring, among many others, the posters below (‘kehren’ in German means ‘to sweep’ – ‘Matsch’ means ‘mud’)⁹:



T T T T

⁹ See their website <http://www.bsr.de/bsr/html/6729.htm>.

Haiku (originally *hokku*) is a form of Japanese poetry, traditionally printed in one vertical line. In English, *haiku* are usually written in three lines to equate to the three metrical phrases of *haiku* in Japanese that consist of five, seven, and five sound symbols (*on* in Japanese). By using seventeen syllables, English *haiku* are longer and have more content than *haiku* in Japanese. The impressionistic compactness of *haiku* appealed particularly to the Imagist poets in the early 20th century, notably Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell.¹⁰

O fan of white silk,
clear as frost on the grass-blade,
You also are laid aside. (*Ezra Pound – Fan-Piece, for Her Imperial Lord*)

Amy Lowell - From Twenty-Four Hokku on a Modern Theme

III

Morning and evening —
Yet for us once long ago
Was no division.

XV

Night lies beside me
Chaste and cold as a sharp sword.
It and I alone.

XVII

Foolish so to grieve,
Autumn has its coloured leaves —
But before they turn?

*C.E. Laine (*1960) - From Twelve months of haiku*

January

Two months, you've been gone.
I can't put away your clothes-
it is too cold now.

November

Your grave is flat now.
There is green moss on your stone.
Your head rests gently.

December

I folded your shirt-
your scent clings to the walls here.
I can't put it down.

Whitecaps on the bay:
A broken signboard banging
In the April wind. (*Richard Wright - 1908-1960*)

¹⁰ I am curious to learn more about **Ales Rasanau** (Алес Разанау), a “minimalist poet” from Belarus, a collection of whose poems – resembling *haiku* – has just been published in German translation, e.g. “Die Sonne geht unter: / Mit zwei Augen / schau ich ins dritte” (*The sun goes down: / with two eyes / I look into the third*). Minimalist does not necessarily mean meaningless.

Although the *haiku* form has proven popular as a way of introducing students to poetry, I am not convinced of its lasting reputation – in the end very little is said, all is suggested and *haiku* are therefore easily parodied, as in the poem below by Richard Aldington (1892-1962), based on Ezra Pound's *In a Station of the Metro*.

The apparition
of these faces in the crowd:
Petals, on a wet, black bough. (*Pound*)

The apparition
of these poems in a crowd:
White faces in a black dead faint. (*Aldington*)

A collection of *haiku* parodies circulated on the Internet a few years ago, claiming to be new *Microsoft* error messages, including:

Yesterday it worked.
Today it is not working.
Windows is like that.

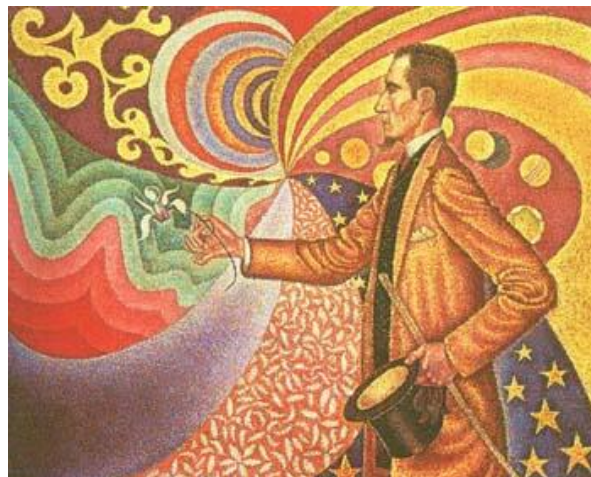
A crash reduces
Your expensive computer
To a simple stone.

Three things are certain:
Death, taxes and lost data.
Guess which has occurred?

T T T T

Félix Fénéon

Félix Fénéon (1861-1944), French anarchist, editor, and art critic, is virtually unknown outside France – and even there he is largely forgotten. Born in Turin, he moved to Paris at the age of 20 to work for the Ministry of Defence. He befriended many contemporary artists and championed their style, later coining the term *Neo-Impressionism* to define the movement led by Georges Seurat, Paul Signac and others. Fénéon also published the first French edition of James Joyce's works.



Félix Fénéon by Paul Signac (New York Museum of Modern Art)

In 1892, he was arrested with 29 other intellectuals and artists and put on trial, accused of terrorism. Although the charges were dismissed, he lost his government post. During the trial, the judge warned him: “You know you had on you everything you need to commit a murder?” Fénéon famously replied: “Yes, but I also had on me everything I needed to commit a rape.”

Félix Fénéon is remembered for the 1,220 short items he wrote for the *faits divers* section of the Paris newspaper *Le Matin*.¹¹ Collected and published in book form after his death as *Nouvelles en trois lignes*, Fénéon’s miniature masterpieces of irony and suspense have been described as “a tour de force of Pointillist prose.”

Le médecin chargé d'autopsier Mlle Cuzin, de Marseille, morte mystérieusement, a conclu : suicide par strangulation.

Le Dunkerquois Scheid a tiré trois fois sur sa femme. Comme il la manquait toujours, il visa sa belle-mère : le coup porta.

Jugeant sa fille (19 ans) trop peu austère, l'horloger stéphanois Jallat l'a tuée. Il est vrai qu'il lui reste onze autres enfants.

Il n'y a même plus de Dieu pour les ivrognes : Kersilie, de Saint-Germain, qui avait pris la fenêtre pour la porte, est mort.

Mlle Paulin, des Mureaux, 46 ans, a été saccagée, à 9 heures du soir, par un satyre.

Le mendiant septuagénaire Verniot, de Clichy, est mort de faim. Sa paillasse recélait 2000 francs. Mais il ne faut pas généraliser.

Sous des noms toujours neufs, une jeune femme se place comme bonne et vite file, lestée. Gain, 25 000 francs. On ne la pince pas.

Une machine à battre happa Mme Peccavi. On démontra celle-là pour dégager celle-ci. Morte.

Mme Olympe Fraisse conte que, dans le bois de Bordezac (Gard), un faune fit subir de merveilleux outrages à ses 66 ans.

C'est au cochonnet que l'apoplexie a terrassé M. André, 75 ans, de Levallois. Sa boule roulait encore qu'il n'était déjà plus.

T T T T

Some Short Poems in Other Languages

Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966)

<p>Наше священное ремесло Существует тысячи лет... С ним и без солнца миру светло. Но ещё ни один не сказал поэт, Что мудрости нет, старости нет, А может, и смерти нет.</p>	<p>Our sacred craft Has existed for thousands of years... With it, even without the sun, the world is bright. But so far not a single poet has said That there is no wisdom, no old age, And, perhaps, that there is no death.</p>
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¹¹ A fascinating article on Fénéon was published in October 2007 in the *London Review of Books* – see http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n19/barn02_.html.

Antonio Machado (1875-1939)

<p>La plaza tiene una torre, la torre tiene un balcón, el balcón tiene una dama, la dama una blanca flor. Ha pasado un caballero - ¡quién sabe por qué pasó! -, y se ha llevado la plaza con su torre y su balcón, con su balcón y su dama, su dama y su blanca flor.</p>	<p>In the square there is a tower, on the tower there is a balcony, on the balcony there is a lady holding a white flower. A horseman came by – who knows why he came! and he took away the square with its tower and balcony, with its balcony and lady, its lady and her white flower.</p>
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Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970) - *Non Gridate Più (Stop screaming)*

<p>Cessate d'uccidere i morti, Non gridate più, non gridate Se li volete ancora udire, Se sperate di non perire. Hanno l'impercettibile sussurro, Non fanno più rumore Del crescere dell'erba, Lieta dove non passa l'uomo.</p>	<p>Stop killing the dead Stop screaming, don't scream, If you want to ask them more questions If you hope to survive. They murmur imperceptibly, Make less noise Than growing grass Where no human passes.</p>
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Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) - *Milano, agosto 1943 (Milan, August 1943)*

<p>Invano cerchi fra la polvere, povera mano, la città è morta. È morta: s'è udito l'ultimo rombo sul cuore del Naviglio. E l'usignolo è caduto dall'antenna, alta sul convento, dove cantava prima del tramonto. Non scavate pozzi nel cortile: i vivi non hanno più sete. Non toccate i morti, così rossi, così gonfi: lasciateli nella terra delle loro case: la città è morta, è morta.</p>	<p>You search fruitlessly in the dust Poor hand, the city is dead. Is dead: has uttered the last sound In the heart of the Naviglio. And the nightingale Fell from the antenna, high above the cloister, Where she sang before the sunset. Don't dig for water in the courtyards: The living are no longer thirsty. Don't touch the dead, the red swollen things: Leave them in the earth of their houses: The city is dead, dead.</p>
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T T T T

Raymond Chandler

In his novels and short stories, Raymond Chandler (1888-1959) was the absolute master of lapidary and laconic writing. Born in Chicago, he attended Dulwich College in London after his Irish-born mother moved to Britain in 1895. In 1907, he was naturalised as a British subject in order to take the Civil Service examination, which he passed with the third-highest score of the year. He then took an Admiralty job but, finding the bureaucratic atmosphere stifling, quit after only a year. He tried his hand unsuccessfully at journalism and in 1912 returned to the U.S., eventually settling in Los Angeles, where he strung tennis rackets, picked

fruit and generally had trouble making ends meet. Finally, he took a bookkeeping course and found a steady job. In 1917, he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force and saw combat in the trenches in France.

By 1932, he was vice-president of the Dabney Oil syndicate, but a year later, his alcoholism, absenteeism, and a threatened suicide provoked his firing. To earn a living with his creative talent, he taught himself to write detective stories: his first story, *Blackmailers Don't Shoot*, was published in *Black Mask* magazine in 1933; his first novel, *The Big Sleep*, was published in 1939. Here are some examples of his inimitable style, combining economy and precision of description with dry wit.

Blackmailers don't shoot, 1933

She held up her hand, the one with the cigarette holder, looked at it, posing. It was a beautiful hand, without a ring. Beautiful hands are as rare as jacaranda trees in bloom, in a city where pretty faces are as common as runs in dollar stockings.

Finger Man, October 1934

I used the automatic elevator and prowled along an upper corridor to the last door on the left. I knocked, waited, knocked again, went in with Miss Glenn's key. Nobody was dead on the floor.

Spanish Blood, November 1935

She turned her head slowly and looked at him. Lights shifted in her hair. Gold glinted in it. Her eyes were vividly, startlingly blue. Her voice faltered a little, saying: 'Who killed him, Sam? Have they any ideas?'

Mandarin's Jade, 1937

Mrs. Prendergast gave a smile I could feel in my hip pocket. 'I just love straight rye,' she cooed. 'Could we – just a little one?'

Bay City Blues, 1938

The girl at the table next to me had red hair too. It was parted in the middle and strained back as if she hated it. She had large, dark, hungry eyes, awkward features and no make-up except a mouth that glared like a neon sign. Her street suit had too-wide shoulders, too-flaring lapels. An orange under-sweater snuggled her neck and there was a black-and-orange quill in her Robin Hood hat, crooked on the back of her head. She smiled at me and her teeth were as thin and sharp as a pauper's Christmas. I didn't smile back.

Red Wind, January 1938

She had brown wavy hair under a wide-brimmed straw hat with a velvet band and loose bow. She had wide blue eyes and eyelashes that didn't quite reach her chin. She wore a blue dress that might have been crepe silk, simple in lines but not missing any cues. Over it she wore what might have been a print bolero jacket.

'So you're a chess-player,' she said, in that guarded tone, as if she had come to look at my etchings. I wish she had.

The King in Yellow, March 1938

He turned west at Court and began to read the numbers. The one he wanted was

two from the corner, across the street from a red brick funeral parlour with a sign in gold over it: PAOLO PERUGINI FUNERAL HOME. A swarthy iron-grey Italian in a cutaway coat stood in front of the curtained door of the red brick building, smoking a cigar and waiting for somebody to die.

The waiter set the drinks down in front of them, made a grace note in the air with his napkin and went away.

Pearls are a Nuisance, April 1939

In a moment the door opened again and Ellen Macintosh came in. Maybe you don't like tall girls with honey-coloured hair and skin like the first strawberry peach the grocer sneaks out of the box for himself. If you don't, I'm sorry for you.

The Lady in the Lake, January 1939

The Doreme Cosmetic Company was on the seventh floor and had a good piece of it. There was a big glass-walled reception room with flowers and Persian rugs and bits of nutty sculpture in glazed ware. A neat little blond sat in a built-in switchboard at a big desk with flowers on it and a tilted sign reading: MISS VAN GRAAF. She wore Harold Lloyd cheaters and her hair was dragged back to where her forehead looked high enough to have snow on it.

The Big Sleep, 1939

She got up slowly and swayed towards me in a tight black dress that didn't reflect any light. She had long thighs and she walked with a certain something I hadn't often seen in bookstores. She was an ash blonde with greenish eyes, beaded lashes, hair waved smoothly back from ears in which large jet buttons glittered. Her fingernails were silvered. In spite of her get-up she looked as if she would have a hall bedroom accent. She approached me with enough sex appeal to stampede a businessmen's lunch and tilted her head to finger a stray, but not very stray, tendril of softly glowing hair. Her smile was tentative, but could be persuaded to be nice. 'Was it something?' she enquired.

Trouble is My Business, August 1939

The Arbogast I wanted was John D. Arbogast and he had an office on Sunset near Ivar. I called him up from a phone booth. The voice that answered was fat. It wheezed softly, like the voice of a man who had just won a pie-eating contest.

She wore a street dress of pale green wool and a small cockeyed hat that hung on her ear like a butterfly. Her eyes were wide-set and there was thinking room between them. Their colour was lapis lazuli blue and the colour of her hair was dusky red, like a fire under control but still dangerous. She was too tall to be cute. She wore plenty of make-up in the right places and the cigarette she was poking at me had a built-on mouthpiece about three inches long. She didn't look hard, but she looked as if she had heard all the answers and remembered the ones she thought she might be able to use some time..... I sat down and reached for the Scotch. The girl sat in a deep chair and crossed her knees. She crossed her legs the other way. I put another lump of ice in my drink.

He opened the rear door and I got in and sank down into the cushions and George slid under the wheel and started the big car. It moved away from the kerb and

around the corner with as much noise as a bill makes in a wallet.

Farewell, My Lovely, 1940

I got down to Montemar Vista as the light began to fade, but there was still a fine sparkle on the water and the surf was breaking far out in long smooth curves. A group of pelicans was flying bomber formation just under the creaming lip of the waves. A lonely yacht was taking in toward the yacht harbor at Bay City. Beyond it the huge emptiness of the Pacific was purple-gray. Montemar Vista was a few dozen houses of various sizes and shapes hanging by their teeth and eyebrows to a spur of mountain and looking as if a good sneeze would drop them down among the box lunches on the beach.

She reached into her bag and slid a photograph across the desk, a five-by-three glazed still. It was a blonde. A blonde to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window. ...

I got up on my feet and went over to the bowl in the corner and threw cold water on my face. After a little while I felt a little better, but very little. I needed a drink, I needed a lot of life insurance, I needed a vacation, I needed a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun. I put them on and went out of the room.

The eighty-five cent dinner tasted like a discarded mail bag and was served to me by a waiter who looked as if he would slug me for a quarter, cut my throat for six bits and bury me at sea in a barrel of concrete for a dollar and a half, plus sales tax.

No Crime in the Mountain, 1941

This was a shot in the dark, but it wasn't likely to hit anything. Not with the amount of dark I had to shoot into.

The High Window, 1942

A long-limbed languorous type of showgirl blonde lay at her ease in one of the chairs, with her feet raised on a padded rest and a tall misted glass at her elbow, near a silver ice bucket and a Scotch bottle. She looked at us lazily as we came over the grass. From thirty feet away she looked like a lot of class. From ten feet away she looked like something made up to be seen from thirty feet away. Her mouth was too wide, her eyes were too blue, her make-up was too vivid, the thin arch of her eyebrows was almost fantastic in its curve and spread, and the mascara was so thick on her eyelashes that they looked like miniature iron railings. She wore white duck slacks, blue and white open-toed sandals over bare feet and crimson lake toenails, a white silk blouse and a necklace of green stones that were not square-cut emeralds. Her hair was as artificial as a night-club lobby.

She wore an egret plume in her hair, enough clothes to hide behind a toothpick, one of her long beautiful naked legs was silver, and one was gold. She had the utterly disdainful expression of a dame who makes her dates by long distance.

The Lady in the Lake, 1943

I lit a cigarette and dragged a smoking stand beside the chair. The minutes went by on tiptoe, with their fingers to their lips.

Grayson was a long, stooped, yellow-faced man, with high shoulders, bristly

eyebrows and almost no chin. The upper part of his face meant business. The lower part was just saying goodbye. He wore bifocals and he had been gnawing fretfully at the evening paper. I had looked him up in the city directory. He was a C.P.A. and looked it every inch. He even had ink on his fingers and there were four pencils in the pocket of his open vest. Grayson put his bony hand out and I shook it. It felt like shaking hands with a towel-rack.

I went back along the silent hallway. The self-operating elevator was carpeted in red plush. It had an elderly perfume in it, like three widows drinking tea.

The Little Sister, 1949

The bell chimed and a tall dark girl in jodhpurs opened the door. Sexy was very faint praise for her. The jodhpurs, like her hair, were coal black. She wore a white silk shirt with a scarlet scarf loose around her throat. It was not as vivid as her mouth. She held a long brown cigarette in a pair of tiny golden tweezers. The fingers holding it were more than adequately jeweled. Her black hair was parted in the middle and a line of scalp as white as snow went over the top of her head and dropped out of sight behind. Two thick braids of her shining black hair lay one on each side of her slim brown neck. Each was tied with a small scarlet bow. But it was a long time since she was a little girl.

She was wearing a white wool skirt, a burgundy silk blouse and a black velvet over-jacket with short sleeves. Her hair was a hot sunset. She wore a golden topaz bracelet and topaz earrings and a topaz dinner ring in the shape of a shield. Her fingernails matched her blouse exactly. She looked as if it would take a couple of weeks to get her dressed.

He looked back at me. I told him. The orange queen wrote without looking up. To say she had a face that would have stopped a clock would have been to insult her. It would have stopped a runaway horse.

The Simple Art of Murder, 1950

The English may not always be the best writers in the world, but they are incomparably the best dull writers.

The Long Good-Bye, 1953

I went to a late movie after a while. It meant nothing. I hardly saw what went on. It was just noise and big faces. When I got home again I set out a very dull Ruy Lopez and that didn't mean anything either. So I went to bed. But not to sleep. At three a.m. I was walking the floor and listening to Katchaturian working in a tractor factory. He called it a violin concerto. I called it a loose fan belt and the hell with it.

.... A rubbed glass partition slid open and a receptionist looked out at me. She had an iron smile and eyes that could count the money in your hip pocket.

She hung up and I set out the chess board. I filled a pipe, paraded the chessmen, and inspected them for French shaves and loose buttons, and played a championship tournament game between Gortchakoff and Meninkin, seventy-two moves to a draw, a prize specimen of the irresistible force meeting the immovable object, a battle without armour, a war without blood, and as elaborate a waste of human intelligence as you could find anywhere outside an advertising agency.

Playback, 1958

'I'm sorry I was rude to. you,' I said. 'I didn't get enough sleep last night.'

'Forget it. It was a stand-off. With a little practice I might get to like you. You're kind of cute in a low-down sort of way.'

'Thanks,' I said and moved to the door. I wouldn't say she looked exactly wistful, but neither did she look as hard to get as a controlling interest in General Motors.

I turned back and closed the door.

T T T T

Epitaphs

Epitaphs are a special form of epigram dealing with a single subject: death. There are many collections in print: some of the supposed gravestone texts are so contrived that they must be apocryphal (e.g. *Gravestone of spinster postmistress, North Carolina*: Returned to sender - Unopened) and others are clearly composed rather as epigrams than for funeral use.¹²

William Shakespeare's gravestone in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon

Good friend for Jesus' sake forbear
to dig the dust enclosed here
blest be the man who spares these stones
and curst be he that moves my bones

Upon the death of Sir Andrew Morton's Wife

He first deceased; she for a little tried
To live without him, liked it not, and died. (*Sir Henry Wotton - 1568-1639*)

Aphra Behn's epitaph – buried in Westminster Abbey

Here lies a Proof that Wit can never be
Defence enough against Mortality.

¹² Some witty epitaphs are not in verse: W.C. Fields - *Here lies W. C. Fields. On the whole I would rather be living in Philadelphia*; Spike Milligan - *I told you I was ill* (Milligan was perhaps inspired by H.G. Wells's *Goddamn you all: I told you so*); Winston Churchill is reported to have said: *I am ready to meet my Maker - whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter*. One of the most beautiful epitaphs was written by Benjamin Franklin for himself

The body of
B. Franklin,
Printer,
Like the cover of an old book
its contents torn out,
and stripped of its lettering and gilding,
lies here, food for worms.
But the work shall not be wholly lost,
for it will, as he believed, appear once more,
in a new and more perfect edition,
corrected and amended
by the Author.

(His actual gravestone in Christ Church burial ground, Boston, states simply: *Benjamin and Deborah Franklin*)

John Donne's epitaph – buried in St Paul's Cathedral

Reader, I am to let thee know,
Donne's body only lies below;
For could the grave his soul comprise,
Earth would be richer than the skies.

A Maid of Queen Elizabeth (early 17th century)

Here lies, the Lord have mercy upon her,
One of her Majesty's maids of honour:
She was both young, slender, and pretty,
She died a maid, the more the pity.

Ci-gît, oui, gît, par la mort-bleu !
Le cardinal de Richelieu.
Et ce qui cause mon ennui,
Ma pension avec lui. *Isaac de Benserade (1612-1691)*

Here Skugg lies snug
As a bug in a rug. *Benjamin Franklin (1706-90)*

An epitaph supposedly designed for the grave next to Skugg's
Here I lie snugger than that other bugger

Here lies Stephen Rumbold
Lived to the age of 100 & 1
Sanguine and strong
An hundred to one
You don't live so long. *Brightwell Baldwin, Oxfordshire*

Beneath these poppies buried deep,
The bones of Bob the bard lie hid;
Peace to his manes; and may he sleep
As soundly as his readers did! *Thomas Moore - Epitaph on Robert Southey*

Erected to the Memory of Mr Jonathan Gill, Esq (1751)

Beneath this smooth stone,
by the bone of his bone,
Sleeps Mr Jonathan Gill.
By lies when alive
This attorney did thrive,
And now that he's dead he lies still.

Here lie I, Martin Elginbrodde:
Hae mercy o' my soul, Lord God;
As I wad do, were I Lord God,
And ye were Martin Elginbrodde. *Aberdeen*

Here lie the bones of Mary Charlotte,
Born a virgin, died a harlot.
For fourteen years she kept her virginity,
Which is a record for this vicinity. *Also reputedly from Aberdeen*

Lord Francis Jeffrey (1773-1850)¹³ - On Peter Robinson

Here lies the preacher, judge and poet, Peter,
Who broke the laws of God, and man, and metre.

Sur Robespierre

Passant, ne pleure point son sort,
Car, s'il vivait, tu serais mort. *Anonymous*

Posterity will ne'er survey,
A nobler grave than this:
Here lie the bones of Castlereagh:
Stop, traveller, and piss. *George Gordon Lord Byron (1788-1824)*

Requiem

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

This is the verse you grave for me:
'Here he lies where he longed to be;
Here is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.' *Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)*

Epitaph on a Party Girl¹⁴

Lovely Pamela, who found
One sure way to get around
Goes to bed beneath this stone
Early, sober and alone. *Richard Usborne (1910-2006)*

Epitaph on the Politician Himself

Here richly, with ridiculous display,
The Politician's corpse was laid away.
While all of his acquaintance sneered and slanged
I wept: for I had longed to see him hanged. *Hilaire Belloc*

The Statue

When we are dead, some Hunting-boy will pass
And find a stone half-hidden in tall grass
And grey with age: but having seen that stone
(Which was your image), ride more slowly on. *Hilaire Belloc*

¹³ Lord Jeffrey was a Scottish judge and literary critic. Like the author of the lampoon on Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* on p. 29, he protested the immorality of the poem in an article in *The Edinburgh Review* that led in 1806 to a duel between the two authors. The police intervened and Jeffrey's pistol was found to contain no bullet. This led to a warm friendship between the two, and Jeffrey subsequently wrote an article in praise of *Lalla Rookh*.

¹⁴ Robert Benchley (1889-1945) – American humorist, contributor to *The New Yorker* and a one-time colleague of Dorothy Parker who appears frequently in this *CP* – wrote something very similar: asked by a notoriously promiscuous actress to help her write her own epitaph for a party game he suggested "At last she sleeps alone."

Epitaph for an explorer

Tiger, tiger, my mistake;

I thought that you were William Blake. *Ogden Nash*



Epitaph for a Wells Fargo agent in Boot Hill cemetery in Tombstone, Arizona

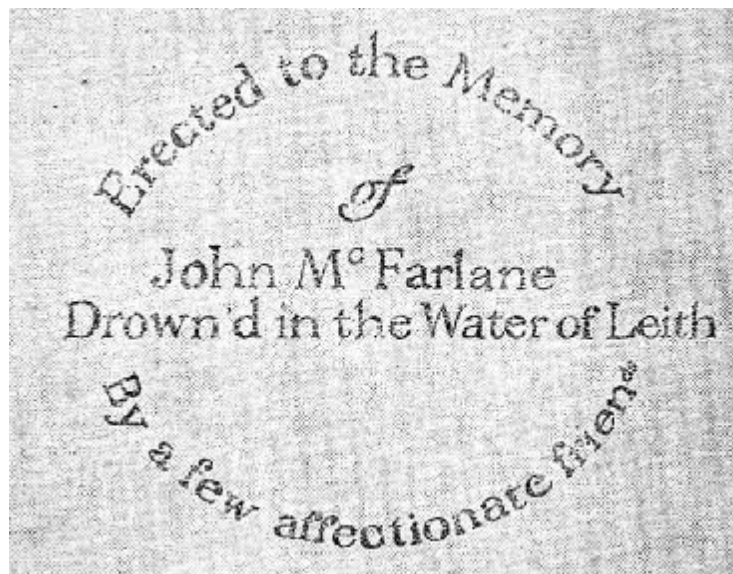
Compare the following (apocryphal):

Here lays Butch
We planted him raw
He was quick on the trigger
But slow on the draw

Bill Blake
Was hanged by mistake

Here lies a man named Zeke
Second fastest draw in Cripple Creek

In conclusion, I can't resist including the following, supposedly from Edinburgh:



T T T T

Odds and ends

For me, the most moving article on the result of the US elections was on <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/05/us/politics/05civil.html>.

I am the beneficiary of a pension of a few Euros each month for four years' work in Belgium in the mid-1960s. In May this year I was delighted to receive an increase of Euro 0.12, announced as a "Bonus bien-être." It made me feel much better.

Nigel Williams points out that in addition to the six works listed in *CP 2007*, Beethoven's extraordinary composition *Wellington's Victory* also contains the British national anthem.

In 1994 I successfully resisted proposals to extend my work to the Karategin Valley in NE Tajikistan where the civil war was still raging – I argued that this required further thought. I was glad to see a UN report a couple of years later entitled "Karategin Valley Needs Assessment." I fully agreed.



Bus number 666 in Moscow between the Metro Station Novie Cheriomushki and Vernadsky Prospekt no longer exists: it was re-numbered 616 after complaints by the Orthodox Church that 666 is the satanic number referred to in *Revelation XIII, 18* (*Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six*). Those with long memories may recall that in the 1980s Procter & Gamble was forced by fundamentalist groups in the US to change its "man-in-the-moon" logo because the stars and part of his beard were said to represent the satanic number.

For an excellent explanation of the 2008 financial crisis see <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/09/business/economy/09greenspan.html> and <http://matrix.millersamuel.com/?p=1438> (thanks to Reiner Nassauer and Todd Stewart).

I stayed in a Marriott hotel and was surprised to find a piece of paper under the bed. I fished it out in triumph, ready to complain to housekeeping until I read what was printed on it: *Yes it's true, we look here too! Your Housekeeping Department.*

Watch your spellchecker: I received an e-mail from the Swiss consular department in Dushanbe informing me that as soon as the necessary formalities have been completed (photo, fee, letter of invitation etc.) a visa can be issued *immodestly*.

Another e-mail reported on the chances that in forthcoming elections in Tajikistan an employee of the Aga Khan Foundation might get into the *lover house*.

Can you decipher this rebus love poem?



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