CHRISTMAS PUDDING

1999

Robert Middleton

I love anthologies. They can be 'dipped into' at leisure and at will. They contain much that is unfamiliar together with much that is well-known and dear. If the compiler has learning, urbanity and eclectic interests, they are also a perennial source of amusement and intellectual stimulation. Among my favourites is *Christmas Crackers,* collected by the distinguished scholar John Julius Norwich and circulated, in the first instance, to a group of his friends. (I particularly enjoyed his *Byzantium*, a history of a little known and underestimated period of European history.) The last collection of *Christmas Crackers* I have (published by Penguin) is for 1979. Twenty years on, I much miss a continuing supply of such wisdom, wit and linguistic surprise.

Oscar Wilde said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery - hence, with no claim to originality or any pretence at the wide-ranging erudition of John Julius Norwich, here is my first volume of *Christmas Pudding.* The title seemed 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.

If the reader has only a small proportion of the pleasure I have had as compiler, the project will have been worthwhile. Let me know and share with me <u>your</u> favourite quotation, anecdote, poem, witticism, quotation or words of wisdom..... In my project, the computer has replaced Norwich's blue-leather-covered book with its 150 blank pages and future distribution of *Christmas Pudding* will be by e-mail (if you let me know your e-mail address) rather than by a private printing as an enclosure with a Christmas card.

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Ah, yet, e'er I descend to the grave,
May I a small house and a large garden have!
And a few friends, and many books, both true,
Both wise, and both delightful too!
And since love ne'er will from me flee,
A mistress, moderately fair,
And good as guardian angels are,
Only beloved, and loving me!

Abraham Cowley – 1618-1667

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I think it appropriate to begin this first *Christmas Pudding* with the witches' song from Macbeth. Most of us know the first two lines, but the full list of ingredients merits careful attention.

Double, double, toil and trouble:
Fire burn; and cauldron bubble.

Fillet of a fenny snake
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

Double, double, toil and trouble:
Fire, burn, and cauldron, bubble.

Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf;
Witches' mummy: maw, and gulf
Of the ravined salt-sea shark;
Root of hemlock digged i' th' dark;
Liver of blaspheming Jew;
Gall of goat and slips of yew
Slivered in the moon's eclipse;
Nose of Turk and Tartar's lips;
Finger of birth-strangled babe,
Ditch-delivered by a drab:
Make the gruel thick and slab:
Add thereto a tiger's chaudron,
For th' ingredients of our cauldron.
Double, double, toil and trouble:
Fire, burn, and cauldron, bubble.

Cool it with a baboon's blood:
Then the charm is firm and good.

Although the contents are also varied, I hope this Christmas Pudding will be a little more appetising.

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In the early 1960s, I was a graduate student in the English faculty at Stanford University. There I had the extreme good fortune to attend the poetry criticism class of Yvor Winters. He was an iconoclast, who poured scorn on much of what passes for poetry in contemporary writing and who dragged from their pedestals many of the accepted figures of English Literature. (I have never liked Wordsworth, whom I find most of the time turgid, pompous and/or maudlin, but after attending Winters' class, I no longer felt bad about it.)

His literary criticism was rigorous in the extreme - devastating even - and he never shrank from unpopular or politically incorrect opinions. He had the temerity to point out how many tenures in the English faculties of major universities were due to reputations built on the interpretation of obscure poetry - a lack of professional etiquette not designed to make friends and influence people in academic circles. One of his memorable statements, recorded in my notes, was 'On this issue, there are two schools of thought, of one of which I am, as far as I know, the only member'.

He pointed out the drift from the end of the seventeenth century towards cliché in poetic subject matter and diction, with descriptions of or comparisons with nature becoming the 'standard' for the expression of poetic sentiment. He also deplored - on moral as well as aesthetic grounds - the strong anti-rational tendencies of most of the poetry written in the English language since the Romantic movement of the last century: he drew attention to the shift, beginning at this time, in the relative importance of connotation and denotation in the use of language in poetry, with Romantic and modern writing giving greater emphasis to the former at the expense of the latter.

For Winters, the 17th century was the golden age of English poetry, with a partial renaissance in a few late 19th and 20th century American (but not English) poets. My choice of poems for *Christmas Pudding* is heavily influenced by his literary criticism and by his own anthology of what he considered the best poems in the language (*Quest for Reality,* Swallow Press, Chicago). He chose the following lines by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503?-1542) as an epigraph for this anthology:

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

Few people read poetry today, which is a pity, since good poetry is civilised and intelligent and develops an understanding of the nature and importance of language, man's highest natural attribute. The gradual and deliberate relaxation of content and meaning, and subsequent abandonment of form, which characterise poetry for the last two hundred years is largely responsible for the breakdown in communication between writer and reader: today, 'anything goes' - much poetry is obscure and, if it were not divided into lines, would be indistinguishable from prose[1]. In particular, I hope to show that the seventeenth century poets are truly modern in the absence of cliché, the plain language and the lack of inhibition in their poems.

> Is it no verse, except enchanted groves
> And sudden arbours shadow course-spun lines?
> Must purling streams refresh a lover's loves?
> Must all be veil'd, while he that reads, divines,
> Catching the sense at two removes?
> *(George Herbert, 1593-1633: from Jordan I)*

In addition to the desire to entertain and amuse, *Christmas Pudding* has, therefore, a serious intent: the poems I have chosen use normal, plain language, their content is rational, their meaning is clear and they express emotions which we can share - they are intended to show that poetry can be (I would say, should be) a means of communication between normal rational people.

Here is one of my favourite (and seasonally appropriate) poems, by Thomas Campian, (1567?-1619) - I like especially the last two lines.

Winter nights

> Now winter nights enlarge
> The number of their hours,
> And clouds their storms discharge
> Upon the airy towers.
> Let now the chimneys blaze
> And cups o'erflow with wine;
> Let well-tuned words amaze

[1] At the risk of being politically incorrect, I have trouble accepting the following as poetry - or even verse. *(Sonia Sanchez* - included in *The Penguin Book of American Verse)*

> wite/motha/fucka
> wite/motha/fucka
> wite/motha/fucka
> whitey (etc)

Cole Porter's song was indeed prophetic: 'Good authors too, who once knew better words,
Now only use four-letter words.'

With harmony divine.
Now yellow waxen lights
Shall wait on honey love,
While youthful revels, masques and courtly sights
Sleep's leaden spells remove.

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

Henry King (1592-1699) was one of the finest craftsmen of the English language. His poetry says exactly what is needed to express his thoughts and emotions - no more, no less. Three hundred years after his death, his exquisite love poems speak to us with an emotion as fresh and modern as if written today.

An Exequy to His Matchless Never to be Forgotten Friend
(Extract)

Meantime thou hast her, earth: Much good
May my harm do thee. Since it stood
With heaven's will I might not call
Her longer mine, I give thee all
My short-lived right and interest
In her, whom living I loved best:
With a most free and bounteous grief
I give thee what I could not keep.
Be kind to her; and prithee look
Thou write into thy Domesday Book
Each parcel of this rarity
Which in thy casket shrined doth lie:
See that thou make thy reck'ning straight,
And yield her back again by weight;
For thou must audit on thy trust
Each grain and atom of this dust,
As thou wilt answer him that lent,
Not gave thee, my dear monument.
So close the ground, and about her shade
Black curtains draw: my bride is laid.

Sleep on, my love, in thy cold bed,
Never to be disquieted.
My last good night! Thou wilt not wake
Till I thy fate shall overtake
Till age, or grief, or sickness must
Marry my body to that dust
It so much loves, and fill the room
My heart keeps empty in thy tomb.

The Forfeiture

My dearest, to let you or the world know
What debt of service I do truly owe
To your unpatterned self were to require
A language only formed in the desire
Of him that writes. It is the common fate
Of greatest duties to evaporate
In silent meaning, as we often see
Fires by their too much fuel smothered be:
Small obligations may find vent and speak,
When greater the unable debtor break.
And such are mine to you, whose favour's store
Hath made me poorer than I was before;
For I want words and language to declare
How strict my bond or large your bounties are.

Since nothing in my desperate fortune found
Can payment make, nor yet the sum compound,
You must lose all, or else of force accept
The body of a bankrupt for your debt.
Then, love, your bond to execution sue,
And take myself, as forfeited to you.

Notice the masterly way in which the first eight lines of this last poem glide easily into each other - when read, it gives the illusion of prose, yet is actually finely crafted verse (one sometimes has the reverse illusion in some modern poems, which are, at best, finely crafted prose).

Ben Jonson (1572?-1637) was also a fine craftsman.

On My First Son

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;
My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy.
Seven years thou wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.
Oh, could I lose all father now! For why

Will man lament the state he should envy?
To have so soon scaped world's and flesh's rage,
And, if no other misery, yet age!
Rest in soft peace, and, asked, say here doth lie
Ben Jonson, his best piece of poetry;
For whose sake, henceforth, all his vows be such,
As what he loves may never like too much.

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One of the great advantages of e-mail is that jokes circulate faster. I have had colleagues who could not wait to get to the office in the morning to find out what new jokes were waiting for them. While not claiming to belong to this brigade, I have nevertheless been pleased to receive some pearls of wisdom by e-mail in 1999, among which:

Indecision is the key to flexibility.

There is absolutely no substitute for a genuine lack of preparation.

Things are more like they are today than they have ever been before.

Nostalgia isn't what it used to be.

Sometimes too much drink is not enough.

All things being equal, fat people use more soap.

Never argue with an idiot. They drag you down to their level then beat you with experience.

A Senility Prayer

God, grant me the senility
To forget the people
I never liked anyway,
The good fortune
To run into the ones I do,
And the eyesight
To tell the difference.

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Some of the greatest love poetry in the English language was written by John Donne (1572-1631). A few critics object to his extremes of language and imagery or to the excessive playfulness of his love poems: but, after all, love is an extreme passion of which playfulness is a part - in any case, Donne more than made up for it later in life, with his equally superb (and very serious) religious poems. I can respond to his love poetry: this is my favourite.

The Sun Rising

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
        Why dost thou thus
Through windows and through curtains call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
    Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
    Late schoolboys and sour prentices;
Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride;
Call country ants to harvest offices:
Love, all alike, no seasons knows, nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams so reverend and strong
        Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long:
    If her eyes have not blinded thine,
    Look, and tomorrow late tell me
Whether both th'Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou sawst yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, all here in one bed lay.

She's all states, and all princes, I:
        Nothing else is.
Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honour's mimic; all wealth alchemy.
    Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,
    In that the world's contracted thus;
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere:
This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.

In rather less playful manner, by Sir Robert Ayton (1570-1638):

To an Inconstant One

I loved thee once; I'll love no more -
  Thine be the grief as is the blame;
Thou art not what thou wast before,
  What reason I should be the same;

He that can love unloved again
Hath better store of love than brain.
God send me love my debts to pay,
While unthrifts fool their love away.

Nothing could have my love o'erthrown
If thou hadst still continued mine;
Yea if thou hadst remained thy own,
I might perchance have still been thine.
But thou thy freedom didst recall
That it thou might elsewhere enthral:
And then how could I but disdain
A captive's captive to remain?

When new desires had conquered thee
And changed the object of thy will,
It had been lethargy in me,
Not constancy, to love thee still.
Yea, it had been a sin to go
And prostitute affection so:
Since we are taught no prayers to say
To such as must to others pray.

Yet do thou glory in thy choice -
Thy choice of his good fortune boast;
I'll neither grieve nor yet rejoice
To see him gain what I have lost:
The height of my disdain shall be
To laugh at him, to blush for thee;
To love thee still, but go no more
A-begging at a beggar's door.

Most seventeenth century love poetry is, however, playful.

On fruition
Sir Charles Sedley - 1639?-1701

None but a Muse in love can tell
The sweet tumultuous joys I feel,
When on Caelia's breast I lie,
When I tremble, faint and die;
Mingling kisses with embraces,
Darting tongues and joining faces,
Panting, stretching , sweating, cooing,
All in the ecstasy of doing.

There are a surprisingly large number of women poets in the seventeenth century. Many of their poems are excellent: note, however, the rather different perspective.

Sonnet IX
Lady Mary Wroth (c.1586- c.1652)

Be you all pleased? Your pleasures grieve not me.
Do you delight? I envy not your joy.
Have you content? Contentment with you be.
Hope you for bliss? Hope still and enjoy.
Let sad misfortune hapless me destroy,
Leave crosses to rule me, and still rule free,
While all delights their contraries employ
To keep good back, and I but torments see:
Joys are bereaved, harms do only tarry;
Despair takes place, disdain hath got the hand;
Yet firm love holds my senses in such band
As since, despisèd, I with sorrow marry;
Then if with grief I now must coupled be,
Sorrow I'll wed: despair thus governs me.

To Alexis in Answer to His Poem against Fruition - Ode
Aphra Behn (1640-1689)

Ah, hapless sex! Who bear no charms
But what like lightning flash and are no more,
False fires sent down for baneful harms,
Fires which the fleeting lover feebly warms,
And given like past debauches o'er,
Like songs that please, though bad, when new,
But learned by heart neglected grew.

In vain did heaven adorn the shape and face
With beauties which by angels' forms it drew;
In vain the mind with greater glories grace,
Which all our joys are stinted to the space
Of one betraying interview:
With one surrender to the eager will
We're short-lived nothing, or a real ill.

Since man with that inconstancy was born,
To love the absent and the present scorn,
Why do we deck, why do we dress
For such a short-lived happiness?
Why do we put attraction on,
Since either way 'tis we must be undone?

They fly if honour take our part,
Our virtue drives them o'er the field;
We lose 'em by too much desert,
And oh! they fly us if we yield.
Ye gods! is there no charm in all the fair
To fix this wild, this faithless, wanderer?

Man! our great business and our aim,
For whom we spread our fruitless snares,
No sooner kindles the designing flame
But to the next bright object bears
The trophies of his conquest and our shame:
Inconstancy's the good supreme,
The rest is airy notion, empty dream.

Then, heedless nymph, be ruled by me,
If e'er your swain the bliss desire:
Think like Alexis he may be,
Whose wished possession damps his fire;
The roving youth in every shade
Has left some sighing and abandoned maid,
For 'tis a fatal lesson he has learned,
After fruition n'er to be concerned.

Similar sentiments are expressed in one of the loveliest of folk songs:

Come all ye fair and tender ladies

Come all ye fair and tender ladies
Take warning how ye court young men.
They're like the stars on a summer's morning
First they'll appear and then they're gone.

If I'd ha' known before I courted,
I never would have courted none.
I'd have locked my heart in a box of silver
And fastened it up with a silver pin.

I wish I were a little swallow
And I had wings and I could fly.
I would fly away to my own false lover
And when he'd speak I would deny.

But I am not a little swallow,
I have no wings nor can I fly.

So I'll sit down here to weep in sorrow
And let my troubles pass me by.

Do you remember our days of courting,
When your head lay upon my breast?
You could make be believe by the falling of your arm
That the sun rose in the west.

Come all ye fair and tender ladies
Take warning how ye court young men.
They're like the stars on a summer's morning
First they'll appear and then they're gone.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) captured a similar poignancy.

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning; but the rain
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh
Upon the glass and listen for reply;
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
For unremembered lads that not again
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.
Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before;
I cannot say what loves have come and gone;
I only know that summer sang in me
A little while, that in me sings no more.

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While I was working for the lobby group of the engineering industries in Brussels, I attended a memorable high-level dinner at the Belfry Club in London, to which some senior diplomats had been invited for a briefing on the engineering industries' position in the Kennedy Round of trade negotiations. The after-dinner speaker (whose name, regrettably, I forget, as I would have liked to pay tribute to his wit and humour) circulated the following business card, explaining that when he received it he realised that all was right with the world.

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B. Cozderis
Wonarz
Peroz

Here's my favourite recipe for fruit cake[2]

You'll need the following: a cup of butter, a cup of water, a cup of sugar, four eggs, two cups of dried fruit, a teaspoon of baking soda, a teaspoon of salt, a cup of brown sugar, lemon juice, nuts and a bottle of whisky.

Sample the whisky to check for quality.

Take a large bowl. Check the whisky again. Turn on the electric mixer, beat one cup of butter in a large fluffy bowl. Add one teaspoon of sugar and beat again. Check the whisky.

Make sure the whisky is still OK. Cry another tup. Turn off the mixerer, break two leggs and add to the bowl and throw in the cup of dried fruit. Mix on the turner - if the fried druit gets stuck in the beaterers pry them loosh with a drewscriver.

Sample the whisky to check for conthistency. Add one table and spoon the slat and saking boda into the jemon luce. Grease the oven and turn the cake tin to 360 degrees.

Beat off the turner and go to bed.

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The late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was not only the golden age of English poetry, but also of English song. The songs made famous by John Dowland (1563-1626), for example, are good poems in their own right. The poetry of songs is often overlooked - we pay more attention to the music than the words.

At school I learned the trombone (and played bad New Orleans jazz). When I got to university, I discovered that my room neighbours were less enthusiastic about the instrument than I was. I sold the trombone and, many years later – actually the year my daughter was born – bought a guitar. At one time I knew more than a hundred songs. Here are a few which, for me, are indeed poetic in their inspiration.

Herbstgewitter über Dächern *(Reinhard Mey)*

Herbstgewitter über Dächern, Schneegestöber voller Zorn,
Frühjahrssturm im Laub vom Vorjahr, Sommerwind in reifem Korn.
Hätt' ich all das nie gesehen, säh, für alles and're blind,
Nur den Wind in deinen Haaren, sagt' ich doch, ich kenn' den Wind.

Strassenlärm und Musicboxen weh'n ein Lied irgendwoher,.
Düsengrollen, Lachen, Rufen, plötzlich Stille ringsumher.
Hätte ich all das nie vernommen, wär' für alles taub und hört'
Nur ein Wort von Dir gesprochen, sagt' ich doch, ich hab' gehört.

Bunte Bänder und Girlanden, Sonne nach durchzechter Nacht,
Neonlicht im Morgennebel, kurz bevor die Stadt erwacht.
Wär' mir das versagt geblieben, hätte ich nur Dich gesehen
Schliess' ich über Dir die Augen, sagt' ich doch, ich hab' gesehen.

Warten, Hoffen und Aufgeben, Irren und Ratlosigkeit.
Zweifeln, Glauben und Verzeihen, Freudentränen, Trunkenheit.
Hätt' ich all das nie erfahren, hätt' ich all das nie erlebt,
Schlief' ich ein in deinen Armen, sagt' ich doch, ich hab' gelebt.

Both sides now *(Joni Mitchell)*

Rows and bows of angel hair,
And ice-cream castles in the air,
And feather canyons everywhere,
I've looked at clouds that way.
But now they only block the sun,
They rain and snow on everyone.
So many things I would have done
But clouds got in my way.
I've looked at clouds from both sides now,
From up and down, and still somehow
It's cloud illusions I recall -

[2] With thanks to Dan Hinckley

I really don't know clouds at all.

Moons and Junes and Ferris-wheels,
The dizzy, dancing way you feel,
As every fairy tale comes real -
I've looked at love that way.
But now it's just another show,
You leave 'em laughing when you go;
And if you care, don't let them know –
Don't give yourself away.
I've looked at love from both sides now,
From give and take and still somehow
It's love's illusions I recall -
I really don't know love at all.

Tears and fears and feeling proud
To say 'I love you' right out loud.
Dreams and schemes and circus crowds –
I've looked at life that way.
But now old friends are acting strange,
They shake their heads, they say I've changed.
Well something's lost but something's gained
In living every day.
I've looked at life from both sides now,
From win and lose, but still somehow
It's life's illusions I recall -
I really don't know life at all.

Une Noix *(Charles Trenet)*

Une noix - qu'y a-t-il à l'intérieur d'une noix?
Qu'est-ce qu'on y voit quand elle est fermée?
On y voit la nuit en rond
Et les plaines et les monts
Les rivières et les vallons -
On y voit toute une armée
De soldats bardés de fer
Qui, joyeux, partent pour la guerre,
Et, fuyant l'orage des bois,
On voit les chevaux du roi
Près de la rivière.

Une noix - qu'y a-t-il à l'intérieur d'une noix?
Qu'est-ce qu'on y voit quand elle est fermée?
On y voit mille soleils -
Tout ça à tes yeux bleus pareil -
On y voit briller la mer
Et, dans l'espace d'un éclair,
Un voilier noir qui chavire.
On y voit des écoliers
Qui dévorent leurs tabliers,
Des abbés en bicyclette,
Le quatorze juillet en fête,
Et ta robe au vent du soir -
On y voit des reposoirs
Qui s'apprêtent.

Une noix - qu'y a-t-il à l'intérieur d'une noix?
Qu'est-ce qu'on y voit quand elle est ouverte?
On n'a pas le temps d'y voir:
On la croque et puis bonsoir -
Elle est découverte.

The 'abbés en bicyclette' are a masterpiece of imagery and I can almost see them riding down an avenue of elms, the wind in their soutanes and the sun on their wide-brimmed hats, held down with one hand to stop them blowing off.

Kathy's song *(Paul Simon)*

I hear the drizzle of the rain, like a memory it falls -
Soft and warm, continuing - tapping on my roof and walls.
And from the shelter of my mind, through the window of my eyes,
I gaze beyond the rain-drenched streets - to England, where my heart lies.
My mind's distracted and diffused, my thoughts are many miles away,
They lie with you when you're asleep, and kiss you when you start your day.
And a song I was writing is left undone: I don't know why I waste my time
Writing songs I can't believe, with words that tear and strain to rhyme.
And so you see I have come to doubt all that I once held as true -
I stand alone, without belief: the only truth I know is you.
And as I watch the drops of rain weave their weary paths and die,
I know that I am like the rain - there, but for the grace of you, go I

The song *By the rivers of Babylon* by Boney M made me look up Psalm No. 137 - the song is remarkably close to the original:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion'. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

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Until this century, the Bible was the most widely read book in the Western World. Its language and imagery have had a very profound effect on our literature – some of the most striking can be found in the book of Revelation. Those who saw Ingmar Bergman's masterpiece *The Seventh Seal* have already a visual image of the following.

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up and all green grass was burnt up.

And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountain of the waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died in the waters because they were made bitter.

And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound.

And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green things, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God on their foreheads. .....

And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth and of brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. ...

And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders offered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered and write them not. And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.

John Donne's *Holy Sonnet VII* reflects this apocalyptic vision with similarly powerful language:

> At the round earth's imagined corners, blow
> Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
> From death, you numberless infinities
> Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,
> All whom the flood did and fire shall overthrow,
> All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
> Despair, law, chance hath slain and you whose eyes
> Shall behold God and never taste death's woe.
> But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
> For if above all these my sins abound,
> 'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace
> When we are there. Here on this lowly ground
> Teach me how to repent, for that's as good
> As if thou'dst sealed my pardon with thy blood.

The speech by Lear on the stormy heath (Act III, scene 2 of Shakespeare's *King Lear*) is infused with a similar apocalyptic vision - and the same pounding rhythm as in the first eight lines of Donne's sonnet[3].

> Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!

[3] Donne's genius can be seen in the way in which, from the ninth line, the rhythm changes radically and becomes slower and more contemplative.

You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-curriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o'the world,
Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
That make ingrateful man! ....
Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters.
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, called you children.
You owe me no subscription; then let fall
Your horrible pleasure. Here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man.
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That will with two pernicious daughters join
Your high-engendered battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. O, ho! 'Tis foul!

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Advertisement from the Recruitment Section of the *Tribune de Genève* of 19.3.87:

Ace Secretary

If you are only 24 years old but have at least ten years' working experience at top level;
If you speak several languages (but never on the telephone to your friends);
If you have impeccable skills but have no other ambition than descreetly [*sic*] correcting your boss's grammar;
If you love making coffee and going out in the rain to buy sandwiches for him;
If you know the name, address and telephone number of every person and company in Geneva;
If you like nothing better than to stay at the office all evening typing urgent memos;
If you have a terrific sense of humour and laugh delightfully when the 20-page report that had to be typed over the weekend is found not to be needed at all;
If you are not motivated by money, want a low salary and will never require a rise.

Then, YOU ARE the one we are looking for - why not immediately contact:

Jimmy Klein, Peat Marwick and Mitchell & Co. S.A:

I have to assume that the following (supposedly genuine) applications were not successful.

'I demand a salary commiserate with my experience'

'Yielding to the post of a Secretary, I have a good typing skills'

'I have lurnt Wordperfect 6.0, computor and spreadsheat programs'

'Personal interests: Donating blood. Fourteen gallons so far'

'Instrumental in ruining entire operation for a Midwest chain store'

'I Am a perfectionist and rarely if if ever forget details'

'Marital status: often. Children: various'

'References: none - I've left a path of destruction behind me'

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

A song writer virtually unknown outside his native Sweden is Carl Michael Bellmann (1740-1795), yet, in Sweden, he is still very much a living tradition[4]. His songs are scurrilous, bawdy, raucous, gluttonous, inebriated, full of *joie de vivre* and thoroughly good fun. In 1977, Martin Best recorded some of *Fredman's Songs and Epistles* by Bellmann, in translations by Paul Britten Austin which capture well the atmosphere of the original.

Fredman's Song No. 11
At nightfall, wishing he were a king

Portugal, Spain,
Ah, did I there reign,
Wear both of their crowns, and Great Britain's as well,
Tonight I confess
A royal princess
Should sleep in my arms, like any mamsell.
Softly we'd slumber,
To all my creditors I'd bid farewell.

Rocket and Bomb
And trumpet and drum
Would early awake us, to thunder of gun.
Splendid parade!
Our troops serenade,
From crystalline cups, drink our health everyone!
Standards unfurl,
Cry 'Vivat, my girl!'

[4] I first heard his songs in 1969 on a boat trip in the Stockholm archipelago, on a clear sunny day, in good company and over a long liquid lunch, which they accompany to perfection.

Then let them thunder until day is done.

Oysters and wine,
All red from the Rhine,
Forthwith I'd command to my empress' repast;
Pudding with plums in,
Waffles a dozen,
Make up our breakfast, a dram at the last.
A hundred piasters
At least, my good masters,
Each luscious mouthful would certainly cost.

Comrades, a skål,
Estates General.
Holiest Father of Rome in thy hall!
One mass I am less;
Say farewell princess;
The crown that has vanished cost nothing at all.
Ended my psalm is,
Brandy my balm is,
As for a cutlet on credit I call.

For those who prefer the original Swedish versions, a very fine recording was made in the 1960s by Sven-Bertil Taube, son of the famous Swedish folksinger Evert Taube, with a chamber ensemble composed of members of the Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra.

Portugal, Spanien,
Stora Brittanien
Ack om jag ägde de kronor i kväll
Uppå min hjässa,
Skull' en prinsessa
Vila i famnen liksom en mamsell;
Jag och min lilla
Somna så stilla.
Av mina björnar böd da farväl.

Bomber, raketer,
Pukor, trompeter
Skulle oss väcka med dån och med knall;
Våra drabanter
Spela sitt lanter,
Dricka vår skål utur krus av kristall;
Jag skull' ock dricka,
Vivat min flicka!
Sen skull' det smälla tills dagen blev all.

Ostron jag väljer,
Rhenska buteljer
Skulle min drottning och jag tömma ut;
Pudding med russin,
Våfflor ett dussin
Bleve vår frukost, en kallsup till slut;
Skönaste knaster,
Hundra piaster
Skålpundet kosta skull' uti minut.

Skål kamerater,
Generalstater,
Helige fader i Rom och din ätt!
Slut på min mässa;
Farväl prinsessa,
Kronan är borta, hon kom också lätt.
Ände på psalmen;
Jag går till Malmen,
Och på kredit tar en sup och kotlett.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

The poetry of Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) has been described as quirky. When her unusual imagery and train of thought are at their most apposite, however, she writes some of the best poetry in the language.

There's a certain slant of light,

There's a certain slant of light,
On winter afternoons,
That oppresses, like the weight
Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;
We can find no scar,
But internal difference
Where the meanings are.

None may teach it anything,
'Tis the seal, despair, -
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,
Shadows hold their breath;
When it goes, 'tis like the distance
On the look of death.

The difference between despair

The difference between despair
And fear, is like the one
Between the instant of a wreck
And when the wreck has been.

The mind is smooth - no motion -
Contented as the eye
Upon the forehead of a Bust,
That knows it cannot see.

Frederick Goddard Tuckerman (1821-1873) was a contemporary of Emily Dickinson. He is virtually unknown in Europe and does not often appear in American anthologies. This is a pity – he wrote some excellent poetry.

From **The Cricket**

The humming bee purrs softly o'er his flower;
From lawn and thicket
The dogday locust singeth in the sun
From hour to hour:
Each has his bard, and thou, ere day be done,
Shalt have no wrong.
So bright that murmur mid the insect crowd,
Muffled and lost in bottom-grass, or loud
By pale and picket:
Shall I not take to help me in my song
A little cooing cricket?

Sonnet XIV

And me my winter's task is drawing over,
Though night and winter shake the drifted door.
Critic or friend, dispraiser or approver,
I come not now nor fain would offer more.
But when buds break and round the fallen limb
The wild weeds crowd in clusters and corymb,
When twilight rings with the red robin's plaint,
Let me give something – though my heart be faint –
To thee, my more than friend! – believer! Lover!
The gust has fallen now, and all is mute –
Save pricking on the pane the sleety showers,
The clock that ticks like a belated foot,
Time's hurrying step, the twanging of the hours:
Wait for those days, my friend, or get thee fresher flowers.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

I have always been fascinated by unusual names: as a child I had a book of stories about a small African boy called Epimanondas - I no longer remember the stories but the name has stuck in my memory.

'I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies . . .'

Whose legs were these?

Who were Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego?

Where did Kubla Khan 'a stately pleasure-dome decree'?

Some places actually make you want to go there to see whether they live up to the promise in their names: how about a trip to Oshkosh, Ouagadougou, Saskatoon, Tallahassee, Baden-Baden, Vers l'église, Samarkand?[5]

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

An article in *The Economist* of 16.3.68, headed *Vereinfachungsbestrebungen,* described efforts by the German Foreign Ministry to encourage simplification of the German language. The article pointed out that, at that time:

some 90 million people had German as their mother tongue, making it sixth on the list after Chinese, English, Hindi, Spanish and Russian;

German was the second foreign language, after English, taught in Russia[6].

[5] I can confirm that Samarkand - Boukhara and Khiva also - 'vaut le voyage' as they say in the Michelin guides - I did not expect to be so moved by bricks and tiles.

[6]The significance of this remark was brought home to me in 1993 when, in Almaty airport, I was addressed in perfect German by a diminutive man of obviously Kazakh extraction. He explained to me that he had grown up in a family of shepherds in Northern Kazakhstan: the nearest village was entirely German-speaking and he had therefore had to learn German. Soviet Central Asia was - and to a large extent still is, despite the return of many Russians to their homeland and the emigration to Germany of many with German backgrounds – a patchwork of different ethnic groups and tragic family histories. For example, my first interpreter in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, came from a family of Russian Tartar Muslims - the grandfather had been a successful farmer and had, as a result, been branded a *kulak* by Stalin's henchmen: the family had been deported to the wastes of Central Asia in the 1930s. Millions of others met the same fate. Robert Conquest's books *The Nation Killers* and *Harvest of Sorrow* depict this tragic period in harrowing detail.

The article referred to the work of the late Professor Hans Eggers, on trends in current German usage and the preference of contemporary speakers for shorter, simpler sentence construction. It generated the following correspondence in subsequent weeks.

Sir - There is a story that a foreign lady once asked Hugo von Hofmannsthal why Austrians spoke German instead of a language of their own. "Madam", he is said to have replied, "we do it so as to make the German language bearable for foreigners".

Even so, they will tell you in Vienna that the gardeners at Schönbrunn once included a *Hofgartenspritzwagenschlauchschleuderer* ….

Yours faithfully *Angus Malcolm,*
London SW10

Sir - Collectors of long words in the German and Austrian languages will be grateful to Angus Malcolm for *Hofgartenspritzwagenschlauchschleuderer* (39 letters) in your issue of March 23rd. Perhaps the Viennese summer causes words to sprout and blossom, because the longest word I could find in Vienna last December was *Schneearbeiteraufnahmestellen* (only 30 letters) which was the heading on a notice pasted on the insides of street-car windows when the City Fathers realised snow was in the offing.

I made my own personal contribution to the German language, *Kraftfahrzeugsteuerkartenverlängerung* many years before the war when I was in Berlin for some time, and when it was necessary for a German permit for my British registered car to be renewed. Angus Malcolm's gem beats mine by two letters.

But another collector has come to my rescue with the official designation for a captain of a vessel owned by the Danube Steamship Company, *Donaudampfschifffahrtsgesellschaftskapitän*. I think the company's head office is in Vienna. If so, this is another triumph for the Austrians. –

Yours faithfully *Steven Musgrave,*
Windermere

Sir - It was pleasant to see the apocryphal steamship company appear in Mr. Musgrave's letter (April 6th). I had always understood that it was the custom of the relict of a director of the company to describe herself as *Frau Donaudampfschifffahrtsaktiengesellschaftsdirektors-witwe*. Her lamented husband, however, had nothing to do with the Danube, and consequently on holidays and Sundays the lady was able to use her full title which was *Frau Nordhanseatischedampf, etc. etc.* (66 letters).

Her only near rival was the railway shunter who used to work in the marshalling yards at Hamm, the *Nochnichteingestellteneisenbahnwagenhinundherschieber* (53 letters).

Yours faithfully *D.M. Gilbert,*
London W2

Sir - I can beat Mr. Musgrave's 41-letter Danube Steamship Company contribution. And it is a genuine one – an advertisement of a vacancy, in a newspaper, for an aviation company official – a *Luftschifffahrtverkehrfrachtbahnhofvorsteher.*

Yours faithfully *W. Horsfall Carter,*
Northampton

A little later, an Austrian colleague, amused by this exchange, which I had shown him, sent me an article from his local paper, the *Tullner Bezirks-Nachrichten*, describing the attendance at an official ceremony of, among others, the *Bezirksfeuerwehrkommandantstellvertreter* (39 letters, and I can prove it).

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

I have just this year, the 200th anniversary of his birth, discovered Pushkin and begun to understand why he is dear to the hearts of all Russians, even though hardly known in the West. In an article in *The Financial Times* (5/6 June 1999), Arkady Ostrovsky gave an interesting explanation of this phenomenon:

"Each culture borrows from another what it lacks itself. European culture responds to Dostoevsky because his novels *are* filled with suffering, psychological fracture, all-burning passions and the mysterious Russian soul. Pushkin, on the other hand, gave European culture little that it did not have already.

Pushkin absorbed European culture and in 37 years caught up with several centuries of European Renaissance. If Peter the Great opened Russia's window on to Europe, it was Pushkin who gave his country not only a native literary language but also European culture."

Here is one of Pushkin's best known poems, together with English and German translations (I have included the latter because I find it closer to the un-selfpitying melancholy of the original).

Я вас любил; любовь еще быть может
В душе моей угасла не совсем –
Но пусть она вас больше не тревожит,
Я не хочу печалить вас ничем.

Я вас любил безмолвно, безнадежно,
То ревностью, то робостью томим,
Я вас любил так искренне, так нежно,
Как дай вам Бог любимой быть другим.

Oh, I have loved you, and perhaps my spirit
Still harbours a warm glow of love today.
But God forbid that you be burdened with it;
I would not sadden you in any way.

I loved you in a wordless, hopeless fashion,
Sometimes in jealous rage, sometimes struck dumb.
I loved you with a deep and tender passion.
May you be loved like this in years to come.

(Translation A.D.P. Briggs
Everyman's Poetry, J.M. Dent)

Ich liebte Sie: die Liebe mag noch immer
In meinem Herzen weiterglühn, wer weiss?
Dass Sie sich ängstigen, ich will es nimmer,
Bekümmern will ich Sie auf keinem Preis.

Ich liebte Sie in hoffnungslosem Schweigen,
War eifersüchtig bald, bald wieder zag;
Ich liebte Sie so inniglich, so eigen,
Wie Sie, geb Gott, ein andrer lieben mag.

(Übersetzung Christoph Ferber,
Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 5/6.6.99)

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

My Russian is still not good and - like most other foreigners trying to speak the language - I have difficulty making the distinction between the vowel sounds **и** and **ы** (English equivalent 'i' and 'iy') - for example, **мыло** is soap and **Мила** is a girl's name. In all Soviet hotels there was, and still is, a woman on every floor (the *dejournaya*, from the French 'de jour') who is responsible for the guests' well-being and, in the old days, for reporting to the KGB on guests' behaviour[7]. Today, in addition probably to whatever the KGB still requires, her duties often extend also to ensuring guests' welfare and happiness at night - I remember my first 'dejournaya' in the Hotel Otrar in Almaty in 1993 who made it very plain to me that I was to consult her on any problem I might have, especially sexual ones, but that's another story. On my way to Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan, I invariably stay in the Intourist Hotel in Osh in the Kyrgyz Republic; on my first trip there I asked the American Ambassador, Stan Escudero, if he had any travel tips for me on my first trip to Osh - 'Yes, he said, take toilet paper and a bath plug and, if you have room, a toilet seat' - I have followed his advice (with the exception of the toilet seat[8]) ever since and have found these items essential in most hotels in the former Soviet Union. But I digress.

[7] Western-style hotels in Moscow are very expensive. In order to save money, I used to stay, in the early days after the break-up of the Soviet Union, in the October Hotel in Moscow. It was previously the equivalent of a hostel for high ranking members of the Communist Party. On arrival I was given a leaflet containing the following message: 'If you are expecting guests, please notify the comrade attached to you or the hotel desk in advance so that a pass can be filled out for them in good time'.

[8] Only for reasons of space, not because it would not have been useful

On one occasion in Osh, there was no soap in my room, so I went to look for the 'dejournaya' in her room where she was talking to a young woman in very heavy makeup. 'I need soap' I declared in my best Russian; reply from the young woman: 'She's not working tonight'.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

In 1955, I went to Paris for the first time, to learn French, and, among other elementary errors, made my hosts laugh by addressing the cat as 'vous'. Their son assured me that his English teacher had advised him, when he went to England and needed to know the time, to go up to a policeman, point at his wrist and say 'boîte à musique'. I regret never having tried it at an age when one did such things for bets.

I tried to explain cricket to him but he had difficulty grasping it, despite the obvious simplicity of the game.

> You have two sides one out in the field and one in. Each man that's in the side that's in goes out and when he's out he comes in and the next man goes in until he's out. When they're all out, the side that's out comes in and the side that's been in goes out and tries to get those coming in out. Sometimes you get players still in and not out. When both sides have been in and out, including the not-outs, that's the end of the game.

My young French friend taught me the following

Telegram from a Frenchman to his mother during his honeymoon:

7 13 + 3, Philippe

His mother replied:

6 7 13 + 3 7 9, Maman

My French was probably better than the 'Fractured French' I found on some cocktail napkins from the 1950s:

Pièce de Résistance - Shy girl
Mise en scène - There are mice in the river
Femme de ménage - Woman of my age
Mal de mer - Mother-in-law
Marseillaise - Mother says O.K.
Carte blanche - Take Blanche home

Croix de Guerre - Across from the station
Honi soit qui mal y pense - I honestly think I'm going to be sick
Chateaubriand - Your hat is on fire

While on the subject of words, it is very unusual to find a concordance in meaning between two apparently related pairs of words in different languages, where there is actually no etymological connection between any of the words. The only one I know is:

mèche/méchant = wick/wicked

If anyone knows a name for this phenomenon or knows any other examples, I would be fascinated to hear from you.

Do you recognise the following poem[9]?

Un petit d'un petit
S'étonne aux Halles
Un petit d'un petit
Ah! degrès te fallent
Indolent qui ne sort cesse
Indolent qui ne se mène
Q'importe un petit d'un petit
Tout Gai de Reguennes.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) is better known as a novelist than as a poet - yet his poetry is exquisite, despite his rather irritating use of archaic words from time to time. His poetry convinces the reader that he has actually observed the natural scenes he describes - in contrast, Wordsworth's and Shelley's Odes *To a Skylark*, for example, are less convincing - the birds in question are more poetic conventions than feathered realities[10].

In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'

Only a man harrowing clods
    In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
    Half asleep as they stalk.

Only thin smoke without flame
    From the heaps of couch-grass;
Yet this will go onward the same
    Though Dynasties pass.

Yonder a maid and her wight
    Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
    Ere their story die.

Afterwards

When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
    And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
    'He was a man who used to notice such things'?

If it be in the dusk when, like an eyelid's soundless blink,
    The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to alight
Upon the wind-warped upland thorn, a gazer may think,
    'To him this must have been a familiar sight'.

If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,
    When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, 'He strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm,
    But he could do little for them and now he is gone'.

If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they stand at the door,
    Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,
Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more,
    'He was one who had an eye for such mysteries'?

And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
    And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
    'He hears it not now, but used to notice such things'?

The Darkling Thrush

I leant upon a coppice gate
    When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
    The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
    Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
    Had sought their household fires.

[9] *Mots d'Heures: Gousses, Rames – the d'Antin Manuscript*, Grafton 1993.
[10] One can only agree with Shelley that 'bird thou never wert'.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
    The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
    His wind the death lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
    Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
    Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
    The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
    Of joy unlimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt and small,
    In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
    Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
    Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
    Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
    His happy goodnight air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
    And I was unaware.

Edward Thomas (1878-1917) was another poet who observed nature with great precision.

Digging

Today I think
Only with scents - scents dead leaves yield,
And bracken, and wild carrot's seed,
And the square mustard field;

Odours that rise
When the spade wounds the roots of tree,
Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,
Rhubarb or celery;

The smoke's smell, too,
Flowing from where a bonfire burns
The dead, the waste, the dangerous,
And all to sweetness turns.

It is enough
To smell, to crumble the dark earth,
While the robin sings over again
Sad songs of Autumn mirth.

After Rain

The rain of a night and a day and a night
Stops at the light
Of this pale choked day. The peering sun
Sees what has been done.
The road under the trees has a border new
Of purple hue
Inside the border of bright thin grass
For all that has
Been left by November of leaves is torn
From hazel and thorn
And the greater trees. Throughout the copse
No dead leaf drops.
On grey grass, green moss, burnt-orange fern,
At the wind's return:
The leaflets out of the ash-tree shed
Are thinly spread
In the road, like little black fish, inlaid,
As if they played.
What hangs from the myriad branches down there
So hard and bare
Is twelve yellow apples lovely to see
On one crab-tree,
And on each twig of every tree in the dell
Uncountable
Crystals both dark and bright of the rain
That begins again.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

In 1976, OXFAM had the brilliant idea to ask a number of public figures for their favourite funny story - the result was *Pass the Port* (followed in 1980 by *Pass the Port Again)*, cheap to produce, with no authors' royalties, the book's profits went to support OXFAM's charitable work. This is ***my*** favourite story - not (yet) included in the OXFAM book:.

A friend of mine is in the furniture trade. He just came back from a business trip to Tajikistan[11]. I asked him how it went.

[11] The country mentioned can, of course, be varied to suit the audience.

'Fantastic, he said, these Tajik women are not only beautiful[12] but highly intelligent. Let me explain. I stayed in the Hotel Tajikistan in Dushanbe and, on my first night there, went to the bar for a drink. In no time at all I had a stunning Tajik woman sitting next to me. I tried English, German and French but she didn't understand, so I took a piece of paper and drew a bottle of wine with two wine glasses - she nodded and I ordered. When we had finished the wine, I took the paper again and drew a bottle of champagne and two glasses - she nodded and I ordered.

When we had finished the champagne, she took the paper and drew a big bed.

Now how did she know that I was in the furniture business?'

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

I have already expressed my aversion to the conventions of 'poetic language' and to the diminution of content and meaning which so often results. The following extracts from poems with 'diminished content', also on the subject of birds, are nevertheless, spell-binding in their masterly creation of atmosphere - we know that we are looking through 'magic casements', but allow ourselves to fall under the spell.

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past and Lethe-wards had sunk
(John Keats, Ode to a Nightingale)

I caught this morning morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin,
dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of, the mastery of the thing.
(Gerard Manley Hopkins, The Windhover)

The following passage from Book V of *Paradise Lost* (John Milton, 1608-1674), describing the Archangel Raphael's descent to the garden of Eden, is remarkably similar in the way it captures the movement of flight.

[12] They are

Nor delayed the wingèd saint
After his charge received; but from among
Thousand celestial ardours, where he stood
Veiled with his gorgeous wings, up springing light
Flew through the midst of heaven; the angelic choirs
On each hand parting, to his speed gave way
Through all the empyreal road; .....
..... Down thither prone in flight
He speeds, and through the vast ethereal sky
Sails between worlds and worlds, with steady wing
Now on the polar winds, then with quick fan
Winnows the buxom air; till, within soar
Of towering eagles, to all the fowls he seems
A phoenix, gazed by all, as that sole bird
When, to enshrine his relics in the sun's
Bright temple, to Aegyptian Thebes he flies.

The poetry of Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) is notable for its precise creation of atmosphere.

Sunday Morning I

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
She dreams a little and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
As a calm darkens among water-lights.
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in some procession of the dead,
Winding across wide water, without sound.
The day is like wide water, without sound,
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

The following short poem by Janet Lewis, Yvor Winters' wife, is equally masterful for what it conveys in a few lines.

Girl Help

Mild and slow and young,
She moves about the room,
And stirs the summer dust

With her wide broom.

In the warm lofted air,
Soft lips together pressed,
Soft wispy hair,
She stops to rest,

And stops to breathe,
Amid the summer hum,
The great white lilac bloom
Scented with days to come.

Elisabeth Daryush (1891-1974) also had a fine eye for detail.

Still Life

Through the open French window, the warm sun
lights up the polished breakfast-table, laid
round a bowl of crimson roses, for one –
a service of Worcester porcelain, arrayed
near it a melon, peaches, figs, small hot
rolls in a napkin, fairy rack of toast,
butter in ice, high silver coffee pot,
and, heaped on a salver, the morning's post.

She comes over the lawn, the young heiress,
from her early walk in her garden-wood,
feeling that life's a table set to bless
her delicate desires with all that's good,
that even the unopened future lies
like a love-letter, full of sweet surprise.

I do not like the poetry of Ezra Pound (1885-1972), but he made some superb translations, particularly of Chinese poetry.

The River-Merchant's Wife – A Letter

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever and forever.
Why should I climb the lookout?

At sixteen you departed,
You went into far Ku-to-yen, by the river of swirling eddies,
And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!
The leaves fall early this autumn, in the wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden;
They hurt me. I grow older.
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you
As far as Cho-fu-Sa.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Limericks, a very popular form of verse, are more difficult than they might appear - there are many, but few really good ones. The rules are simple but the lines are short, quality and wit of rhyme are essential and the last line has to be good. When I worked in Brussels in the mid-1960s, I used to write an annual series of limericks about office life for the Christmas party - one of these contains a rhyme of which I am still proud today:

The end of this organisation
Was a twenty-four hour peroration,
Delivered with vehemence
By Peter von Siemens,
With consecutive interpretation.

The gentleman in question was at that time President of the organisation I worked for - I remember him chiefly for his handshake: he would await your advance with right arm close to the body, hand extended with the palm facing the greetee; when you got within shaking distance, the hand flapped inward and enclosed yours as would a damp flannel. He made long speeches. (I also used to do occasional consecutive interpretation.) But I digress, again.

Here are two of my favourite limericks.

It's time to make love. Douse the glim.
The fireflies flicker and dim.
The stars lean together
Like birds of a feather
And the loin lies down with the limb.
(Conrad Aiken - published in the Pan Book of Limericks)

In the case of Jane Mansfield's chihuahas[13]
They found when they opened her bluahas
That the elegant cups
Held no trace of the pups
But only what nature alluahas.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Since joining the Aga Khan Foundation in 1985, I have been collecting office typos which yield amusing or unexpected results, together with similar curiosities, and use them in an annual after-dinner speech to the Foundation's senior management. Denys Parsons, formerly head of the information service at the British Library, also collected oddities of this kind over many years and published them in a series *Funny Ha Ha and Funny Peculiar* and similar titles (*Pan Books* - I used to take his books on business trips but had to give it up because of my embarrassment at laughing uncontrollably in restaurants and on planes and trains). Denys Parsons discovered the arch villain behind all such typos: Gobfrey Shrdlu, whose surname comes from the first row of characters in the old typographer's box of lead type - today, typographers sit in front of computer screens and spell-checkers take much of the fun out of reading office correspondence. Here is a selection of some of Gobfrey's best, from 'normal' office correspondence.

None of the individuals in xxxxx expressed any reservations about the singing of the Accord by His Highness and the Prime Minister.

With appropriate financial resources, the University's priorities should include the creation of pubic awareness.

The product is now being made in India with a lover specificity.

Could you please send me a little write-up to show me what an impotant personality he is.

[13] This limerick (quoted in the *Financial Times,* 24/25.8.91) was produced by theologians at Maynooth in Ireland. The well-endowed actress in question had just been apprehended trying to smuggle her pet chihuahas through customs by concealing them about her person.

There has so far been little emphasis on health education, especially concerning preventable causes of morbidity and morality.

In a seaport note, I will send you more information on the project. *(Spellcheckers are, after all, not poof - whoops, proof - against human error: this is what happens if you press Enter too soon when an alternative is being proposed for your typo!)*

Jerry Zar, Dean of the Graduate School of Northwestern Illinois University wrote the following witty piece on spellcheckers:

An Owed to the Spelling Chequer

I have a spelling chequer
It came with my PC -
It plane lee marks four my revue
Miss steaks eye can knot sea.
Eye ran this poem threw it,
Your sure reel glad two no.
It's vary polished in it's weigh
My chequer tolled me sew.
A chequer is a bless sing,
It freeze yew lodes of thyme.
It helps me right awl stiles two reed,
And aides me when aye rime.
Each frays come posed up on my screen
Eye trussed too bee a joule -
The chequer pours or every word
To cheque sum spelling rule.
Be fore a veiling chequers
Hour spelling mite decline,
And if were lacks or have a laps
We would be made to wine.
Butt now bee cause my spelling
Is checked with such grate flare,
There are know faults with in my cite,
Of non eye am a wear.
Now spelling does knot phase me,
It does not bring a tier -
My pay purrs awl due glad den
With wrapped words fare as hear.
To rite with care is quite a feet
Of witch won should be proud.
And we mussed dew the best wee can,
Sew floors are knot aloud.
Sow ewe can sea why eye dew prays
Such soft wear for pea seas.
And why I break in two averse

By righting want too pleas.

I was so thrilled to hear the preliminary results of the Partnership Walk. I know that a very large number of people threw their hearts and soles into the immense effort needed to create a success.

Assumptions for the development of the Aga Khan University Hospital: Safe Water, Appropriate Sanitation, Litracy, Disease Prevention Services ....

The Foundation should give priority to projects which encourage and facilitate men's involvement in and responsibility for reproductive tasks.

The University Board of Trustees should look more carefully at the level of Faulty salaries.

The major exclusions of the insurance policy include loss or damage caused by war, rebellion, resurrection, etc.

The co-facilitator's principal responsibility would be to assist the facilitator facilitate the deliberations

The health programme should make use of poxy indicators in the survey.

Scholarship list: The University of Lost Angeles - The University of Shouthampton

I would like to make it clear that the Charity Commission told me that so far as they are concerned, 'pre-school children' will cover children up to age 21. However, I am asking them to confirm this in writing.

I appreciate your need to escape from the UN and hope that you are able to give the Camel Owners Club of Kenya the attention its acronym so richly deserves

This falls in line with the UN's chatter of providing shelter for all by the year 2000

In our livestock programme the way forward is to promote bollocks

Today we signed an agreement with the owner of the apartment - it has kitchen and flashing toilet

If I were to criticise Cookson's bowling, I would say that he has the unfortunate habit of throwing his head in the air on delivery, which greatly shortens his length. *(I remember this one from my school magazine)*

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

The first poem I ever wrote was published in my school magazine:

Anagrammarian's Funeral[14]

Like *HEROIN* draughts is thy sight to me
O RHINE, my source of quiet delight.
On heavy wing, a *HERON I* see -
But boats *ON HIRE* now spoil that sight.

Anagrams have also interested more talented poets.

MARY and *mare*, anagrammatized,
The one is Army, and the other arme;
In both their names is danger moralized,
And both alike do sometimes good, or harm:
Mare's the sea, and *mare*'s arme's a river,
And Mary's army's all for what ye'll give her.

John Taylor (1578?-1653) – Epigram XXIV

John Donne had a different kind of anagram in mind when he wrote the following.

The Anagram (extract)

Marry, and love thy Flavia, for she
Hath all things, whereby others beauteous be,
For, though her eyes be small, her mouth is great,
Though they be ivory, yet her teeth be jet,
Though they be dim, yet she is light enough,
And though her harsh hair fall, her skin is rough;
What though her cheeks be yellow, her hair's red,
Give her thine, and she hath a maidenhead.
These things are beauty's elements, where these
Meet in one, that one must, as perfect, please.
If red and white and each good quality
Be in thy wench, n'er ask where it doth lie.
In buying things perfumed, we ask if there
Be musk and amber in it, but not where.
Though all her parts be not in th'usual place,
She'hath yet an Anagram of a good face.

The following 'cognate anagrams' (i.e. one where the result is related in sense to the original) are taken from *The Anagram Dictionary* published by Macmillan.

[14] I think I was protesting against having to study Robert Browning's *A Grammarian's Funeral* for my A-levels

Anagrams / Ars Magna

The aristocracy / A rich Tory caste

William Shakespeare / We all make his praise

The Taming of the Shrew / Her mate won the fights

Southern California / Hot sun or life in car

Absence makes the heart grow fonder /He wants back dearest gone from here

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

I spent my youth and went to school in Hampshire near Aldershot and learned my first dance steps (and the excitement of first romance) at tennis club dances. I remember at one of the tennis tournaments in which I participated, there was a ladies' doubles pair comprising Misses Coffey and Tee: charming young ladies, who told me, when I commented on the serendipity of their pairing, that this was nothing - they knew of an international tournament where Dibbs had played Dubbs, with, as umpire, Dabbs. But I digress, yet again.

The following by John Betjeman recreates perfectly an atmosphere and attitudes which are probably gone forever - an epoch when we had, and could say we had, a gay[15] time without the risk of misunderstanding: I can smell the pines and the perfume - unlike the subaltern, however, I was un-English enough actually to like dancing.

A Subaltern's Love Song[16]

Miss J. Hunter Dunn, Miss J. Hunter Dunn,
Furnish'd and burnish'd by Aldershot sun,
What strenuous singles we played after tea,
We in the tournament, you against me!

Love-thirty, love-forty, oh! weakness of joy,
The speed of a swallow, the grace of a boy,
With carefullest carelessness, gaily you won
I am weak from your loveliness Joan Hunter Dunn.

Miss Joan Hunter Dunn, Miss Joan Hunter Dunn,
How mad I am, sad I am, glad that you won.
The warm-handled racket is back in its press,
But my shock-headed victor, she loves me no less.

Her father's euonymus[17] shines as we walk,
And swing past the summer-house, buried in talk,
And cool the verandah that welcomes us in
To the six-o'clock news and a lime-juice and gin.

The scent of the conifers, sound of the bath,
The view from my bedroom of moss-dappled path,
As I struggle with double-end evening tie,
For we dance at the golf club, my victor and I.

On the floor of her bedroom lie blazer and shorts
And the cream-coloured walls are be-trophied with sports,
And westering, questioning settles the sun
On your low-leaded window, Miss Joan Hunter Dunn.

The Hillman is waiting, the light's in the hall,
The pictures of Egypt are bright on the wall,
My sweet, I am standing beside the oak stair
And there on the landing's the light on your hair.

By roads 'not adopted', by woodlanded ways,
She drove to the club in the late summer haze,
Into nine-o'clock Camberley, heavy with bells
And mushroomy, pine-woody, evergreen smells.

Miss Joan Hunter Dunn, Miss Joan Hunter Dunn,
I can hear from the car-park the dance has begun.
Oh! full Surrey twilight! importunate band!
Oh! strongly adorable tennis girl's hand!

Around us are Rovers and Austins afar,
Above us, the intimate roof of my car,
And here on my right is the girl of my choice,
With the tilt of her nose and the chime of her voice,

And the scent of her wrap, and the words never said,
And the ominous, ominous dancing ahead.

[15] Sir Richard Vincent, UK Chief of Defence Staff, made the following comment at a dinner in 1991: 'Time was, ladies and gentlemen, when gay meant cheerful, clap meant applause and only generals had aides' (reported in the *Financial Times*).

[16] I am indebted to the late Shirley McColl for drawing my attention, many years ago, to this delightful poem. I did not know it at the time, but her husband, Colin, worked for (and subsequently became head of) MI6. I found out through a diplomat friend (now also head of MI6), who, when I asked him what Colin was doing, told me he was doing something so important he couldn't tell me.

[17] For those who, like me, do not know what an euonymus is: 'any tree of the N. temperate genus *Euonymus*, such as the spindle tree, whose seeds are each enclosed in a fleshy, typically red, aril.'

We sat in the car-park till twenty to one
And now I'm engaged to Miss Joan Hunter Dunn.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

One of the greatest recent humorists was Victor Borge, a highly accomplished musician and inventor of phonetic punctuation and inflationary language. Here is my tribute to the latter, given in the context of one of my annual after-dinner office speeches.

A Love Story (*Any resemblance between the fictitious characters in this story and anybody you know may or may not be fivethreeitous)*

Twice upon a time, there was an extremely eligible bachelor. He was born in Elevenzania but had spent his youth in Tenrobi. Fairly late in life he accepted a posting to a very fivemidable environment. He liked women but was not a Don Two – being of a gentle disposition, he was looking for romance and needed elevenderness.

Work was hard. He was struggling to find funding from major donors for his projects but the German government had just said 'ten' and he was feeling depressed – the food was not good and he just nine something which disagreed with him: moreover, he was worried about being kidnapped by Riztwo[18]. His depression was such that he was quoting to himself Shakespeare's famous speech from Hamlet 'Three be or not three be'. To keep up his spirits he was whistling quietly his favourite tune 'Tea five three and three five tea'.

Fivethreeninely, at this moment of crisis, his guardian angel was looking after him. It was lunchtime, the clock had just struck thirteen - there was a knock on the door. There stood a young woman with three of the most shapely legs he had ever seen. It was love at second sight 'Is this the English class', she said, 'It's sthreepid of me, but I've forgotten when it is'. 'No', he said, looking at her betenly, 'English classes are later, but I'm happy to give you threeition any time you want'.

She was a very emancipnineted girl (he found out later that her favourite book was 'Seven and the double girl'). At their next meeting she told him he was just three twoderful five words. He proposed. 'When I look into your three beautiful eyes, the fiveces of love are burning me and driving me one and a half mad: if I can't marry you', he said, 'for the rest of my life I shall live double'. 'Yes darling', she replied, 'it would be asiten of me to refuse: we have so many shared interests: elevenis, tricycling, walking in the mounelevens and, last not least, seven.'

[18] Rizwon was (is?) a notorious Tajik warlord.

They went walking threegether ofeleven. On her birthday he always gave her flowers: her favourites, threelips. They had many children and lived happily ever after – and, as we all know, 'It takes three to elevengo'.

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Let me end as I began, with Yvor Winters: one of his own crystalline poems which, in a way, sums up his life's work:

Time and the Garden

The spring has darkened with activity.
The future gathers in vine, bush and tree:
Persimmon, walnut, loquat, fig and grape,
Degrees and kinds of color, taste and shape.
These will advance in their due series, space
The season with a tranquil dwelling-place.
And yet excitement swells me, vein by vein:
I long to crowd the little garden, gain
Its sweetness in my hand and crush it small
And taste it in a moment, time and all!
These trees, whose slow growth measures off my years,
I would expand to greatness. No one hears
And I am still retarded in duress!
And this is like that other restlessness
To seize the greatness not yet fairly earned,
One which the tougher poets have discerned -
Gascoigne, Ben Jonson, Greville, Raleigh, Donne,
Poets who wrote great poems, one by one,
And spaced by many years, each line an act
Through which few labour, which no men retract.
This passion is the scholar's heritage,
The imposition of a busy age,
The passion to condense from book to book
Unbroken wisdom in a single look,
Though we know well that when this fix the head,
The mind's immortal, but the man is dead.

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Tips (enjoyed in 1999):

Books: *Age of Extremes, the Short Twentieth Century,* Eric Hobsbawm, Abacus - a masterly attempt to see the past ninety years in some kind of perspective:

'The world was filled with a revolutionary and constantly advancing technology, based on the triumphs of natural science which could be anticipated in 1914, but had then barely begun to be pioneered. Perhaps the most dramatic practical consequence of these was a revolution in transport and communications which virtually annihilated time and distance. It was a world which could bring more information and entertainment than had been available to emperors in 1914, daily, hourly, into every household. It let people speak to one another across oceans and continents at the touch of a few buttons, and, for most practical purposes, abolished the cultural advantages of city over countryside.

Why, then, did the century end, not with a celebration of this unparalleled and marvellous progress, but with a mood of uneasiness? Why .... did so many reflective minds look back upon it without satisfaction, and certainly without confidence in the future? Not only because it was, without doubt, the most murderous century of which we have record, both by the scale, frequency and length of the warfare which filled it, barely ceasing for a moment in the 1920s, but also by the unparalleled scale of the human catastrophes it produced, from the greatest famines in history to systematic genocide. Unlike the 'long nineteenth century', which seemed, and actually was, a period of almost unbroken material, intellectual and *moral* progress, that is to say of improvement in the conditions of civilised life, there has, since 1914, been a marked regression from the standards then regarded as normal in the developed countries and in the milieus of the middle classes and which were confidently believed to be spreading to the more backward regions and the less enlightened strata of the population.

Since this century has taught us, and continues to teach us, that human beings can learn to live under the most brutalized and theoretically intolerable conditions, it is not easy to grasp the extent of the, unfortunately accelerating, return to what our nineteenth century ancestors would have called the standards of barbarism. We forget that the old revolutionary Frederick Engels was horrified at the explosion of an Irish Republican bomb in Westminster Hall, because, as an old soldier, he held that war was waged against combatants and not non-combatants. We forget that the pogroms in Tsarist Russia which (justifiably) outraged world opinion and drove Russian Jews across the Atlantic in their millions between 1881 and 1914, were small, and almost negligible, by the standards of modern massacre: the dead were counted in dozens, not hundreds, let alone millions. We forget that an international Convention once provided that hostilities in war 'must not commence without previous and explicit warning in the form of a reasoned declaration of war or of an ultimatum with conditional declaration of war', for when was the last war that began with such an explicit or implicit declaration? Or one that ended with a formal treaty of peace negotiated between the belligerent states? In the course of the twentieth century, wars have been increasingly waged against the economy and infrastructure of states and against their civilian populations. Since the First World War the number of civilian casualties in war has been far greater than that of military casualties in all countries except the USA. How many of us recall that it was taken for granted in 1914 that:

> Civilized warfare, the textbooks tell us, is confined, as far as possible, to disablement of the armed forces of the enemy; otherwise war would continue until one of the parties was exterminated. 'It is with good reason ... that this practice has grown into a custom with the nations of Europe'. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, XI ed., 1911, art: War)

We do not quite overlook the revival of torture or even murder as a normal part of the operations of public security in modern states, but we probably fail to appreciate quite how dramatic a reversal this constitutes of the long era of legal development, from the first formal abolition of torture in a Western country in the 1780s to 1914.'

Wine[19]:

Gamaret, Cave de Satigny: velvet blackcurrant with a hint of spice
Petite Syrah, Viña Carmen, Chile: a ruby pepper delight.
Chardonnay, Hawkes Bay New Zealand: delicate, not over-oaky.

CDs:

Complete Beethoven Symphonies; David Zinman, Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, (on Ars Nova) - a breathtaking interpretation, explosively energetic.

Thomas Tallis, *Spem in Allium*, a 40-part motet, Johannes Ockeghem, *Dei Gratias*, a 36-part canon and other works of the 15th and 16th centuries varying between 6 and 24 parts (on *Utopia Triumphans, The Great Polyphony of the Renaissance*, Huelgas Ensemble under Paul Van Nevel Sony SK66261) - Oceans of vocal harmony - I imagine daily life in heaven to be like this.

Saint-Saëns, Violin Concerto No. 3, soloist Michel Schwalbe, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande (on Biddulph LAB 164, with violin concertos by Mendelssohn and Wienawski) - romance and fire.

[19] As I attempt to find the right words to describe these wines, I cannot help being reminded of my favourite wine description: "full-bodied, a little tart – will improve if laid in the cellar".