CHRISTMAS PUDDING

2010

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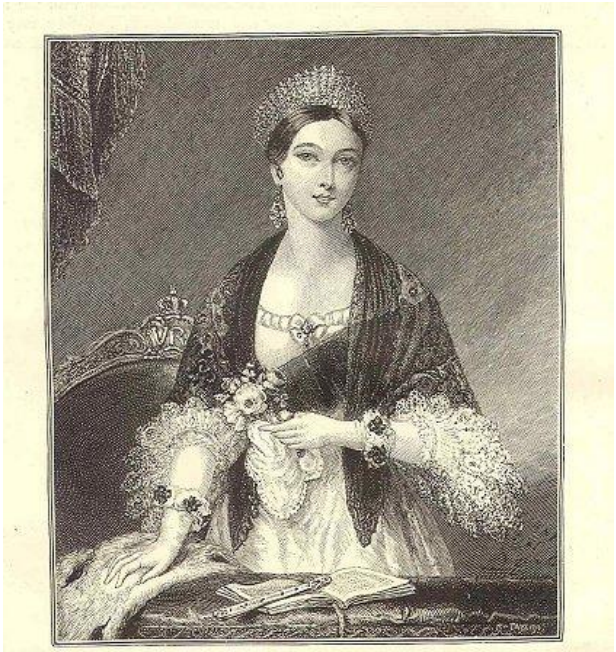
Robert Middleton

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.



QUEEN VICTORIA.
(*Painted by E. T. Parris, 1838.*)

The Queen is most anxious to enlist everyone in checking this mad, wicked folly of 'Women's Rights'. It is a subject which makes the Queen so furious that she cannot contain herself. (Queen Victoria, letter 29 May 1870)

I would venture to warn against too great intimacy with artists as it is very seductive and a little dangerous. (Advice to her daughter Vicky, May 1878)

After watching Sarah Bernhardt's erotic performance as Cleopatra in Victorien Sardou's play written expressly for her, an elderly society lady was heard to say: "How unlike, how very unlike the home life of our own dear queen."

Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. Charlotte Bronte (1816 - 1855)

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CHRISTMAS PUDDING 2010

The Victorians! Biedermaier! Sentimentality, sententiousness, conventionality, self-righteousness, hypocrisy? This period in European culture is much denigrated for its *petit bourgeois* values, anti-feminism and suppressed sexuality.

Most English-speakers have a fairly clear idea of what is meant by the adjective "Victorian," but less about the German equivalent "Biedermaier." The term comes from the pseudonym "Gottlieb Biedermaier," used by the distinguished doctor Adolf Kussmaul (1822-1902) and the lawyer Ludwig Eichrodt (1827-1892) in poems, printed in the Munich periodical *Fliegende Blätter*, that parodied the blandness and sentimentality of contemporary poetry. The name combined the titles of two poems – "Biedermanns Abendgemütlichkeit" (Biedermann's Evening Comfort) and "Bummelmaiers Klage" (Bummelmaier's Complaint) – that had been published in 1848 in the same magazine. As a label for the epoch, the term has been used since around 1900. The following extract from the former poem will illustrate the genre.

Vor meiner Haustür steht 'ne Linde In ihrem Schatten sitz ich gern Ich dampf' mein Pfeiflein in die Winde Und lob' durch Nichtstun Gott, den Herrn.	A lime-tree stands by my front door My favourite place is in its shade - And there I smoke my pipe and praise My God in peaceful quiet repose.
Die Bienen summen froh und friedlich und saugen Blütenhonig ein, Und alles ist so urgemütlich, Dass ich vor innrer Rührung wein'. ….. So gäb' es nicht so viele Krakehler In dieser schönen Gotteswelt, Die Sonne schien' nicht auf die Skandäler, Und doch wär' alles wohlbestellt. Amen.	The buzzing bees fly round and round And suck the blossoms for their honey; All is so cosy, nice and calm I cry warm tears for inner joy. ….. If fewer men would loud complain In this God-given world so fine, Far fewer scandals we would see And all would then well-ordered be. Amen.

Christmas Pudding 2010 attempts, among other things, to rescue some authors from this period from undeserved obscurity – among others: Thomas Hood, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Kenneth Stephen, Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, Arthur Hugh Clough, Matthew Arnold as well as the famous *Struwwelpeter*.

T T T T

Joan – In Memoriam

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.
…….

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm!

T T T T

One thing leads to another

One of wonders of the Internet is how one thing leads to another. In downloading the text of the Hymn above, I discovered, first, that it was not a self-standing hymn, but an extract from a much longer poem *The Brewing of the Soma* by the American Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892). Soma (Sanskrit) or Haoma (Avestan) was the ritual drink of the early Indo-Iranians, who inhabited Central Asia. This made me prick up my ears because of my theory that the ancestors of the present inhabitants of the Pamirs were indeed these same Soma-drinking Scythians known as *Haoma-Varga*.

Odd that a popular and beautiful hymn should have had its origin in a poem that begins by describing "substance abuse."

T T T T

One thing leads to another (bis)

In the United Kingdom, the hymn "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" is usually sung to the lovely tune *Repton* by C. Hubert H. Parry. In the USA, the prevalent (vastly inferior![1]) tune is *Rest* by Frederick Charles Maker. Parry (1848-1918), is probably best known for his setting of William Blake's poem *Jerusalem*:

And did those feet in ancient time,
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold:
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

[1] See http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/d/e/dearlord.htm.

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant Land.

Parry's tune, however, had already been used by him for an aria in his opera *Judith*, almost never performed today. In searching for a recording of it – apparently none exist – I came across two wonderful *cd*s entitled *The Opera Rara Collection.*

I am not a lover of this musical medium – I prefer opera singers[2] to opera – but imagine my pleasure at finding on one of the *cd*s the following lyrics of a comic opera "Christopher Columbus," a pastiche based on arias from twenty-two operettas by Jacques Offenbach.

If this is the Indies, what I want to know
Is why it looks as though we're due for snow.
In the Indies I was told
Sunshine streams like liquid gold.
But instead it's freezing cold.
This doesn't look very much like the Indies
It should be torridly horridly hot
Because the Indies is where the trade wind is –
It's near the Indies is where we are not.

I now understand Sir Thomas Beecham, who quipped (see *CP 2009*): "I prefer Offenbach to Bach often."

Another feature of 19th century operas is the eclecticism of their subject-matter. Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848), for example, found romance not only on Lammermoor but in other unlikely environments, *viz*. *Emilia di Liverpool*, *Gianni da Calais*, *Enrico di Borgogna*, *Gemma di Vergy*, *Linda di Chamounix* – operas that are almost never performed today.

T T T T

To be or not to be

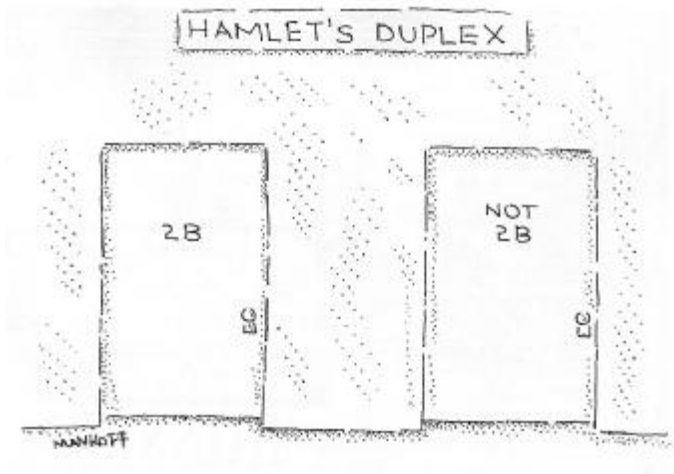
To be, or not to be – that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep –
No more – and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep –
To sleep – perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

[2] Especially young sopranos – Happy Christmas Elena!

Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprise of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.

William Shakespeare (1564-1613) – Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1

This remains – even though we think we know it by heart – one of Shakespeare's best passages and merits re-reading time and time again.



New Yorker, 3 August 2009

T T T T

Pass the Port

According to the *NZZ* of 11 December 2009, Silvio Berlusconi concluded a speech to the European People's Party in Bonn with the following joke:

> Obama, Berlusconi, the Pope and a Papal assistant are travelling on a plane to an international conference. The pilot announces that both engines are on fire and he

is bailing out – there are only three parachutes on board.

The group immediately agrees that Obama is the most important among them. They give him a parachute and he jumps out.

Berlusconi then says: "If Obama is the most important, I'm the most intelligent man in Europe and I'm taking the next parachute." He jumps out.

The pope smiles to his assistant and says: "I'm an old man – you take the last parachute."

The assistant replies: "Actually, there are two parachutes left – the most intelligent man in Europe took my rucksack."

Berlusconi is Europe's bad joke – it's a relief to laugh about him: most of the time he makes me want to cry.

T T T T

C.E. Laine

C.E. Laine is the *nom de plume* of Shae Leighland, an American poet born in 1968. She lives in the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia.

Daisy Wishes
I won't write poems
about the shades
of purple that stain me

(or tell of aubergine
fading to a yellow
that never quite
dissipates)

because words
smack louder
than the closed fist.

I will not bring flowers
to the grave of my dreams,
or indulge often in tears
that taste more like regret
than the salt of the sea.

Instead, I will pull my wishes,
one by one, like flower petals

(he loves me, he loves me not)

and let the summer breeze carry them away.

Confessions to the Envious Man
Kneeling, genuflecting
in a quiet room that smells
of wood and lemongrass oil,

she asks The Father,

she asks The Son,
she asks The Holy Spirit,

for terms of penance.
For inner peace.
For the second chance
she'll not waste

this time.

Hushed words fall from lips
stained with purpose;
words dipped in
water blessed

by the man
dressed in black.

His stiff white collar hides
the lust in his head,
as he chants Latin
behind a polished altar.

With an envious heart,
he tells her how many
"Hail Mary's" to say.

"Of course, my confessions probably aren't nearly as interesting as yours."
(*New Yorker* 12 April 2010)

T T T T

Because All Men Are Brothers

I retrieved some old vinyl records of Peter, Paul and Mary from a local second-hand shop and found a song written by Tom Glazer to the tune of the Chorale *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* from Bach's Matthew Passion. Tom Glazer was part of

the folk music scene in New York in the 1940s, and with Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and others helped prepare for the commercially successful folk revival of the 1960s. Modestly, in the credits, Glazer recognised Bach as the composer of the original score – not so Paul Simon, who also recorded a song based on the same Chorale: you will look in vain for Bach's name on Simon's 1982 record or the sheet music of *American Tune*. Here is Glazer's song and an extract from Simon's – try singing it, I think the crossover is successful:

Because All Men Are Brothers
Because all men are brothers wherever men may be
One Union shall unite us forever proud and free
No tyrant shall defeat us, no nation strike us down
All men who toil shall greet us the whole wide world around.

My brothers are all others forever hand in hand
Where chimes the bell of freedom there is my native land
My brother's fears are my fears yellow white or brown
My brother's tears are my tears the whole wide world around.

Let every voice be thunder, let every heart beat strong
Until all tyrants perish our work shall not be done
Let not our memories fail us the lost year shall be found
Let slavery's chains be broken the whole wide world around.

American Tune
Many's the time I've been mistaken and many times confused
Yes, and I've often felt forsaken and certainly misused
Oh, but I'm all right, I'm all right, I'm just weary to my bones
Still, you don't expect to be bright and bon vivant
So far away from home, so far away from home

And I don't know a soul who's not been battered
I don't have a friend who feels at ease
I don't know a dream that's not been shattered
or driven to its knees
but it's all right, it's all right
for we lived so well so long
Still, when I think of the
road we're traveling on
I wonder what's gone wrong
I can't help it, I wonder what's gone wrong.[3]
…….

Any reservations I might have had about plagiarism in general and in music in particular were dispelled by the information that Bach himself had used somebody else's tune: the original was written for a collection of ballads by Hans Leo Hassler (1564–1612), *Mein Gmüt ist mir verwirret*. The story of the Bach Chorale is even

[3] You can hear Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel singing the song on http://www.actionext.com/names_s/simon_and_garfunkel_lyrics/american_tune.html

more complex: a Latin poem attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) contains a segment beginning "Salve caput cruentatum" that was translated into German by Paul Gerhardt in the early seventeenth century and taken by Bach as the text for his Chorale.

Mein Gmüt ist mir verwirret	**My mind is in confusion**
Mein Gmüt ist mir verwirret, das macht ein Jungfrau zart; Bin ganz und gar verwirret, mein Herz das kränkt sich hart. Hab Tag und Nacht kein Ruh, führ allzeit große Klag, tu stets seufzen und weinen, In Trauren schier verzag.	My mind is in confusion Due to a virgin sweet; I lack all power of reason, My heart knows only pain. Night and day I find no rest, I cry and mourn and weep, I sigh in loud lamenting, Am overcome with grief.
Ach, daß sie mich tät fragen, was doch die Ursach sei, warum führ ich solch Klagen und ich ihr's sagen frei, daß sie allein die ist, die mich so sehr verwundt: Könnt ich ihr Herz erweichen, würd ich bald wieder gsund.	If she would only ask me The cause of all my pain And why I am complaining, I would tell her straight That she alone the cause is Of all my suffering. If I could her heart soften I soon would be in health.
Reichlich ist sie gezieret mit schön'n Tugend ohn' Ziel; höflich wie sich gebühret, ihres Gleichen ist nicht viel. Für andern Jungfraun zart führt sie allzeit den Preis; wann ichs anschau, vermeine ich sei im Paradeis.	Her virtues they are many, Her purity without spot, Full courteous and gentle, There's none like her to find. Among the maidens only She can bear the crown; When I behold her beauty I am in Paradise.

T T T T

Betonköpfe

The Swiss customs were the butt of not a little wry humour and the subject of much self-inflicted ridicule in 2010 – less amusing for their victim, however.

On 24 April, a young violinist, Patricia Kopatchinskaya (born in Moldova), returned to her home in Bern with a violin made in 1741 by Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù (1698-1744), that had recently been loaned to her by the Austrian National Bank (ANB).[4] Violins by this member of the Guarneri family are considered by some players to be superior to those of Stradivari.

On arrival at Zurich airport, she was faced with: confiscation of the violin, a request for a guarantee of €450,000 (7.6% of the estimated value of the

[4] The ANB has a collection of 36 very valuable instruments that it loans to young talents; to maintain the playing qualities (and value) of old instruments they must be played regularly.

instrument) and a fine of CHF 10,000 for failure to declare the violin by filling in a form that it was for temporary use in the exercise of her profession – despite having produced a certificate proving the loan from the ANB.

Traumatised by the rough treatment received at the hands of a punctilious and unimaginative customs officer (*Betonkopf* in German, if you ever need to insult a German-speaking Swiss customs officer), Kopatchinskaya made a formal renunciation of the violin, which then found its way back to the vaults of the ANB in Vienna. The fine remained, however. The Customs service pointed out unconvincingly that everything would have been OK if Kopatchinskaya had not declared Bern as her primary residence (she also has an apartment in Vienna).

The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* reported the incident *in extenso* and used harsh words about the Swiss Customs, mentioning a similar incident just a month earlier. The Russian violinist Sergei Krylov was travelling from his home in Cremona to Bern by car for a concert with the Bern Symphony Orchestra and was stopped at the border in Chiasso and requested to pay a guarantee of half a million Swiss Francs for the importation of his Stradivarius (which would seem to contradict the assertion that all would have been well for Kopatchinskaya if she had lived abroad). After a fruitless argument, Krylov drove the 300km back home and returned later with a violin made by his father, Alexander Krylov, which passed customs without incident.

Could this be part of a right-wing campaign to close the borders not only to Polish plumbers but also Eastern European musicians – or, even more sinister, to mollify the Swiss violin-makers' lobby?

The *NZZ* pointed out, however, that the Swiss are not the only *Betonköpfe*:

> The Polish pianist Krystian Zimermann travelled around the world with his Steinway piano. Shortly after 9/11, the piano was blocked in US Customs because an officer considered that it had an odd smell. In the exercise of their official duties under the *Patriot Act*, or similar, the security officers, in their selfless 24/7 watch over the safety of the motherland, took the piano apart in search of explosives.
>
> The German composer and conductor, Peter Ruzicka, was flying from Hamburg to give a concert in Munich with his valuable baton in his hand luggage. Perhaps because of his foreign-sounding name, or because of the potential danger to airline passengers of this offensive weapon, a zealous security officer took it away for testing, where it was ground to powder.
>
> Mathias Gavrilov, Director of the Bern Symphony Orchestra, travelled frequently as a child to concerts given by his father, the violinist Sashko Gavrilov, on his Stradivarius, and was familiar with the chicanery of Customs officers. After Mathias had begun a musical career himself as a clarinettist, he was stopped one day in customs at Hanover airport and required to provide proof that his instrument belonged to him and was not being imported for commercial purposes. In the absence of documentary proof, Mathias proceeded to play the solo part of Mozart's concerto for the assembled Customs officers.

T T T T

Miscellaneous

James Kenneth Stephen *(1859-1892)* [5] *- To R.K.*

Will there never come a season
Which shall rid us from the curse
Of a prose which knows no reason
And an unmelodious verse:
When the world shall cease to wonder
At the genius of an Ass,
And a boy's eccentric blunder
Shall not bring success to pass:
When mankind shall be delivered
From the clash of magazines,
And the inkstand shall be shivered
Into countless smithereens:
When there stands a muzzled stripling,
Mute, beside a muzzled bore:
When the Rudyards cease from Kipling
And the Haggards Ride no more.

Francis Jammes *(1868-1938)* [6] *- Prière pour aller au paradis avec les ânes*

Lorsqu'il faudra aller vers vous, ô mon Dieu, faites
que ce soit par un jour où la campagne en fête
poudroiera. Je désire, ainsi que je fis ici-bas,
choisir un chemin pour aller, comme il me plaira,
au Paradis, où sont en plein jour les étoiles.
Je prendrai mon bâton et sur la grande route
J'irai, et je dirai aux ânes, mes amis :
Je suis Francis Jammes et je vais au Paradis,
car il n'y a pas d'enfer au pays du Bon Dieu.
Je leur dirai : "Venez, doux amis du ciel bleu,
pauvres bêtes chéries qui, d'un brusque mouvement d'oreille,
chassez les mouches plates, les coups et les abeilles."
Que je Vous apparaisse au milieu de ces bêtes
que j'aime tant parce qu'elles baissent la tête
doucement, et s'arrêtent en joignant leurs petits pieds
d'une façon bien douce et qui vous fait pitié.
J'arriverai suivi de leurs milliers d'oreilles,
suivi de ceux qui portent au flanc des corbeilles,
de ceux traînant des voitures de saltimbanques
ou des voitures de plumeaux et de fer-blanc,
de ceux qui ont au dos des bidons bossués,
des ânesses pleines comme des outres, aux pas cassés,

[5] J.K. Stephen was tutor to Prince Albert, son of the future King Edward VII.

[6] Francis Jammes spent most of his life in his native region of Béarn and the Basque Country and his poems frequently relate to the simple pleasures of country life. After his conversion to Catholicism, his later poetry included a strong religious element.

de ceux à qui l'on met de petits pantalons
à cause des plaies bleues et suintantes que font
les mouches entêtées qui s'y groupent en ronds.
Mon Dieu, faites qu'avec ces ânes je Vous vienne.
Faites que, dans la paix, des anges nous conduisent
vers des ruisseaux touffus où tremblent des cerises
lisses comme la chair qui rit des jeunes filles,
et faites que, penché dans ce séjour des âmes,
sur vos divines eaux, je sois pareil aux ânes
qui mireront leur humble et douce pauvreté
à la limpidité de l'amour éternel.

Translation by Richard Wilbur
When I must come to you, O my God, I pray
It be some dusty-roaded holiday,
And even as in my travels here below,
I beg to choose by what road I shall go
To Paradise, where the clear stars shine by day.
I'll take my walking-stick and go my way,
And to my friends the donkeys I shall say,
"I am Francis Jammes, and I'm going to Paradise,
For there is no hell in the land of the loving God."
And I'll say to them: "Come, sweet friends of the blue skies,
Poor creatures who with a flap of the ears or a nod
Of the head shake off the buffets, the bees, the flies ..."
Let me come with these donkeys, Lord, into your land,
These beasts who bow their heads so gently, and stand
With their small feet joined together in a fashion
Utterly gentle, asking your compassion.
I shall arrive, followed by their thousands of ears,
Followed by those with baskets at their flanks,
By those who lug the carts of mountebanks
Or loads of feather-dusters and kitchen-wares,
By those with humps of battered water-cans,
By bottle-shaped she-asses who halt and stumble,
By those tricked out in little pantaloons
To cover their wet, blue galls where flies assemble
In whirling swarms, making a drunken hum.
Dear God, let it be with these donkeys that I come,
And let it be that angels lead us in peace
To leafy streams where cherries tremble in air,
Sleek as the laughing flesh of girls; and there
In that haven of souls let it be that, leaning above
Your divine waters, I shall resemble these donkeys,
Whose humble and sweet poverty will appear
Clear in the clearness of your eternal love.

Peter Pindar[7] - *A King of France and the Fair Lady*
A king of France upon a day,
With a fair lady of his court,
Was pleased at battledore to play
A very fashionable sport,

Into the bosom of this fair court dame,
Whose whiteness did the snow's pure whiteness shame,
King Louis by odd mischance did knock
The shuttlecock,
Thrice happy rogue, upon the town of doves,
To nestle with the pretty little loves!
"Now, sire, pray take it out" – quoth she,
With an arch smile, – But what did he?
What? what to charming modesty belongs!
Obedient to her soft command,
He raised it – but not with his hand!
No, marvelling reader, but the chimney tongs,

What a chaste thought in this good king!
How clever!
When shall we hear again of such a thing?
Lord! never,
Nor, were our princes to be prayed
To such an act by some fair maid,
I'll bet my life not one would mind it:
But handy, without more ado,
The youths would search the bosom through,
Although it took a day to find it!

Elinor Wylie (*1885-1928*) - *Self-portrait*
A lens of crystal whose transparence calms
Queer stars to clarity, and disentangles
Fox-fires to form austere refracted angles;
A texture polished on the horny palms
Of vast equivocal creatures, beast or human;
A flint, a substance finer-grained than snow,
Graved with the Graces in intaglio
To set sarcastic sigil on the woman.
This for the mind, and for the little rest
A hollow scooped to blackness in the breast.
The simulacrum of a cloud, a feather:
Instead of stone, instead of sculptured strength,
This soul, this vanity, blown hither and thither
By trivial breath, over the whole world's length.

[7] "Peter Pindar" was the *nom de plume* of John Wolcot (1738-1819), an English satirist – another poet almost forgotten today.

Frederick Goddard Tuckerman (*1821-1873*) - *Sonnet VII*

Dank fens of cedar, hemlock branches gray
With trees and trail of mosses, wringing-wet,
Beds of the black pitchpine in dead leaves set
Whose wasted red has wasted to white away,
Remnants of rain and droppings of decay,
Why hold ye so my heart, nor dimly let
Through your deep leaves the light of yesterday,
The faded glimmer of a sunshine set?
Is it that in your darkness, shut from strife,
The bread of tears becomes the bread of life?
Far from the roar of day, beneath your boughs
Fresh griefs beat tranquilly, and loves and vows
Grow green in your gray shadows, dearer far
Even than all lovely lights and roses are?

Marina Tsvetaeva *(1892-1941)*

Моим стихам, написанным так рано, Что и не знала я, что я — поэт, Сорвавшимся, как брызги из фонтана, Как искры из ракет,	To my poems, written so early, Before I even knew I was … a poet, Spread wide, like water from a fountain, Like sparks from a rocket,
Ворвавшимся, как маленькие черти, В святилище, где сон и фимиам, Моим стихам о юности и смерти, — Нечитанным стихам! —	We burst like little devils into a holy place with its visions and incense, To these, my poems about youth and death, – This unread verse! –
Разбросанным в пыли по магазинам (Где их никто не брал и не берет!), Моим стихам, как драгоценным винам, Настанет свой черед. *I Июль 1933*	Scattered in the dusty shops (unseen, untouched), These are my poems – like a precious wine, Their time will come. *July 1933*

Lawrence Raab *(*1946)*

The Poem that can't be written
is different from the poem
that is not written, or the many

that are never finished – those boats
lost in the fog, adrift

in the windless latitudes,
the charts useless, the water gone.

In the poem that cannot
be written there is no danger,

no ponderous cargo of meaning,
no meaning at all. And this

is its splendor, this is how
it becomes an emblem,

not of failure or loss,
but of the impossible.

So the wind rises. The tattered sails
billow, and the air grows sweeter.

A green island appears.
Everyone is saved.

X.J. Kennedy *(*1929) - Little Elegy (for a child who skipped rope)*
Here lies resting, out of breath,
Out of turns, Elizabeth
Whose quicksilver toes not quite
Cleared the whirring edge of night.

Earth whose circles round us skim
Till they catch the lightest limb,
Shelter now Elizabeth
And for her sake trip up Death.

T T T T

It was on Fox News – It must be true…..

Earlier this year Fox News and other right-wing U.S. media claimed that the logo of the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit held in Washington is an "Islamic crest":

In his April 14 *New York Post* column, Michael Goodwin wrote that the logo "reminded" him of "a crescent moon," the "kind of crescent moon you see on the flags of Muslim countries." He added: "Indeed, the crescent, often with a single or multiple stars, is the main symbol of Islam. So now there is something like it at an official presidential event, prominently displayed in photographs being beamed around the world." While Goodwin claimed that he was "not suggesting President Obama is a secret Muslim," he wrote: "But I am certain the crescent-like design of the logo is not a coincidence, especially at an event where Iran's nuclear ambition and al Qaeda's search for a bomb are prime topics."

Look up the *Comedy Central* website to find the explanation obtained from the White House: "…. the inspiration for the logo is actually the Rutherford-Bohr Model of the atom that we all learned about in high school."

See http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-april-14-2010/a-farewell-to-arms

T T T T

Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861)

Arthur Hugh Clough's poetical output was small but he is recognised as one of the most forward-looking English poets of the 19th century, in part due to a sexual frankness that shocked his contemporaries (particularly in his unfinished poem *Dipsychus*). He often went against the popular religious and social ideals of his day, and his verse is said to have the melancholy and the perplexity of an age of transition. His sister Anne was a prominent suffragette who worked closely with her cousin Florence Nightingale and became principal of Newnham College, Cambridge. Clough was a close friend of Matthew Arnold.

The Latest Decalogue

Thou shalt have one God only; who
Would be at the expense of two?
No graven images may be
Worshipped, except the currency.
Swear not at all; for, for thy curse,
Thine enemy is none the worse.
At church on Sunday to attend
Will serve to keep the world thy friend.
Honour thy parents; that is, all
From whom advancement may befall.
Thou shalt not kill; but need'st not strive
Officiously to keep alive.
Do not adultery commit;
Advantage rarely comes of it.
Thou shalt not steal: an empty feat,
When it's so lucrative to cheat.
Bear not false witness; let the lie
Have time on its own wings to fly.
Thou shalt not covet, but tradition
Approves all forms of competition.

With Whom is no Variableness, Neither Shadow of Turning [8]

It fortifies my soul to know
That though I perish, truth is so;
That wheresoe'er I stray and range,
Whate'er I do, Thou dost not change.
I steadier step when I recall
That, if I slip, Thou dost not fall.

Say not the struggle naught availeth,
    The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
    And as things have been, things remain.

[8] Clough did not actually give a title to this poem - it was added by his wife.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
    It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
    And, but for you, possess the field.

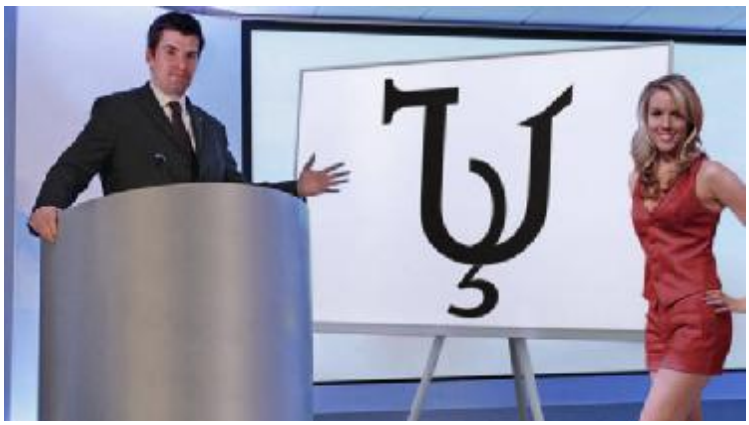
For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
    Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back through creeks and inlets making
    Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
    When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
    But westward, look, the land is bright.

T T T T

Alphabet Updated With 15 Exciting New Replacement Letters

The Onion, 10 December, 2009[9]: Dynamic, sleek, and even sexy is how a panel of typographic and marketing experts described the 15 new replacement letters they unveiled Monday in an effort to reinvigorate interest in the faltering English alphabet.



"Forget everything you thought you knew about reading and writing," announced David Greenberg, 34, lead designer of the exciting ABC makeover. "These new letters are hip, fresh, and sure to forever change the way English speakers everywhere form their words."

"Move over 'M' and 'P,'" Greenberg continued. "Because this ain't your grandfather's alphabet."

According to Greenberg, the exciting new set of consonants and vowels will be rolled out over the next few months, and should find its way into most newspapers, magazines, and popular works of fiction by early spring.

Among the updated letter designs that have thus far been released to the public are the  , which designers described as an edgy reimagining of the old, humdrum "T," as well as the innovative new  , which will replace the "U" effective immediately.

In addition to giving the alphabet a "much-needed face-lift," Greenberg and his

[9] http://www.theonion.com/content/news/alphabet_updated_with_15_exciting

team said they'd be drastically changing the order of most letters in an effort to better reflect modern tastes.

"There's a reason Americans would rather sit down in front of their television sets than pick up a book or commit their innermost thoughts to paper," said Maartin Ulriksen, who cited architect Frank Gehry and early '80s New Wave music as some of his biggest influences in redesigning the alphabet. "I would, too, if I had to stare at the same boring "C" all day long, or, God forbid, was forced to come across that flat and predictable "H" every time I opened up a copy of *Us Weekly*."

The result of nearly a year of focus-group testing, the new letters are reportedly more than just an aesthetic update. Studies found that more than 87 percent of Americans rarely ever use the letter "X" in their daily lives, a discovery that led to a complete reworking of the neglected consonant that has transformed it from unpopular alphabet pariah to something "people will be dying to write down."

By contrast, the vowel "E" was found to be by far the most used letter in the alphabet, giving designers the idea to cash in on its popularity by adding a third horizontal line to the less desirable "F."

Though black has long been the dominant color of choice for alphabet letters and fonts, designers said they were also experimenting with a number of different hues of indigo.

"There's something in here for everyone: crowd-pleasers, tried and true classics, hidden gems," said marketing guru Jack Gonson, who will work with top advertisers, web masters, highway departments, and other major purveyors of alphabetic content to popularize the new letters. "Functionality can always be fixed later. This is about style, about energy, about *sizzle* – something the alphabet hasn't had in centuries."

A number of school districts across the country have already embraced the redesigned alphabet, as new curricula are developed for students to learn their

"*ABC*", and teachers are showing confused first-graders how to spell their new names.

A series of PSAs for alphabet users of all ages is also scheduled to air this month, with such titles as "Coming Soon To A Paperback Near You" and "The New Alphabet: It Puts The B In F.B.n!"

So far, reaction to the new replacement has been positive.

"I've never rea[illegible] much a [illegible] en [illegible] i[illegible]n [illegible] w[illegible]rd an[illegible] [illegible]ff like [illegible] ha[illegible], [illegible] [illegible] ell y[illegible] [illegible] he [illegible] r[illegible] h," 10th-gra[illegible]er Patrick Reyno[illegible] [illegible]ai[illegible]. "B[illegible] [illegible] hi[illegible] i[illegible] f[illegible]n. I bare[illegible]y even feel like I'm wri[illegible] ing."

T T T T

Struwwelpeter

Der Struwwelpeter is one of the best-known German children's books. Written by Heinrich Hoffmann and first published in 1845, the book comprises ten illustrated and rhymed stories, each demonstrating to the reader the disastrous consequences of misbehaviour. Hoffmann, a German psychiatrist, supposedly wanted to buy a picture book for his son for Christmas in 1844 but, unimpressed by what he found in the bookshops, he bought a notebook instead and drafted his own stories and pictures.

The original title was *Lustige Geschichten und drollige Bilder mit 15 schön kolorierten Tafeln für Kinder von 3–6 Jahren* (Funny Stories and Whimsical Pictures with 15 Beautifully Coloured Panels for Children Aged 3 to 6) and it was not until the third edition in 1858 that the title *Struwwelpeter* was used.

Struwwelpeter has been translated into several languages, including a version by Mark Twain, who called it *Slovenly Peter*.[10]

Most modern translations diverge substantially from the original text

[10] See http://www.fathersforlife.org/hist/der_struwwelpeter.htm). A more recent translation can be found on http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12116/12116-h/12116-h.htm.

by Heinrich Hoffmann, apparently to make it more politically correct. As one commentator remarks: “Although some results of this politically-correct redaction are hilarious, such as to make Mamma “crackle so, and spit, and flame”, that is Orwellian re-writing of history; and the Christchild isn’t the only thing that the Project Gutenberg translation and various other modern translations managed to edit out. Amongst many other things, the politically-correct translations managed to replace parents with “mother and nurse” or “Mamma and Nursey”, and did a good job of meticulously replacing most references to “father” in the German original with “mother” or “Mamma” in the English text.”

Here are two of Mark Twain’s translations.

The Tale of Fussy-Philip (Der Zappel-Philipp)

“Philip, if ’twon’t make you ill,
Try to sit a minute still.”
So, in earnest tone and rough,
Spake the father to his tough,
While the mother’s troubled glance
Prophesied a present dance
When these two should get a start.
And so it made her sick at heart
To see the boy hadn’t heard
His restive father’s warning word.
He jiggered,
And sniggered,
And joggled,
And boggled,
On his chair and squirmed galore:
“Philip this doth irk me sore!”

See, ye darling little chaps,
Number Two of Phil’s mishaps:
Observe, the picture shows the fact;
See! he tilts his chair aback —
See! He’s going – going – gone!
Grabs the cloth and what’s thereon,
Sprawls heels upward on the floor.
Dishes follow, crash and roar,
Down they clash and plash and slash,
Down come soup and cheese and hash,
And under them the boy they mash!
Father stares in consternation,
Can’t size up the situation,
While the mother’s troubled glance
Notes fulfilled the promised place.

Philip’s buried, hide and hair,
Naked stands the table there!

All the fam'ly had for dinner
Decks the grave of that young sinner -
Soup and sausage, wholesome bread,
Gone to hide that foolish head.
Soup-tureen is split in two —
What shall they do, what shall they do!
Frantic view they this defeat —
They've not a single bite to eat.

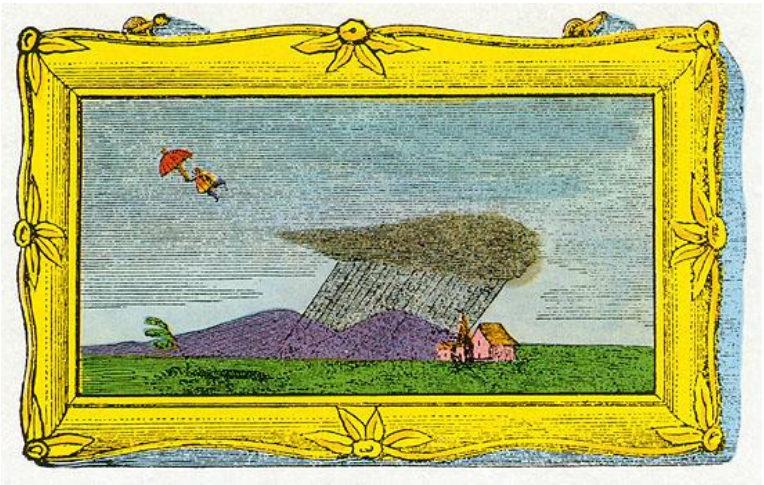
The Story of Flying Robert (Der fliegende Robert)

When the rain comes down a-dash,
When the storms the meadows lash,
Boys and girls stay snug at home
Preferring to let others roam;
But Robert thinks, "Ah, me,
It's just the time outside to be!"
and so, umbrella'd safe and sound,
Takes to the fields and slops around.

My! how shrieks the windy storm,
and how the big tree bows its form!
Hoho! the 'brella's caught the breeze,

And Robert sails above the trees!
Above the houses, church and steeple,
and out of sight of all the people!
Above the clouds he spins at last,
His hat is gone, and he's aghast!

And so he sails and sails and sails,
Through banks of murky clouds, and wails,
And weeps and mourns, poor draggled rat,
Because he can't o'ertake his hat.
Oh, where on high can that hat be?
When you find out, pray come tell me.



T T T T

Pass the Port Again

The religious needs of the inhabitants of a small English town were served by a Protestant vicar and a Catholic priest, who were good friends. One day they met in the main street and the priest remarked that his friend was not riding his bicycle as he normally did. "No," replied the vicar, "Someone stole it."

"That is bad news," said the priest. "I tell you what we'll do: next Sunday we'll deliver a sermon on the Ten Commandments and when we get to the eighth, 'Thou shalt not steal,' we'll make a long pause and look round the congregation – I'm sure it will stir the thief's conscience to bring your bicycle back."

The following Monday they met again in the street and the vicar was riding his bicycle. "I see our little plan worked," said the priest.

"Well, not really," said the vicar. "When I got to the seventh Commandment, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' I remembered where I'd left my bicycle."

T T T T

The Whisperers

The Whisperers – Private Life in Stalin's Russia by Orlando Figes (Penguin 2008) is a very moving book.[11] I have read many histories of the Soviet period, especially the years of the Great Terror, but this is without doubt one of the best, in the same league, if rather different in approach from Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. Whereas Solzhenitsyn's work is a comprehensive memoir of the *Gulag* inmates themselves, *The Whisperers* looks at the period essentially from the viewpoint of the families of the victims.

> Extraordinary even by the standards of the Stalinist regime, the Great Terror was not a routine wave of mass arrests, such as those that swept across the country throughout Stalin's reign, but a calculated policy of mass murder. No longer satisfied with imprisoning his real or imagined 'political enemies', Stalin now ordered the police to take people out of the prisons and labour camps and murder them. In the two years of 1937 and 1938, according to incomplete statistics, a staggering total of at least 681,692 people, and probably far more, were shot for 'crimes against the state' (91 per cent of all death sentences for political crimes between 1921 and 1940, if NKVD figures are to be believed). The population of the Gulag labour camps and colonies grew in these same years from 1,196,369 to 1,881,570 people (a figure which excludes at least 140,000 deaths within the camps themselves and an unknown number of deaths during transport to the camps). Other periods of Soviet history had also seen mass arrests of 'enemies', but never had so many of the victims been killed. More than half the people arrested during the Great Terror were later shot, compared to less than 10 per cent of arrests in 1930, the second highest peak of executions in the Stalin period, when 10,201 death sentences were carried out. During the 'anti-kulak operation' of 1929-32, the number of arrests was also very high (586,904), but of these victims only 6 per cent (35,689 people) were subsequently shot…..(p. 234)

[11] With thanks to Andreas Gembler.

> The terror in the leadership thus spread down through the Party ranks, Soviet institutions and society. According to one estimate, 116,885 Party members were executed or imprisoned in 1937-8. The more senior a Party member was, the more likely he was to be arrested, for juniors in the ranks were always ready to denounce their superiors in order to replace them in their posts. Of the 139 Central Committee members elected at the Seventeenth Party Congress in 1934, 102 were arrested and shot, and five more killed themselves in 1937-8; in addition, 56 per cent of the congress delegates were imprisoned in these years. The decimation of the Red Army was even more complete: of the 767 members of the high command (brigade commanders and above), 412 were executed, 19 died in prison, 3 committed suicide, and 59 remained in jail. (p. 238)

The devastation in Party ranks gave rise to some black humour:

> The NKVD bangs on the door of an apartment in the middle of the night. 'The NKVD, open up!' The man is relieved: 'No, no,' he tells them, 'you've got the wrong apartment – the Communists live upstairs.

The book also makes clear the extraordinary cost to Russia of the second World War.

> The generation of 1941 fought with selfless dedication and heroic bravery, from the first day of the war. It bore the greatest human cost. Only 3 per cent of the male cohort of soldiers born in 1923 survived until 1945. Older men fought more cautiously – and they were the ones who tended to survive….. (p. 416)

> According to the most reliable estimates, 26 million Soviet citizens lost their lives (two-thirds of them civilians); 18 million soldiers were wounded (though far less were recognized as such by the Soviet authorities); and 4 million disappeared between 1941 and 1945. The demographic consequences of the war were catastrophic. Three-quarters of the people killed were men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five. …(p. 456)

> The material devastation was unparalleled: 70,000 villages, 1,700 towns, 32,000 factories and 40,000 miles of railway track were destroyed. In areas occupied by the Germans half the housing stock was damaged or destroyed. In Moscow, which was not the worst affected, 90 per cent of the city's buildings had no heating, and 48 per cent no running water or sewage systems, in 1945. In all, 20 million people were left homeless by the war. The Soviet authorities were very slow to respond to the urban housing crisis, which was exacerbated by the massive in-migration of people from the countryside as rural living standards steadily declined. As late as the 1950s, there were still millions of people living in the ruins of buildings, in basements, sheds or dug-outs in the ground. (p. 457)

In parallel to the story of the sufferings of Soviet families, *The Whisperers* describes the apparently charmed life of the author Konstantin Simonov (1915-1979), one of Stalin's favourites. Although his mother was a princess, Simonov proved his communist credentials at an early age and, before discovering his writing talent, worked as a machinist. His literary reputation was built on his war poetry and the novel *The Living and the Dead* published in 1956. His poem *Wait for me* is still one of the best-known poems in Russia today.

В.С. (1941)	**V.S. (Valentina Serova)**
Жди меня, и я вернусь. Только очень жди, Жди, когда наводят грусть Желтые дожди, Жди, когда снега метут, Жди, когда жара, Жди, когда других не ждут, Позабыв вчера. Жди, когда из дальних мест Писем не придет, Жди, когда уж надоест Всем, кто вместе ждет.	Wait for me and I'll return. Just wait with all your strength, Wait, when the yellow rains Make you sad, Wait when the snows are whirling, Wait in the heat, Wait when others don't, Forgetting yesterday. Wait, when from far away Letters don't arrive, Wait, when those with whom you wait Grow bored with waiting.
Жди меня, и я вернусь, Не желай добра Всем, кто знает наизусть, Что забыть пора. Пусть поверят сын и мать В то, что нет меня, Пусть друзья устанут ждать, Сядут у огня, Выпьют горькое вино На помин души... Жди. И с ними заодно Выпить не спеши.	Wait for me, and I'll return! Do not wish those well Who claim to know There is a season for forgetting. Let mother and son believe I am no more, Let friends grow tired of waiting And sit beside the fire To drink the bitter cup For souls forgotten…. Wait – don't rush to raise Your glass with them.
Жди меня, и я вернусь, Всем смертям назло. Кто не ждал меня, тот пусть Скажет: - Повезло. Не понять, не ждавшим им, Как среди огня Ожиданием своим Ты спасла меня. Как я выжил, будем знать Только мы с тобой,- Просто ты умела ждать, Как никто другой.	Wait for me and I'll return, Avoiding death itself. Those who will not wait for me Will say: it's over. They, impatient, cannot understand How by waiting for me In the fiery heat, You were my saviour. Only you and I will know How I survived …. Just this - you waited, As no other could.

Editor-in-chief of *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (1950-1953), secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers (1946-1950, 1967-1969), a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (1952-1956), editor-in-chief of the journal *Novyi mir* from 1954-1958 and a deputy to the Supreme Soviet, Simonov's pact with the Stalin regime was a Faustian one. In these various official capacities, more interested in protecting his privileges and avoiding suspicion, he rarely defended friends and acquaintances from persecution and on some occasions actively denounced them.

It was the elevation of duty to a supreme virtue that determined Simonov's political obedience: he confused public virtue with submission to the Party line. He was in awe of Stalin. His post-war notebooks are filled with synopses of Stalin's

works, quotations from his speeches and lists of the leader's phrases and ideas which he set out to learn in order to become more politically literate. Simonov was infatuated with Stalin's power. He felt his presence, felt Stalin watching over him, in virtually everything he did. Stalin was his patron and protector, his teacher and his guide, his critic and confessor, and at times perhaps, in his imagination, his jailer, torturer and executioner.

When Stalin died, Simonov lost his sense of direction:

> The editor can ask to cut away
> The name of Stalin from my verse,
> But he cannot help me
> With the Stalin who is left within my soul.

Others too were concerned that the return of many from the camps would lead to finger-pointing and revenge.

> "Now those who were arrested will return, and two Russias will look each other in the eye: the one that sent these people to the camps and the one that came back." [*Letter by Anna Akhmatova*, quoted on p. 583] …..
>
> Not surprisingly, the return of Stalin's prisoners provoked great fear in the people who had helped to send them to the camps. 'All the murderers, provocateurs and informers had one feature in common,' recalls Nadezhda Mandelshtam: they never thought that their victims might return one day:
>
> 'They thought that everybody sent to the next world or to the camps had been eliminated once and for all. It never entered their heads that these ghosts might rise up and call their grave-diggers to account. During the period of rehabilitations, therefore, they were utterly panic-stricken. They thought that time had gone into reverse and that those they had dubbed 'camp dust' had suddenly once more taken on flesh and reassumed their names. They were seized by terror.' (p. 587)

The Whisperers concludes that "It was Stalin's lasting achievement to create a whole society in which stoicism and passivity were social norms." The only positive note was that

> Families had a miraculous capacity for survival despite the enormous pressures arrayed against them during Stalin's reign. The family emerged from the years of terror as the one stable institution in a society where virtually all the traditional mainstays of human existence – the neighbourhood community, the village and the church – had been weakened or destroyed. For many people the family represented the only relationships they could trust, the only place they felt a sense of belonging, and they went to extraordinary lengths to reunite with relatives. (p. 607)

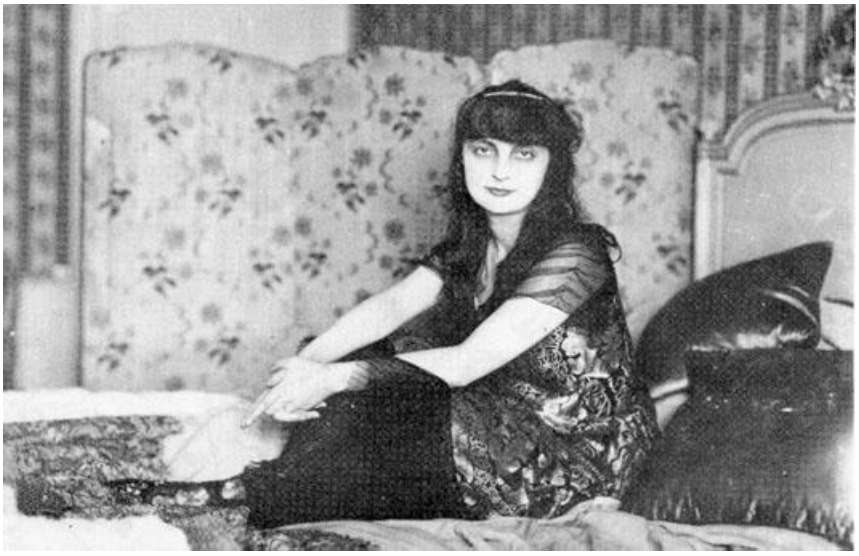
T T T T

Anna de Noailles (1876-1933)

Comtesse Anna de Noailles was born Anna Elisabeth de Brancovan. Her father was Prince Grégoire Bassaraba de Brancovan, a Romanian expatriate, and her mother Princess Rachel Musurus, an accomplished pianist of Greek origin born in Constantinople and brought up in London. The family spent the winter in Paris

and the rest of the year at their estate, the "Villa Bassaraba" in Amphion-les-Bains, near Évian on the south shore of Lac Léman. In 1897 she married Mathieu de Noailles (1873–1942), the fourth son of the 7th Duc de Noailles, and entered Parisian high society.

She published many books of poetry and three novels – the first volume of poems, *Le Coeur Innombrable*, published in 1901, made her a celebrity in France. The first woman to become a Commander of the Légion d'Honneur, and to be admitted to the Royal Belgian Academy of French Language and Literature, she received in 1921 the "Grand Prix" of the Académie Française.



Noailles' poetry radiates the calm beauty and exuberance of the natural world, particularly her love of the scenery around Lac Léman.

…. Enfance au bord d'un lac ! Angélique tendresse
D'un azur dilaté qui sourit, qui caresse,
D'un azur pastoral, d'un héroïque azur
Où l'aigle bleu tournoie, où gonfle un brugnon mûr ! ….

Le Retour au Lac Léman
Je retrouve le calme et vaste paysage:
C'est toujours sur les monts, les routes, les rivages,
Vos gais bondissements, chaleur aux pieds d'argent!
Le monde luit au sein de l'azur submergeant
Comme une pêcherie aux mailles d'une nasse;
Je vois, comme autrefois, sur le bord des terrasses,
Des jeunes gens; l'un rêve, un autre fume et lit;
Un balcon, languissant comme un soir au Chili,
Couve d'épais parfums à l'ombre de ses stores.
Le lac, tout embué d'avoir noyé l'aurore,
Encense de vapeurs le paresseux été;
Et le jour traîne ainsi sa parfaite beauté
Dans une griserie indolente et muette.
Soudain l'azur fraîchit, le soir vient; des mouettes

S’abattent sur les flots; leur vol compact et lourd
Qui semble harceler la faiblesse du jour
Donne l’effroi subit des mauvaises nouvelles...

Tout luit, tout bleuit, tout bruit,
Le jour est brûlant comme un fruit
Que le soleil fendille et cuit.
Chaque petite feuille est chaude
Et miroite dans l’air où rôde
Comme un parfum de reine-claude.
Du soleil comme de l’eau pleut
Sur tout le pays jaune et bleu
Qui grésille et oscille un peu.
Un infini plaisir de vivre
S’élance de la forêt ivre,
Des blés roses comme du cuivre.

Il fera longtemps clair ce soir, les jours allongent,
La rumeur du jour vif se disperse et s’enfuit,
Et les arbres, surpris de ne pas voir la nuit,
Demeurent éveillés dans le soir blanc, et songent...

Les marronniers, sur l’air plein d’or et de lourdeur,
Répandent leurs parfums et semblent les étendre ;
On n’ose pas marcher ni remuer l’air tendre
De peur de déranger le sommeil des odeurs.

De lointains roulements arrivent de la ville...
La poussière, qu’un peu de brise soulevait,
Quittant l’arbre mouvant et las qu’elle revêt,
Redescend doucement sur les chemins tranquilles.

Nous avons tous les jours l’habitude de voir
Cette route si simple et si souvent suivie,
Et pourtant quelque chose est changé dans la vie,
Nous n’aurons plus jamais notre âme de ce soir...

La chaude chanson
La guitare amoureuse et l’ardente chanson
Pleurent de volupté, de langueur et de force
Sous l’arbre où le soleil dore l’herbe et l’écorce,
Et devant le mur bas et chaud de la maison.

Semblables à des fleurs qui tremblent sur leur tige,
Les désirs ondoyants se balancent au vent,
Et l’âme qui s’en vient soupirant et rêvant
Se sent mourir d’espoir, d’attente et de vertige.

- Ah ! quelle pâmoison de l’azur tendre et clair !
Respirez bien, mon coeur, dans la chaude rafale,

La musique qui fait le cri vif des cigales,
Et la chanson qui va comme un pollen sur l'air...

Azur
Comme un sublime fruit qu'on a de loin lancé,
La matinée avec son ineffable extase
Sur mon coeur enivré tombe, s'abat, s'écrase,
Et mon plaisir jaillit comme un lac insensé!
-- O pulpe lumineuse et moite du ciel tendre,
Espace où mon regard se meurt de volupté,
O gisement sans fin et sans bord de l'été,
Azur qui sur l'azur vient reluire et s'étendre,
Coulez, roulez en moi, détournez dans mon corps
Tout ce qui n'est pas vous, prenez toute la place,
Déjà ce flot d'argent m'étouffe, me terrasse,
Je meurs, venez encor, azur! venez encor...

Deux êtres luttent dans mon coeur,
C'est la bacchante avec la nonne,
L'une est simplement toute bonne,
L'autre, ivre de vie et de pleurs.
La sage nonne est calme, et presque
Heureuse par ingénuité.
Nul n'a mieux respiré l'été;
Mais la bacchante est romanesque,
Romanesque, avide, les yeux
Emplis d'un sanguinaire orage.
Son clair ouragan se propage
Comme un désir contagieux!
La nonne est robuste, et dépense
Son âme d'un air vif et gai.
La païenne, au corps fatigué,
Joint la faiblesse à la puissance.
Cette Ménade des forêts,
Pleine de regrets et d'envies,
A failli mourir de la vie,
Mais elle recommencerait!
La nonne souffre et rit quand même:
C'est une Grecque au coeur soumis.
La dyonisienne gémit
Comme un violon de Bohême!
Pourtant, chaque soir, dans mon coeur,
Cette sage et cette furie
Se rapprochent comme deux soeurs
Qui foulent la même prairie.
Toute deux lèvent vers les cieux
Leur noble regard qui contemple.

L'étonnement silencieux
De leurs deux âmes fuse ensemble;
Leurs fronts graves sont réunis;
La même angoisse les visite:
Toutes les deux ont, sans limite,
La tristesse de l'infini!...

She is buried in the Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris, but there is a small memorial garden to her memory in Amphion, where the following words can be found:

Etranger qui viendras lorsque je serai morte,
Contempler mon lac genevois,
Laisse que ma ferveur, dès à présent t'exhorte,
A bien aimer ce que je vois.

T T T T

The end of the line?

The Guardian, Friday April 4 2008: An unlikely row has erupted in France over suggestions that the semicolon's days are numbered; worse, the growing influence of English is apparently to blame. Jon Henley reports on the uncertain fate of this most subtle and misused of punctuation marks.

It is a debate you could only really have in a country that accords its intellectuals the kind of status other nations – to name no names – tend to reserve for footballers, footballers' wives or (if they're lucky) rock stars; a place where structuralists and relativists and postmodernists, rather than skulk shamefacedly in the shadows, get invited on to primetime TV; a culture in which even today it is considered entirely acceptable, indeed laudable, to state one's profession as 'thinker'.

That country is France, which is currently preoccupied with the fate of its ailing semicolon.

Encouragingly, a Committee for the Defence of the Semicolon appeared on the web (only to disappear some days later, which cannot be a very good sign). Articles have been written in newspapers and magazines. The topic is being earnestly discussed on the radio. It was even the subject of an April Fool's joke on a leading internet news site, which claimed, perfectly plausibly, that President Nicolas Sarkozy had just decreed that to preserve the poor point-virgule from an untimely end, it must henceforth be used at least three times a page in all official correspondence.

In the red corner, desiring nothing less than the consignment of the semicolon to the dustbin of grammatical history, are a pair of treacherous French writers and (of course) those perfidious Anglo-Saxons, for whose short, punchy, uncomplicated sentences, it is widely rumoured, the rare subtlety and infinite elegance of a good semicolon are surplus to requirements. The point-virgule, says legendary writer, cartoonist and satirist François Cavanna, is merely "a parasite, a timid, fainthearted, insipid thing, denoting merely uncertainty, a lack of audacity, a fuzziness of thought".

Philippe Djian, best known outside France as the author of *37°2 le matin*, which was

brought to the cinema in 1986 by Jean-Jacques Beneix as *Betty Blue* and successfully launched Beatrice Dalle on an unsuspecting world, goes one step further: he would like nothing better than to go down in posterity, he claims, as "the exterminating angel of the point-virgule". Objectionable English-language typesetting practices, as used by most of the world's computers, are also to blame for the semicolon's decline, its defenders argue.

In the blue corner are an array of linguistic patriots who cite Hugo, Flaubert, De Maupassant, Proust and Voltaire as examples of illustrious French writers whose respective oeuvres would be but pale shadows of themselves without the essential point-virgule, and who argue that – in the words of one contributor to a splendidly passionate blog on the topic hosted recently by the leftwing weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* – "the beauty of the semicolon, and its glory, lies in the support lent by this particular punctuation mark to the expression of a complex thought."

The semicolon, continues this sadly anonymous defender of the Gallic grammatical faith, "finds its rightful home in the subtlety of a fine and rich analysis, one which is not afraid to pronounce – and sometimes to withhold – judgment where mere affirmation might be found wanting. It allows the writer to link ideas without breaking a train of thought; by contrast, over-simplified communication and bald, efficient discourse whose simplistic style is the best guarantee of being widely understood is naturally wary of this punctuation mark."

For many believers, the defence of the point-virgule is, of course, a logical extension of France's ongoing battle against the inexorable decline of its language. For despite the existence of a battery of protective laws and directives, and in defiance of the best efforts of the Académie Française, founded in 1634 to stand guard over the French language, and the General Commission on Terminology and Neology, which publishes acceptable Gallic alternatives for Anglo-Saxon interlopers, French is becoming increasingly anglicised.

Words now common in spoken French but among 65 pages of "non-recommended" invaders published recently on the commission's website include *email*, *blog* and *fast food*, as well as *supermodel*, *takeaway*, *low-cost*, *coach*, *corner* (as in football), *shadow-boxing* and (bizarrely) *detachable motor caravan*. And if it is threatened at home, the language of Molière is equally at risk abroad: once the undisputed language of diplomacy, French is now in serious decline at both the European Commission and the United Nations. "The defence of our language must be the major national cause of the new century," has proclaimed Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, the Académie's permanent secretary.

To listen to France's small but growing army of semicolon fans, the full-frontal assault on the semicolon launched by uncultured modern writers and journalists and spearheaded by those idiot Anglo-Saxons is, sadly, just another symptom of the present-day malaise of French language and culture. As the great early 20th-century Gallic novelist, essayist, playwright and Academician Henry Marie Joseph Frédéric Expedite Millon de Montherlant so succinctly put it in his Carnets: "One immediately recognises a man of judgment by the use he makes of the semicolon." M de Montherlant would not, hélas, recognise a great many men of judgment these days.

How, though, are you supposed to use the thing? According to the eminently readable rules of French grammar, the semicolon has several specific applications. First, it allows a writer to introduce a logical balance into a long phrase. Second, it can serve to divide two phrases that are in themselves independent, but whose significance is in some way linked (viz: "The semicolon is necessary; I have just proved it," or, as Michel Houellebecq, one of the very few contemporary French writers to use the point-virgule, would have it: "He was unable to remember his last erection; he was waiting for the storm.") It can also, more prosaically, be used to separate the various elements of an enumeration or list (or indeed to separate groups of similar elements linked by commas within a longer list). Finally, a semicolon can replace a comma when "the use of the latter might prove confusing".

Facile, non?

T T T T

Narrative

Andrew Barton "Banjo" Paterson (1864-1941) was an Australian poet, journalist and author. His many ballads and poems about Australian rural life – including the district around Binalong, New South Wales where he spent much of his childhood – are well known and loved in Australia but he is virtually unknown in Europe, where few even know that he is the author of *Waltzing Matilda*.

The Man from Snowy River - *Andrew Barton "Banjo" Paterson*

THERE was movement at the station, for the word had passed around
That the colt from old Regret had got away
And had joined the wild bush horses - he was worth a thousand pound,
So all the cracks had gathered to the fray.
All the tried and noted riders from the stations near and far
Had mustered at the homestead overnight,
For the bushmen love hard riding where the wild bush horses are,
And the stock-horse snuffs the battle with delight.

There was Harrison, who made his pile when Pardon won the cup,
The old man with his hair as white as snow;
But few could ride beside him when his blood was fairly up –
He would go wherever horse and man could go.
And Clancy of the Overflow came down to lend a hand,
No better horseman ever held the reins,
For never horse could throw him while the saddle-girths would stand -
He learned to ride while droving on the plains.

And one was there, a stripling on a small and weedy beast;
He was something like a racehorse undersized,
With a touch of Timor pony – three parts thoroughbred at least,
And such as are by mountain horsemen prized.
He was hard and tough and wiry – just the sort that won't say die –

There was courage in his quick impatient tread;
And he bore the badge of gameness in his bright and fiery eye,
And the proud and lofty carriage of his head.

But still so slight and weedy, one would doubt his power to stay,
And the old man said, "That horse will never do
For a long and tiring gallop – lad, you'd better stop away,
Those hills are far too rough for such as you."
So he waited, sad and wistful – only Clancy stood his friend –
"I think we ought to let him come," he said;
"I warrant he'll be with us when he's wanted at the end,
For both his horse and he are mountain bred."

"He hails from Snowy River, up by Kosciusko's side,
Where the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough;
Where a horse's hoofs strike firelight from the flint stones every stride,
The man that holds his own is good enough.
And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make their home,
Where the river runs those giant hills between;
I have seen full many horsemen since I first commenced to roam,
But nowhere yet such horsemen have I seen."

So he went; they found the horses by the big mimosa clump,
They raced away toward the mountain's brow,
And the old man gave his orders – "Boys, go at them from the jump,
No use to try for fancy riding now.
And, Clancy, you must wheel them, try and wheel them to the right;
Ride boldly, lad, and never fear the spills,
For never yet was rider that could keep the mob in sight,
If once they gain the shelter of those hills."

So Clancy rode to wheel them – he was racing on the wing,
Where the best and boldest riders take their place,
And he raced his stock-horse past them and he made the ranges ring
With the stockwhip, as he met them face to face.
Then they halted for a moment, while he swung the dreaded lash,
But they saw their well-loved mountain full in view,
And they charged beneath the stockwhip with a sharp and sudden dash,
And off into the mountain scrub they flew.

Then fast the horsemen followed, and the gorges deep and black
Resounded to the thunder of their tread,
And the stockwhips woke the echoes and they fiercely answered back
From cliffs and crags that beetled overhead.
And upward, ever upward, the wild horses held their way,
Where mountain ash and kurrajong grew wide;
And the old man muttered fiercely, "We may bid the mob good day,
No man can hold them down the other side."

When they reached the mountain's summit, even Clancy took a pull –

It might well make the boldest hold their breath;
For the wild hop scrub grew thickly, and the hidden ground was full
Of wombat holes, and any slip was death.
But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head,
And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer,
And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed,
While the others stood and watched in very fear.

He sent the flint-stones flying, but the pony kept his feet,
He cleared the fallen timber in his stride,
And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat –
It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride.
Past the stringybarks and saplings, on the rough and broken ground,
Down the hillside at a racing pace he went,
And he never drew the bridle till he landed safe and sound
At the bottom of that terrible descent.

He was right among the horses as they climbed the farther hill,
And the watchers on the mountain, standing mute,
Saw him ply the stockwhip fiercely; he was right among them still,
As he raced across the clearing in pursuit.
Then they lost him for a moment, where two mountain gullies met
In the ranges – but a final glimpse reveals
On a dim and distant hillside the wild horses racing yet
With the man from Snowy River at their heels.

And he ran them single-handed till their sides were white with foam;
He followed like a bloodhound on their track,
Till they halted, cowed and beaten; then he turned their heads for home,
And alone and unassisted brought them back.
But his hardy mountain pony he could scarcely raise a trot,
He was blood from hip to shoulder from the spur;
But his pluck was still undaunted, and his courage fiery hot,
For never yet was mountain horse a cur.

And down by Kosciusko, where the pine-clad ridges raise
Their torn and rugged battlements on high,
Where the air is clear as crystal, and the white stars fairly blaze
At midnight in the cold and frosty sky,
And where around the Overflow the reed-beds sweep and sway
To the breezes, and the rolling plains are wide,
The Man from Snowy River is a household word today,
And the stockmen tell the story of his ride.

The following remarkable poem by Charles Jefford has, as far as I know, not yet been published.

A Summer's Night at Quinn Farm, Hopewell, New Jersey
On the verandah in twos and threes,
we gather, drinks in hand,

chatting absently together.
While glancing through the trees
towards the sedgy pond,
we spy far-off a band
of brothers clad in black,
marching out of step.
Down the lane they come
through the darkling glen,
their faces blanco-white, set-firm, intent.
They move with jerky arms and knees,
with clothes unkempt.
They've come to claim their own again.
They've come to claim their hearth and home.
They want it back.
Deep in the valley, a lighted window glows.
Did they come from there we wonder?
Then suddenly they appear before our eyes,
stumbling headlong in a rush.
No word is uttered, no sound is heard,
as guests and hosts recoil as one.
The expected altercation,
the rain of blows, does not arise.
The vision fades, the far-off light has gone.
Confused, we turn, and go in to dine,
our table talk resumes.
It was just imagination, a troubling dream.
Ghosts they were, their name is Quinn.
We hope they never come again.
But that will never be.
The family Quinn were foresters,
fowlers, in a time gone-by.
They roamed the hill, are roaming still.
By the springhouse their footprints lie
imbedded in the muddy bank.
In these fields they hunted birds, cut wood.
Unaware, we presume on sacred ground.
We tramped here never, have left no trace of blood.
We're alien people from the town.
Men in suits with pens in hand.
holding title to the land,
we bought its antecedents too, those souls
who rove at night and hide by day,
that band of Brothers clad in black,
whose name is Quinn.

T T T T

Ethel Smyth

Female composers are very rare birds – what a pleasure therefore to discover the works of the Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944). Somewhat Brahmsian in conception, her music does not attempt to set new musical frontiers and is marked by a classical lyricism and romantic colour that was beginning to be out-of-date at the time she was composing. Her works included chamber music, symphonies, choral works and operas.

Taught piano at an early age as part of her social upbringing, Ethel met determined opposition from her family when she announced plans to pursue a career as a composer. After a prolonged "strike," during which she confined herself to her room and refused to attend meals, church, or social functions, her father finally gave in and she was allowed to study music in Leipzig. While at the conservatory there she met Dvořák, Grieg and Tchaikovsky, but found the tuition not up to her expectations and left after a year. She later met Clara Schumann and Brahms.

Portrait by John Singer Sargent[12]

Ethel Smyth was a militant suffragette, going to prison for her support of votes for women and her *The March of the Women* (1911) became the anthem of the women's suffrage movement. Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the Women's Social and Political Union, called on her members to break the windows of anti-suffrage politicians as a protest: Ethel Smyth – along with 108 others – did so and was condemned to two months in Holloway Prison. When Thomas Beecham went to visit her there, he found suffragettes marching in the quadrangle and singing, with Ethel Smyth conducting with a toothbrush.

Wikipedia states: "Smyth was prone to grand romantic passions, most of them with women. She wrote to Harry Brewster, who may have been her only male lover, that it was 'easier for me to love my own sex passionately, rather than yours,' calling this an 'everlasting puzzle.' At age 71 she fell in love with Virginia Woolf, who, both alarmed and amused, said it was 'like being caught by a giant crab,' but the two became friends."

T T T T

Contemporary German Poetry

I include below some remarkable contemporary poems by relatively unknown German authors, most of whom are still alive today – in several cases I have not even been able to determine their dates of birth. Their poems – discovered by trawling on the Internet – are full of brightness, simplicity and wit.

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[12] A remarkable similarity to the actress Maggie Smith!

*Hans Kruppa (*1952)* **E**s liegt an uns. Laß uns doch einfach die Verwirrung genießen, in die wir uns gegenseitig gestürzt haben. Sie ist Reichtum. Wenn wir die ganze Palette der Gefühle plötzlich in der Hand halten, liegt es an uns, ob wir das Bild unserer Tage mit den dunklen Farben der Traurigkeit malen oder den strahlenden Tönen des Glücks.	 **I**t's up to us. Let's just enjoy the confusion into which we threw one other. This is wealth. If we suddenly hold the whole palette of feelings in our hand, it's up to us whether we paint the picture of our days in the dark colours of sadness or in the brilliant colours of happiness.

Einbruchsmeldung - *Stefan Hüppe* Du, du bist bei mir eingebrochen. Schonungslos bist du vorgestoßen an mein Herz, warst von Anfang an sehr offen, erzähltest mir von Freuden und von Schmerz. Du, du hast bei mir ein Fenster eingeworfen, dessen Glas milchig wurde. Ich habe kein neues Glas einsetzen lassen, so lieb ist mir der frische Wind, den du mitgebracht hast.	**Burglary complaint** You, you broke into me. Without remorse you entered my heart, you hid nothing from me from the beginning and talked of joy and pain. You, you broke one of my windows leaving the glass opaque. I didn't replace it because I love the fresh air you brought in.

Dein Lied - *Cay Rademacher* Du hast mir eine Handvoll Musik ins Ohr geworfen. Nun höre ich die ganze Nacht Dein Lied.	**Your song** You threw a handful of music into my ear. Now all night long I hear your song.

Sommernacht - *Helga Mandel* Samtweiche Schwärze mit funkelnden Sternen besetzt kühles Mondlicht auf der Haut alles in flüssiges Silber getaucht Tautropfen am Saum glitzernd wie Edelstein barfuß durch das wispernde Gras eine Sternschnuppe schnell wünsch dir was jeder Zauber wirkt in so einer Nacht	**Summer night** The velvet dark with its sparkling stars occupies cool moonlight on the body everything is bathed in liquid silver drops of dew on the hem shining like jewels barefoot through the whispering grass a shooting star quick – make a wish – no magic fails on a night like this

Ein Gefühl - *Ernst Ferstl (*1955)* Es war mir, als ob sich der Himmel jeden Moment auf mich stürzt, als ob mich der Stille Ozean als Spielzeug hin und her wirft, als ob sich die Sonne ausgerechnet in mir versteckt - und dabei hast du mir doch nur die Wange gestreichelt.	**Sensation** It seemed as if the heavens could fall on me any moment, as if the Pacific tossed me to and fro like a toy, as if the sun was hiding in me – yes, me – and all you you did was stroke my cheek.

Umweg - *Ernst Ferstl (*1955)* Ich liebe die Umwege. Am allerliebsten komme ich über dich zu mir.	**Detour** I love detours. My favourite way to me is via you.

Gesprächstherapie *Jörn Pfennig (*1944)* Als ich dich plötzlich weniger liebte – ich weiß nicht warum – da durfte ich es dir sagen du hast mich verstanden und meine Liebe wurde größer.	**Speech therapy** When I suddenly loved you less – I don't know why – I could tell you and you understood and my love grew.

Träumende Heimat *Rose Ausländer (1901-1988)* Ich küsse dich Nacht meine träumende Heimat Deine Stille ist die Wahrheit nicht der Tag mit seiner lauten Wirklichkeit Ich liebe dich und deine zahllosen Lichter du schenkst mir den schlaflosen Traum flüsterst Liebesworte und gibst mir Mut	**Dreaming Home** I kiss you night my dreaming home your calm is truth not day with its loud reality I love you and your innumerable lights you give me sleepless dreams whisper words of love and give me strength

T T T T

Dame Kiri Te Kanawa

The following article appeared in the *New Zealand Herald* of 5 March 2009.

Move over Manilow - when it comes to warding off teenage troublemakers you can't beat New Zealand's own Dame Kiri Te Kanawa.

Christchurch is considering using Barry Manilow's much-maligned middle-of-the-road music to deter young people from congregating in public, vandalism and intimidating passers-by.

But in Waitakere City, the classics have already done the job. Mayor Bob Harvey is in no doubt that piping in classical music to the concourse between the council and the city's transport centre has kept vandals away for three years, because it is "so bloody hideous" to the teens.

"We have been playing what I would call 'Hooked on Classics' - Mozart, Vivaldi, Tchaikovsky and a dash of Dame Kiri. I think probably it is Dame Kiri that does it, but [troublemakers] don't stay around long," Mr Harvey told the Herald.

"I'm thinking of young kids that could possibly get into some problems with graffiti, and what you might call wilful damage. If it's not your music, and you really

don't like it all, why would you, how could you, stay around?"

The concourse featured art and sculptures and nothing had been defaced or destroyed. Mr Harvey describes the effect of the classical music on the teens as "like us being locked in a room with hip-hop. It would be enough to drive you crazy."

While it might seem surprising to see the music of a Kiwi icon such as Dame Kiri used this way, Mr Harvey joked that she was not a icon "if you're under 60, mate."

T T T T

More Music[13]

The audience was hushed as the second movement of Brahms Symphony No. 4 – one of the quieter passages in classical music – began. But a note of discord was struck when a fresh note was heard: that of a mobile phone.

And as the wind section of the Halle Orchestra tried to compete, the phone rang ... and rang ... and rang.

Eventually, Dutch conductor Jac Van Steen put down his baton, turned to his audience at Manchester's Bridgewater Hall and said:

"If that's my wife, tell her I'm not here."[14]

T T T T

Thomas Hood

Thomas Hood (1799-1845) is a much under-rated poet. Perhaps his punning wit and sometimes wicked humour (see the sparkle in his eyes in the portrait on the right) as well as his support for social causes were out of tune with the romantic mood of his times – in any case it is time for a reappraisal. "Happy the humorist whose works and life are an illustration of the great moral truth that the sense of humour is the just balance of all the faculties of man, the best security against the pride of knowledge and the conceits of the imagination, the strongest inducement to submit with a wise and pious patience to the vicissitudes of human existence." (On Thomas Hood in *A Cyclopedia of Popular Literary People*, 1888, Frank McAlpine)

[13] See *CP2009.*

[14] Boris Becker – not famous for witticisms – was disturbed by a mobile phone in the middle of a match at Wimbledon: "If it's for me," he called into the stands, "tell them I'm busy."

From **A Plain Direction**
In London once I lost my way
In faring to and fro,
And asked a little ragged boy
The way that I should go;

He gave a nod, and then a wink,
And told me to get there
“Straight down the Crooked Lane,
And all round the Square.”

I boxed his little saucy ears,
And then away I strode;
But since I've found that weary path
Is quite a common road.

Utopia is a pleasant place,
But how shall I get there?
“Straight down the Crooked Lane,
And all round the Square.”
……

They say there is an ancient House,
As pure as it is old,
Where Members always speak their minds
And votes are never sold.

I’m fond of all antiquities,
But how shall I get there?
“Straight down the Crooked Lane,
And all round the Square.”

They say there is a Royal Court
Maintained in noble state,
Where every able man, and good,
Is certain to be great!

I’m very fond of seeing sights,
But how shall I get there?
“Straight down the Crooked Lane,
And all round the Square.”

They say there is a Temple too,
Where Christians come to pray;
But canting knaves and hypocrites,
And bigots keep away.

Oh that’s the parish church for me!
But how shall I get there?
“Straight down the Crooked Lane,
And all round the Square.”
…..

I've heard there is a famous Land
For public spirit known –
Whose Patriots love its interests
Much better than their own.

The Land of Promise sure it is!
But how shall I get there?
"Straight down the Crooked Lane,
And all round the Square."
…..
I've heard about a pleasant Land,
Where omelettes grow on trees,
And roasted pigs run crying out,
"Come eat me, if you please."

My appetite is rather keen,
But how shall I get there?
"Straight down the Crooked Lane,
And all round the Square."

From **Faithless Sally Brown**
His death which happened in his berth,
At forty-odd befell:
They went and told the sexton, and
The sexton tolled the bell.

From **French and English**
Never go to France
Unless you know the lingo,
If you do, like me,
You will repent, by jingo.

From **The Bridge of Sighs**
Alas! for the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun!

From **Ode-Autumn**
I saw old Autumn in the misty morn
Stand shadowless like Silence, listening
To silence.

From **No!**
No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease,
No comfortable feel in any member—
No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees,
No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds—
November!

From **The Lay of the Labourer**
Wherever Nature needs,

Wherever Labour calls,
No job I'll shirk of the hardest work,
To shun the workhouse walls;
Where savage laws begrudge
The pauper babe its breath,
And doom a wife to a widow's life,
Before her partner's death.

From **Eugene Aram's Dream**
Ben Battle was a soldier bold,
And used to war's alarms:
But a cannon-ball took off his legs,
So he laid down his arms.

"Some minds improve by travel, others, rather, resemble copper wire, or brass, which get the narrower by going farther."

T T T T

Tony Judt (1948-2010)

Tony Judt, a historian I greatly admired and one of my favourite contributors to the *New York Review of Books*, died on 6 August. Here is an extract from one of his last pieces for the *NYRB*.[15]

Words

I was raised on words. They tumbled off the kitchen table onto the floor where I sat: grandfather, uncles, and refugees flung Russian, Polish, Yiddish, French, and what passed for English at one another in a competitive cascade of assertion and interrogation. Sententious flotsam from the Edwardian-era Socialist Party of Great Britain hung around our kitchen promoting the True Cause. I spent long, happy hours listening to Central European autodidacts arguing deep into the night: *Marxismus, Zionismus, Socialismus.* Talking, it seemed to me, was the point of adult existence. I have never lost that sense.

In my turn – and to find my place – I too talked. For party pieces I would remember words, perform them, translate them. "Ooh, he'll be a lawyer," they'd say. "He'll charm the birds off the trees": something I attempted fruitlessly in parks for a while before applying the admonition in its Cockney usage to no greater effect during my adolescent years. By then I had graduated from the intensity of polyglot exchanges to the cooler elegance of BBC English.

The 1950s – when I attended elementary school – were a rule-bound age in the teaching and use of the English language. We were instructed in the unacceptability of even the most minor syntactical transgression. "Good" English was at its peak. Thanks to BBC radio and cinema newsreels, there were nationally accepted norms for proper speech; the authority of class and region determined not just how you said things but the kind of things it was appropriate to say. "Accents" abounded

[15] See http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/jun/17/words/ for the full article.

(my own included), but were ranked according to respectability: typically a function of social standing and geographical distance from London.

I was seduced by the sheen of English prose at its evanescent apogee. This was the age of mass literacy whose decline Richard Hoggart anticipated in his elegiac essay *The Uses of Literacy* (1957). A literature of protest and revolt was rising through the culture. From *Lucky Jim* through *Look Back in Anger*, and on to the "kitchen sink" dramas of the end of the decade, the class-bound frontiers of suffocating respectability and "proper" speech were under attack. But the barbarians themselves, in their assaults on the heritage, resorted to the perfected cadences of received English: it never occurred to me, reading them, that in order to rebel one must dispense with good form.

By the time I reached college, words were my "thing." As one teacher equivocally observed, I had the talents of a "silver-tongued orator" – combining (as I fondly assured myself) the inherited confidence of the milieu with the critical edge of the outsider. Oxbridge tutorials reward the verbally felicitous student: the neo-Socratic style ("why did you write this?" "what did you mean by it?") invites the solitary recipient to explain himself at length, while implicitly disadvantaging the shy, reflective undergraduate who would prefer to retreat to the back of a seminar. My self-serving faith in articulacy was reinforced: not merely evidence of intelligence but intelligence itself.

T T T T

Pass the Port one more time

The people of Zurich are not the most-loved Swiss inhabitants. In Basel, a report that a Zürcher had been eaten by a crocodile was met with incredulity: commentators there wrote that in view of the relative sizes of mouth the reverse was more likely. Here's another Zurich joke:

A man from Zurich rushes into a Bern bakery with a baby chimpanzee in his arms. At the door he asks a young woman, in a broad Zurich accent, to hold the animal for a moment while he buys his bread. Another woman comes out and asks where she got the animal. "Oh," she replies, "I got it from a man from Zurich." "Oh dear," says the other woman, "and they didn't notice it on the ultrasound display?"

T T T T

Bluetooth

My granddaughter (then 11 years old) taught me the intricacies of Bluetooth. What she didn't know – and I found out through sheer idle curiosity – is how this particular communications technology got its name. If you look up "Bluetooth" on Wikipedia you will get the following message: "This article is about the electronic protocol. For the medieval King of Denmark, see Harald I of Denmark."

I thought this was a joke, but the latter link provides the following information: "Harald 'Bluetooth' Gormsson (born c. 920) was the son of King Gorm the Old and of Thyra Dannebod. He died in 985 or 986 having ruled as King of Denmark from around 958 and King of Norway for a few years probably around 970."

Further research reveals that "The word Bluetooth is an anglicised version of Danish/Swedish *Blåtand*, the epithet of the tenth-century king Harald I of Denmark and parts of Norway who united dissonant Danish tribes into a single kingdom. The implication is that Bluetooth does the same with communications protocols, uniting them into one universal standard."

The following related neologisms have now found their way into English: *Bluejacking, Bluesniping, Bluesnarfing, Bluechatting, Bluecasting, Bluedating* and *Bluebugging* – all of which use (or abuse) Bluetooth technology; and, of course, if you have Bluetooth you probably ought also to have a *Jawbone* or *Jabra* headset and possibly a *Gumstix* for establishing your *Piconet* or *Scatternet*. [16]

You now know more about Bluetooth than you probably wanted to know – and it doesn't work with all mobile phones, as my granddaughter can confirm.

T T T T

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

The following extract typifies the struggle of the Victorians to come to terms with their passions and instincts:[17]

From *The Buried Life*
But often, in the world's most crowded streets,
But often, in the din of strife,
There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life;
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
In tracking out our true, original course;
A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart which beats
So wild, so deep in us--to know
Whence our lives come and where they go.
And many a man in his own breast then delves,
But deep enough, alas! none ever mines.
And we have been on many thousand lines,
And we have shown, on each, spirit and power;
But hardly have we, for one little hour,
Been on our own line, have we been ourselves--

[16] Don't believe reports about *Toothing* as a means of using Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones or PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) to arrange random sexual encounters – this is a hoax.

[17] See also the poem by Anna de Noailles on p. 27 which contains the lines:

Deux êtres luttent dans mon coeur,
C'est la bacchante avec la nonne ….

Arthur Clough – see p. 15 – was haunted by a similar dichotomy:

Yet, when my heart would fain rejoice,
A small expostulating voice
Falls in; ……
In accent tremulous and thin
I hear high Prudence deep within …. (*Love and Reason*)

Hardly had skill to utter one of all
The nameless feelings that course through our breast,
But they course on for ever unexpressed.
And long we try in vain to speak and act
Our hidden self, and what we say and do
Is eloquent, is well – but 'tis not true!
And then we will no more be racked
With inward striving, and demand
Of all the thousand nothings of the hour
Their stupefying power;
Ah yes, and they benumb us at our call!
Yet still, from time to time, vague and forlorn,
From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
A melancholy into all our day.

Only – but this is rare –
When a beloved hand is laid in ours,
When, jaded with the rush and glare
Of the interminable hours,
Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
When our world-deafened ear
Is by the tones of a loved voice caressed –
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.

And there arrives a lull in the hot race
Wherein he doth for ever chase
That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
An air of coolness plays upon his face,
And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
And then he thinks he knows
The hills where his life rose,
And the sea where it goes.

T T T T

Even More Music

Letter from Toby Appel, a viola player on the Juilliard faculty since 1990, to the editors of *The Strad*, a monthly magazine for string players published in London.[18]

[18] With thanks to Suzette.

Dear Sirs:

I recently ran into a colleague by the fifth-floor elevators at The Juilliard School in New York City, where we are both on the faculty. He said, "I saw a review of you in *The Strad* today." I said, "Good or bad?" "Bad," he said. Well, this sent me off to the library to find out which of my transgressions had disturbed your critic. I had no trouble finding the review, which is in the October 2001 edition, pages 1150-51. There it was in plain English. Toby Appel, along with violinist Mark Peskanov and cellist Nathaniel Rosen, performing in New York at a repeat pair of concerts which included the Opus 9 string trios of Beethoven. The reviewed concert took place on July 26 on the Barge [Bargemusic], and it was suggested by your critic that "given the individual excellence of each of these players, it was disappointing to hear so many details imperfectly executed when one was certain that more rehearsal would have improved the level of performance exponentially." It goes on, and I suppose I should be grateful for these kind words: "Appel was the steadiest of the three and had the fewest intonation problems." Well, that's nice to know. Your critic finishes by saying "the paying audience for the first time deserved better."

As I mentioned before, it pleases me to think that my intonation, while weak, was the best of the three, but I am certainly disappointed that your readers now know that I have such little regard for my audience that I chose not to rehearse properly with my weaker colleagues. My weak intonation notwithstanding, I have a neat bit of news for you and your most eloquent critic. On July 26 I was not playing a concert in New York with Mark and Nick, but was in Leipzig, Germany, fast asleep after a full day of master classes and a final dinner with my pupils at the *Hochschule für Musik* at the conclusion of a wonderful three-week course there. I suppose it is not such a small consolation for me to know that my reputation is so widespread that when my name is listed on a concert program, one should expect, at best, some weak intonation, even if I'm not going to be there in person.

Of course I know of your critic, Dennis Rooney, as I have always enjoyed him in his many wonderful films with Judy Garland. I suggest Mr. Rooney check out his concert program more carefully and that in the future, when he wants to confuse me with another performer, he choose someone who plays better.

T T T T

British Politics

David Cameron is being shown around a hospital. He comes to a ward full of people who seem to have nothing wrong with them. He goes to the first bed and says "Well, how are you." The patient looks him straight in the eye and says "The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men, Gang aft agley." The PM smiles politely, and walks to the next bed, where the patient greets him with a hearty "O would some power the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us." Slightly confused, Cameron tries to strike up a conversation with yet another inmate, but this one just mutters "O my Luve's like a red, red rose That's newly sprung in June" repeatedly.

"Is this the psychiatric ward?" he asks.

"No," the ward sister replies. "It's the burns unit."

……

The old 50p coin was known as a Wilson, because it was many sided and two-faced.

The £1 coin is known as a Thatcher, because it is thick, brassy and thinks it's a sovereign. (Attributed to Neil Kinnock)[19]

The 5p piece is known as a Major, because it is pointless, irritating, and you try to get rid of it as quickly as possible.

The new 50p piece is known as a Blair, because it is like the old one, but more lightweight.

T T T T

Esoteric / Erotic

Their Sex Life - *Archie Randolph Ammons (1926-2001)*
One failure on
Top of another

Beautiful Woman - *A. R. Ammons*
The spring
in

her step
has

turned to
fall

Lucia - *Ravi Shankar (*1975)*
My hair, voluminous from sleeping in
six different positions, redolent with your scent,
helps me recall that last night was indeed real,

that it's possible for a bedspread to spawn
a watershed in the membrane that keeps us
shut in our own skins, mute without pleasure,

that I didn't just dream you into being.
You fit like a fig in the thick of my tongue,
give my hands their one true purpose,

find in my shoulder a groove for your head.
In a clinch, you're clenched and I'm pinched,
we're spooned, forked, wrenched, lynched

in a chestnut by a mob of our own making,
only to be resurrected to stage several revivals
that arise from slightest touch to thwart

[19] Also attributed to Kinnock: "You cannot fashion a wit out of two half-wits."

deep sleep with necessities I never knew
I knew until meeting you a few days
or many distant, voluptuous lifetimes ago.

On Reading Poorly Transcribed Erotica - *Jill Alexander Essbaum (*1972)*
She stood before him wearing only pantries
and he groped for her Volvo under the gauze.
She had saved her public hair, and his cook
went hard as a fist. They fell to the bad.
He shoveled his duck into her posse
and all her worm juices spilled out.
Still, his enormous election raged on.
Her beasts heaved as he sacked them,
and his own nibbles went stuff as well.
She put her tong in his rear and talked ditty.
Oh, it was all that he could do not to comb.

T T T T

Boring (?) Swiss Politics

The past two years have not been easy for Swiss politicians. President Merz's trip, cap-in-hand, to dictator Ghaddafi in August 2009 led to much criticism at home, and other members of the Federal Council were not spared when it was revealed that hair-raising contingency plans had been prepared for a military operation to free the Swiss hostages held in Libya.

In 2008, Foreign Minister Calmy-Rey appeared in Teheran with a headscarf to sign a bilateral agreement for gas delivery and immediately attracted the ire of the USA and the ridicule of Swiss feminists and others. Finally, in his last appearance before the Swiss Parliament in September, ex-President Merz answered a complex question on the customs rules affecting "Bündnerfleisch" (thinly sliced dry beef) and had a laughing attack before he could get to the end of his statement – see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVFnGw-hnXk. More fun was to come, when a Portuguese blogger added subtitles to the video indicating that Merz was actually laughing at the current Portuguese political scene, where the opposition leader Passos Coelho had refused to meet Prime Minister Socrates without a third party being present: the subtitles included words put into Merz's mouth expressing astonishment that two men would refuse to meet alone in a country where single-sex marriages have been authorised and his suggestion that what Portugal needed was an attractive female opposition leader, so that the parties could get on better together. The doctored version has had huge success in Portugal where Merz is now a star.

If you thought that only Merz was subject to laughing attacks, see the current Swiss President, Doris Leuthard, answering a question earlier this year about horses on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLrzGajbqZI&NR=1.

T T T T

The Decline and Fall of the British Empire

I enjoyed *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781-1997* by Piers Brendon (Vintage Books, London 2008) probably more than any other history book I have read. It is sparkling, witty, easy to read and full of amusing anecdotes. Here are a few extracts:

> Sir John Pakington's reluctant appointment [as Colonial Secretary] in 1852 provoked ribaldry, not least when he allegedly expressed the hope that, wherever they were, the Virgin Islands were situated as far as possible from the Isle of Man. (p. 74)

> The Colonial Office had no monopoly of power in the Empire and could at any time be overruled by the Admiralty, the War Office, the India Office, the Board of Trade, the Foreign Office or the Treasury. The last of these departments often had the final word, though its efforts to impose 'stringent economy' were not always successful – when the Treasury tried literally to cut the Colonial Office's use of stationery, it penned a crushing riposte: "No gentleman writes to another on half a sheet of paper." (p. 96)

> The Chinese thought the British looked like devils, stank like corpses and probably had webbed feet. They also reckoned that a ban on the export of rhubarb from Canton could bring England to a halt via an epidemic of constipation. (p. 101)

> ….. the tiny British caste, itself temporary, official and divided into a strict hierarchy, became more assertively racist during the 1830s. As a French observer noted, the Englishman only appeared before the natives 'on a footing of superiority and grandeur' and if one of them addressed him as 'you' instead of 'your Highness' he had to be given a 'very sharp lesson in manners.' Domestic servants were regularly beaten and high status was no protection against white violence elsewhere: any Indian was liable to be kicked by 'any planter's assistant or sub-deputy railway contractor whose path he may chance to cross.' Matters would get worse after the Mutiny. An American visitor to India, who was 'astonished to see everybody bowing to us in the streets,' noted that a rich native had 'narrowly missed a horse-whipping lately' because he did not stop his carriage and make obeisance to a British officer riding on the same road. General Baden-Powell refined the convention, asserting that
>
> > as a rule the niggers seem to me cringing villains. As you ride or walk along the middle of the road, every cart or carriage has to stop and get out of your way, and every native, as he passes you, gives a salute. If he has an umbrella up he takes it down, if he is riding a horse he gets off and salutes. Moreover they do whatever you tell them. If you meet a man in the road and tell him to dust your boots, he does it.
>
> Always prepared with a fatuous cliché, the founder of the international Boy Scout movement justified this custom on the grounds that before a man can rule he must learn to obey. Few things, indeed, could have inspired Indians with a more ardent desire to rule themselves than such public assertions of racial supremacy. (p. 124)

> …. even after her death Queen Victoria remained an icon. When rioters

broke off a finger of her statue at Amritsar before the massacre in 1919, someone in the mob averted further damage by shouting, "Do not attack her. She was a good Queen." An army officer drumming up support in Assam during the Second World War found that his interpreter was saying persuasively, "the British are of the same race as the great Queen . . . and Japan is therefore sure to be defeated." After the war, during which the Japanese looted royal statues from Hong Kong, the only one to be re-erected was that of Queen Victoria (though earlier party-goers had often committed sacrilege, "with someone putting a straw hat or a bowler on her crown"). Well into the twentieth century black Barbadians revered her "as a good queen because she freed us." As late as the 1950s chiefs in Nyasaland regretted that "Queen Victoria did not come herself to make the treaties." Some Victorians, though, feared that as democracy blossomed the mystique of monarchy might wither. They did their utmost to prevent a loss of faith. Throughout the Empire children learned their history as a succession of English kings and queens, but in Nigeria Sir Frederick Lugard discouraged schools from teaching about the Stuarts since this might "foster disrespect for authority." At the coronation durbar of Edward VII in Delhi, Lord Curzon banned the singing of 'Onward! Christian Soldiers' because it contained the lines, 'Crowns and thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane.'

The crusading strain of imperialism after the Mutiny, which many saw as 'a challenge to Christianity itself,' was perhaps best conjured up by this parody of the popular hymn:

> Onward Christian soldiers, on to heathen lands,
> Prayer-books in your pockets, rifles in your hands,
> Take the glorious tidings where trade can be done,
> Spread the peaceful gospel - with the Maxim gun. (pp.139-40)

The last major entrepreneur to resist the amalgamation [with Rhodes' *De Beers*] was Barney Barnato, a very rough diamond indeed – when, later, an aristocratic lady invited him to see her Watteau he assumed she was referring to part of her anatomy. (p. 189)

Beatrice Potter (later Webb) [the author of *Peter Rabbit* and other children's books], who was in love with him, remarked on visiting [Joseph] Chamberlain's house that "there was a good deal of taste, and all of it bad." (p. 201)

Kipling, now established as the laureate of empire, urged Americans to 'Take up the White Man's burden.' ….. On both sides of the ocean people forecast an Anglo-American reign of global peace, plenty, justice and progress. In the United States, however, many invoked traditions of liberty going back to Jefferson. These were always to play a part, and ultimately perhaps a dominant one, in the relationship between Britain and America. But they had been flouted by the cruel conquest of the Philippines. Mark Twain said this colonial conflict, which caused the death of some 220,000 Filipinos, had "debauched America's honour and blackened her face before the world." Henry Adams turned "green in bed at midnight if I think of the horror of a year's warfare." Members of the Anti-Imperialist League parodied Kipling:

> Pile on the brown man's burden

To gratify your greed;
Go, clear away the 'niggers'
Who progress would impede,
Be very stern, for truly
'Tis useless to be mild …
With new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child. (pp. 212-3)

The young George Nathaniel Curzon, who was said to have the habits of minor royalty without its habitual incapacity, made it plain that he was destined to ascend the Viceregal throne – conveniently situated in a Government House modelled on his own ancestral home. He was duly mocked as a 'most superior person,' as 'George the Fifth,' and as 'God's butler.' But the grand manner was as natural to him as the air he breathed. Pomp was his essential medium and pomposity his instinctive mode, though he sometimes pricked both with shafts of ribaldry. Lord Beaverbrook could not understand how he managed to be at once a wit and a bore. Curzon behaved with "enamelled self-assurance," not to say brazen arrogance – late in life, when the chimes of Big Ben disturbed his rest, he tried to have them silenced. Conscious of Britain's world responsibilities, he personified 'the old Roman quality of *gravitas.*' He wrote incessantly, never pausing for thought and once sending his wife a letter a hundred pages long. He spoke with orotund magniloquence, though (a friend observed) his words were always a size too big for his thoughts. "He lisped in Gibbon," said Lord D'Abernon, and gave orders "in language that would not have disgraced Cicero addressing the Roman Senate … 'Housemaid, throw wide the casement,' 'Footman, add fuel to the flame.'" (p. 239)

India's summer capital [Simla] was as remote as it was precarious – an avalanche of villas, faintly reminiscent of Tunbridge Wells, poised to cascade off its ridge. "Beyond the beyond," was the architect Edwin Lutyens's verdict on the ramshackle, tin-roofed hill station which might have been built by clever monkeys, he suggested, "who must be shot in case they do it again." (p. 241)

… Sir Percy Cox, a man renowned for "his ability to keep silence in a dozen languages." (p. 318)

[In Malaya, the British] invested in education, sanitation, irrigation and power generation. They erected buildings and created enterprises, notably the tin smelting industry. They constructed roads and railways. The most spectacular railway station was the white and gold fantasy at Kuala Lumpur, supposedly built to British specification that its roof should be capable of bearing the weight of three feet of snow. It was embellished with minarets, spires, cupolas, scalloped eaves and keyhole arches, an architectural style described as 'Late Marzipan.' (p. 340)

[Sir Stafford] Cripps's Puritanism irked Churchill. "He has all the virtues I

dislike and none of the vices I admire," said the Prime Minister, who called him 'Sir Stifford Crapps.' (p. 394)

Much more than the 'Glamour Boy' sneered at by Stilwell, Mountbatten was a showman to rival Montgomery. He possessed just the kind of flair and dynamism to win what he called Britain's 'last chukka in India.' He had instilled a new spirit into troops engaged in jungle warfare against the Japanese – an enterprise that Churchill likened to going into the water to fight a shark. Moreover, at SEAC – Americans claimed that the initials stood for 'Save England's Asian Colonies' – Mountbatten had actually favoured post-war colonial independence. An egalitarian besotted with the trappings of grandeur, he flew over a personal barber from the Mayfair salon Trumper's to avoid having his hair cut by an Indian but he liked to cause consternation by shaking hands with Untouchables. His attractive wife Edwina, who Attlee thought would make a brilliant Vicereine, was also politically pink. But, grand-daughter of the Jewish millionaire Sir Ernest Cassel, himself such a close friend of King Edward VII that he earned the nickname 'Windsor Cassel,' she was less socialist than socialite. Until she took up good works during the war, her life had been devoted to the frenetic pursuit of pleasure. She had spent hours with hairdressers, manicurists, couturiers. She had had her ear lobes pulped and remodelled. She had acquired a male harem, swapping one playboy lover for another and saying that her husband, himself unfaithful and known to his intimates as 'Mountbottom,' regarded sex as 'a mixture of psychology and hydraulics.' (p. 406)

Nothing insulated the British more definitively from their imperial subjects than that omnipresent institution, the club. Wherever the map was painted red, Britons created more or less accurate imitations of the palaces of Pall Mall. Their aim was to exclude as well as to include, on the metropolitan model. In London, for example, Pratt's not only barred women but forbade them to telephone the club; while to get into the Beefsteak one had to be a relation of God and, members intoned, a damned close relation at that. ….. Women were confined to separate enclaves, usually known as the 'Hen House,' or *moorgi-khanna* (though the Sind Club in Karachi called this area the 'Shallow End'),[20] and sometimes they were banned completely. ….. The Hill Club at Nuwara Eliya in Ceylon imposed a range of petty restrictions on women, whose luggage was permitted to go through the front door while they themselves had to use a side entrance.[21] When a lost female strayed into the 'sacred precinct' of the United Services Club in Simla between the wars its horrified major-domo "snatched a notice from the wall and, holding it in front of him, barred further progress to the intruder. The notice ran: 'Dogs and other noxious animals are not allowed in the Club.'" (pp. 342-3)

T T T T

[20] In the 1980s I was invited to the Sind Club by a prominent Ismaili lawyer, who complained that it had become "like a morgue" now that they were no longer allowed to serve alcohol.

[21] My club in London – see next page – was among the last in London to admit women. Before the change in the statutes in 1997, my wife was (politely) scolded by the head doorman for daring to walk down the main staircase rather than the former servants' stairs.

Why I belong to an English Club

Dress in the Club House: (1)(a) After 11.00am on Weekdays and after 6.00pm on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays those using public rooms in the Club house are required to dress with appropriate formality. In particular, gentlemen are required to wear a jacket and tie and ladies are required to dress with commensurate formality;

(b) before 11.00am on Weekdays and before 6.00pm on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays, those using the public rooms of the Club house, while having due regard to the character of the Club, may wear less formal clothing than is normally required.

(2) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (1)(a) and (1)(b) of this Regulation:

(a) in the Silence Library, the Pall Mall Room, the Lower Sitting Room and the Billiards Room, gentlemen may remove their jackets (but not ties), but must resume them on vacating these rooms;

(b) when engaged in playing cards or board games at tables provided by the Club for those purposes, gentlemen may remove their jackets (but not ties), but must resume them on leaving the tables of play;

(c) if the Club house is uncomfortably hot, the Secretary or in his absence the Duty Manager may at any time permit gentlemen to remove their jackets, but not their ties, when a Notice to that effect shall be displayed in the Front Hall.

(3) This regulation does not apply:

(a) to any person wearing his national dress or the uniform or costume appropriate to his office or vocation; or

(b) in the Squash Bar or on the staircase connecting the Squash Courts and the Squash Bar.

[I have yet to meet a striptease dancer or swimming pool attendant in the Club, but fear the uniform or costume appropriate to their office or vocation might cause problems, particularly if the weather is hot.]

T T T T

Pass the Port yet again[22]

Jesus and Satan were arguing about who was better on the computer. Fed up with all the bickering, God finally said: "Right, that's enough – I'm going to put an end to this with a two-hour test, and then we'll see who is better."

So Satan and Jesus sat down at the keyboards and worked away. They moused – they faxed – they e-mailed and added attachments – they did spreadsheets with functions and charts and graphs – they wrote reports and created labels and envelopes – they downloaded files, wrote in HTML and did every job known to Bill Gates – and then some more.

[22] Thank you Hilary.

Suddenly, ten minutes before their time was up, lightning flashed across the sky, thunder rolled, rain poured, and, of course, the power went off. Satan stared at his blank screen and screamed every curse known in the underworld. Jesus just sighed.

Finally the electricity came back on, and each of them restarted their computers. Satan started searching frantically, screaming: "It's gone! It's all GONE! I lost everything when the power went out!" Meanwhile, Jesus quietly started printing out all of his files from the past two hours of work.

"Wait!" screamed Satan, "That's not fair! How come he has all his work and I lost all mine?" God just shrugged and said:

JESUS SAVES.

T T T T

Se non è vero, è ben trovato

A widely circulated (but unconfirmed) story has it that Lord George Brown, when he was UK Foreign Secretary in the 1960s, created an embarrassing incident at an official reception in Peru. Brown already had a reputation for heavy drinking, and is said to have approached a tall, elegant presence in a long red gown, and requested the honour of the next dance, to be told: "I will not dance with you for three reasons. The first is that you are drunk. The second is that the band is not playing a waltz, but the Peruvian national anthem. The final reason is that I am the Archbishop of Lima."

I remember a similar incident with a drunken colleague at a reception in Dushanbe, when he insisted on dancing with the US Ambassador's attractive female interpreter just as she was translating a long speech by the Russian Minister of Defence. I had to take him home.

T T T T

Odds and ends

T Nigel Williams writes from Copenhagen: "In my schooldays we used to sing another version of *While Shepherds washed their socks by night*, of which the last two lines were: 'The Angels threw some soapflakes in / and they began to scrub.' My father was fond of the story about waiting for the German verb before beginning to translate, but it was Bismarck he told it of and the interpreter said "Patience! I am waiting for the verb."

T Seen on a caravan with GB number plates driving through Switzerland: *Adventure before Dementia.*

T "Stabiles Geld ist nicht alles – aber ohne stabiles Geld ist alles nichts." (Die Bilanz, Karl-Heinz Paqué, Hanser 2009)

T "The Constitution is the rock upon which our nation rests. We must follow it not only when it is convenient, but when fear and danger beckon in a different direction. To do less would diminish us and undermine the foundation upon which we stand." (Judge Lewis A. Kaplan of United States District Court in Manhattan, who, in October 2010, barred testimony from a crucial witness in the

first non-military trial of a former Guantánamo detainee because it had been obtained at a secret CIA prison site outside the USA and with the strong presumption that the witness had been subjected to torture.)

T E-mail from Tajikistan, April 2010 – "Dear Robert, Thank you for your message and concern. We are in contact with our Vanj district office, fortunately there are no causalities but some residential houses have been damaged and a governmental commotion is assessing the volume of the damage. Kind regards, Bakhtiyor" – I love the idea of governmental commotions exploring causalities….

T Switzerland has just appointed a Federal Council with a majority of women. Unfortunately the horse trading involved led to mutual recriminations, name-calling and a threat of legal action by one party leader against another. As the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 29 September wisely commented: "Wer den Kuhhandel sucht, sollte nicht beleidigt sein, wenn zum Schluss auch etwas Mist herauskommt." (If you go in for horse trading you shouldn't be surprised if you end up with some manure on your hands.)

T "Being president of the University of California is like being manager of a cemetery: there are many people under you, but no one is listening." Mark Yudof, President of UC Berkeley, quoted in the *NYT Magazine* September 2009.

T *Le Progrès* (Lyon), 18.4.2010: "Les relations sexuelles illicites à l'origine des tremblements de terre : L'augmentation des relations sexuelles illicites est la cause de l'accroissement des tremblement de terre selon l'ayatollah Kazem Sedighi, imam de la prière du vendredi à Téhéran. Beaucoup de femmes mal habillées corrompent les jeunes et l'augmentation des relations sexuelles illicites fait accroître le nombre de tremblements de terre, a t-il déclaré." [This must be a mass movement.]

T "What we have had, in effect, is a government-guaranteed and taxpayer-subsidized casino industry piggy-backed onto the legitimate banking sector." John Cassidy, *New Yorker,* 3 May 2010.

T "We are no longer the nation that used to amaze the world with its visionary projects. We have become, instead, a nation whose politicians seem to compete over who can show the least vision, the least concern about the future and the greatest willingness to pander to short-term, narrow-minded selfishness." Paul Krugman, *NYT* 7.10.10"

T What must be a new record in the German language for stringing together adverbial phrases: "Das Obergericht hat einen weitherum bekannt-berüchtigten, mehrfach einschlägig vorbestraften, derzeit flüchtigen, selbsternannten Zahnarzt-ratgeber zu einer unbedingten Freiheitsstrafe von 15 Monaten verurteilt ….." (*NZZ*, 15.10.2010 – I'm not going to even attempt a translation.)

T According to the President of the Freiburg-based Association for German Language, between 2 and 3.5% of words in use in spoken German today are borrowed from English. What he doesn't say is that many of these have perfectly acceptable German equivalents. This doesn't worry him – it does me.