

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

2011

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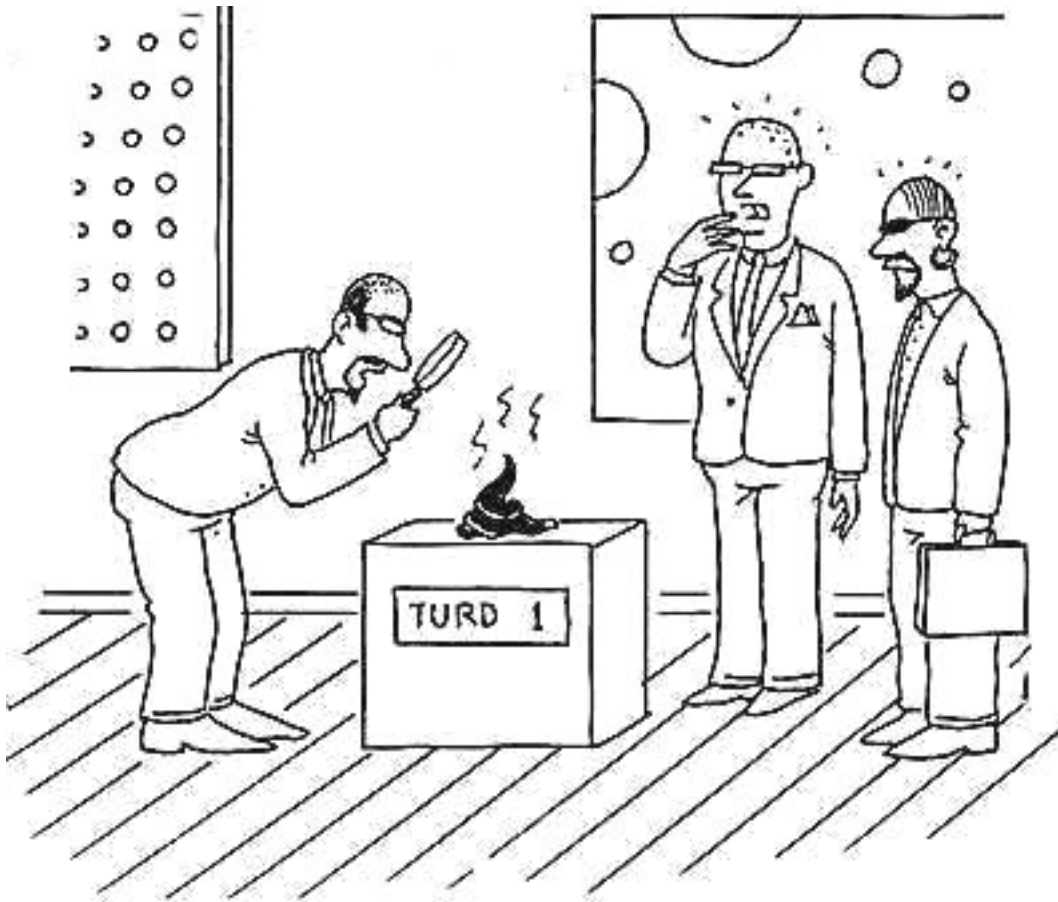
Robert Middleton

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.



"Gentlemen, it's either a fake or a damn fine original"

The handwriting on the wall may be a forgery. *Ralph Hodgson*

If you haven't got it, fake it! Too short? Wear big high heels, but do practice walking! *Victoria Beckham*

The document had been sitting with the CIA and their U.K. counterparts for a long while, and they had not discovered it ... And I think it took the IAEA a day to discover that it was a forgery. *Hans Blix*

Actually I am very glad that people can buy Armani - even if it's a fake. I like the fact that I'm so popular around the world. *Giorgio Armani*

With a gentleman I am always a gentleman and a half, and with a fraud I try to be a fraud and a half. *Otto von Bismarck*

The secret of life is honesty and fair dealing. If you can fake that, you've got it made. *Groucho Marx*

CHRISTMAS PUDDING 2011

This year's *CP* again has no main "theme" – a few highlights, however. I have long been fascinated by forgery, especially in the art world, although hoaxes and parodies also add colour to literature. Oscar Wilde is credited with having said that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" – an attribution that is perhaps a hoax within a hoax. As Dorothy Parker pointed out in 1927:

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

An edition of Joseph Addison's *The Spectator* of 1776, contained the following aphorism: "Imitation is a kind of artless flattery." However, the nearest to the original Wilde "quotation" is found in *Lacon: or, Many things in few words*, published in 1820 by Charles Caleb Colton (1780–1832), an English cleric and author: "Imitation is the sincerest of flattery."¹

Of course, in the current year, plagiarism hit the headlines, at least in Germany, where Defence Minister von Guttenberg – or to give him his full name, Karl Theodor Maria Nikolaus Johann Jacob Philipp Franz Joseph Sylvester Freiherr von und zu Guttenberg – was forced to resign after Andreas Fischer-Lescano, a young law professor at the University of Bremen, "Googled" ("gegoogelt" in German if you ever need to know) Guttenberg's doctoral thesis for the University of Bayreuth, and discovered many sections where the author had simply copied and pasted texts from other sources without giving appropriate acknowledgment. Fischer-Lescano described this as "outrageous" behaviour, especially as the University of Bayreuth had awarded Guttenberg *summa cum laude* for his work. More than thirty thousand professors and students agreed. The only surprising things were that a) Chancellor Angela Merkel defended Guttenberg for so long and b) the University, in withdrawing the degree, left open the issue of whether Guttenberg had "deliberately cheated" – fortunately for them Guttenberg did not then claim that he had cheated accidentally.

A remarkable website, GuttenPlag, documented the plagiarism in the form of a bar chart showing 1218 plagiarising fragments on 371 of a total of 393 pages: quite an achievement, worthy of some kind of award, perhaps in the Guinness Book of Records if not a doctorate.

Activists got to work, announcing three other plagiarising dissertations by politicians, and newspaper headlines reported on the "Raiders of the Lost Quote" – an exercise in healthy democracy.

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¹ Colton's books, including collections of epigrammatic aphorisms and short essays on conduct, though now almost forgotten, had a phenomenal popularity in their day.

Another theme this year is new poetry. I was given a series of three remarkable anthologies this year²: *Staying Alive*, *Being Alive* and *Being Human* (Bloodaxe Books).

Remarkable in three ways: most of the poets are still alive or died only recently, many of their poems are excellent and (most remarkably) the first volume published in 2002 was so successful that it is currently in its tenth impression and was followed after only two years by the second; and this second volume was followed in turn by the third in 2011. So people still read poetry – and are discriminating in their tastes. As Neil Astley, the anthologist of all three volumes, wrote in his Introduction to the second volume: “*Staying Alive* didn’t just reach a broader readership, it introduced thousands of new readers to contemporary poetry, giving them an international gathering of poems with emotional power, intellectual edge and playful wit. It also brought many readers back to poetry, people who hadn’t read poetry for years because it hadn’t held their interest.”

The poems in *CP 2011* are taken almost exclusively from the first volume. Here is a first selection:

Homage to my hips – Lucille Clifton (1936-2010)

these hips are big hips.
they need space to
move around in.
they don’t fit into little
petty places. these hips
are free hips.
they don’t like to be held back.
these hips have never been enslaved,
they go where they want to go
they do what they want to do.
these hips are mighty hips.
these hips are magic hips.
i have known them
to put a spell on a man and
spin him like a top

Considering the Snail – Thom Gunn (1929-2004)

The snail pushes through a green
night, for the grass is heavy
with water and meets over
the bright path he makes, where rain
has darkened the earth’s dark. He
moves in a wood of desire,

pale antlers barely stirring
as he hunts. I cannot tell
what power is at work, drenched there
with purpose, knowing nothing.

² Thanks Luisa.

What is a snail's fury? All
I think is that if later

I parted the blades above
the tunnel and saw the thin
trail of broken white across
litter, I would never have
imagined the slow passion
to that deliberate progress.

Happiness – *Stephen Dunn* (*1939)

A state you must dare not enter
with hopes of staying,
quicksand in the marshes, and all
the roads leading to a castle
that doesn't exist.
But there it is, as promised,
with its perfect bridge above
the crocodiles,
and its doors forever open.

The Loch Ness Monster's Song – *Edwin Morgan* (1920-2010)

Sssnnnwhuffffll?
Hnwhuffl hhnnwfl hnfl hfl?
Gdroblboblhobngbl gbl gl g g g glbgl.
Drubhaflabhaflubhafgabhaflhafl fl fl –
gm grawwww grf grawf awfgm graw gm.
Hovoplodok – doplodovok – plovodokot-doplodokosh?
Splgraw fok fok splgrafhatchgabrlgabrl fok splfok!
Zgra kra gka fok!
Grof grawff gahf?
Gombl mbl bl –
blm plm,
blm plm,
blm plm,
blp.

Psalm - *Charles Simic* (*1938)

You've been a long time making up your mind,
O Lord, about these madmen
Running the world. Their reach is long
And their claws must have frightened you.
One of them found me with his shadow.
The day turned chill. I dangled
Between terror and valor
In the darkest corner of my son's bedroom.
I saw with my eyes, You in whom I do not believe.
You've been busy making the flowers pretty,

The lambs run after their mother,
 Or perhaps you haven't been doing even that?
 It was spring. The killers were full of sport
 And merriment, and your divines
 Were right at their side, to make sure
 Our final goodbyes were said properly.

The door – Miroslav Holub (1923-1998)

<p>Jdi a otevři dveře. Třeba je tam venku Strom nebo les, Nebo zahrada, Nebo magické město. Jdi a otevři dveře. I kdyby tam byla jen tikající tma, i kdyby tam bylo jen duté vanutí i kdyby tam nic nebylo, jdi a otevři dveře.</p> <p>Jdi a otevři dveře. Třeba tam pes zaškrabe. Třeba je tam tvář, Nebo oko, Nebo obraz obrazu.</p> <p>Jdi a otevři dveře, Když je tam mlha, Spadne. Aspoň Průvan Bude.</p>	<p>Go and open the door. Perhaps outside there's a tree, or a wood, or a garden, or a magic town. Go and open the door. Perhaps outside there's a dog scratching. Perhaps there's a face outside, or an eye or the picture of a picture. Go and open the door. If there's fog outside it will go.</p> <p>Go and open the door. There could be outside only singing darkness, and there could be outside only wind's hollow breath and there could be absolutely nothing outside, go and open the door. At least there would be a draught.</p>
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Living – Denise Levertov (1923-1997)

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

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

A red salamander
 so cold and so

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

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Wisdom from the third century BCE

I found the following inscription on a monument from Ai Khanum at the marvellous exhibition *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World* at the British Museum:

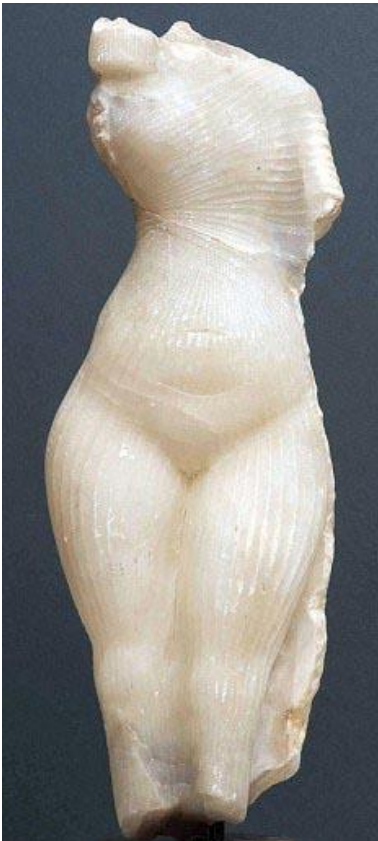
As a child learn good manners
As a young man learn to control your passions
In middle age be just
In old age give good advice
Then die without regret

T T T T

Fakes and forgeries at the V&A Museum

The following article by Owen Jarus appeared in *The Independent* on 19 January 2010.

“This Saturday the Victoria and Albert Museum in London will open a show that is all about a fake, in partnership with Scotland Yard. The exhibit, *Metropolitan Police Service's Investigation of Fakes and Forgeries*, will explore the work of counterfeit mastermind Shaun Greenhalgh, and reveal some of the techniques used by the police to spot fakes.



Over a 17-year period Greenhalgh created fake art pieces that fooled museum experts and sold for sums as high as six figures. Sentenced in 2007 he is currently serving a four year prison sentence. His parents Olive and George Greenhalgh, who assisted in his activities, were given suspended sentences – they were both in their 80s when tried.

Shaun Greenhalgh's fakes encompassed both the ancient and modern worlds. These include Assyrian reliefs, Thomas Moran paintings and a Barbara Hepworth sculpture.

The Greenhalghs melted down genuine Roman coins in order to create a forged Rizley Park Lanx - a Roman serving plate The art world tentatively accepted it as an original, and the lanx was sold at auction in 1992 for £100,000, before being donated to the British Museum.

But perhaps his most remarkable criminal achievement is that of the so-called 'Amarna Princess' that was sold to the Bolton Museum in 2003 for £440,000. It's a headless 52 cm alabaster statue that shows what appears to be an Egyptian princess.

Now, this is no ordinary fake. Amarna art is a very unique artform in Egyptian history. It was only practiced for about 20 years – during and shortly after the reign of the pharaoh Akhenaten.

As pharaohs go Akhenaten was a total rebel. When he came to power he threw out Egypt's polytheistic religion, focusing Egyptian beliefs around the worship of one entity – the Aten, a sun-disc. He built an entirely new capital called Amarna out in the desert and he brought in a new and utterly strange style of Egyptian art.

Unlike the formal prose of earlier pharaohs, art from his reign shows the human body with long spindly fingers, cone shaped heads and intimate scenes such as Akhenaten kissing one of his daughters.

Two years after Akhenaten's death Tutankhamun came to the throne and art returned to its traditional formal style which is seen so beautifully in the artefacts from King Tut's tomb. It has been suggested that Akhenaten suffered from a medical condition, such as Marfan's syndrome, that affected his appearance and caused him to bring in this new art-style.

So the fact that Greenhalgh was able to create such a convincing fake of a royal – from such a unique time period of Egyptian art history – is quite remarkable.

The Bolton Museum said in a statement that the rarity of the item actually made it more difficult to out as a fake:

“There were few comparable objects to compare the statue to, apart from a statue in the Louvre Museum in Paris. For this reason the statue's provenance (ownership history) played an important part in the authentication of the statue,” they said in a release on their website. “Experts at the British Museum also concluded that it was a genuine piece.”

To help peddle the fake, Greenhalgh's father played the role of front-man. The elder Greenhalgh told the museum a story about how it had been bought by his great-grandfather at an 1892 auction of items from the 4th Earl of Egremont's collection.

Shaun Greenhalgh's Slip-up – The success of the Amarna Princess appears to have gone to Greenhalgh's head. In 2005 his father (again playing front-man) tried to sell three faked Assyrian reliefs to the British Museum. They depicted ancient battle scenes and at first glance appeared to be genuine. But the work that Shaun Greenhalgh had done on the details was sloppy.

The errors were numerous. The artwork showed what appeared to be 20th century harnesses on the horses, and there was a spelling mistake in the cuneiform inscription. To top it off, this time the Greenhalgh's cover story about how they came about the artefacts didn't add up.

Museum curator John Curtis told the journal *Art and Antiquities* that the condition of the reliefs “just didn't fit the story that the piece had been hidden in their garage for decades.” While Iraqi deserts may help preserve Assyrian reliefs, car garages in northern latitudes don't. Scotland Yard was called and before long the Greenhalghs were exposed.”

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Pass the Port

A young Tajik arrives in Moscow in the 1960s. His friends have told him that there are many shortages and the only way to survive is quickly to join any queue he sees in the street – there is sure to be some food to buy at the other end.

After a couple of weeks he returns home – his friends ask him if he has taken their advice. Yes, he says: “On the first day I came to this enormous square and there was a very long queue outside a red building – so I joined it. But the shop-owner must just have died because there he was all laid out with flowers And nothing left to eat.”



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More “Staying Alive”

Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota – *James Wright (1927-1980)*

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year’s horses
Blaze up into golden stones.
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have wasted my life.

Elizabeth Daryush (1887-1977)

I saw the daughter of the sun; she stood
Under the north rise of the copse, where now
The shade-hoar faded, where began to show
Pale primrose heads, fresh as her own pale hood
Of straight hair, groups of early mercury
No greener than her own plain sheeny gown -
Long had I wandered in the winter-town
Of smoke-grey fog, of stone grey field and tree
Nor girl she seemed, nor goddess; her grave face
Soft as a child’s, yet wise, brighter than spring,

More warm than summer, had strange shadowing,
Then mundane lustre held both more and less;

No mirth was there, no glee, no eagerness,
No love, save love for every living thing.

The Execution – Alden Nowlan (1933-1983)

On the night of the execution
a man at the door
mistook me for the coroner.
“Press,” I said.

But he didn’t understand. He led me
into the wrong room
where the sheriff greeted me:
“You’re late, Padre.”

“You’re wrong,” I told him. “I’m Press.”
“Yes, of course, Reverend Press.”
We went down the stairway.

“Ah, Mr. Ellis,” said the Deputy.
“Press!” I shouted. But he shoved me
through a black curtain.
The lights were so bright
I couldn’t see the faces
of the men sitting opposite. But, thank God, I thought
They can see me!

“Look!” I cried. “Look at my face!
Doesn’t anybody know me?”

Then a hood covered my head.
“Don’t make it harder for us,” the hangman whispered.

The Leaden-Eyed – Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931)

Let not young souls be smothered out before
They do quaint deeds and fully flaunt their pride.
It is the world’s one crime its babes grow dull,
Its poor are ox-like, limp and leaden-eyed.

Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly;
Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap;
Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve;
Not that they die, but that they die like sheep.

Signs – Gjertrud Schnackenberg (*1953)

Threading the palm, a web of little lines
Spells out the lost money, the heart, the head,
The wagging tongues, the sudden deaths, in signs
We would smooth out, like imprints on a bed,
In signs that can’t be helped, geese heading south,

In signs read anxiously, like breath that clouds
A mirror held to a barely open mouth,
Like telegrams, the gathering of crowds -

The plane's X in the sky, spelling disaster;
Before the whistle and hit, a tracer flare;
Before rubble, a hairline crack in plaster
And a housefly's panicked scribbling on the air.

A Puppy Called Puberty – *Adrian Mitchell (1932-2008)*

It was like keeping a puppy in your underpants
A secret puppy you weren't allowed to show to anyone
Not even your best friend or your worst enemy

You wanted to pat him stroke him cuddle him
All the time but you weren't supposed to touch him

He only slept for five minutes at a time
Then he'd suddenly perk up his head
In the middle of school medical inspection
And always on bus rides
So you had to climb down from the upper deck
All bent double to smuggle the puppy off the bus
Without the buxom conductress spotting
Your wicked and ticketless stowaway.

Jumping up, wet-nosed, eagerly wagging –
He only stopped being a nuisance
When you were alone together
Pretending to be doing your homework
But really gazing at each other
Through hot and hazy daydreams

Of those beautiful schoolgirls on the bus
With kittens bouncing in their sweaters.

Listening to Collared Doves – *Edith Joy Scovell (1907-1999)*

I am homesick now for middle age, as then
For youth. For youth is our home-land: we were born
And lived there long, though afterwards moved on
From state to state, too slowly acclimatising
Perhaps and never fluent, through the surprising
Countries, in any languages but one.

This mourning now for middle age, no more
For youth, confirms me old as not before.
Age rounds the world, they say, to childhood's far
Archaic shores; it may be so at last,
But what now (strength apart) I miss the most
Is time unseen like air, since everywhere.

And yet, when in the months and in the skies

That were the cuckoos', and in the nearer trees
That were the deep-voiced wood-pigeons', it is
Instead now the collared doves that call and call
(Their three flat notes growing traditional),
I think we live long enough, listening to these.

I draw my line out from their simple curve
And say, our natural span may be enough;
And think of one I knew and her long life;
And how the climate changed and how the sign-
Posts changed, defaced, from her Victorian
Childhood and youth, through our century of grief,

And how she adapted as she could, not one
By nature adaptable, bred puritan
(Though quick to be pleased and having still her own
Lightness of heart). She died twenty years ago,
Aged, of life - it seems, all she could do
Having done, all the change that she could know having known.

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Joyce Hatto

Probably the most remarkable musical fraud of all time – it can hardly be called a hoax – concerned the career of Joyce Hatto. The following are extracts from an article by Mark Singer in *The New Yorker* of 17 September 2007.

In the summer of 1989, in Royston, England, a man named William Barrington-Coupe cheerfully received a visitor from Germany: Ernst Lumpe, a high-school teacher, fervent music lover, and record collector. For a couple of years, the two men had sustained a correspondence that consisted mainly of Barrington-Coupe, a former classical-music agent and a peripatetic record producer, responding to Lumpe's questions about the authenticity of various arcane LPs.

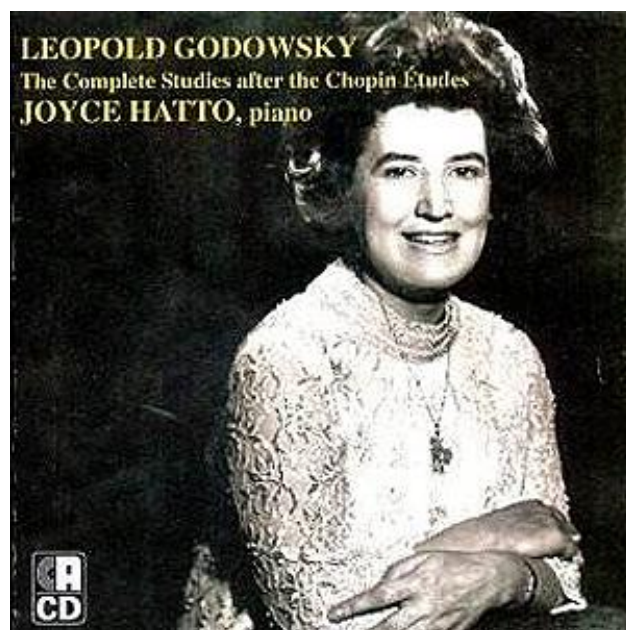
During the nineteen-fifties and sixties, a number of record companies in England and America had a practice – questionable but nodded and winked at – of repackaging LPs by established artists as the work of fictitious performers and selling the recordings at a deep discount. Barrington-Coupe, known to familiars as Barry, worked at several music labels that helped establish the form—known as the “super-bargain” classical LP. Such recordings, which retailed for roughly a dollar apiece, were a wellspring of artful pseudonyms – Paul Procopolis, Giuseppe Parolini, the Cincinnati Pro Arte Philharmonic, the Munich Greater State Symphony – and Barry is credited with coining the wittiest of all: Wilhelm Havagesse (conducting Rimsky-Korsakov's “Scheherazade,” as rendered by the spurious Zurich Municipal Orchestra). The small labels that Barry worked at had a tendency to run aground financially, but perhaps his most dependable asset was his resilience – a facility for dusting himself off and moving on to the next venture.

After their meeting, Lumpe remained in touch with Barry, whose letters often included music-world gossip or bulletins about his or Hatto's health. Barry found

rare 78s and LPs for Lumpe's collection, inquired about Lumpe's children, furnished seeds from his flower garden. Among the recordings he sent were works by Liszt and Chopin that Hatto had played many years earlier, in concert. Several weeks after his trip to Royston, Lumpe also received in the mail a tape of a piano arrangement of Edward Elgar's First Symphony—from a Hatto recital, Barry said, that had taken place recently in Cambridge.

This was unexpected: hadn't Joyce Hatto retired from concertizing years earlier? A thank-you note to Barry elicited more details: The second half of the concert was the Liszt piano transcription of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which, unfortunately, "was not recorded due to some stupidity of the University Recording engineer." But Barry had pressed the buttons himself in time to capture her encore, Liszt's transcription of the "William Tell Overture." For some reason, he hadn't included a copy of this recording. Lumpe filed Hatto's Elgar First Symphony among his several hundred cassette and reel-to-reel tapes.

As a piano omnivore, Lumpe welcomed the advent of online group discussions In the comparatively genteel Yahoo group *ThePiano*, one popular amusement was the blind listening quiz, in which an unidentified musical selection was uploaded and members critiqued the performance. In November, 2002, Lumpe posed a different type of quiz: "Look at the quite impressive list below and guess which pianist has recorded all these works over roughly the last fifteen years." The list implied an artist with exceptional breadth, depth, and stamina: Bach (Goldberg Variations), Beethoven (complete piano concertos, complete piano sonatas, complete bagatelles), Brahms (piano concertos), Chopin (complete works for solo piano and for piano and orchestra, complete mazurkas, nocturnes, and polonaises), Schubert (complete piano sonatas), Liszt (complete etc.), a lot of Rachmaninoff and Scarlatti, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Mussorgsky, Saint-Saëns, Schumann, Tchaikovsky.



No one guessed correctly, so Lumpe volunteered the answer: Joyce Hatto. Participants in the Yahoo group demanded to know more about Hatto, who wasn't even mentioned in the standard music reference books. Such texts can be arbitrary, Lumpe replied online, and Hatto was an artist "who worked just quietly and who acquired more fame outside her country." Quoting from Concert Artist promotional material, he cited a roster of conductors and composers with whom she'd played (among them Benjamin Britten and Ralph Vaughan Williams). After a series of recitals in London, Lumpe reported, she had been "described by the London Daily Telegraph as 'The Indomitable Champion of Liszt.'" Another critic had observed that "probably not since Busoni has a pianist presented such a wide and rich in-depth repertoire."

The full story of what Mark Singer describes in his article as William Barrington-Coupe's "sustained wholesale plagiarism" can be found on *The New Yorker* website under http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/09/17/070917fa_fact_singer. In the end, the fraud was discovered by an amateur pianist, Brian Ventura.

On February 12th, in Mount Vernon, New York, Brian Ventura received a package that he had been anticipating for a long time. An avocational pianist, Ventura worked on Wall Street and had a fifty-minute commute, which he usually spent listening to an iPod. He had learned of Hatto not long before she died, and in the months that followed he closely read reviews of her recordings until he knew which ones he wanted to own. Placing an order turned out to be more of a chore than he expected, but he eventually established a friendly correspondence with Barrington-Coupe. Weeks passed, nothing came in the mail, and he wrote to Barry, who explained that the shipment had been delayed because one selection was unavailable. So Ventura asked Barry to substitute Liszt's "Transcendental Studies."

Ventura unwrapped the "Studies" disk first. He placed it in his computer's disk drive and, through Apple's iTunes software, connected to Gracenote, an Internet database of CDs. According to Gracenote, which identifies a CD by the durations of its individual tracks, Ventura had loaded the "Transcendental Studies," but the pianist was a Hungarian named László Simon. *László Simon?* Ventura weighed the possibilities: Gracenote might be mistaken (mislabellings had been known to occur), or someone named László Simon had recorded the same music with precisely the same track timings.

"I started listening," he recalled. "Going back and forth between the iPod and the Amazon clips for individualistic things—sudden changes in dynamics or ornaments, or a cadenzalike passage where the performer has more leeway in the interpretation. In slower pieces, it's easier to hear subtleties. I was ninety-five per cent certain that most of the tracks were the same. So I didn't know what to do. If she was the one that was copying, part of me didn't want it to come out. The whole Joyce Hatto story seemed so terrific you just wanted it to be true. I didn't want to bring down the story."

Within seventy-two hours, the truth had not so much come out as exploded. Ventura had sent an e-mail to Jed Distler, a composer and reviewer who contributed to *Gramophone* and had published positive Hatto reviews in the online publication *ClassicsToday*. Distler later wrote, "After careful comparison of the actual Simon performances to the Hatto, it appeared to me that 10 out of 12 tracks showed remarkable similarity in terms of tempi, accents, dynamics, balances, etc." When Distler next tested a CD of Rachmaninoff's Second and Third Piano Concertos—ostensibly Hatto playing with the elusive René Köhler and his equally elusive National Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra—Gracenote identified the soloist as Yefim Bronfman, accompanied by the Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen. Distler reported his findings to Ventura via e-mail, and sent copies to the editors of *Gramophone* and *ClassicsToday* and to Jeremy Nicholas and two other *Gramophone* critics who had championed Hatto.

James Inverne, the editor of *Gramophone*, enlisted an audio expert, Andrew Rose, who examined the waveforms of the Simon and the Hatto recordings. The visual

match was exact, and Rose knew the result even before listening. Ten of the twelve tracks of the Concert Artist “Transcendental Studies” were “without a shadow of a doubt” performed by Simon, though the timing of one track had been subtly altered—sped up by 0.02 per cent. Distler had sensed that another track wasn’t lifted from the Simon recording, and Rose confirmed this: it had been appropriated from a 1993 release by the Japanese pianist Minoru Nojima. Again, the timing had been tweaked, but the waveform revealed the truth. “No pianist who’s ever lived could replicate a performance to anything like the degree of accuracy heard here,” Rose wrote. “It’s simply not humanly possible, whatever the degree of Ms. Hatto’s claimed virtuosity.”

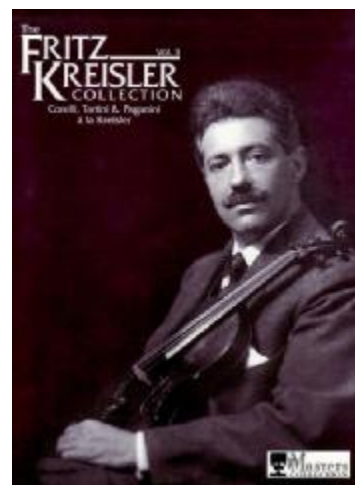
On the evening of February 15th, *Gramophone* published the story online, appending a report from Rose that rendered the evidence unassailable. In the days that followed, Rose continued to analyze recordings and post updates: The Rachmaninoff concertos were not Hatto but Bronfman. And had Hatto, Köhler, and the National Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra collaborated on the Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2? No, but Vladimir Ashkenazy, Bernard Haitink, and the Vienna Philharmonic had.

T T T T

Fritz Kreisler

The story of the “frauds” perpetrated by the Austrian violinist Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962) is simpler and less “criminal.” Kreisler was a brilliant violinist – he made his US début at the age of 13 at Steinway Hall in New York City and gave the première of Elgar’s violin concerto in 1910 – and wrote some of the most popular violin pieces in the world, among them *Caprice viennois*, *Tambourin chinois*, *Schön Rosmarin*, *Liebesleid* and *Liebesfreud*.

He also published and played a number of pieces in a more classical style, which he ascribed to various composers (Vivaldi, Pugnani, Couperin, Padre Martini, Dittersdorf, Francoeur, Corelli, Stamitz, Tartini and others). In 1935 he reluctantly admitted that these pieces were his own, with the exception of the first 8 bars from the *Chanson Louis XIII* (attributed by him to Couperin), which was taken from a traditional melody; he explained his motive in doing so as the necessity of building up well-rounded programs for his concerts that would contain virtuoso pieces by established composers, rather than a series of compositions under his own, as yet unknown, name. “The name changes, the value remains” he said.



T T T T

Castles of the Assassins

I received recently from a former colleague *Eagle’s Nest – Ismaili Castles in Iran and Syria* by Peter Willey. Before opening it, however, I decided to read first the account by Freya Stark of her visit to these same castles in 1927-1931: *The valleys of the Assassins*. My decision was well-founded – I discovered in Freya Stark a most engaging and humorous personality, who made light of her remarkable

achievements as the first Western woman to visit these regions at a time when travel there was not only unusual but highly dangerous. The preface to her book is one of the most delightful I have ever read:

An imaginative aunt who, for my ninth birthday, sent a copy of the Arabian Nights, was, I suppose, the original cause of trouble.

Unfostered and unnoticed, the little flame so kindled fed secretly on dreams. Chance, such as the existence of a Syrian missionary near my home, nourished it; and Fate, with long months of illness and leisure, blew it to a blaze bright enough to light my way through labyrinths of Arabic, and eventually to land me on the coast of Syria at the end of 1927.

Here, I thought, all difficulty was over: I had now but to look around me, to learn, and to enjoy.

And so it would have been had not those twin Virtues so fatal to the joie de vivre of our civilized West, the sense of responsibility and the illusion, dear to well-regulated minds, that every action must have a purpose – had not these virtues of Responsibility and Purpose met me at every step with the embarrassing enquiry: “Why are you here alone?” and: “What do you intend to do?”

I may confess at once that I had never thought of why I came, far less of why I came alone: and as to what I was going to do – I saw no cause to trouble about a thing so nebulous beforehand. My sense of responsibility was in effect deficient, and purpose non-existent. When excessively badgered, the only explanation I could think of for being so unwontedly in Asia was an interest in Arabic grammar – a statement rarely accepted in that candid spirit in which I offered it to unconvinced enquirers.

I came to the conclusion that some more ascetic reason than mere enjoyment should be found if one wishes to travel in peace: to do things for fun smacks of levity, immorality almost, in our utilitarian world. And though personally I think the world is wrong, and I know in my heart of hearts that it is a most excellent reason to do things merely because one likes the doing of them, I would advise all those who wish to see unwrinkled brows in passport offices to start out ready labelled as entomologists, anthropologists, or whatever other -ology they think suitable and propitious.

But as this book is intended for the Public, and is therefore necessarily truthful, I must admit that for my own part I travelled single-mindedly for fun. I learned my scanty Arabic for fun, and a little Persian – and then went for the same reason to look for the Assassin castles and the Luristan bronzes in the manner here related. And here I would like to thank the much-tried, frequently accused, and not unreasonably perplexed officials who came across me, for much indulgence, not always unmixed with disapproval, but invariably kind.

I have given events and impressions as they occurred, as accurately as I could. This I am particularly anxious to say in regard to the Treasure Hunt in Luristan, which might otherwise be suspected of fantasy by readers unacquainted with lands so sensational: the only alteration made there is to disguise the situation of the treasure map and cave.

I have many to remember who were good to me in my journeying, British, Arabic, and Persian, whose presence lives in the enchanted frame of days and whose kindnesses are beyond the possibility of recording. *Freya Stark, Villa Freia Asolo Italy*

T T T T

Still “Staying Alive”

The Horses – *Michael Longley (*1939)*

For all the horses butchered on the battlefield,
shell-shocked, tripping over their own intestines,
drowning in the mud – the best war memorial
is in Homer: two horses that refuse to budge
despite threats and sweet-talk and the whistling whip,
unmovable as tombstone, their heads drooping
in front of the streamlined motionless chariot,
hot tears spilling from their eyelids on to the ground
because they are still in mourning for Patroclus
their charioteer, their shiny manes bedraggled
under the yoke pads on either side of the yoke.

Mushrooms – *Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)*

Overnight, very
Whitely, discreetly,
Very quietly

Our toes, our noses
Take hold on the loam,
Acquire the air.

Nobody sees us,
Stops us, betrays us;
The small grains make room.

Soft fists insist on
Heaving the needles,
The leafy bedding,

Even the paving.
Our hammers, our rams,
Earless and eyeless,

Perfectly voiceless,
Widen the crannies,
Shoulder through holes. We

Diet on water,
On crumbs of shadow,
Bland-mannered, asking

Little or nothing.
So many of us!
So many of us!

We are shelves, we are
Tables, we are meek,
We are edible,

Nudgers and shovers
In spite of ourselves.
Our kind multiplies:

We shall by morning
Inherit the earth.
Our foot's in the door.

Visiting Hour – *Stewart Conn* (*1936)

In the pond of our new garden
Were five orange stains, under
Inches of ice. Weeks since anyone
Had been there. Already by far
The most severe winter for years.
You broke the ice with a hammer.
I watched the goldfish appear,
Blunt-nosed and delicately clear.

Since then so much has taken place
To distance us from what we were.
That it should come to this.
Unable to hide the horror
In my eyes, I stand helpless
By your bedside and can do no more
Than wish it were simply a matter
Of smashing the ice and giving you air.

A Bird – *Sheila Wingfield* (1906-1992)

Unexplained
In the salt meadow
Lay the dead bird.
The wind
Was fluttering its wings.

Snow – *Louis McNiece* (1907-1963)

The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was
Spawning snow and pink roses against it
Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:
World is suddener than we fancy it.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.

And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world
Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes –

On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands –
There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.

The Mermaid Tank – *Stephen Knight* (*1960)

Beneath my weight, the duckboards bow.
Two buckets, slopping water, weigh me down.
A cold wind howls around the cages now,
While rain sweeps in – across the town –
Again; and while our rheumy-eyed,
Arthritic monsters fall asleep
Or vegetate
I kneel beside
The Songstress of The Deep
And wait.

All afternoon, the punters pass
Her tank in single file; because it's dark
Inside, they press their faces to the glass.
I breathe, at night, on every mark.
Behind my cloth, the water churns
And curls around our fat dugong
And when it clears
(Like smoke) she turns
Away, and any song
I hear

Is 'just the wind' or 'my mistake' ...
Outside, discarded handbills catch their wings
On tents or in the mud while, in their wake,
Paper cups, tickets stubs and things
The rain dismantles every night
Turn cart-wheels in the foreign air
Before they throng
The sky, too light
To settle anywhere
For long.

Variation on a Theme by Rilke – *Denise Levertov* (1923-1997)

A certain day became a presence to me;
there it was, confronting me – a sky, air, light:
a being. And before it started to descend
from the height of noon, it leaned over
and struck my shoulder as if with
the flat of a sword, granting me
honor and a task. The day's blow
rang out, metallic – or it was I, a bell awakened,
and what I heard was my whole self
saying and singing what it knew: I can.

Parody

Fans of the late Charles' Schulz's *Peanuts* will recognise the picture on the right. They may not know, however, that the text being typed by budding novelist Snoopy is the opening line from *Paul Clifford*, a novel by Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, (1803-1873).

"It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents—except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness."



Bulwer Lytton is remembered for this and the proverbial quotation "the pen is mightier than the sword" from his play *Richelieu* – otherwise the rest of his work has fallen into well-deserved obscurity. However, the English department at San Jose State University runs an annual contest named after him in which competitors offer only the first sentence of a bad novel (see <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com/>).

Here is a selection from Bulwer-Lytton contests over the years:

- As a scientist, Throckmorton knew that if he were ever to break wind in the echo chamber, he would never hear the end of it.
- Just beyond the Narrows, the river widens.
- With a curvaceous figure that Venus would have envied, a tanned, unblemished oval face framed with lustrous thick brown hair, deep azure-blue eyes fringed with long black lashes, perfect teeth that vied for competition, and a small straight nose, Marilee had a beauty that defied description.
- Stanley looked quite bored and somewhat detached, but then penguins often do.
- The sun oozed over the horizon, shoved aside darkness, crept along the greensward, and, with sickly fingers, pushed through the castle window, revealing the pillaged princess, hand at throat, crown asunder, gaping in frenzied horror at the sated, sodden amphibian lying beside her, disbelieving the magnitude of the frog's deception, screaming madly, "You lied!"
- Like an expensive sports car, fine-tuned and well-built, Portia was sleek, shapely, and gorgeous, her red jumpsuit moulding her body, which was as warm as the seatcovers in July, her hair as dark as new tires, her eyes flashing

like bright hubcaps, and her lips as dewy as the beads of fresh rain on the hood; she was a woman driven – fueled by a single accelerant – and she needed a man, a man who wouldn't shift from his views, a man to steer her along the right road, a man like Alf Romeo.

- The camel died quite suddenly on the second day, and Selena fretted sulkily and, buffing her already impeccable nails – not for the first time since the journey began – pondered snidely if this would dissolve into a vignette of minor inconveniences like all the other holidays spent with Basil.
- Through the gathering gloom of a late-October afternoon, along the greasy, cracked paving-stones slick from the sputum of the sky, Stanley Ruddlethorp wearily trudged up the hill from the cemetery where his wife, sister, brother, and three children were all buried, and forced open the door of his decaying house, blissfully unaware of the catastrophe that was soon to devastate his life.
- As the fading light of a dying day filtered through the window blinds, Roger stood over his victim with a smoking .45, surprised at the serenity that filled him after pumping six slugs into the bloodless tyrant that mocked him day after day, and then he shuffled out of the office with one last look back at the shattered computer terminal lying there like a silicon armadillo left to rot on the information superhighway.
- Detective Bart Lasiter was in his office studying the light from his one small window falling on his super burrito when the door swung open to reveal a woman whose body said you've had your last burrito for a while, whose face said angels did exist, and whose eyes said she could make you dig your own grave and lick the shovel clean.³

T T T T

Pass the Port again

A housekeeper approaches the lady of the house for a very significant raise in pay.

"On what basis can you justify such a vast increase?" replies her employer.

"Three reasons - first, I can iron better than you."

"What makes you think that?"

"Your husband told me."

"And the second reason?"

"I can cook better than you."

"And on what basis do say that?"

"Your husband told me."

"And the third reason?"

"I'm better in bed than you."

"I suppose my husband told you that too."

"No, the butler."

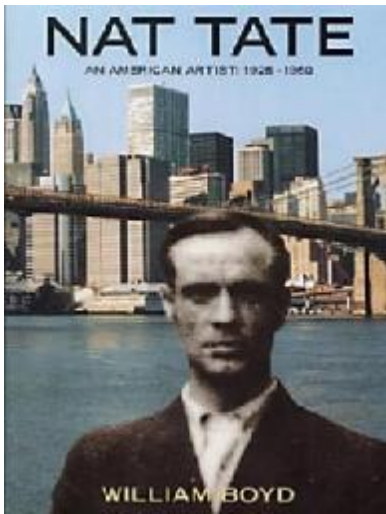
"Er, well, how much was that increase you were asking for?"⁴

³ A good pastiche of the style of Raymond Chandler - see *CP 2008*.

⁴ With thanks to Larry Bosley

Nat Tate

Probably the most successful contemporary art hoax concerns the work of “Nat Tate.” In 1998, William Boyd published *Nat Tate - An American Artist 1928-1960*



purporting to be the biography of a hitherto unknown abstract painter. Gore Vidal, John Richardson (Picasso’s biographer), and David Bowie (a board member of *Modern Painters* magazine and director of *21 Publishing* which published the book) were all participants in the hoax. Nat Tate’s name is a combination of two London art galleries, the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery. Boyd and his co-conspirators set about convincing the New York *glitterati* that the reputation of this influential abstract expressionist needed to be re-evaluated. Karen Wright, one of Bowie’s co-directors at *21 Publishing* said the hoax was not meant to be malicious: “Part of it was, we were very amused that people kept saying ‘Yes, I’ve heard of him’ – there is a willingness not to appear foolish. Critics are too proud for that.”

In an article in *The Guardian* on 14 October 2011, Boyd explained his objectives:

It all started in 1998. I was on the editorial board of *Modern Painters* magazine, then a very classy and influential art quarterly, and one day in a meeting the editor of the magazine, Karen Wright, wondered out loud if there was a way we could introduce some fiction into the mix of artists’ profiles, exhibition reviews and general essays in which the magazine specialised. I don’t know what made me speak out but I said, without really thinking: “Why don’t I invent an artist?” And so Nat Tate was born.

..... ‘Nat Tate’ seemed to me both punchily memorable and American – this fictional artist was to be American, I had decided, not British – and, it’s worth remembering that at this embryonic stage of his existence there wasn’t the remotest idea of developing a hoax – I was thinking only of a long short story, perhaps. A long short story with illustrations. ... And so I began to collect photos from junk shops and car boot sales – photos of anonymous people taken by anonymous photographers that had been discarded and were therefore free for use. The minute I had my idea for Nat Tate I was already thinking of what photos I could use in the depiction of his short and unhappy life.

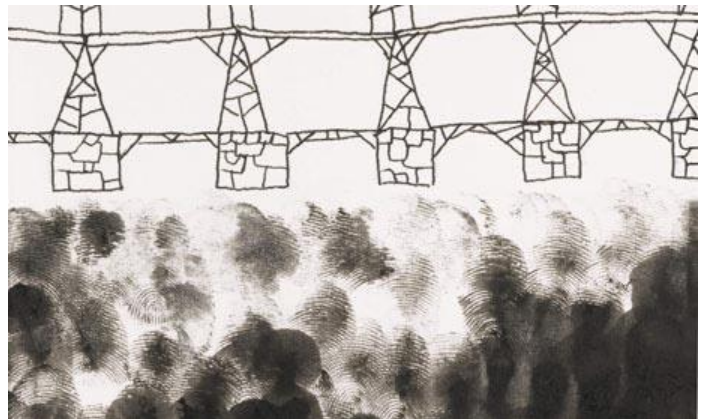
So I duly wrote *Nat Tate: An American Artist 1928-1960* – copiously illustrated with found anonymous pictures of Nat and his foster parents, his friends, his lovers, his colleagues, his dealers and his patrons. And there were also some reproductions of his art – a couple of drawings. The drawings were done by me.

.... The book was printed – it looked perfect, beautifully authentic. Bowie suggested two launch parties – one in Manhattan, one in London. We would present Nat Tate straight – no tongue in cheek, no nod and wink – and see what

happened. Bowie wrote the blurb. Gore Vidal – who was in on the conceit – provided a cover quote. The first launch party was scheduled for Manhattan on April Fools' Day, 1998. A week later, London would follow.

This is where the Nat Tate 'hoax' was born. A British journalist from the Independent newspaper (who was one of the conspirators) toured the crowded party in Manhattan – it took place in Jeff Koons's studio and was full of the *glitterati* of the art world – asking leading questions. The guests responded, guilelessly and not so guilelessly, assuming Nat Tate was a genuine forgotten painter, just rediscovered. Poor Nat. What a tragedy. A truly interesting artist. The work was fascinating. A real loss.

..... It was all getting out of hand, I felt. The unintended consequences of the history of Nat Tate were out of my control. Some sort of decent termination had to be found. And so I came up with an idea. Perhaps the circle could be closed if a Nat Tate drawing came on the open market. If this fictional artist could sell an artwork for real money then the Nat Tate story would have reached some kind of apotheosis and consummation.



So I 'found' another Nat Tate drawing – one from his famous bridge sequence, a series of drawings inspired by Hart Crane's poem 'The Bridge' – *Bridge No 114* (the sequence runs to more than 200 drawings). I had it elegantly framed and took it into Sotheby's and showed it to Philip Hook, senior director of the Impressionist and Modern Art department.Hook consulted with colleagues and in due course I was told the sale was on – Nat Tate's *Bridge No 114* will be sold at auction at Sotheby's on 16 November. all proceeds from the sale are going to charity – to the Artists' General Benevolent Institution, which provides financial aid "for artists who are in difficulties". I'm convinced that Nat would approve.

T T T T

"Staying Alive" again

Mirror Image – Louise Glück (*1943)

Tonight I saw myself in the dark window as
the image of my father, whose life
was spent like this,
thinking of death, to the exclusion
of other sensual matters,
so in the end that life
was easy to give up, since
it contained nothing: even
my mother's voice couldn't make him
change or turn back
as he believed

that once you can't love another human being
you have no place in the world.

Love: Beginnings – C K Williams (*1936)

They're at that stage where so much desire streams between them,
so much frank need and want,
so much absorption in the other and the self
and the self-admiring entity and unity they make --
her mouth so full, breast so lifted, head thrown back
so far in her laughter at his laughter
he so solid, planted, oaky, firm, so resonantly factual
in the headiness of being craved so,
she almost wreathed upon him as they intertwine again,
touch again, cheek, lip, shoulder, brow,
every glance moving toward the sexual, every glance away
soaring back in flame into the sexual --
that just to watch them is to feel again that hitching in the groin,
that filling of the heart,
the old, sore heart, the battered, foundered, faithful heart,
snorting again, stamping in its stall.

Yearn On – Katie Donovan (*1962)

I want you to feel
the unbearable lack of me.
I want your skin
to yearn for the soft lure of mine;
I want those hints of red
on your canvas
to deepen in passion for me:
carmine, burgundy.
I want you to keep
stubbing your toe
on the memory of me;
I want your head to be dizzy
and your stomach in a spin;
I want you to hear my voice
in your ear, to touch your face
imagining it is my hand.
I want your body to shiver and quiver
at the mere idea of mine.
I want you to feel as though
life after me is dull, and pointless,
and very, very aggravating;
that with me you were lifted
on a current you waited all your life to find,
as though you were wading
through a soggy swill of inanity and ugliness
every minute we are apart.

I want you to drive yourself crazy
with the fantasy of me,
and how we will meet again, against all odds,
and there will be tears and flowers,
and the vast relief of not I,
but us.
I am haunting your dreams,
conducting these fevers
from a distance,
a distance that leaves me weeping,
and storming,
and bereft.

Woman to man – *Judith Wright* (1915-2000)

The eyeless labourer in the night,
the selfless, shapeless seed I hold,
builds for its resurrection day---
silent and swift and deep from sight
foresees the unimagined light.

This is no child with a child's face;
this has no name to name it by;
yet you and I have known it well.
This is our hunter and our chase,
the third who lay in our embrace.

This is the strength that your arm knows,
the arc of flesh that is my breast,
the precise crystals of our eyes.
This is the blood's wild tree that grows
the intricate and folded rose.

This is the maker and the made;
this is the question and reply;
the blind head butting at the dark,
the blaze of light along the blade.
Oh hold me, for I am afraid.

New Year's Eve – *D.H. Lawrence* (1885-1930)

There are only two things now,
The great black night scooped out
And this fire-glow.

This fire-glow, the core,
And we the two ripe pips
That are held in store.

Listen, the darkness rings
As it circulates round our fire.
Take off your things.

Your shoulders, your bruised throat!
Your breasts, your nakedness!
This fiery coat!

As the darkness flickers and dips,
As the firelight falls and leaps
From your feet to your lips!

Spell – Kate Clancy (*1965)

If, at your desk, you push aside your work,
Take down a book, turn to this verse,
and read that I kneel here, pressing
my ear where on your chest the muscles
arch as great books part, in seagull curves,
bridging the seasounds of your heart,
and that your hands run through my hair,
draw the wayward mass to strands
as flat as scarlet silk-thread bookmarks,
and stroke my cheeks as if smoothing
back the tissue leaves from chilly,
plated pages, and pull me near
to read my eyes alone, then you shall see,
silvered and monochrome, yourself,
sitting at your desk, taking down a book,
turning to this verse, and then, my love,
you shall not know which one of us is reading,
now, which is writing, and which written.

Anthem for Doomed Youth – Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
– Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, –
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

Everyone Sang – Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white

Orchards and dark-green fields; on--on--and out of sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;
And beauty came like the setting sun:
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror
Drifted away ... O, but Everyone
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will never be done.

Returning we hear the Larks – Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918)

Sombre the night is.
And though we have our lives, we know
What sinister threat lies there.

Dragging these anguished limbs, we only know
This poison-blasted track opens on our camp -
On a little safe sleep.

But hark! joy – joy – strange joy.
Lo! heights of night ringing with unseen larks.
Music showering our upturned list'ning faces.

Death could drop from the dark
As easily as song -
But song only dropped,
Like a blind man's dreams on the sand
By dangerous tides,
Like a girl's dark hair for she dreams no ruin lies there,
Or her kisses where a serpent hides.

Grass – Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo,
Shovel them under and let me work--
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.
Shovel them under and let me work.
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor:
What place is this?
Where are we now?

I am the grass.
Let me work.

T T T T

Pass the Port once more

A man and a woman in the Ozarks are returning from their wedding with items for their new home loaded on a mule.



Isaac Rosenberg – Self-portrait⁵

⁵ As can be seen, Rosenberg was also an accomplished painter. Three poets, Edward Thomas (p. 32), Wilfred Owen and Rosenberg, died in the last years of the first World War. Siegfried Sassoon survived the war but wrote much poignant poetry about his experiences of it.

After a little while the mule stumbles. The man says "One."

A little while later, the mule stumbles again. The man says "Two."

Finally the mule stumbles again. The man says "Mule, I warned you," takes out his pistol and shoots the mule dead.

His wife rushes up to him and shouts: "You silly fool, that was our only mule – I won't allow you to do things like that."

The man looks her in the eye and says: "One."

T T T T

Spurious musical works

According to Wikipedia, Joseph Haydn's string quartets Opus 3 (Hoboken⁶ III 13-18) are spurious; as are three concertos for violin, two for cello, two for horn, two for piano and a sole oboe concerto listed by Hoboken. The Köchel catalogue (KV) of works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart also contains a number of spurious attributions: the following is taken from the liner notes by German musicologist Uwe Kraemer of a *LaserLight* recording of Violin Concertos "Nos. 6 & 7."

Since the Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum (Salzburg International Mozart Foundation) set about producing an accurate "New Mozart Edition" conforming to today's standards in 1956, the results achieved have led to a revision of many earlier ones and have brought about new knowledge with regard to the chronology and authenticity of works.

A number of works which either did not appear in the first edition at all or not in their original versions have been eliminated as not being genuine, and still others have been established as being adaptations or copies of other people's works performed by Mozart.

Alongside the genuine compositions, the Central Institute for Mozart Research in Salzburg has catalogued over 300 larger and smaller works which once appeared under Mozart's name, but which are dubious or not genuine according to the opinion of the editors.

This group includes the work KV271a (KV Appendix C14.05) known as the "Adelaide Concerto", whose manuscript remained hidden from the critical eye of Mozart researchers, and was not published until 1933 by Marius Casadesus with three cadences written for it by Paul Hindemith. The legend according to which the work was composed by the ten-year-old Mozart in Versailles on May 26th, 1766 and dedicated to Madame Adelaide de France, the eldest daughter of Louis XV, was not able to be confirmed. No one had seen the manuscript, whose handwritten dedication was supposed to be on the frontispiece (although the custom of the time demanded printing with dedications to important personalities).

Walter Lebermann then proved that the Mozarts had not even arrived in Paris on their concert tour by May 26th. The myth according to which the Princess had handed the valuable autograph to a certain Lavan de Montmorency before fleeing to Trieste in 1791, whose descendants had then kept it until publication in 1933,

⁶ Anthony van Hoboken (1887-1983) was a Dutch collector and musicologist, best known for his comprehensive catalogue of the compositions of Joseph Haydn published in 1957.

was destroyed: the family died out as early as 1851. The work, as a “Mystifikation à la Fritz Kreisler” (Einstein), is a cleverly manufactured workshop product in the style of the period by Marius Casadesus, who possibly also composed a viola concerto purported to be by Handel and perhaps a number of the themes which Stravinsky took to be original melodies by Pergolesi.

The problem with the Concerto in E flat major KV 268 (KV Appendix C14.01) is somewhat more complicated. Supposedly written in Salzburg and Munich in late 1780 and printed based on an unknown copy in 1799 (no autograph has been handed down), it has with its flute, two oboes, two bassoons and two horns a more imposing orchestral instrumentation than any genuine violin concerto by Mozart.

According to C. B. Oldman’s opinion, the thematic relationship between the outer movements and the Sinfonia concertante (KV 364) and the Concerto for Two Pianos (KV 365) indicates that the work was written between 1779 and 1781. The Mannheim violin virtuoso, Johann Friedrich Eck, to whom Mozart is supposed to have played the work, is purported to have written it down from memory, making more or less suitable additions.

In contrast to this, Alfred Einstein believes “the excellent first movement (to be genuine), whose score with the quite extensively developed solo may have been given to Eck as a present by Mozart. Only the draft of the beginning of the rondo can have existed. It is not likely that a single note of the obsolete and superficial second movement was written by Mozart.”

What an extraordinary century! – Was there ever a period in which the work of so many contemporary but forgotten composers was sufficiently good that it could be mistaken for the works of the composers we count today as geniuses?

T T T T

Crash blossoms

An article by Ben Zimmer in *The New York Times Magazine* of 31 January 2010 revealed the origins of the neologism: “crash blossoms.” A shortened version of the article follows.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning once gave the poetry of her husband, Robert, a harsh assessment, criticizing his habit of excessively paring down his syntax with opaque results. “You sometimes make a dust, a dark dust,” she wrote him, “by sweeping away your little words.”

In their quest for concision, writers of newspaper headlines are, like Robert Browning, inveterate sweepers away of little words, and the dust they kick up can lead to some amusing ambiguities. Legendary headlines from years past (some of which verge on the mythical) include “Giant Waves Down Queen Mary’s Funnel,” “MacArthur Flies Back to Front” and “Eighth Army Push Bottles Up Germans.” The Columbia Journalism Review even published two anthologies of ambiguous headlines in the 1980s, with the classic titles “Squad Helps Dog Bite Victim” and “Red Tape Holds Up New Bridge.”

For years, there was no good name for these double-take headlines. Last August, however, one emerged in the *Testy Copy Editors* online discussion forum. Mike

O'Connell, an American editor based in Sapporo, Japan, spotted the headline "Violinist Linked to JAL Crash Blossoms" and wondered, "What's a crash blossom?" (The article, from the newspaper Japan Today, described the successful musical career of Diana Yukawa, whose father died in a 1985 Japan Airlines plane crash.)

After I mentioned the coinage of "crash blossoms" on the linguistics blog *Language Log* having been alerted to it by the veteran *Baltimore Sun* copy editor John E. McIntyre, new examples came flooding in. Linguists love this sort of thing, because the perils of ambiguity can reveal the limits of our ability to parse sentences correctly.

One of my favorite crash blossoms is this gem from the Associated Press, first noted by the Yale linguistics professor Stephen R. Anderson last September: "McDonald's Fries the Holy Grail for Potato Farmers." If you take "fries" as a verb instead of a noun, you're left wondering why a fast-food chain is cooking up sacred vessels. Or consider this headline, spotted earlier this month by Rick Rubenstein on the *Total Telecom* Web site: "Google Fans Phone Expectations by Scheduling Android Event." Here, if you read "fans" as a plural noun, then you might think "phone" is a verb, and you've been led down a path where Google devotees are calling in their hopes.

Nouns that can be misconstrued as verbs and vice versa are, in fact, the hallmarks of the crash blossom. Take this headline, often attributed to *The Guardian*: "British Left Waffles on Falklands." In the correct reading, "left" is a noun and "waffles" is a verb, but it's much more entertaining to reverse the two, conjuring the image of breakfast food hastily abandoned in the South Atlantic. Similarly, crossword enthusiasts laughed nervously at a May 2006 headline on *AOL News*, "Gator Attacks Puzzle Experts."

After encountering enough crash blossoms, you start to realize that English is especially prone to such ambiguities. Since English is weakly inflected (meaning that words are seldom explicitly modified to indicate their grammatical roles), many words can easily function as either noun or verb. And it just so happens that plural nouns and third-person-singular present-tense verbs are marked with the exact same suffix, "-s." In everyday spoken and written language, we can usually handle this sort of grammatical uncertainty because we have enough additional clues to make the right choices of interpretation. But headlines sweep away those little words — particularly articles, auxiliary verbs and forms of "to be" — robbing the reader of crucial context. If that A.P. headline had read "McDonald's Fries Are the Holy Grail for Potato Farmers," there would have been no crash blossom for our enjoyment.....

The space limitations of telegrams are echoed now in the terse messages of texting and Twitter. News headlines, however, are not so constrained these days, since many of them appear in online outlets rather than in print. (And many print headlines are supplanted online by more elastic "e-heads.") But even when they are unfettered by narrow newspaper columns, headline writers still sweep away those little words as a matter of journalistic style. As long as there is such a thing as *headlines*, we can count on crash blossoms continuing to blossom.

Here are a few more crash blossoms plucked from the Internet:

Kids Make Nutritious Snacks
Miners Refuse to Work After Death
Teacher Strikes Idle Kids
US President Wins on Budget, but More Lies Ahead
Stolen Painting Found by Tree
Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half
Include Your Children When Baking Cookies
Doctor Testifies in Horse Suit
Stud Tires Out
American Ships Head to Libya
Enraged Cow Injures Farmer with Ax

T T T T

Mobile Phones

Steve Jobs, co-founder of *Apple*, died this year. Few of the younger generation understand how much the iPhone and its humble predecessor, the mobile phone, have changed our lives. Just to remind us, here are a few of my favourite cartoons.



Would you mind talking to me for a while?
I forgot my cell phone

It's an OK phone, but it takes great pictures



Is that your cell phone or are you
just glad to see me?



Can you hang on a sec, I think I just took
another picture of my ear



Revolutionary phone



Do you have one of those phones you can talk to people on?

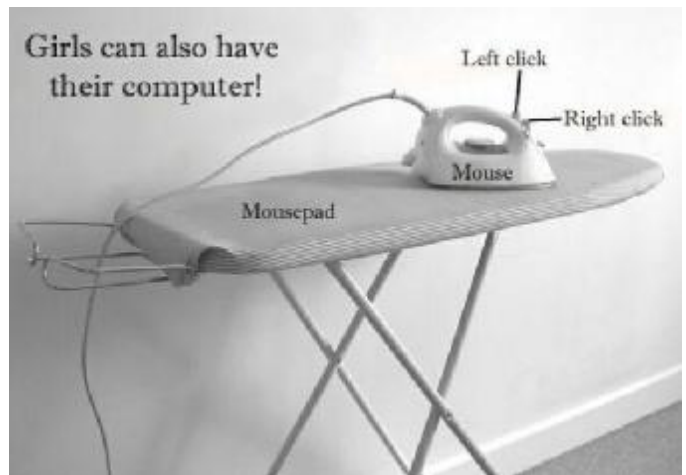
T T T T

It all began with an iPhone...

March was when my son celebrated his 15th birthday, and I got him an iPhone. He just loved it. Who wouldn't? I celebrated my birthday in July, and my wife made me very happy when she bought me an iPad.

My daughter's birthday was in August so I got her an iPod Touch.

September came by so for her birthday I got my wife an iRon. It was around then that the fight started.....



What the wife failed to recognize is that the iRon can be integrated into the home network with the iWash, iCook and iClean.

T T T T

“Staying Alive” yet again

Phrase Book – Jo Shapcott (*1953)

I'm standing here inside my skin,
which will do for a Human Remains Pouch
for the moment. Look down there (up there).
Quickly. Slowly. This is my front room

where I'm lost in the action, live from a war,
on screen. I am Englishwoman. I don't understand you,
What's the matter? You are right. You are wrong.
Things are going well (badly). Am I disturbing you?

TV is showing bliss as taught to pilots:
Blend, Low silhouette, Irregular shape, Small,
Secluded. (Please write it down. Please speak slowly.)

Bliss is how it was in this very room
 when I raised my body to his mouth,
 when he even balanced me in the air,
 or at least I thought so and yes the pilots say
 yes they have caught it through the Side-Looking
 Airbone Radar, and through the J-Stars.
 I am expecting a gentleman (a young gentleman,
 two gentlemen, some gentlemen). Please send him
 (them) up at once. This is really beautiful.

Yes they have seen us, the pilots in the Kill Box
 on their screens and played the routine for
 getting us Stealthed, that is, Cleaned, to you and me,
 Taken Out. They know how to move into a single room
 like that, to send in with Pinpoint Accuracy, a hundred Harms.
 I have two cases and a cardboard box. There is another
 bag there. I cannot open my case – look out,
 the lock is broken. Have I done enough?

Bliss the pilots say is for evasion
 and escape. What's love in all this debris?
 Just one person pounding another into dust,
 into dust. I do not know the word for it yet.

Where is the British Consulate? Please explain.
 What does it mean? What must I do? Where
 can I find? What have I done? I have done
 nothing. Let me pass please. I am an Englishwoman.

*Gösta Ågren (*1936)*

Dödens hemlighet Det är inte så, att <i>döden</i> börjar efter livet. När livet upphör upphör också <i>döden</i> .	Death's secret It is not true that death begins after life. When life stops death also stops.
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The Persian Version – Robert Graves (1895-1985)

Truth-loving Persians do not dwell upon
 The trivial skirmish fought near Marathon.
 As for the Greek theatrical tradition
 Which represents that summer's expedition
 Not as a mere reconnaissance in force
 By three brigades of foot and one of horse
 (Their left flank covered by some obsolete
 Light craft detached from the main Persian fleet)
 But as a grandiose, ill-starred attempt
 To conquer Greece - they treat it with contempt;

And only incidentally refute
Major Greek claims, by stressing what repute
The Persian monarch and the Persian nation
Won by this salutary demonstration:
Despite a strong defence and adverse weather
All arms combined magnificently together.

Mary Elizabeth Frye (1905-2004)

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft starlight at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.

Rent – *Jane Cooper (*1924)*

If you want my apartment, sleep in it
but let's have a clear understanding:
the books are still free agents.

If the rocking chair's arms surround you
they can also let you go,
they can shape the air like a body.

I don't want your rent, I want
a radiance of attention
like the candle's flame when we eat,

I mean a kind of awe
attending the spaces between us –
Not a roof but a field of stars.

Thaw – *Edward Thomas (1878-1917)*

Over the land half freckled with snow half-thawed
The speculating rooks at their nests cawed,
And saw from elm-tops, delicate as a flower of grass,
What we below could not see, Winter pass.

Eden Rock – *Charles Causley (1917-2003)*

They are waiting for me somewhere beyond Eden Rock:
My father, twenty-five, in the same suit
Of Genuine Irish Tweed, his terrier Jack
Still two years old and trembling at his feet.
My mother, twenty-three, in a sprigged dress

Drawn at the waist, ribbon in her straw hat,
 Has spread the stiff white cloth over the grass.
 Her hair, the colour of wheat, takes on the light.
 She pours tea from a Thermos, the milk straight
 From an old H.P. Sauce bottle, a screw
 Of paper for a cork; slowly sets out
 The same three plates, the tin cups painted blue.
 The sky whitens as if lit by three suns.
 My mother shades her eyes and looks my way
 Over the drifted stream. My father spins
 A stone along the water. Leisurely,
 They beckon to me from the other bank.
 I hear them call, 'See where the stream-path is!
 Crossing is not as hard as you might think.'
 I had not thought that it would be like this.
 Somebody asked me the other day
 where Eden Rock is - I mean, I have no idea,
 I made it up! 'Dartmoor,' I said – that's always a safe answer.

Alle Tage – Ingeborg Bachmann (1926-1973)

<p> Der Krieg wird nicht mehr erklärt, sondern fortgesetzt. Das Unerhörte ist alltäglich geworden. Der Held bleibt den Kämpfen fern. Der Schwache ist in die Feuerzonen gerückt. Die Uniform des Tages ist die Geduld, die Auszeichnung der armselige Stern der Hoffnung über dem Herzen. Er wird verliehen, wenn nichts mehr geschieht, wenn das Trommelfeuer verstummt, wenn der Feind unsichtbar geworden ist und der Schatten ewiger Rüstung den Himmel bedeckt. Er wird verliehen für die Flucht von den Fahnen, für die Tapferkeit vor dem Freund, für den Verrat unwürdiger Geheimnisse und die Nichtachtung jeglichen Befehls. </p>	<p> War is no longer declared, only continued. The monstrous has become everyday. The hero stays away from battle. The weak have gone to the front. The uniform of the day is patience, its medal the pitiful star of hope above the heart. The medal is awarded when nothing more happens, when the artillery falls silent, when the enemy has grown invisible and the shadow of eternal armament covers the sky. It is awarded for desertion of the flag, for bravery in the face of friends, for the betrayal of unworthy secrets and the disregard of every command. </p>
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Ars Poetica – Archibald MacLeish (1892-1982)

A poem should be palpable and mute
 As a globed fruit,
 Dumb
 As old medallions to the thumb,

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
 Of casement ledges where the moss has grown --
 A poem should be wordless
 As the flight of birds.
 A poem should be motionless in time
 As the moon climbs,
 Leaving, as the moon releases
 Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,
 Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
 Memory by memory the mind --
 A poem should be motionless in time
 As the moon climbs.
 A poem should be equal to
 Not true.
 For all the history of grief
 An empty doorway and a maple leaf.
 For love
 The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea --
 A poem should not mean
 But be.

Postscript – Seamus Heaney (*1939)

And some time make the time to drive out west
 Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,
 In September or October, when the wind
 And the light are working off each other
 So that the ocean on one side is wild
 With foam and glitter, and inland among stones
 The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
 By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,
 Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,
 Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads
 Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
 Useless to think you'll park and capture it
 More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
 A hurry through which known and strange things pass
 As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
 And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

From The Painter Dreaming in the Scholar's House – Howard Nemerov (1920-1991)

The painter's eye follows relation out.
 His work is not to paint the visible,
 He says, it is to render visible.
 Being a man, and not a god, he stands
 Already in a world of sense, from which

He borrows, to begin with, mental things
Chiefly, the abstract elements of language:
The point, the line, the plane, the colors and
The geometric shapes. Of these he spins
Relation out, he weaves its fabric up
So that it speaks darkly, as music does
Singing the secret history of the mind.
And when in this the visible world appears,
As it does do, mountain, flower, cloud, and tree,
All haunted here and there with the human face,
It happens as by accident, although
The accident is of design. It is because
Language first rises from the speechless world
That the painterly intelligence
Can say correctly that he makes his world,
Not imitates the one before his eyes.
Hence the delightful gardens, the dark shores,
The terrifying forests where nightfall
Enfolds a lost and tired traveler.

And hence the careless crowd deludes itself
By likening his hieroglyphic signs
And secret alphabets to the drawing of a child.
That likeness is significant the other side
Of what they see, for his simplicities
Are not the first ones, but the furthest ones,
Final refinements of his thought made visible.
He is the painter of the human mind
Finding and faithfully reflecting the mindfulness
That is in things, and not the things themselves.

For such a man, art is an act of faith:
Prayer the study of it, as Blake says,
And praise the practice; nor does he divide
Making from teaching, or from theory.
The three are one, and in his hours of art
There shines a happiness through darkest themes,
As though spirit and sense were not at odds.

T T T T

Germany's \$14 Million Art Forgers Jailed for Total 15 Years

Another spectacular forgery case recently came to a close in Cologne. Here are extracts from an article by Catherine Hickley in *Bloomberg News*, 27 October 2011:

An art forger and his three accomplices, who made at least \$14 million by selling oil paintings they falsely attributed to famous artists, were today sentenced to a total of 15 years in prison by a court in Cologne. Wolfgang Beltracchi, 60, was sentenced to 6 years in jail after he confessed to painting 14 works that he sold as masterpieces

by Max Ernst, Max Pechstein, Heinrich Campendonk, Andre Derain, Fernand Leger and Kees van Dongen. His wife, Helene Beltracchi, got a 4-year term; her sister, named by the court as Jeanette S., was handed a 21-month suspended sentence; and a fourth associate, Otto Schulte-Kellinghaus, was given 5 years at the Cologne regional court.

“Beltracchi was the guiding spirit, who brought the others in, even if they came willingly,” Wilhelm Kremer, the presiding judge at the trial, told the court. The scam was “organized in great detail, you could say with military precision,” he said.

Dealers and collectors say confidence in the German art market has been shaken by the forgery scandal, described as the biggest ever in Germany, as art historians, museums and auction houses were duped by the fake pictures. The Cologne auction house Kunsthaus Lempertz said in January that it had sold five of the forgers’ works. The authenticity of all of them “was confirmed by leading experts and some of them were subsequently shown in a number of museums.” “My colleagues and I, like the whole art market, were deceived by the highly skilled and professional operations of the forgers,” Lempertz chief executive Henrik Hanstein wrote in a letter to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in July.

The group not only produced and sold the paintings, it also invented an entire provenance for them, claiming the art came from either the “Jaegers Collection” or the “Wilhelm Knops Collection,” according to the Cologne court. They said Werner Jaegers was Helene Beltracchi’s grandfather, while Knops was Schulte-Kellinghaus’s grandfather. The Beltracchi couple produced fake gallery and collectors’ labels to stick on the back of the canvases. They even forged family photographs from the 1930s, showing paintings hanging in the background, with Helene Beltracchi posing as her grandmother, to convince potential buyers that the provenance was authentic. In fact, neither Jaegers nor Knops collected art, Kremer told the court.

Christian Rode, Beltracchi’s lawyer, said in a final statement that his client wasn’t motivated by profit alone. He felt a close connection with the artists whose oeuvres he sought to “complete,” calling his paintings the works that the artists should themselves have produced, but never got around to, Rode said. Beltracchi told the court that his pictures were sometimes almost “too good” for the artist, because he had the benefit of hindsight and knew how the artist and the history of art developed.

The judge described how Beltracchi bought canvases dating from the 1920s, choosing those without too much paint on so that he could carefully remove it. He sometimes mixed his own pigments or bought antique paint kits. He became an expert in art history and the lives of the artists whose work he emulated. In some cases, he took the titles of paintings listed as lost during World War II in directories of the artists’ works and recreated them from scratch.

Rode said the trial exposed many of the shadier aspects of the art market. “We have heard a lot about experts driven by interests, who don’t only provide expertise but also buy, mediate and receive commission,” he said in his concluding statement.

The forgers were only caught out when one buyer became suspicious and sent his

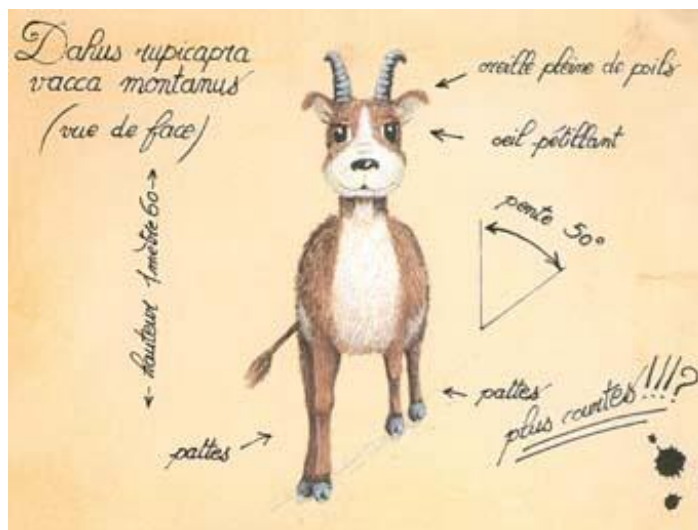
picture to be examined by scientists. They discovered a paint color that had not existed at the time the work was supposed to have been produced. As many as 41 more paintings not included in the trial because of statutes of limitations may also be forgeries by Beltracchi. The scandal has also spawned a number of civil cases against dealers and auction houses, as well as the criminal trial. Kremer said today it is not the job of the court to try to uncover each forgery.

T T T T

Le Dahu

I reserved a room for friends at a hotel in Gryon called *Le Dahu* some years ago but only recently found out that a Dahu is a mythical Alpine animal with the legs on one side shorter than on the other (so that he can stand up straight on the mountainside, of course). A Dahu looks like this à à à

Here is a sure way to catch a Dahu: your partner stands at the bottom of the mountain with a big sack while you creep up quietly towards the Dahu from the front and, by making a loud noise, force him to run in the opposite direction – the poor Dahu will inevitably roll down the mountain side, where your partner opens the sack into which the Dahu falls.



T T T T

Still more “Staying Alive”

The Trout – John Montague (*1939)

Flat on the bank I parted
Rushes to ease my hands
In the water without a ripple
And tilt them slowly downstream
To where he lay, tendril-light,
In his fluid sensual dream.

Bodiless lord of creation,
I hung briefly above him
Savouring my own absence,
Senses expanding in the slow
Motion, the photographic calm
That grows before action.

As the curve of my hands
Swung under his body
He surged, with visible pleasure.
I was so preternaturally close

I could count every stipple
But still cast no shadow, until

The two palms crossed in a cage
Under the lightly pulsing gills.
Then (entering my own enlarged
Shape, which rode on the water)
I gripped. To this day I can
Taste his terror on my hands.

Tyranny of Choice – Elizabeth Garrett (*1958)

Pick a card, any card
You'll say. I love this trick –
The tease and tyranny of choice –
The dove's tail tender
On your fine and hidden fingers,
And the thumb I'm under.

You know my Queen of Hearts
By the dog-ear on her top-left
Bottom-right corner;
By the voluptuous sad mouth
Which will not smile,
Whichever way you turn her.

Initial Illumination – Tony Harrison (*1937)

Farne cormorants with catches in their beaks
shower fishscale confetti on the shining sea.
The first bright weather here for many weeks
for my Sunday G-day train bound for Dundee,
off to St Andrew's to record a reading,
doubtful, in these dark days, what poems can do,
and watching the mists round Lindisfarne receding
my doubt extends to Dark Age Good Book too.
Eadfrith the Saxon scribe/illuminator
incorporated cormorants I'm seeing fly
round the same island thirteen centuries later
into the *In principio's* initial *I*.
Billfrith's begemmed and jewelled boards got looted
by raiders gung-ho for booty and berserk,
the sort of soldiery that's still recruited
to do today's dictators' dirty work,
but the initials in St John and in St Mark
graced with local cormorants in ages,
we of a darker still keep calling Dark,
survive in those illuminated pages.
The word of God so beautifully scripted
by Eadfrith and Billfrith the anchorite
Pentagon conners have once again conscripted

to gloss the cross on the precision sight.
 Candlepower, steady hand, gold leaf, a brush
 were all that Eadfrith had to beautify
 the word of God much bandied by George Bush
 whose word illuminated midnight sky
 and confused the Baghdad cock who was betrayed
 by bombs into believing the day was dawning
 and crowed his heart out at the deadly raid
 and didn't live to greet the proper morning.
 Now with the noonday headlights in Kuwait
 and the burial of the blackened in Baghdad
 let them remember, all those who celebrate,
 that their good news is someone else's bad
 or the light will never dawn on poor Mankind.
 Is it open-armed at all that victory V,
 that insular initial intertwined
 with slack-necked cormorants from black laquered sea,
 with trumpets bulled and bellicose and blowing
 for what men claim as victories in their wars,
 with the fire-hailing cock and all those crowing
 who don't yet smell the dunghill in their claws?

Naked Vision – *Gwen Harwood (1920-1995)*

I was sent to fetch an eye
 promised for a fresh corneal graft.
 At the doctor's rooms nurse gave me
 a common paper bag;
 in that, a sterile jar;
 in that, the disembodied eye.
 I sat in Davey Street
 on a low brick garden wall
 and looked. The eye looked back.
 It gazed, lucid and whole,
 from its colourless solution.
 The window of whose soul?
 Trees in St. David's Park
 refreshed the lunchtime lovers:
 riesling gold, claret dark;
 late flowers flaunted all colours.
 But my friend and I had eyes
 only for one another.

Bitcherel – *Eleanor Brown (*1969)*

You ask what I think of your new acquisition;
 and since we are now to be 'friends',
 I'll strive to the full to cement my position
 with honesty. Dear – it depends.
 It depends upon taste, which must not be disputed;

for which of us does understand
why some like their furnishings pallid and muted,
their cookery wholesome, but bland?
There isn't a law that a face should have features,
it's just that they generally do;
God couldn't give colour to all of his creatures,
and only gave wit to a few;
I'm sure she has qualities, much underrated,
that compensate amply for this,
along with a charm that is so understated
it's easy for people to miss.
And if there are some who choose clothing to flatter
what beauties they think they possess,
when what's underneath has no shape, does it matter
if there is no shape to the dress?
It's not that I think she is boring, precisely,
that isn't the word I would choose;
I know there are men who like girls who talk nicely
and always wear sensible shoes.
It's not that I think she is vapid and silly;
it's not that her voice makes me wince;
but - chilli con carne without any chilli
is only a plateful of mince...

To the one upstairs – *Charles Simic* (*1938)

Boss of all bosses of the universe.
Mr. know-it-all, wheeler-dealer, wire-puller,
And whatever else you're good at.
Go ahead, shuffle your zeros tonight.
Dip in ink the comets' tails.
Staple the night with starlight.

You'd be better off reading coffee dregs,
Thumbing the pages of the Farmer's Almanac.
But no! You love to put on airs,
And cultivate your famous serenity
While you sit behind your big desk
With zilch in your in-tray, zilch
In your out-tray,
And all of eternity spread around you.

Doesn't it give you the creeps
To hear them begging you on their knees,
Sputtering endearments,
As if you were an inflatable, life-size doll?
Tell them to button up and go to bed.
Stop pretending you're too busy to take notice.
Your hands are empty and so are your eyes.

There's nothing to put your signature to,
Even if you knew your own name,
Or believed the ones I keep inventing,
As I scribble this note to you in the dark.

The Waking – *Theodore Roethke (1908-1963)*

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close behind me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lonely worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air;
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.

A Glass of Water – *May Sarton (1912-1995)*

Here is a glass of water from my well.
It tastes of rock and root and earth and rain;
It is the best I have, my only spell,
And it is cold, and better than champagne.
Perhaps someone will pass this house one day
To drink, and be restored, and go his way,
Someone in dark confusion as I was
When I drank down cold water in a glass,
Drank a transparent health to keep me sane,
After the bitter mood had gone again.

Groundsmen – *David Scott (*1947)*

The pile of cuttings puts on dreadful weight,
swelters in the season, and leaks treacle.
Beside it, the tractor and the cutters drip oil
into the earth floor, in a shed where cobwebs
link the roof to the wired window and the oil drums.
The twisted blades and the spiked roller
rest from the nibbling and pricking of the pitch;

and in the corner a white liner, clogged white
round the wheels, darkens towards the handles.
The quiet men whose stuff this is
have the next shed along. Their door shuts
neatly to, unlike the tractor shed
where the door drags and billows against the bricks.
It was a secret kingdom for a boy.
I envied them their work; lending out bats,
lowering the posts, the twirl of the cutter
at the end of a straight run; and their shed
at the edge of the known world.

Late Fragment – Raymond Carver (1938-1998)

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.

T T T T

Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity

One of the most successful hoaxes in scientific literature was carried out in 1996 by NYU physics professor Dr. Alan Sokal. Sokal was concerned at what he perceived as a misuse of scientific and mathematic terminology by humanities professors who obfuscated their hollow ideas in jargon while pretending to speak authoritatively about the physical sciences. *Social Text*, the cultural studies journal of Duke University, published his paper entitled “Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity,” a collection of nonsense, buzzwords, and jargon, making liberal use of recontextualized quotes. The same day the essay was published, he announced the hoax in the journal *Lingua Franca*.

Sokal’s article presents what he believed would be a transparently nonsensical argument about the political and social implications of quantum gravity in language that is sometimes barely readable. As he subsequently explained:

“Throughout the article, I employ scientific and mathematical concepts in ways that few scientists or mathematicians could possibly take seriously. For example, I suggest that the “morphogenetic field” – a bizarre New Age idea due to Rupert Sheldrake – constitutes a cutting-edge theory of quantum gravity. This connection is pure invention; even Sheldrake makes no such claim. I assert that Lacan’s psychoanalytic speculations have been confirmed by recent work in quantum field theory. Even non-scientist readers might well wonder what in heaven’s name quantum field theory has to do with psychoanalysis; certainly my article gives no reasoned argument to support such a link. In sum, I intentionally wrote the article so that any competent physicist or mathematician (or undergraduate physics or math major) would realize that it is a spoof. Evidently the editors of *Social Text* felt

comfortable publishing an article on quantum physics without bothering to consult anyone knowledgeable in the subject.”

What made the hoax so successful was that it was a parody of much that was being written and taught by post-modernist/deconstructionist professors at US universities at the time. One of my favourite Cornell graduates had to put up with impenetrable prose similar to the extracts from Sokal’s article quoted below.⁷

“There are many natural scientists, and especially physicists, who continue to reject the notion that the disciplines concerned with social and cultural criticism can have anything to contribute, except perhaps peripherally, to their research. Still less are they receptive to the idea that the very foundations of their worldview must be revised or rebuilt in the light of such criticism. Rather, they cling to the dogma imposed by the long post-Enlightenment hegemony over the Western intellectual outlook, which can be summarized briefly as follows: that there exists an external world, whose properties are independent of any individual human being and indeed of humanity as a whole; that these properties are encoded in “eternal” physical laws; and that human beings can obtain reliable, albeit imperfect and tentative, knowledge of these laws by hewing to the “objective” procedures and epistemological strictures prescribed by the (so-called) scientific method.

“But deep conceptual shifts within twentieth-century science have undermined this Cartesian-Newtonian metaphysics; revisionist studies in the history and philosophy of science have cast further doubt on its credibility; and, most recently, feminist and poststructuralist critiques have demystified the substantive content of mainstream Western scientific practice, revealing the ideology of domination concealed behind the façade of “objectivity”. It has thus become increasingly apparent that physical “reality”, no less than social “reality”, is at bottom a social and linguistic construct; that scientific “knowledge”, far from being objective, reflects and encodes the dominant ideologies and power relations of the culture that produced it; that the truth claims of science are inherently theory-laden and self-referential; and consequently, that the discourse of the scientific community, for all its undeniable value, cannot assert a privileged epistemological status with respect to counter-hegemonic narratives emanating from dissident or marginalized communities. These themes can be traced, despite some differences of emphasis, in Aronowitz’s analysis of the cultural fabric that produced quantum mechanics; in Ross’ discussion of oppositional discourses in post-quantum science; in Irigaray’s and Hayles’ exegeses of gender encoding in fluid mechanics; and in Harding’s comprehensive critique of the gender ideology underlying the natural sciences in general and physics in particular.”

“Luce Irigaray, in her famous article ‘Is the Subject of Science Sexed?’, pointed out that the mathematical sciences, in the theory of wholes [*théorie des ensembles*], concern themselves with closed and open spaces ... They concern themselves very little with the question of the partially open, with wholes that are not clearly delineated [*ensembles flous*], with any analysis of the problem of borders [*bords*] ...

“In 1982, when Irigaray’s essay first appeared, this was an incisive criticism:

⁷ My heart bled for you, Suzette.

differential topology has traditionally privileged the study of what are known technically as “manifolds without boundary.” However, in the past decade, under the impetus of the feminist critique, some mathematicians have given renewed attention to the theory of “manifolds with boundary” [Fr. *variétés à bord*]. Perhaps not coincidentally, it is precisely these manifolds that arise in the new physics of conformal field theory, superstring theory and quantum gravity.”

“Over the past two decades there has been extensive discussion among critical theorists with regard to the characteristics of modernist versus postmodernist culture; and in recent years these dialogues have begun to devote detailed attention to the specific problems posed by the natural sciences. In particular, Madsen and Madsen have recently given a very clear summary of the characteristics of modernist versus postmodernist science. They posit two criteria for a post-modern science:

A simple criterion for science to qualify as post-modern is that it be free from any dependence on the concept of objective truth. By this criterion, for example, the complementarity interpretation of quantum physics due to Niels Bohr and the Copenhagen school is seen as postmodernist.

Clearly, quantum gravity is in this respect an archetypal postmodernist science. Secondly, the other concept which can be taken as being fundamental to post-modern science is that of *essentiality*. Post-modern scientific theories are constructed from those theoretical elements which are essential for the consistency and utility of the theory.

Thus, quantities or objects which are in principle unobservable -- such as space-time points, exact particle positions, or quarks and gluons -- ought not to be introduced into the theory. While much of modern physics is excluded by this criterion, quantum gravity again qualifies: in the passage from classical general relativity to the quantized theory, space-time points (and indeed the space-time manifold itself) have disappeared from the theory.”

Alan Sokal’s final confession: *“But why did I do it? I confess that I’m an unabashed Old Leftist who never quite understood how deconstruction was supposed to help the working class. And I’m a stodgy old scientist who believes, naively, that there exists an external world, that there exist objective truths about that world, and that my job is to discover some of them.”*

T T T T

The art of the artless (*Translated from the Neue Zürcher Zeitung of 8 July 2010*)

John Lely’s composition is called “Symphony No. 5.” If you are thinking of a conventional symphony, you’ve got it very wrong. The “score” comprises exactly seven bars. Three musicians from the ensemble *Incidental Music* are sitting in the Mark Müller gallery – the cellist Stefan Thut is playing a C, the lowest note on his instrument, holds it for eight seconds and then pauses for another eight seconds – then follows the same procedure with C sharp, D, D sharp and so on: the chromatic scale. When the cellist has gone high enough on the scale, the viola player, Julia Eckhardt, joins in. Each note is now played by both instruments. Later the cello stops and the flautist Normisa Pereira da Silva joins in. Then everyone stops, even though the flautist has not reached the end of her range. Art? No, an experiment.

The composer, pianist and instigator of the event, Manfred Werder, will again be organising a small concert programme during which English and American composers will be featured. On the first evening, Tim Parkinson will follow Lely with his “Symphony” – premiered this Spring by *Incidental Music*. “Symphony” is scored for flute, viola, cello and various sound sources and is in four “movements” that are very similar to each other. They comprise some conventionally written and rhythmically scored parts as well as others that are only accompanied by verbal instructions: for example, the players are invited to “divide the string into twenty equal parts” and the resulting sounds of both instruments are not supposed to be corrected to achieve a “pleasant harmony.” This composition does not aim at marked dissonance or eccentric rhythms, but seeks an apparent artlessness. The bow of the cello is drawn across the edge of a tin can. Together with “Symphony,” the experimental character of the evening is confirmed by “Conspiracy piece” by Adam Overton, made up of optical effects.⁸

T T T T

Song of the Walking-Pedestals

And as if the above was not bad enough, here is the official description of a recent show at the Lucerne Museum of Art – no, I’m not making this up, I saw it:

Gesang der Schreitsockel. Visitors as actors – The work, purchased in 1992, consists of 55 wooden elements, up to 5 metres long, covered with cotton fabric. They are the components of the art work, which is variable in terms of form and size. The form of presentation chosen for the exhibition stresses the multiform character of the artistic work: while one half of the space is defined by an open, variable arrangement of the stepping-pedestals, the elements in the other half are presented in a stacked form. The arrangement of the stepping-pedestals bears testimony to the ‘extended work concept’ conceived by Walther as early as the late 1960s. It defines the art-work not as a completed object, but as a variable form which to a great extent demands participation on the part of the viewers. The laid-out stepping-pedestals inspire both a real walking (in the context of the three public events) or pacing of the wooden elements and the idea of such an action.

By performing or imagining motion, they become active recipients, and the action performed by them becomes the central component of the artistic work. The act described by Walther as a ‘work-action’ dissolves the closed, traditional work concept; the artist no longer acts as a genius-like creator. The responsibility – Walther said – “for anything artistic produced in the use of the object finally lies with each individual actor.” The ‘extended work-concept’ demonstrated in exemplary fashion by the *Gesang der Schreitsockel* actually represents a paradigm shift in visual art and a break with the vision of art of the first half of the 20th century.

T T T T

A to Z

The Spectator has from time to time some remarkable competitions with some even

⁸ There is still, I believe, a section in *Private Eye* called “Pseud’s Corner” – both this article and the next section *Gesang der Schreitsockel* definitely belong there.

more remarkable entries. The edition of 10 July 2010 gave the results of one in which readers were asked to submit a piece of lively and plausible prose, the first word beginning with 'a', the second with 'b', and so on, throughout the alphabet. Then to start again from 'a' and continue up to a maximum of 156 words.

Here are some of the winning entries:

At best, Charles Dickens exemplifies flawed genius, however interpreted. Joyful knockabout, lively melodrama, nauseatingly overdone pathos, quite ridiculous sentimental tosh uneasily vie with x-rated yarns. Zestful always, brilliantly charismatic, Dickens entertains famously, giving himself in joyous, kind-hearted, liberal measure. No other practitioner quite realises such terrific, unquenchable vitality, with x-factor youthful zeal. Articulating brave causes, Dickens eloquently fought greed, hypocrisy, injustice — jollying killjoys, lampooning moneybags, needling officious pomposity, questioning received stupidities. That unflinching vision was x-ray, yielding Zoroastrian archetypes. But creatively deconstructing egregious false gods helped ignite jealousies, kindled long-term, malevolent, narrow-minded opposition, perpetually quarrelsome. (Remember something, though: universally valued was 'Xmas', yuletide zippily adapted beyond Christ-mass – Dickens engagingly fostered gregarious hijinks in jovially kitsch lavishness.) Marriage now obtrudes. Patient quarrying reveals: spouse traduced, unwarrantedly vilified – wretched Xanthippe. Yes, zealotry also begets callousness: Dickens, extravagantly – fabulously – gifted, hurt innocents, junked kinsfolk loutishly. Magnificent novelist, ordinary person. Queer. Rankles somehow, truthfully. *W.J. Webster*

Alexander battled continually, defeating everyone. Fortune granted him impressive judgment, knowing little Macedonia's nobility, opposite Persian quantity, required superior tactics, unfailing, virtuous wisdom, Xenocratic, youthful zest and bravery. Courage dominated everything; fidelity gained his inspirational justice, kingly luxury meaning nothing. Olympias, perhaps questionably, received support though utterly virago-like, with Xanthippe's yapping zeal. Audacious Bucephalus could do exceptional feats, giving his illustrious junior king loyalty. Macedonia's noble officer, Parmenion, quibbled regarding storming Tyre, urgently voicing: 'When Xerxes yielded, Zeus approved, but chasing Darius everywhere fuels Grecian hatred. It just keeps long-suffering men needlessly occupied. Pursuit questions reason.' Sagely, the unbending victor, whose xenophilic, youth-inspired zing annoyed belligerent Clitus, disagreed. Eventually, fatigue gained hold. India's jungles killed legions. Many now openly protested, quarrelling resentfully. Sadly this Übermensch vanished with Xenophon – yesterday's zenith. Afterwards, bloodthirsty Cassander defeated Eumenes for governorship. He inspired jealousy, killing leading Macedonians. Noble officer Ptolemy quietly ruled southern territories, upholding values without Xerxes' yoke-inflicting zealotry. *Frank McDonald*

At bedtime Caroline deliciously emerged from Good Housekeeping in jolly, kissy, loving mood, needing, obviously, pretty quick responses. Sex tonight, unusually violent, was xerodermatic, yesterday's Zeitgeist. At breakfast, Charles devoured eagerly 'fresh grapefruit halves in jus', 'kelp laver-bread', 'mini nuggets of pork

quenelles', 'Russian sardines', two unpasteurised 'very wholesome Xtra-lite' yoghurts, zucchini and bacon. Caroline declined everything, feeling ghastly herself. In jaded kilt, looking mildly nauseous, or perhaps queasily rebellious, she tarted up visibly when Xenophon Yarnton, zoologist and botanist, came downstairs. Extraordinary feelings gripped her inside. Joint kindergartens, lecherous moments, now overturned present quiet reality. She tottered upwards, visibly wilting, X-ray yearnings zooming across behind Charles's deaf ear. 'Feeling giddy?' he inquired, just kissing lightly. Men never offer purely quixotic responses. She trembled uncontrollably, vibrant with Xenophon Yarnton. Zest, and being cosseted, dissolved everything. Feeling good, he inspired just kindness, loving manhood, nothing obviously patronising, quiet reassurance. She totally understood. *Tim Raikes*

T T T T

Love your banker

Nothing so cements and holds together all the parts of a society as faith or credit, which can never be kept up unless men are under some force or necessity of honestly paying what they owe to one another. *Cicero*

It is not by augmenting the capital of the country, but by rendering a greater part of that capital active and productive than would otherwise be so, that the most judicious operations of banking can increase the industry of the country. *Adam Smith*

Blest paper-credit! last and best supply! / That lends corruption lighter wings to fly. *Alexander Pope*

Credit is a matter so subtle in its essence, that, as it may be obtained almost without reason, so, without reason, may it be made to melt away. *Anthony Trollope*

I sincerely believe that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies, and that the principles of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale. *Thomas Jefferson*

It is well enough that people of the nation do not understand our banking and monetary system, for if they did, I believe there would be a revolution before tomorrow morning. *Henry Ford*

Credit is like a looking-glass, which when once sullied by a breath, may be wiped clear again; but if once cracked can never be repaired. *Sir Walter Scott*

O Gold! I still prefer thee unto paper / Which makes bank credit like a bark of vapour. *Lord Byron*

Credit is a system whereby a person who can't pay gets another person who can't pay to guarantee that he can pay. *Charles Dickens*

The modern banking system manufactures money out of nothing. The process is perhaps the most astounding piece of sleight-of-hand that was ever invented. Banking was conceived in inequity and born in sin... But if you want to continue to be slaves of the bankers and pay the cost of your own slavery, then let the bankers continue to create money and control credit. *Josiah Charles Stamp*

I wish someone would give me one shred of neutral evidence that financial

innovation has led to economic growth – one shred of evidence. ...the only useful banking innovation was the invention of the ATM. *Paul Volcker*

A bank is a place where they lend you an umbrella in fair weather and ask for it back when it begins to rain. *Robert Frost*

In God we trust; all others must pay cash. *Anon*

T T T T

Amnesty for corrupt gentlemen

Translation of an article in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 8 February 2010:

Peter Rásonyi, London. As announced this weekend, the British criminal investigation authorities have “solved” the biggest case of corruption in recent history. Europe’s leading armaments manufacturer, BAE Systems, has agreed with the Serious Fraud Office SFO and with the US Justice Department to pay a fine of nearly \$450 million, putting an end to all investigations, some of which go back to 1980s and range from Africa and Saudi Arabia to Eastern Europe.

The Director of the SFO, Richard Alderman, praised the agreement in the kind of bombastic words to which we have grown accustomed under New Labour. He was delighted with the precedent-setting success of two of the world’s leading criminal justice departments, he stated. This would send an important signal to all companies that they will have to implement modern standards of business ethics: he left no doubt that the SFO will pursue wrong-doing by companies and force them to modify their culture.

One can, of course, draw a different lesson from the settlement with BAE. The SFO very carefully avoided any mention of the “C-word” in its short communiqué. Officially, BAE has admitted only to some minor accounting misdemeanours. Moreover, very little space was given to the fact that no legal action will be taken against any of those responsible. All the gentlemen involved were guaranteed immunity, after the Blair government – “in the interest of national security” – stopped the investigation into the biggest arms contract with Saudi Arabia in 2006. The difference with the Siemens case is striking. Here the German prosecutors (and the company) undertook a rigorous investigation and several former Board members were given prison sentences.

We can only speculate what might have been the outcome if the USA had not undertaken independently their own prosecution of the British case. The relative political will and power of “the leading criminal justice departments in the world” can easily be seen from their acts. The Americans imposed fines on the arms company of \$400 million and did not mince their words – the British were satisfied with a paltry £30 million.

T T T T

Martin Lukes - Obituary

One of my favourite columns from *The Financial Times* was the regular exchange of e-mails generated by the fictional character Martin Lukes. Here is his obituary notice from the FT of 23 September 2010:

Martin Lukes, the thought leader's thought leader has died suddenly at the age of 50. Mr Lukes became the iconic businessman of his age and was influential in developing many popular management practices. He initially shot to fame for rebranding the US-based global group A&B as a-b glöbäl. The revolutionary use of accents was subsequently copied by Arthur Andersen in its rebranding as Accenture.

However, Mr Lukes' most important contribution to management thinking was creovation – a combination of creativity and innovation – which was the basis of GE's scheme, Ecomagination.

Mr Lukes won multiple awards including BT Outstanding Individual Contribution to Work-Life Balance 2004 (runner-up) and Best Change of DNA in Outsourced Space 2003, sponsored by Hyatt Regency.

Never afraid of attracting controversy, Mr Lukes was arrested on a charge of insider dealing and served a two-year prison sentence but was released when the charge was overturned on a technicality.

Martin lives on – see his blog: <http://blogs.ft.com/martin-lukes-blog/>. He also lives on in other companies' (sometimes unwitting) parroting of his credo and style. David Carr referred in the "Blog Decoder" of the *New York Times* dated 28 October 2010 to a statement by Charles H. Townsend, Condé Nast Publications chief executive, announcing "a consumer-centric business model, a holistic brand management approach and the establishment of a multi-platform, integrated sales and marketing organization." Carr commented:

Gracious, that sounds exciting, but what does it mean? Don't ask the people who work at Condé Nast. "We all read it and have no idea what he was talking about. It's the kind of communication where there are no verbs and every other word is some kind of buzzy techno jargon," said one of the people who cranks words at Condé Nast but asked not to be quoted criticizing their boss so they can continue to do so.

In announcing a new set of executive assignments – many longtime executives left the company in the last year – Mr. Townsend wrote:

"Our commitment to consumer centricity is evident in the talent we have assembled in the short time since Bob Sauerberg became president," adding, "To optimize brand revenue growth, we will shift responsibility for single-site, digital sales and marketing to the brand level. Publishers can now fully leverage their offerings across all platforms. Next month, we will begin newly established brand management meetings where the publishers and editors jointly discuss the growth strategies for their brands."

..... From a company built on the clarity and beauty of prose and image – regardless of the platform – we get the kind of rap you hear at a C-list tech conference from some guy who looks like a Trekkie and talks like that Klingon from brand marketing. It's the kind of rap that once it thankfully ends, you want to say, "Gee, that all sounds very interesting, but I have no idea what your product is."

T T T T

Devoid of Content

The following, by Stanley Fish, dean emeritus at the University of Illinois at Chicago, appeared in *The New York Times* of 31 May 2005.

We are at that time of year when millions of American college and high school students will stride across the stage, take diploma in hand and set out to the wider world, most of them utterly unable to write a clear and coherent English sentence. How is this possible? The answer is simple and even obvious: Students can't write clean English sentences because they are not being taught what sentences are.

Most composition courses that American students take today emphasize content rather than form, on the theory that if you chew over big ideas long enough, the ability to write about them will (mysteriously) follow. The theory is wrong. Content is a lure and a delusion, and it should be banished from the classroom. Form is the way.

On the first day of my freshman writing class I give the students this assignment: You will be divided into groups and by the end of the semester each group will be expected to have created its own language, complete with a syntax, a lexicon, a text, rules for translating the text and strategies for teaching your language to fellow students. The language you create cannot be English or a slightly coded version of English, but it must be capable of indicating the distinctions - between tense, number, manner, mood, agency and the like - that English enables us to make.

You can imagine the reaction of students who think that 'syntax' is something cigarette smokers pay, guess that 'lexicon' is the name of a rebel tribe inhabiting a galaxy far away, and haven't the slightest idea of what words like 'tense', 'manner' and 'mood' mean. They think I'm crazy. Yet 14 weeks later - and this happens every time - each group has produced a language of incredible sophistication and precision.

How is this near miracle accomplished? The short answer is that over the semester the students come to understand a single proposition: A sentence is a structure of logical relationships. In its bare form, this proposition is hardly edifying, which is why I immediately supplement it with a simple exercise. "Here," I say, "are five words randomly chosen; turn them into a sentence." (The first time I did this the words were coffee, should, book, garbage and quickly.) In no time at all I am presented with 20 sentences, all perfectly coherent and all quite different. Then comes the hard part. "What is it," I ask, "that you did? What did it take to turn a random list of words into a sentence?" A lot of fumbling and stumbling and false starts follow, but finally someone says, "I put the words into a relationship with one another."

Once the notion of relationship is on the table, the next question almost asks itself: what exactly are the relationships? And working with the sentences they have created the students quickly realize two things: first, that the possible relationships form a limited set; and second, that it all comes down to an interaction of some kind between actors, the actions they perform and the objects of those actions.

The next step (and this one takes weeks) is to explore the devices by which English indicates and distinguishes between the various components of these interactions.

If in every sentence someone is doing something to someone or something else, how does English allow you to tell who is the doer and whom (or what) is the doee; and how do you know whether there is one doer or many; and what tells you that the doer is doing what he or she does in this way and at this time rather than another?

Notice that these are not questions about how a particular sentence works, but questions about how any sentence works, and the answers will point to something very general and abstract. They will point, in fact, to the forms that, while they are themselves without content, are necessary to the conveying of any content whatsoever, at least in English.

Once the students tumble to this point, they are more than halfway to understanding the semester-long task: they can now construct a language whose forms do the same work English does, but do it differently.

In English, for example, most plurals are formed by adding an 's' to nouns. Is that the only way to indicate the difference between singular and plural? Obviously not. But the language you create, I tell them, must have some regular and abstract way of conveying that distinction; and so it is with all the other distinctions - between time, manner, spatial relationships, relationships of hierarchy and subordination, relationships of equivalence and difference - languages permit you to signal.

In the languages my students devise, the requisite distinctions are signaled by any number of formal devices - word order, word endings, prefixes, suffixes, numbers, brackets, fonts, colors, you name it. Exactly how they do it is not the point; the point is that they know what it is they are trying to do; the moment they know that, they have succeeded, even if much of the detailed work remains to be done.

At this stage last semester, the representative of one group asked me, "Is it all right if we use the same root form for adjectives and adverbs, but distinguish between them by their order in the sentence?" I could barely disguise my elation. If they could formulate a question like that one, they had already learned the lesson I was trying to teach them.

In the course of learning that lesson, the students will naturally and effortlessly conform to the restriction I announce on the first day: "We don't do content in this class. By that I mean we are not interested in ideas - yours, mine or anyone else's. We don't have an anthology of readings. We don't discuss current events. We don't exchange views on hot-button issues. We don't tell each other what we think about anything - except about how prepositions or participles or relative pronouns function.» The reason we don't do any of these things is that once ideas or themes are allowed in, the focus is shifted from the forms that make the organization of content possible to this or that piece of content, usually some recycled set of pros and cons about abortion, assisted suicide, affirmative action, welfare reform, the death penalty, free speech and so forth. At that moment, the task of understanding and mastering linguistic forms will have been replaced by the dubious pleasure of reproducing the well-worn and terminally dull arguments one hears or sees on every radio and TV talk show.

Students who take so-called courses in writing where such topics are the staples of

discussion may believe, as their instructors surely do, that they are learning how to marshal arguments in ways that will improve their compositional skills. In fact, they will be learning nothing they couldn't have learned better by sitting around in a dorm room or a coffee shop. They will certainly not be learning anything about how language works; and without a knowledge of how language works they will be unable either to spot the formal breakdown of someone else's language or to prevent the formal breakdown of their own.

In my classes, the temptation of content is felt only fleetingly; for as soon as students bend to the task of understanding the structure of language - a task with a content deeper than any they have been asked to forgo - they become completely absorbed in it and spontaneously enact the discipline I have imposed. And when there is the occasional and inevitable lapse, and some student voices his or her 'opinion' about something, I don't have to do anything; for immediately some other student will turn and say, "No, that's content." When that happens, I experience pure pedagogical bliss.

T T T T

The Awful English Language

In *CP 2008* I included sections from Mark Twain's *The Awful German Language* and complained about a particularly dense text in German from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* which I attempted unsuccessfully to translate into English. I must apologise for my defamation of the German language because I am not sure that I understand the following that appeared in an article by Mark Lilla in the 7 April 2011 edition of the *New York Review of Books*, normally a shining example of good English usage:

The great contradiction in modern capitalist societies is that antibourgeois cultural hedonism is set against bourgeois economic hedonism, and both are at war with the ascetic Protestant ideal capitalism was originally founded on. Marxism denies this pluralism in theory; communism denies it in fact, with monstrous results.

It could be that this is in some way related to the notion that something may work in practice but will never work in theory, but I do not intend even to try to translate this passage into German.

T T T T

Pass the Port yet again

Miss Beatrice, the church organist, was in her eighties and had never been married. She was admired for her sweetness and kindness to all. One afternoon the pastor came to call on her and she showed him into her quaint sitting room and invited him to have a seat while she prepared tea.

As he sat facing her old Hammond organ, the young minister noticed a cut glass bowl sitting on top of it. The bowl was filled with water, and in the water floated, of all things, a condom!

When she returned with tea and scones, they began to chat. The pastor tried to stifle his curiosity about the bowl of water and its strange floater, but soon it got the better of him and he could no longer resist.

“Miss Beatrice,” he said, “I wonder if you would tell me about this?” pointing to the bowl.

“Oh, yes,” she replied, “Isn’t it wonderful? I was walking through the Park a few months ago and I found this little package on the ground. The directions said ‘To place it on the organ, keep it wet and that it would prevent the spread of disease.’ Do you know I haven’t had the flu all winter.”

T T T T

Language in Poetry - Ezra Pound “A Retrospect” (Literary Essays)

Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something.

Don’t use such an expression as “dim lands of peace.” It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer’s not realizing that the natural object is always the adequate symbol.

Go in fear of abstractions. Do not retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Don’t think any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths. . . . Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it.

Use either no ornament or good ornament.

When Shakespeare talks of the “Dawn in russet mantle clad” he presents something which the painter does not present. There is in this line of his nothing that one can call description; he presents.

Don’t imagine that a thing will “go” in verse just because it’s too dull to go in prose.

Consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for a new soap.

The mot juste is of public utility. We are governed by words, the laws are graven in words, and literature is the sole means of keeping these words living and accurate.

T T T T

Odds and ends

T A friend sent me an e-mail suggesting “linch or golf or both” – I told him I’d rather just play golf.

T Certes, un rêve de beignet, c’est un rêve, pas un beignet. Mais un rêve de voyage, c’est déjà un voyage – *Marek Halter*

T Mieux vaut mourir dans la nuit, car chaque jour on peut apprendre quelque chose.

T Quotes about John Foster Dulles from Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*⁹: “Eden’s mental state was not improved over the next three months by having to deal with Dulles, whom he compared unfavourably to

⁹ See *CP 2010* pp. 48-51.

Ribbentrop. The Secretary of State's leaden manner was tiresome enough: his speech was slow, Macmillan memorably observed, but it easily kept pace with his thought." (Churchill had already gone on record with: "Dull, Duller, Dulles")

T Comments on the Irish credit crisis: "There's nothing right on the left and nothing left on the right" – "We have too many Brians and not enough Brains" (Brian Cowen, Brian Lenihan) – "They've got what it takes to take what we've got."

T Engineer's Epitaph: Spite of the world, the flesh, the Devil, / He strove to keep his spirit level.

T If you are not living on the edge, you are simply taking up space.

T I think American media has a bad case of substance abuse right now. We are not producing the body of news and information that democracy needs to conduct a civic dialogue. We are not producing as much news as we did five years, 10 years, 15 years ago. We have to reverse that trend or I think we are going to be pretty close to denying our citizens the essential news and information that they need to have in order to make intelligent decisions.

Michael Copps FCC

T If you are worried about your weight just remember that *overeating* is an anagram of *invigorate*

T Azrail, the Archangel of Death, comes from heaven to visit Mubarak and informs the leader that he must say farewell to the Egyptian people. "Why, where are they going?" he asks.

T The early bird might get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.

T An unfortunate choice of words by a champion of transparency in the ongoing saga of sexual abuse by Catholic priests: "In this sense I think the Holy See cannot get to the bottom of this matter."¹⁰

T On a wall in Tunis: "Soyons réalistes – exigeons l'impossible."

T Je älter wir werden, desto knackiger werden wir. Jeden morgen knacks an einem anderen Punkt.

T Deborah Fallows, in *Dreaming in Chinese* (New York 2010), relates the story of Chao Yuen Ren's work "The Lion-Eating Poet in the Stone Den" which is the story of a poet (*shi*) named Shi who loves to eat lions (*shi shi*), goes to the market (*shi*) to buy ten (*shi*) of them, takes them home to eat (*shi*) and discovers they are made (*shi*) of stone (*shi*).

石室詩士施氏
嗜獅 誓食十獅
氏時時適市視獅
十時 適十獅適市
是時 適施氏適市
氏視是十獅 恃矢勢
使是十獅逝世
氏拾是十獅屍 適石室
石室濕 氏使侍拭石室
石室拭 氏始試食是十獅屍
食時 始識是十獅屍
實十石獅屍
試釋是事

¹⁰ Alberto Athié Gallo, a former priest in Mexico, quoted in the *New York Times*, 3 May 2010. Father Athié doggedly sought to find justice for victims. For his refusal to give up their cases, Athié was relieved of his duties, and was forced to leave Mexico, and eventually, when the church cut off all support, he left the priesthood altogether.