

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

2002

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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 characterise 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 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 and acknowledges Norwich's superior recipe.

Let me not be sad because I am born a woman
in this world. Many saints suffer in this way
Janabai (Maharashtra saint-poet, ca. 1298-1350)

Both man and woman of three parts consist,
Which Paul doth body, soul, and spirit call:
And from the soul three faculties arise,
The mind, the will, the power; then wherefore shall
A woman have her intellect in vain,
Or not endeavour knowledge to attain.
Rachel Speght (1597-after 1621)



Es fehlt uns nicht an Witz / und andern guten Gaben /
Nur dass man nicht dazu Gelegenheit kann haben.
Wenn man uns so wie euch / die Künste gösse ein /
So wollten wir euch auch hierinnen gleicher sein.
Susanna Elisabeth Zeidler (1657-1706)

While Europe's eye is fix'd on mighty things,
The fate of empires and the fall of kings;
While quacks of State must each produce his plan,
And even children lisp the Rights of Man;
Amid this mighty fuss just let me mention,
The Rights of Woman merit some attention.
Robert Burns (1759-96) – from Address on "The Rights of Woman"

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CHRISTMAS PUDDING 2002

For most readers of English mother tongue, the poem *The Night Before Christmas*, by Clement Clark Moore (1779-1863), is indissociably linked with Christmas – certainly in my childhood it was read aloud from beginning to end every year. What we perhaps do not realise is how much of our present perception of Christmas (from the design of Christmas cards to the conventional image of Father Christmas) has been shaped by the poem. “Not until St. Nicholas passed through the crucible of Dr. Clement Clark Moore’s mind did the patron saint of childhood ever ride in a sleigh or have eight tiny reindeer or dress in furs”¹. I quote from <http://www.fsu.edu/~speccoll/night2.htm>:

“Moore composed the poem as a prank for his children in 1822, perhaps using a Dutch handyman in the community as his model. Tradition holds that a family friend, Miss Harriet Butler, sent it anonymously to the *Troy Sentinel* a year later. This caused Moore much chagrin and regret, such that he delayed admitting authorship for twenty-two years.



Clement Clarke Moore was the only child of Benjamin Moore, the Episcopal Bishop of New York who assisted in officiating at the inauguration of George Washington, read the last rites to Alexander Hamilton, and served as the president of King's College (later known as Columbia University). Clement Clarke Moore played the violin and piano. He was proficient in French, Italian, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and graduated at 19 from Columbia University as first in his class. He studied for the ministry and drew the first plans of the church he helped establish, for which he gave the land. He was a scholar of oriental and classical literature which led to his being appointed a professor at the General Theological Seminary. He later donated Chelsea Square, a city block in the heart of New York, to the Seminary.”

¹ Hoskins “Life” in Moore, Clement Clarke: The True Story of “A Visit from St. Nicholas” with a Life of the Author Clement C. Moore. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1933.

The night before Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled down for a long winter's nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;
"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! on Cupid! on, Donner and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"
As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my hand, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.
He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.
His eyes -- how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook, when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,

Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."

T T T T

This year's *Christmas Pudding* features almost exclusively poetry by women. It has never been easy for women to succeed at professions that not only are male-dominated but have been considered until relatively recently as inappropriate for women. It is therefore remarkable that in all periods of our literature (and in antiquity) women have succeeded in producing (though in some cases not publishing in their lifetime) works in every way as good as those of men. I hope to show a representative sample.

A fairly intensive reading of poetry by women in English, French and German leads me to the following conclusions: a) women's poetry in these languages is both under-rated and under-represented on Internet and in anthologies²; b) in general, women's poetry is less pompous and pretentious than men's, and shows consistently more of the qualities that I look for in poetry - rational use of language, wit and clear communication of ideas and emotions; c) women have had to struggle over the centuries to acquire the education and leisure necessary for the writing of poetry and to make themselves heard as poets; d) the general liberalisation of social conventions from approximately the middle of the nineteenth century released a flood of excellent poetry by women.

The principal difficulties faced by women until this time in achieving poetic expression were lack of access to education (and to the great works of classical literature) and rigid definitions of gender roles. From the medieval period, where a nobleman – frequently absent in military activities – considered that he must know whether the children borne by his wife are his own, until well into the nineteenth century, the male discourse of “chastity”, “constancy” and “honour” determined what was appropriate for female activity and what was not. The necessity of education for women was rarely conceded and verbal self-expression (as in poetry) accessible to a broad public was considered a breach of these (male-designed) virtues.

² Could it be that men decide what is selected for publication in these media? I am surprised how little of the poetry I have reviewed for inclusion here is available in full-text on the web, while much inferior poetry by male contemporaries is.

At the same time, the dominant male discourse promoted a different set of male virtues: men might attain honour through excellence in letters, martial arts or loyal service to a king or prince: but constancy and chastity were not relevant to masculine honour. This double standard is essential to understanding of the work of some of the most important female writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³

T T T T

One of the most remarkable books I have consulted in preparing this overview of women's poetry is *Women Writing in India - Volume I: 600 BC to the present*, edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, The Feminist Press N.Y. 1991. The following two poems appear in this anthology, both by members of the earliest community of women followers of Buddha in India (6th century BC). Their cry of joy at the freedom their religion has given them from household drudgery and male domination echoes plaintively down the centuries.

At last free, at last I am a woman free!
No more tied to the kitchen,
stained amid the stained pots,
no more bound to the husband
who thought me less
than the shade he wove with his hands⁴.
No more anger, no more hunger,
I sit now in the shade of my own tree.
Meditating thus, I am happy, serene.
Sumangalamata

So free am I, so gloriously free,
Free from three petty things -
From mortar, from pestle,
And from my twisted lord,
Freed from rebirth and death I am,
All that has held me down is hurled away.
Mutta



T T T T

Sappho is one of the few known female poets of the ancient world. Born between 630 and 612 BC, she composed most of her poetry on the island of Lesbos, a major cultural centre at the time. Her poems were written to be performed to the lyre (hence "lyric" poetry). The metrical conventions of her poetry became so well established that they are now known as "sapphic" meter. She changed the frame of reference of lyric poetry from gods and muses to the

³ See article by Richard Bear, University of Oregon, at <http://www.uoregon.edu/~rbear/mary.html>

⁴ Sumangalamata was married to a hatmaker

emotions and thoughts of the individual. Almost all her poetry exists only in fragments, much of which was retrieved only in the nineteenth century in Egypt from papyrus used for entirely different purposes, such as wrapping mummies.

It's no use
Mother dear, I
can't finish my weaving.
You may
blame Aphrodite -
soft as she is
she has almost
killed me with
love for that boy

Sleep darling
I have a small
daughter called
Cleis, who is
like a golden
flower.
I wouldn't
take all Croesus'
kingdom, with love
thrown in, for her.

You know the place, then
Leave Crete and come to us
waiting where the grove is
pleasantest, by precincts
sacred to you: incense
smokes on the altar; cold

streams murmur through the
apple branches, a young
rose thicket shades the ground
and quivering leaves pour
down deep sleep; in meadows
where horses have grown sleek
among spring flowers, dill scents the air.
Queen! Cyprian!
Fill our gold cups with love
stirred into clear nectar.

Don't ask me what to wear
I have no embroidered
headband from Sardis to
give you, Cleis, such as
I wore
and my mother
always said that in her
day a purple ribbon
looped through the hair was thought
to be high style indeed
but we were dark:
a girl
whose hair is yellower than
torchlight should wear no
headdress but fresh flowers.

Translation by Mary Barnard⁵

T T T T

The Night Before Christmas has inspired many parodies – the following is my favourite.⁶

The Legal Night Before Christmas

Whereas, on or about the night prior to Christmas, there did occur at a certain improved piece of real property (hereinafter "the House") a general lack of stirring by all creatures therein, including, but not limited to a mouse.

A variety of foot apparel, e.g. stocking, socks, etc., had been affixed by and around the chimney in said House in the hope and/or belief that St. Nick a.k.a. St. Nicholas a.k.a. Santa Claus (hereinafter "Claus") would arrive at sometime thereafter.

⁵ See <http://users.erols.com/kmdavis/sappho.html>

⁶ With thanks to Suzette Won.

The minor residents, i.e. the children, of the aforementioned House were located in their individual beds and were engaged in nocturnal hallucinations, i.e. dreams, wherein vision of confectionery treats, including, but not limited to, candies, nuts and/or sugar plums, did dance, cavort and otherwise appear in said dreams.

Whereupon the party of the first part (sometimes hereinafter referred to as "I"), being the joint-owner in fee simple of the House with the party of the second part (hereinafter "Mamma"), and said Mamma had retired for a sustained period of sleep. (At such time, the parties were clad in various forms of headgear, e.g. kerchief and cap.)

Suddenly, and without prior notice or warning, there did occur upon the unimproved real property adjacent and appertaining to said House, i.e. the lawn, a certain disruption of unknown nature, cause and/or circumstance. The party of the first part did immediately rush to a window in the House to investigate the cause of such disturbance.

At that time, the party of the first part did observe, with some degree of wonder and/or disbelief, a miniature sleigh (hereinafter "the Vehicle") being pulled and/or drawn very rapidly through the air by approximately eight (8) reindeer. The driver of the Vehicle appeared to be and in fact was, the previously referenced Claus.

Said Claus was providing specific direction, instruction and guidance to the approximately eight (8) reindeer and specifically identified the animal co-conspirators by name: Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen (hereinafter "the Deer"). (Upon information and belief, it is further asserted an additional co-conspirator named "Rudolph" may have been involved.)

The party of the first part witnessed Claus, the Vehicle and the Deer intentionally and wilfully trespass upon the roofs of several residences located adjacent to and in the vicinity of the House, and noted that the Vehicle was heavily laden with packages, toys and other items of unknown origin or nature.

Suddenly, without prior invitation or permission, either express or implied, the Vehicle arrived at the House, and Claus entered said House via the chimney.

Said Claus was clad in a red fur suit, which was partially covered with residue from the chimney, and he carried a large sack containing a portion of the aforementioned packages, toys, and other unknown items. He was smoking what appeared to be tobacco in a small pipe in blatant violation of local ordinances and health regulations.

Claus did not speak, but immediately began to fill the stocking of the minor children, which hung adjacent to the chimney, with toys and other small gifts. (Said items did not, however, constitute "gifts" to said minors pursuant to the applicable provisions of the U.S. Tax Code.)

Upon completion of such task, Claus touched the side of his nose and flew, rose and/or ascended up the chimney of the House to the roof where the Vehicle and Deer waited and/or served as "lookouts." Claus immediately departed for an unknown destination.

However, prior to the departure of the Vehicle, Deer and Claus from said House, the party

of the first part did hear Claus state and/or exclaim: "Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!" Or words to that effect.

T T T T

Which reminds me that I received the following "Lawyers' seasonal greeting":

From us ("the wishor") to you ("hereinafter called the wishee") Please accept without obligation, implied or implicit, our best wishes for an environmentally conscious, socially responsible, politically correct, low stress, non-addictive, gender neutral celebration of the winter solstice holiday, practised within the most enjoyable traditions of the religious persuasion of your choice, or secular practices of your choice, with respect for the religious/secular persuasions and/or traditions of others, or their choice not to practice religious or secular traditions at all... and a financially successful, personally fulfilling and medically uncomplicated recognition of the onset of the generally accepted calendar year 2002, but with due respect for the calendars of choice of other cultures or sects, and having regard to the race, creed, colour, age, physical ability, religious faith, choice of computer platform or dietary preference of the wishee.

By accepting this greeting you are bound by these terms that

- This greeting is subject to further clarification or withdrawal
- This greeting is freely transferable provided that no alteration shall be made to the original greeting and that the proprietary rights of the wishor are acknowledged.
- This greeting implies no promise by the wishor to actually implement any of the wishes and is warranted by the wishor greeting only for the limited replacement of this wish or issuance of a new wish at the sole discretion of the wishor.
- This greeting may not be enforceable in certain jurisdictions and/or the restrictions herein may not be binding upon certain wishees in certain jurisdictions and is revocable at the sole discretion of the wishor.
- This greeting is warranted to perform as reasonably as may be expected within the usual application of good tidings, for a period of one year or until the issuance of a subsequent holiday greeting, whichever comes first.
- Any references in this greeting to "the Lord", "Father Christmas", "Our Saviour", or any other festive figures, whether actual or fictitious, dead or alive, shall not imply any endorsement by or from them in respect of this greeting, and all proprietary rights in any referenced third party names and images are hereby acknowledged.

T T T T

Pan Zhao (48-117? B.C.) was the only woman to hold the post of official historian to the Imperial Court of the Han Dynasty. She is the most famous woman scholar of Chinese history; in addition to history and poetry she wrote a popular collection of Confucian "Precepts for Women."

Needle and Thread

Tempered, annealed, the hard essence of autumn metals
finely forged, subtle, yet perdurable and straight.
By nature penetrating deep yet advancing by inches

to span all things yet stitch them up together,
 Only needle-and-thread's delicate footsteps
 are truly broad-ranging yet without beginning!
 How can those who count pennies calculate their worth?
 They may carve mountains yet lack all understanding.⁷

T T T T

One of the most remarkable women of the Middle Ages was **Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)**. At a time when virtually no women wrote, Hildegard produced major works of theology; at a time when few women were accorded respect, she was consulted by and advised bishops, popes, and kings. She wrote much religious music and founded a convent, in Bingen on the Rhine. Hildegard received only a rudimentary education: she started to have visions at the age of three, but hid her gift for many years. At the age of forty-two, a vision of God gave her a new understanding of the meaning of the religious texts, and commanded her to write down everything she would observe in her visions. In addition to the composition of plainchant and accompanying texts, she wrote visionary works and books on natural history and the curative powers of various natural objects.

Ave, generosa, gloriosa et intacta puella. Tu pupilla castitatis, tu materia sanctitatis, que Deo placuit.	Hail, noble, glorious and pure woman, the pupil of chastity. You are the sacred essence pleasing to God.
Nam hec superna infusio in te fuit, quod supernum Verbum in te carnem induit.	The essences of Heaven flooded into you, and the Great Word of God was made flesh.
Tu candidum lilium, quod Deus ante omnem creaturam inspexit.	You are a white lily, that God looked upon before all creatures.
O pulcerrima et dulcissima, quam valde Deus in te delectabatur, cum amplexionem caloris sui in te posuit, ita quod Filius eius de te lactatus est.	O lovely and tender one, how greatly has God delighted in you. For He has placed His warm embrace within you, so that His Son might nurse at your breast.

T T T T

The following is a genuine exchange of correspondence in a London hotel.

Dear Maid, Please do not leave any more of those little bars of soap in my bathroom since I have brought my own bath-sized Dial. Please remove the six unopened little bars from the shelf under the medicine chest and another three in the shower soap dish. They are in my way. Thank you, *S. Berman*

⁷ See <http://music.acu.edu/www/iawm/pages/reference/praise.html>

Dear Room 635, I am not your regular maid. She will be back tomorrow, Thursday, from her day off. I took the 3 hotel soaps out of the shower soap dish as you requested. The 6 bars on your shelf I took out of your way and put on top of your Kleenex dispenser in case you should change your mind. This leaves only the daily 3 bars I left today according to my instructions from the management. I hope this is satisfactory. *Kathy, Relief Maid*

Dear Maid - I hope you are my regular maid. Apparently Kathy did not tell you about my note to her concerning the little bars of soap. When I got back to my room this evening I found you had added 3 little Camays to the shelf under my medicine cabinet. I am going to be here in the hotel for two weeks and have brought my own bath-size Dial so I won't need those 6 little Camays which are on the shelf. They are in my way when shaving, brushing teeth, etc. Please remove them. *S. Berman*

Dear Mr. Berman, My day off was last Wed, so the relief maid left 3 hotel soaps which we are instructed by the management. I took the 6 soaps which were in your way on the shelf and put them in the soap dish where your Dial was. I put the Dial in the medicine cabinet for your convenience. I didn't remove the 3 complimentary soaps which are always placed inside the medicine cabinet for all new check-ins and which you did not object to when you checked in last Monday. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance. *Your regular maid, Dotty*

Dear Mr. Berman, The assistant manager, Mr. Kensedder, informed me this A.M. that you called him last evening and said you were unhappy with your maid service. I have assigned a new girl to your room. I hope you will accept my apologies for any past inconvenience. If you have any future complaints please contact me so I can give it my personal attention. Call extension 1108 between 8 AM and 5 P.M. Thank you. *Elaine Carmen, Housekeeper*

Dear Miss Carmen, It is impossible to contact you by phone since I leave the hotel for business at 7.45 AM and don't get back before 5.30 or 6 P.M.. That's the reason I called Mr. Kensedder last night. You were already off duty. I only asked Mr. Kensedder if he could do anything about those little bars of soap. The new maid you assigned me must have thought I was a new check-in today, since she left another 3 bars of hotel soap in my medicine cabinet along with her regular delivery of 3 bars on the bath-room shelf. In just 5 days here I have accumulated 24 little bars of soap. Why are you doing this to me? *S. Berman*

Dear Mr. Berman, Your maid, Kathy, has been instructed to stop delivering soap to your room and remove the extra soaps. If I can be of further assistance, please call extension 1108 between 8 A.M. and 5 P.M.. Thank you, *Elaine Carmen, Housekeeper*

Dear Mr. Kensedder, My bath-size Dial is missing. Every bar of soap was taken from my room including my own bath-size Dial. I came in late last night and had to call the bellhop to bring me 4 little Cashmere Bouquets. *S. Berman*

Dear Mr. Berman, I have informed our housekeeper, Elaine Carmen, of your soap problem. I cannot understand why there was no soap in your room since our maids are instructed to leave 3 bars of soap each time they service a room. The situation will be rectified immediately. Please accept my apologies for the inconvenience. *Martin L. Kensedder, Assistant Manager*

Dear Mrs. Carmen, Who the hell left 54 little bars of Camay in my room? I came in last night and found 54 little bars of soap. I don't want 54 little bars of Camay. I want my one damn bar of bath-size Dial. Do you realise I have 54 bars of soap in here. All I want is my bath size Dial. Please give me back my bath-size Dial. *S. Berman*

Dear Mr. Berman, You complained of too much soap in your room so I had them removed. Then you complained to Mr. Kensedder that all your soap was missing so I personally returned them. The 24 Camays which had been taken and the 3 Camays you are supposed to receive daily (sic). I don't know anything about the 4 Cashmere Bouquets. Obviously your maid, Kathy, did not know I had returned your soaps so she also brought 24 Camays plus the 3 daily Camays. I don't know where you got the idea this hotel issues bath-size Dial. I was able to locate some bath-size Ivory which I left in your room. *Elaine Carmen, Housekeeper*

Dear Mrs. Carmen, Just a short note to bring you up-to-date on my latest soap inventory. As of today I possess:

- On shelf under medicine cabinet - 18 Camay in 4 stacks of 4 and 1 stack of 2.
- On Kleenex dispenser - 11 Camay in 2 stacks of 4 and 1 stack of 3.
- On bedroom dresser - 1 stack of 3 Cashmere Bouquet, 1 stack of 4 hotel-size Ivory, and 8 Camay in 2 stacks of 4.
- Inside medicine cabinet - 14 Camay in 3 stacks of 4 and 1 stack of 2.
- In shower soap dish - 6 Camay, very moist.
- On northeast corner of tub - 1 Cashmere Bouquet, slightly used.
- On northwest corner of tub - 6 Camays in 2 stacks of 3.

Please ask Kathy when she services my room to make sure the stacks are neatly piled and dusted. Also, please advise her that stacks of more than 4 have a tendency to tip. May I suggest that my bedroom windowsill is not in use and will make an excellent spot for future soap deliveries. One more item, I have purchased another bar of bath-sized Dial which I am keeping in the hotel vault in order to avoid further misunderstandings.

*S. Berman*⁸

T T T T

Christine de Pisan (c1364-c1430)⁹ was probably the first woman writer to earn her living from her pen. Born in Venice in about 1364, she moved at the age of five with her father, Tomasso de Pizzano, a physician and astrologer, to the court of King Charles V of France, where she received an excellent education. In 1380, Christine married Etienne du Castel, a court secretary. King Charles V died that same year, and the new king did not renew the favoured status of her father and her husband. Tomasso died shortly after and, in 1390, Etienne too died suddenly.

⁸ With thanks to David Esch. His source states that this exchange was submitted to the *Sunday Times* by the hotel - the hotel's name was not, however, revealed. I am cynical enough to think it may be yet another Internet hoax - *ma, se non è vero, è ben trovato*.

⁹ cf <http://www.netsrq.com/~dbois/pisan.html>

At the age of twenty-five Christine was left a widow with three small children, her mother and a niece to support.

She decided to earn her income as a writer. Her poems, songs and ballads were well received by many leading members of the French aristocracy, including King Charles VI and his wife Queen Isabella of Bavaria, and soon she was able to support her family.



De triste coeur chanter joyusement
Et rire en deuil c'est chose fort à faire,
De son penser montrer tout le contraire,
N'issir doux ris de dolent sentiment,

Ainsi me faut faire communément,
Et me convient, pour celer mon affaire,
De triste coeur chanter joyusement.
Car en mon coeur porte couvertelement

Le deuil qui soit qui plus me peut déplaire,
Et si me faut, pour les gens faire taire,
Rire en pleurant et très amèrement
De triste coeur chanter joyusement.

Her best-known work is the *Cité des Dames*. Angry at the disparaging attitudes of the male writers of her day towards women, she decided to publish a work in which women's historical achievements and strengths would be fairly represented. The work describes a vision in which three ladies appear to her: "Dame Raison", "Dame Droiture" and "Dame Justice" - all three invite her to build a strong citadel within which women of character and talent can defend their achievements against the prejudices of men. She was careful however, not to be too provocative, given the weak position of women in medieval society.

"Et vous, chères amies qui êtes mariées, ne vous indignez pas d'être ainsi soumises à vos maris, car ce n'est pas toujours dans l'intérêt des gens que d'être libres... Que celle qui a un mari doux, bon et raisonnable, et qui l'aime d'un véritable amour, remercie le Seigneur, car ce n'est pas là une mince faveur, mais le plus grand bien qu'elle puisse recevoir sur cette terre; qu'elle mette tous ses soins à le servir, le chérir et l'aimer d'un cœur fidèle - comme il est de son devoir - vivant dans la tranquillité et priant Dieu qu'il continue à protéger leur union et à leur garder la vie sauve. Quand à celle dont le mari n'est ni bon ni méchant, elle doit aussi remercier le Seigneur de ne pas lui en avoir donné un pire - elle doit faire tous ses efforts pour modérer ses excès et pour vivre paisiblement selon leur rang. Et celle dont le mari est pervers, félon et méchant doit faire tout son possible pour le supporter, afin de l'arracher à sa perversité et le ramener, si elle le peut, sur le chemin de la raison et de la bonté; et si, malgré tous ses efforts, le mari s'obstine dans le mal, son âme sera récompensée de cette courageuse patience, et tous la béniront et prendront sa défense."

The work concludes with words of encouragement to her women readers:

“... vous toutes, mesdames, femmes de grande, de moyenne ou d’humble condition, avant toute chose restez sur vos gardes et soyez vigilantes pour vous défendre contre les ennemis de votre honneur et de votre vertu. Voyez, chères amies, comme de toutes parts ces hommes vous accusent des pires défauts! Démasquez leur imposture par l’éclat de votre vertu; en faisant le bien, convainquez de mensonge tout ceux qui vous calomnient.”

T T T T

Pass the Port

Three men were playing golf one morning and one of them hit his ball into a pond. As they walked up to the pond, they saw a frog which said as they approached: "I will fetch your ball but then you must kiss me and I will grant you each a wish".

The player whose ball was in the pond said OK and, after retrieving his ball, kissed the frog which immediately turned into a beautiful fairy.

"Right, tell me your wishes", she said.

The first player said he would really like to be a bit better-looking and it would be good if his IQ could be raised a notch. BOOM – there he was looking pretty good and with a new light of intelligence in his eyes.

The second player was so impressed he said he wanted to be five times more handsome and intelligent and with a pleasant and agreeable character as well. BOOM – there he was looking like the centrefold of "Playgirl", quoting Shakespeare and doing calculus in his head, radiating strength and happiness from his sensitive, confident face.

The third player – having seen all this – asked to be ten times more of everything. "Um," said the fairy, "I think you should reflect a bit before you ask for that – are you absolutely sure that's what you want?" "Yes", said the other "why on earth not?". "Well", said the fairy, you may be a bit surprised about the outcome". "No, no", said the golfer, "I'm absolutely sure".

BOOM – the golfer was turned into a woman.

T T T T

The golden age of English poetry was also a golden age for women poets.

Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603)

The doubt of future foes exiles my present joy,
And wit me warns to shun such snares as threaten mine annoy;
For falsehood now doth flow, and subjects' faith doth ebb,
Which should not be if reason ruled or wisdom weaved the web.
But clouds of joys untried do cloak aspiring minds,
Which turn to rain of late repent by changed course of winds.

The top of hope supposed the root upreared shall be,
And fruitless all their grafted guile, as shortly ye shall see.
The dazzled eyes with pride, which great ambition blinds,
Shall be unsealed by worthy wights whose foresight falsehood finds.
The daughter of debate that discord aye doth sow
Shall reap no gain where former rule still peace hath taught to know.
No foreign banished wight shall anchor in this port;
Our realm brooks not seditious sects, let them elsewhere resort.
My rusty sword through rest shall first his edge employ
To poll their tops that seek such change or gape for future joy.

Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645)

Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum

Our Mother Eve, who tasted of the tree,
Giving to Adam what she held most dear
Was simply good, and had no power to see,
The after-coming harm did not appear:
The subtle serpent that our sex betrayed,
Before our fall so sure a plot had laid.

...
But surely Adam can not be excused,
Her fault though great, yet he was most to blame;
What weakness offered, strength might have refused,
Being Lord of all, the greater was his shame:
Although the serpent's craft had her abused,
God's holy word ought all his actions frame,
For he was Lord and King of all the earth,
Before poor Eve had either life or breath.

....
If Eve did err, it was for knowledge sake,
The fruit being fair persuaded him to fall:
No subtle serpent's falsehood did betray him,
If he would eat it, who had power to stay him?

Not Eve, whose fault was only too much love,
Which made her give this present to her dear,
That what she tasted, he likewise might prove,
Whereby his knowledge might become more clear;
He never sought her weakness to reprove,
With those sharp words, which he of God did hear:
Yet men will boast of knowledge, which he took
From Eve's fair hand, as from a learned book.

.....
Then let us have our liberty again,
And challenge to yourselves no sovereignty;
You came not in the world without our pain,
Make that a bar against your cruelty;
Your fault being greater, why should you disdain
Our being your equals, free from tyranny?

If one weak woman simply did offend,
This sin of yours hath no excuse, nor end.

Lady Mary Wroth¹⁰ (1586-1652) - Sonnet 7
Love leave to urge, thou knowest thou hast the hand;
'Tis cowardice to strive where none resist,
Pray thee leave off, I yield unto thy band,
Do not thus, still in thine own power persist.
Behold, I yield; let forces be dismissed,
I am thy subject conquered bound to stand
Never thy foe, but did thy claim assist,
Seeking thy due of those who did withstand.
But now it seems thou would'st I should thee love,
I do confess, 'twas thy will made me choose,
And thy fair shows made me a lover prove,
When I my freedom did for pain refuse.
Yet this Sir god, your Boy-ship I despise,
Your charms I obey, but love not want of eyes.

T T T T

Women's Wit and Wisdom

In principle women never say no, but men never ask the right questions. *Zulfia Safarmanadova*
Humour is the first of the gifts to perish in a foreign tongue. *Virginia Woolf*
I can take reality in small doses, but not as a life style. / The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat. / I always said I wanted to be somebody, but I should have been more specific. *Lily Tomlin*
If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in the room. *Anita Koddick*
"No, mother, I haven't met Mr. Right yet, but I've met Mr. Cheap, Mr. Rude and Mr. Married..." *Anonymous*
In America, sex is an obsession, in other parts of the world, it is a fact. *Marlene Dietrich*
The money is always there. Only the pockets change. *Gertrude Stein*
I never panic when I get lost. I just change where it is I want to go. *Rita Rudner*
The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing in the right place, but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment. *Dorothy Nevill*
The trouble with some women is that they get all excited over nothing ... and then they marry him. *Cher*
I have everything I had twenty years ago – except that it's now all lower. *Gypsy Rose Lee*
I was the first woman to burn my bra – it took the fire department four days to put it out. *Dolly Parton*
The state of matrimony is a dangerous disease. Far better to take drink in my opinion. *Madame de Sévigné*
When you see what some girls marry, you realise how they must hate to work for a living. *Helen Rowland*
The more I see of men, the more I like dogs. *Madame de Staël*

¹⁰ Ben Jonson dedicated his play *The Alchemist* to Mary, and wrote of her that her sonnets made him "a better lover and a much better Poet".

Breakfast is the most important meal of the afternoon. *Amdia T. Smith*
The best way to find something you've lost is to buy a replacement. *Ann Landers*
It is not true that life is one damn thing after another - it's one damn thing over and over. *Edna St. Vincent Millay*
The problem with people who have no vices is that generally you can be pretty sure they're going to have some pretty annoying virtues. *Elizabeth Taylor*
Household pets should never be allowed at the dining table unless they can hold their own in conversation. *Emily Post*
Remember, Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, but she did it backwards and in high heels. *Faith Whittlesey*
As a breastfeeding mother, you are basically meals on wheels. *Kathy Lette*
Don't put your head around the door to see if your child is asleep – it was. *Faith Hines*
I once had a rose named after me and was very flattered. But I wasn't pleased to see the catalogue description: not very good in a bed, but fine up against a wall. *Eleanor Roosevelt*
I love children, especially when they cry, for then someone takes them away. *Nancy Mitford*
He was so narrow minded he could see through a keyhole with both eyes. *Molly Ivins*
In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice, there is. *Muffy Barkocy*
There are more tears shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones. *St. Teresa of Avila*
There's less here than meets the eye. / My heart is pure as the driven slush. / The only thing I regret about my past is the length of it. If I had my life to live again, I'd make the same mistakes, only sooner. / Nobody can be exactly like me. Even I have trouble doing it. *Tallulah Bankhead*
Macho does not prove mucho. / I never hated a man enough to give him his diamonds back. / Never despise what it says in the women's magazines: it may not be subtle, but neither are the men. / I want a man who is kind and understanding – is that too much to ask of a billionaire? / I'm a wonderful housekeeper – every time I get divorced, I keep the house. *Zsa Zsa Gabor*
The statistics on sanity are that one out of every four Americans is suffering from some form of mental illness. Think of your three best friends. If they are okay, then it's you. *Rita Mae Brown*

T T T T

Rachel Speght (1597- after 1621) was the first English woman to write a feminist tract under her own name. Daughter of a Calvinist minister, Speght was a well-educated woman of the London middle class. In 1617, a certain Joseph Swetnam published a misogynist pamphlet *The Arraignment of Women*, and challenged English women to enter a debate on the issue of gender; the debate was in part a game of wit for men's own amusement, in part a serious discussion of women's abilities and rightful roles, and in part an effort by publishers and booksellers to drum up business for the relatively cheap books made possible by the newly invented printing press. Rachel Speght was the first of his respondents in her *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (A Muzzle for Foulmouth), in which she attempted to interpret the Bible from a female standpoint. (cf <http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/march99/speght3.html> and <http://www.uoregon.edu/~rbear/rachel.html>). The work was prefaced by the following acrostic.

I f Reason had but curbed thy witless will,
O r fear of God restrained thy raving quill,
S uch venom foul thou would'st have blushed to spew,
E xcept that Grace had bidden thee adieu:
P rowess disdains to wrestle with the weak,
H eathenish affected care not what they speak.
S educer of the vulgar sort of men,
W as Satan crept into thy filthy Pen,
E nflaming thee with such infernal smoke,
T hat (if thou had'st thy will) should women choke?
N efarious fiends thy sense having deluded,
A nd from thee all humanity excluded.
M onster of men, worthy no other name,
 For that thou did'st assay our Sex to shame.

T T T T

Lucy Hutchinson (1620-1675) is one of the most brilliant women writers of the seventeenth century. In 1638, she married John Hutchinson and their marriage, which lasted until his death in 1664, was a deeply romantic one. As a Parliamentarian, her husband was imprisoned at the Restoration. She wrote his biography (*Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*) and her **autobiography**, from which the following extract is taken. She also translated Lucretius and Virgil (cf <http://www.wwnorton.com/nael/NTO/17thC/family/hutchinsfrm.htm>)

“As soon as I was weaned a French woman was taken to be my dry-nurse, and I was taught to speak French and English together. My mother, while she was with child with me, dreamed that she was walking in the garden with my father, and that a star came down into her hand, with other circumstances, which, though I have often heard, I minded not enough to remember perfectly; only my father told her, her dream signified she should have a daughter of some extraordinary eminency; which thing, like such vain prophecies, wrought as far as it could its own accomplishment: for my father and mother fancying me then beautiful, and more than ordinarily apprehensive, applied all their cares, and spared no cost to improve me in my education, which procured me the admiration of those that flattered my parents. By the time I was four years old I read English perfectly, and having a great memory, I was carried to sermons; and while I was very young could remember and repeat them exactly, and being caressed, the love of praise tickled me, and made me attend more heedfully. When I was about seven years of age, I remember I had at one time eight tutors in several qualities, languages, music, dancing, writing, and needlework; but my genius was quite averse from all but my book, and that I was so eager of, that my mother thinking it prejudiced my health, would moderate me in it; yet this rather animated me than kept me back, and every moment I could steal from my play I would employ in any book I could find, when my own were locked up from me. After dinner and supper I still had an hour allowed me to play, and then I would steal into some hole or other to read..... As for music and dancing, I profited very little in them, and would never practice my lute or harpsichords but when my masters were with me; and for my needle I absolutely hated

it. Play among other children I despised, and when I was forced to entertain such as came to visit me, I tired them with more grave instructions than their mothers, and plucked all their babies to pieces, and kept the children in such awe, that they were glad when I entertained myself with elder company; to whom I was very acceptable, and living in the house with many persons that had a great deal of wit, and very profitable serious discourses being frequent at my father's table and in my mother's drawing-room, I was very attentive to all, and gathered up things that I would utter again, to great admiration of many that took my memory and imitation for wit.... I used to exhort my mother's maids much, and to turn their idle discourse to good subjects; but I thought, when I had done this on the Lord's day, and every day performed my due tasks of reading and praying, that then I was free to anything that was not sin; for I was not at that time convinced of the vanity of conversation which was not scandalously wicked. I thought it no sin to learn or hear witty songs and amorous sonnets or poems, and twenty things of that kind, wherein I was so apt that I became the confidant of all the loves that were managed among my mother's young women; and there was none of them but had many lovers, and some particular friends beloved above the rest.”

The following poem illustrates her familiarity with the philosophy and natural science of her day:

And (Memmius) lest you think I false grounds lay,
 When I of fire, air, earth and water, say
 That each of them is mortal, daily dies
 And doth again from dissolutions rise.
 First know, parts of the earth with the sun's heat
 Scorched daily, and worn out with travellers' feet,
 Exhale thick clouds of dust, which everywhere
 Blown with wild winds, are scattered into air.
 Part of the furrows waste with every shower,
 And the encroaching floods their banks devour.
 Earth for her part made by her fruitful womb
 The general mother, is the common tomb.
 So wastes she all which there have birth or food,
 So is herself diminished and renewed.

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673), was also well versed in natural science (<http://www.firstscience.com/SITE/poems/cavendish.asp>):

Just like as in a nest of boxes round,
 Degrees of sizes in each box are found:
 So, in this world, may many others be
 Thinner and less, and less still by degree:
 Although they are not subject to our sense,
 A world may be no bigger than two-pence.
 Nature is curious, and such works may shape,
 Which our dull senses easily escape:
 For creatures, small as atoms, may be there,
 If every one a creature's figure bear.
 If atoms four, a world can make, then see
 What several worlds might in an ear-ring be:

For millions of those atoms may be in
The head of one small, little, single pin.
And if thus small, then ladies may well wear
A world of worlds, as pendants in each ear.

T T T T

I am told that in Japan Microsoft error messages have been replaced with Haiku poetry messages. Haiku poetry has strict construction rules: each poem has only three lines with 17 syllables, five in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. Haiku are used to communicate timeless messages, and are intended to achieve a wistful, yearning and powerful insight through extreme brevity - the essence of Zen.

<p>Your file was so big. It might be very useful. But now it is gone.</p> <p>The Website you seek Cannot be located, but Countless more exist.</p> <p>Chaos reigns within. Reflect, repent, and reboot. Order shall return.</p> <p>Programme aborting: Close all that you have worked on. You ask far too much.</p> <p>Windows NT crashed. I am the Blue Screen of Death. No one hears your screams.</p> <p>Yesterday it worked. Today it is not working. Windows is like that.</p> <p>First snow, then silence. This thousand-dollar screen dies So beautifully.</p> <p>With searching comes loss And the presence of absence: “My Novel” not found.</p>	<p>The Tao that is seen Is not the true Tao - until You bring fresh toner.</p> <p>Stay the patient course. Of little worth is your ire. The network is down.</p> <p>A crash reduces Your expensive computer To a simple stone.</p> <p>Three things are certain: Death, taxes and lost data. Guess which has occurred.</p> <p>You step in the stream, But the water has moved on. This page is not here.</p> <p>Out of memory. We wish to hold the whole sky, But we never will.</p> <p>Having been erased, The document you're seeking Must now be retyped.</p> <p>Serious error. All shortcuts have disappeared. Screen. Mind. Both are blank.</p>
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T T T T

One of the most moving stories in the Bible is that of Ruth and Naomi (*Ruth 1*).

Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelt there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah. And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have a husband also tonight, and should also bear sons; would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

T T T T

Sting - Fields of Gold

You'll remember me when the west wind moves
Upon the fields of barley
You'll forget the sun in his jealous sky
As we walk in fields of gold

So she took her love
For to gaze awhile
Upon the fields of barley
In his arms she fell as her hair came down
Among the fields of gold
Will you stay with me, will you be my love
Among the fields of barley
We'll forget the sun in his jealous sky
As we lie in fields of gold

See the west wind move like a lover so
Upon the fields of barley
Feel her body rise when you kiss her mouth
Among the fields of gold

I never made promises lightly
And there have been some that I've broken
But I swear in the days still left
We'll walk in fields of gold

Many years have passed since those summer days
Among the fields of barley
See the children run as the sun goes down
Among the fields of gold
You'll remember me when the west wind moves
Upon the fields of barley
You can tell the sun in his jealous sky
When we walked in fields of gold

T T T T

Some of the best work of women poets of the seventeenth century deals with friendship between women¹¹ and marital (and occasionally extra-marital) love.

Anne Bradstreet (ca.1612-72) : *To My Dear And Loving Husband*

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee.
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, you women, if you can.

¹¹ Although perhaps politically incorrect, I avoid entering a debate on whether some or all of these friendships were lesbian. On the one hand it is clear that seventeenth century conventions on gender roles led several educated and intelligent women to seek one another's company; on the other hand, I am always wary of applying the *mores* of one age to interpret social behaviour in another.

I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay.
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persevere
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

Henriette de la Suze (1618-1673) : *L'amour conjugal*

Il est des maris si charmants,
Qu'ils peuvent être époux, sans cesser d'être amants.
Lorsqu'une âme tendre a l'adresse
D'assembler les devoirs de femme et de maîtresse,
Ceux d'amant et d'époux s'assemblent à leur tour.
Quand par la loi du coeur une main s'est donnée,
Le ciel n'a pas fait l'hyménée
Pour être, comme on dit, le tombeau de l'amour.

Katherine Philips (1631-1664) : *A retired friendship, to Ardelia.*

Come, my Ardelia, to this bower
Where, kindly mingling souls awhile,
Let's innocently spend an hour
And at all serious follies smile.

Here is no quarrelling for crowns,
Nor fear of changes in our fate,
No trembling at the great ones' frowns,
Nor any slavery of state.

Here's no disguise, nor treachery,
Nor any deep concealed design;
From blood and plots this place is free,
And calm as are those looks of thine.

Here let us sit, and bless our stars
Who did such happy quiet give,
As that removed from noise of wars
In one another's hearts we live.

Why should we entertain a fear?
Love cares not how the world is turned:
If crowds of dangers should appear,
Yet friendship can be unconcerned.

We wear about us such a charm,
No horror can be our offence,
For mischief's self can do no harm
To friendship and to innocence.

Let's mark how soon Apollo's beams
Command the flocks to quit their meat,
And not entreat the neighbour streams
To quench their thirst, but cool their heat.

In such a scorching age as this,
Whoever would not seek a shade
Deserve their happiness to miss,
As having their own peace betrayed.

But we, of one another's mind
Assured, the boisterous world disdain,
With quiet souls, and unconfined,
Enjoy what princes wish in vain.

Aphra Behn (1640-1689) : To Mrs. Mary Awbrey - From *Friendship*

For love, like earthly fires (which will decay
If the material fuel be away)
Is with offensive smoke accompanied,
And by resistance only is supplied:
But friendship, like the fiery element,
With its own heat and nourishment content,
Where neither hurt, nor smoke, nor noise is made,
Scorns the assistance of a foreign aid.
Friendship (like heraldry) is hereby known,
Richest when plainest, bravest when alone;
Calm as a virgin, and more innocent
Than sleeping doves are, and as much content
As saints in visions; quiet as the night,
But clear and open as the summer's light;
United more than spirits' faculties,
Higher in thoughts than are the eagle's eyes;
What shall I say? when we true friends are grown,
We are like - Alas, we are ourselves alone

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea (1661-1720) : A Letter to Daphnis

This to the Crown, and blessing of my life,
The much loved husband of a happy wife.
To him, whose constant passion found the art
To win a stubborn, and ungrateful heart;
And to the world, by tenderest proof discovers
They err, who say that husbands can't be lovers.
With such return of passion, as is due,
Daphnis I love, Daphnis my thoughts pursue,
Daphnis, my hopes, my joys, are bounded all in you:
Even I, for Daphnis, and my promise sake,
What I in women censure, undertake.
But this from love, not vanity, proceeds;
You know who writes; and I who 'tis that reads.
Judge not my passion, by my want of skill,

Many love well, though they express it ill;
And I your censure could with pleasure bear,
Would you but soon return, and speak it here.

Ephelia¹² (fl 1678-1681) : To one that asked me why I loved J.G.

Why do I love? Go, ask the glorious sun
Why every day it round the world doth run:
Ask Thames and Tyber, why they ebb and flow:
Ask damask roses why in June they blow:
Ask ice and hail, the reason why they're cold:
Decaying beauties, why they will grow old:
They'll tell thee, Fate, that every thing doth move,
Enforces them to this, and me to love.
There is no reason for our love or hate,
'Tis irresistible, as death or fate;
'Tis not his face; I've sense enough to see
That is not good, though doted on by me:
Nor is't his tongue, that has this conquest won;
For that at least is equalled by my own:
His carriage can to none obliging be,
'Tis rude, affected, full of vanity:
Strangely ill-natured, peevish and unkind,
Unconstant, false, to jealousy inclined;
His temper could not have so great a power,
'Tis mutable, and changes every hour:
Those vigorous years that women so adore
Are past in him: he's twice my age and more;
And yet I love this false, this worthless man,
With all the passion that a woman can;
Dote on his imperfections, though I spy
Nothing to love; I love, and know not why.
Sure 'tis decreed in the dark Book of Fate,
That I should love, and he should be ingrate.

Mary Monck (c1678-1715)

Verses Wrote On Her Death-Bed At Bath, To Her Husband, In London

Thou, who dost all my worldly thoughts employ,
Thou pleasing source of all my earthly joy :
Thou tenderest husband, and thou best of friends,
To thee this first, this last adieu I send.
At length the conqueror death asserts his right,
And will for ever veil me from thy sight.
He woos me to him with a cheerful grace;
And not one terror clouds his meagre face.
He promises a lasting rest from pain;
And shows that all life's fleeting joys are vain.

¹² Ephelia's identity is somewhat of an enigma. Maureen Mulvihill has made a case for identifying her as Lady Mary Villiers Herbert Stuart Howard; Duchess of Richmond & Lennox (1622-1685). (cf. <http://www.troplep.org/ephelial.htm>)

The eternal scenes of heaven he sets in view,
 And tells me that no other joys are true.
 But love, fond love, would yet resist his power;
 Would fain awhile defer the parting hour:
 He brings thy mourning image to my eyes,
 And would obstruct my journey to the skies.
 But say, thou dearest, thou unwearied friend;
 Say, should'st thou grieve to see my sorrows end?
 Thou knowest a painful pilgrimage I've past;
 And should'st thou grieve that rest is come at last?
 Rather rejoice to see me shake off life,
 And die as I have lived, thy faithful wife.

T T T T

In February 1996, *The New York Times* reported on research into the incidence of Alzheimer's disease in nuns, stating that the research had concluded that

"The nuns whose sentences were grammatically complex and packed with ideas when they were in their 20s remained sharp of mind when they were in their 80s. In contrast, almost all those whose sentences were simple and comparatively devoid of complex grammatical constructions were demented six decades later."

In June last year, *The New Yorker* published an article by Adam Lehner, *An Antidote to the Elements of Style*¹³, based on the above news item.

"The reader of the fifth edition of *The Elements of Style* will find many of the rules changed from previous editions. The elementary principles have been modified as a result of the recent discovery that a talent for composing complicated prose early in life can stave off the onset of dementia or Alzheimer's later in life, or, at least, make it much more difficult to detect - a fact that writers can ignore no longer. Here are some of the new principles of composition:

1. Use "the fact that"

Healthy writing is unfocussed and blithering. A sentence should not be trimmed of unnecessary words, for the same reason that a fork should not be inserted into your forehead: self-preservation. "The fact that" is a particularly salubrious expression, and it and similar phrases should be introduced into a sentence whenever possible. For example:

There is no doubt as to the question whether the fact that at eighty-three years of age Sister Marjorie can remember the incident involving Sister Jane as if it were yesterday is due to her florid manner of writing.

2. Employ fancy words

The old notion that the paragraph should be the basic unit of composition, containing one central idea, has been deemed medically perilous. Having one or more ideas per word, on

the other hand, maximizes the idea density of the writer's prose. And the fancier the words, the denser the prose. Foreign words are best of all. If you are tickled by the following:

The dénouement of the impromptu pow-wow convened at the accouchement of Sister Jane was that, Deo volente, the nuns would be separated by a thick purdah from that handsome young horseman Dick at the next gymkhana

you will have an easy time with No. 2.

3. Write with nouns and verbs and adjectives and adverbs and superlatives and vocatives and dangling participles and gerunds and nonrestrictive elements, lots of them, and split infinitives and possessive adjectives and prepositional idioms and interrogative adjectives collective nouns and compound everythings and symbols such as # and @.

4. Express coordinate ideas in different form.

Parallel construction is a symptom of simplemindedness and can be risky. To be on the safe side, you should mix syntactical forms. For example, the beatitudes, familiar to all, would be more therapeutic, though less familiar, if they were rendered like this:

Blessed are the verbose in spirit, for theirs shall be the kingdom of clarity; and the inheritance of the ability to name those children who sat beside them in third grade, and of the ability to name many animals, in a single minute, is what's coming to those who use complicated grammar.

5. Qualify

Qualifiers suggest equivocation, which indicates just the kind of complexity of thought that keeps Alzheimer's at bay. Especially healthful are the words "little" and "pretty":

The Mother Superior tried a little harder to explain to the pretty disappointed (but not really that disappointed) Dick that Sister Jane, perhaps for her own good, had been sent kind of far away.

6. Do not underwrite

Rich, ornate prose is hard to digest, fattening, and sometimes nauseating, but it is very, very good for you:

Recalling these incredibly regrettable but hopefully edifying incidents some six Order-oriented decades later, Sister Marjorie, adorned in damask, had occasion to consider a lifetime of convent memoranda and their effect, however inadvertent, on her ability to summon, in every excruciating detail, not only Sister Jane but myriad other little moments, too, including how the Mother Superior had fixed in an upright position a twelve-foot-high chain-link impediment, with razor wire along its rim, around the grounds and how she had also installed, on the convent's perimeter, ill-tempered canines to chaperon the Sisters for the rest of their days."

T T T T

Other seventeenth (and early eighteenth) century women poets reflect boredom and frustration at men's inconstancy and at contemporary conventions of female behaviour, occupation and submission:

¹³ See *Christmas Pudding 2000* and *2001* – items on Strunk & White

Mary, Lady Chudleigh (Marissa) (1656-1710) : *To the Ladies*

Wife and servant are the same,
But only differ in the name,
For when the fatal knot is tied,
Which nothing, nothing, can divide,
When she the word *obey* has said,
And Man by law supreme has made,
Then all that's kind is laid aside
And nothing left but state and pride.
Fierce as an eastern prince he grows,
And all his innate rigour shows.
Then but to look, to laugh or speak
Will the nuptial contract break.
Like mutes she signs alone must make
And never any freedom take,
But still be governed by a nod
And fear her husband as her God.
Him still must serve, him still obey,
And nothing act, and nothing say,
But what her haughty Lord thinks fit,
Who, with the power, has all the wit.
Then shun, oh! shun that wretched state,
And all the fawning flatterers hate.
Value yourselves, and men despise.
You must be proud, if you'll be wise.

Sarah Fyge, later Field, then Egerton (1670-1723) : From *The Liberty*

Shall I be one of those obsequious fools
That square their lives by Custom's scanty rules?
Condemned forever to the puny curse
Of precepts taught at boarding school or nurse.
That all the business of my life must be
Foolish, dull, trifling formality?
Confined to a strict magic complaisance
And round a circle of nice visits dance,
Nor for my life beyond the chalk advance?
The devil Censure stands to guard the same;
One step awry, he tears my venturous fame,
So when my friends, in a facetious vein
With mirth and wit a while can entertain,
Though ne'er so pleasant, yet I must not stay,
If a commanding clock bids me away,
But with a sudden start, as in a fright,
'I must be gone indeed! 'Tis after eight!'

...

Whatever is not vicious I dare do.
I'll never to the idol Custom bow
Unless it suits with my own humour too.

...

My sex forbids I should my silence break;
I lose my jest, 'cause women must not speak.
Mysteries must not be with my search profaned;
My closet not with books but sweetmeats crammed,
A little china to advance the show,
My prayerbook and *Seven Champions* or so.
My pen, if ever used, employed must be
In lofty themes of useful housewifery,
Transcribing old receipts of cookery,
And what is necessary among the rest,
Good cures for agues and a cancered breast,
But I can't here write my *probatum est*.

...

I'll blush at sin, and not what some call shame,
Secure my virtue, slight precarious fame.
This courage speaks me brave. 'Tis surely worse
To keep those rules which privately we curse,
And I'll appeal to all the formal saints
With what reluctance they endure restraints.

Elizabeth Thomas (1675-1731) : From *A midnight thought*

O sacred time! how soon thou'rt gone!
How swift thy circling minutes run!
O time! our chiefest worldly good,
If we employ thee as we should.
And yet how few thy value know,
But think thee troublesome and slow!
(Motion and rest fill up our time,
And little, O my soul, is thine!)
We eat, we drink, we sleep, and then
We rise – to do the same again;
And thus like fairies daily tread
The same dull round our predecessors led.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu¹⁴ (1689-1762)

Lines Written In A Blank Page Of Milton's "Paradise Lost"

This happy pair a certain bliss might prove,
Confined to constancy and mutual love:
Heaven to one object limited their vows,
The only safety faithless Nature knows.
God saw the wandering appetite would range,
And would have kept them from the power to change;

¹⁴ Lady Montagu contributed to the development of smallpox vaccination. In 1717 she travelled with her husband, the British ambassador, to the court of the Ottoman Empire. There she noted that the local practice of stimulating a mild form of smallpox through inoculation conferred immunity. She had the procedure performed on both her children. By the end of the eighteenth century, the English physician Edward Jenner had cultivated a serum in cattle, which, when used in human vaccination, eventually led to the worldwide eradication of smallpox. (*cf* <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/montagu-smallpox.html>).

But falsehood, soon as man increased, began;
 Down through the race the swift contagion ran,
 All ranks are tainted, all deceitful prove,
 False in all shapes, but doubly false in love.
 This makes the censure of the world more just,
 That damns with shame the weakness of a trust!
 Ere change began, our sex no scandal knew,
 All nymphs were chaste as long as swains were true;
 But now, though by the subtlest art betrayed,
 We're so by custom and false maxims swayed
 That infamy still brands the injured maid.

T T T T

Brussels rejects “Mother Xmas”

BRUSSELS (Reuters 24.10.01) - Father Christmas does not need a “Mother Christmas” partner under European Union sex equality rules, the European Commission has ruled.

It rejected as a “marketing prank” what it said was a claim by British retailer Woolworth that it had to sell Mother Christmas suits alongside Father Christmas outfits to satisfy Santa sex equality clauses in EU legislation. “EU rules aim to prevent discrimination against female employees at work,” spokesman Andrew Fielding said on Wednesday.

He said that the EU’s executive arm, often berated for meddling too much in citizens’ lives, would not be breaking down sexual stereotypes by giving Santa a female partner. He also noted that reindeer portrayed as pulling Santa’s sleighs were all female - male reindeer lose their antlers before the winter while females keep them until the spring. He quoted an Alaskan State government office as once having said that only females “would be able to drive a fat-arsed guy in a velvet suit around the world in one night and not get lost”.

T T T T

One of the best known and most stirring poems written by a woman is the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* by **Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910)**.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
 He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
 He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
 His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps,
 They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damp;
 I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:
 His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:
 "As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;
 Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
 Since God is marching on."

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
 He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:
 Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
 Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
 With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
 As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
 While God is marching on.

T T T T

From a little book called *Disorder in the Court* things people actually said in court:

Q: What is your date of birth?
 A: July fifteenth.
 Q: What year?
 A: Every year.

Q: What gear were you in at the moment of the impact?
 A: Gucci sweats and Reeboks.

Q: This Myasthenia gravis - does it affect your memory at all?
 A: Yes.

Q: And in what ways does it affect your memory?
 A: I forget.

Q: You forget. Can you give us an example of something that you've forgotten?

Q: What was the first thing your husband said to you when he woke that morning?

A: He said, "Where am I, Cathy?"

Q: And why did that upset you?

A: My name is Susan.

Q: And where was the location of the accident?

A: Approximately milepost 499.

Q: And where is milepost 499?

A: Probably between milepost 498 and 500.

Q: Sir, what is your IQ: ?

A: Well, I can see pretty well, I think.

Q: Did you blow your horn or anything?

A: After the accident?

Q: Before the accident.

A: Sure, I played for ten years. I even went to school for it.

Q: Do you know if your daughter has ever been involved in voodoo or occult?

A: We both do.

Q: Voodoo?

A: We do.

Q: You do?
A: Yes, voodoo.

My favourite, however, is the following, from the Alameda County (CA) District Attorney's Office publication *The Point of View*. In a murder trial, the defense attorney was cross-examining a pathologist. This is what was recorded:

Attorney: Before you signed the death certificate, had you taken the pulse?
Coroner: No.
Attorney: Did you listen to the heart?
Coroner: No.
Attorney: Did you check for breathing?
Coroner: No.
Attorney: So, when you signed the death certificate you weren't sure the man was dead, were you?
Coroner: Well, let me put it this way. The man's brain was sitting in a jar on my desk. But I guess it's possible he could be out there practicing law somewhere.

T T T T

Despite the sentimentality and clichés that flaw most poems of the late 18th century and the 19th century, a few women poets succeeded in surpassing the poetic conventions of the age.

Anna Seward (1747-1809) : Sonnet – December morning

I love to rise ere gleams the tardy light,
Winter's pale dawn: - and as warm fires illume,
And cheerful tapers shine around the room,
Through misty windows bend my musing sight
Where, round the dusky lawn, the mansions white,
With shutters closed, peer faintly through the gloom,
That slow recedes, while yon grey spires assume,
Rising from their dark pile, an added height
By indistinctness given. - Then to decree
The grateful thoughts to God, ere they unfold
To friendship, or the Muse, or seek with glee
Wisdom's rich page! - O, hours! More worth than gold,
By whose blest use we lengthen life, and, free
From drear decays of age, outlive the old.

Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) : The Gossamer

Over faded heath-flowers spun, or thorny furze,
The filmy gossamer is lightly spread;
Waving in every sighing air that stirs,
As fairy fingers had entwined the thread:
A thousand trembling orbs of lucid dew
Spangle the texture of the fairy loom,
As if soft sylphs, lamenting as they flew,
Had wept departed summer's transient bloom:

But the wind rises, and the turf receives
The glittering web:- So, evanescent, fade
Bright views that youth with sanguine heart believes:
So vanish schemes of bliss, by fancy made;
Which, fragile as the fleeting dews of morn,
Leave but the withered heath, and barren thorn!

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859)

E n vain l'aurore, Qui se colore, Annonce un jour Fait pour l'amour; De ta pensée Tout oppressée, Pour te revoir, J'attends le soir.	Heure charmante, Soyez moins lente! Avancez-vous, Moment si doux! Une journée Est une année, Quand, pour te voir, J'attends le soir.
L'aurore en fuite, Laisse à sa suite Un soleil pur, Un ciel d'azur; L'amour s'éveille; Pour lui je veille; Et, pour te voir, J'attends le soir.	Un voile sombre Ramène l'ombre; Un doux repos Suit les travaux: Mon sein palpite, Mon cœur me quitte ... Je vais te voir; Voilà le soir.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
for the ends of Being and Ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right:
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise:
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith;
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, - I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! - and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Elisa Mercoeur (1809-1835) : Rêverie

Qu'importe qu'en un jour on dépense une vie,
Si l'on doit en aimant épuiser tout son cœur,
Et doucement penché sur la coupe remplie,
Si l'on doit y goûter le nectar du bonheur.

Est-il besoin toujours qu'on achève l'année?
 Le souffle d'aujourd'hui flétrit la fleur d'hier;
 Je ne veux pas de rose inodore et fanée;
 C'est assez d'un printemps, je ne veux pas d'hiver.

Une heure vaut un siècle alors qu'elle est passée;
 Mais l'ombre n'est jamais une soeur du matin.
 Je veux me reposer avant d'être lassée;
 Je ne veux qu'essayer quelques pas du chemin.

Ondine Valmore (1821-1853) : La voix

La neige au loin couvre la terre nue;
 Les bois déserts étendent vers la nue
 Leurs grands rameaux qui, noirs et séparés,
 D'aucune feuille encore ne sont parés;
 La sève dort et le bourgeon sans force
 Est pour longtemps engourdi sous l'écorce;
 L'ouragan souffle en proclamant l'hiver
 Qui vient glacer l'horizon découvert.
 Mais j'ai frémi sous d'invisibles flammes.
 Voix du printemps qui remuez les âmes,
 Quand tout est froid et mort autour de nous,
 Voix du printemps, ô voix, d'où venez-vous?...

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) - in a class of her own

<p>I stepped from Plank to Plank A slow and cautious way The Stars about my Head I felt About my Feet the Sea.</p> <p>I knew not but the next Would be my final inch -- This gave me that precarious Gait Some call Experience.</p>	<p>The bustle in a house The morning after death Is solemnest of industries Enacted upon earth,--</p> <p>The sweeping up the heart, And putting love away We shall not want to use again Until eternity.</p>
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Christina Rossetti (1830-94) : Ricordo al tempo di' io vi vidi prima (Petrarca)

I wish I could remember that first day,
 First hour, first moment of your meeting me,
 If bright or dim the season, it might be
 Summer or winter for aught I can say;
 So unrecorded did it slip away,
 So blind was I to see and to foresee,
 So dull to mark the budding of my tree
 That would not blossom yet for many a May.
 If only I could recollect it, such
 A day of days! I let it come and go

As traceless as a thaw of bygone snow;
 It seemed to mean so little, meant so much;
 If only now I could recall that touch,
 First touch of hand in hand--Did one but know!

T T T T

In *Christmas Pudding 2001* I referred to the September 11 events as a challenge to all civilised values – and expressed my hope that our response might serve to uphold those values. With this in mind ...¹⁵



Hussein for his actions. We will
Mobilize to meet this threat to
 vital interests in the Persian
 until an ble solution is reached.
 Our best strategy is to repared.
 Failing that, we ming
 to kick your ass."

T T T T

More Dorothy Parker

She was born two months premature: "The first time I was ever early for anything."

"I have slogged along in the exquisite footsteps of Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay, unhappily in my own horrible sneakers. Just a little Jewish girl trying to be cute. Miss Millay did a great deal of harm with her double-burning candles¹⁶. She made poetry seem so easy that we could all do it – but of course we couldn't"

Other boyfriends: "Ah yes, his is the hue of availability." "Poor John, his body went to his head."

"That woman speaks eighteen languages and she can't say "No" in any one of them".

Refused admittance to the Casino in Monte Carlo because not wearing stockings: "So I sent and found my stockings and lost my shirt."

Separated from second husband – Alan Campbell: "Oh don't worry about Alan. Alan will always fall on somebody's feet."

Hollywood: "Unless someone comes near my office, I'm going to write MEN on the door."

¹⁵ The *Financial Times* of 25 September reported that "the US has tacitly promised Russia a part in the development of Iraq's oil industry". Premature allocation of the spoils of war?

¹⁶ "My candle burns at both ends; It will not last the night;
 But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends - It gives a lovely light." *Edna St. Vincent Millay*

Investigated by the FBI: "Listen, I can't even get my dog to stay down. Do I look to you like someone who could overthrow the government?"

Fun with words: Opium "I opium mother is better today."

Loss of a garter at a NY party: "Nearer my garter Thee."

"Take me or leave me, or as is the usual order of things, both."

"Did I enjoy the party? One more drink and I'd have been under the host."

The choice

He'd have given me rolling lands,
Houses of marble, and billowing farms,
Pearls to trickle between my hands,
Smouldering rubies to circle my arms.
You – you'd only a lilting song,
Only a melody, happy and high,
You were sudden and swift and strong –
Never a thought for another had I.

He'd have given me laces rare,
Dresses that glimmered with frosty sheen,
Shining ribbons to wrap my hair,
Horses to draw me, as fine as a queen.
You – you'd only to whistle low,
Gaily I followed wherever you led.
I took you, and I let him go –
Somebody ought to examine my head.

The Lady's Reward

Lady, lady, never start
Conversation toward your heart;
Keep your pretty words serene;
Never murmur what you mean.
Show yourself, by word and look,
Swift and shallow as a brook.
Be as cool and quick to go
As a drop of April snow:
Be as delicate and gay
As a cherry flower in May.
Lady, lady, never speak
Of the tears that burn your cheek –
She will never win him, whose
Words had shown she feared to lose.
Be you wise and never sad,
You will get your lovely lad.
Never serious be, nor true,
And your wish will come to you –
And if that makes you happy, kid,
You'll be the first it ever did.

T T T T

From around the middle of the nineteenth century there begins another golden age for women's poetry – more liberated and more public than in the previous golden age begun by Elizabeth I, women's poetry is filled with intelligence, irony, humour and fine sensibility.

Lizette Woodworth Reese (1856-1935) : *Herbs*

A serviceable thing
Is fennel, mint, or balm,
Kept in the thrifty calm
Of hollows, in the spring;
Or by old houses pent.
Dear is its ancient scent
To folk that love the days forgot,
Nor think that God is not.
Sage, lavender, and rue,
For body's hurt and ill,
For fever and for chill;
Rosemary, strange with dew,
For sorrow and its smart,
For breaking of the heart.
Yet pain, dearth, tears, all come to dust,
As even the herbs must.
Life-everlasting, too,
Windless, poignant, and sere,
That blows in the old year,
Townsmen, for me and you.
Why fret for wafting airs?
Why haste to sell our wares?
Captains and clerks, this shall befall;
This is the end of all.
Oh, this the end indeed!
Oh, unforgotten things,
Gone out of all the springs;
The quest, the dream, the creed!
Gone out of all the lands,
And yet safe in God's hands; --
For shall the dull herbs live again,
And not the sons of men?

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) : *The Mother's Charge*

She raised her head. With hot and glittering eye,
"I know", she said, "that I am going to die.
Come here, my daughter, while my mind is clear.
Let me make plain to you your duty here;
My duty once – I never failed to try –
But for some reason I am going to die."
She raised her head, and, while her eyes rolled wild,
Poured these instructions on the gasping child:
"Begin at once – don't iron sitting down –

Wash your potatoes when the fat is brown –
Monday, unless it rains – it always pays
To get fall sewing done on the right days –
A carpet-sweeper and a little broom –
Save dishes – wash the summer dining room
With soda – keep the children out of doors –
The starch is out – beeswax on all the floors –
If girls are treated like your friends they stay –
They stay, and treat you like their friends – the way
To make home happy is to keep a jar –
And save the prettiest pieces for the star
In the middle – blue's too dark – all silk is best –
And don't forget the corners – when they're dressed
Put them on ice – and always wash the chest
Three times a day, the windows every week –
We need more flour – the bedroom ceilings leak –
It's better than onion – keep the boys at home –
Gardening is good – a load, three loads of loam –
They bloom in spring – and smile, smile always, dear –
Be brave, keep on – I hope I've made it clear.”
She died, as all her mothers died before.
Her daughter died in turn, and made one more.

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge (1861-1907) : A Clever Woman

You thought I had the strength of men
Because with men I dared to speak,
And courted science now and then,
And studied Latin for a week;
But woman's woman even when
She reads her Ethics in the Greek.

You thought me wiser than my kind;
You thought me “more than common tall”;
You thought because I had a mind,
That I could have no heart at all;
But woman's woman you will find,
Whether she be great or small.

And then you needs must die – ah, well!
I knew you not, you loved not me.
'Twas not because the darkness fell,
You saw not what there was to see.
But I that saw and could not tell –
O evil Angel, set me free.

Marie Kryszewska (1864-1908)

<p><i>La gigue</i> Les Talons Vont D'un train d'enfer, Sur le sable blond, Les Talons Vont D'un train d'enfer Implacablement Et rythmiquement, Avec une méthode d'enfer, Les Talons Vont.</p> <p>Cependant le corps, Sans nul désarroi, Se tient tout droit, Comme appréhendé au collet Par les Recors La danseuse exhibe ses bas noirs Sur des jambes dures</p>	<p>Comme du bois. Mais le visage reste coi Et l'oeil vert, Comme les bois, Ne trahit nul émoi.</p> <p>Puis d'un coup sec Comme du bois, Le danseur, la danseuse Retombent droits D'un parfait accord, Les bras le long Du corps. Et dans une attitude aussi sereine Que si l'on portait La santé De la Reine. Mais de nouveau Les Talons Vont D'un train d'enfer Sur le plancher clair.</p>
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T T T T

Gobfrey Shrdlu's Column¹⁷

Since there is no response I am cooling my heels down in the dumps. Awaiting anxiously and eagerly for your ingenuous response. (*Application letter*)

Most of the aid [*for Afghanistan*] should be distributed by non-governmental organisations on the ground for [*construction of*] village schools and clinics. *The Economist* 26.1.2002

Mr. --- was elected and has accepted the office of People's Churchwarden. We could not get a better man! *Church magazine*

For a moment he stood there looking into her eyes. Between them there was a bowl of hyacinths. *Story in women's magazine*

Evangelist Billy Graham concludes the third week of his crusade tonight with a nationally televised talk. Last night's discussion of the difference between pride and humility drew 15,500 people to the arena. *Virginia paper*

Wanted: maid for mousework - four in family. *Canadian paper*

For the Sheik the word compromise has no meaning. He answered his nephew in violet language. *Scots paper*

Because there is so little drunkenness at Epping, the Council is backing an application to serve drinks until 10.30 p.m. *Daily Mail*

Please Help our Nurses Home. *Hospital poster*

Played at Timberscombe on Saturday on a real glue-pot type of wicket, making scoring difficult. The home side winning the toss decided to bat first. *Somerset paper*

¹⁷ With acknowledgements to Denys Parsons for some of his best.

The Prime Minister spoke from the briefest of notes which he had pencilled on his knees during debate. *The Observer*

The return visit to Johannesburg of Miss E...., the famous vaudeville artist, recalls a pleasing incident during her previous visit when she appeared at the Empire eight years ago. *Johannesburg paper*

Pope Cites Dangers Facing the World – Names 8 Cardinals. *New York paper*

T T T T

Oddities

Who translated Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* into Russian?

How many overtures did Beethoven write for his opera *Fidelio*?

What would happen if an irresistible force met an immovable object?

Beatrix Potter (1866-1943)

The man in the wilderness said to me,
'How many strawberries grow in the sea?'
I answered him as I thought good –
'As many red herrings as grow in the wood.'

<p>I think I am in love with A.E. Housman Which puts me in a worse-than-usual fix.</p>	<p>No woman ever stood a chance with Housman And he's been dead since 1936. <i>Wendy Cope *1946</i></p>
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T T T T

In the twentieth century the best women poets express a new self-confidence, using the natural cadences of speech, free of all rhetoric and clear in meaning – sensibility is frequently replaced by sensuality, sometimes with tongue in cheek:

Charlotte Mew (1869-1928) : A Quoi Bon Dire

Seventeen years ago you said
Something that sounded like Good-bye;
And everybody thinks that you are dead,
But I.

So I, as I grow stiff and cold
To this and that say Good-bye too;
And everybody sees that I am old
But you.

And one fine morning in a sunny lane
Some boy and girl will meet and kiss and swear

That nobody can love their way again
While over there
You will have smiled, I shall have tossed your hair.

Jeanne Perdriel-Vaissière (1870-1951) : from L'Été

Écoute, c'est demain l'été; sens avec moi
Le goût de ce seul mot "été" ... les roses pourpres,
La résine âpre et balsamique sur nos doigts,
L'héliotrope – odeur de vanille et de musc –
Et, tissant avec le velours de son feuillage
La base des parfums dont l'intensité croît,
L'âcre géranium dont la tiédeur propage
Une odeur de chair blonde et de miel à la fois.
Ce soir, dans la vallée ouverte sur la mer,
Près des sources dont se gorgèrent les ciguës,
La violente odeur des foins imprègne l'air
Et l'aspérule y joint des senteurs ambiguës.

Amy Lowell (1874-1925) : From The Sisters

Taking us by and large, we're a queer lot
We women who write poetry. And when you think
How few of us there've been, it's queerer still.
I wonder what it is that makes us do it.
Singles us out to scribble down, man-wise
The fragments of ourselves. Why are we
Already mother-creatures, double-bearing,
With matrices in body and brain?
I rather think that there is just the reason
We are so sparse a kind of human being:
The strength of forty thousand Atlases
Is needed for our everyday concerns.

There's Sappho, now I wonder what was Sappho.
I know a single slender thing about her:
That, loving, she was like a burning birch-tree
All tall and glittering fire, and that she wrote
Like the same fire caught up to Heaven and held there,
A frozen blaze before it broke and fell.
Ah me! I wish I could have talked to Sappho,
Surprised her reticences by flinging mine
Into the wind. This tossing off of garments
Which cloud the soul is none too easy doing
With us to-day.
Sappho could fly her impulses like bright
Balloons tip-tilting to a morning air
And write about it. Mrs. Browning's heart
Was squeezed in stiff conventions. So she lay
Stretched out upon a sofa, reading Greek
And speculating, as I must suppose,
In just this way on Sappho . . .

But Emily hoarded--hoarded--only giving
 Herself to cold, white paper. Starved and tortured,
 She cheated her despair with games of patience
 And fooled herself by winning. Frail little elf,
 The lonely brain-child of a gaunt maturity,
 She hung her womanhood upon a bough
 And played ball with the stars--too long--too long—
 The garment of herself hung on a tree
 Until at last she lost even the desire
 To take it down.

Alice Duer Miller (1874-1942) : *Through American Eyes*

The English love their country with a love
 Steady, and simple, wordless, dignified;
 I think it sets their patriotism above
 All others: We Americans have pride –
 We glory in our country's short romance.
 We boast of it and love it. Frenchmen, when
 The ultimate menace comes, will die for France
 Logically as they lived. But Englishmen
 Will serve day after day, obey the law,
 And do dull tasks that keep a nation strong.
 Once I remember in London how I saw
 Pale shabby people standing in a long
 Line in the twilight and the misty rain
 To pay their tax. I then saw England plain.

Comtesse Anna de Noailles (1876-1933)

L'horizon était beau comme une mélodie,
 La montagne d'argent brillait molle, engourdie,
 Et glissait dans le lac son torrent de clarté.
 C'est là que j'ai connu les bonheurs de l'été;
 Quel échange d'amour, de promesses, de joie
 Entre les coteaux verts et les cieus de Savoie ...
 Et puis c'étaient les soirs en août mélancoliques,
 Parfum des châtaigniers, des noyers, des colchiques!
 La lune doucement dans le ciel arrivait;
 On voyait luire au loin les jardins de Vevey,
 Les jardins de Clarens ombragés par les vignes;
 Les flots contre les quais faisaient trembler des cygnes.
 Un romanesque ardent émanait de cette eau
 Comme au temps de Byron, comme au temps de Rousseau.
 Près de moi, s'envolaient des roitelets, des grives;
 De paisibles pêcheurs sur les moëlleuses rives,
 Dans les vapeurs du soir renouaient leurs filets.
 Les hameaux embaumaient la fumée et le lait.
 Brusquement les grillons emplissaient la prairie,
 C'était une sublime, une immense rêverie ...

Renée Vivien (1877-1909) : *Chair des choses*

Je possède, en mes doigts subtils, le sens du monde,
 Car le toucher pénètre ainsi que fait la voix,
 L'harmonie et le songe et la douleur profonde
 Frémissent longuement sur le bout de mes doigts.

Je comprends mieux, en les frôlant, les choses belles,
 Je partage leur vie intense en les touchant,
 C'est alors que je sais ce qu'elles ont en elles
 De noble, de très doux et de pareil au chant.

Car mes doigts ont connu la chair des poteries,
 La chair lisse du marbre aux féminins contours
 Que la main qui les sait modeler a meurtrie,
 Et celle de la perle et celle du velours.

Ils ont connu la vie intime des fourrures,
 Toison chaude et superbe où je plonge les mains!
 Ils ont connu l'ardent secret des chevelures
 Où se sont effeuillés des milliers de jasmins.

Et, pareils à ceux-là qui viennent des voyages,
 Mes doigts ont parcouru d'infinis horizons,
 Ils ont éclairé, mieux que mes yeux, des visages
 Et m'ont prophétisé d'obscur trahisons.

Ils ont connu la peau subtile de la femme,
 Et ses frissons cruels et ses parfums sournois...
 Chair des choses! j'ai cru parfois étreindre une âme
 Avec le frôlement prolongé de mes doigts...

Cécile Sauvage (1883-1927)

Je t'apporte ce soir ma natte plus lustrée
 Que l'herbe qui miroite aux collines de juin;
 Mon âme d'aujourd'hui fidèle à toi rentrée
 Odore de tilleul, de verveine et de foin;
 Je t'apporte cette âme à robe campagnarde.
 Tout le jour j'ai couru dans la fleur des moissons
 Comme une chevreuse innocente qui garde
 Ses troupeaux clochetant des refrains aux buissons.
 Je fis tout bas ta part de pain et de fromage;
 J'ai bu dans mes doigts joints l'eau rose du ruisseau
 Et dans le frais miroir j'ai cru voir ton image.

Je t'apporte un glaïeul couché sur des roseaux.
 Comme un cabri de lait je suis alerte et gaie;
 Mes sonores sabots de hêtre sont ailés
 Et mon visage a la rondeur pourpre des baies

Que donne l'aubépine quand les mois sont voilés.

Lorsque je m'en revins, dans les ombres pressées
Le soc bleu du croissant ouvrait un sillon d'or;
Les étoiles dansaient cornues et lactées;
Des flûtes de bergers essayaient un accord.
Je t'offre la fraîcheur dont ma bouche était pleine,
Le duvet mauve encor suspendu dans les cieux,
L'émoi qui fit monter ma gorge sous la laine
Et la douceur lunaire empreinte dans mes yeux.

Mathilde Pomès 1886-? : Fluidité

<p>Quand je ne serai plus là qui vous aimera, qui vous bercera, qui vous dira la couleur des heures, le vol de l'oiseau, sur le miroir de l'étang, le nuage qui s'y pose, si mollement indécis que ces floconneux contours dissous dessinent, en image ralentie, l'apparence même du pur devenir? Qui vous dira le soleil dansant en farandoles de ronds sur l'herbe au pied du tilleul, et dont le vent dans les feuilles, en mille figures faites, défaites, nouées, rompues, en cadence agile,</p>	<p>fou, mène le branle? Qui vous dira les senteurs? Le parfum de lune du jasmin d'Espagne, l'odeur d'aisselle poivrée de l'oeillet grenat, la mielleuse haleine de la giroflée, la fine amertume du laurier fleuri à point pour le grand jour des Rameaux, avec son tourteau tout clouté d'anis? Qui vous dira, ma douceur, ce qui ne peut être qu'évaporement? Qui le bâtira, le pont de fluidité, le seul pont solide, entre vous et moi? Ce qui vit encore un peu, ce qui tout à fait ne vit.</p>
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Sarah Teasdale (1884-1933) : Dew

As dew leaves the cobweb lightly
Threaded with stars,
Scattering jewels on the fence
And the pasture bars;
As dawn leaves the dry grass bright
And the tangled weeds
Bearing a rainbow gem
On each of their seeds;
So has your love, my lover,
Fresh as the dawn,
Made me a shining road

To travel on,
Set every common sight
Of tree or stone
Delicately alight
For me alone.

I would live in your love as the sea-grasses live in the sea,
Borne up by each wave as it passes, drawn down by each wave that recedes;
I would empty my soul of the dreams that have gathered in me,
I would beat with your heart as it beats, I would follow your soul as it leads.

Louisa Paulin (1886-1944) Chant pour le Vent du Sud

Ô brise du Sud, viens boire la neige,
nous sommes repus de gel et de vent,
un doux pissenlit a tiré de terre
un petit soleil tout en or vibrant.

Ô brise du Sud, viens boire la neige,
nous sommes repus de froid et de pluie,
une pâquerette a tiré de terre
un petit soleil frangé de sang vif.

Ô brise du Sud, qu'Amour te protège,
nous avons tous faim et soif d'être heureux;
chaque oeil de bourgeon épie, tout peureux,
ton souffle d'azur qui boira la neige.

Hilda Doolittle (1886-1961) : Sea Poppies¹⁸

<p>Amber husk fluted with gold, fruit on the sand marked with a rich grain, treasure spilled near the shrub-pines to bleach on the boulders: your stalk has caught root</p>	<p>among wet pebbles and drift flung by the sea and grated shells and split conch-shells. Beautiful, wide-spread, fire upon leaf, what meadow yields so fragrant a leaf as your bright leaf?</p>
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¹⁸ Hilda Doolittle was a leading poet of the group known as the *Imagists*. Their poetry aimed to “use the language of common speech” (abandoning Victorian rhetoric), “to create new rhythms” and to present an accurately delineated image. The movement was undoubtedly influenced – as is this poem – by the new awareness of Japanese art at the turn of the century.

Anna Akhmatova 1889-1966

<p>Родилась я не поздно, ни рано Это время блаженно одно, Только сердцу прожить без обмана Было господом не дано.</p>	<p>I was born neither late, nor early, This time is uniquely blessed, Except that God did not permit my heart To survive without deceit.</p>
<p>Оттого и темно в светлице, Оттого и друзья мои, Как вечерние грустные птицы, О небывшей поют любви.</p>	<p>That is why it is dark in a light room, That is why my friends Like sad birds of evening Are singing about a love that didn't happen.</p>

Edith Södergran 1892-1923

<p><i>Upptäckt</i> Din kärlek förmörkar min stjärna - månen går upp i mitt liv. Min hand är ej hemma i din. Din hand är lusta - min hand är längtan.</p>	<p><i>Discovery</i> Your love has darkened my forehead - the moon is rising in my life. My hand is not at home in yours. Your hand is lust - my hand is longing.</p>
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Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941)

<p>Ты, меня любивший фальшью Истины – и правдой лжи, Ты, меня любивший – дальше Некуда! – За рубежи! Ты – меня любивший дальше Времени – десницы взмах! – Ты меня не любишь больше: Истина в пяти словах.</p>	<p>You, who loved me with the insincerity Of truth – and with the truth of falsehood, You, who loved me – further Than nowhere – to the outer limits! You, who loved me longer Than time – just a wave of your hand! You do not love me any more: The truth is in seven words.</p>
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Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
 Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
 I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
 I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
 The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
 And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
 But last year's bitter loving must remain
 Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide.
 There are a hundred places where I fear
 To go, -- so with his memory they brim.

And entering with relief some quiet place
 Where never fell his boot or shone his face
 I say, "There is no memory of him here!"
 And so stand stricken, so remembering him.

Andrée Sodenkamp (*1906) : Portrait

Tu as l'odeur du blé de mes anciens mois d'août,
 l'impudence des mares
 où les grenouilles à grand bruit
 font l'amour à minuit.

Tu es belle pour les famines,
 assouvissante à regarder.
 Tes yeux légers
 Font la danse des feuilles.

Ton corps est ta raison
 et tu rêves par-dessus.
 Tu conquiers pour jouer.
 Et ton péché,
 c'est Toi.

Florbela Espanca (1894-1930) : Amar

<p>Eu quero amar, amar perdidamente! Amar só por amar: aqui... além... Mais Este e Aquele, o Outro e toda a gente... Amar! Amar! E não amar ninguém!</p>	<p>I want to love, to love with abandon! To love for the sake of loving: here...there... This one, another and everyone... To love! To love! And love no one!</p>
<p>Recordar? Esquecer? Indiferente!... Prender ou desprender? É mal? É bem? Quem disser que se pode amar alguém Durante a vida inteira é porque mente!</p>	<p>Remember? Forget? It's all the same! Take or leave? Evil? Good? He who loves someone and says that love Can last a lifetime is nothing but a liar!</p>
<p>Há uma primavera em cada vida: É preciso cantá-la assim florida, Pois se Deus nos deu voz, foi pra cantar!</p>	<p>There is a springtime in every life: As it blooms, just so we must sing it, For if God gave us a voice, it is for singing.</p>
<p>E se um dia hei-de ser pó, cinza e nada Que seja a minha noite uma alvorada, Que me saiba perder... pra me encontrar...</p>	<p>And if one day I must turn to dust, ashes, nothing, May my night be only a dawn song, May I know how to lose myself .. so as to know myself.</p>

Joyce Grenfell (1910-79) : Time

When I was a girl there was always time,
 There was always time to spare.
 There was always time to sit in the sun;
 And we were never done
 With lazing and flirting,
 And doing our embroidery,
 And keeping up our memory books,

And brushing our hair,
And writing little notes,
And going on picnics,
And dancing, dancing, dancing, dancing –
When I was a girl there was always time to waste.

Thank the Lord.

When I was a young woman there was always time,
There was always time to spare.
There was always time to sit in the sun,
And we were never done
With going to weddings,
Our own and our friends',
And going to parties,
Away at weekends,
And having our children
And bringing them up.
And talking, talking, talking, talking –
When I was a young woman there was always time to enjoy things.

Thank the Lord.

And when I was an elderly woman there was no more time,
There was no more time to spare.
There was never time to sit in the sun,
For we were never done
With answering the telephone,
And looking at TV,
And doing baby-sitting,
And talking to our friends,
And shopping, shopping, shopping, shopping,
And washing-up, washing-up, washing-up,
Writing letters, writing letters,
Rushing, rushing, rushing,
And we were always hurried,
And we were never bored.
When I was an elderly woman
There was never time to think.

Thank the Lord.

But now I'm an old woman,
So I want the last word:
There is no such thing as time –
Only this very minute
And I'm in it.

Thank the Lord.

Maya Angelou (*1928) : *Phenomenal Woman*

<p>Pretty women wonder where my secret lies. I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size But when I start to tell them, they think I'm telling lies.</p> <p>I say, It's in the reach of my arms, The span of my hips, The stride of my step, The curl of my lips. I'm a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That's me.</p> <p>I walk into a room Just as cool as you please, And to a man, The fellows stand or Fall down on their knees. Then they swarm around me, A hive of honey bees.</p> <p>I say, It's the fire in my eyes, And the flash of my teeth, The swing of my waist, And the joy in my feet. I'm a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That's me.</p>	<p>Men themselves have wondered What they see in me. They try so much But they can't touch My inner mystery. When I try to show them, They say they still can't see.</p> <p>I say, It's in the arch of my back, The sun of my smile, The ride of my breasts, The grace of my style. I'm a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That's me.</p> <p>Now you understand Just why my head's not bowed. I don't shout or jump about Or have to talk real loud. When you see me passing, It ought to make you proud.</p> <p>I say, It's in the click of my heels, The bend of my hair, the palm of my hand, The need for my care. 'Cause I'm a woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That's me.</p>
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Lorna Wood (1913-?) : *To a Descendant*

I shall not be an importunate, nagging ghost,
Sighing for unsaid prayers: or a family spectre
Advertising that someone is due to join me ...
Nor one who has to be exorcised by the rector.

I shall not be the commercial type of ghost,
Pointing to boxes of gold under the floor
And I certainly don't intend to jangle chains
Or carry my head .. (such a gruesome type of chore!)

I shall not cause draughts, be noisy, spoil your "let", -
In fact, to be brief, I shan't materialise.
But I shall be pleased if anyone ever sees me
In your face or your walk or the glance of your laughing eyes.

Kath Walker (Oodgeroo of the Clan Noonuccal) (1920-93)

<p>No more boomerang No more spear; Now all civilised -- Colour bar and beer.</p> <p>No more corroboree, Gay dance and din. Now we got movies, And pay to go in.</p> <p>One time naked, Who never knew shame; Now we put clothes on To hide whatsname.</p> <p>No more gunya, Now bungalow, Paid by hire purchase In twenty year or so.</p> <p>Lay down the stone axe, Take up the steel, And work like a nigger For a white man meal</p> <p>No more firesticks That made the whites scoff. Now all electric, And no better off.</p> <p>Bunyip he finish, Now got instead</p>	<p>White fella Bunyip, Call him Red.</p> <p>No more sharing What the hunter brings. Now we work for money, Then pay it back for things.</p> <p>Now we track bosses To catch a few bob, Now we go walkabout On bus to the job.</p> <p>Abstract picture now -- What they coming at? Cripes, in our caves we Did better than that.</p> <p>Black hunted wallaby, White hunt dollar; White fella witchdoctor Wear dog-collar.</p> <p>No more message-stick; Lubras and lads. Got television now, Mostly ads.</p> <p>Lay down the woomera, Lay down the waddy. Now we got atom-bomb, End everybody.</p>
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Jenny Joseph (*1932) : Warning

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
 With a red hat which doesn't go and doesn't suit me.
 And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
 And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
 I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
 And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
 And run my stick along the public railings
 And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
 I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
 And pick the flowers in other people's gardens
 And learn to spit.
 You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
 And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
 Or only bread and pickle for a week
 And hoard pens and pencils and beermats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
 And pay our rent and not swear in the street
 And set a good example for the children.
 We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practice a little now?
 So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
 When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

T T T T

I recently found a book shop, just opposite the British Museum in London, that specialises in "Bizarre Books". The owners – Russell Ash and Brian Lake – have produced the ultimate guide on the subject: *Bizarre Books*, Pavilion Books, 1998. Here are a few examples:

Ten Good Tricks with Empty Bass Bottles, Bass, Ratcliff and Gretton, Burton-on-Trent 1929
Practical Taxidermy and Home Decoration, Joseph H. Batty, Orange Judd, New York, 1880
In Love and Unity – A Book about Brushmaking Thomas Girtin, Hutchinson, 1961
Teach Yourself Alcoholism, Meier Glatt, EUP, 1975
Let's Make Some Undies, Marion Hall, W. Foulham & Co, 1954
The Great Pantyhose Crafts Book, Ed and Stevie Baldwin, NY, Western Publishing Co, 1982
Frolic and Fun with Eggshells, Meredith Nugent, Girl's Realm, 1903
You Can Make a Stradivarius Violin, Joseph V. Reid, Popular Mechanics Press, Chicago, 1950
The Passionate Game: Lessons in Chess and Love, Gustav Schenk, G. Routledge and Son, 1937
Explosive Spiders and How to Make Them, John Scoffern, Boy's Own Paper, 1881
Hand Grenade Throwing as a College Sport, Lewis Omer, A.G. Spalding and Bros., NY, 1918
Fun on the Billiard Table, "Strancliffe", C. Arthur Pearson, 1899
Side and Screw - Notes on the Theory of the Game of Billiards, Charles Locock, Longmans 1901
Ice Cream for Small Plants, Etta H. Handy, Hotel Monthly Press, Chicago, 1937
Food for Survival after Disaster (with Plates), Raymond Hutchinson, Melbourne UP, 1959
Appealing Potatoes, Princess Weikersheim, Hutchinson, 1981
The Gentle Art of Cooking Wives, Dodge Publishing Co. NY, 1900
Life and Laughter midst the Cannibals, Clifford Collinson, Hurst and Blackett, 1926
Recollections of Squatting in Victoria, Edward Curr, Melbourne: George Robertson, 1883
Yofuku – or Japan in Trousers, Sherard Vines, Wishart and Co., 1931
Clinical Hat Pegs for Students and Graduates, R.J. Willan, Heinemann, 1951
Julius Caesar and his Public Image, Zvi Yavetz, Cornell UP, 1982
How to Avoid Huge Ships, John. W. Trimmer, Cornell Maritime Press, 1993
Careers in Dope, Dan Waldorf, Prentice-Hall, 1973
How to Write While You Sleep, Elizabeth Irvin Ross, Writer's Digest Books, 1985

T T T T

Until the end of the nineteenth century, poetry in German by women is rare. My main source, *Der neue Conrady - Das grosse deutsche Gedichtbuch*, (Artemis & Winckler 2000), contains – until the twentieth century – poetry by some 500 authors, of which only ten women. It contains some 370 twentieth century authors, of which

still only some 15% are women. Here are some of the best.

Ricarda Huch 1864 - 1947

Wo hast du all die Schönheit hergenommen,
Du Liebesangesicht, du Wohlgestalt!
Um dich ist alle Welt zu kurz gekommen.
Weil du die Jugend hast, wird alles alt,
Weil du das Leben hast, muss alles sterben,
Weil du die Kraft hast, ist die Welt kein Hort,
Weil du vollkommen bist, ist sie ein Scherben,
Weil du der Himmel bist, gib't's keinen dort!.

Else Lasker-Schüler 1869-1945

Unsere Seelen hingen an den Morgenträumen
Wie die Herzkirschen,
Wie lachendes Blut an den Bäumen.

Kinder waren unsere Seelen,
Als sie mit dem Leben spielten,
Wie die Märchen sich erzählen.

Und von weissen Azaleen
Sangen die Spätsommerhimmel
Über uns im Südwindwehen.

Und ein Kuss und ein Glauben
Waren unsere Seelen eins,
Wie drei Tauben.

Christine Lavant 1915-1973

In doppelter Ährenhöhe
schweben die Engel der Unkrautsamen
langsam zum Friedhof hinüber.
Verlöscht sind die heurigen Kerzen
der goldenen Löwenzähne,
feurig werden sie aufgehen
über den Leibern der Toten
und mir im Herzen schon bald.

Inge Müller 1925-66

Ich will nicht deine Träume stören.
Die stummen Nächte bleiben dein.
Ich will nur deine Atemzüge hören
und bei dir sein.
Und wachen, weil des Mondes Schimmer
dein Antlitz ganz veränderte,
weil kaltes Licht das fremdgewordene Zimmer
umränderte.

From where have you taken all the beauty,
You lovely countenance, you handsome form!
Around you the whole world lacks something.
Since you have youth, all becomes old,
Since you have life, all must die,
Since you have strength, the world is no sanctuary,
Since you are perfect, it is a shard,
Since you are heaven, there is none.

Our souls hung on the dreams of the morning
Like heart-cherries,
Like joyous blood on the trees.

Our souls were children,
As they played with life,
As they told each other fairy tales.

And the late summer skies sang
Above us of white azaleas
In the movement of the South wind.

And a kiss and a faith
Were the unity of our souls,
Like three doves.

At twice the height of the ears of wheat
the angels in the seed drift slowly
from the weed over to the cemetery.
This year's candles of golden
dandelion are doused,
they will rise in flames
over the bodies of the dead
and in my heart shortly.

I do not want to disturb your dreams.
The silent nights are yours.
I only want to hear your breathing
and to be by you.
And to keep watch, since the moon's glow
transformed your countenance,
and cold light outlined
the room grown strange.

Und warten, bis ein Stern zersplittert
und hinter deine Stirne fällt.
Erwache nicht: es ist mein Herz, das zittert,
weil es dich hält.

Eva Strittmatter (*1930) : Der Amsel

Wie sehr bewundere ich
Die nach Regeln gebauten Gedichte.
Das Metrum bezaubert mich,
Und die richtig gesetzten Gewichte

Machen mich immer versucht,
Die Zeilen nachzuzählen,
Und ich denke: Ei verflucht,
Musste der Dichter sich quälen!

Wie kann er das leisten: zu fühlen
Und die Gefühle so einzuteilen,
Dass sie das Sonett nicht zerwühlen
Und heilen in vierzehn Zeilen?

Zum Teufel mit den klassischen Formen,
Wenn der Junigrünwind weht
Und der Amsel zersingt mir die schönsten
Normen,
Weil er nichts vom Singen versteht.

Er pfeift und eifert vor Sonnentollheit,
Weil er grad pflichtlos ist.
Noch muss er nicht die Zweitbrut füttern,
Der bald sein Lied auffrisst.

Wie heiter und herzlich ist dieser Morgen!
Und ich bin gesättigt von Licht.
Was soll ich mich da um Sonette sorgen?
Ich mach einfach ein Gedicht.

Ulla Hahn (*1945) : Ars poetica

Danke ich brauche keine neuen
Formen ich stehe auf
festen Versfüßen und alten
Normen Reimen zu Hand
zu Papier und zu euren
Ohren bring ich was klingen soll
klingt mir das Lied aus den
Poren rinne die Zeilen voll
und über und drüber und drunter
und drauf und dran und wohlan.

And wait, until a star shatters
and falls behind your forehead.
Don't wake up: it's my heart that's trembling
because it holds you.

The blackbird

How much I admire
Poems built on rules.
The meter fascinates me,
And stress correctly placed

always tempts me
to count the lines,
and I think: Oh God,
how the poet must have suffered!

How can he manage it: to feel and
divide up the feelings
so that they don't mess up the sonnet
and mend it in fourteen lines.

To hell with classical forms,
when the green wind of June is blowing
and the blackbird ignores the finest rules
because he doesn't understand a thing about
singing.

He whistles and bustles with sunny madness,
just because he has no duties.
He doesn't have to feed the second brood
That will soon devour his song.

How serene and lovely is this morning!
And I am replete with light.
Why should I bother about sonnets?
I'll just make a poem.

Ars poetica

Thanks I don't need any new
forms I am standing on
firm feet of verse and old
standards in my hand
on to paper and to your
ears I bring something that should ring
if the song rings out of my
pores the lines run full
and over and above and under
and on top and to the point and good.

T T T T

Epigrams

Madeleine de Scudéry 1607-1701

Contre Job autrefois le démon révolté
Lui ravit ses enfants, ses biens et sa santé;
Mais pour mieux l'éprouver et déchirer son âme,
Savez-vous ce qu'il fit? ... Il lui laissa sa femme.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu 1689-1762

A summary of Lord Lyttleton's advice to a Lady.

Be plain in dress, and sober in your diet,
In short, my deary, kiss me! and be quiet.

Epithalamium

Since you, Mr. H**d, will marry black Kate,
Accept of good wishes for that blessed state:
May you fight all the day like a dog and a cat,
And yet every year produce a new brat.
Fal la!

May she never be honest--you never be sound;
May her tongue like a clapper be heard a mile round;
Till abandoned by joy, and deserted by grace,
You hang yourselves both in the very same place.
Fal la!

Amelia Opie 1769-1853

Yes, Mary Ann, I freely grant,
The charms of Henry's eyes I see;
But while I gaze, I something want,
I want those eyes -- to gaze on me.

And I allow, in Henry's heart
Not Envy's self a fault can see:
Yet still I must one wish impart,
I wish that heart -- to sigh for me.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

If I could have
Two things in one:
The peace of the grave,
And the light of the sun.

Or had I some poison gas
I could make the moments pass.
Bumping off a number of
People whom I do not love.

Mascha Kaléko

Polizeilogik – was verstehen Sie darunter?

- Zum Beispiel Paragraphen, so wie diesen:

Wer kein Ausweis hat, wird ausgewiesen.

T T T T

Measured by the number of books of poetry sold, the most popular poet in the German language after Goethe is Mascha Kaléko (1907-75). Born in Poland of a Russian father and an Austrian mother, Mascha Kaléko made her literary mark in Berlin in the late 1920s and 1930s. Her poetry is witty, wistful and sometimes mordant; it speaks to the proverbial "man (and woman) in the street" – her language is easy to understand and is devoid of pedantry and pretentiousness.

Blatt im Wind

Lass mich das Pochen deines Herzens spüren,
Dass ich nicht höre, wie das meine schlägt.
Tu vor mir auf all die geheimen Türen,
Da sich ein Riegel vor die meinen legt.

Ich kann es, Liebster, nicht im Wort bekennen,
Und meine Tränen bleiben ungeweint,
Die Macht, die uns von Anbeginn vereint,
Wird uns am letzten aller Tage trennen.

All meinen Schmerz ertränke ich in Küssen.
All mein Geheimnis trag ich wie ein Kind.
Ich bin ein Blatt, zu früh vom Baum gerissen.
Ob alle Liebenden so einsam sind?

Der Eremit

Sie warfen nach ihm mit Steinen.
Er lächelte mitten im Schmerz.
Er wollte nur sein, nicht scheinen.
Es sah ihm keiner ins Herz.

Es hörte ihn keiner weinen,
Er zog in die Wüste hinaus.
Sie warfen nach ihm mit Steinen.
Er baute aus ihnen sein Haus.

Alkoholverbot

So allein
ist keiner
wie einer,
der ganz allein ist.
Wenn einer
beim Wein ist,
ist er schon
zu zweien.

Leaf in the wind

Let me feel the beat of your heart,
So that I no longer hear how mine is beating.
Open for me every secret door
Since mine are bolted shut.

I cannot, dearest, say what I feel in words -
My tears too remain unwept.
The power uniting us from the beginning
Will, at the last, tear us apart.

I drown all pain in kisses,
All secrets carry like a child.
I am a leaf, ripped off too early from the tree.
Is solitude the fate of all who love?

The Hermit

They chased him away with their stones.
He laughed as he felt the pain.
True to himself, he avoided all show.
None saw what he felt in his heart.

None saw his tears as he wept,
He made his way out to the desert.
They chased him away with their stones.
He used them to build his own house.

Prohibition

No one
is so alone
as someone
on their own.
If someone
drinks wine,
he's got
company.

T T T T

Tips – enjoyed in 2002

Books

One of Us – A Biography of Margaret Thatcher, Hugo Young, Macmillan , 1989

Che Guevara – A Revolutionary Life, Jon Lee Anderson, Bantam Books, 1997

Enlightenment – Britain and the Creation of the Modern World, Roy Porter, Penguin 2000

Wine

Galisce 1999, Assemblage de Cépages Nobles – Château de Crans, Pierre Cretegny

Zemfira - Moldovan full bodied scented wine produced from Lidia and Isabella grapes.

Pinot Noir 1999 – Cricova Acorex, Moldova

CDs

Mikhail Pletnev : Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach – Deutsche Grammophon 459614-2

Simply Baroque – Yo-yo Ma; Ton Koopman – Sony SK 60680

Musikalische Eskapaden (German folksongs in the style of various composers) Nordwestdeutsche

Philharmonie, Peter Falk – Philips 446 408-2

T T T T

Answers to 2001 oddities:

Hermann Hesse's *Demian* was published in 1919 under the pseudonym Emil Sinclair.

Durendal (sword) and Olifant (horn) belonged to Roland (*Chanson de Roland*)

US Presidents who died on the 4th of July:

John Adams, 2nd President of the United States (March 4, 1797 to March 3, 1801)

Died: July 4, 1826, in Braintree (now Quincy), Massachusetts

Thomas Jefferson, 3rd President of the United States (March 4, 1801 to March 3, 1809)

Died: July 4, 1826, at Monticello (near Charlottesville, Virginia)

James Monroe, 5th President of the United States (March 4, 1817 to March 3, 1825)

Died: July 4, 1831, in New York.

Postscriptum

Christmas Pudding 2001 featured Bertie Felstead and his participation in the 1914 “football truce.” I found it odd that he remembered the German soldiers singing the German translation of the Welsh song *All through the night* rather than the much more popular *Stille Nacht*. My suspicion that his recollection was faulty is confirmed by the book *Silent Night – the Remarkable 1914 Christmas Truce* by Stanley Weintraub (Simon & Schuster, London 2001).¹⁹

¹⁹ With thanks to John Tomaro.