CHRISTMAS PUDDING

2009

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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.

The first commercial Christmas card

From *The Prairie Home Companion* :
(Sing to the tune *The First Noël*)
A-B-C-D-E-F-G
H-I-J-K-M-N
O-P-Q-R-S-T
U-V-W-X-Y-Z
No L, no L, no L, no L
No L, no L, no L, no L

(Sing to the tune *Frère Jacques*)
Life is but a, life is but a
Melancholy flower, melancholy flower
Life is but a melan-, life is but a melan-
Choly flower, choly flower.

Galoshlessness is foolishness when sharply slants the sleet *(Paul Jennings 1918-1989)*

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The frontispiece shows the first commercial Christmas card (actual size 5⅛ by 3¼ inches), printed in London in 1843 for Sir Henry Cole (1808-1882), with an illustration by the English painter John Callcott Horsley. From 1837 to 1840, Cole worked as an assistant to Rowland Hill, who reformed the British postal service and invented the postage stamp: Cole is sometimes credited with the design of the Penny Black. Finding that he lacked sufficient time to write personal greetings to all his friends, Cole asked Horsley to produce a card. It proved a good business proposition and a total of 2,050 were printed by Jobbins of Warwick Court in Holborn and hand-coloured by an artist named Mason, selling for a shilling each.

The Christmas card is still going strong, despite prophecies that the decline of letter-writing and the advent of e-mail and e-cards will lead to its disappearance. Despite a decline, it is estimated that every family in the United States still sends and receives an average of 26 cards each year. Regrettably, *Christmas Pudding*, as an ersatz Christmas card, contributes to the decline of the Christmas card per se – but not of the tradition. Enjoy – by the way, I hate e-cards ….

T T T T

Most of the previous ten editions of *Christmas Pudding* have taken as their theme specific aspects of poetry: the sonnet (2001), poems by women (2002), erotic poetry (2003), quotations from literature that have become part of our spoken language (2004), narrative poetry (2005), poetry by US authors (2006), poems on food and drink (2007) and short poems (2008).

I have now run out of discrete themes with sufficient substance to fill my standard 54 pages and, from this 2009 edition of *Christmas Pudding*, will return to the original concept of a wide-ranging anthology. The word derives from the ancient Greek for garland or bouquet of flowers: ἀνθολογία – 'anthologia' (combining ἀνθος – 'flower' and λέγω – 'I gather, pick up, collect') which was the title of the earliest surviving anthology, assembled by Meleager of Gadara, a collection of poems, mostly epigrams, that span the classical and Byzantine periods of Greek literature. In medieval Europe the Latin word *florilegium*, again meaning a collection of flowers, was used for an anthology, usually of Latin proverbs and textual excerpts. The term *miscellany* was also common. Later, the expression *common-place book* (a translation of the Latin *locus communis*, meaning a theme of general application, such as a statement of proverbial wisdom) came to describe a collection of titbits of information, anecdote, quotation or poetry that were recorded by the collector in a notebook.

In German they say 'quer durch den Garten' to describe a recipe that includes all ingredients that come to hand on a walk through the garden. *CP 2009* could be described as 'quer durch das Jahr' – it includes a breath of winter wind, the sound of music and some animals as well as a few things that just crossed my path on the way here.

T T T T

Winter Wind

Sonnet XCVII – *William Shakespeare (1564-1613)*
How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
What old December's bareness every where!
And yet this time removed was summer's time,
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,
Bearing the wanton burden of the prime,
Like widow'd wombs after their lords' decease:
Yet this abundant issue seem'd to me
But hope of orphans and unfather'd fruit;
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And, thou away, the very birds are mute;
Or, if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

Winter nights – *Thomas Campion (1567-1620)*
Now winter nights enlarge
The number of their hours,
And clouds their storms discharge
Upon the airy towers.
Let now the chimneys blaze
And cups o'erflow with wine;
Let well-tuned words amaze
With harmony divine.
Now yellow waxen lights
Shall wait on honey love,
While youthful revels, masques and courtly sights
Sleep's leaden spells remove.

This time doth well dispense
With lovers' long discourse:
Much speech hath some defence,
Though beauty no remorse.
All do not all things well:
Some measures comely tread,
Some knotted riddles tell,
Some poems smoothly read.
The summer hath his joys,
And winter his delights.
Though love and all his pleasures be but toys,
They shorten tedious nights.

The Dead – *Jones Very (1813-1880)*
I see them crowd on crowd they walk the earth
Dry, leafless trees no Autumn wind laid bare,
And in their nakedness find cause for mirth,

And all unclad would winter's rudeness dare;
No sap doth through their clattering branches flow,
Whence springing leaves and blossoms bright appear;
Their hearts the living God have ceased to know,
Who gives the spring time to th'expectant year;
They mimic life, as if from him to steal
His glow of health to paint the livid cheek;
They borrow words for thoughts they cannot feel,
That with a seeming heart their tongue may speak;
And in their show of life more dead they live
Than those that to the earth with many tears they give.

From **Christmass** (*The Shepherd's Calendar*) – *John Clare (1793-1864)*[1]
Christmass is come and every hearth
Makes room to give him welcome now
Een want will dry its tears in mirth
And crown him wi a holly bough
…….

Old customs O I love the sound
However simple they may be
What ere wi time has sanction found
Is welcome and is dear to me
Pride grows above simplicity
And spurns it from her haughty mind
And soon the poets song will be
The only refuge they can find

The shepherd now no more afraid
Since custom doth the chance bestow
Starts up to kiss the giggling maid
Beneath the branch of mizzletoe
That neath each cottage beam is seen
Wi pearl-like-berrys shining gay
The shadow still of what hath been
Which fashion yearly fades away
…….

Around the glowing hearth at night
The harmless laugh and winter tale
Goes round – while parting friends delight
To toast each other oer their ale
The cotter oft wi quiet zeal
Will musing oer his bible lean

[1] John Clare was a self-taught poet of simple origins who found his original inspiration in James Thomson's *The Seasons*. He left school at the age of twelve and wrote his poems using terms used locally in his Northamptonshire dialect, frequently without punctuation and not observing standardised English grammar and spelling that was gradually coming into use at the time. I have preferred to leave these extracts in what I believe to be their original form.

While in the dark the lovers steal
To kiss and toy behind the screen

The yule cake dotted thick wi plumbs
Is on each supper table found
And cats look up for falling crumbs
Which greedy childern litter round
And huswifes sage stuffd seasond chine
Long hung in chimney nook to drye
And boiling eldern berry wine
To drink the christmass eves 'good bye'

November – *Frederick Goddard Tuckerman (1821-1873)*
Oh! who is there of us that has not felt
The sad decadence of the failing year,
And marked the lesson still with grief and fear
Writ in the rolled leaf and widely dealt?
When now no longer burns yon woodland belt
Bright with disease; no tree in glowing death
Leans forth a cheek of flame to fade and melt
In the warm current of the west wind's breath;
Nor yet through low blue mist on slope and plain
Droops the red sunlight in a dream of day;
But from that lull the winds of change have burst
And dashed the drowsy leaf with shattering rain,
And swung the groves, and roared, and wreaked their worst
Till all the world is harsh and cold and gray.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)
A Cap of Lead across the sky
Was tight and surly drawn
We could not find the mighty Face
The Figure was withdrawn –
A Chill came up as from a shaft
Our noon became a well
A Thunder storm combines the charms
Of Winter and of Hell.

A Song for Candlemas – *Lizette Woodworth Reese (1856-1935)*
There's never a rose upon the bush,
And never a bud on any tree;
In wood and field nor hint nor sign
Of one green thing for you or me.
Come in, come in, sweet love of mine,
And let the bitter weather be!
Coated with ice the garden wall;
The river reeds are stark and still;
The wind goes plunging to the sea,
And last week's flakes the hollows fill.

Come in, come in, sweet love, to me,
And let the year blow as it will!

Storm Fear – *Robert Frost (1874-1963)*
When the wind works against us in the dark,
And pelts with snow
The lowest chamber window on the east,
And whispers with a sort of stifled bark,
The beast,
'Come out! Come out!' –
It costs no inward struggle not to go,
Ah, no!
I count our strength,
Two and a child,
Those of us not asleep subdued to mark
How the cold creeps as the fire dies at length, –
How drifts are piled,
Dooryard and road ungraded,
Till even the comforting barn grows far away
And my heart owns a doubt
Whether 'tis in us to arise with day
And save ourselves unaided.

Prophecy – *Elinor Wylie (1885-1928)*
I shall lie hidden in a hut
In the middle of an alder wood,
With the back door blind and bolted shut,
And the front door locked for good.

I shall lie folded like a saint.
Lapped in a scented linen sheet,
On a bedstead striped with bright-blue paint,
Narrow and cold and neat.

The midnight will be glassy black
Behind the panes, with wind about
To set his mouth against a crack
And blow the candle out.

From **Preludes for Memnon** – *Conrad Aiken (1889-1973)*
Winter for a moment takes the mind; the snow
Falls past the arclight; icicles guard a wall;
The wind moans through a crack in the window;
A keen sparkle of frost is on the sill.
Only for a moment; as spring too might engage it,
With a single crocus in the loam, or a pair of birds;
Or summer with hot grass; or autumn with a yellow leaf.
Winter is there, outside, is here in me:
Drapes the planets with snow, deepens the ice on the moon,

Darkens the darkness that was already darkness.
The mind too has its snows, its slippery paths,
Walls bayonetted with ice, leaves ice-encased.
Here is the in-drawn room, to which you return
When the wind blows from Arcturus: here is the fire
At which you warm your hands and glaze your eyes;
The piano, on which you touch the cold treble;
Five notes like breaking icicles; and then silence.
The alarm-clock ticks, the pulse keeps time with it,
Night and the mind are full of sounds. I walk
From the fire-place, with its imaginary fire,
To the window, with its imaginary view.
Darkness, and snow ticking the window: silence,
And the knocking of chains on a motor-car, the tolling
Of a bronze bell, dedicated to Christ.
And then the uprush of angelic wings, the beating
Of wings demonic, from the abyss of the mind:
The darkness filled with a feathery whistling, wings
Numberless as the flakes of angelic snow,
The deep void swarming with wings and sound of wings,
The winnowing of chaos, the aliveness
Of depth and depth and depth dedicated to death.
……

T T T T

Pass the Port

What I thought was a great Obama/Bush joke came too late for inclusion in CP 2008 but I put it in as an addendum slip. Michael Parkany has given me the original Hungarian joke from which it was derived:

A devout Catholic woman goes to the new priest in her village and asks for confession. “Father I have sinned gravely – I have had sex with a married man.” “When was this my child?” the priest asks.

“Forty years ago, father.” “My child, this sin has long since been forgiven. Go in peace. *Dominus noster Jesus Christus te absolvat; ….. Amen.*”

The next week the woman goes again to confession: “Father I have sinned gravely.”

“My child, is this the same sin for which you made confession last week?” “Yes father.”

“My child, I told you that this sin has long since been forgiven. Go in peace.”

The next week the woman comes again to confession. The priest is now visibly irritated. “My child, why do you want to keep confessing to a sin that has long been forgiven?”

“It brings back such happy memories Father.”

“See you again next week my child.”

T T T T

On the subject of priests, I liked the report in *20 Minutes* of 29 June 2009 about the Milanese priest who was caught one Sunday afternoon driving with too much alcohol in his blood. His excuse: three fellow priests had been ill and he had been officiating at four successive Masses in different dioceses that day. It makes a pleasant change from most other recent stories about Catholic priests.

T T T T

Folk Music

Many people of my generation remember with affection the folk singers Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, Pete Seeger (and the Weavers), Burl Ives, Joan Baez, Odetta and many others whose recordings not only rescued English and American folk songs from obscurity but created a new taste for simplicity in musical style, combined with social and political protest.

You will have a hard time finding these artists on radio or television today but their music can still be heard thanks to the magic of *YouTube* – look up for example Joan Baez and her lovely but less famous sister Mimi Fariña in a superb live performance of *Viva mi Patria Bolivia* for the inmates of Sing Sing prison in 1972; and Pete Seeger's *Rainbow Quest* public TV series, begun in the mid-1960s just after he had been taken off the House Un-American Activities Committee's black list, including the wonderful song *Pack up your sorrows* with Mimi Fariña and her husband Richard, who died tragically in a motor-cycle accident shortly after this appearance. It was appropriate that *The New York Times* of 5 May 2009 found space for an editorial by Lawrence Downes on Pete Seeger, entitled 'Still Singing':

> I saw Pete Seeger Sunday night, alive as you and me. They threw a birthday concert for him at Madison Square Garden. John Seeger, age 95, said from the stage that he expected his 90-year-old younger brother to make 100, which seems reasonable. Standing there, banjo off his shoulder, head thrown back, Pete looked eternal, in that pose so engraved in American memory it should be on a coin.
>
> More than 40 artists, including John Mellencamp, Arlo Guthrie, Joan Baez and Bruce Springsteen, joined in a stage-clogging sing-along. When its four-plus hours are edited down to highlights, from "This Land Is Your Land" to "Goodnight, Irene," it will be a PBS special made in pledge-week heaven.
>
> I wonder, though, how many of the angry moments will survive. Will we hear the Native American musicians pleading for support in their battle with Peabody Energy? Peabody is a giant strip-mining company that has been at the center of lawsuits by Southwestern tribes over drinking water and income from mineral rights.
>
> Will we hear the praise for the Clean Water Act of 1972, or the acid remark from one of the Indians: "Ever since that man by the name of Hudson went up that river, it's gone to hell."
>
> The evening was, after all, a benefit for Clearwater, the name of an organization and a boat, both built by Mr. Seeger, that have fought for decades to rescue the Hudson River from life as an industrial sewer. The job isn't done. Remember

> PCBs? General Electric dumped tons of them in the river. The company is about ready to dredge them out, but for now they are still there, seeping downriver and into fish.
>
> That's one hot issue. But issues and leftist anger were mostly confined to the first half of the evening. Under a sweet, heavy nostalgia glaze, the show summoned but never lingered on bygone days when folk singing was considered both relevant and dangerous.
>
> Mr. Seeger has walked the walk for so long that he has outwalked most everybody who would ever want to beat him up, throw bricks at him or denounce him as a Red. He's "outlasted the bastards," Bruce Springsteen said. But others will outlast him, and it will be up to a new generation to write and sing songs to fight power with truth. Will they? Or will they close their eyes and sway to "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore," forgetting the part of folk singing that was never sweet for its own sake?
>
> "Behind Pete's somewhat benign, grandfatherly facade," Mr. Springsteen said, lies a "nasty optimism," a great way to describe the steel-willed Seeger method, the geniality that others mistake for softness.
>
> Mr. Seeger is "a stealth dagger through the heart of our country's illusions about itself," Mr. Springsteen said, getting it exactly right.

A few months earlier (6 October 2008), The Guardian published an editorial tribute to Joan Baez, making similar points:

> In 1958 Britain discovered Cliff Richard; America found Joan Baez. It is not to disparage the man who once told the BBC that he was "the most radical rock star there has ever been" to say that Baez has done more to make the world a better place. Five decades on from her first performance she remains a political phenomenon as well as a musical one - endorsing for the first time in her life a presidential candidate, Barack Obama. She has one thing in common with his opponent: both were in Hanoi in December 1972, John McCain as a prisoner of war, Baez on a visit to North Vietnam that reflected her absolute opposition to America's war. Baez's commitment to peace and justice has always been outstanding: campaigning for civil rights in the American south, in Israel and Palestine, for Czech dissidents under communism, for Amnesty International and against the invasion of Iraq (where she lived briefly as a child). She is one of only four performers who were at both Woodstock in 1969 and Live Aid in 1985. Her new album, *Day After Tomorrow*, has returned her to the US album charts; she has just toured Britain. The protest songs of the 60s, she says, are needed again. Anyone who remembers listening to Baez the first time round – perhaps through a haze of student self-righteousness, joss sticks and funny cigarettes – knows that, however naive the simplicities of the world-view she has championed, she and her voice will be for ever on the side of the forces of light.

I will forever remember playing my first Joan Baez record to a fellow-teacher at the Lycée Jacques Decour in Paris in 1961. He responded as only an Italian could: "Where does she live – I want to marry her!" (Thank you Todd Stewart for the

following link to a superb and deeply moving retrospective on Joan Baez on US Public Broadcasting: http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/joan-baez/how-sweet-the-sound/1185/.) There's also a link here to Pete Seeger's 90th birthday celebration (see above) with "This Land is Your Land."

T T T T

Advice to a Lady

All good common-place books should contain advice to a lady: here are two charming examples.

Advice to a Lady in Autumn – *Philip Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773)*

Asses' milk, half a pint, take at seven, or before,
Then sleep for an hour or two, and no more.
At nine stretch your arms, and, oh! think when alone
There's no pleasure in bed. – Mary, bring me my gown.
Slip on that ere you rise; let your caution be such;
Keep all cold from your breast, there's already too much;
Your pinners set right, your twitcher tied on,
Your prayers at an end, and your breakfast quite done,
Retire to some author improving and gay,
And with sense like your own, set your mind for the day.
At twelve you may walk, for at this time o' the year,
The sun, like your wit, is as mild as 'tis clear:
But mark in the meadows the ruin of time;
Take the hint, and let life be improved in its prime.
Return not in haste, nor of dressing take heed;
For beauty like yours no assistance can need.
With an appetite thus down to dinner you sit,
Where the chief of the feast is the flow of your wit:
Let this be indulged, and let laughter go round;
As it pleases your mind to your health 'twill redound.
After dinner two glasses at least, I approve;
Name the first to the King, and the last to your love:
Thus cheerful, with wisdom, with innocence, gay,
And calm with your joys, gently glide through the day.
The dews of the evening most carefully shun;
Those tears of the sky for the loss of the sun.
Then in chat, or at play, with a dance or a song,
Let the night, like the day, pass with pleasure along.
All cares, but of love, banish far from your mind;
And those you may end, when you please to be kind.

From **The Art of Dancing** – *Soame Jenyns (1704-87)*

Dare I in such momentous points advise,
I should condemn the hoop's enormous size:
Of ills I speak by long experience found,
Oft have I trod th'immeasurable round,
And mourn'd my shins bruis'd black with many a wound.

Nor should the tighten'd stays, too straitly lac'd,
In whalebone bondage gall the slender waist;
Nor waving lappets should the dancing fair,
Nor ruffles edg'd with dangling fringes wear;
Oft will the cobweb ornaments catch hold
On th'approaching button rough with gold,
Nor force nor art can then the bonds divide,
When once th'entangled Gordian knot is ty'd.
So the unhappy pair, by Hymen's pow'r,
Together join'd in some ill-fated hour,
The more they strive their freedom to regain,
The faster binds th'indissoluble chain.
Let each fair maid, who fears to be disgrac'd,
Ever be sure to tie her garters fast,
Lest the loos'd string, amidst the public ball,
A wish'd-for prize to some proud fop should fall,
Who the rich treasure shall triumphant show;
And with warm blushes cause her cheeks to glow.

T T T T

Spybot

I use a software programme called *Spybot – Search and Destroy* and, after the catch-all gobbledygook of the licence agreements of Microsoft and others, love these clauses of the *Spybot* licence:

1.a. *Dedication*: Spybot-S&D is dedicated to the most wonderful girl on earth :)

1.b. *Binary*: What do you get if you buy software? Lots of ones and zeros, nothing more. If they were distributed as art, I could understand paying it. But if the main goal of their order is to earn money – by fees or ads – I don't like it!

1.c. *Conclusion*: This means that I grant you the license to use Spybot-S&D as much as you like. But if you like it, I ask two things of you: say a prayer for me (and the most wonderful girl while you're at it ;)) to your god – or whatever you believe – and wish us some luck.

Let's say a prayer for a generous genius and (fill in the blanks yourself) ……..

T T T T

Radio Yerevan

'Radio Yerevan' jokes were very popular in Germany (East and West) during the late Soviet period but were hardly known in English-speaking countries. It is now impossible to distinguish between the genuine East European version and those made up for Western newspaper columns, since the former travelled by word of mouth; the only certain thing is that none of them were ever broadcast from the Armenian capital. At their best, they were a subtly subversive means of protest against falling living standards in Eastern Europe and the by then obvious defects of the Soviet system. On this twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall it is time to resurrect this source of wit, irony and sometimes just good humour.

The jokes are presented as being from the Question & Answer programme of the Armenian Radio. The typical format of the joke will be evident from the following examples:

Question to Radio Yerevan: Is there a difference between capitalism and communism?
Answer: In principle yes. In capitalism, man exploits man. In communism, it's the reverse.

Q: Is it true that freedom of speech in the Soviet Union is the same as in the USA?
A: In principle yes: in the USA, you can stand in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, and shout "Down with Reagan!" and you will not be sent to jail. In the Soviet Union, you can stand in Red Square in Moscow and also shout "Down with Reagan!" and you will not be punished either.

Q: Is it true that in Moscow, Mercedes cars are being given to citizens?
A: In principle yes, but it is not Moscow but Leningrad, not Mercedes but Ladas, and not given to but stolen from.

Q: Our school wants to produce Schiller's *William Tell* – Is this permitted?
A: In principle yes, but you may have trouble finding an apple.

Q: Is it possible to introduce socialism in Switzerland?
A: In principle yes, but what a pity.

Q: Is it possible to drive a Moskvitch at 80km per hour round a tight corner?
A: In principle yes, but only once.

Q: Is it possible that Khrushchev might have been assassinated instead of Kennedy?
A: In principle yes, but it is doubtful that Onassis would have married his widow.

Q: Is it true that at the tenth party congress wages will be raised by fifty per cent?
A: In principle yes, but it will be the fiftieth party congress and ten per cent.

Q: Is it possible to sit with a bare bottom on a hedgehog?
A: In principle yes, but it depends if it is an order from party headquarters.

Q: Is it true that our glorious Soviet army was requested by the Czech people to come to the aid of Czechoslovakia?
A: In principle yes, but this request from 1939 was not followed up until 1968.

Q: What is chaos?
A: Radio Yerevan does not answer questions relating to the agricultural sector.

Q: Is it true that there are also dwarfs in the USA?
A: In principle yes, but of course the Russian ones are bigger.

Q: Is it good to have sex with an open window?
A: In principle yes, but with a human partner it is better.

Q: Is it true that in the USA everyone has a car?
A: In principle yes, but remember that in the USSR everyone has a parking space.

Q: Can carrots increase male potency?

A: In principle yes, but it is very difficult to strap them on.

Q: Does the pill work on the moon?
A: In principle yes, but Soviet space suits are more effective.

Q: Is it true that Hungary is the largest European country?
A: In principle yes: our heroic Soviet forces started leaving Budapest immediately after the 1956 uprising and still haven't reached the frontier.

Q: Is it true that it's going to be worse?
A: In principle no – If it were true it would be worse already.

Q: Is it true that Felix Dzerzhinsky,[2] founder of the KGB, died of a heart attack and if so, what were his last words?
A: In principle yes: his last words were: "... don't shoot!"

Q1: I am a listener from America – What is the most important city in the Soviet Union?
A1: Yerevan, of course.
Q2: How many nukes do you need to destroy it?
A2: Actually, on reflection, Moscow is a pretty important city too.

Q: Is it true that in the USSR we have more humour than elsewhere?
A: In principle yes, but we need it more.

And finally one that only works in German:
Q: Kann man in der Sowjetunion sein Leben in vollen Zügen geniessen?
A: Im Prinzip ja, aber es kommt auf die Bahnstrecke an.

T T T T

Who coined the expression *Iron Curtain*?

The Guardian – Letters, 6 March 2006

Who brought down the iron curtain?

"It is a common error that it took the "fecund literary imagination" of Winston Churchill to invent the phrase "the iron curtain" (Leaders, March 4). The words are first traceable to a Russian philosopher, Vasily Rozanov, in 1918 in *The Apocalypse of Our Times* ("An iron curtain is being lowered, creaking and squeaking, at the end of Russian history"). Ethel Snowden then used it two years later in her *Through Bolshevist Russia* ("We were behind the 'iron curtain' at last!"), while Goebbels used it in a leading article in Das Reich on February 25 1945, which *The Manchester Guardian*, among others, reported. In fact, Churchill used the phrase in a cable to President Truman on June 4 1945, nine months almost to the day before his Fulton, Missouri speech." (*Terry Philpot, Limpsfield Chart, Surrey*)

"So far as the phrase refers to the barrier between the Soviet-dominated half of Europe and the rest, it was coined by one of Hitler's ministers, Count Schwerin von Krosigk, who was appointed foreign minister by Doenitz in the last days of the

[2] One of my most pleasurable activities in Tajikistan was helping to dismantle the Felix Dzerzhinsky state farm in the Pamir region, the first to be privatised as part of the agricultural reform programme of the Aga Khan Foundation.

war. On May 2, 1945, he made a radio broadcast in which he said: "In the streets of still unoccupied Germany, a great stream of desperate and famished people is rolling westwards, pursued by fighter-bombers, in flight from indescribable terror. In the east, the iron curtain behind which, unseen by the eyes of the world, the work of destruction goes on is moving steadily forward." (*Times*, May 3 1945). It is perhaps an uncomfortable fact that the phrase has such a disagreeable authorship and that Churchill, in this instance, wasn't above plagiarism. But fact it is." (*Douglas Wass, London*)

Edgar Vincent, Viscount D'Abernon, British Ambassador in Berlin from 1923-1926, was also an early user of the expression (*Memoirs*, 14 September 1924 – see below): "I put forward [in a conversation with Gustav Stresemann, German Foreign Minister] my view of the reciprocal iron curtain or strip of inviolable territory as a protection."

T T T T

The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* has been publishing this year a remarkable series of retrospective articles on the dramatic events of 1989 that led to the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. An article dated 24 August recalls the very different approaches of the governments in Eastern Europe to the reforms proposed by Gorbachev. In Poland, for example, the Polish parliament elected on 24 August 1989 Tadeusz Mazowiecki, one of the leaders of *Solidarnosc*, as Prime Minister – the economic situation there had, however, become catastrophic and there were food shortages. In Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, the economic situation was much better but the Communist government was clinging obstinately to power. The *NZZ* recounts the following joke that circulated at the time:

Two dogs meet at the Polish / Czech frontier. The Polish dog is travelling south to Czechoslovakia and the Czech dog north to Poland. Each asks the other why he is travelling in the opposite direction.

"Well," says the Polish dog, "I want to get my teeth into a good bit of sausage once again."

"I know what you mean," says the Czech dog, "but what I really want is to be able to bark again."

T T T T

More Winter Wind

Winter Night – *Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)*
Pile high the hickory and the light
Log of chestnut struck by the blight.
Welcome-in the winter night.

The day has gone in hewing and felling,
Sawing and drawing wood to the dwelling
For the night of talk and story-telling.

These are the hours that give the edge
To the blunted axe and the bent wedge,

Straighten the saw and lighten the sledge.

Here are question and reply,
And the fire reflected in the thinking eye.
So peace, and let the bob-cat cry.

Good Night Near Christmas – *Robert Francis (1901-1987)*
And now good night. Good night to this old house
Whose breathing fires are banked for their night's rest.
Good night to lighted windows in the west.
Good night to neighbors and to neighbor's cows
Whose morning milk will be beside my door.
Good night to one star shining in. Good night
To earth, poor earth with its uncertain light,
Our little wandering planet still at war.
Good night to one unstarved and gnawing mouse
Between the inner and the outer wall.
He has a paper nest in which to crawl.
Good night to men who have no bed, no house.

A Word about Winter – *Ogden Nash (1902-1971)*
Now the frost is on the pane,
Rugs upon the floor again,
Now the screens are in the cellar,
Now the student cons the speller,
Lengthy summer noon is gone,
Twilight treads the heels of dawn,
Round-eyed sun is now a squinter,
Tiptoe breeze a panting sprinter,
Every cloud a blizzard hinter,
Squirrel on the snow a printer,
Rain spout sprouteth icy splinter,
Willy-nilly, this is winter.

Summer-swollen doorjambs settle,
Ponds and puddles turn to metal,
Skater whoops in frisky fettle,
Golf-club stingeth like a nettle,
Radiator sings like kettle,
Hearth is popocatapetl.

Runneth nose and chappeth lip,
Draft evadeth weather strip,
Doctor wrestleth with grippe
In never-ending rivalship.
Rosebush droops in garden shoddy,
Blood is cold and thin in body,
Weary postman dreams of toddy,
Head before the hearth grows noddy.
On the hearth the embers gleam,

Glowing like a maiden's dream,
Now the apple and the oak
Paint the sky with chimney smoke,
Husband now, without disgrace,
Dumps ash trays in the fireplace.

Winter, Never Mind Where – *Hyam Plutzik (1911-1962)*
The illusion is one of flatness: the sky
Has no depth, is a sheet of tin
Upon which the blackened branches and twigs
Are corroded, burnt in
By a strong acid:

Hang there, outside the squares of pane –
Work of a gruff but extraordinary artist,
Who has done good things in pastels too,
In summer scenes, leaf-stuff
And the placid

Nuances of snow.
Since, as we know,
Genius is superior to praise or blame,
He will not mind if I suggest:
"Fewer cold subjects please (they do not please!).
Really, your leafy stuff, Sir, is best."

February Days – *May Sarton (1912-1995)*
Who could tire of the long shadows,
The long shadows of the trees on snow?
Sometimes I stand at the kitchen window
For a timeless time in a long daze
Before these reflected perpendiculars,
Noting how the light has changed,
How tender it is now in February
When the shadows are blue not black.

The crimson cyclamen has opened wide,
A bower of petals drunk on the light,
And in the snow-bright ordered house
I am drowsy as a turtle in winter,
Living on light and shadow
And their changes.

Those Winter Sundays – *Robert Hayden (1913-1980)*
Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

Galoshes – *Paul Jennings (1918-1989)*
I am having a *rapprochement* with galoshes
And some would say this heralds middle age;
Yes, sneering they would say
'Does he always wear *pince-nez* ?
Old jossers wore galoshes when ladies' hats were cloches,
Ha! Woollen combinations are this dodderer's next stage!'
Well, let these people snigger
Just because my feet look bigger,
For, colossal in galoshes, they are dry among the sploshes;
A story that won't wash is this notion that galoshes,
So snug at slushy crossings, make a man a sloppy figure.
Oh, crossly, and still crosslier,
I have bought shoes ever costlier
Which, still quite new, let water through before I've crossed the street:
There's nothing manly, I repeat,
In always having cold wet feet;
Galoshlessness is foolishness when sharply slants the sleet –
And I utterly refuse
The expression 'overshoes',
To make galoshes posher I would scorn this feeble ruse.
The word 'galosh' is strong, not weak,
It comes from *kalopous*, the Greek
For 'cobbler's last', and thus it's classed with hero times antique.
Come, Muse, through slush and sleet dry-footed with me trip so
That I may praise galoshes in a *kalopous* calypso.
Oh, when swishing buses splash,
And the rush-hour masses clash
When it's marshy as molasses, how galoshes cut a dash!
It makes me quite impassioned
When they're dubbed unsmart, old-fashioned
(For such, by gosh, the bosh is that's talked about galoshes)
Since the very finest leather
Is outsmarted altogether
By the classy, glossy polish of galoshes in such weather.

Come, galoshers, be assertive,
Drop that air discreet and furtive!

Let galosh shops' stocks be lavish
With designs and hues that ravish -
Men's galoshes black and British, but for ladies colours skittish
(And galoshes could make rings
Round those silly plastic things
Which tie up with clumsy strings)
Let us all have this *rapprochement* with galoshes
And see what health and happiness it brings!

The Snowfall – *Donald Justice (1925-2004)*
The classic landscapes of dreams are not
More pathless, though footprints leading nowhere
Would seem to prove that a people once
Survived for a little even here.

Fragments of a pathetic culture
Remain, the lost mittens of children,
And a single, bright, detasseled snow-cap,
Evidence of some frantic migration.

The landmarks are gone. Nevertheless
There is something familiar about this country.
Slowly now we begin to recall

The terrible whispers of our elders
Falling softly about our ears
In childhood, never believed till now.

Winter Landscape, With Rooks – *Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)*
Water in the millrace, through a sluice of stone,
plunges headlong into that black pond
where, absurd and out-of-season, a single swan
floats chaste as snow, taunting the clouded mind
which hungers to haul the white reflection down.

The austere sun descends above the fen,
an orange cyclops-eye, scorning to look
longer on this landscape of chagrin;
feathered dark in thought, I stalk like a rook,
brooding as the winter night comes on.

Last summer's reeds are all engraved in ice
as is your image in my eye; dry frost
glazes the window of my hurt; what solace
can be struck from rock to make heart's waste
grow green again? Who'd walk in this bleak place?

T T T T

Parrotfolio management

With all the furore about bankers' bonuses, I liked the suggestion by the *NZZ* of 25 August that perhaps parrots should be allowed to handle portfolios. The

suggestion was based on a news item from *Sky News* of 7 August 2009:

> A five-year-old female parrot called Strawberry has proved to be smarter than human investors in a stock investment contest. The parrot from Papua New Guinea finished third in the six-week challenge, said Paxnet, an online stock market information provider.
>
> Ddalgi (Korean for Strawberry) competed with 10 stock investors in South Korea. Each started with 60 million *won* (£29,000) in cyber money and traded 10 million *won* (£4,860) worth of stocks in each transaction. Human investors picked any stocks they wanted but the parrot, using its beak, made random choices from balls representing 30 blue chips, including Samsung Electronics.

> "The outcome of our contest was amazing. Ddalgi stood third with her investment return standing at 13.7%," Paxnet general manager Chung Yeon-Dae said. Human investors averaged a 4.6% loss, with only two outperforming the parrot - one by 64.4% and one by 21.4%.
>
> The human investors mostly chose to trade shares of small and medium-sized firms. They each made an average of 190 trades over the six weeks. Organisers gave the parrot seven chances to pick shares over the same period.

Paxnet general manager Chung Yeon-Dae said that his company's experiment "proved that making long-term investments in blue chips is safe and effective."

One blogger on the Internet commented: "I still wouldn't hire a parrot to handle my portfolio. The chicken I had doing it before flew the coop with all my money."

T T T T

John Updike (1932-2009)

John Updike, who died on 27 January this year, was not only a master of the novel. His essays on various subjects (e.g. in *The New York Review of Books*) were always elegant and memorable. His poetry too is well-crafted and, even in the last weeks of his life, exceptionally lucid as illustrated by the two following poems:

Oblong Ghosts *November 6, 2008*
A wakeup call? It seems that death has found
the portals it will enter by: my lungs,
pathetic oblong ghosts, one paler than
the other on the doctor's viewing screen.
Looking up "pneumonia," I learn
it can, like an erratic dog, turn mean
and snap life short for someone under two
or "very old (over 75)."

Meanwhile, our President Obama waits
downstairs to be unwrapped and I, a child
transposed toward Christmas Day in Shillington –
air soft and bright, a touch of snow outside –
pause here, one hand upon the banister,
and breathe the scent of fresh-cut evergreens.

Hospital - *Mass. General, Boston, November 23-27,2008*
Benign big blond machine beyond all price,
it swallows us up and slowly spits us out
half-deafened and our blood still dyed: all this
to mask the simple dismal fact that we
decay and find our term of life is fixed.
This giant governance, a mammoth toy,
distracts us for the daytime, but the night
brings back the quiet, and the solemn dark.

God save us from ever ending, though billions have.
The world is blanketed by foregone deaths,
small beads of ego, bright with appetite,
whose pin-sized prick of light winked out,
bequeathing Earth a jagged coral shelf
unseen beneath the black unheeding waves.

T T T T

What's in a name?

In CP 2006 I included some unusual place names. Sarah Lyall, in *The New York Times* of 23 January 2009, provided some more.

No Snickering: That Road Sign Means Something Else

CRAPSTONE, England – When ordering things by telephone, Stewart Pearce tends to take a proactive approach to the inevitable question "What is your address?"

He lays it out straight, so there is no room for unpleasant confusion. "I say, 'It's spelled "crap," as in crap,' " said Mr. Pearce, 61, who has lived in Crapstone, a one-shop country village in Devon, for decades.

Disappointingly, Mr. Pearce has so far been unable to parlay such delicate encounters into material gain, as a neighbor once did.

"Crapstone," the neighbor said forthrightly, Mr. Pearce related, whereupon the person on the other end of the telephone repeated it to his co-workers and burst out laughing. "They said, 'Oh, we thought it didn't really exist,' " Mr. Pearce said, "and then they gave him a free something."

In the scale of embarrassing place names, Crapstone ranks pretty high. But Britain is full of them. Some are mostly amusing, like Ugley, Essex; East Breast, in western Scotland; North Piddle, in Worcestershire; and Spanker Lane, in Derbyshire.

Others evoke images that may conflict with residents' efforts to appear dignified when, for example, applying for jobs.

These include Crotch Crescent, Oxford; Titty Ho, Northamptonshire; Wetwang, East Yorkshire; Slutshole Lane, Norfolk; and Thong, Kent. And, in a country that delights in lavatory humor, particularly if the word "bottom" is involved, there is Pratts Bottom, in Kent, doubly cursed because "prat" is slang for buffoon.

As for Penistone, a thriving South Yorkshire town, just stop that sophomoric snickering.

"It's pronounced 'PENNIS-tun,' " Fiona Moran, manager of the Old Vicarage Hotel in Penistone, said over the telephone, rather sharply. When forced to spell her address for outsiders, she uses misdirection, separating the tricky section into two blameless parts: "p-e-n" – pause – "i-s-t-o-n-e."

Several months ago, Lewes District Council in East Sussex tried to address the problem of inadvertent place-name titillation by saying that "street names which could give offense" would no longer be allowed on new roads.

"Avoid aesthetically unsuitable names," like Gaswork Road, the council decreed. Also, avoid "names capable of deliberate misinterpretation," like Hoare Road, Typple Avenue, Quare Street …….

The council explained that it was only following national guidelines and that it did not intend to change any existing lewd names. Still, news of the revised policy raised an outcry.

"Sniggering at double entendres is a loved and time-honored tradition in this country," Carol Midgley wrote in *The Times* of London. Ed Hurst, a co-author, with Rob Bailey, of *Rude Britain* and *Rude UK*, which list arguably offensive place names – some so arguably offensive that, unfortunately, they cannot be printed here – said that many such communities were established hundreds of years ago and that their names were not rude at the time.

"Place names and street names are full of history and culture, and it's only because language has evolved over the centuries that they've wound up sounding rude," Mr. Hurst said in an interview.

Mr. Bailey, who grew up on Tumbledown Dick Road in Oxfordshire, and Mr. Hurst got the idea for the books when they read about a couple who bought a house on Butt Hole Road, in South Yorkshire.

The name most likely has to do

with the spot's historic function as a source of water, a water butt being a container for collecting water. But it proved to be prohibitively hilarious.

"If they ordered a pizza, the pizza company wouldn't deliver it, because they thought it was a made-up name," Mr. Hurst said. "People would stand in front of the sign, pull down their trousers and take pictures of each other's naked buttocks."

The couple moved away.

The people in Crapstone have not had similar problems, although their sign is periodically stolen by word-loving merrymakers. And their village became a stock joke a few years ago, when a television ad featuring a prone-to-swearing soccer player named Vinnie Jones showed Mr. Jones's car breaking down just under the Crapstone sign.

In the commercial, Mr. Jones tries to alert the towing company to his location while covering the sign and trying not to say "crap" in front of his young daughter.

The consensus in the village is that there is a perfectly innocent reason for the name "Crapstone," though it is unclear what that is. Theories put forth by various residents the other day included "place of the rocks," "a kind of twisting of the original word," "something to do with the soil" and "something to do with Sir Francis Drake," who lived nearby.

Jacqui Anderson, a doctor in Crapstone who used to live in a village called Horrabridge, which has its own issues, said that she no longer thought about the "crap" in "Crapstone."

Still, when strangers ask where she's from, she admitted, "I just say I live near Plymouth."

In the same vein, in *CP 2007* I included a 19th century poem about picturesque American place names such as 'Devil's Den' and 'Scramble Hollow' as well as many of native American origin. Here is a similar but contemporary poem, using original sources from the First World War, that I find superb.[3]

Trench Names – *A.S. Byatt (*1936)*
The column, like a snake, winds through the fields,
Scoring the grass with wheels, with heavy wheels
And hooves, and boots. The grass smiles in the sun,
Quite helpless. Orchard and copse are Paradise
Where flowers and fruits grow leisurely, and birds
Rise in the blue, and sing, and sink again
And rest. The woods are ancient. They have names –
Thiepval, deep vale, La Boisselle, Aubépines,
Named long ago by dead men. And their sons
Know trees and creatures, earth and sky, the same.

We gouge out tunnels in the sleeping fields.
We turn the clay and slice the turf, and make

[3] From Antonia Byatt's novel *The Children's Book*, Chatto & Windus 2009, based on research by Peter Chasseaud in his 2005 book *Rats Alley: Trench Names of the Western Front 1914-1918*.

A scheme of cross-roads, orderly and mad,
Under and through, like moles, like monstrous worms.
Dig out our dens, like cicatrices scored
Into the face of earth. And we give names
To our vast network in the roots, imposed,
Imperious, desperate to hide, to hurt.

The sunken roads were numbered at the start.
A chequer board. But men are poets, and names
Are Adam's heritage, and English men
Imposed a ghostly English map on French
Crushed ruined harvests and polluted streams.

So here run Piccadilly, Regent Street,
Oxford Street, Bond Street, Tothill Fields, Tower Bridge,
And Kentish places, Dover, Tunbridge Wells,
Entering wider hauntings, resonant,
The Boggart Hole, Bleak House, Deep Doom and Gloom.

Remembering boyhood, soldier poets recall
The desperate deeds of Lost Boys, Peter Pan,
Hook Copse, and Wendy Cottage. Horrors lurk
In Jekyll Copse and Hyde Copse. Nonsense smiles
As shells and flares disorder tiny lines
In Walrus, Gimble, Mimsy, Borogrove –
Which lead to Dum and Dee and to that Wood
Where fury lurked, and blackness, and that Crow.

There's Dead Man's Dump, Bone Trench and Carrion Trench,
Cemetery Alley, Skull Farm, Suicide Road,
Abuse Trench and Abyss Trench, Cesspool, Sticky Trench,
Slither Trench, Slimy Trench, Slum Trench, Bloody Farm.
Worm Trench, Louse Post, Bug Alley, Old Boot Street.
Gas Alley, Gangrene Alley, Gory Trench.
Dreary, Dredge, Dregs, Drench, Drizzle, Drivel, Bog.

Some frame the names of runs for frames of mind.
Tremble Copse, Wrath Copse, Anxious Crossroads, Howl,
Doleful and Crazy Trenches, Folly Lane,
Ominous Alley, Worry Trench, Mad Point,
Lunatic Sap, and then Unbearable
Trench, next to Fun Trench, Worry Trench, Hope Trench,
And Happy Alley.

How they swarm, the rats.
Fat beasts and frisking, yellow teeth and tails
Twitching and slippery. Here they are at home
As gaunt and haunted men are not. For rats
Grow plump in ratholes and are not afraid,
Resourceful little beggars, said Tom Thinn,

The day they ate his dinner, as he died.

Their names are legion. Rathole, Rat Farm, Rat Pit,
Rat Post, Fat Rat, Rats' Alley, Dead Rats' Drain,
Rat Heap, Flat Rat, the Better 'Ole, King Rat.
They will outlast us. This is their domain.

And when I die, my spirit will pass by
Through Sulphur Avenue and Devil's Wood
To Jacob's Ladder along Pilgrim's Way
To Eden Trench, through Orchard, through the gate
To Nameless Trench and Nameless Wood, and rest.

Finally, I can't resist including this photograph from Swansea where all road signs must be bilingual English/Welsh.

In this case, the Welsh text means: "I am not in the office at the moment. Please send any work to be translated." According to the BBC, the local authority e-mailed its in-house translation service for the Welsh version. The reply duly came back and was sent on to the (English-speaking) sign-makers.

T T T T

Vent d'Hiver

La feuille flétrie – *Elisa Mercoeur (1809-1835)*
Pourquoi tomber déjà, feuille jaune et flétrie?
J'aimais ton doux aspect dans ce triste vallon.
Un printemps, un été furent toute ta vie,
Et tu vas sommeiller sur le pâle gazon.

Pauvre feuille! il n'est plus, le temps où ta verdure
Ombrageait le rameau dépouillé maintenant.
Si fraîche au mois de mai, faut-il que la froidure
Te laisse à peine encore un incertain moment!

L'hiver, saison des nuits, s'avance et décolore
Ce qui servait d'asile aux habitants des cieux.
Tu meurs! un vent du soir vient t'embrasser encore,
Mais ces baisers glacés pour toi sont des adieux.

Chant d'automne – *Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)*
Bientôt nous plongerons dans les froides ténèbres;
Adieu, vive clarté de nos étés trop courts !
J'entends déjà tomber avec des chocs funèbres
Le bois retentissant sur le pavé des cours.

Tout l'hiver va rentrer dans mon être : colère,

Haine, frissons, horreur, labeur dur et forcé,
Et, comme le soleil dans son enfer polaire,
Mon coeur ne sera plus qu'un bloc rouge et glacé.

J'écoute en frémissant chaque bûche qui tombe;
L'échafaud qu'on bâtit n'a pas d'écho plus sourd.
Mon esprit est pareil à la tour qui succombe
Sous les coups du bélier infatigable et lourd.

Il me semble, bercé par ce choc monotone,
Qu'on cloue en grande hâte un cercueil quelque part.
Pour qui ? - C'était hier l'été; voici l'automne !
Ce bruit mystérieux sonne comme un départ.

Contrerime LXIII – *Jean-Paul Toulet (1867-1920)*
Toute l'allégresse a son défaut
Et se brise elle-même.
Si vous voulez que je vous aime,
Ne riez pas trop haut.

C'est à voix basse qu'on enchante
Sous le cendre d'hiver
Ce cœur, pareil au feu couvert,
Qui se consume et chante.

T T T T

Ein Hauch von Winter

Rainer Maria Rilke

Du wacher Wald, inmitten wehen Wintern hast du ein Frühlingsfühlen dir erkühnt, und leise lässest du dein Silber sintern, damit ich seh, wie deine Sehnsucht grünt. Und wie mich weiter deine Wege führen, erkenn ich kein Wohin und kein Woher und weiss: vor deinen Tiefen waren Türen - und sind nicht mehr.	**Y**ou lively wood, amid the blowing winter have dared to show a feeling for the Spring, and now you quietly let your silver ooze, to show me how your longing turns to green. And as you lead me further down your paths I recognise no more the where and whence and know: before your depths there were once doors that are no more.

Es ist ein Weltmeer voller Lichte, das der Geliebten Aug umschliesst, wenn von der Flut der Traumgesichte die keusche Seele überfliesst. Dann beb ich vor der Wucht des Schimmers so wie ein Kind, das stockt im Lauf, geht vor der Pracht des Christbaumzimmers die Flügeltüre lautlos auf.	**A** global sea filled with lights surrounds the eye of the beloved when the chaste soul overflows flooded by the dream-like countenance. I tremble then at the power of the glow just as a child, halting as it runs, moves silently towards the double doors that open on the splendour of the Christmas room.

Wintermorgen Der Wasserfall ist eingefroren, die Dohlen hocken hart am Teich. Mein schönes Lieb hat rote Ohren und sinnt auf einen Schelmenstreich. Die Sonne küsst uns. Traumverloren schwimmt im Geäst ein Klang in Moll; und wir gehn fürder, alle Poren vom Kraftarom des Morgens voll.	*Winter Morning* The waterfall is frozen now, jackdaws sit beside the pond. My pretty love has bright red ears and plans to play a trick on me. A kiss from the sun. A dream-like sound in minor key swims in the branches; and we walk on further, all our pores filled with the powerful aroma of the morning.

T T T T

Pass the Port Again

A Russian couple were strolling in Red Square one evening when the man felt a drop hit his nose." I think it's raining, "he said to his wife.

"No, I think that felt more like snow to me," she replied.

"No," he said, "I'm sure it's rain."

They were just about to have an argument about whether it was raining or snowing, when they saw a minor Communist Party official walking towards them.

"Let's not fight about it," said the husband," we'll ask Comrade Rudolf whether it's rain or snow."

As the official approached, the man asked, "Tell us Comrade, is it officially raining or snowing?"

"It's raining of course," he answered and carried on walking.

The woman wasn't happy, "I know that it felt like snow!!"

To which her husband quietly replied: "Rudolf the Red knows rain dear." [4]

T T T T

Boris Pasternak

I am grateful to Galina Alexandrovna Roubanova for reminding me of the poetry of Boris Pasternak. The poem below is one of her favourites and I include it with pleasure in the hope of encouraging others to explore his poetry – he is a master of atmosphere, using a minimum of words. If you have read *Doctor Zhivago*, get it out and read it again – if you have not, buy it! His persecution for his refusal to espouse 'Soviet realism' in his writing and, at the end of his life, for the perceived anti-Soviet attitudes reflected in the novel, is well-known. However, Pasternak survived the purges that led directly or indirectly to the early death of so many great poets in Russia and other Soviet Republics, and ruined the lives of others; Pasternak's son Evgeny, in his biography Boris Pasternak – *The Tragic Years 1930-60*, suggests interestingly that perhaps Stalin recognised Pasternak's genius.

[4] Thank you Evelyn.

ЗИМНЯЯ НОЧЬ	**WINTER NIGHT**
Мело, мело по всей земле Во все пределы. Свеча горела на столе, Свеча горела.	It blew, it blew over the whole land, Across all boundaries. The candle was burning on the table, The candle was burning.
Как летом роем мошкара Летит на пламя, Слетались хлопья со двора К оконной раме.	As in summer a swarm of midges Flutters into the flame, So flakes from the courtyard gathered in flight On the window frame.
Метель лепила на стекле Кружки и стрелы. Свеча горела на столе Свеча горела.	The snowstorm made patterns Of circles and arrows on the glass. The candle was burning on the table The candle was burning.
На озаренный потолок Ложились тени. Скрещенья рук, скрещенья ног, Судьбы скрещенья.	On the brightly lit ceiling Shadows lay. Crossed hands, crossed legs, Destinies crossed.
И падали два башмачка Со стуком на пол, И воск слезами с ночника На платье падал.	Two little shoes fell Noisily to the floor, And wax tears from a bedtime candle Fell on a dress.
И все терялось в снежной мгле, Седой и белой. Свеча горела на столе, Свеча горела.	And all was lost in a flurry of snow, Grey-haired and white. The candle was burning on the table The candle was burning.
На свечку дуло из угла, И жар соблазна Вздымал, как ангел, два крыла Крестообразно.	From the corner a gust caught the candle, And the heat of desire Raised, like an angel, two wings In the shape of a cross.
Мело весь месяц в феврале, И то и дело	For the whole month of February It blew without end.
Свеча горела на столе,	The candle was burning on the table
Свеча горела.	The candle was burning.

Pasternak did not set himself in opposition to the authorities *per se*; his primary concern was to maintain his intellectual independence. When submitting the manuscript of ***Doctor Zhivago*** to the journal *Литературная Москва* ('Literary Moscow') in July 1956, for example, he wrote: "You will all be deterred by the unacceptability of the novel, I think. Yet it is in fact only the unacceptable that needs printing. All that is acceptable has long since been written and published." He also had a sense of humour. At one of the first official meetings called to humiliate him many years before the award of the Nobel Prize in 1958, he said to the assembly: "Don't yell at me. But if you must yell, don't do it in unison." [5]

[5] This quotation serves as an epigraph to Robert Conquest's *Courage of Genius – The Pasternak Affair* (Collins-Harvill, 1961); a full transcript of Pasternak's statement can be found on p.87 of Evgeny Pasternak's biography of his father.

He began his studies as a musician and was greatly influenced by Scriabin, his father's neighbour at their dacha in Maloyaroslavets. He wrote memorably of Scriabin's music: "The melodies in these compositions start as tears start to your eyes, and flow as tears flow from the corners of your eyes, down your cheeks to the corners of your mouth. They flow along your bare nerves and heart, and your tears are not tears of sorrow but of astonishment because the way to your heart has been so perfectly discovered." Of his poetry, he wrote "… my concern has always been for meaning, and my dream that every poem should have a content in itself – a new thought or a new image. And that the whole of it with all its individual character should be engraved so deeply into the book that it should speak from it with all the colours of its colourless black print." (*An Essay in Autobiography*, Collins-Harvill 1959, pp. 50 and 81.) [6]

T T T T

A Prairie Home Companion

In July 1974, Minnesota public radio broadcast the first of a weekly series that is still running (with a short gap between 1987 and 1989) called *A Prairie Home Companion*, produced by Garrison Keillor and today featured on 590 public radio stations. Although primarily a variety show, American folk music became an important ingredient and in July 1983 a 'Department of Folk Song' was created on the show and listeners were invited to send in their own favourites for performance. Two criteria were applied: the songs must be 'ones you have heard from someone else,' and 'to which you remember the words mostly.' The 'Department' under Marcia and Jon Pankake (no, I'm not making this up) lasted until 1987, when public interest began to flag, but in 1988 the Pankakes published an anthology *A Prairie Home Companion Folk Song Book* (Viking Penguin). It contains some genuinely old songs but also many variants with new words set to well-known tunes. Here are some of my favourites.

Oh My Monster Frankenstein (Tune: *Clementine*)
In a castle, near a mountain,
Near the dark and murky Rhine.
Dwelt a doctor, the concoctor
Of the monster, Frankenstein.

Chorus: Oh my monster, oh my monster,
Oh my monster, Frankenstein.
You were built to last forever,
Dreadful scary Frankenstein.

In a graveyard, near the castle,
Where the sun refused to shine,
He found noses and some toeses

[6] The website http://www.litera.ru/stixiya/authors/pasternak.html contains a good selection of Pasternak's poetry in Russian. The translation above is my own but there are many translations of Pasternak's poems available on the Internet. The owners of the copyright to his poems seem to be very liberal in their approach, for which we can be thankful.

For his monster Frankenstein.
(Chorus)

It pays to advertise (Tune: *Auld Lang Syne*)
The fish, it never cackles 'bout
it's million eggs or so;
The hen is quite a different bird,
one egg – and hear her crow.
The fish we spurn, but crown the hen,
which leads me to surmise:
Don't hide your light, but blow your horn –
it pays to advertise.

Pink Pyjamas (Tune: *Battle Hymn of the Republic*)
I wear my pink pyjamas in the summer when it's hot.
I wear my flannel nighties in the winter when it's not.
And sometimes in the balmy spring and sometimes in the fall,
I jump right in between the sheets with nothing on at all.

Chorus: Glory, glory for the summer;
Glory, glory for the fall;
Glory, glory for the springtime,
With nothing on at all.

Do you remember the song 'Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, zip-a-dee-ay' from the 1946 Disney film about Br'er Rabbit (*Song of the South*). Here's another version.

Zip up your doo-dah, don't be risqué
My oh my, what a thing to display.
Plenty of people looking your way.
Zip up your doo-dah, it's cold out today!.

And a few well-known carols:

While Shepherds washed their socks by night,
All seated round the tub,
The Angel of the Lord came down,
And gave them all a scrub.

An alternative version:
While shepherds washed their socks by night
All watching ITV
The angel of the Lord came down
And switched to BBC

Hark! the Herald angels sing
Beecham's Pills are just the thing.
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
Two for a man and one for a child.
Joyful all ye nations rise
Medicate when you arise

With angelic hosts proclaim
They are worthy of acclaim.
Hark! The herald angels sing
Beecham's Pills are just the thing.

T T T T

Beecham's Pills

Time magazine of 20 July 1925 published the following article:

A short time ago, an advertisement appeared in *The Times* and other newspapers stating that Sir Thomas Beecham would not be responsible for his wife's debts. Last week, Lady Beecham, who was former Utica Welles of Newark, N. J., applied unsuccessfully to restrain her husband from so advertising. She admitted that she had taken a lease of No. 15 Grosvenor Square, but was surprised to find that Sir Thomas had also rented a nearby house "for a lady," reputed to be Lady Cunard, former Maude Alice Burke of Manhattan.

Her reason for moving to the Square was that her son is coming into $2,500,000 left to him by his grandfather and that it was necessary that he should maintain himself in a style befitting his coming station in life. But she thought that, if Sir Thomas could afford to rent a house for another woman, he could certainly afford to support his wife in comfort.

Sir Thomas, son of old Sir Joseph, pill maker, who died in 1916, unfolded anew the extravagances of his wife and informed the court that his income was only $75,000 a year after taxes had been deducted. On that amount, he said, he could not afford to permit his wife to pledge indiscriminately his credit. The Court agreed.

Sir Thomas is conceded to be one of the most erratic men alive, but of a friendly, pleasing disposition. In the position of pioneer and patron, he founded in 1907 the *New Symphony Orchestra* of which he was the conductor. He delved into the literature of music from which he "unfolded treasures that only learned students of art knew to be in existence." In 1908 he formed the *Beecham Symphony Orchestra;* turned soon after to opera, for which, from 1909 to 1919, he did more than any man in London. In 1915, he became conductor of the *London Philharmonic Society*. Spruce, brisk, genial, he is a good conductor, cultured impresario. He gave enormous amounts to Music, but, despite the immense wealth that his father left him, he was forced to retire temporarily in 1919 to untangle his finances, which were in a precarious condition.

The money which enabled Sir Thomas heroically to champion Music was realized from the sale of the world-famed *Beecham's Pills.* Sir Joseph, the first baronet, began life as a farm boy, ended it the "third richest man in England," leaving a fortune of $140,000,000.

As a lad, he had taken a great interest in the ailments of animals, which eventually led to interest in human ailments. At the age of 20 he left the farm, began to travel, peddling pills of his own manufacture as he went. Sales grew fast as his fame spread to the four corners of the earth.

He was one of the first Englishmen to recognize the value of advertising and the

praise of *Beecham's Pills* was sung in thousands of newspapers, thousands of magazines, on thousands of car-cards and posters throughout the world in numerous languages. His methods were often called vulgar and probably his most famed advertisement was:

Hark! the Herald angels sing / *Beecham's Pills* are just the thing. / Peace on earth and mercy mild, / Two for a man and one for a child.

Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961) was not only famed as a conductor and an eccentric but also as a wit. Among the many anecdotes and witticisms attributed to him are the following:

1917 Caricature of Beecham by 'Emu'

He was once asked if he had played any Stockhausen. "No," he replied, "but I have trodden in some."

During rehearsal one day Beecham stopped the orchestra. "No, no. The second trumpet is playing much too loudly," he said. The first trumpet responded, "But Sir Thomas, the second trumpet hasn't arrived yet." Unperturbed, Sir Thomas replied, "Well, when he gets here, tell him he's playing too loudly.

On the Harpsichord: Like two skeletons copulating on a corrugated tin roof – *and* The harpsichord is a birdcage played with a toasting fork.

On Bruckner's 7th: In the first movement alone, I took note of six pregnancies and at least four miscarriages.

On Beethoven's 7th: What can you do with it? It's like a lot of yaks jumping about.

To a cellist: Madam, you have between your legs an instrument capable of giving pleasure to thousands – and all you can do is scratch it.

No operatic star has yet died soon enough for me.

Her singing reminds me of a cart coming downhill with the brake on.

Brass bands are all very well in their place – outdoors and several miles away.

A musicologist is a man who can read music but cannot hear it.

Why do we in England engage at our concerts so many third-rate continental conductors when we have so many second-rate ones of our own?

The English may not like music, but they absolutely love the noise it makes.

Talking of Toscanini, I hear he is in trouble with his eyes and has therefore to conduct from memory. It is indeed a double affliction when you consider for how many years he has been practically tone-deaf.

Ladies and gentlemen, in upwards of fifty years of concert-giving, it has seldom been my good fortune to find the programme correctly printed. Tonight is no exception to the rule and, therefore, with your kind permission, we will now play you the piece which you think you have just heard.

If an opera cannot be played by an organ grinder, it's not going to achieve immortality.

Movie music is noise... even more painful than my sciatica.

The true gentleman is a man who knows how to play the bagpipes but doesn't.

Great music is that which penetrates the ear with facility and leaves the memory with difficulty. Magical music never leaves the memory.

There are two golden rules for an orchestra: start together and finish together. The public doesn't give a damn what goes on in between.

I have just been all round the world and have formed a very poor opinion of it.

Harpists spend half their life tuning and the other half playing out of tune.

Elgar's first symphony is the musical equivalent of St. Pancras railway station.

I like to conduct ballet music at a very fast tempo. That makes the buggers hop.

Try everything once except folk dancing and incest.

Composers should write tunes that chauffeurs and errand boys can whistle.

I prefer Offenbach to Bach often.

I didn't know he'd been knighted. I knew he'd been doctored.

T T T T

If music be the food of love ….

Sonnet 8 – *William Shakespeare*

Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?
Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy.
Why lov'st thou that which thou receiv'st not gladly,
Or else receiv'st with pleasure thine annoy?
If the true concord of well-tunèd sounds,
By unions married, do offend thine ear,
They do but sweetly chide thee, who confounds
In singleness the parts that thou shouldst bear.
Mark how one string, sweet husband to another,
Strikes each in each by mutual ordering,
Resembling sire and child and happy mother,
Who, all in one, one pleasing note do sing;
Whose speechless song being many, seeming one,
Sings this to thee: "Thou single wilt prove none."

Sonnet 128 – *William Shakespeare*

How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st,
Upon that blessèd wood whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers when thou gently sway'st
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,

Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,
At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand!
To be so tickled, they would change their state
And situation with those dancing chips
O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,
Making dead wood more blest than living lips.
Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,
Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus.
Let no such man be trusted. *The Merchant of Venice, V, i, 83*

Free Thoughts On Several Eminent Composers – *Charles Lamb (1775-1834)*

Some cry up Haydn, some Mozart,
Just as the whim bites; for my part,
I do not care a farthing candle
For either of them, or for Handel. –
Cannot a man live free and easy,
Without admiring Pergolesi?
Or thro' the world with comfort go,
That never heard of Doctor Blow?
So help me God, I hardly have;
And yet I eat, and drink, and shave,
Like other people, if you watch it,
And know no more of Stave or Crotchet,
Than did the primitive Peruvians;
Or those old ante-queer-Diluvians
That lived in the unwash'd world with Tubal,
Before that dirty blacksmith Jubal
By stroke on anvil, or by summ'at,
Found out, to his great surprise, the gamut.
I care no more for Cimarosa,
Than he did for Salvator Rosa,
Being no painter; and bad luck
Be mine, if I can bear that Gluck!
Old Tycho Brahe, and modern Herschel,
Had something in 'em; but who's Purcell?
The devil, with his foot so cloven,
For aught I care, may take Beethoven;
And, if the bargain does not suit,
I'll throw him Weber in to boot.
There's not the splitting of a splinter

To choose ’twixt him last named, and Winter.
Of Doctor Pepusch old queen Dido
Knew just as much, God knows, as I do.
I would not go four miles to visit
Sebastian Bach (or Batch, which is it?);
No more I would for Bononcini.
As for Novello, or Rossini,
I shall not say a word to grieve ’em,
Because they’re living; so I leave ’em.

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach 1830-1916

Ein kleines Lied! Wie geht’s nur an, Dass man so lieb es haben kann, Was liegt darin? erzähle! Es liegt darin ein wenig Klang, Ein wenig Wohllaut und Gesang Und eine ganze Seele.	**A** little song! How can it be That it can give us so much joy, What’s in it? Tell us now! It holds within some resonance, Some pleasant notes that harmonise – But most of all a soul.

Mélodie – *Comtesse Anna de Noailles (1876-1933)*
Comme un couteau dans un fruit
Amène un glissant ravage,
La mélodie aux doux bruit
Fend le coeur et le partage
Et tendrement le détruit.
– Et la langueur irisée
Des arpèges, des accords,
Descend, tranchante et rusée,
Dans la faiblesse du corps
Et dans l’âme divisée...

Peter Quince At The Clavier I – *Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)*
Just as my fingers on these keys
Make music, so the self-same sounds
On my spirit make a music, too.

Music is feeling, then, not sound;
And thus it is that what I feel,
Here in this room, desiring you,

Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk,
Is music. It is like the strain
Waked in the elders by Susanna:

Of a green evening, clear and warm,
She bathed in her still garden, while
The red-eyed elders, watching, felt

The basses of their beings throb
In witching chords, and their thin blood
Pulse pizzicati of Hosanna.

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

Liebeslied Wie soll ich meine Seele halten, dass sie nicht an deine rührt? Wie soll ich sie hinheben über dich zu andern Dingen? Ach gerne möcht ich sie bei irgendwas Verlorenem im Dunkel unterbringen an einer fremden stillen Stelle, die nicht weiterschwingt, wenn deine Tiefen schwingen. Doch alles, was uns anrührt, dich und mich, nimmt uns zusammen wie ein Bogenstrich, der aus zwei Saiten eine Stimme zieht. Auf welches Instrument sind wir gespannt? Und welcher Spieler hat uns in der Hand? O süsses Lied.	**Love song** How can I hold back my soul so that it touches yours no more? How can I raise it up above you, reaching other things? I wish that I could find a dark and secret place where I could hide it from all outside gaze, a place where nothing resonates in sympathy with your deep counterpoint. But all that touches us, both you and me, moves us together as a bowing stroke makes but a single voice from two strings crossed. What is this instrument on which we're strung? Who is the player in whose hand we're held? Oh, sweet song.
Die Laute Ich bin die Laute. Willst du meinen Leib beschreiben, seine schön gewölbten Streifen: sprich so, als sprächest du von einer reifen gewölbten Feige. Übertreib das Dunkel, das du in mir siehst. Es war Tullias Dunkelheit. In ihrer Scham war nicht so viel, und ihr erhelltes Haar war wie ein heller Saal. Zuweilen nahm sie etwas Klang von meiner Oberfläche in ihr Gesicht und sang zu mir. Dann spannte ich mich gegen ihre Schwäche, und endlich war mein Inneres in ihr.	**The Lute** I am the lute. If you would like to talk about my body, and the beauty of its cambered ribs, use words as to describe a ripened fig. Exaggerate the dark you see in me – Tullia's darkness; less visible between her thighs, for then the brightness of her golden hair was like a floodlit hall. From time to time she plucked some sound up from my surface board into her face and sang to me. Then, at last, now taut against her softness, I placed within her all my innermost.

Musician – *Louise Bogan (1897-1970)*

Where have these hands been,
By what delayed,
That so long stayed
Apart from the thin

Strings which they now grace
With their lonely skill?
Music and their cool will
At last interlace.

Now with great ease, and slow,
The thumb, the finger, the strong
Delicate hand plucks the long
String it was born to know.

And, under the palm, the string
Sings as it wished to sing.

Instructions to the Player – *Karl Rakosi (1903-2004)*
Cellist,
easy on that bow.
Not too much weeping.

Remember that the soul
is easily agitated
and has a terror of shapelessness.
It will venture out
but only to a doe's eye.

Let the sound out
inner misterioso
but from a distance
like the forest at night.

And do not forget
the pause between.
That is the sweetest
and has the nature of infinity.

T T T T

Pass the baton

The great Knappertsbusch once went to conduct a distinctly inferior orchestra at Bochum in the Ruhr. After the concert, the enthusiastic chairman of the orchestral board engaged him in conversation. "Tell me, Maestro, when was the last time you conducted the Bochum Symphony Orchestra?" "Tonight," he replied.

One evening, the contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink, noted for her enormous girth, performed at a Detroit concert hall. As she struggled through the cramped orchestra to make her entrance – sending music racks crashing to the floor – the conductor gazed down with understandable alarm. "Sideways, madam!" he frantically whispered. "Go sideways!" "Mein Gott!" Schumann-Heink cried in reply, "I haff no seidveys!"

After a performance of Beethoven's "Leonora Overture No. 3" one evening, during which the offstage trumpet call had twice failed to sound on cue, an irate Stokowski raced from the rostrum in search of the delinquent trumpeter – whom he found in the wings, struggling violently with a burly janitor. "You can't blow that damn thing here, I tell you!" the janitor cried. "There's a concert going on!"

Midway through the performance of a certain mediocre modern piece, Klemperer noticed a member of the audience leaving the hall. "Thank God," the conductor exclaimed, "somebody understands it!"

Artur Schnabel was once amused to find an elderly woman in the front row sleeping right through one of his concerts. When she abruptly woke as the final ovation rang through the auditorium, Schnabel leaned over to apologize: "It was

the applause, Madame," he whispered. "I played as softly as I could."

The composer Max Reger once received a nasty review from a critic named Rudolf Louis. Reger promptly sent a note in reply: "I am sitting in the smallest room of my house," it read, "I have your review before me. In a moment it will be behind me."

While attending a musical party one day, George Bernard Shaw was asked by his hostess, "What do you think of the violinist?" "He reminds me of Paderewski," Shaw remarked. "But Paderewski is not a violinist," the woman replied. "Neither," said Shaw, "is this gentleman."

Finally, here is yet another version of the Bush-Obama joke:

A musician calls the symphony office to talk to the conductor. "I'm sorry, he's dead," comes the reply. The musician calls back 25 times, always getting the same reply from the receptionist. At last she asks him why he keeps calling. "I just like to hear you say it."

T T T T

The review below is from the Nevada newspaper *Desert Aria* of 23 March 1983.[7]

Zuckerman Dazzles Las Vegans

Wednesday January 18, Pinchas Zuckerman [*sic*] conducted and performed with the St Paul Chamber Orchestra in an all Betthoven [*sic*] concert at Ham Hall. Those Las Vegans lucky enough to attend were treated to an evening of performance of a calibre shamefully rare in a city of half a million people.

The first half of the program, consisting of the Overture to the Creatures of Prometheus and the Symphony No. 4 in B flat, Op 60, was somewhat disappointing in that Zuckerman conducted the orchestra with his back to the audience. While one cannot fault him entirely for assuming the traditional posture of the vast majority of great maestros, it must be said that the choice of his stance in combination with his having also elected to wear the traditional "tails" all but obscured whatever clarity of physique one might have hoped to savor, even from the best seats

Even so, true genius shines forth, The broad expanse of his shoulders, the abundant wavy dark hair, the well proportioned legs planted oh-so-firmly on the podium were sufficient food for the culture-starved crowd to feast upon throughout even the longest of movements. Perhaps it might even be said that the program order reflected a certain deftness of planning, for it certainly left the audience clambering to return to their seats in anticipation of the climactic second half which promised the chance to observe Mr Zuckerman from the front for the duration of the whole violin concerto.

What followed was pure magic, as Zuckerman proved that the combination of

[7] Quoted in *Words about Music*, by John Amis and Michael Rose. Improbable as it sounds, this review seems to be genuine. The website of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra states that it was found by Leonard Rose (1918-1984), one of the best cellists of his generation, whose agency also handled Zukermann. Rose sent it to his agent with a handwritten note: "Lee -- Photocopy -- show to Shelly. Both laugh!! - and please return! This I've got to frame -- Leonard."

virtuosity, artistry and a great body can make even the Concerto in D for Violin and Orchestra, Op 61, seem too short. He inspired his audience where a performer of lesser attributes might have left them bored to death. But who among them could for an instant let her eyes stray from the Maestro as he cradled his violin so gently, yet firmly, with the touch of well proportioned hands made strong and supple by years of torturous practice? Whose eyes could have been other than riveted to the spectacle of the grace and power of the bow arm, the fire in his dark eyes, the tension in his taut thighs as he made ready to launch into some passionate passage with the energy of an athlete? Who could but succumb to the tenderness of his smile as he lost himself in the ecstacy [*sic*] of each undulating sweet melodic phrase that surged and swelled from the instrument at his command? It is only a wonder that the audience managed to suppress both thunderous applause and shrieks of pleasure until the end. We can only hope that it will not be an eternity before he again graces our stage with the captivating magic of his talents.

Mr Zuckerman is a native of Israel, Middle East. He has recorded quite a number of musical pieces onto records which are considered quite good by those who listen to them. He is married to a woman of questionable musical ability and character.

Lisa Coffey

T T T T

Dorothy Parker

I enjoyed Marion Meade's biography of Dorothy Parker (1893-1967),[8] whose wit has appeared frequently in Christmas Pudding over the years. The portrait is a generous one even if it told me perhaps more than I wanted to know about her (and her friends') alcoholism and suicide attempts and raised uncomfortable questions about the relationship between artistic creativity and substance abuse.[9] Yvor Winters would certainly have raised a wagging finger.

I learned, however, for the first time of her support for left-leaning causes (including a trip to Spain to support the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War) at a time when such a commitment was likely to lead to a summons to appear before the *House Un-American Activities Committee* and to blacklisting as a writer.[10] I was also unaware that in her will she donated her estate to Martin Luther King (who had never met her) and that her ashes, after having lain unclaimed with a New York law firm for several years, were taken over by the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* and placed in a specially designed memorial garden on the grounds of the NAACP headquarters in Baltimore.

I also picked up a few of her lesser-known witticisms, including:

"Wasn't the Yale Prom wonderful? If all the girls were laid end to end I wouldn't be at all surprised."

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[8] *Dorothy Parker – What Fresh Hell is This*, Penguin 1989.

[9] "Three be the things I shall never attain: Envy, content and sufficient champagne."

[10] At a fund-raising event for the nineteen Hollywood directors, actors and writers who refused to cooperate with the *House Un-American Activities Committee*, she loudly declared: "For Heaven's sake, children, Fascism isn't coming, it's here. It's dreadful. Stop it!"

> "She speaks eighteen languages but can't say no in any of them."
>
> An Atlantic crossing was "so rough, the only thing I could keep on my stomach was the first mate."
>
> When interviewed by the FBI about her political affiliations her dog misbehaved: "Look, I can't even get my dog to stay down. Do I look like someone who would overthrow the government?"

In 1915 she worked as a copywriter at Vogue, where she produced the famous caption for a page of underwear (that I had not seen in its original context before):

> "From these foundations of the autumn wardrobe, one may learn that brevity is the soul of lingerie."

Also from this period, for a photo of what Marion Meade calls "a model wearing a tarted-up but very expensive nightgown,"

> There was a little girl and she had a little curl, right in the middle of her forehead. When she was good she was very very good, but when she was bad she wore this divine nightdress of rose-coloured mousseline de soie, trimmed with frothy Valenciennes lace. [Regrettably, an editor discovered it before it could be immortalized in print.]

After being fired from Vogue, she worked on several occasions as a screen writer, the first of which lasted only a week after she wrote a sub-title for a scene in a silent movie in which the hero is having his nails manicured by an attractive woman: "The divinity that shapes our ends …"[11] She and Robert Benchley then set up a tiny single-room office near Times Square, that was the origin of her remark: "An inch smaller and it would have been adultery" and mused about taking the telegraphic address PARKBENCH.

Shortly afterwards, she became a founder member (with Alexander Woollcott, Marc Connelly, Frank P. Adams, Robert Benchley and other wits) of the luncheon group that came to be known as "The Round Table" at the Algonquin Hotel in New York. She had the bad habit of immediately criticising a person who had just left the room and on one occasion a member of the group leapt to the defence of the departed saying that she wouldn't hurt a fly – Dorothy Parker retorted: "Not if it was buttoned up." On another occasion a wag passing Marc Connelly's chair patted his bald, pink head. "Your head," he said, "feels just like my wife's behind." Connelly felt his head and replied: "Why, so it does."

The Algonquin Round Table was also associated with the (very shaky) beginnings of that great US institution *The New Yorker*, set up by Harold Ross and his wife Jane Grant in 1925; Dorothy Parker was on the original board of editors and made many contributions – verse and short stories – until 1955.

> On October 1 [1927], she took over the "Recent Books" column in *The New Yorker*, under the pseudonym "Constant Reader." Need of money was her reason for

[11] *Hamlet* Act 5, Scene 2

assuming the responsibility of a regular weekly assignment. She started out cautiously and the reviews were relatively benign during the early weeks. As a reviewer, she did poorly with quality books, usually slopping adjectives like "beautiful" and "exquisite" all over the page. By the end of the first month, reviewing a memoir by President Warren Harding's mistress and the mother of his illegitimate child, Dorothy had worked herself into a properly bilious mood. An effort had been made to suppress Nan Britton's creation because police had invaded the printing plant to seize the plates. "Lady," Dorothy was dying to tell the author, "those weren't policemen; they were critics of literature dressed up."

It was the rare column that did not contain something to make readers laugh: "*Crude* is the name of Robert Hyde's first novel," she reported. "It is also a criticism of it." Margot Asquith's latest book, she chortled, has "all the depth and glitter of a worn dime," and she went on to speculate that "the affair between Margot Asquith and Margot Asquith will live as one of the prettiest love stories in all literature." Dorothy was probably at her most pugilistic with how-to books. Confronted with a work about happiness, titled *Happiness* and written by a Yale professor, she described the book as "second only to a rubber duck as the ideal bathtub companion. It may be held in the hand without causing muscular fatigue or nerve strain, it may be neatly balanced back of the faucets, and it may be read through before the water has cooled. And if it slips down the drain pipe, all right, it slips down the drain pipe."

Constant Reader's best-known review was of A. A. Milne's *The House at Pooh Corner*. Milne's whimsy had always nauseated her. When she came to the word 'hummy', her stomach revolted. "And it is that word 'hummy,' my darlings," she wrote, "that marks the first place in *The House at Pooh Corner* at which Tonstant Weader Fwowed up." (Marion Meade, p. 188)

In 1929 she moved back to script-writing in Hollywood for *MGM* (which she called 'Metro Goldwyn Merde') and was so lonely that when the sign-painter came by to put her name on her office door, she tried to persuade him to print *GENTLEMEN* instead.

At MGM, William Randolph Hearst had built his mistress, actress Marion Davies, a dressing-room bungalow whose entrance was adorned with a statue of the Madonna. To Dorothy's annoyance, Hollywood insisted upon crediting her with the authorship of a popular jingle about them:

Upon my honor
I saw a Madonna
Standing in a niche
Above the door
Of a prominent whore
Of a prominent son of a bitch.

Dorothy, offended, declared that she would never stoop to rhyming *honor* with *Madonna.* (Meade, pp. 246-7)

Algonquin Round Table by Albert Hirschfield (Parker top left)

T T T T

Pass the baton again

One can't judge Wagner's opera Lohengrin after a first hearing, and I certainly don't intend hearing it a second time. *Gioacchino Rossini*

Wagner has lovely moments but awful quarters of an hour. *Gioacchino Rossini*

Wagner's music is better than it sounds. *Mark Twain* (quoting humorist *Edgar Wilson Nye*)

Wagner's operas are long, so the performances start early. When I went to see *Parsifal* it began at 5:30, and when I looked at my watch three hours later it said 5:45. *Variously attributed to Puccini or Mark Twain*

I can't listen to that much Wagner. I start getting the urge to conquer Poland. *Woody Allen*

I don't like country music, but I don't mean to denigrate those who do. And for those people who like country music, denigrate means 'put down.' *Bob Newhart*

Never, under any circumstances, look at the brass – it only encourages them. *Richard Strauss*

I occasionally play works by contemporary composers and for two reasons. First, to discourage the composer from writing any more, and, secondly, to remind myself how much I appreciate Beethoven. *Jascha Heifetz*

At every concert at least one person should enjoy himself. And it might as well be me. *Isaac Stern*

I do play the violin, but not well enough to hold a steady job – just a series of one night stands. *Isaac Stern*

Interviewer: Do you know what your songs are about? *Bob Dylan*: Yeah, some are about ten minutes long, others five or six.

They say that when the angels play before God, they are playing Bach, but for each other, they are playing Mozart. *Isaiah Berlin*

My sole inspiration is a telephone call from a producer. *Cole Porter*

After playing the violin for *Gregor Piatigorsky* (another great cellist of the last century), *Albert Einstein* asked, "Did I play well?" "You played relatively well," replied Piatigorsky.

Why is it that whenever I hear a piece of music I don't like, it's always by Villa-Lobos? *Igor Stravinsky*

Too many pieces of music finish too long after the end. *Igor Stravinsky*

People who have heard me sing say I don't. *Mark Twain*

A man walks into a pet store to buy a parrot. The salesman shows him two beautiful specimens: "This one costs $5,000 and the other $10,000," he says. "What does the $5,000 one do?" "He can sing every aria Mozart ever wrote." "And the other?" "He can sing Wagner's entire *Ring* cycle – and there's another one in the back room for $30,000." "What does that one do that he costs so much?" "Nothing that I can tell, but the other two parrots call him *Maestro*."

I had the misfortune to attend a violin competition this summer in a Swiss city that shall be nameless, at which a young Asian violinist played the Brahms concerto in the manner of Paganini with an excruciatingly shrill tone and an unrelenting hammer vibrato that was literally painful to my ears – not however to the judges, since he won. I was reminded of two quotations:

> The Detroit Quartet played Brahms last night. Brahms lost. *Bennett Cerf*
>
> Competitions are for horses, not artists. *Bela Bartok*

T T T T

Wrong on Kenya

I much enjoyed Michela Wrong's account of Kenyan government corruption in *It's Our Turn to Eat*, (Fourth Estate 2009). The story is depressing, not only for Africa but also for western taxpayers because of the limp response of donor governments and the World Bank to the whistle-blowing of John Githongo, appointed by President Kibaki in 2003 as Secretary for Governance and Ethics.[12] On discovering that Kibaki was himself abetting corrupt practices, Githongo went into exile in London and revealed details of a scam involving up to $1 billion that used a plethora of phantom companies (including Anglo-Leasing Finance, a letter-box company in Liverpool), to perpetrate fraud on the Kenyan taxpayer through non-delivery of goods and services and massive overpricing. The only other person to emerge with any credit is the then UK High Commissioner, Sir Edward Clay (knighted during his posting to Nairobi, probably in an attempt to keep him quiet). He received the singular honour of being declared *persona non grata* by the Kenyan government in 2008, three years after his retirement.[13]

In a speech to the British Business Association of Kenya in July 2004 he stated:

> We never expected corruption to be vanquished overnight. We all recognised that some would be carried over to the new era. We hoped it would not be rammed in our faces. But it has: evidently the practitioners now in government have the arrogance, greed and perhaps a sense of panic to lead them to eat like gluttons. They may expect we shall not see, or will forgive them, a bit of gluttony because they profess to like Oxfam lunches. But they can hardly expect us not to care when their gluttony causes them to vomit all over our shoes; do they really expect us to ignore the lurid and mostly accurate details conveyed in the commendably free media and pursued by a properly-curious Parliament?[14]

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[12] I am encouraged, however, to see that the Swedish Minister for Development, Gunilla Carlsson, has now started a public debate on the Swedish blog *Newsmill* about the propriety vis-à-vis taxpayers of continuing aid to countries with a poor record on combating corruption (see http://www.newsmill.se/artikel/2009/08/23/dags-en-mer-uppriktig-debatt-om-bistandet#comment-77530. The *NZZ*, which reported this on 31 August, noted that on a scale of 10 drawn up by *Transparency International*, most countries receiving aid from Sweden scored less than 2.5 and none received more than 3.5.

[13] Both Clay and his counterpart in Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, who was also discredited by the UK government for speaking the truth about major human rights abuses there, including torture (see http://www.craigmurray.org.uk/), have continued to support worthy causes.

[14] See http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/jul/15/kenya.jeevanvasagar.

In addition to the strong images in his public statements (the "vomit" image made headlines all over the world and led to attempts to silence and discredit him by the British aid agency DfID and others in the Blair government), Clay also used witty poetic parodies in illustration of his case, among which were the following.

> **M**acavity's a mystery cat, he's called the hidden paw –
> For he's the great facilitator, far above the law.
> He's a menace to the donors, he's the taxpayers' despair:
> For the treasury is empty…….but Macavity's not there!
> Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
> He flourishes in cyberspace, he stalks through zero gravity.
> He'll be on a yacht off Cyprus when they find the cupboard's bare,
> For the treasury is empty……..but Macavity's not there:
> Don't ask for him in government – you'll get an icy stare
> And they'll tell you once and once again, Macavity's not there.
> He likes to be in transit and he's partial to hotels,
> He has a place in Manchester, he's fond of the Seychelles.
> So when the nation's revenue's in European banks,
> Or you need a team of tractors but acquire a troop of tanks
> Or the nation's full of caviar, but hasn't any bread,
> Or you want a road for Christmas, but a frigate comes instead
> Or you're buying a police car and you're paying through your teeth
> For a chicken house that's blue and white and rotten underneath:
> You can look behind the scenery or stare up in the air
> But the Ministers will tell you that Macavity's not there.
> His manipulative skills would make a physio despair,
> For the Treasury is empty…..but Macavity's not there!"
>
> Based on *Macavity: the Mystery Cat* by T.S. Eliot.[15]

> **T**he King asked
> The Queen, and
> The Queen asked
> The Dairymaid:
> "Could we have some butter for
> The Royal slice of bread?"
>
> The Dairymaid
> She curtsied,
> Thinking that this might be
> A lovely little earner
> If generously spread.
>
> The Dairymaid
> Swiftly
> Went and said to
> The Alderney:
> "About the butter contract

[15] See http://www.poetry-online.org/eliot_macavity_the_mystery_cat.htm.

For the Royal slice of bread –
Are you interested
In long-term
Exclusive tendering?
For I heard that butter prices
Were about to leap ahead."

Based on *The King's Breakfast* by A.A: Milne[16]

T T T T

Carambar[17]

What time is it when an elephant sits on your fence. Time to get a new fence.

What is grey and has a trunk? A mouse going on holiday.

What is brown and has a trunk? A mouse coming back from holiday.

Quel est l'animal le plus bizarre ? Le loup-phoque !

Que dit un serpent à un autre serpent ? Quelle heure reptile ?

Quel est le jeu préféré des hommes d'affaires ? Cash-cash !

Comment appelle-t-on un lapin sourd ? LAAAAAPIN !!!! (très fort)

Vrai ou faux? La toute première star animale de l'histoire du cinéma était un castor en string. Faux c'était un chien à poils.

Quelle différence entre une poule et un chapon ? Une poule cha pond et un chapon cha pond pas.

Un chat entre dans une pharmacie et demande "un sirop pour matou."

Une poule rencontre une autre poule : "Viens, on va prendre un ver."

La maîtresse demande de construire une phrase avec le mot *épithète*. Nicolas lève le doigt et dit: "Aujourd'hui il pleut, *épithète* demain, il fera beau."

T T T T

More Animals

Most of us know de la Fontaine's fable *Le Corbeau et le Renard*. The following by Guy Wetmore Carryl (1873-1904) is undeservedly less well-known.[18]

A raven sat upon a tree,
And not a word he spoke, for
His beak contained a piece of Brie,
Or, maybe, it was Roquefort:
We'll make it any kind you please—
At all events, it was a cheese.

Beneath the tree's umbrageous limb
A hungry fox sat smiling;

[16] See CP 2007, p. 52.

[17] Merci Félicia!

[18] With thanks to Huw Owen. A compilation of Carryl's texts based on de la Fontaine (*Fables for the Frivolouos*) can be found on http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/6438.

He saw the raven watching him,
And spoke in words beguiling:
"J'admire," said he, "ton beau plumage,"
(The which was simply persiflage).

Two things there are, no doubt you know,
To which a fox is used,—
A rooster that is bound to crow,
A crow that's bound to roost,
And whichsoever he espies
He tells the most unblushing lies.

"Sweet fowl," he said, "I understand
You're more than merely natty:
I hear you sing to beat the band
And Adelina Patti.
Pray render with your liquid tongue
A bit from *Götterdämmerung*."

This subtle speech was aimed to please
The crow, and it succeeded:
He thought no bird in all the trees
Could sing as well as he did.
In flattery completely doused,
He gave the "Jewel Song" from *Faust*.

But gravitation's law, of course,
As Isaac Newton showed it,
Exerted on the cheese its force,
And elsewhere soon bestowed it.
In fact, there is no need to tell
What happened when to earth it fell.

I blush to add that when the bird
Took in the situation
He said one brief, emphatic word,
Unfit for publication.
The fox was greatly startled, but
He only sighed and answered "Tut!"

The moral is: A fox is bound
To be a shameless sinner.
And also: When the cheese comes round
You know it's after dinner.
But (what is only known to few)
The fox is after dinner, too.

The Duck – *Ogden Nash*
Behold the duck,
It does not cluck,
A cluck it lacks.

It quacks.
It is specially fond
Of a puddle or a pond.
When it dines or sups,
It bottoms ups.

The Rabbit – *Anonymous*
The rabbit has a charming face:
Its private life is a disgrace.
I really dare not name to you
The awful things that rabbits do;
Things that your paper never prints --
You only mention them in hints.
They have such lost, degraded souls
No wonder they inhabit holes;
When such depravity is found
It only can live underground.

The hippopotamus is the surprising subject of a number of poems, almost all humorous.

Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953)

I shoot the Hippopotamus
With bullets made of platinum,
Because if I use leaden ones
His hide is sure to flatten 'em.

Theodore Roethke (1908-63)

A head or tail - which does he lack?
I think his forward's coming back!
He lives on carrots, leeks and hay;
He starts to yawn - it takes all day –
Some time I think I'll live that way.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

The broad-backed hippopotamus
Rests on his belly in the mud;
Although he seems so firm to us
He is merely flesh and blood.

Flesh and blood is weak and frail,
Susceptible to nervous shock;
While the True Church can never fail
For it is based upon a rock.

The hippo's feeble steps may err
In compassing material ends,
While the True Church need never stir
To gather in its dividends.

The 'potamus can never reach

The mango on the mango-tree;
But fruits of pomegranate and peach
Refresh the Church from over sea.

At mating time the hippo's voice
Betrays inflexions hoarse and odd,
But every week we hear rejoice
The Church, at being one with God.

The hippopotamus's day
Is passed in sleep; at night he hunts;
God works in a mysterious way –
The Church can sleep and feed at once.

I saw the 'potamus take wing
Ascending from the damp savannas,
And quiring angels round him sing
The praise of God, in loud hosannas.

Blood of the Lamb shall wash him clean
And him shall heavenly arms enfold,
Among the saints he shall be seen
Performing on a harp of gold.

He shall be washed as white as snow,
By all the martyr'd virgins kist,
While the True Church remains below
Wrapt in the old miasmal mist.

Michael Flanders (1922-1975) and *Donald Swann (1923-1994)*

A bold hippopotamus was standing one day
On the banks of the cool Shalimar
He gazed at the bottom as he peacefully lay
By the light of the evening star
Away on the hilltop sat combing her hair
His fair hippopotami maid
The hippopotamus was no ignoramus
And sang her this sweet serenade:

Chorus: Mud, mud, glorious mud
Nothing quite like it for cooling the blood
So follow me follow, down to the hollow
And there let me wallow in glorious mud.

The fair hippopotama he aimed to entice
From her seat on that hilltop above
As she hadn't got a ma to give her advice
Came tiptoeing down to her love
Like thunder the forest re-echoed the sound
Of the song that they sang when they met
His inamorata adjusted her garter

And lifted her voice in duet.
(Chorus Mud, mud, glorious mud …..*)*
Now more hippopotami began to convene
On the banks of that river so wide
I wonder now what am I to say of the scene
That ensued by the Shalimar side
They dived all at once with an ear-splitting splosh
Then rose to the surface again
A regular army of hippopotami
All singing this haunting refrain:
(Chorus Mud, mud, glorious mud …..*)*

*J. Patrick Lewis (*1942)*

A hippopotamusn't sit
On lawn chairs, stools, and rockers.
A hippopotamusn't yawn
Directly under tightrope walkers.
A hippopotamusn't roll
In gutters used by bowlers.
A hippopotamusn't fail
To floss his hippopotamolars.
The awful things a hippopotamusn't do
Are just
As important as the lawful things
A hippopotamust.

Anonymous

Consider the poor hippopotamus:
His life is unduly monotonous.
He lives half asleep
At the edge of the deep,
And his face is as big as his bottom is.

I never had a dog but like to think that, if I had, I would have felt about it as the author of the following poem.

Advice to a Man Who Lost a Dog – *Howard Baker (1905-1990)*
Don't hunt too anxiously a wilful hound;
Don't hope to hear the hot expectant sound
Or see him in the brush turn leaping round
To give a token of reply
Promptly to your cry.

Things called must take their time about complying;
Things summoned come, but as they come they're trying
Each dangling scent, though it be false and dying:
Since blood has ancient ghosts to lay
Let's grant the blood its way.

The ranging dog is like the red leaves driven

Over a wall, vine-covered and frost-riven,
To the devouring cedar thicket given;
  The woodbine's scarlet leaf compels
  His wild autumnal spells.

Stop by the brook and take your thoughts to school,
Scan your reflection in a quiet pool –
Does the dog's quest mark him the greater fool?
  What of the men who have thus gazed?
  The wisdom they have praised?

Think when you hunt him on the windy brow
Where the lean settler led his shaggy cow
And questing yielded to the tranquil plow,
  That that fine poise bequeathed alone
  A cellar overgrown.

If you don't find him, for the spirit's sake
Go get the blanket from the car and make
His bed where last he was. When you awake
  Tonight, you'll seem to see him there,
  Curled tight in flowing air.

Tomorrow try more habitable land.
By a back-door perhaps he'll take his stand,
Pleasant but cautious to the stranger's hand;
  As he had been unquenched and wild,
  Exhausted now and mild.

Finally, the following poem was written in August this year by a friend to celebrate a victory in a battle for protection of the environment of my village from a planned landfill dump:

Pendant son long voyage, commère Cigogne
Se repose à Crans sans vergogne.
Et bonjour, Monsieur du Corbeau,
Que vous êtes joli ! Que vous me semblez beau !
Je fais halte dans votre merveilleux village
Pour me reposer et lisser mon plumage.
Dans tout mon périple, votre hospitalité
Est celle que je préfère pour m'arrêter.
Compère le Corbeau dit à la charmeresse
Que ses compliments le mettent en liesse.
Arrêtez votre migration et restez avec moi.
Jamais je n'ai ressenti tant d'émoi.
La Cigogne ouvre un large bec… et prend la parole.
Retenez cette leçon avant que je ne m'envole :
Je reviendrai chaque année sur ces lieux
Enchanteurs auprès des Corbeaux heureux
Que j'aime pour leurs idées larges,

Car ils ne veulent pas d'une décharge.

T T T T

Wit And Wisdom – Tom Paine

This is the 200th anniversary of the death of Tom Paine, who is more revered in the US and France than in his native Britain, where he is virtually unremembered.

His principal contributions to the American Revolution were the powerful, widely-read pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), advocating colonial America's independence from Britain, and *The American Crisis* (1776-1783), a pro-revolutionary pamphlet series.

I enjoyed his brief appearance (played by Harvey Keitel) in the much under-rated film *La Nuit de Varennes* by Ettore Scola, an irreverent look at the French Revolution. Epitaphs appeared in CP 2008 and I wish I had then come across the following for a pet crow written by Tom Paine when only eight years old, an early indication of his democratic and revolutionary credentials:

Here lies the body of Tom Crow
Who once was high and now is low
Ye brother Crows take warning all
For as you rise so must you fall.

Here are some of Tom Paine's thoughts:

A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right.

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

An army of principles can penetrate where an army of soldiers cannot.

Belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man.

But such is the irresistible nature of truth, that all it asks, and all it wants is the liberty of appearing.

Character is much easier kept than recovered.

He that rebels against reason is a real rebel, but he that in defence of reason rebels against tyranny has a better title to Defender of the Faith, than George the Third.

It is not a God, just and good, but a devil, under the name of God, that the Bible describes.

He that would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from opposition; for if he violates this duty he establishes a precedent that will reach himself.

If we do not hang together, we shall surely hang separately.

Lead, follow, or get out of the way.

Moderation in temper is always a virtue; but moderation in principle is always a vice.

One good schoolmaster is of more use than a hundred priests.

The greatest remedy for anger is delay.

The most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is reason.

To establish any mode to abolish war, however advantageous it might be to Nations, would be to take from such Government the most lucrative of its branches.

War involves in its progress such a train of unforeseen circumstances that no human wisdom can calculate the end; it has but one thing certain, and that is to increase taxes.

To say that any people are not fit for freedom, is to make poverty their choice, and to say they had rather be loaded with taxes than not.

When men yield up the privilege of thinking, the last shadow of liberty quits the horizon.

When we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary.

T T T T

Alfred Brendel

Alfred Brendel (*1931), the doyen of concert pianists, announced his retirement at the beginning of the year. In addition to being a great performer, Brendel was exceptionally lucid about his art and his interviews provide interesting new perceptions on well-known works. The following, one of his last, is from the *The Guardian Weekly* of 9.1.09.

Q. You have always been a great concerto player, and are ending with two Mozart concertos, the early E flat, K271, “Jeunehomme”, and the C minor, K491.

B. I started playing Mozart in my teens but I had a hard time with-his piano music. And then, as an 18-year-old, I went to the great Swiss pianist Edwin Fischer's masterclass and played the A minor Sonata there, and that opened the door. I played Mozart’s concertos for years in Vienna and Salzburg. That was my early Mozart period. Later, there was another Mozart period, starting 12 or 15 years ago, where I dared to tackle the sonatas, too. [Pianist Artur] Schnabel’s remarks about them is still the best: “Too easy for children, too difficult for artists.”

In my young years, the notion that Mozart was predominantly graceful was widespread. But there were people who were of the other camp, people such as Fischer, Bruno Walter and Schnabel, who let the demon in when the music was demonic. I think in my 1960s period, I was more on the graceful and poised side, and only later began to perceive Mozart's full range. The violinist Sandor Végh once asked what I thought constituted good Mozart playing, and I said a combination of singing and speaking. I still think this is so. The ninth piano concerto, K271, has one of Mozart's greatest cadenzas, and a movement in C minor, one of my favourite keys, which was as important to Mozart as it was to Beethoven. The Ninth is the concerto where everything is written out, every note, every lead-in and decoration, which didn't happen in the later works, since they

were not finished for print.

Thanks to musicologists we now know more about the so-called Jeunehomme Concerto. Suddenly there is a structure and the most wonderful ideas, formal ideas, and a vision of everything the classical piano concerto could become, in subtlety and richness. For me, it is a perfect work, with that special freshness of something done for the first time and succeeding at the same time.

Martin Meyer, chief editor of the cultural pages of the *NZZ* and himself something of a doyen of music journalism, held a series of conversations with Brendel for a book published in October 2002. The following extracts appeared in the *New York Review of Books* Vol. 49, No. 15.[19]

Martin Meyer: You see Mozart to a considerable extent as a composer of form. Could it not be that Mozart's strict sense of form is obscured for the public at large by his wonderful melodies, his so-called "sweetness"?

Alfred Brendel: There is perfection of form, yes, but there is also the sensual beauty of the "cantabile" composer, the beauty above all of the Mozart sound. Mozart is one of the most sensuous composers ever. There is a sensuality too about his melodies. I'm reminded of a lovely sentence from Busoni, who said a few wonderful things in his aphorisms about Mozart. Busoni said there was no doubt that Mozart took singing as his starting point, and from this stems the uninterrupted melodiousness which shimmers through his compositions like the lovely forms of a woman through the folds of a flimsy dress. Isn't that wonderful? And with Mozart, of course, you also have the quite amazing expressiveness which goes beyond what Busoni, who in this respect was more rooted in the nineteenth century, would concede: Mozart's art of characterization from an early age was bound up with his observation of human beings. Mozart clearly observed people continually, and as a child took delight in improvising human emotions and reactions in the form of arias. His range is from the most comic and absurd to the demonic – which is where I disagree with Busoni, who does not recognize Mozart's demonic side. Busoni was one of the greatest Mozart enthusiasts and a real authority – and yet it was he who said: "If Beethoven's nature can be compared with the magnificence of a thunderstorm, then Mozart is an eternally sunny day."

…. *MM*: When did you yourself discover the dark side of Mozart's genius? Was it clear from the moment you began to devote yourself to Mozart?

AB: No, to begin with it was not clear. My approach to him in my first significant Mozart period in the Sixties was that of Apollonian poise. There are a few recordings from that time which still give me some pleasure. But that was later to change, probably something to do with my getting older. …..

MM: Let's talk about a couple of Mozart clichés. Busoni has already been mentioned. Ernst Bloch, who wanted to derive the entire history of music of the eighteenth century from the French Revolution, called Mozart a composer of

[19] See http://www.nybooks.com/articles/15736. Translated from the German by Richard Stokes. Excerpted from *Me of All People: Alfred Brendel in Conversation with Martin Meyer*, Cornell University Press.

porcelain. These images and falsifications lasted well into the twentieth century – a little like what happened to Haydn.

AB: Relapses do still occur. All the same, the old instruments have brought about much that is good and have shown, for example, that the brass and the timpani could be much more aggressive than one had previously thought, and also that many old keyboard instruments can play with greater rasp. Now this can, if it is forced, sound exaggerated in the other direction, as can the very detailed articulation which may obscure the cantabile element. Basically, there should be a combination of both elements. In the first place, singing, but then as an important addition, speaking – whether one is talking about opera or not. For it is crucial in instrumental works as well. …..

MM: In this context there is a speculative question that preoccupies me. In the case of Beethoven, one can almost imagine the composer, psychologically, in the throes of the creative process. One also thinks of Beethoven when one plays certain particular pieces by him. But with Mozart it is quite different. Isn't it as if there's a wall of impenetrability between his works and his personality?

AB: That is a very interesting question. I am basically of the opinion that you should not draw conclusions about the composer from his work, or vice versa. In exceptional cases this can be done with advantage, but only exceptionally. I would personally prefer it if all artists had remained as anonymous in their everyday life as Shakespeare. The less one knows about them the better. And particularly with composers. When Beethoven is portrayed as the all-embracing lover of humanity, I have to point out that the final movement of the Ninth Symphony or the prisoners' chorus and the final act of Fidelio are not the only things he composed. It's true, Mozart's Magic Flute and Bach's Passions also have a message, if one wishes to speak of messages. But with regard to Beethoven: his expressiveness ranges from the all-embracing to the private, from the numinous to the comic, from wit to "eternal truth." Yet the Diabelli Variations are as devoid of pathos as any work that has ever been written. With the best will in the world, you can read no message there, unless it be Kleist's statement: "When perception has passed through infinity, gracefulness reappears." Of course, if you cultivate the old-fashioned view of a heroic Beethoven, you will easily misinterpret the piece.

T T T T

An Ambassador of Peace

I enjoyed reading the sober and often witty (if lengthy) memoirs of Lord D'Abernon, British Ambassador in Berlin from 1923-1926, a period of European history about which I know too little, but essential to understanding the rise of Hitler. During his time in Berlin he made a major contribution to the conclusion of the *Dawes Plan* (providing for a settlement of war reparations and thereby stabilising the German currency) and the *Locarno Pact of Mutual Guarantee* (bringing Germany back into the European comity of nations), as well as to the signing of a far-reaching *Anglo-German Treaty of Commerce.*

At one point in the third volume, describing the quibbling among the Allies about the last 5% of German disarmament when the French were proving especially

difficult, he quotes an exchange between the German Ambassador and French Prime Minister Édouard Herriot (1872-1957):[20]

German Ambassador: "We cannot understand why France makes such a fuss about some rusty old pieces of iron at Wittenau [a suburb of Berlin]."

Herriot: "Only four nails were needed for the Crucifixion."

T T T T

Odds and ends

T "He's not a very good golfer, but, unlike a lot of golfers, he doesn't let that ruin his day or your day." (Comment on US Chief Justice John G. Roberts by one of his friends, quoted in *The New Yorker* of 25 May 2009) I am not an admirer of John Roberts as a member of the Supreme Court but, as a golfer, he deserves respect.

(*With thanks to Philipp Ruperti*)

T *CP 2008* celebrated brevity. Here is another candidate for the shortest poem ever written:

U
Nu!
(in English: You - Now!)

With this short piece, the Dutch poet Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) became the winner of a poetry contest in 1620. A related anecdote tells that van den Vondel and contemporary poet Jacob Cats were challenging each other with poems. At one point, Cats grabbed a candle from the table, and spilt the molten wax on Vondel's clothes, exclaiming *Vet smet* (wax stain). Vondel responded with apunch and the words *Ik tik* (I strike).

T For those who miss in the language of the new US President the expression "nucular" and statements such as "the illiteracy level of our children are appalling," and "they misunderestimated me" it is worth bearing in mind the observation by the much regretted Alistair Cooke (1908-2004) that "Americans seem to be more comfortable with Republican presidents because they share the common frailty of muddled syntax and because, when they attempt eloquence, they do tend to spout a kind of Frontier Baroque."

T *Todd Stewart* writes from Sun Valley Idaho: "Mark Twain's reflections on the

[20] Herriot led three coalition Ministries, of which the first survived only from June 1924 to April 1925. A member of the *Parti Radical-Socialiste*, he was described by historian Zara Steiner (*The Lights that Failed - European International History, 1919-1933* – OUP 2005) as neither radical nor socialist. Herriot is one of the few French politicians who kept a relatively cool head during the 1930s. During his first ministry, France accepted the *Dawes Plan*, granted *de jure* recognition to the Soviet Union and agreed to evacuate from the Ruhr the troops that former premier Raymond Poincaré had sent in to enforce payment of reparations by Germany. He abstained from voting when, on 10 July 1940, the National Assembly accorded full powers to Marshal Pétain. Herriot was arrested by the Vichy authorities and handed over to the Germans. He was interned in Potsdam until liberated by Soviet forces in April, 1945.

German language reminded me of a story that was circulating among Americans in Munich in the early 1960s. A German government official had invited a visiting American, who spoke no German, to accompany him to the Bundestag, where Adenauer was scheduled to deliver a major policy address. Fifteen minutes into Adenauer's remarks the American whispered to his German host, 'What's he saying?' The German replied, 'I don't know. He hasn't reached the verb yet.'

Some might say that President Calvin Coolidge carried brevity to extremes. At a White House reception a woman is supposed to have approached Silent Cal and said, 'Mr. President, I have bet my friend a dollar that I can get you to say more than two words.' Coolidge replied, 'You lose.' "

T Uncle Rebus (from *The Guardian*)

T I well recall *Yvor Winters*, ever combative, saying in a seminar: "There are two schools of thought on this, of one of which I am, as far as I know, the only member." *Viscount D'Abernon*, from whose memoirs I have already quoted, expressed a similarly memorable thought: "… on two quite minor subjects of theoretical controversy – currency and trade balance – he [Walther Rathenau (1867-1922) Foreign Minister of Germany during the Weimar Republic] held theories quite opposite to my own, and these subjects happen to be among those about which I am less sure than usual that I know nothing."

T Saddened but also slightly amused at the news that an imaginative Romanian web developer is composing "the longest poem in the world" by aggregating real-time public *Twitter* updates and selecting those that rhyme. Judge for yourself on www.longestpoemintheworld.com. Sometimes surreal, mostly just banal.

T The dismal progress of President Obama's much-needed reform proposals for the financial and health sectors makes me pessimistic about the possibility of any major reform in the USA when vested interests are so powerful, the average American is so ill-informed and ill-served by US media and the public interest so little in focus.[21] I liked the conclusion of a review in the *NYT* by Abigail Zuger, M.D. of a recent book by T.R. Reid, *The Healing of America: A Global Quest for Better, Cheaper, and Fairer Health Care*: "And then there is the insured working person who discovers, with surprise, that health insurance is a for-profit industry, that the industry term for payment is 'medical loss' and that the process of extracting payment for a dire health condition can turn into a bizarre game of 'catch me if you can.' A person's last days can be spent in any number of ways. But on the phone pleading with an insurer, that's only in America."

T *Oliver Wendell Holmes*: "I like paying taxes. With them I buy civilization."

[21] The US Census Bureau reported in September that 20% of adults under 65 have no health insurance and 13.2% of the population now lives below the poverty line.