

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

2016

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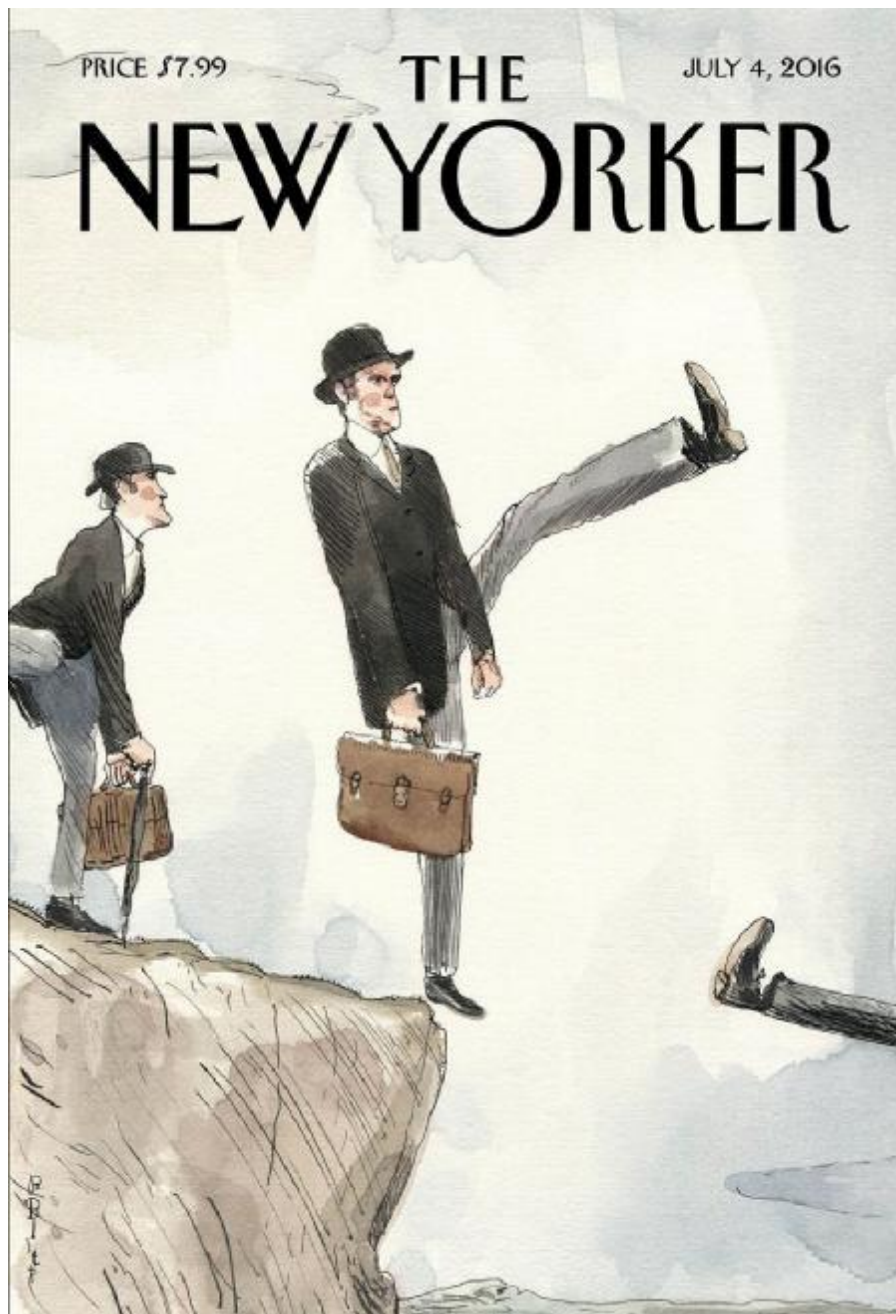
Robert Middleton

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.

After studying under Graham Storey and Frank Leavis in Cambridge, I was deeply influenced by the 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 that characterises verse for the last two hundred years is, at least in part, responsible for a breakdown in communication between writer and reader: today, 'anything goes' - much verse is obscure and, if it were not divided into lines, would be indistinguishable from prose. I share Winters' view that the late sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century was a golden age for poetry and that several 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 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. Until 2011, *Christmas Pudding* drew heavily on poetry of the 'golden age'; since then I include much modern and contemporary verse that, in my opinion, meets Winters' strict criteria. If I no longer insist on form, my criterion remains nevertheless quality of language and content - and, a new ingredient, wit.

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.



Brexit

"Polling shows that most Leavers assumed their side would lose, seeing their vote as no more than a harmless protest. Once the result was known, many told reporters or radio call-in shows that they were suffering a dreadful case of buyer's remorse, a syndrome rapidly identified as Regrexit." (Jonathan Freedland - NYRB, 18 August 2016)

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All previous editions of Christmas Pudding can be found on
<http://www.pamirs.org/Christmas-Pudding.htm>

CHRISTMAS PUDDING 2016

I have hitherto tried to avoid controversy and polemic in *CP*. However, infuriated by the unconscionable misrepresentations and outright lies peddled during the Brexit campaign,¹ the outcome of which will affect us all for years to come, I have made this Christmas Pudding with different ingredients Enjoy, nevertheless! With a nod to my readers of German mother tongue, this year's recipe also includes more ingredients for them than usual. Also, for once, there is relatively more prose than poetry in this edition - specially for those who prefer the former to the latter.² Most of the "port" offered this year is close to or on the golf curse.

T T T T

Brexit by Shakespeare

The day before: 22 June 2016:

This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.
Richard II i

The morning after: 24 June 2016:

England, bound in with the triumphant sea
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds:
That England, that was wont to conquer others,
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.
Richard II i

¹ And perhaps also by the fact that otherwise intelligent and open-minded people around me naively swallowed such half-truths and spread them further.

² My advice to all is to read a poem out loud slowly - get a feel for the poem as a whole without worrying at first about the meaning.

From now on, for the rest of us:

The cress of majesty
Dies not alone; but, like a gulf, doth draw
What's near it with it: it is a massy wheel,
Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortised and adjoin'd; which, when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boisterous ruin.

Hamlet III iii

T T T T

Seasonally Appropriate

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Blow, blow, thou winter wind
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.

Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then heigh-ho, the holly!
This life is most jolly.

Freeze, freeze thou bitter sky,
That does not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As a friend remembered not.

Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then heigh-ho, the holly!
This life is most jolly.

January - William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

Again I reply to the triple winds
running chromatic fifths of derision
outside my window:
Play louder.

You will not succeed. I am
bound more to my sentences
the more you batter at me
to follow you.
And the wind,
as before, fingers perfectly
its derisive music.

Воронеж / Voronezh - Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966)
For Osip Mandelstam (Translated by A.S. Kline)

<p>И город весь стоит оледенелый. Как под стеклом деревья, стены, снег. По хрусталям я прохожу несмело. Узорных санок так неверен бег. А над Петром воронежским — вороны, Да тополя, и свод светло-зеленый, Размытый, мутный, в солнечной пыли, И Куликовской битвой веют склоны Могучей, победительной земли. И тополя, как сдвинутые чаши, Над нами сразу зазвонят сильнее, Как будто пьют за ликование наше На брачном пире тысячи гостей. А в комнате опального поэта Дежурят страх и Муза в свой черед. И ночь идет, Которая не ведает рассвета</p>	<p>And the town is frozen solid in a vice, Trees, walls, snow, beneath a glass. Over crystal, on slippery tracks of ice, the painted sleighs and I, together, pass. And over St Peter's there are poplars, crows there's a pale green dome there that glows, dim in the sun-shrouded dust. The field of heroes lingers in my thought, Kulikovo's barbarian battleground. The frozen poplars, like glasses for a toast, clash now, more noisily, overhead. As though it was our wedding, and the crowd were drinking to our health and happiness. But Fear and the Muse take turns to guard the room where the exiled poet is banished, and the night, marching at full pace, of the coming dawn, has no knowledge.</p>
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January - John Updike (1932-2009)

The days are short,
The sun a spark,
Hung thin between
The dark and dark.

Fat snowy footsteps
Track the floor.
Milk bottles burst
Outside the door.

The river is
A frozen place
Held still beneath
The trees of lace.

The sky is low.
The wind is gray.
The radiator
Purrs all day.

Dust Of Snow - *Robert Frost (1874-1963)*

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

The sky is low, the clouds are mean,
A travelling flake of snow
Across a barn or through a rut
Debates if it will go.

A narrow wind complains all day
How some one treated him;
Nature, like us, is sometimes caught
Without her diadem.

Christmas Holidays - *Thomas Hood (1799-1845)*

Along the Woodford road there comes a noise
Of wheels, and Mr. Rounding's neat post-chaise
Struggles along, drawn by a pair of bays,
With Reverend Mr. Crow and six small boys,
Who ever and anon declare their joys
With trumping horns and juvenile huzzas,
At going home to spend their Christmas days,
And changing learning's pains for pleasure's toys.
Six weeks elapse, and down the Woodford way
A heavy coach drags six more heavy souls,
But no glad urchins shout, no trumpets bray,
The carriage makes a halt, the gate-bell tolls,
And little boys walk in as dull and mum
As six new scholars to the Deaf and Dumb!

Song For A Winter's Night³ - Gordon Lightfoot (*1938)

The lamp is burning low upon my table top,
The snow is softly falling.
The air is still in the silence of my room -
I hear your voice softly calling.
If I could only have you near
To breathe a sigh or two,
I would be happy just to hold the hands I love
On this winter night with you.

The smoke is rising in the shadows overhead
My glass is almost empty.
I read again between the lines upon each page
The words of love you sent me.
If I could know within my heart, that you were lonely too,
I would be happy just to hold the hands I love
On this winter night with you

The fire is dying now, my lamp is growing dim,
The shades of night are lifting.
The morning light steals across my windowpane
Where webs of snow are drifting.
If I could only have you near
to breathe a sigh or two,
I would be happy just to hold the hands I love
On this winter night with you -
And to be once again with you.

Christmas Eve - Amera Andersen⁴

O Christmas Eve is such a treat:
Forget the malls and things I dread,
With Candy dreams and you my sweet
The time has come to go to bed.

³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Is38naHuxjE> - well worth a visit.

⁴ I make no apology for including this rather mediocre poem, for the form (*pantoun*) is interesting and requires much skill. The *pantoun* originated in Malaysia in the fifteenth-century as a short folk poem, typically made up of two rhyming couplets that were recited or sung. However, as the *pantoun* spread, and Western writers altered and adapted the form, the importance of rhyming and brevity diminished. The modern *pantoun* is a poem of any length, composed of four-line stanzas in which the second and fourth lines of each stanza serve as the first and third lines of the next stanza. The last line of a *pantoun* is often the same as the first.

Forget the malls and things I dread
As we lay down and close our eyes
The time has come to go to bed;
Tomorrow brings a bright surprise.

As we lay down and close our eyes
I reach for you and hold your hand.
Tomorrow brings a bright surprise -
It's perfect now just as we planned

I reach for you and hold your hand
With Candy dreams and you my sweet,
It's perfect now just as we planned.
O Christmas Eve is such a treat.

T T T T

Paraprosdokians ⁵

After the *pantoum*, the *paraprosdokian*, a figure of speech in which the latter part of a sentence is unexpected. Winston Churchill loved them. Some examples:

Where there's a will, I want to be in it.

Time flies like an arrow, fruit flies like a banana.

Silence is golden, duct tape is silver.

Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.

There but for the grace of God—goes God. (Winston Churchill)

I just got lost in thought ... It was unfamiliar territory

I've reached an age when my train of thought often leaves the station without me

War does not determine who is right - only who is left

If I could just say a few words... I'd be a better public speaker. (Homer Simpson)

If I am reading this graph correctly—I'd be very surprised. (Stephen Colbert)

I've had a perfectly wonderful evening, but this wasn't it. (Groucho Marx)

I sleep eight hours a day and at least ten at night. (Bill Hicks)

If at first you don't succeed - you're fired.

On the other hand, you have different fingers. (Steven Wright)

For people who like that sort of thing it is just the sort of thing they like.
(Mary Kingsley - see below)

T T T T

⁵ With thanks to Hans-Georg Mangold. *Paraprosdokian* comes from the Greek *παρά* (against) and *προσδοκία* (expectation).

Pass the Port

The President of an American company was visiting the branch office in one of the remoter outposts of Africa. He enquired about golfing facilities from the local manager, who, he knew, was also a keen golfer and with a lower handicap than his. The manager explained that a course had recently been cut in the jungle, but that the rough was sometimes still occupied by dangerous wild animals.

When they met next day for a game, the manager was carrying a rifle in his golf bag. On the very first hole, the President's drive sliced into the trees alongside the fairway. As he went to play it, a python slithered down from one of the branches towards him, but was immediately shot by the manager. On hole number 5, as the President was about to play his ball out of the rough, a charging lion suddenly appeared, but was felled by a shot between the eyes by the quick-sighted manager.

There was no further incident until the thirteenth, when the President's ball landed in a water hazard just off the fairway. As he was about to retrieve it, a crocodile grabbed him by the leg and started to pull him into the water. "Help! Help!" he cried, calling to the manager, "Quick, shoot it!"

"Sorry, Sir," said the manager, "you don't get a shot on this hole."

T T T T

Women travellers

I recently included on my website a collection of writing on travel in Central Asia entitled *Nuggets* - see www.pamirs.org/Nuggets.pdf. One of the most entertaining and at the same time profound authors I selected was Ella Maillart (1903-1997) who crossed Central Asia at great personal risk in 1932.⁶ Here is another entertaining extract from women's travel writing.⁷

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu - (1689-1762)

When Lady Mary Worthy Montagu, a poet and satirist with a respected reputation and friends who included writers Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison, left London in 1716 to follow her husband, the ambassador to Turkey, to Constantinople, she created a scandal. Women of her social class were not to travel without their husbands, particularly to the East. But Lady Montagu, the first woman to travel abroad for curiosity's sake, spurned societal expectations to the point of changing her dress for Turkish robes and

⁶ In the company of Peter Fleming, elder brother of the author of the *James Bond* novels.

⁷ From *The Virago Book of Women Travellers*, Mary Morris ed., 1996 - with thanks to Pauline Brown.

inoculating her son and baby daughter with a vaccine presented her by a local medicine woman (seventy years before the invention of the Jenner smallpox vaccination). At 49, she again left London—and her husband—to pursue the man she loved to Italy, and although she failed in her romantic conquest, she lived the next twenty-two years on the Continent with an assortment of escorts. She did not return home to England until her husband died in 1762, and she died shortly thereafter. Her book of letters was published a year after her death.

To Lady Mar— Adrianople April 1, 1717

I wish to God (dear sister) that you was as regular in letting me have the pleasure of knowing what passes on your side of the globe as I am careful in endeavouring to amuse you by the account of all I see that I think you care to hear of. You content yourself with telling me over and over that the town is very dull. It may possibly be dull to you when every day does not present you with something new, but for me that am in arrear at least two months' news, all that seems very stale with you would be fresh and sweet here; pray let me into more particulars. I will try to awaken your gratitude by giving you a full and true relation of the novelties of this place, none of which would surprise you more than a sight of my person as I am now in my Turkish habit, though I believe you would be of my opinion that 'tis admirably becoming. I intend to send you my picture; in the meantime accept of it here.

The first piece of my dress is a pair of drawers, very full, that reach to my shoes and conceal the legs more modestly than your petticoats. They are of a thin, rose-colour damask brocaded with silver flowers, my shoes of white kid leather embroidered with gold. Over this hangs my smock of a fine white silk gauze edged with embroidery. This smock has wide sleeves hanging half-way down the arm and is closed at the neck with a diamond button, but the shape and colour of the bosom very well to be distinguished through it. The *antery* is a waistcoat made close to the shape, of white and gold damask, with very long sleeves falling back and fringed with deep gold fringe, and should have diamond or pearl buttons. My *caftan* of the same stuff with my drawers is a robe exactly fitted to my shape and reaching to my feet, with very long straight falling sleeves. Over this is the girdle of about four fingers broad, which all that can afford have entirely of diamonds or other precious stones. Those that will not be at the expense have it of exquisite embroidery on satin, but it must be fastened before with a clasp of diamonds. The *aurdee* is a loose robe they throw off or put on according to the weather, being of a rich brocade (mine is green and gold) either lined with ermine or sables; the sleeves reach very little below the shoulders. The head-dress is composed of a cap called *talpack*, which is in winter of fine velvet embroidered with pearls

or diamonds and in summer of a light, shining silver stuff. This is fixed on one side of the head, hanging a little way down with a gold tassel and bound on either side with a circle of diamonds (as I have seen several) or a rich embroidered handkerchief. On the other side of the head the hair is laid flat, and here the ladies are at liberty to show their fancies, some putting flowers, others a plume of heron's feathers, and in short what they please, but the most general fashion is a large bouquet of jewels made like natural flowers, that is the buds of pearl, the roses of different coloured rubies, the jasmines of diamonds, jonquils of topazes, etc., so well set and enamelled 'tis hard to imagine anything of that kind so beautiful. The hair hangs at its full length behind, divided into tresses braided with pearl or riband, which is always in great quantity.

I never saw in my life so many fine heads of hair. I have counted one hundred and ten of these tresses of one lady's, all natural; but it must be owned that every beauty is more common here than with us. 'Tis surprising to see a young woman that is not very handsome. They have naturally the most beautiful complexions in the world and generally large black eyes. I can assure you with great truth that the Court of England (though I believe it the fairest in Christendom) cannot show so many beauties as are under our protection here. They generally shape their eyebrows, and the Greeks and Turks have a custom of putting round their eyes on the inside a black tincture that, at a distance or by candlelight, adds very much to the blackness of them. I fancy many of our ladies would be overjoyed to know this secret, but 'tis too visible by day. They dye their nails rose colour; I own I cannot enough accustom myself to this fashion to find any beauty in it.

As to their morality or good conduct, I can say like Harlequin, "'Tis just as 'tis with you"; and the Turkish ladies don't commit one sin the less for not being Christians. Now I am a little acquainted with their ways, I cannot forbear admiring either the exemplary discretion or extreme stupidity of all the writers that have given accounts of 'em. 'Tis very easy to see they have more liberty than we have, no woman of what rank soever being permitted to go in the streets without two muslins, one that covers her face all but her eyes and another that hides the whole dress of her head and hangs half-way down her back; and their shapes are wholly concealed by a thing they call a *ferigée*, which no woman of any sort appears without. This has strait sleeves that reach to their fingers' ends and it laps all round 'em, not unlike a riding hood. In winter 'tis of cloth, and in summer, plain stuff or silk. You may guess how effectually this disguises them, that there is no distinguishing the great lady from her slave, and 'tis impossible for the most jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her, and no man dare either touch or follow a woman in the street.

This perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery. The most usual method of intrigue is to send an appointment to the lover to meet the lady at a Jew's shop, which are as notoriously convenient as our Indian houses, and yet even those that don't make that use of 'em do not scruple to go to buy penn'orths and tumble over rich goods, which are chiefly to be found amongst that sort of people. The great ladies seldom let their gallants know who they are, and 'tis so difficult to find it out that they can very seldom guess at her name they have corresponded with above half a year together. You may easily imagine the number of faithful wives very small in a country where they have nothing to fear from their lovers' indiscretion, since we see so many that have the courage to expose themselves to that in this world and all the threatened punishment of the next, which is never preached to the Turkish damsels. Neither have they much to apprehend from the resentment of their husbands, those ladies that are rich having all their money in their own hands, which they take with 'em upon a divorce with an addition which he is obliged to give 'em. Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire. The very Divan pays a respect to 'em, and the Grand Signior himself, when a Pasha is executed, never violates the privilege of the harem (or women's apartment) which remains unsearched entire to the widow. They are queens of their slaves, which the husband has no permission so much as to look upon, except it be an old woman or two that his lady chooses. 'Tis true their law permits them four wives, but there is no instance of a man of quality that makes use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer it. When a husband happens to be inconstant (as those things will happen) he keeps his mistress in a house apart and visits her as privately as he can, just as 'tis with you. Amongst all the great men here I only know the *defterdar* (i.e., treasurer) that keeps a number of she slaves for his own use (that is, on his own side of the house, for a slave once given to serve a lady is entirely at her disposal), and he is spoke of as a libertine, or what we should call a rake, and his wife won't see him, though she continues to live in his house.

Thus you see, dear sister, the manners of mankind do not differ so widely as our voyage writers would make us believe. Perhaps it would be more entertaining to add a few surprising customs of my own invention, but nothing seems to me so agreeable as truth, and I believe nothing so acceptable to you. I conclude with repeating the great truth of my being, dear sister, etc.

T T T T

Marriage

Sonnet 106 - William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no; it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.



*"No, but I do think there should be a law
against no-sex marriages."*



*"I'm leaving you for someone who does care what
we have for dinner"*



"You have irritable-spouse syndrome"



"For emergency use only."

T T T T

More seasonally appropriate

Excelsior - *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)*

The shades of night were falling fast,
As through an Alpine village passed
A youth, who bore, 'mid snow and ice,
A banner with the strange device,
Excelsior

His brow was sad; his eye beneath,
Flashed like a falchion from its sheath,
And like a silver clarion rung
The accents of that unknown tongue,
Excelsior!

In happy homes he saw the light
Of household fires gleam warm and bright;
Above, the spectral glaciers shone,
And from his lips escaped a groan,
Excelsior

"Try not the Pass!" the old man said:
"Dark lowers the tempest overhead,
The roaring torrent is deep and wide!
And loud that clarion voice replied,
Excelsior!

"Oh stay," the maiden said, "and rest
Thy weary head upon this breast!"
A tear stood in his bright blue eye,
But still he answered, with a sigh,
Excelsior!

"Beware the pine-tree's withered branch!
Beware the awful avalanche!"
This was the peasant's last Good-night,
A voice replied, far up the height,
Excelsior!

At break of day, as heavenward
The pious monks of Saint Bernard
Uttered the oft-repeated prayer,
A voice cried through the startled air,
Excelsior!

A traveller, by the faithful hound,
 Half-buried in the snow was found,
 Still grasping in his hand of ice
 That banner with the strange device,
Excelsior!

There in the twilight cold and gray,
 Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay,
 And from the sky, serene and far,
 A voice fell, like a falling star,
Excelsior!

This seasonally appropriate poem from 1841 is so excruciatingly trite that it has often been parodied. Perhaps the funniest is by *Marriott Edgar (1880-1951)* of whom more later. I included his famous "Albert and the Lion" in *CP 2004* (see illustration right).



Uppards

'Twere getting dusk, one winter's night,
 When up the clough there came in sight,
 A lad who carried through the snow,
 A banner with this 'ere motto...
'Uppards'

His face was glum as he did pass,
 His eyes were shiny... just like glass,
 And as he went upon his way,
 He nobbut this 'ere word did say...
'Uppards'

And people sitting down to tea,
 They heard him plain, as plain can be,
 They thowt 'twere final football score,
 As this 'ere word rang out once more...
'Uppards'

A policeman on his lonely beat,
 He stopped the lad up t' end of t' street,
 He said, "Where't going wi' that theer?"
 The lad just whispered in his ear...
'Uppards'

"Don't go down t' clough." the policeman said,
"It's mucky road for thee to tread,
Canal's at bottom... deep and wide."
"That's not my road." the lad replied,
It's... '*Uppards*'

A young lass stopped him further up,
She said "Come in wi' me, and sup."
He said, "I'm takin none o' yon,
Besides... I must be getting on...
'*Uppards*'"

Next day some lads had just begun,
To tak' their whippets for a run,
When dogs got scratching in the snow,
And found flag with this 'ere motto...
'*Uppards*'

That set them digging all around,
And 'twasn't long before they found,
A lad whose name they never learned,
Whose face was white, whose toes had turned...
'*Uppards*'

'Twas very plain for to behold,
The lad had ta'en his death o' cold,
He'd got his feet wet early on,
And from his feet the cold had gone...
'*Uppards*'

This story only goes to show,
That when the fields is white wi' snow,
It's inadvisable to go...
'*Uppards*'

Here is a version by *A.E. Housman (1859-1936)*.

Excelsior: the Shades of Night
The shades of night were falling fast
And the rain was falling faster,
When through an Alpine village passed
An Alpine village pastor;
A youth who bore mid snow and ice
A bird that wouldn't chirrup,
And a banner, with the strange device —

'Mrs. Winslow's soothing syrup'.

"Beware the pass," the old man said,
"My bold and desperate fellah;
Dark lowers the tempest overhead,
And you'll want your umbrella;
And the roaring torrent is deep and wide —
You may hear how it washes."
But still that clarion voice replied:
"I've got my old goloshes."

"Oh stay," the maiden said, "and rest
(For the wind blows from the nor'ward)
Thy weary head upon my breast —
And please don't think me forward."
A tear stood in his bright blue eye
And gladly he would have tarried;
But still he answered with a sigh:
"Unhappily I'm married."

Bret Harte (1836-1902) wrote yet another:

The shades of night were falling fast,
As through an Eastern village passed
A youth who bore, through dust and heat,
A stencil-plate, that read complete--"Sapolio."⁸
Clean paint, oil cloths, floors, wood work, tables & shelves with Sapolio.

His brow was sad, but underneath,
White with "Odonto" shone his teeth,
And through them hissed the words, "Well, blow
Me tight if here is 'ary show!" "Sapolio."
Wash dishes, porcelain, china & glass ware with Sapolio.

On household fences, gleaming bright,
Shone "Gargling Oil," in black and white,
Once "Bixby's Blacking" stood alone,
He straight beside it clapped his own--"Sapolio."
Polish milk cans & pans and all kinds of tin ware with Sapolio.

"Try not my fence," the old man said,
"With 'Mustang Liniment' 'tis spread,

⁸ *Sapolio* was a brand of soap for which Bret Harte wrote jingles. See Project Gutenberg (http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/24019?msg=welcome_stranger).

Another vacant spot thar aint."
 He answered with a dash of paint--"Sapolio."
Clean steel knives & forks and all metallic tools and utensils with Sapolio.

"O, stay," the maiden said, "A rest
 Pray give us! What with 'Bixby's Best,'
 And 'Simmons' Pills,' we're like to die."
 He only answered, "Will you try--Sapolio?"
Clean bath tubs, wash basins and sinks with Sapolio.



"Beware them peaks! That wall so
 bright
 Is but a snow bank, gleaming white,
 Your paint won't stick!" Came the
 reply,
 "I've done it! How is that for high?"
 "Sapolio."
*Scour pots, kettles, pans & all brass &
 copper utensils with Sapolio.*

One Sabbath morn, as heavenward
 White Mountain tourists slowly spurred,
 On ev'ry rock, to their dismay,
 They read that legend strange, alway--"Sapolio"
Clean glass ware, windows, porcelain & china wares with Sapolio.

There on the summit, old and fat,
 Shameless, but vigorous, he sat,
 While on their luggage as they passed,
 He checked that word, from first to last, "Sapolio."
Clean marble tables, floors, statuary and hard finished walls with Sapolio.

Despite *Excelsior*, Longfellow did write some passable poetry - witness the fine onomatopoeia of lines four to six of the first and the "slowly in silent syllables ..." in the final stanza of the poem below.

Snow-Flakes - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
 Out of the bosom of the Air
 Out of the cloud-folds of her garments shaken,
 Over the woodlands brown and bare,
 Over the harvest-fields forsaken,
 Silent, and soft, and slow
 Descends the snow.

Even as our cloudy fancies take

Suddenly shape in some divine expression,
Even as the troubled heart doth make
In the white countenance confession
The troubled sky reveals
The grief it feels.

This is the poem of the air,
Slowly in silent syllables recorded;
This is the secret of despair,
Long in its cloudy bosom hoarded,
Now whispered and revealed
To wood and field.

T T T T

Euromyths

Anti-EU prejudices have been deliberately and irresponsibly stoked by the popular newspapers for more than 20 years, most flagrantly by those owned by Rupert Murdoch.⁹ The truth was not far to seek but the misrepresentation and propaganda had been going on for far too long.

If any proof was needed not only of the low level of information provided by the best-selling British newspapers, but also their peddling of outright propaganda, it was provided by what the European Commission describes as Euromyths on its UK website <http://blogs.ec.europa.eu/ECintheUK/>, but, when mouthed by opportunistic politicians, would more appropriately be called EuroLies.

Here are some samples from the above website:

Myth: Clampdown on off-licences (*The Sun*, 21 February 2005)

EU health chiefs are drawing up plans to close thousands of British off-licences... The proposal is said to be part of a drive to curb alcohol abuse across Europe. Other measures include a Monday to Friday ban on off-sales and huge booze price hikes through tax rises. A blueprint masterminded by EU health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou also contains moves to control sales through a state-run monopoly...

Truth: The EU has no plans, nor secret documents proposing to clamp down on off licenses by closing them or banning Monday-Friday sales. The EU does not have, nor does it seek, the power to propose such measures

⁹ To understand the abuse of press power by Rupert Murdoch in the UK I highly recommend *Dial M for Murdoch* by Tom Watson and Martin Hickman, Allen Lane London, 2012.

which are a matter for national governments. At the request of all EU health ministers, including the UK's, the EU is looking into ways to reduce the harm caused by excessive consumption of alcohol, particularly among young people. The document referred to in these articles is a working paper, not adopted by the Commission, which seeks to draw views from the drinks industry and European countries (including the UK) on possible ways to combat excessive drinking. It contains a review of measures in place in different member states.

Myth: Curved bananas have been banned by Brussels bureaucrats, with shops ordered not to sell fruit which is too small or abnormally bent.

Sources: *The Sun, Daily Mirror, Daily Mail, Daily Express (21 September 1994)*

Truth: Yes ... and no. Curved bananas have not been banned. In fact, as with the supposed banning of curved cucumbers, the Commission regulation classifies bananas according to quality and size for the sake of easing the trade of bananas internationally.

Quality standards are necessary in order that people buying and ordering bananas can rest assured that what they are getting lives up to their expectations. Individual EU member states have tended to have their own standards, as has the industry (whose standards are often very stringent). The European Commission was asked by the Council of Ministers and the industry to prepare a draft regulation laying down EU quality standards, and this has been the subject of consultation for some time now. As such it represents a consensus position.

Myth: Hands off our barmaids' boobs (*The Sun, 4 August 2005*)

The EU has declared a crackpot war on busty barmaids – by trying to ban them from wearing low-cut tops. Po-faced penpushers have deemed it a HEALTH HAZARD for bar girls to show too much cleavage. And in a daft directive that will have drinkers choking on their pints, Brussels bureaucrats have ordered a cover-up. They say barmaids run a skin cancer risk if they expose themselves to the sun when they go outside to collect glasses. Last night the move was blasted as an affront. Annie Powell, of real ale group Camra, raged: “It’s just another blatant example of Europe gone mad.”

Truth: New EU rules on optical radiation, due to be voted on by ministers and MEPS (including those from the UK) in September 2005, do not tell people what they can wear, or ban low-cut tops or, heaven forbid, dirndls. They instead require bosses to assess the risk of skin and retina damage for employees who work in the sun all day. This is a pressing concern, given that in the UK alone there are 69,000 new cases of skin cancer diagnosed

each year. How the risk to employees will be assessed, and what measures should be taken if there is deemed to be one, will be decided at local level – in the UK by the Health and Safety Executive. Of course, bar managers can always use their common sense by handing out sun cream.

Myth: Ban our beaches

A recent *Daily Mail* article (14 April 2014) widely copied and circulated in social media, claimed “EU to ban our beaches” adding that “dozens of British beaches will be off-limits for swimmers”.

Truth: There are numerous inaccuracies in this article:

1. the EU does not “ban” beaches
2. EU laws do not prevent anyone from swimming anywhere
3. there are no new bathing water laws, but, above all, this is a classic case of shooting the messenger. The main recent change in EU bathing water law (agreed, as usual, by the UK government) is that it now gives a truer picture of the long-term quality of the water. If a problem is found with that quality, the problem does not lie in EU law – it lies quite simply in the quality of the water. People have a right to make informed decisions around that quality.

As can be seen from the above examples, among the most frequent butts of anti-EU bias were EU technical directives, in the drafting of some of which I was personally involved from 1964-1971. The fact that their object is to facilitate trade by harmonising and/or codifying national practices and that they are developed by intergovernmental working groups or private international standards bodies such as the Comité Européen de Normalisation and the International Standards Organisation was deliberately obfuscated. These are not faceless entities but agencies in which the UK has always played a full and active part. The faceless entities are those British ministries that did not attempt to put the record straight for the British public and the unaccountable newspaper editors who swayed public opinion with their propaganda.

T T T T

More women travellers - Mary Kingsley (1862-1900)

With her delightful sense of humour, Mary Kingsley experiences a range of hair-raising situations: Crocodiles pawing the gunnels of her riverboats, leopards face to face ("I can confidently say I am not afraid of any wild animal—until I see it—and then—well I will yield to nobody in terror"), and remnants of cannibalism "the hand was fresh, the others only so so"). Once she fell into an animal trap with twelve-inch spikes ("It is at these moments you realize the blessings of a good thick skirt").

The following excerpt tells of two separate experiences; the first as she began to work her way above the tide line of the Ogowé River and the second en route to another river; the Rembwé. Kingsley spent her early life caring for her ailing family like a good, dutiful Victorian daughter. In 1892, when she was 50, her parents died within six weeks of one another. The next year she went to West Africa for six months. She returned in 1894 and stayed a year, working as a trader and gathering fish and fetishes. Kingsley volunteered as a nurse during the Boer War but died shortly after arriving in South Africa.

I should like here to speak of West Coast dangers because I fear you may think that I am careless of, or do not believe in them, neither of which is the case. The more you know of the West Coast of Africa, the more you realise its dangers. For example, on your first voyage out you hardly believe the stories of fever told by the old Coasters. That is because you do not then understand the type of man who is telling them, a man who goes to his death with a joke in his teeth. But a short experience of your own, particularly if you happen on a place having one of its periodic epidemics, soon demonstrates that the underlying horror of the thing is there, a rotting corpse which the old Coaster has dusted over with jokes to cover it so that it hardly shows at a distance, but which, when you come yourself to live alongside, you soon become cognisant of. Many men, when they have got ashore and settled, realise this, and let the horror get a grip on them; a state briefly and local! described as funk, and a state that usually ends fatally; and you can hardly blame them. Why, I know of a case myself. A young man who had never been outside an English country town before in his life, from family reverses had to take a situation as book-keeper down in the Bights. The factory he was going to was in an isolated out-of-the-way place and not in a settlement, and when the ship called off it, he was put ashore in one of the ship's boats with his belongings, and a case or so of goods. There were only the Arm's beach-boys down at the surf, and as the steamer was in a hurry the officer from the ship did not go up to the factory with him, but said good-bye and left him alone with a set of naked savages as he thought, but really of good kindly Kru boys on the beach. He could not understand what they said, nor they what he said, and so he walked up to the house and on to the verandah and tried to find the Agent he had come out to serve under. He looked into the open-ended dining-room and shyly round the verandah, and then sat down and waited for some one to turn up. Sundry natives turned up, and said a good deal, but no one white or comprehensible, so in desperation he made another and a bolder tour completely round the verandah and noticed a most peculiar noise in one of the rooms and an infinity of flies going into the Venetian shuttered window. Plucking up courage he went in and found what was left of the white Agent, a considerable quantity of rats, and most of the flies in West Africa. He then

presumably had fever, and he was taken off, a fortnight afterwards, by a French boat, to whom the natives signalled, and he is not coming down the Coast again. Some men would have died right out from a shock like this.

But most of the new-comers do not get a shock of this order. They either die themselves or get more gradually accustomed to this sort of thing, when they come to regard death and fever as soldiers, who on a battle-field sit down, and laugh and talk round a camp fire after a day's hard battle, in which they have seen their friends and companions falling round them; all the time knowing that to-morrow their battle comes again and that to-morrow night they themselves may never see. It is not hard-hearted callousness, it is only their way. Michael Scott put this well in Tom Cringle's Log, in his account of the yellow fever during the war in the West Indies. Fever, though the chief danger, particularly to people who go out to settlements, is not the only one, but as the other dangers, except perhaps domestic poisoning, are incidental to pottering about in the forests, or on the rivers, among the unsophisticated tribes, I will not dwell on them. They can all be avoided by any one with common sense, by keeping well out of the districts in which they occur; and so I warn the general reader that if he goes out to West Africa, it is not because I said the place was safe, or its dangers overrated. The cemeteries of the West Coast are full of the victims of those people who have said that Coast fever is "Cork fever," and a man's own fault, which it is not; and that natives will never attack you unless you attack them: which they will—on occasions.

My main aim in going to Congo Français was to get up above the tide line of the Ogowé River and there collect fishes; for my object on this voyage was to collect fish from a river north of the Congo. I had hoped this river would have been the Niger, for Sir George Goldie had placed at my disposal great facilities for carrying on work there in comfort; but for certain private reasons I was disinclined to go from the Royal Niger Protectorate into the Royal Niger Company's territory; and the Calabar, where Sir Claude MacDonald did everything he possibly could to assist me, I did not find a good river for me to collect fishes in. These two rivers failing me, from no fault of either of their own presiding genii, my only hope of doing anything now lay on the South West Coast river, the Ogowe, and everything there depended on Mr. Hudson's attitude towards scientific research in the domain of ichthyology. Fortunately for me that gentleman elected to take a favourable view of this affair, and in every way in his power assisted me during my entire stay in Congo Français. But before I enter into a detailed description of this wonderful bit of West Africa, I must give you a brief notice of the manners, habits and customs of West Coast rivers in general, to make the thing more intelligible.

There is an uniformity in the habits of West Coast rivers, from the Volta to the Coanza, which is, when you get used to it, very taking. Excepting the Congo, the really great river comes out to sea with as much mystery as possible; lounging lazily along among its mangrove swamps in a what's-it-matter when-one-comes-out and where's-the hurry style, through quantities of channels inter-communicating with each other. Each channel, at first sight as like the other as peas in a pod, is bordered on either side by green-black walls of mangroves, which Captain Lugard graphically described as seeming "as if they had lost all count of the vegetable proprieties, and were standing on stilts with their branches tucked up out of the wet, leaving their gaunt roots exposed in mid-air." High-tide or low-tide, there is little difference in the water; the river, be it broad or narrow, deep or shallow, looks like a pathway of polished metal; for it is as heavy weighted with stinking mud as water e'er can be, ebb or flow, year out and year in. But the difference in the banks, though an unending alternation between two appearances, is weird.

At high-water you do not see the mangroves displaying their ankles in the way that shocked Captain Lugard. They look most respectable, their foliage rising densely in a wall irregularly striped here and there by the white line of an aërial root, coming straight down into the water from some upper branch as straight as a plummet, in the strange, knowing way an aërial root of a mangrove does, keeping the hard straight line until it gets some two feet above water-level, and then spreading out into blunt fingers with which to dip into the water and grasp the mud. Banks indeed at high water can hardly be said to exist, the water stretching away into the mangrove swamps for miles and miles, and you can then go, in a suitable small canoe, away among these swamps as far as you please.

This is a fascinating pursuit. For people who like that sort of thing it is just the sort of thing they like, as the art critic of a provincial town wisely observed anent an impressionist picture recently acquired for the municipal gallery. But it is a pleasure to be indulged in with caution; for one thing, you are certain to come across crocodiles. Now a crocodile drifting down in deep water, or lying asleep with its jaws open on a land-bank in the sun, is a picturesque adornment to the landscape when you are on the deck of a steamer, and you can write home about it and frighten your relations on your behalf, but when you are away among the swamps in a small dug-out canoe, and that crocodile and his relations are awake—a thing he makes a point of being at flood tide because of fish coming along—and when he has got his foot upon his native heath—that is to say, his tail within holding reach of his native mud—he is highly interesting, and you may not be able to write home about him—and you get frightened on your own behalf. For crocodiles can, and often do, in such places, grab at people in small canoes. I

have known of several natives losing their lives in this way; some native villages are approachable from the main river by a short cut, as it were, through the mangrove swamps, and the inhabitants of such villages will now and then go across this way with small canoes instead of by the constant channel to the village, which is almost always winding. In addition to this unpleasantness you are liable—until you realise the danger from experience, or have native advice on the point—to get tide-trapped away in the swamps, the water falling round you when you are away in some deep pool or lagoon, and you find you cannot get back to the main river. For you cannot get out and drag your canoe across the stretches of mud that separate you from it, because the mud is of too unstable a nature and too deep, and sinking into it means staying in it, at any rate until some geologist of the remote future may come across you, in a fossilised state, when that mangrove swamp shall have become dry land. Of course if you really want a truly safe investment in Fame, and really care about Posterity, and Posterity's Science, you will jump over into the black batter-like, stinking slime, cheered by the thought of the terrific sensation you will produce 20,000 years hence, and the care you will be taken of then by your fellow-creatures, in a museum. But if you are a mere ordinary person of a retiring nature, like me, you stop in your lagoon until the tide rises again; most of your attention is directed to dealing with an "at home" to crocodiles and mangrove flies, and with the fearful stench of the slime round you. What little time you have over you will employ in wondering why you came to West Africa, and why, after having reached this point of absurdity, you need have gone and painted the lily and adorned the rose, by being such a colossal ass as to come fooling about in mangrove swamps. Twice this chatty little incident, as Lady MacDonald would call it, has happened to me, but never again if I can help it. On one occasion, the last, a mighty Silurian, as *The Daily Telegraph* would call him, chose to get his front paws over the stem of my canoe, and endeavoured to improve our acquaintance. I had to retire to the bows, to keep the balance right, and fetch him a clip on the snout with a paddle, when he withdrew, and I paddled into the very middle of the lagoon, hoping the water there was too deep for him or any of his friends to repeat the performance. Presumably it was, for no one did it again. I should think that crocodile was eight feet long; but don't go and say I measured him, or that this is my outside measurement for crocodiles. I have measured them when they have been killed by other people, fifteen, eighteen, and twenty-one feet odd. This was only a pushing young creature who had not learnt manners.

T T T T

One-liners

Related to *paraprosdokians* (see above) are so-called "one-liners". Many of the best come from golf.

Golfer: "Well Caddy, How do you like my game?" Caddy: "Very good, Sir! But personally I prefer Golf."

Golfer: "Well, I have never played this badly before! Caddy: "I didn't realize you had played before, Sir."

Golfer: "I'd move heaven and earth to be able to break 100 on this course," Caddy: "Try heaven - you've already moved most of the earth."

Golfer: "This is the worst golf course I've ever played on!" Caddy: "This isn't the golf course, sir! We left that an hour ago!"

Golfer: "Caddy, Do you think my game is improving? Caddy: "Oh yes, Sir! You miss the ball much closer than you used to."

Golfer: "Caddy, do you think it is a sin to play golf on Sunday? Caddy: "The way you play, Sir, its a crime any day of the week!"

Golfer: "This golf is a funny game." Caddy: "It's not supposed to be."

Golfer: "That can't be my ball, caddie. It looks far too old." Caddy: "It's a long time since we started, sir."

Golfer: "Do you think I can get there with a 5-iron?" Caddy: "Eventually."

Golfer: "You've got to be the worst caddy in the world!" he screamed." Caddy: "I doubt it, that would-be too much of a coincidence"

Golfer: "I've played so poorly all day; I think I'm going to go drown myself in that lake." Caddy: "I don't think you could keep your head down that long."

T T T T

More Brexit Myths



Truth: (*The Guardian* 14 August 2016) "Matthew Elliott, Leave's supreme director confirm[ed] with a smirk that the supposed £350m heading to Brussels each week was big on the side of the bus because it stirred up controversy over the cost of the EU rather than representing any kind of

objective truth about future NHS funding. Oh! And the battle bus itself was deliberately painted red to confuse Labour voters who didn't know which side their party was on."

Moreover, Conservative MP Sarah Wollaston defected to the remain camp because of this unsubstantiated claim; the UK Statistics Authority, that at first described it as "potentially misleading", later said it was "misleading" plain and simple; and for the respected Institute for Fiscal Studies, it was "absurd".

T T T T

Pass the Port again

Three ladies were playing golf on a sunny afternoon. As they approached hole number 4, they noticed a man sunbathing, totally naked, fast asleep on the side of a bunker, with a newspaper over his face.

The first lady went up to have a look: "Thank God, it's not my husband," she said.

The second lady went up: "Yes, you're right, it's not your husband."

The third lady went up: "Thank God, it's not a club member."

T T T T

Lies, Damned Lies and Boris Johnson

"Boris Johnson peddled lies, half-truths and evasions. Now he's paid the price" - Sonia Purnell¹⁰ - *The Guardian* 1 July 2016.



It's not surprising Johnson hasn't entered the race for No 10. But until now he's covered his tracks with bluster and buffoonery.

The striking thing about Boris Johnson's betrayal of his own leadership campaign was his palpable sense of relief. Running, as he intended, would have allowed him a tilt at No 10 and his life's ambition. But the spotlight en route would have been unremittingly harsh. Too harsh for a man whose public life as we know it has been an amalgam of lies, half truths and evasions.

Remember when the then London mayor had to retract evidence given to a House of Commons select committee about his actions over the arrest of fellow Tory Damian Green in 2008? Well, you

¹⁰ Sonia Purnell is the author of *Just Boris – A Tale Of Blond Ambition*.

probably don't, because when it came to public attention he rang the committee chairman, Keith Vaz, and showered him with four-letter abuse and everyone wrote about that instead. Good ol' Boris!

Or how about that time he denied conducting an extramarital affair with Petronella Wyatt by branding the idea an "inverted pyramid of piffle"? He had, of course, dallied with her for years, but by coming up with such an eye-catching phrase, he was widely forgiven.

Deception from the outset. He was sacked from his first job in journalism at the Times for making up quotes before walking straight into a job at the Daily Telegraph, where his talent was recognised and his foibles indulged.

This allowed him to peddle stories from his posting to Brussels that began as embellishments or exaggerations about the EU, but in the end became simply gross distortions. As a distinguished fellow correspondent from another newspaper, sickened by Johnson's antics, wrote mockingly afterwards: "Boris told such dreadful lies/ It made one gasp and stretch one's eyes." It is all part of the Johnsonian creed that it is, in his own words, acceptable, sometimes desirable to lie.

By the time he returned to London after five years in Brussels his credibility among his peers was shot, but he was now a star back home and intent on a political career – in the first instance in the European parliament.

Appalled by his disregard of the truth in Brussels, Tory MEPs tried to block him from seeking a seat. Such was the row that Johnson agreed a compromise by vowing not to go for a safe seat. It's a misunderstanding, he said, when challenged as to why his name was found on the list for a plum constituency.

Soon afterwards, at just 35, Johnson was offered the Spectator editorship on condition that he abandon thoughts of entering politics. Yet within two months his name was down for two more constituencies.

All good fun, but not so much in Oxfordshire when Johnson unexpectedly beat the highly favoured David Platt to become Tory candidate for the desirable seat of Henley. Anonymous letters were distributed, wrongly suggesting Platt was unpatriotically sympathetic to Europe and also gay (when to be so was a career-ender in conservative politics). Platt's girlfriend of the time was dismissed as "window dressing". Meanwhile, photographs were quietly circulated of the proudly hetero Johnson with his wife, Marina, in a maternity ward with a newborn baby. The identity of Johnson's mystery helper was never established, nor was any connection to Johnson himself. But the beneficial effect was all too clear.

As mayor, he honed a new technique – the decoy insult. Caught making false

claims about the success, or more usually failure, of one of his initiatives or cuts in police staffing, he would regularly light up mayor's question time with a volley of name-calling. His critics were variously Labour stooges, snivelling, illiterate or care in the community.

He is standard bearer for a new kind of politics. Last weekend one of his most fervent media supporters told the Today programme – in all apparent seriousness – that “people want to be lied to.” It is all part of the Johnsonian creed that it is, in his own words, acceptable, sometimes desirable to lie. Certainly that approach has been advantageous to him. But it must come at a price. Johnson paid it yesterday [*Ed* withdrawal of candidacy to become PM].

T T T T

Bad poetry

On the subject of excruciatingly awful poems, readers may recall that *CP 2005* included some examples of bad poetry, of which the star was undoubtedly the Scotsman *William Topaz McGonagall (1825-1902)*. His work rarely scans and is so unrelievedly awful that it is actually funny. My favourite lines are:

On yonder hill there stands a coo,
If it's no' there, it's awa' noo.

Here is another gem:

A Christmas Carol

Welcome, sweet Christmas, blest be the morn
That Christ our Saviour was born!
Earth's Redeemer, to save us from all danger,
And, as the Holy Record tells, born in a manger.

The snow was on the ground when Christ was born,
And the Virgin Mary His mother felt very forlorn
As she lay in a horse's stall at a roadside inn,
Till Christ our Saviour was born to free us from sin.

The way to respect Christmas time
Is not by drinking whisky or wine,
But to sing praises to God on Christmas morn,
The time that Jesus Christ His Son was born;

Therefore, good people, be warned in time,
And on Christmas morn don't get drunk with wine
But praise God above on Christmas morn,
Who sent His Son to save us from hell and scorn.

There the heavenly babe He lay
In a stall among a lot of hay,
While the Angel Host by Bethlehem
Sang a beautiful and heavenly anthem.

Christmas time ought to be held most dear,
Much more so than the New Year,
Because that's the time that Christ was born,
Therefore respect Christmas morn.

T T T T

Pass the Port yet again

Earlier this year I was elected Syndic (mayor) of my community. The following is apposite:

The Syndic and the Vicar were travelling together by car to a civic ceremony. On the way, they were involved in a head-on collision with an overtaking car. Both died instantly.

On arrival in heaven they were welcomed by St. Peter's assistant who suggested showing the Vicar to his room before processing the Syndic.

They went down in the lift to the seventeenth basement where the vicar was installed in small spartan room. The Syndic was then shown to a spacious apartment on the 34th floor with wide views of the heavenly meadows.

"Isn't there some mistake?" asked the Syndic. "No," said the assistant, "we have thousands of vicars, but you are the first Syndic here."

T T T T

Weitere Wintergedichte

Advent - *Erich Kästner (1899-1974)*

Das Jahr ward alt. Hat dünnes Haar.
Ist gar nicht sehr gesund.
Kennt seinen letzten Tag, das Jahr.
Kennt gar die letzte Stund.

Ist viel geschehn. Ward viel versäumt.
Ruht beides unterm Schnee.
Weiss liegt die Welt, wie hingeträumt.
Und Wehmut tut halt weh.

Noch wächst der Mond. Noch schmilzt er hin.
Nichts bleibt. Und nichts vergeht.
Ist alles Wahn. Hat alles Sinn.
Nützt nichts, dass man's versteht.

Und wieder stapft der Nikolaus
durch jeden Kindertraum.
Und wieder blüht in jedem Haus
der goldengrüne Baum.

Warst auch ein Kind. Hast selbst gefühlt,
wie hold Christbäume blühen.
Hast nun den Weihnachtsmann gespielt
und glaubst nicht mehr an ihn.

Bald trifft das Jahr der zwölfte Schlag.
Dann dröhnt das Erz und spricht:
"Das Jahr kennt seinen letzten Tag,
und du kennst deinen nicht."

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

Es treibt der Wind im Winterwalde
die Flockenherde wie ein Hirt
und manche Tanne ahnt wie balde
sie fromm und lichterheilig wird.
Und lauscht hinaus: den weissen Wegen
streckt sie die Zweige hin - bereit
und wehrt dem Wind und wächst entgegen
der einen Nacht der Herrlichkeit.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Die hohen Tannen atmen heiser
im Winterschnee, und bauschiger
schmiegt sich sein Glanz um alle Reiser.
Die weissen Wege werden leiser,
die trauten Stuben lauschiger.

Da singt die Uhr, die Kinder zittern:
Im grünen Ofen kracht ein Scheit
und stürzt in lichten Lohgewittern, -
und draussen wächst im Flockenflittern
der weisse Tag zur Ewigkeit.

Erich Kästner

Morgen, Kinder, wird's nichts geben!
Nur wer hat, kriegt noch geschenkt.
Mutter schenkte euch das Leben.
Das genügt, wenn man's bedenkt.

Einmal kommt auch Eure Zeit.
 Morgen ist's noch nicht so weit.
 Doch ihr dürft nicht traurig werden,
 Reiche haben Armut gern.
 Gänsebraten macht Beschwerden,
 Puppen sind nicht mehr modern.
 Morgen kommt der Weihnachtsmann.
 Allerdings nur nebenan.
 Lauft ein bisschen durch die Strassen!
 Dort gibt's Weihnachtsfest genug.
 Christentum, vom Turm geblasen,
 macht die kleinsten Kinder klug.
 Kopf gut schütteln vor Gebrauch!
 Ohne Christbaum geht es auch.
 Tannengrün mit Osrambirnen -
 lernt drauf pfeifen! Werdet stolz!
 Reisst die Bretter von den Stirnen,
 denn im Ofen fehlt's an Holz!
 Stille Nacht und heilige Nacht -
 Weint, wenn's geht, nicht! Sondern lacht!
 Morgen, Kinder, wird's nichts geben!
 Wer nichts kriegt, der kriegt Geduld!
 Morgen, Kinder, lernt fürs Leben!
 Gott ist nicht allein dran schuld.
 Gottes Güte reicht so weit . . .
 Ach, du liebe Weihnachtszeit!

Christgeschenk/The Christmas Box - *Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832)*

<p> Mein süßes Liebchen! Hier in Schachtelwänden Gar mannigfalt geformte Süßigkeiten. Die Früchte sind es heil'ger Weihnachtszeiten, Gebackne nur, den Kindern auszuspenden! Dir möcht ich dann mit süßem Redewenden Poetisch Zuckerbrot zum Fest bereiten; Allein was soll's mit solchen Eitelkeiten? Weg den Versuch, mit Schmeichelei zu blenden! Doch gibt es noch ein Süßes, das vom Innern Zum Innern spricht, genießbar in der Ferne, Das kann nur bis zu dir hinüber wehen. Und fühlst du dann ein freundliches Erinnern, Als blinkten froh dir wohlbekannte Sterne, Wirst du die kleinste Gabe nicht verschmähen. </p>	<p> This box, mine own sweet darling, thou wilt find With many a varied sweetmeat's form supplied; The fruits are they of holy Christmas tide, But baked indeed, for children's use design'd. I'd fain, in speeches sweet with skill combin'd, Poetic sweetmeats for the feast provide; But why in such frivolities confide? Perish the thought, with flattery to blind! One sweet thing there is still, that from within, Within us speaks,--that may be felt afar; This may be wafted o'er to thee alone. If thou a recollection fond canst win, As if with pleasure gleam'd each well-known star, The smallest gift thou never wilt disown. </p>
--	--

Joachim Ringelnatz (1883-1934)

**Ein Kind - von einem Schiefertafel-Schwämmchen
Umhüpft - rennt froh durch mein Gemüt.**

**Bald ist es Weihnacht! - Wenn der Christbaum blüht,
Dann blüht er Flämmchen.**

**Und Flämmchen heizen. Und die Wärme stimmt
Uns mild. - Es werden Lieder, Düfte fächeln. -**

**Wer nicht mehr Flämmchen hat, wem nur noch Fünkchen glimmt,
Wird dann doch gütig lächeln.**

**Wenn wir im Traume eines ewigen Traumes
Alle unfeindlich sind - einmal im Jahr! -
Uns alle Kinder fühlen eines Baumes.**

Wie es sein soll, wie's allen einmal war.

T T T T

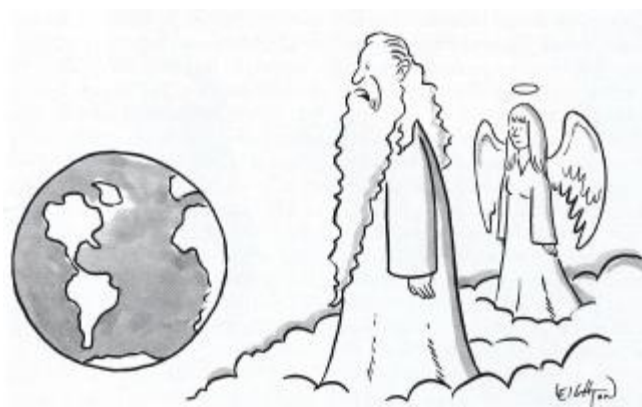
God



***When you get a chance, remember to ask God the
meaning of life - it's a riot.***



***If you laugh at all of God's jokes, he's never
going to learn what's funny***



I'm starting to prefer those who don't believe in me



I love your early work



*You have been randomly selected for
additional screening*



*A few minutes ago, God very graciously called
to congratulate me*

T T T T

Marriott Edgar (1880–1951), born George Marriott Edgar in Kirkcudbright, Scotland, was a poet, scriptwriter and comedian best known for writing many of the 'monologues' performed by Stanley Holloway with piano accompaniment, particularly the 'Albert' series. In total he wrote sixteen monologues for Stanley Holloway.

One evening at dusk as Noah stood on his Ark,
Putting green oil in starboard side lamp,
His wife came along and said, 'Noah, summat's wrong,
Our cabin is getting quite damp.

Noah said, 'Is that so?' Then he went down below,
And found it were right what she'd said,
For there on the floor quite a puddle he saw,
It was slopping around under t' bed.

Said he, 'There's an 'ole in the bottom somewhere,
We must find it before we retire.'
Then he thowt for a bit, and he said 'Aye, that's it,
A bloodhound is what we require.'

Se he went and fetched bloodhound from place where it lay,
'Tween the skunk and the polecat it were,
And as things there below, were a trifle so-so,
It were glad of a breath of fresh air.

They followed the hound as it went sniffing round,

'Til at last they located the leak,
'Twere a small hole in the side, about two inches wide,
Where a swordfish had poked in its beak.

And by gum! how the wet squirted in through that hole,
Well, young Shem who at sums was expert,
Worked it out on his slate that it came at the rate,
Of per gallon, per second, per squirt.

The bloodhound tried hard to keep water in check,
By lapping it up with his tongue,
But it came in so fast through that hole, that at last,
He shoved in his nose for a bung.

The poor faithful hound, he were very near drowned,
They dragged him away none too soon,
For the stream as it rose, pushed its way up his nose,
And blew him up like a balloon.

And then Mrs Noah shoved her elbow in t'hole,
And said, 'Eh! it's stopped I believe,'
But they found very soon as she'd altered her tune,
For the water had got up her sleeve.

When she saw as her elbow weren't doing much good,
She said to Noah, 'I've an idea,
You sit on the leak and by t'end of the week,
There's no knowing, the weather may clear.'

Noah didn't think much to this notion, at all,
But reckoned he'd give it a try,
On the 'ole down he flopped, and the leaking all stopped,
And all... except him, was quite dry.

They took him his breakfast and dinner and tea,
As day after day there he sat,
'Til the rain was all passed and they landed at last,
On top side of Mount Ararat.

And that is how Noah got them all safe ashore,
But ever since then, strange to tell,
Them as helped save the Ark has all carried a mark,
Aye, and all their descendants as well.

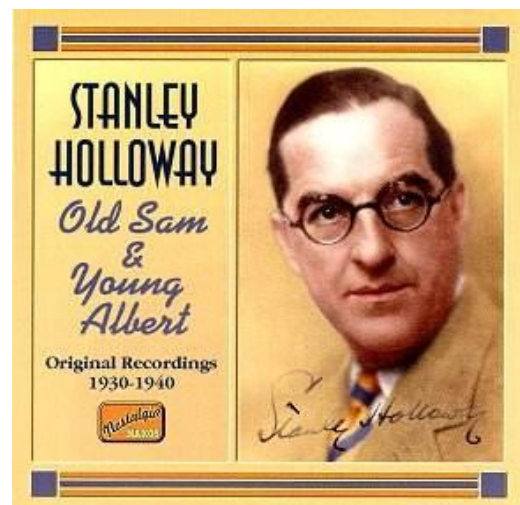
That's why dog has a cold nose, and ladies cold elbows.
You'll also find if you enquire,

That's why a man takes his coat tails in hand,
And stands with his back to the fire.

It was Christmas Day in the trenches
In Spain in Peninsular War,
And Sam Small were cleaning his musket
A thing as he'd ne're done before.

They'd had 'em inspected that morning
And Sam had got into disgrace,
For when sergeant had looked down the barrel
A sparrow flew out in his face.

The sergeant reported the matter
To Lieutenant Bird then and there.
Said Lieutenant 'How very disgusting'
The Duke must be told of this 'ere.'



The Duke were upset when he heard
He said, 'I'm astonished, I am.
I must make a most drastic example
There'll be no Christmas pudding for Sam.'

When Sam were informed of his sentence,
Surprise rooted him to the spot.
'Twas much worse than he had expected,
He thought as he'd only be shot.

And so he sat cleaning his musket
And polishing barrel and butt.
While the pudding his mother had sent him,
Lay there in the mud at his foot.

Now the centre that Sam's lot were holding
Ran around a place called Badajoz.
Where the Spaniards had put up a bastion
And ooh...! what a bastion it was.

They pounded away all the morning
With canister, grape shot and ball.
But the face of the bastion defied them,
They made no impression at all.

They started again after dinner
Bombarding as hard as they could.
And the Duke brought his own private cannon

But that weren't a ha'pence o' good.

The Duke said, 'Sam, put down thy musket
And help me lay this gun true.'

Sam answered, 'You'd best ask your favours
From them as you give pudding to.'

The Duke looked at Sam so reproachful
'And don't take it that way,' said he.
'Us Generals have got to be ruthless
It hurts me more than it did thee.'

Sam sniffed at these words kind of sceptic,
Then looked down the Duke's private gun.
And said 'We'd best put in two charges,
We'll never bust bastion with one.'

He tipped cannon ball out of muzzle
He took out the wadding and all.
He filled barrel chock full of powder,
Then picked up and replaced the ball.

He took a good aim at the bastion
Then said 'Right-o, Duke, let her fly.'
The cannon nigh jumped off her trunnions,
And up went the bastion, sky high.

The Duke, he weren't 'alf elated
He danced around trench full of glee.
And said, 'Sam, for this gallant action.
You can hot up your pudding for tea.'

Sam looked 'round to pick up his pudding
But it wasn't there, nowhere about.
In the place where he thought he had left it,
Lay the cannon ball he'd just tipped out.

Sam saw in a flash what 'ad happened:
By an unprecedented mishap.
The pudding his mother had sent him,
Had blown Badajoz off map.

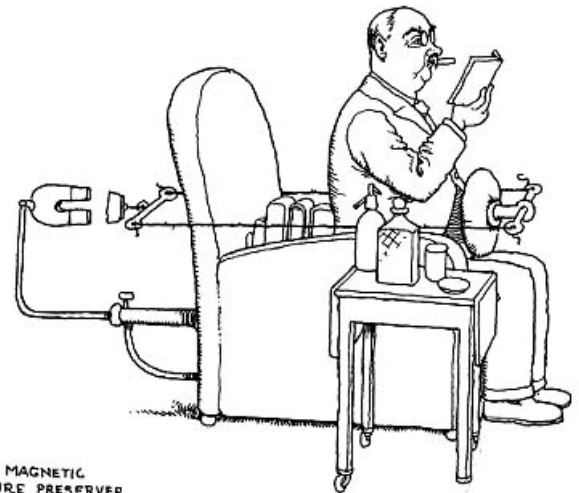
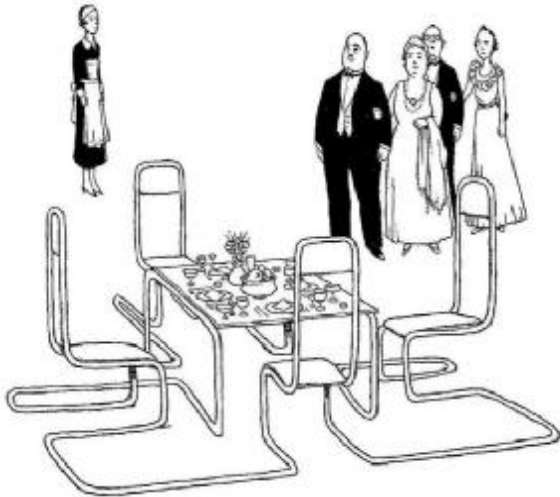
That's why fuisilliers wear to this moment
A badge which they think's a grenade.
But they're wrong... it's a brass reproduction,
Of the pudding Sam's mother once made.



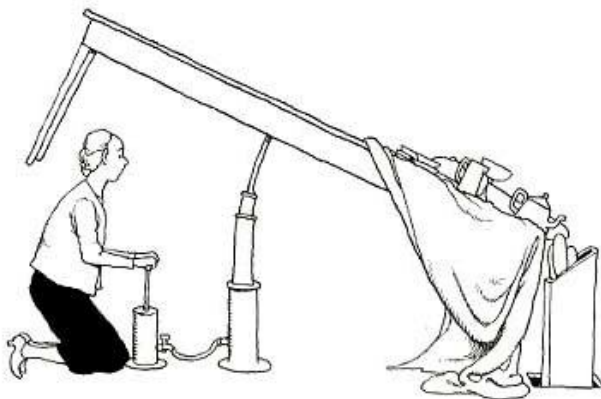
T T T T

W. Heath Robinson

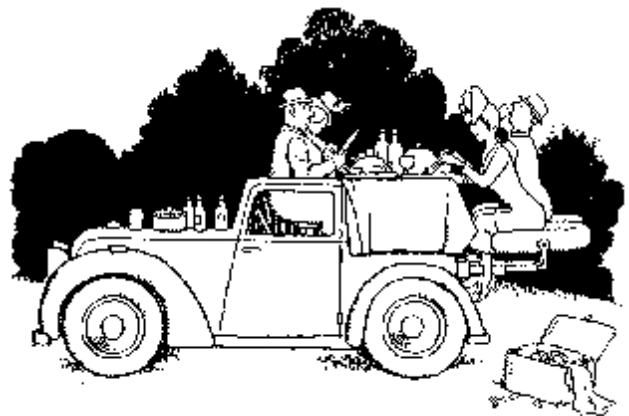
Does anyone remember W. Heath Robinson (1872-1944)? His improbable and ingenious inventions accompanied my youth. In the U.K., the term "Heath Robinson" entered the language as a description of any unnecessarily complex and implausible contrivance. During the First World War, he drew large numbers of cartoons, depicting ever-more-unlikely secret weapons being used by the combatants.



THE MAGNETIC
FIGURE PRESERVER
FOR THE MIDDLEAGED



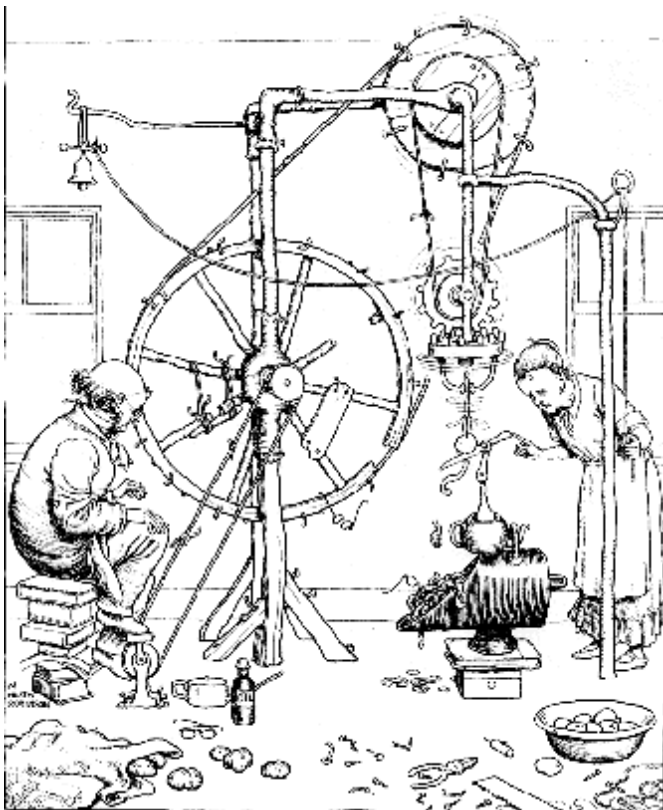
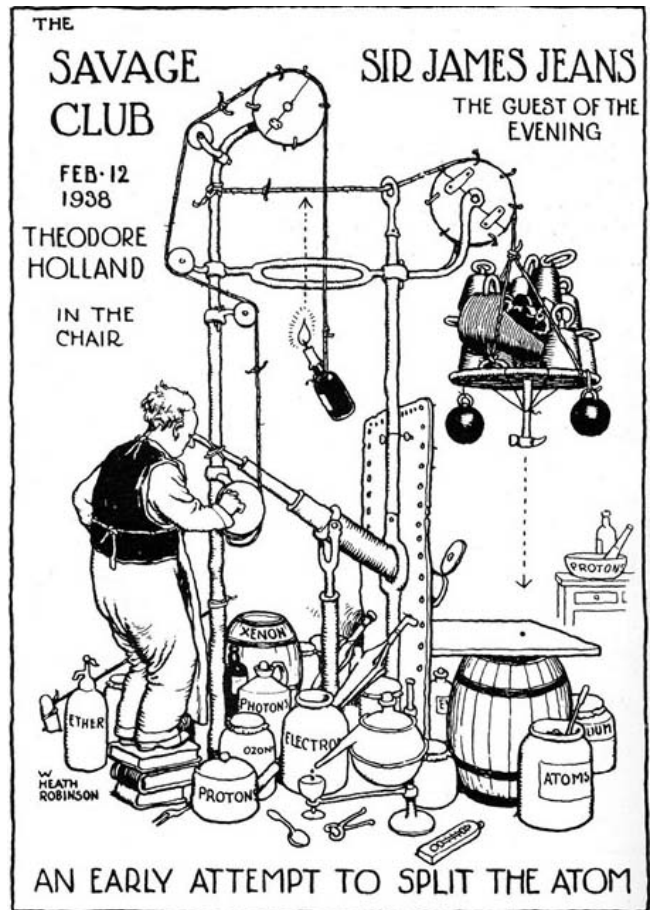
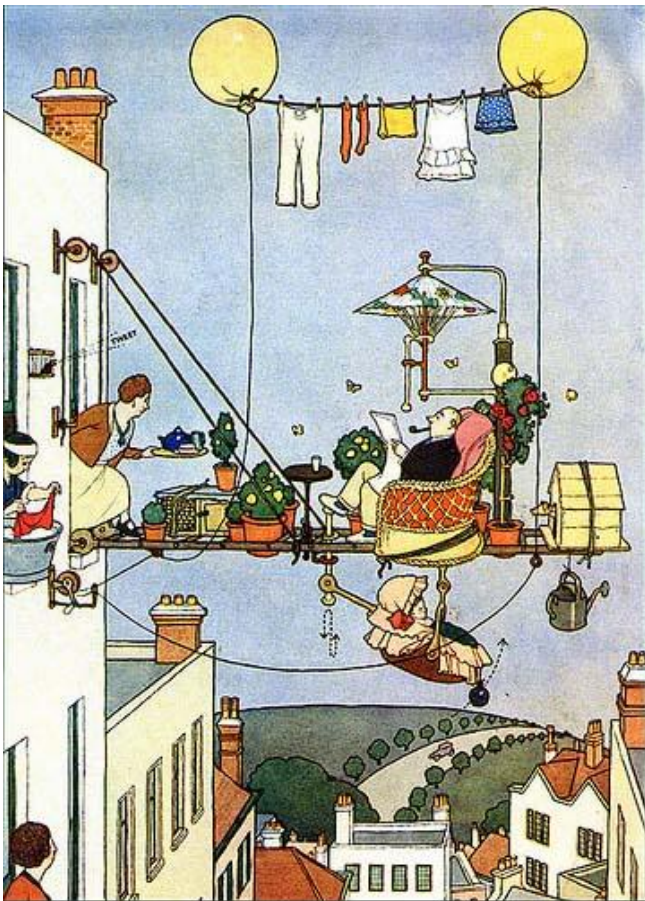
FOR QUICKLY CLEARING
AWAY THE BREAKFAST
THINGS



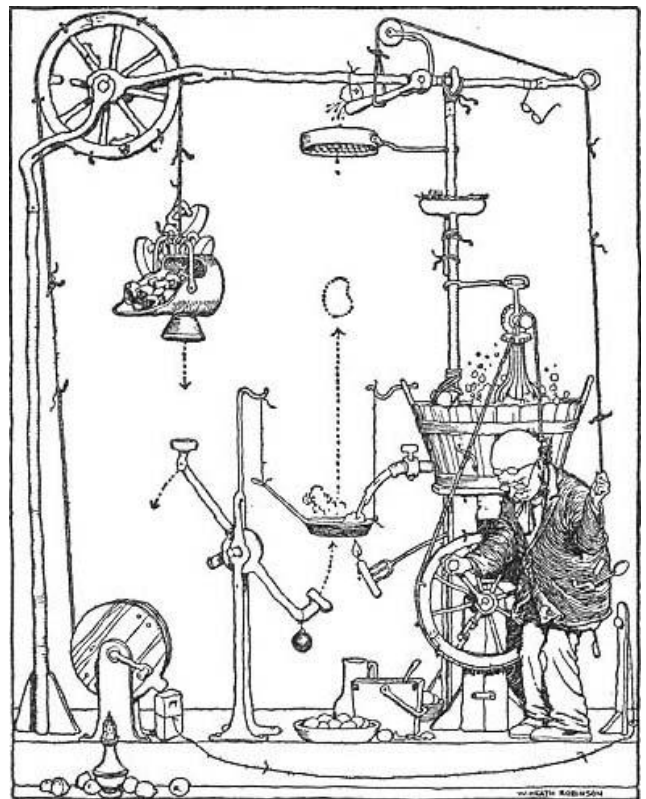
The Picnic Saloon



Anti-splash



The Professor's invention for peeling potatoes



The pancake-making machine

TTTT

2016 selection

Roman Wall Blues - *W.H. Auden*

Over the heather the wet wind blows,
I've lice in my tunic and a cold in my nose.

The rain comes pattering out of the sky,
I'm a Wall soldier, I don't know why.

The mist creeps over the hard grey stone,
My girl's in Tungria; I sleep alone.

Aulus goes hanging around her place,
I don't like his manners, I don't like his face.

Piso's a Christian, he worships a fish;
There'd be no kissing if he had his wish.

She gave me a ring but I diced it away;
I want my girl and I want my pay.

When I'm a veteran with only one eye
I shall do nothing but look at the sky.

Equations of the Light - *Dana Gioia*

Turning the corner, we discovered it
just as the old wrought-iron lamps went on—
a quiet, tree-lined street, only one block long
resting between the noisy avenues.

The streetlamps splashed the shadows of the leaves
across the whitewashed brick, and each tall window
glowing through the ivy-decked facade
promised lives as perfect as the light.

Walking beneath the trees, we counted all
the high black doors of houses bolted shut.
And yet we could have opened any door,
entered any room the evening offered.

Or were we deluded by the strange
equations of the light, the vagrant wind
searching the trees, that we believed this brief
conjunction of our separate lives was real?

It seemed that moment lingered like a ghost,
a flicker in the air, smaller than a moth,

a curl of smoke flaring from a match,
haunting a world it could not touch or hear.

There should have been a greeting or a sign,
the smile of a stranger, something beyond
the soft refusals of the summer air
and children trading secrets on the steps.

Traffic bellowed from the avenue.
Our shadows moved across the street's long wall,
and at the end what else could I have done
but turn the corner back into my life?

Martin Niemöller (1892-1984)

<p>Als die Nazis die Kommunisten holten, habe ich geschwiegen; ich war ja kein Kommunist. Als sie die Sozialdemokraten einsperrten, habe ich geschwiegen; ich war ja kein Sozialdemokrat. Als sie die Gewerkschafter holten, habe ich geschwiegen; ich war ja kein Gewerkschafter. Als sie die Juden holten, habe ich geschwiegen; ich war ja kein Jude. Als sie mich holten, gab es keinen mehr, der protestieren konnte.</p>	<p>First the Nazis came for the communists, and I did not speak out - I was not a communist; Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out - I was not a socialist; When they came for the trade unionists I did not speak out - I was not a trade unionist; When they came for the Jews I did not speak out - I was not a Jew; When they came for me there was no one left to protest.</p>
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Charles Jefford

I'm a follower of Jesus Christ Esquire
I paid my dues to the established church
By singing in the choir.

Do I believe in God? they ask,
The question requires a search.
Polite, I simply wear the mask.

I don't wish to reveal my doubt,
or knock the clerics off their perch,
I say the jury's out.

Evidence has yet to come my way,
Religionists I never smirch,
I've seen no sign today.

Tomorrow will be much the same,

experiments and pure research
will never fault their game.

Reason is treason, says the Pope.
It gives our apple cart a lurch.
Just believe in Faith and Hope.

Roman priests have got it made,
Cosy in their capes and skirts.
Work on Sunday gets them paid

Music - For D.D.S. (Shostakovich) - *Anna Akhmatova*

В ней что-то чудотворное горит, И на глазах ее края гранятся. Она одна со мною говорит, Когда другие подойти боятся. Когда последний друг отвел глаза, Она была со мной в моей могиле И пела словно первая гроза Иль будто все цветы заговорили.	Something miraculous burns in it, And its facets are like diamonds. It alone speaks to me, When other people are too shy. When my last friend looked away, It joined me in my grave And sang like a spring storm or as if all the flowers had spoken.
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Star System - *Clive James* (*1939)

The stars in their magnificent array
Look down upon the Earth, their cynosure,
Or so it seems. They are too far away,
In fact, to see a thing; hence they look pure
To us. They lack the textures of our globe,
So only we, from cameras carried high,
Enjoy the beauty of the swirling robe
That wraps us up, the interplay of sky
And cloud, as if a Wedgwood plate of blue
And white should melt, and then, its surface stirred
With spoons, a treasure too good to be true,
Be placed, and hover like a hummingbird,
Drawing all eyes, though ours alone, to feast
On splendor as it turns west from the East.

There was a time when some of our young men
Walked plumply on the moon and saw Earth rise,
As stunning as the sun. The years since then
Have aged them. Now and then somebody dies.
It's like a clock, for those of us who saw

The Saturn rockets going up as if
Mankind had energy to burn. The law
Is different for one man. Time is a cliff
You come to in the dark. Though you might fall
As easily as on a feather bed,
It is a sad farewell. You loved it all.
You dream that you might keep it in your head.
But memories, where can you take them to?
Take one last look at them. They end with you.

And still the Earth revolves, and still the blaze
Of stars maintains a show of vigilance.
It should, for long ago, in olden days,
We came from there. By luck, by fate, by chance,
All of the elements that form the world
Were sent by cataclysms deep in space,
And from their combination life unfurled
And stood up straight, and wore a human face.
I still can't pass a mirror. Like a boy,
I check my looks, and now I see the shell
Of what I was. So why, then, this strange joy?
Perhaps an old man dying would do well
To smile as he rejoins the cosmic dust
Life comes from, for resign himself he must.

A Glossary Of Chickens - Gary Whitehead (*1965)

There should be a word for the way
they look with just one eye, neck bent,
for beetle or worm or strewn grain.
"Gleaning," maybe, between "gizzard"
and "grit." And for the way they run
toward someone they trust, their skirts
hiked, their plump bodies wobbling:
"bobbling," let's call it, inserted
after "blowout" and before "bloom."
There should be terms, too, for things
they do not do—like urinate or chew—
but perhaps there already are.
I'd want a word for the way they drink,
head thrown back, throat wriggling,
like an old woman swallowing
a pill; a word beginning with "S,"
coming after "sex feather" and before "shank."

And one for the sweetness of hens
but not roosters. We think
that by naming we can understand,
as if the tongue were more than muscle.

A Pity. We Were Such a Good Invention - *Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000)*

They amputated
Your thighs off my hips.
As far as I'm concerned
They are all surgeons. All of them.

They dismantled us
Each from the other.
As far as I'm concerned
They are all engineers. All of them.

A pity. We were such a good
And loving invention.
An aeroplane made from a man and a wife.
Wings and everything.
We hovered a little above the earth.

We even flew a little.

Lullaby for the modern child - *Basil Ransome-Davies*

Hush little baby, cry no more
Daddy's gonna get you an iPhone 4.
If that iPhone 4 don't fit
Daddy's gonna buy you an England kit.
When that kit becomes a joke
Daddy's gonna buy you a bag of coke.
When that coke is all used up
Daddy's gonna buy you a pit-bull pup.
If that pit-bull pup won't bite
Daddy's gonna buy you a microlight.
If that microlight should crash
Daddy's gonna give you a load of cash.
When that load of cash runs out
That's when you'll have to do without.
Hush little baby, go to sleep
Daddy loves you, but you don't come cheap.¹¹

¹¹ *The Spectator*, 25 Sept 2010.

T T T T

Mormon Underwear

I quote from the website www.mormon-underwear.com:

"Welcome ... This is an informational site about **mormon underwear** (mormon garments), what they are, and why mormon's [*sic*] wear them. There are many sites on the internet about mormon underwear that have incorrect information. This site is set up to give real explanations and answer the real questions that you have. The terms 'underwear' or 'undergarments' are routinely used in the garment industry, and retailers have entire departments and stores that sell these items. To most people, undergarments or underwear are thought of only as another article of clothing. However, if you mention the word 'garments' to your mormon friend or neighbor, you'll get an entirely different reaction.

To millions of Mormons around the world, garments are a special piece of clothing worn as a symbolic gesture of the promises that they have made to God. The garment is always worn under other clothing, next to the skin. For most people who wear it, the garment takes the place of regular underwear. (For this reason, some people refer to the garment as Mormon undergarments or as Mormon underwear. Most LDS prefer simply using the term 'garment' instead.)

The garment is directly related to Mormon temples. It is there that faithful members first receive the garment after individual instruction on what it stands for and how it should be cared for. The garment is worn as part of a special ceremony called the temple endowment. The garment is worn at all times (day and night) by members as a constant reminder of the promises they have made to God in the Temple to be honest and faithful to the commandments of the Lord."

T T T T

Boris Johnson, Raël and the Flying Spaghetti Monster

If you believed what Boris told us about the EU, what about Mormon Underwear? Scientology? 7th day Adventism? Rastafarianism? Here are some other things to worry about (I quote from Wikipedia):

"**Raëlism** is a UFO religion that was founded in 1974 by Claude Vorilhon (b. 1946), now known as **Raël**. The Raëlian Movement teaches that life on Earth was scientifically created by a species of extraterrestrials, which they call the Elohim. Members of this species appeared



human when having personal contacts with the descendants of the humans that they made. They purposefully misinformed early humanity that they were angels, cherubim, or gods. Raélians believe that messengers, or prophets, of the Elohim include Buddha, Jesus, and others who informed humans of each era. The founder of Raëlism, members claim, received the final message of the Elohim and that its purpose is to inform the world about Elohim and that if humans become aware and peaceful enough, they wish to be welcomed by them."¹²

If this wasn't enough for you, what about the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (again courtesy Wikipedia).

"The Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM) is the deity of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster or Pastafarianism (a portmanteau of pasta and Rastafarian), a social movement that promotes a light-hearted view of religion and opposes the teaching of intelligent design and creationism in public schools. According to adherents, Pastafarianism is a "real, legitimate religion, as much as any other." Pastafarianism is legally recognized as a religion in the Netherlands and New Zealand – where Pastafarian representatives have been authorized to celebrate weddings and where the first legally recognized Pastafarian wedding was performed in April 2016."



T T T T

Fun at Christmas

Lines for a Christmas Carol - *Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953)*

May all my enemies go to hell,
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel.

¹² I once had a tennis partner who seriously tried to convert me to Raelism.

While shepherds washed their socks at night - Anon.
(Sung to the tune "While Shepherds watched")

While shepherds washed their socks at night
All seated round the tub
A bar of Sunlight soap came down
And they began to scrub!

While shepherds washed their socks by night
All watching BBC,
The angel of the Lord came down
And switched to ITV.

Deck the Malls with loads of money - Anon.
(Sung to the tune "Deck the Halls")

Deck the malls with loads of money,
Fa la la la, la la la la
Tis the season to act funny,
Fa la la
Fill the cash tills, use the plastic
Fa la la
Stretch your money like elastic
Fa la la
Fill the Cash tills, Drain your money,
Fa la la
Pretend you find the season funny,
Fa la la
Deck the malls with loads of money,
Fa la la

Jingle Tills - Anon.
Sung to the tune "Jingle Bells"

Jingle Tills, Jingle Tills
Jingle all the way
Oh what fun it is to spend
Our hard earned Christmas pay!
Dashing through the stores
Sweating all the way
Oh what fun it is to spend
Our hard earned Christmas pay!

T T T T

Photo ops gone wrong: Israel edition¹³

"Both the relative smallness of Israel as well as the relative nearness of its enemies ensure that whenever an Israeli political leader has a crisis-related photo-op, it often includes the leader looking sternly through a pair of binoculars.

Netanyahu held up a pair of binoculars and told reporters that Gaza is "under control." The only problem was that the binocular covers were still on."

Netanyahu's was but the most recent of several photo ops gone wrong:



Amir Peretz, the former Israeli defence minister watching a training exercise in the Golan Heights in 2007



Ariel Sharon in 2002 during the Second Intifada

T T T T

¹³ From *The Atlantic*, 20 October 2015.

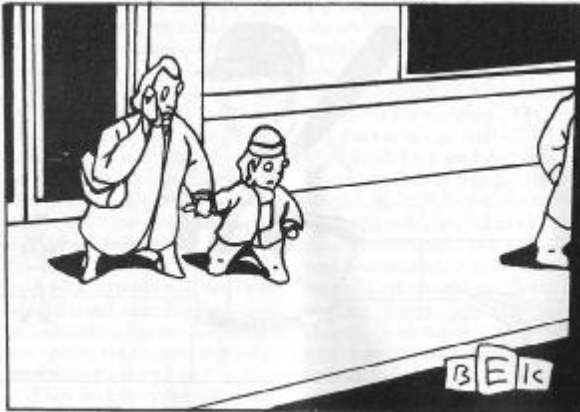
Kids



"I've decided to work from home today"



"My mom says you can sleep in the top bunk if your parents sign a release form"



"I'm taking him to his class for things kids used to learn on their own"



"My parents didn't do my homework for me but I did bring them in as consultants"

T T T T

Qui a dit que le français était compliqué? ¹⁴

Nous portions nos portions.
 Les poules du couvent couvent.
 Mes fils ont cassé mes fils.
 Il est de l'est.
 Je vis ces vis.
 Cet homme est fier; peut-on s'y fier?
 Nous éditions de belles éditions.
 Nous relations ces intéressantes relations.
 Je suis content qu'ils nous content cette histoire.
 Il convient qu'ils convient leurs amis.
 Ils ont un caractère violent et ils violent leurs promesses.
 Ces dames se parent de fleurs pour leurs parents.

¹⁴ With thanks to Jean-Léon Blanc

Ils expédient leurs lettres; c'est un bon expédient.
 Nos intentions c'est que nous intentions un procès.
 Ils négligent leur devoir; moi, je suis moins négligent.
 Nous objections beaucoup de choses à vos objections.
 Ils résident à Paris chez le résident d'une ambassade étrangère.
 Ces cuisiniers excellent à composer cet excellent plat.
 Les poissons affluent d'un affluent de la rivière.

T T T T

Insomnia

In CP 2015 I included the results of one of the regular poetry competitions organised by The Spectator. Here are some more, "in praise of insomnia."

My linen lover winds me in her lithe
 Embrace, her breast a pillow for my head,
 Her limbs the sheets that twine mine as I writhe
 And relish this tryst in her sleepless bed.
 I feast my wide eyes on the dreamless dark.
 I revel in the long nights I've enjoyed
 Reclining here declining to embark
 Upon the royal road of Dr Freud.
 (How hapless he, bedevilled by his dreaming,
 Who rises, seeks another couch, and pays
 To descant on his brain's nocturnal teeming,
 Contriving that his nights should haunt his days.)
 Sleep, be not proud. Though some crave thy caress,
 I find more pure allure in wakefulness. *Chris O'Carroll*

Sleep will not come by being willed;
 It tantalises those who try
 To grasp at it: far better lie
 And let all wilfulness be stilled.
 For this is a most precious time —
 Unharried, undisturbed, unfraught —
 For gentle, horizontal thought,
 To plan, to reason — or to rhyme.
 Once in the underworld of sleep
 It's Morpheus who controls your mind:
 Your dreams are those that he's designed
 While you are helpless in his keep.
 Awake in bed you're truly free

To think of anything you choose:
But that's a power sleep makes you lose
In passive surreality. *W.J. Webster*

Should sleep be difficult at night,
I never groan or seek respite.
Instead, I creep beneath the stars
To frequent dark, illegal bars
Where, while the city gets its rest,
I join the ranks of the obsessed —
The unasleep (though not undead)
Who spurn the comfort of the bed.
The background sound's a smoochy sax
For nighthawks and insomniacs,
The manners rough, the ashtrays full
And half the conversation bull.
Who cares? The straight world dreams its dreams
Of mortgages and pensions schemes.
We drink and rave the night away
Till blinding light announces day. *C.M. Davis*

Some yearn to rest, and pray for sleep in vain;
But it's those hours of wakefulness I like,
Those long, slow hours in darkness when the brain
Is loosed to wander, take a little hike
Round secret places which in daylight seem
Not to exist. I love those ancient shames,
Those half-forgotten guilts, that almost-dream
That teases memory and plays mind-games
With my poor self-esteem, revealing all.
Then once I've had enough I quit the fray,
And just get up, and bathe my aching eyes,
Or read a book, or contemplate the wall,
Or wait, aware that without doubt I'll prize
That spaced-out feeling later in the day. *Gerard Benson*

A very overrated pastime, sleep!
Though Shelley finds it 'sweet', for Keats it's 'magic',
For me the nightlong vigil that I keep
Is restful, nightmare-free, in no way tragic.
At holiday hotels I often find

That kitchens stay unlocked when supper's ended;
Full many a midnight feasting comes to mind,
Somnambulance my plea if apprehended.
'Beware of the insomniac'; my sign
Has kept all would-be burglars from my door.
Astronomy's a passion now of mine;
I know my stars — move over, Patrick Moore!

No need then for alarm clocks, and I find
That girlfriends know full well, when I suggest a
Post-prandial nap, that what I have in mind
Is no traditional afternoon siesta. *Roger Theobald*

Da Vinci burned the midnight oil,
as did the Bard without whose toil
today we'd lack a 'Mona Lisa',
a Hamlet and a Julius Caesar.
Had Descartes not been wont to lie awake,
would he have watched that fly?
All ye who vainly try to sleep,
if you'd just give up counting sheep
while tossing on those restless seas,
you might create a masterpiece:
an opera or philosophy —
but, failing that, just watch TV. *Marion Shore*

T T T T

Have some more Port

Two friends had played golf together for more than fifty years; as they approached the age of eighty, each promised that, when one of them died, the other would try to find a way to keep in touch.

A few months later, one of them died. The survivor visited the grave regularly, trying to communicate with his departed friend. One day, sure enough, he heard a voice: "Well, here I am, in heaven". "What's it like?" asked the other.

"Better than we ever imagined. The courses are perfect, the weather is fine, the female caddies are all beautiful and my score card is always below 72 - pars and birdies on every hole; as soon as you hook or slice, a celestial wind drifts the ball back on to the fairway; we play 36 holes a day and never get tired".

"Well, that sounds just too perfect", said the survivor, "surely there must be some bad news?"

"I'm afraid there is", said his friend's voice, "You tee off at ten thirty tomorrow".

T T T T

Signs of the times¹⁵

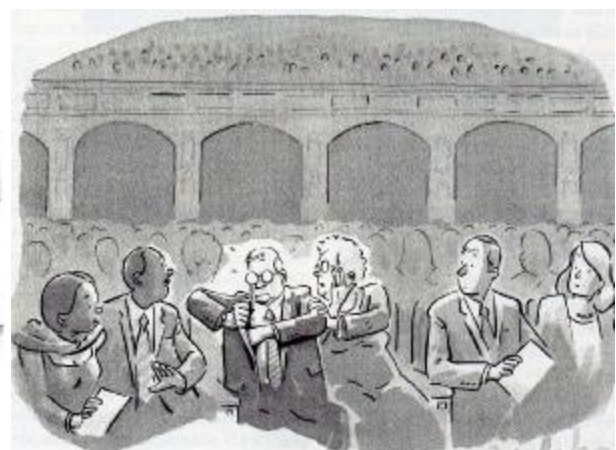


T T T T

Modern Living¹⁶



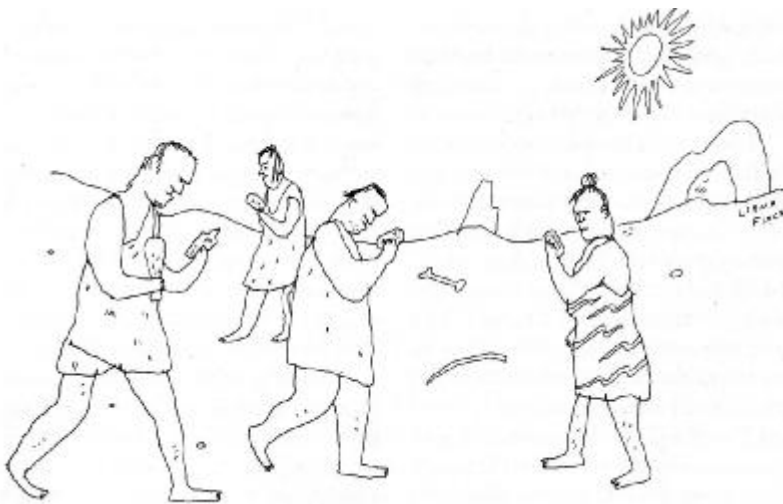
Frank?



It's not your phone - they're playing Für Elise

¹⁵ Under the pictogram on the left, a sign reads: "If light stays on for more than 4 hours, call electrician:" With thanks to Bibi Ruperti.

¹⁶ With the exception of the one with a text bubble, from *The New Yorker*.



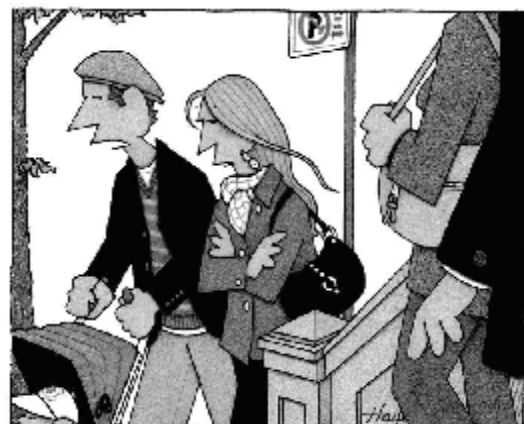
When it comes to blowing leaves around uselessly and creating an insane amount of noise, this model can't be beat



She's had so much work done that she's starting to look like her mother



She's in a conversationally induced coma



Don't look - it's the people we steal wi-fi from

TTTTT

Would you like some more Port?

A British car is stopped at a police checkpoint outside a small village in the Dordogne. "Monsieur, French rules against drink and driving are very strict - I must ask you if you have been drinking."

The man inside the car explains somewhat incoherently that he has just attended a marriage in the nearby village where he probably had some five glasses of champagne, nearly a bottle of St. Estèphe, an uncertain amount of Montbazillac with dessert and at least a couple of Calvados with the coffee.

Visibly surprised by the man's honesty, the Officer says to him: "Monsieur, do you understand that I am a Police officer and must ask you to accompany me to the police station for a breathalyzer test?"

"Officer, do you understand that I am English, like my car, and that my wife sitting next to me is driving?"¹⁷

T T T T

Duh

US Daily Mail, 13 August 2016: Montgomery, Ala. - Friday afternoon, Alabama State Senator Fred Q. Calhoun, (R-Delbert, Ala.) published an open letter to the President of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, complaining that it was unfair for the committee to allow only one U.S. state to participate as an independent team in this year's Summer Olympic Games.

"As I was watching last night's Olympic games with my family, I was stunned to see that Georgia was permitted to participate as an independent entity," penned the freshman lawmaker.

"Alabama athletes are among the world's most talented and passionate competitors... On behalf of the nearly 5 million people who call the Yellow Hammer State home, we request that Alabama be allowed to compete in future Olympic games — just as you've permitted the State of Georgia to do," concluded the state senator.

T T T T

Odds and Ends

Jack is looking at Anne, but Anne is looking at George. Jack is married, but George is not. Is a married person looking at an unmarried person?



¹⁷ With thanks to Dominique Vernex and Eddy Clarke.

Mary's father has five daughters: Nana, Nene, Nini, Nono and ??? What is the name of the fifth daughter?

A mute person goes into a shop and wants to buy a toothbrush. By imitating the action of brushing his teeth he successfully expresses himself to the shopkeeper and the purchase is done. Next, a blind man comes into the shop who wants to buy a pair of sunglasses; how does he indicate what he wants?

An Arkansas State trooper pulls over a pickup truck on I-40 and says to the driver, "Got any ID?" The driver says, "'Bout what?"

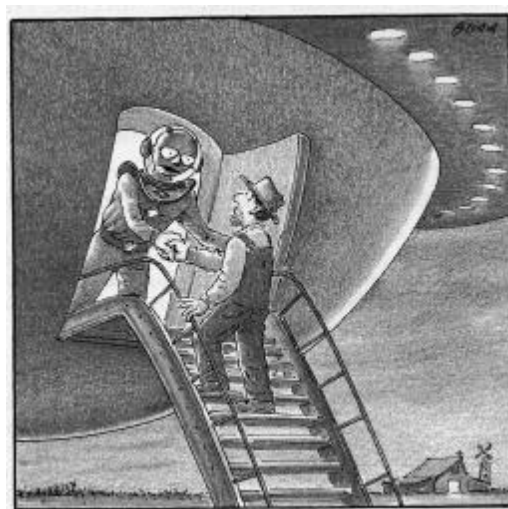
For most of us, the problem with our golf swing is not how close we stand to the ball before we hit it, but how close we are afterwards.

Golf is a game in which a very little ball is placed on a very big ball; the secret of the game is not to hit the big ball.

Golf is a sport in which a small white ball is chased by men who are too old to chase anything else.

"The Chinese thought the British looked like devils, stank like corpses and probably had webbed feet. They also reckoned that a ban on the export of rhubarb from Canton could bring England to a halt via an epidemic of constipation." (Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781-1997*, p. 101)¹⁸

"The Danes' reign as the happiest nation on Earth has been usurped by Switzerland, In the third *World Happiness Report*, now encompassing 158 nations, Denmark has slipped to third, behind both the Swiss and Iceland, with Norway, Finland and Sweden also near the top. The UK is 21st, one place higher than the second edition, in 2013." (*The Guardian*, 23.4.2015)



You voted Leave, didn't you?

¹⁸ In traditional Chinese medicine, rhubarb roots have been used as a laxative for several millennia. Rhubarb also appears in medieval Arabic and European prescriptions. It was one of the first Chinese medicines to be imported to the West from China.