

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

2020

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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 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.

Heaven, I'm in heaven
And the cares that hung around me through the week
Seem to vanish like this gambler's lucky streak
Now he's out forever with a peak of pique.
Slightly adapted from the 1935 song by Irving Berlin

One sunny day in February 2021 an old man approaches the White House from across Pennsylvania Ave where he has been sitting on a park bench. He goes up to the Marine standing guard and says "I would like to go and meet President Trump." The Marine looks at the old man and replies "Sir, Mr. Trump is no longer President and no longer lives here." The old man says "OK" and walks away.

The next day the same old man walks across and asks the same Marine the same question and the Marine, a bit irritated, gives the same reply and the old man walks away.

On the third day the same old man comes again and asks the same Marine "I would like to go in and meet President Trump."

Now the marine is even more irritated at the man and says "I told you yesterday and the day before that Mr. Trump is no longer President and no longer lives here. Don't you understand?"

The old man looks at the Marine, smiles and says "I understand. I just love hearing it." The Marine snaps to attention and salutes: "See you tomorrow sir."



I can't bear it any longer

~ Robert Middleton 2020

Cartoons from *The New Yorker*

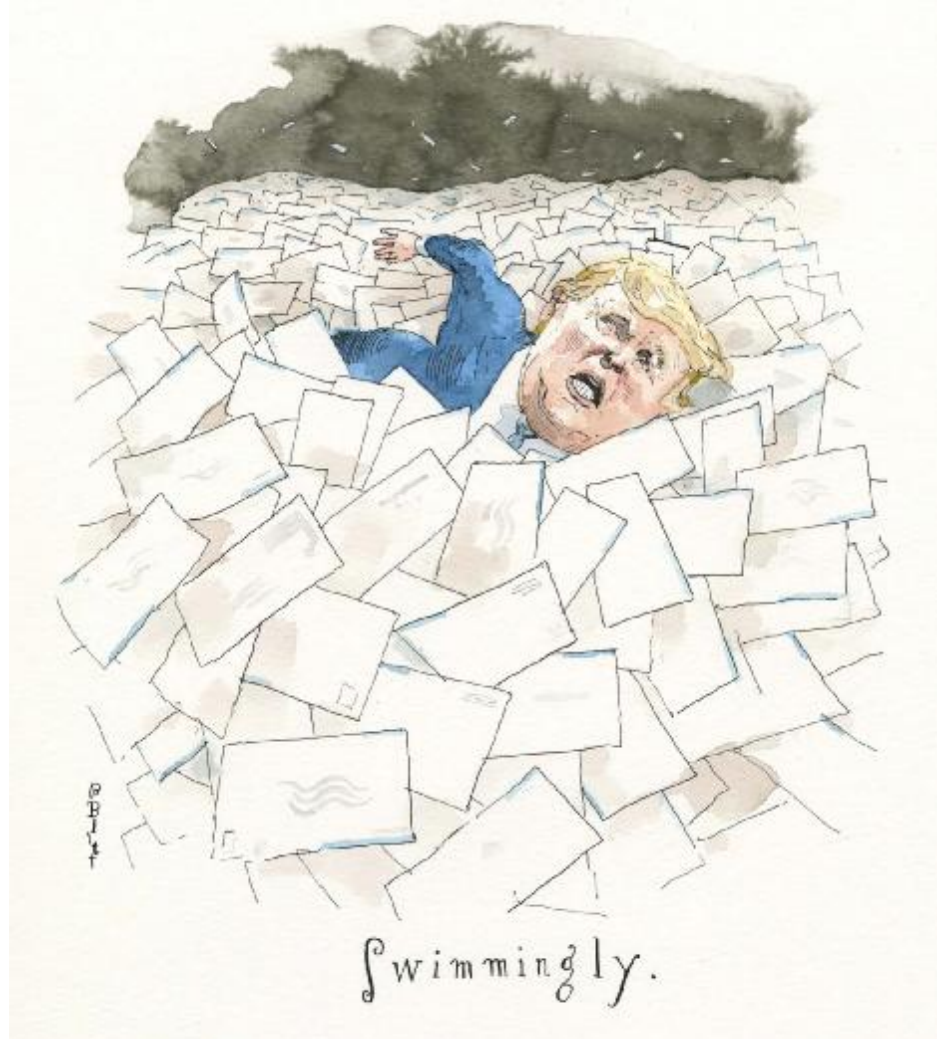
e-mail robert@middleton.ch

Visit my website www.pamirs.org

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

CHRISTMAS PUDDING 2020

How are the Vote Recounts Going for Donald Trump?



T T T T

Rub your eyes, get out of bed

I am pleasantly reminded of *The Wizard of Oz*, the first film I ever saw.

Ding Dong! The Witch is dead. Which old Witch? The Wicked Witch!
Ding-dong! The Witch is dead
Which old Witch? The Wicked Witch!
Ding-dong! The Wicked Witch is dead
Wake up you sleepy head, rub your eyes, get out of bed
Wake up, the Wicked Witch is dead
She's gone where the goblins go
Below, below, below
Yo-ho, let's open up and sing and ring the bells out
Ding-dong's the merry-oh, sing it high, sing it low

Let them know the Wicked Witch is dead!!¹

T T T T

"Historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. ...the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." (Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*)

"Donald Trump's increasingly desperate bid to hang on to the White House crossed into abject farce on Saturday, after his campaign staged a purportedly major press conference at a Philadelphia landscaping business situated between a crematorium and a sex shop.

On Saturday morning, as Trump played golf and continued to baselessly accuse the Democrats of stealing the election for Joe Biden, the president announced, in a tweet that was subsequently deleted, a "big press conference" at the Four Seasons in Philadelphia.

Trump quickly altered his statement, revealing that the press conference venue was not a Four Seasons hotel, but Four Seasons Total Landscaping, a suburban business between a crematorium and an adult book store on the outer edges of the city.



¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPIdRJlzERo>. On 9 April, 2013 this song reached the No. 1 spot in the UK Download charts after the death of former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

'Big press conference today in Philadelphia at Four Seasons Total Landscaping – 11.30am!' the president tweeted at 9.45am. ...

The Trump campaign has not publicly said whether this was, as it would appear, a case of mistaken identity. Either way, the press conference, headlined by Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, went ahead in the car park of the garden centre in what *USA Today* called an 'industrial park'. *The Guardian*, 8 November 2020

T T T T

Of course, Giuliani had already received his well-deserved come-uppance at the hands of who else but Borat.

"Sacha Baron Cohen's new movie, Borat Subsequent Moviefilm, *Delivery of Prodigious Bribe to American Regime for Make Benefit Once Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, ends with an already notorious sequence in which Rudy Giuliani goes into a hotel bedroom with a young woman whom he believes to be a journalist, stretches out on the bed, and sticks his hand into his pants. The woman in question, 24-year-old actress Maria Bakalova, is playing Borat's 15-year-old daughter, Tutar; Tutar, in turn, is pretending to be an of-age journalist as part of a scheme in which she will be offered to Giuliani as a wife, for make benefit once glorious nation of Kazakhstan." Matthew Dessem, *Slate*, 22 October 2020.²



² Giuliani has denied any wrong intentions, but, whatever the truth, the damage is done. As *Slate* also points out, in another scene "alone in the hotel bedroom, Giuliani got more handsy than was strictly necessary." The article concludes: "Partisans on both sides will scour the footage looking for clues to Giuliani's behavior, and I won't be one of them. There's only so much Giuliani footage one man can take."

T T T T

Seasonally appropriate

La voix - Ondine Valmore (1821-1853)

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

T T T T

Pass the Port

A young man and a nun were sitting alone in a railway compartment on the way to Zurich.

After a long silence the young man said to the nun: "Sister, I have always had this fantasy of kissing a nun - while we are alone here, would you be offended if I asked you for a kiss."

The nun thought for a while and asked: "Are you a Catholic?" "Oh yes," said the young man.

"And are you single?" "Oh yes," he replied.

"Well, just this once but promise never to tell anyone." "I promise," he said. So he kissed her.

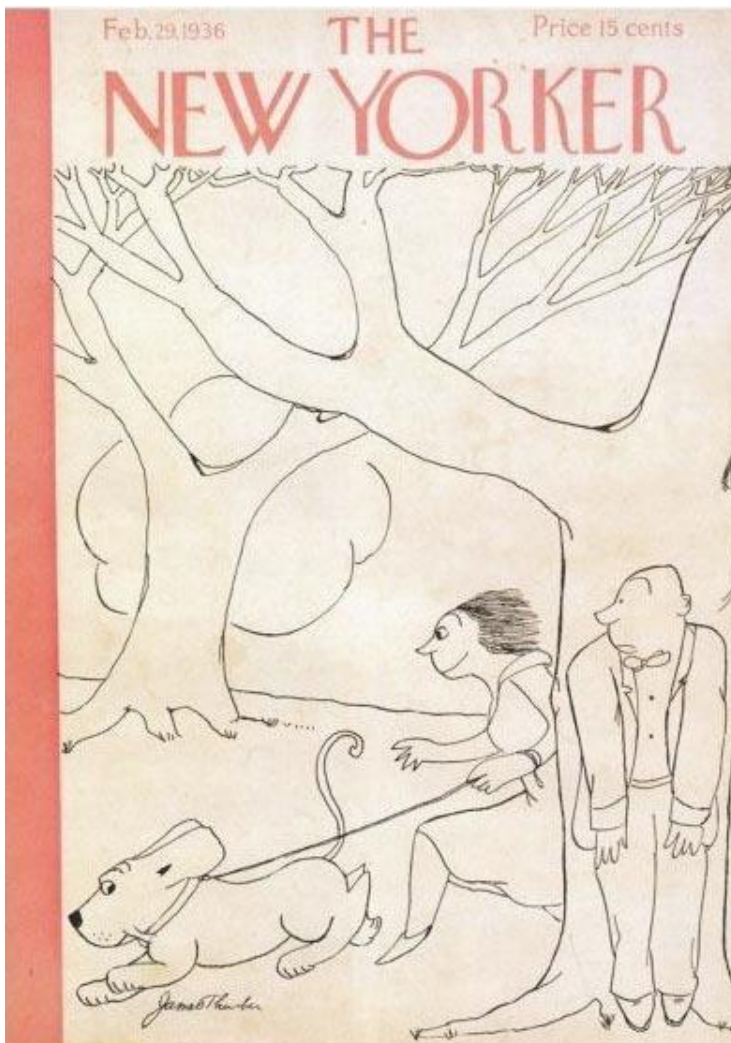
After a little while he said: "Sister, I must apologise. Your kindness obliges me to tell you the truth: I am not a Catholic and I am not single."

"Well," said the nun, "then I must also tell you the truth. I am not a nun, but am on my way to the Gay Pride event in Zurich."

T T T T

James Thurber

After P.G. Wodehouse in 2019, I promised the humorist James Thurber (1894-1961), best known for his short stories and cartoons, published mainly in *The New Yorker* and collected in his numerous books. In 1927, Thurber joined the staff of *The New Yorker* as an editor, with the help of E.B. White, his friend and fellow *New Yorker* contributor. His career as a cartoonist began in 1930 after White found some of Thurber's drawings in a trash can and submitted them for publication, although they defied previous criteria for cartoons. As with Wodehouse, I will "scatter" bits of Thurber across this edition of *CP*.

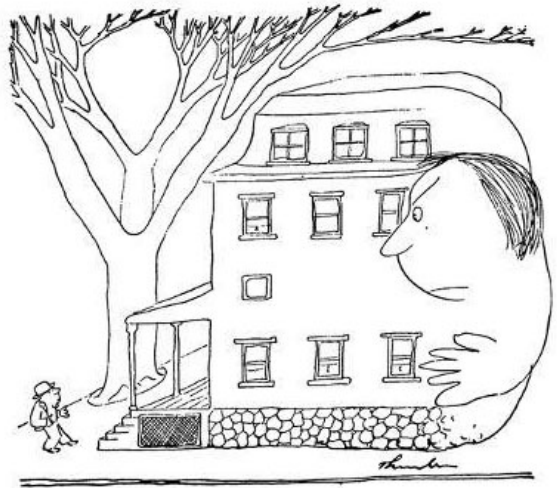
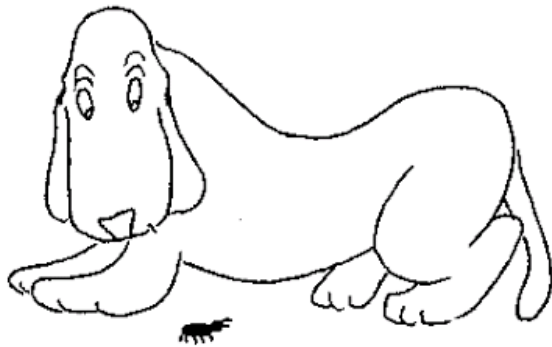


Judging from many of his cartoons, Thurber had a fraught relationship with women (and, perhaps, with dogs and other animals). The former were always keen, dominant and threatening; the latter quizzical, uncertain, passive or ambiguous.

Thurber's men are almost always timid, tense, hunted and fearful.

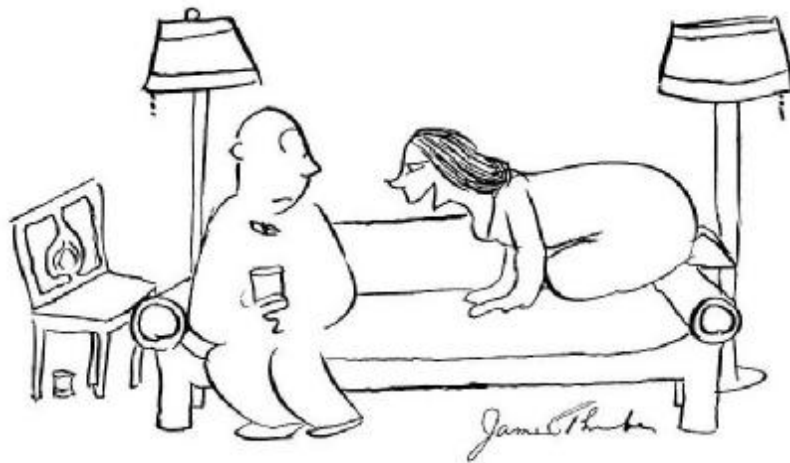
In this typical drawing (a cover from 1936), the woman is in hot pursuit, but the bloodhound (a favourite trope) seems to show some sympathy for the man's predicament.

Enjoy!



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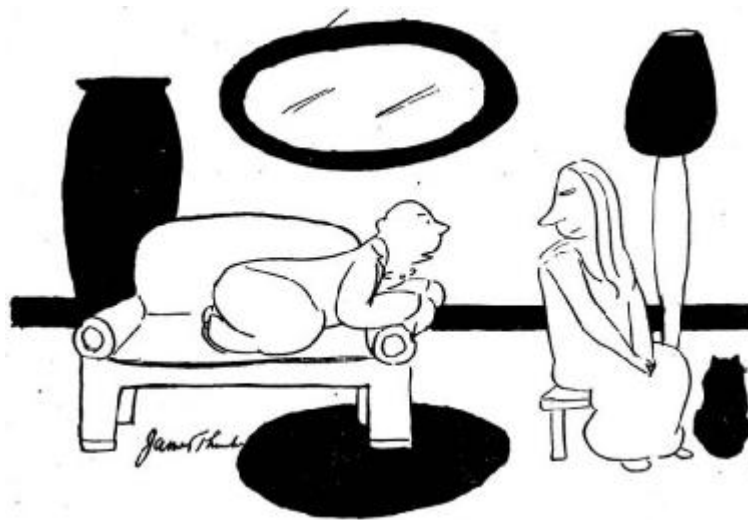
Thurber's Women



"The trouble with me is I can never say no."



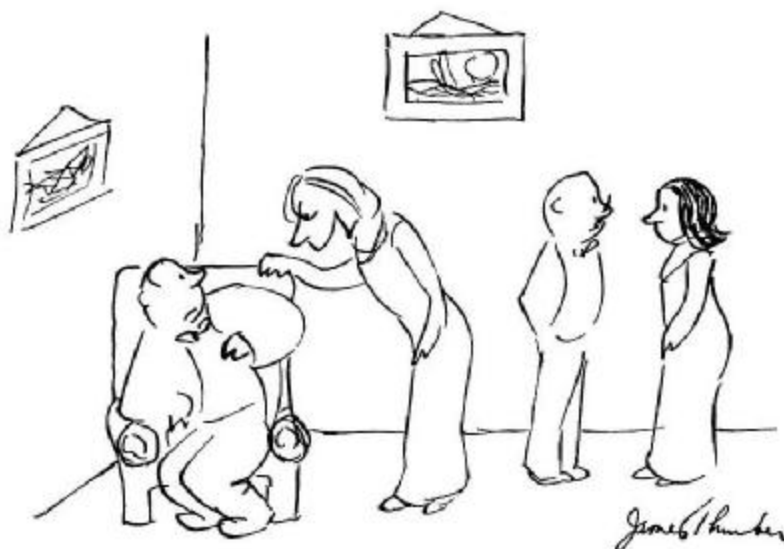
"I love the idea of there being two sexes, don't you?"



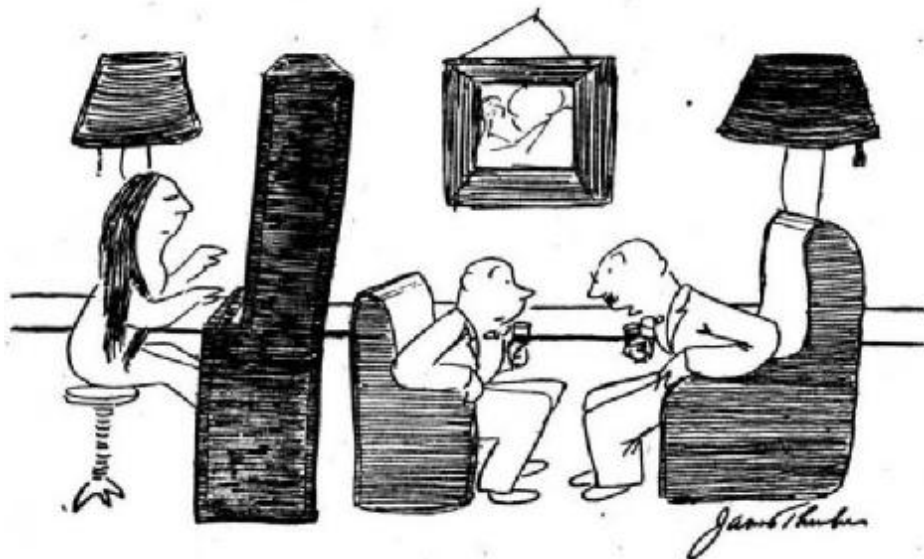
"What do you want to be inscrutable for, Marcia?"



"If you can keep a secret, I'll tell you how my husband died."



"I have a neurosis."



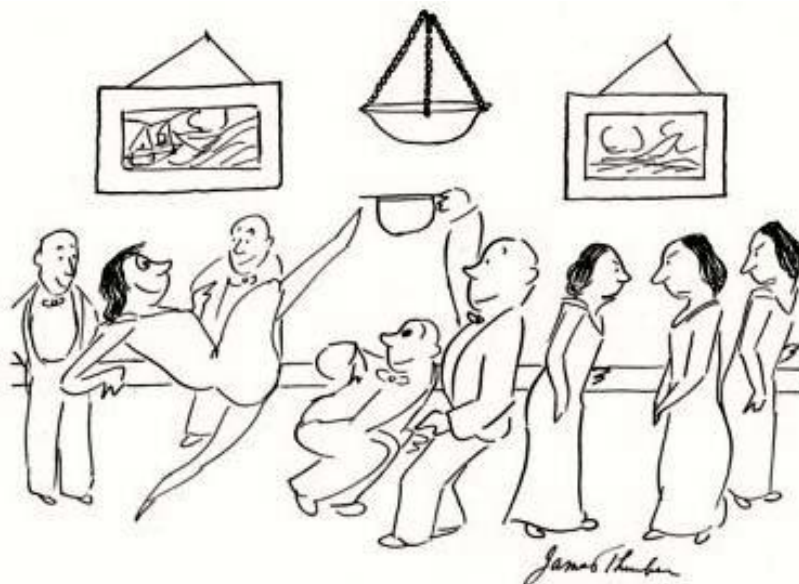
"I'd feel a great deal easier if her husband hadn't gone to bed."



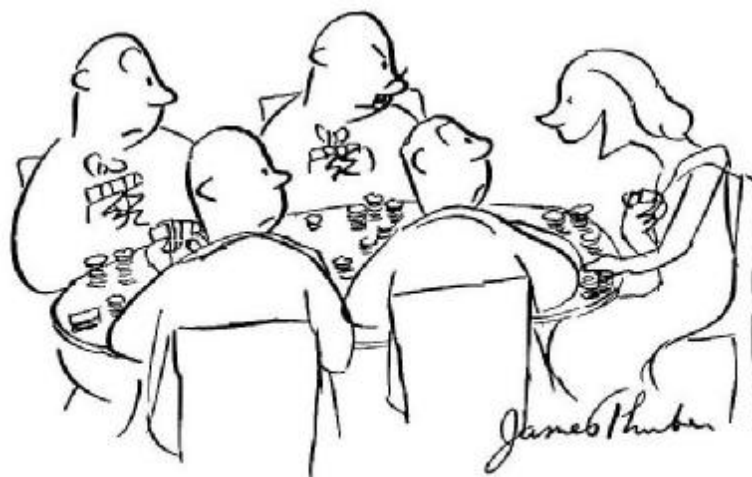
"A penny for your thoughts, Mr. Grisham."



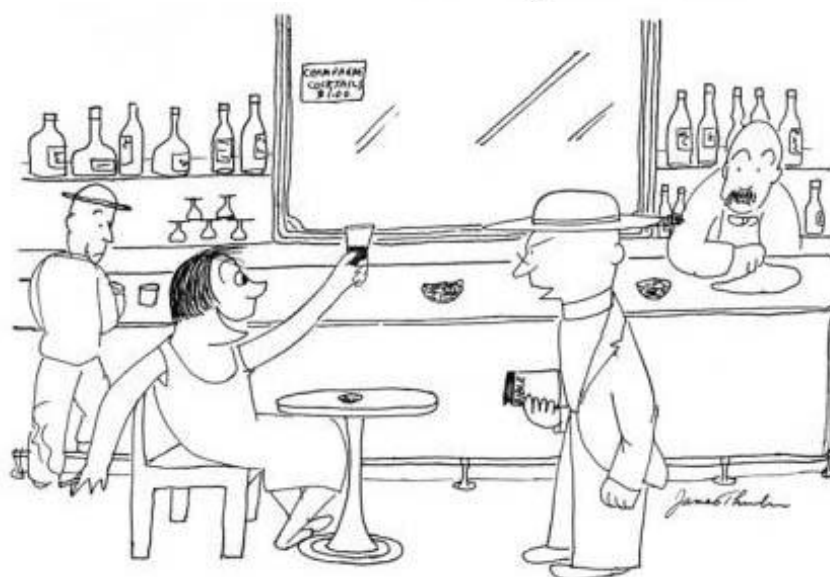
"How long are we going to keep up this mad pretence of mutual disinterestedness, Mr. Millnos?"



"Well she's all I know about Bryn Mawr and she's all I have to know."



"What do four ones beat?"



"Unhappy woman!"

T T T T

A Note on Thurber's Drawings

E.B. White (from *Is Sex Necessary*) - To understand, even vaguely, Thurber's art, it is necessary to grasp the two major themes which underlie all his drawings. The first theme is what I call the 'melancholy of sex'; the other is what I can best describe as the 'implausibility of animals'. These two basic ideas motivate, subconsciously, his entire creative life. Just how some of the animals shown in these pages 'come in' is not clear even to me - except in so far as any animal must be regarded as sexually relevant because of our human tendency to overestimate what can be learned from watching it.

When one studies the drawings, it soon becomes apparent that a strong undercurrent of grief runs through them. In almost every instance the man in the picture is badly frightened, or even hurt. These 'Thurber men' have come to be recognized as a distinct type in the world of art; they are frustrated, fugitive beings; at times they seem vaguely striving to get out of something without being seen (a room, a situation, a state of mind), at other times they are merely perplexed and too humble, or weak, to move. The women, you will notice, are quite different: temperamentally they are much better adjusted to their surroundings than are the men, and mentally they are much less capable of making themselves uncomfortable.

It would be foolish to attempt here a comprehensive appreciation of the fierce sweep, the economy, and the magnificent obscurity of Thurber's work, nor can I adequately indicate the stark qualities in the drawings that have earned for him the title of 'the Ugly Art'. All I, all anybody, can do is to hint at the uncanny faithfulness with which he has caught - caught and thrown to the floor - the daily, indeed the almost momentarily, severity of life's mystery, as well as the charming doubtfulness of its purpose.

T T T T

Extra Bold Fontgate

Ross Arbes, *The New Yorker*, 31.7.2017 - "Lucas de Groot, a Dutch typeface designer living in Berlin, recently began receiving a flood of calls and e-mails from Pakistan that, he said, "seemed very urgent." He soon discovered that Calibri, a font he'd designed almost fifteen years earlier, was playing a central role in a corruption scandal engulfing Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of Pakistan. As part of an investigation launched by the country's Supreme Court, the Prime Minister's daughter had released a supposedly exculpatory document signed and dated February 2, 2006. The document, however, had been printed in Calibri, which was not widely available until 2007.

Investigators deemed the document to have been falsified, and the term "fontgate" began trending on Twitter.

Speaking from his office in Berlin, de Groot said that the incident "has definitely generated the most publicity for Calibri, ever." He admitted to being a little bit happy about it. "People usually take fonts for granted," he said.

Calibri was born in 2004, when a fellow typeface designer recruited de Groot to work on a project for "a secret client." The client wanted a modern font that was optimized for screen reading. De Groot revised a font he'd developed seven years earlier, paying special attention to "the rhythm of the letter widths" and "the speed of the curvature." The client turned out to be Microsoft, which, to de Groot's astonishment, chose Calibri as the default font for its Microsoft Office suite. His payment for the font covered some office renovations, but not much else. "I am not a very good businessman," he said.

Since 2007, Calibri has figured in several other forgery allegations. In 2012, the Turkish government accused approximately three hundred people of plotting a coup, on the basis of documents that had been printed in Calibri but were purported to date from as early as 2003. De Groot sent a form letter in response to the many inquiries he received from Pakistan. "In my opinion, the document in question was produced much later" than 2006, he wrote. While Microsoft had by then released a beta version of its Office suite that included Calibri, de Groot pointed out that only "computer nerds" and "font lovers" were using it.

"Why would anyone use a completely unknown font for an official document?"

By coincidence, the font also figures in America's ongoing Presidential scandal. One day before fontgate, Donald Trump, Jr., took to Twitter to release the e-mails he wrote while setting up a meeting between members of the Trump campaign and Russians offering dirt on Hillary Clinton. He included a short introductory note—"in order to be totally transparent, I am releasing the entire email chain of my emails"—typed in Calibri.

While most Trump critics focussed on the contents of the e-mail chain, a few zeroed in on Donald, Jr.'s font choice. A writer for Elle's Web site called Calibri "fine for a grocery list; a less ideal choice for what's supposed to be a considered response." One Twitter user said, "The part that angers me most is his use of Calibri font, which I hate #sad #loweffort."

De Groot is "not a big fan" of the Trump Administration, but he defended Donald, Jr.'s choice of Calibri, explaining that the President's son may have

been trying to tap into the font's reliability. "Calibri is a font that everybody recognizes—a normal font," he said. "Everybody who reads his note will realize, 'Hey, this is the font that I'm using.' It comes off genuine."

De Groot dismissed the critics who attack Calibri as boring, arguing that its "neutrality" belies its underlying precision: "If you're eating soup, you shouldn't remember the shape of the spoon." He listed Calibri's virtues: it doesn't try to mimic what already exists ("Courier is an ugly old typewriter font"); it's stripped of old-fashioned serif embellishments ("Compared to Calibri, Times New Roman looks outdated"); and it's playful, with its rounded corners, but not frivolous ("Comic Sans doesn't work").

A Pakistani journalist recently tweeted that if Prime Minister Sharif is forced out of office he should write his resignation letter using Calibri. If the Russia investigation forces Trump to resign, should the U.S. President do the same? De Groot considered. "I don't think Calibri fits with the voice of Donald Trump, not at all," he said. "He's speaking so poorly, a very bold kind of speech. A resignation letter by Trump should be in black capitals — loud. You need Franklin Gothic extra bold, I think."

Here are the different fonts mentioned above:

Calibri - Times New Roman - Comic Sans - Courier - Franklin Gothic extra bold. *The New Yorker* uses Constantia - I use Garamond in *Christmas Pudding*

For Trump's resignation letter I would personally recommend **Jokerman**, Juice or Curlz - or even Wi ng di ngs ³

T T T T

Is Sex Necessary? (James Thurber and E.B. White) - Preface

Men and women have always sought, by one means and another, to be together rather than apart. At first they were together by the simple expedient of being unicellular, and there was no conflict. Later the cell separated, or began living apart, for reasons which are not clear even today, although there is considerable talk. Almost immediately the two halves of the original cell began experiencing a desire to unite again - usually with a half of some other cell. This urge has survived down to our time. Its commonest manifestations are marriage, divorce, neuroses, and, a little less frequently, gun-fire.

³ Wingdings.

When society decided it would have to set up laws to govern these polymorphous manifestations of a once simple urge which had got out of hand, it did so without a very clear notion of sex as we know it today. It did not realize that direction of the Love Urge by outside forces of law and order must be subversive of the complete flowering of the individual - and is there anything in life more wonderful than a completely flowered individual, man or woman?

Yet under all the weight of social regulation, the ancient desire to unite and to separate and to unite again, usually with some one else, has survived, for the simple reason that it is stronger than man-made law and because cells, as now constituted, are more astute than the police. They have to be. Thus we find men and women being consistently together even against the rigorous dictates of a prescribed behaviourism to whose institutional coldness the warmth of their emotional natures is irrevocably opposed. And so on.

LT COL. H. R. L. LE BOUTELLIER, C.I.E.

Schlaugenschloss Haus

King's Byway

Boissy-le-Doux sur Seine

15 July 1929

The Sexual Revolution: Being a Rather Complete Survey of the Entire Sexual Scene

The sexual revolution began with Man's discovery that he was not attractive to Woman, as such. The lion had his mane, the peacock his gorgeous plumage, but Man found himself in a three-button sack suit.



His masculine appearance not only failed to excite Woman, but in many cases it only served to bore her. The result was that Man found it necessary to develop attractive personal traits to offset his dull appearance. He learned to say funny things. He learned to smoke, and blow smoke rings. He learned to earn money. This would have been a solution to his difficulty, but in the course of making himself attractive to Woman by developing himself

mentally, he inadvertently became so intelligent an animal that he saw how comical the whole situation was.

Thus, at the very start of the sexual revolution, Man faced one very definite problem: in becoming mentally 'aware', he had become intellectually critical, and had discovered that it was increasingly difficult to make up his mind whether he really desired any one woman, however capable he was of getting her. It was the heyday of monogamy, and in order to contemplate marriage, it was necessary for a man to decide on One Particular Woman. This he found next to impossible, for the reason that he had unconsciously set up so many mental barriers and hazards. ...

T T T T

Das digitale æ, ë, í, ø, ū

Die Programmierer scheinen an alles und alle – und dabei doch wenig gescheites zu denken. (Hans Magnus Enzensberger, NZZ 13.12.2018)

Zwischen Mensch und Maschine kommt es schon mal zu Zerwürfnissen.

Jeder, der vor sich den Bildschirm eines Rechners hat, kennt die Wutausbrüche über die Dummheit dieses Geräts, seiner Programmierer und der Oligopole, die den Weltmarkt beherrschen und ohne Rücksicht auf den sogenannten User alle Jahre wieder ihre Betriebssysteme ändern, um ihre Billionengewinne zu steigern. Updates und Verbesserungen jede Woche, die meist Verschlimmerungen sind und immer neue Zertifikate, Zugangshürden und Kennwörter von einem fordern.

Sinnlos sind auch die zahlreichen «Formatierungen», die «Formatvorlagen» und die «erweiterte Formatierung». Was eine Steuerelement-Tool-box, ein Visual Basic-Editor oder ein Frame ist, weiss nur der geistig umnebelte Programmierer. Ganz besondere Leckerbissen sind die «Japanischen Grussformeln» und die ebendort benötigte «Konsistenzüberprüfung».

Von Condensed bis Fett

Eurozentrismus kann man der Firma Microsoft also nicht vorwerfen. Für chinesische, japanische und indische Schriftzeichen ist gesorgt, und sogar für die mongolischen, burmesischen und thailändischen Schreiber ist ein Eckchen frei. Im Word-Programm gibt es eine Menge von Schriftschnitten, von denen die meisten nie benützt werden. Sie zu entfernen, ist schwierig oder ganz unmöglich, weil sie fest installiert sind.

Zwar gibt es auch Klassiker wie die Garamond, die Baskerville, Bodoni, Paladino, die Gill und die Times New Roman, mit allen Varianten von Fett, Semibold, Kursiv, Light, Semilight, Condensed, Semicondensed und so

weiter. Wer danach sucht, wird sogar Frakturschriften wie die Schwabacher finden. Aber ohne den völlig überflüssigen «Designer»-Schwachsinn und ohne Wing-, Webdings, und Emojis geht es nicht.

Zwar gibt es im Menu ein Omega-Zeichen, mit dem man das @, €, \$, das griechische und kyrillische Alphabet, das Copyright-Symbol © und andere gewöhnliche Schriftzeichen in jedes Wort-Dokument bringen kann. Aber der wahre Jakob ist das nicht. Wohl dem, der die Zahlentabelle gefunden hat. Sie ist gut versteckt. Dort gibt es Unterscheidungen, die so subtil sind, dass man sich an den Kopf greift.

Wer von uns kann den weichen Bindestrich, Geviertstrich, den Halbgeviertstrich, das Bindestrich-Minus, und den Unterstrich auf Anhieb voneinander unterscheiden? Was ist das geschützte Leerzeichen? Oder das Nummernsymbol #, das erst von den Musikern und dann von den blöden amerikanischen Hashtag-Nutzern enteignet worden ist.

Diärese und Cedille

Für die Ukrainer steht eine Reihe von Buchstaben zur Verfügung, die offenbar dje, lje, kje, dzhe und tshe bedeuten sollen. Andere bevorzugen Buchstaben wie das Eth, das Thorn, das Eng und das Kra oder Ligaturen wie das æ, œ oder ij. Der Phantasie sind keine Grenzen gesetzt. Ein invertiertes Ausrufe- und Fragezeichen ist in Spanien üblich, und mit der Tilde wird im Portugiesischen verschwenderisch umgegangen.

Manche wollen unbedingt einen kleinen Ring über dem a oder einen Querstrich durch das o haben, andere haben eine Vorliebe für die Cedille. Die Deutschen lieben die Diärese, die sie Umlaut nennen, und die Polen setzen kleine Pünktchen und Häkchen dorthin, wo immer es ihnen passt.

Deshalb ist die Zeichentabelle so endlos. Dort kann auch der Laie begreifen, was ein Macron, ein Caron, ein Pilcrow und ein Ogonek ist, von den mathematischen Symbolen ganz zu schweigen. Es gibt unter ihnen sogar ein Nicht-Zeichen. Wem das immer noch nicht reicht, der hat die Wahl zwischen verschiedenen Zeichencodes: Ascii (dezimal), Ascii (hex) und Unicode (hex).

Am liebsten möchte ich den Rechner sofort aus dem Fenster werfen, wenn ich ihn nicht täglich brauchte.

T T T T

Etymology of Some Common Typos

The New Yorker, Ian Frazier, February 3, 2020 - "The word "typo" is actually a misnomer. Derived from a phrase that denotes error, it suggests that the

typist has made a mistake. In fact, what we call typos are more accurately described as variants. Take “anmd,” which often appears when we think we have typed the conjunction “and.” In some parts of the Anglophobe world, both versions of this word—“and” and “anmd” (or “and” anmd “anmd”)—are acceptable, just as the mistyped “trhe” may be used interchangeably with the (or trhe) more conventional article “the.” Of course, there are exceptions, or erxceptions, such as the word “erxceptions” itself, which is also accepted but considered impolite.

“Anmd” and “trhe,” unlike “erxception,” both derive from ancient oral tradition. In Old, Old Norse, the stray “m” and “r” are believed to have corrupted “and” and “the” in common speech through the negligence or haste of slob members of the ur-Norse community. When monks transcribed these words directly from the mouths of the speakers, they became grossed out, but dutifully included the variants on their stain-spattered vellum manuscripts, and, as such, these so-called typos have been handed down.

Variants sometimes occur as typographic representations of consonants that seem to have migrated sideways in the mouth. This is the case with variants containing the letter “p,” such as “yopu” (“you”). As Indo-European peoples moved laterally in their wanderings, west to east (or vice versa), the plosive consonants did something similar on the tongue. Thus, we may be typing along and see an unfamiliar sentence, such as “I will be goping home,” appear on the screen. Unconsciously, we have typed exactly what an ancient Indo-European person would have said. The sentence “Dopn’t dop that” (in everyday modern English, “Don’t do that”) has been seen spelled out in finger paint on the walls of the limestone caves of Lascaux, France, where human occupation dates to more than 30000 B.C.E. Moreover, in certain contexts the second-person singular “yopu” appears to have been not a pronoun but the proper name of a particular cave individual, and ideally should be capitalized, as “Yopu.”

What do we know of this Yopu, or of any of the Indo-Europeans? Here is where our “typos” may be trying to tell us something. When these ancient humans used aspirated consonants, such as “h” (or the “wh” sound), our mistypings show that they often snuck in a seemingly gratuitous “j,” as in “whjat” (“what”), “hjere” (“here”), or “hjog” (“hog”). An ancient Indo-European sentence such as “Whjat is thjat hjog doping hjere?” makes sense only if we posit that the speaker was trying to come off as Swedish. Why he or she would want to do that is another question, but it does shed light on a weird kind of insecurity that permeated the society. The faster we type, the more intriguing this window into the distant past becomes. “Trhe quick brownb fsocx jumtde over rtha laxy dopg,” a typing-practice sentence that

all of us learned in high school, includes, in this typed-super-fast version, at least eight different proto-language families struggling to be reborn.

Modern humans who type “fsox” for “fox” likely have some Neanderthal DNA. Perhaps the well-known practice sentence describes an encounter that occurred regularly between Ice Age foxes and Neanderthal dogs. Bone-density studies of canine skeletons found in conjunction with Neanderthal shell middens indicate high concentrations of gene pairings often associated with laziness—for what that’s worth. The word “jumptde” is an elongated verb form of pre-Celtic origin, later common in Turkic languages, which fell out of favor when it became kind of a pain. And, remarkably, “over” is one of those rare words which are exactly the same in every language, extinct or living, around the world.

Nopw we fast-foprwrd top trhe technop era, amnd trhe influence opf Autopcoprrct. (Or, “Nope we fast-foppish tomorrow trh technophobe era, amid tre influence old Autocorrect.”) Today, corrections that used to take weeks happen automatically. But here a darker process seems to be goping on. When we set out to create a text message, the echoes of lost languages, and all connections to our shared human past, are erased. Text a harmless sentence like “I’m here, ready to help,” and whjat may pop up is “I’m here, ready to Hal.” Huh? Who is this “Hal”? We will never know, nor will the text’s no doubt baffled recipient. If, instead of “Hal,” the name supplied had been “Hjal,” we would have met another shadowy figure from the mists of time, someone who might conceivably have known Yopu. But, thanks to Autocorrect, poor Hjal is long forgotten. Type in his name, and it will be corrected to “Hal,” just another ordinary present-day guy, and we are the poorer for the loss.”

T T T T

Feminist Knock-Knock Jokes

Kimberly Harrington, *The New Yorker* July 2, 2017

Knock, knock!

Who’s there?

Dwayne.

Dwayne who?

Dwayne the swamp and fill it up with lady-haters, looks like.

**

Knock, knock!

Who’s there?

Annie.

Annie who?

Annie thing you can do I can do for eighty-seven cents on the dollar.

**

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Harry.

Harry who?

Harry the hell up and join the twenty-first century, corporate boards, geez.

**

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Nana.

Nana who?

Nana your business what I'm wearing.

**

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Ice cream!

Ice cream who?

Ice cream right now if I could but then you'd say I was being hysterical.

**

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Irish.

Irish who?

Irish I didn't have to tell knock-knock jokes to get my point across.

T T T T

Thurber on couples



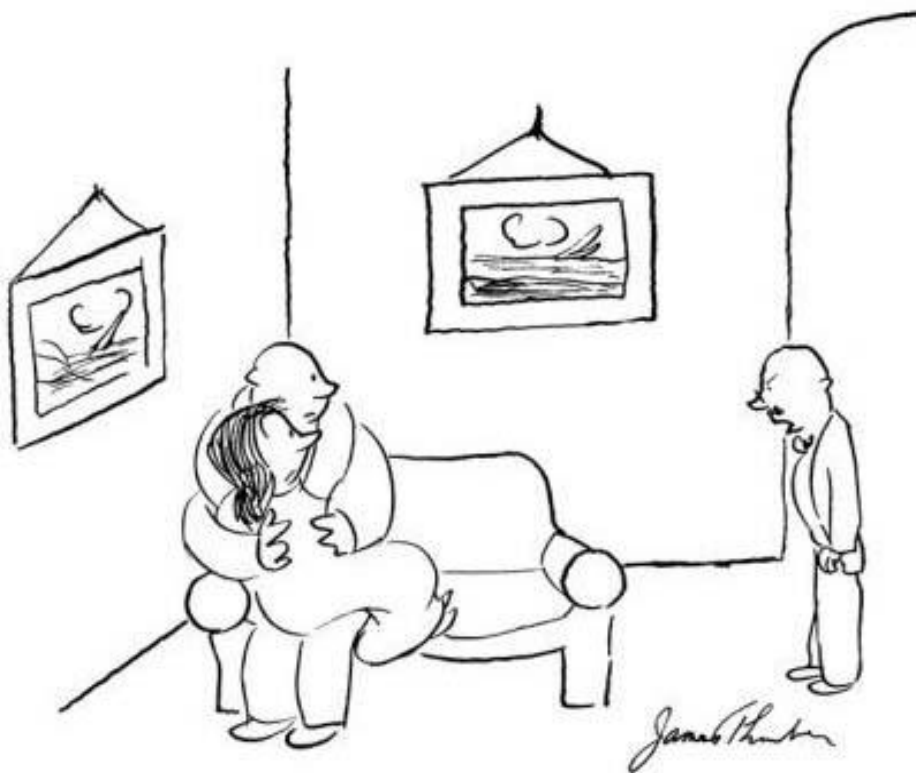
"Yoo-hoo, it's me and the ape-man."



"You and your premonitions."



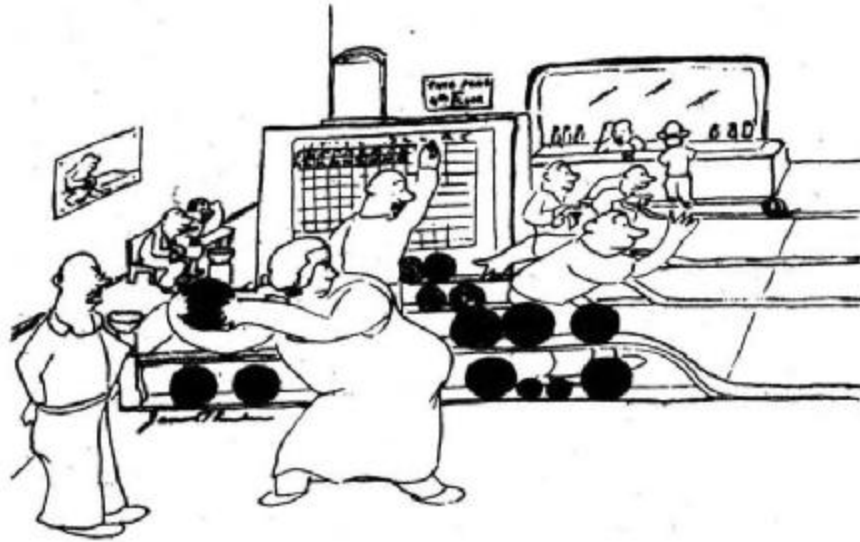
"Well, what's come over you suddenly?"



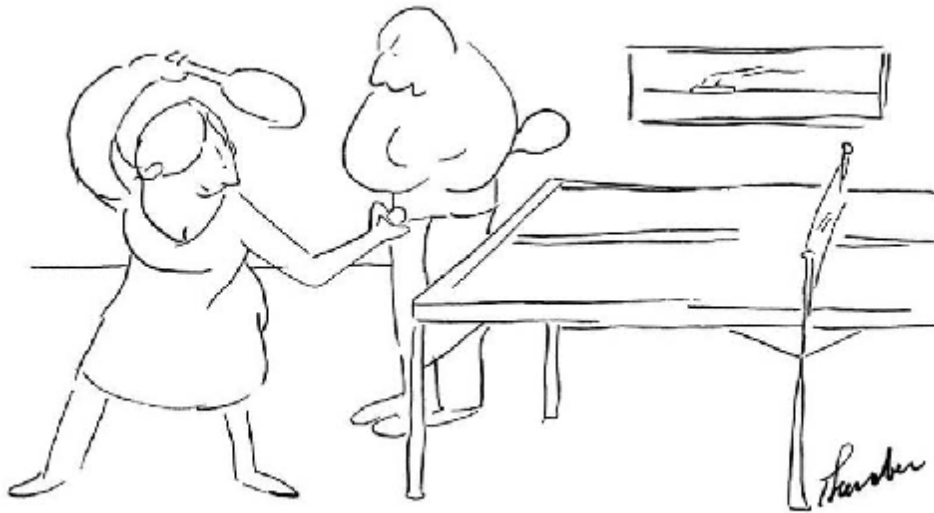
"Is this man annoying you, dear?"



"All Right, Have It Your Way—You Heard a Seal Bark"



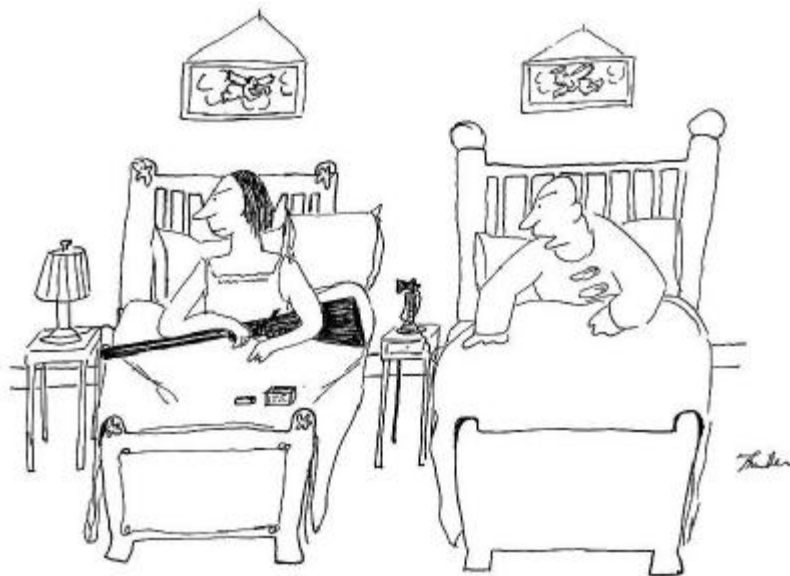
"All right, all right, try it that way! Go ahead and try it that way!"



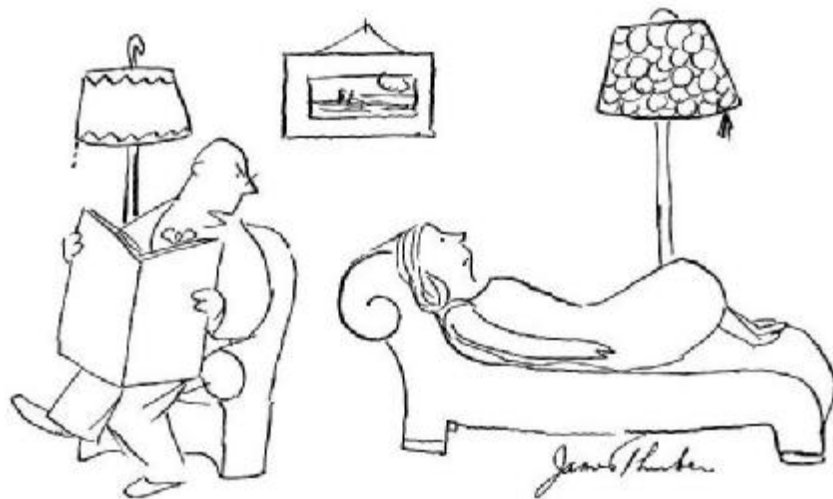
"I can tell you right now that isn't going to work."



"Have you seen my pistol, Honey-Bun?"



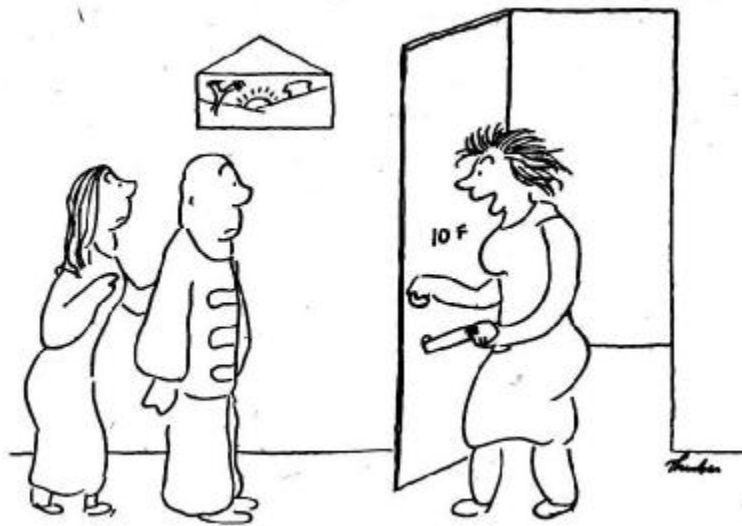
"I tell you there isn't going to be any insurrection."



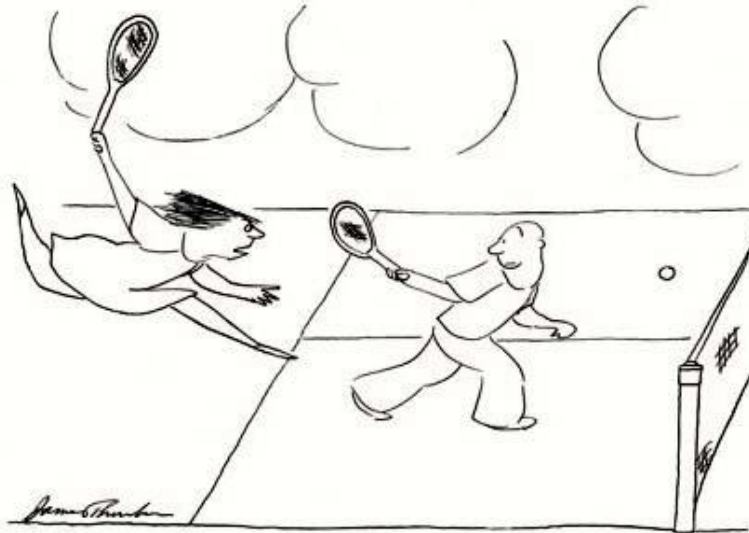
"I do love you. I just don't feel like talking military tactics with you."



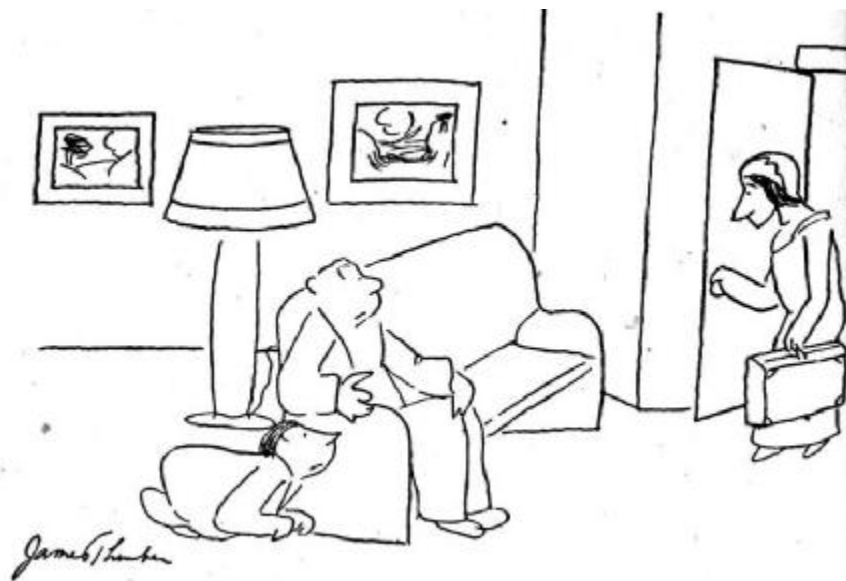
"This gentleman was kind enough to see me home, Darling"



"Have you people got any .38 cartridges?"



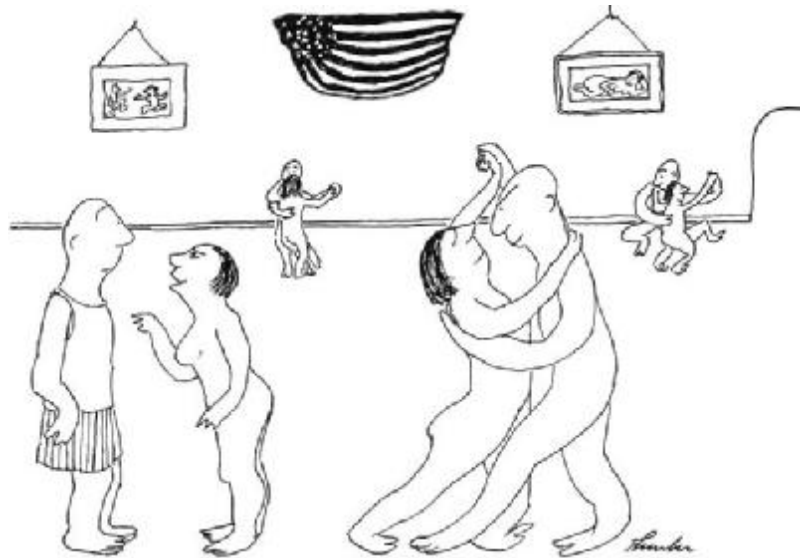
"Mine!"



"Hello, Darling- Woolgathering?"



"That's my first wife up there, and this is the present Mrs. Harris."



"See how beautifully your wife has caught the spirit of nudism, Mr. Spencer."

T T T T

Borowitz

(Washington, 10 November 2020) In what the network described as “the bombshell of the century,” Fox News Channel has obtained a damning video of President-elect Joe Biden talking to scientists.

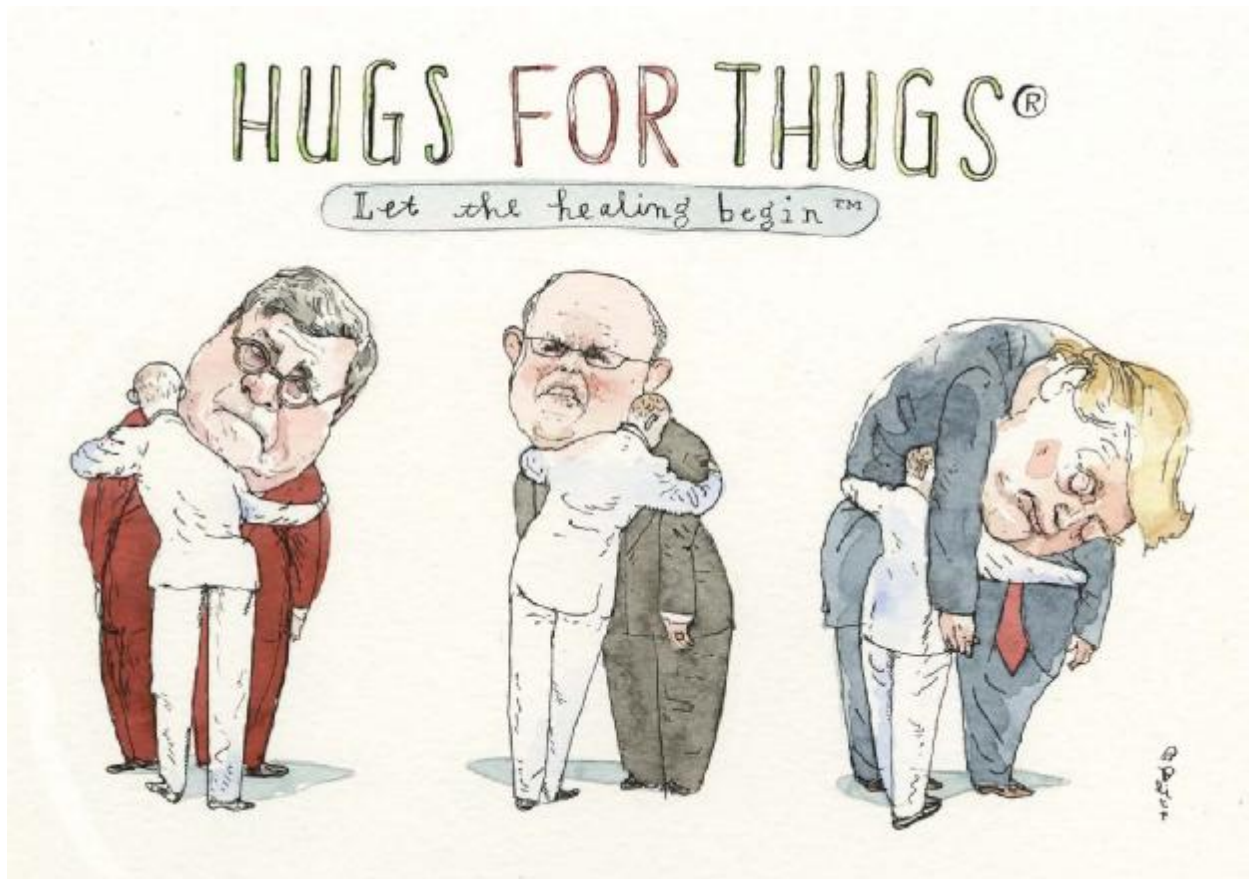
The video, which the Fox host Tucker Carlson warned viewers was “almost too disturbing to air,” was reportedly taped on Monday, during a video conference with the President-elect.

“If authentic, this video could be grounds for Biden’s impeachment,” Carlson said. “Talking to scientists, most legal scholars would agree, is a high crime under the United States Constitution.”

To buttress his assertion, Carlson singled out the appearance on the video of an epidemiologist from the University of Minnesota. “You can read the Constitution backward and forward, and you will not find the word ‘epidemiologist,’ ” Carlson said.

Stating that Biden has “a lot of explaining to do,” the Fox host said that the video could be “the last nail in the coffin of the Biden Presidency.”

“I am not easily shocked, but this is far worse than anything on Hunter’s laptop,” he said.



(Washington, 8 May 2020) In a test result that he called “a tremendous relief,” the Attorney General, Bill Barr, has tested negative for integrity, Barr confirmed on Friday.

Barr submitted to the test after learning that he had come into contact with career Justice Department prosecutors who were found to be integrity carriers.

“When I learned that there were still people at the Justice Department with integrity, I was understandably furious,” Barr told reporters. “I told them to go home at once.”

Barr said that he was putting into place new protocols that would require

Justice Department employees to be tested for integrity before entering the building.

"I thought that anyone with integrity had already left the Justice Department, but apparently I was mistaken," he said. "It's better to be safe than sorry."

Although he was elated to learn that he had tested negative for integrity, Barr said that he shuddered to think how close he came to contracting the dreaded virtue.

"Having integrity would have made it impossible for me to work for President Trump," he said.

T T T T

Daffodils - *Henri Cole* (*1956)

Sometimes I arrive with my buds closed,
and I am mistaken for scallions,
but if you cut a half inch from my stems
and put me in water, I open up and release
yellow dust from my petal cups,
like talcum sprinkled on her shoulders
after she bathes and swallows her
third tranquillizer to erase herself,
the sedative piercing right through her
like a small bunch of flowers grasped
by a hand that connects the melancholy
to something in nature urging *Trust me*,
as the blackbirds at dawn trust
the aurora that conquers night.

T T T T

The Macbeth Murder Mystery (James Thurber)

"It was a stupid mistake to make," said the American woman I had met at my hotel in the English lake country, "but it was on the counter with the other Penguin books—the little sixpenny ones, you know, with the paper covers—and I supposed of course it was a detective story. All the others were detective stories. I'd read all the others, so I bought this one without really looking at it carefully. You can imagine how mad I was when I found it was Shakespeare." I murmured something sympathetically. "I don't see why the Penguin-books people had to get out Shakespeare plays in the same size and everything as the detective stories," went on my companion. "I think they have different-colored jackets," I said. "Well, I didn't notice that,"

she said. "Anyway, I got real comfy in bed that night and all ready to read a good mystery story and here I had 'The Tragedy of Macbeth'—a book for high-school students. Like 'Ivanhoe,'" "Or 'Lorna Doone,'" I said. "Exactly," said the American lady. "And I was just crazy for a good Agatha Christie, or something. Hercule Poirot is my favorite detective." "Is he the rabbit one?" I asked. "Oh, no," said my crime-fiction expert. "He's the Belgian one. You're thinking of Mr. Pinkerton, the one that helps Inspector Bull. He's good, too."

Over her second cup of tea my companion began to tell the plot of a detective story that had fooled her completely—it seems it was the old family doctor all the time. But I cut in on her. "Tell me," I said. "Did you read 'Macbeth'?" "I had to read it," she said. "There wasn't a scrap of anything else to read in the whole room." "Did you like it?" I asked. "No, I did not," she said, decisively, "In the first place, I don't think for a moment that Macbeth did it." I looked at her blankly. "Did what?"- I asked. "I don't think for a moment that he killed the King," she said. "I don't think the Macbeth woman was mixed up in it, either. You suspect them the most, of course, but those are the ones that are never guilty—or shouldn't be, anyway." "I'm afraid," I began, "that I—" "But don't you see?" said the American lady. "It would spoil everything if you could figure out right away who did it. Shakespeare was too smart for that. I've people that never have figured out 'Hamlet,' so it isn't likely Shakespeare would have made 'Macbeth' as simple as it seems." I thought this over while I filled my pipe. "Who do you suspect?" I asked, suddenly. "Macduff," she said, promptly. "Good God!" I whispered, softly.

"Oh Macduff did it, all right," said the murder specialist. "Hercule Poirot would have got him easily." "How did you figure it out?" I demanded. "Well," she said, "I didn't right away. At first I suspected Banquo. And then, of course, he was the second person killed. That was good right in there, that part. The person you suspect of the first murder should always be the second victim." "Is that so?" I murmured. "Oh, yes," said my informant. "They have to keep surprising you. Well, after the second murder I didn't know who the killer was for a while." "How about Malcolm and Donalbain, the King's sons?" I asked. "As I remember it, they fled right after the first murder. That looks suspicious." "Too suspicious," said the American lady. "Much too suspicious. When they flee, they're never guilty. You can count on that." "I believe," I said, "I'll have a brandy," and I summoned the waiter. My companion leaned toward me, her eyes bright, her teacup quivering. "Do you know who discovered Duncan's body?" she demanded. I said I was sorry, but I had forgotten. "Macduff discovers it," she said, slipping into the historical present. "Then he comes running downstairs and shouts, 'Con-

fusion has broke open the Lord's anointed temple' and 'Sacrilegious murder has made his masterpiece' and on and on like that." The good lady tapped me on the knee. "All that stuff was rehearsed," she said. "You wouldn't say a lot of stuff like that, offhand, would you—if you had found a body?" She fixed me with a glittering eye. "I—" I began. "You're right!" she said. "You wouldn't! Unless you had practiced it in advance. 'My God, there's a body in here!' is what an innocent man would say." She sat back with a confident glare.

I thought for a while. "But what do you make of the 'Third Murderer?'" I asked. "You know, the Third Murderer has puzzled 'Macbeth' scholars for three hundred years." "That's because they never thought of Macduff," said the American lady. "It was Macduff, I'm certain. You couldn't have one of the victims murdered by two ordinary thugs—the murderer always has to be somebody important." "But what about the banquet scene?" I asked, after a moment. "How do you account for Macbeth's guilty actions there, when Banquo's ghost came in and sat in his chair?" The lady leaned forward and tapped me on the knee again. "There wasn't any ghost," she said. "A big, strong man like that doesn't go around seeing ghosts—especially in a brightly lighted banquet hall with dozens of people around. Macbeth was shielding somebody!" "Who was he shielding?" I asked. "Mrs. Macbeth, of course," she said. "He thought she did it and he was going to take the rap himself. The husband always does that when the wife is suspected." "But what," I demanded, "about the sleepwalking scene, then?" "The same thing, only the other way around," said my companion. "That time she was shielding him. She wasn't asleep at all. Do you remember where it says, 'Enter Lady Macbeth with a taper'? "Yes," I said. "Well, people who walk in their sleep never carry lights!" said my fellow-traveler. "They have a second sight. Did you ever hear of a sleepwalker carrying a light?" "No," I said, "I never did." "Well, then, she wasn't asleep. She was acting guilty to shield Macbeth." "I think," I said, "I'll have another brandy," and I called the waiter. When he brought it, I drank it rapidly and rose to go. "I believe," I said, "that you have got hold of something. Would you lend me that 'Macbeth'? I'd like to look it over tonight. I don't feel, somehow, as if I'd ever really read it." "I'll get it for you," she said. "But you'll find that I am right."

I read the play over carefully that night, and the next morning, after breakfast, I sought out the American woman. She was on the putting green, and I came up behind her silently and took her arm. She gave an exclamation. "Could I see you alone?" I asked, in a low voice. She nodded cautiously and followed me to a secluded spot. "You've found out something?" she breathed. "I've found out," I said, triumphantly, "the name

of the murderer!" "You mean it wasn't Macduff she said. "Macduff is as innocent of those murders," I said, "as Macbeth and the Macbeth woman." I opened the copy of the play, which I had with me, and turned to Act II, Scene 2. "Here," I said, "you will see where Lady Macbeth says, 'I laid their daggers ready. He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it.' Do you see?" "No," said the American woman, bluntly, "I don't." "But it's simple!" I exclaimed. "I wonder I didn't see it years ago. The reason Duncan resembled Lady Macbeth's father as he slept is that it actually was her father!" "Good God!" breathed my companion, softly. "Lady Macbeth's father killed the King," I said, "and, hearing someone coming, thrust the body under the bed and crawled into the bed himself." "But," said the lady, "you can't have a murderer who only appears in the story once. You can't have that." "I know that," I said, and I turned to Act II, Scene 4. "It says here, 'Enter Ross with an old Man.' Now, that old man is never identified and it is my contention he was old Mr. Macbeth, whose ambition it was to make his daughter Queen. There you have your motive." "But even then," cried the American lady, "he's still a minor character!" "Not," I said, gleefully, "when you realize that he was also one of the weird sisters in disguise!" "You mean one of the three witches?" "Precisely," I said. "Listen to this speech of the old man's. 'On Tuesday last, a falcon towering in her pride of place, was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.' Who does that sound like?" "It sounds like the way the three witches talk," said my companion, reluctantly. "Precisely!" I said again. "Well," said the American woman, "maybe you're right, but—" "I'm sure I am," I said. "And do you know what I'm going to do now?" "No," she said. "What?" "Buy a copy of 'Hamlet,'" I said, "and solve that!" My companion's eye brightened. "Then," she said, "you don't think Hamlet did it?" "I am," I said, "absolutely positive he didn't." "But who," she demanded, "do you suspect?" I looked at her cryptically. "Everybody," I said, and disappeared into a small grove of trees as silently as I had come.

T T T T

May Sarton

In John Le Carré's acceptance speech for the Olaf Palme prize in February, I came across a memorable line by May Sarton on ethical problems in today's world: "One must think like a hero to behave like a merely decent human being." ⁴

Here is some of her equally memorable poetry.

⁴ May Sarton is the pen name of Eleanore Marie Sarton (1912-1995), a Belgian-American poet, novelist and memoirist. Le Carré quoted her in relation to Brexit and Boris Johnson.

New Year Resolve

The time has come
To stop allowing the clutter
To clutter my mind
Like dirty snow,
Shove it off and find
Clear time, clear water.

Time for a change,
Let silence in like a cat
Who has sat at my door
Neither wild nor strange
Hoping for food from my store
And shivering on the mat.

Let silence in.
She will rarely speak or mew,
She will sleep on my bed
And all I have ever been
Either false or true
Will live again in my head.

For it is now or not
As old age silts the stream,
To shove away the clutter,
To untie every knot,
To take the time to dream,
To come back to still water.

The Work of Happiness

I thought of happiness, how it is woven
Out of the silence in the empty house each day
And how it is not sudden and it is not given
But is creation itself like the growth of a tree.
No one has seen it happen, but inside the bark
Another circle is growing in the expanding ring.
No one has heard the root go deeper in the dark,
But the tree is lifted by this inward work
And its plumes shine, and its leaves are glittering.

So happiness is woven out of the peace of hours
And strikes its roots deep in the house alone:
The old chest in the corner, cool waxed floors,
White curtains softly and continually blown

As the free air moves quietly about the room;
A shelf of books, a table, and the white-washed wall—
These are the dear familiar gods of home,
And here the work of faith can best be done,
The growing tree is green and musical.

For what is happiness but growth in peace,
The timeless sense of time when furniture
Has stood a life's span in a single place,
And as the air moves, so the old dreams stir
The shining leaves of present happiness?
No one has heard thought or listened to a mind,
But where people have lived in inwardness
The air is charged with blessing and does bless;
Windows look out on mountains and the walls are kind.

Autumn Sonnets

I wake to gentle mist over the meadow
The chilling atmosphere before sunrise
Where half my world lies still asleep in shadow
And half is touched awake as if by eyes.
Sparse yellow leaves high in the air are struck
To sudden flame as the first rays break through
And all the brightness gathers to that mark,
While floating in the dim light far below
A monarch settles on an autumn crocus
For one last drink before impending flight.
The slow pulse of the wings brings into focus
The autumn scene and all its dark and bright,
And suddenly the granite rock is split
As sun lights up exactly half of it.

After a night of rain the brilliant screen
Below my terraced garden falls away.
And there, far off, I see the hills again
On this, a raw and windy, somber day.
Moments of loss, and it is overwhelming
(Crimson and gold gone, that rich tapestry),
But a new vision, quiet and soul-calming,
Distance, design, are given back to me.
This is good poverty, now love is lean,
More honest, harder than it ever was

When all was glamour'd by a golden screen.
The hills are back, and silver on the grass,
As I look without passion or despair
Out on a larger landscape, grand and bare.

T T T T

Help yourself to Port

John Smith was looking for a new car. In the showroom the salesman described the features of the latest model: "Among other improvements, you no longer have to push buttons to choose your music, just say the name of the composer or the artist and the car will choose it for you."

"Let me try," said John. "Bach."

Back came the answer "Father or sons?"

"Mendelssohn?" "Brother or sister?"

"Schumann?" "Husband or wife?"

"I'll take it," said John.

The next day, John was stuck in a traffic jam at Marble Arch due to a breakdown and roadworks blocking two of the lanes. "Idiots, imbeciles, clowns, cretins!" he shouted.

Back came the answer from the car: "Johnson, Trump or Macron?"

T T T T

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

One of James Thurber's best-known short stories is *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, filmed in 1947 with Danny Kaye and in 2013 with Ben Stiller. The former stays close to the original, the later strays in all directions. Here is an extract.

"We're going through!" The Commander's voice was like thin ice breaking. He wore his full-dress uniform, with the heavily braided white cap pulled down rakishly over one cold gray eye. "We can't make it, sir. It's spoiling for a hurricane, if you ask me." "I'm not asking you, Lieutenant Berg," said the Commander. "Throw on the power lights! Rev her up to 8,500! We're going through!" The pounding of the cylinders increased: ta-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa. The Commander stared at the ice forming on the pilot window. He walked over and twisted a row of complicated dials. "Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!" he shouted. "Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!" repeated Lieutenant Berg. "Full strength in No. 3 turret!" shouted the Commander. "Full strength in No. 3 turret!" The crew,

bending to their various tasks in the huge, hurtling eight-engined Navy hydroplane, looked at each other and grinned. "The Old Man'll get us through," they said to one another. "The Old Man ain't afraid of Hell!" . . .

"Not so fast! You're driving too fast!" said Mrs. Mitty. "What are you driving so fast for?"

"Hmm?" said Walter Mitty. He looked at his wife, in the seat beside him, with shocked astonishment. She seemed grossly unfamiliar, like a strange woman who had yelled at him in a crowd. "You were up to fifty-five," she said. "You know I don't like to go more than forty. You were up to fifty-five." Walter Mitty drove on toward Waterbury in silence, the roaring of the SN202 through the worst storm in twenty years of Navy flying fading in the remote, intimate airways of his mind. "You're tensed up again," said Mrs. Mitty. "It's one of your days. I wish you'd let Dr. Renshaw look you over."

Walter Mitty stopped the car in front of the building where his wife went to have her hair done. "Remember to get those overshoes while I'm having my hair done," she said. "I don't need overshoes," said Mitty. She put her mirror back into her bag. "We've been all through that," she said, getting out of the car. "You're not a young man any longer." He raced the engine a little. "Why don't you wear your gloves? Have you lost your gloves?" Walter Mitty reached in a pocket and brought out the gloves. He put them on, but after she had turned and gone into the building and he had driven on to a red light, he took them off again. "Pick it up, brother!" snapped a cop as the light changed, and Mitty hastily pulled on his gloves and lurched ahead. He drove around the streets aimlessly for a time, and then he drove past the hospital on his way to the parking lot.

. . . "It's the millionaire backer, Wellington McMillan," said the pretty nurse. "Yes?" said Walter Mitty, removing his gloves slowly. "Who has the case?" "Dr. Renshaw and Dr. Benbow, but there are two specialists here, Dr. Remington from New York and Mr. Pritchard-Mitford from London. He flew over." A door opened down a long, cool corridor and Dr. Renshaw came out. He looked distraught and haggard. "Hello, Mitty," he said. "We're having the devil's own time with McMillan, the millionaire banker and close personal friend of Roosevelt. Obstreosis of the ductal tract. Tertiary. Wish you'd take a look at him." "Glad to," said Mitty.

In the operating room there were whispered introductions: "Dr. Remington, Dr. Mitty. Mr. Pritchard-Mitford, Dr. Mitty." "I've read your book on streptothricosis," said Pritchard-Mitford, shaking hands. "A brilliant performance, sir." "Thank you," said Walter Mitty. "Didn't know you were in the States, Mitty," grumbled Remington. "Coals to Newcastle,

bringing Mitford and me up here for a tertiary." "You are very kind," said Mitty. A huge, complicated machine, connected to the operating table, with many tubes and wires, began at this moment to go pocketa-pocketa-pocketa. "The new anesthetizer is giving way!" shouted an interne. "There is no one in the East who knows how to fix it!" "Quiet, man!" said Mitty, in a low, cool voice. He sprang to the machine, which was now going pocketa-pocketa-queep-pocketa-queep. He began fingering delicately a row of glistening dials. "Give me a fountain pen!" he snapped. Someone handed him a fountain pen. He pulled a faulty piston out of the machine and inserted the pen in its place. "That will hold for ten minutes," he said. "Get on with the operation." A nurse hurried over and whispered to Renshaw, and Mitty saw the man turn pale. "Coreopsis has set in," said Renshaw nervously. "If you would take over, Mitty?" Mitty looked at him and at the craven figure of Benbow, who drank, and at the grave, uncertain faces of the two great specialists. "If you wish," he said. They slipped a white gown on him; he adjusted a mask and drew on thin gloves nurses handed him shining . . .

"Back it up, Mac! Look out for that Buick!" Walter Mitty jammed on the brakes. "Wrong lane, Mac," said the parking-lot attendant, looking at Mitty closely. "Gee. Yeh," muttered Mitty. He began cautiously to back out of the lane marked "Exit Only." "Leave her sit there," said the attendant. "I'll put her away." Mitty got out of the car. "Hey, better leave the key." "Oh," said Mitty, handing the man the ignition key. The attendant vaulted into the car, backed it up with insolent skill, and put it where it belonged.

They're so damn cocky, thought Walter Mitty, walking along Main Street; they think they know everything. Once he had tried to take his chains off, outside New Milford, and he had got them wound around the axles. A man had had to come out in a wrecking car and unwind them, a young, grinning garageman. Since then Mrs. Mitty always made him drive to a garage to have the chains taken off. The next time, he thought, I'll wear my right arm in a sling; they won't grin at me then. I'll have my right arm in a sling and they'll see I couldn't possibly take the chains off myself. He kicked at the slush on the sidewalk. "Overshoes," he said to himself, and he began looking for a shoe store.

When he came out into the street again, with the overshoes in a box under his arm, Walter Mitty began to wonder what the other thing was his wife had told him to get. She had told him twice, before they set out from their house for Waterbury. In a way he hated these weekly trips to town—he was always getting something wrong. Kleenex, he thought, Squibb's, razor blades? No. Toothpaste, toothbrush, bicarbonate, carborundum, initiative and referendum? He gave it up. But she would remember it. "Where's the

what's-its-name?" she would ask. "Don't tell me you forgot the what's-its-name." A newsboy went by shouting something about the Waterbury trial.

. . . "Perhaps this will refresh your memory." The District Attorney suddenly thrust a heavy automatic at the quiet figure on the witness stand. "Have you ever seen this before?" Walter Mitty took the gun and examined it expertly. "This is my Webley-Vickers 50.80," he said calmly. An excited buzz ran around the courtroom. The judge rapped for order. "You are a crack shot with any sort of firearms, I believe?" said the District Attorney insinuatingly. "Objection!" shouted Mitty's attorney. "We have shown that the defendant could not have fired the shot. We have shown that he wore his right arm in a sling on the night of the fourteenth of July." Walter Mitty raised his hand briefly and the bickering attorneys were stilled. "With any known make of gun," he said evenly, "I could have killed Gregory Fitzhurst at three hundred feet with my left hand." Pandemonium broke loose in the courtroom. A woman's scream rose above the bedlam and suddenly a lovely, dark-haired girl was in Walter Mitty's arms. The District Attorney struck at her savagely. Without rising from his chair, Mitty let the man have it on the point of the chin. "You miserable cur!" . . .

T T T T

Prince Charles goes Pidgin in Nigeria

Prince Charles gave one of his better speeches in Lagos two years ago.

"He's better known for speaking the Queen's English but the Prince of Wales on Wednesday turned to Pidgin as he visited Nigeria's commercial capital. (*The Guardian* 8 Nov 2018)

"How you dey? (How are you?)" he asked assembled dignitaries, including former heads of state, presidential candidates, leading politicians, and stars from the world of fashion, music and the arts.

... "As they say, 'God don butta my bread' (God has blessed me)," he said, praising the city for its dynamism and energy.⁵

Pidgin is the widely spoken lingua franca of much of west and central Africa. The language is a cultural force, driving everything from the lyrics of Afrobeat music to movies emerging from Nigeria's Nollywood, now the world's second-largest film industry. West African Pidgin began in the late 17th and 18th centuries as a simple trade language between Europeans and Africans.

⁵ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qlbBeMmm90> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YU9rVcSEnkw>.

"If life dey show you pepper, make pepper soup," he said, which roughly translates to "life is what you make it".

A BBC programme in pidgin was launched by the BBC World Service in 2017 (<https://www.bbc.com/pidgin>). There are, of course, many varieties of pidgin. My very good and much regretted old friend Bill Boyle, having spent part of World War II in Papua-New Guinea, spoke some of the local pidgin: his favourite phrase, describing a plane crash, was "him allbuggerup finish" - Prince Charles couldn't have put it more eloquently.

A version was spoken in China until the end of the 19th century, but came to be looked upon by the Chinese as humiliating (because English speakers ridiculed it).

Charles Godfrey Leland (1824-1903) made a serious study of Chinese pidgin and added it to his collection of folklore and folk linguistics.

Arnold Silcock in *Verse and Worse* (Faber 1958) - "Born in Philadelphia, he studied at the Universities of Princeton, Heidelberg, Munich, and Paris, and was in the Paris Revolution of 1848. He became a barrister, a journalist and author, and a much travelled and versatile worker and writer in the fields of education and handicrafts (especially wood-carving, on which he wrote two or three books), and for the cause of Negro emancipation and education. One of his best-known pro-Negro writings was 'The Wonderful Crow', a poem included in his book, *The Music Lesson of Confucius*. He was also a tireless student of Etruscan and Roman antiquities, of the gipsies, of folklore, and magic—see his book, *Aradia*, or *The Gospel of the Witches*. He served in the American Civil War, and came to Europe in 1869 and lived for about ten years in London. He died in Florence in 1903.

"It was Charles Godfrey Leland, an American poet, and author of the famous 'Hans Breitmann Ballads', so full of humour and pathos, who also was the only poet to write verse in and popularize Pidgin-English."

Leland is quoted extensively in *Verse and Worse*, one of my favourite sources for *CP*. In addition to the short biography of Leland quoted above, the editor, Arnold Silcock, has this to say about Chinese pidgin:⁶

"Almost the funniest, yet almost the least well known of the forms of broken English is the brand spoken in the old Treaty-ports of China.

⁶ **TRIGGER WARNING** - Not 100% politically correct. If we laugh at this today, it was not Leland's intention.

‘Pidgin-English’ originally meant ‘Business English’ for the word ‘pidgin’ itself was the nearest the average Chinese could get to a pronunciation of the word ‘business’. So ‘pidgin’ now means business and affair or matter or way of life or method - unless birds are in the wind, when ‘pidgin’, at last, means ‘pigeon’! Consequently ‘love-pidgin’ means making love, ‘joss-pidgin’ is religion, and ‘look-see-pidgin’ is hypocrisy. But ‘pidgin-eye’ means a pigeon’s eye or good sight!

Enunciation of the consonant R is another impossible feat for most Chinese, and their attempts result in a sound resembling L. Therefore in the following verses L, *in italics*, represents the letter R. The commonest examples are, velly for very: cly-cly for cry: plopa for proper: solly for sorry: flin for friend.

Other common variations on English words are, chilo for child: allo for all: alloway for always: in fact the Chinese love to add an ‘o’ whenever possible, and a fool is foolo, while others as easily recognizable are, debilo for devil: golo for gold: waifo for wife.

The Chinese are also especially fond of adding an ‘ee’ sound to any word at will—like ‘squeezey’ for squeeze: ‘tinkee’ for think: ‘supposey’ for suppose: ‘blongey’ for belong.

As in the Chinese language itself Pidgin-English makes no distinction between he, she, it and they, and his, hers, its, and theirs, so ‘he’ is commonly used to denote any of these words. ‘My’ is indiscriminately used for I, me, my, mine, we, our and ours!

Finally ‘maskee’ is a very common word meaning ‘however’, or ‘without’, or ‘no matter’, or ‘also’, or ‘anyhow’, or ‘but’, or ‘in spite of’! While ‘galow’ means absolutely nothing, and is even more common!

A good test for any exasperated reader is the following snippet from Leland’s story of the cat who was converted and wore a rosary.

One time lib China-side one piecee cat,
One day he massa take Joss-pidgin beads
He put bead *I* ound cat neck.

But the conversion, though apparent to the mice, was not real:

Wat-time he mousey walk outside he hole,
Look-see dat pidgin—see dat cat hab catch
One piecee bead, he mousey too much glad.

They gather round and celebrate the conversion of ‘one-piecee cat’, in these words:

‘One tim he vell y bad—but now he ‘pent

An' nevva chow-chow mousey any more,
 An allo mousey lib all p^lopa now;
 He go outside what-tim he wantchee go,
 An' nevva blongey f^laid—he cat no fear.
 An' mousey go to sing-song allo tim,
 An' takee waifo, chilos walk outside,
 An' allo day for allo mousey now,
 He be one Feast ob Lantern, *hai! ch'hoy!*
 T'at mousey tink t'at pidgin vell^y nice,
 He catchee too much happy ininside,
 He makee dancee, galantee, maskee.

But one string of beads is not a sufficiently powerful Joss to turn one piecee velly bad cat into one Joss-pidgin cat; and he creeps, man-man (slowly) towards the joyous mouse party.

He cat look-see t'at dance, he walk man-man,
 No makee bobbel^y till wat-tim he come
 Long-side he dancee—t'en he ^lun chop-chop
 Insidee dance and catch one piecee mouse,
 An' makee chow-chow all same olo tim.

And the dead mouse's friends all run away and hide

He mousey f^lin all wailo in he hole,
 An' allo c^ly-c^ly—some for he dead f^lin,
 An' some what fo' he f^laid cat catchee he;
 An' allo-tim t'ey makee one sing-song,
 Sing-song how mousey so^lly ininside....

This one little rhyme contains most of the usual phrases and forms peculiar to Pidgin-English. For instance 'wat-tim' for what time or when: 'galantee' for gallant in the sense of gay and grand: 'bobbely' for a commotion: man-man for slowly (a word 'lifted' direct from the Chinese) and 'chop-chop' meaning quickly."

T T T T

Some More Port?

A Greek and a Chinese trader had stalls next to one another in the Covent Garden Friday market. The Greek was continually teasing the Chinese about his inability to pronounce the letter R. "Good morning, good morning", he would say, "what day is it today?"

His Chinese colleague would invariably say "Fliday" to roars of laughter from the Greek. This so infuriated the Chinese stall-holder that he secretly took elocution lessons to pronounce the word 'Friday' correctly.

Some weeks later, the usual scenario: "Well, what day is it today?"

The reply came: "Friday, you Gleek plick."

T T T T

The Secret Life of James Thurber

[*Extract*] Two years ago my wife and I, looking for a house to buy, called on a firm of real-estate agents in New Milford. One of the members of the firm, scrabbling through a metal box containing many keys, looked up to say, "The key to the Roxbury house isn't here." His partner replied, "It's a common lock. A skeleton will let you in." I was suddenly once again five years old, with wide eyes and open mouth. I pictured the Roxbury house as I would have pictured it as a small boy, a house of such dark and nameless horrors as have never crossed the mind of our little bat-biter.

It was of sentences like that, nonchalantly tossed off by real-estate dealers, great-aunts, clergymen, and other such prosaic persons that the enchanted private world of my early boyhood was made. In this world, businessmen who phoned their wives to say that they were tied up at the office sat roped to their swivel chairs, and probably gagged, unable to move or speak, except somehow, miraculously, to telephone; hundreds of thousands of businessmen tied to their chairs in hundreds of thousands of offices in every city of my fantastic cosmos. An especially fine note about the binding of all the businessmen in all the cities was that whoever did it always did it around five o'clock in the afternoon.

Then there was the man who left town under a cloud. Sometimes I saw him all wrapped up in the cloud, and invisible, like a cat in a burlap sack. At other times it floated, about the size of a sofa, three or four feet above his head, following him wherever he went. One could think about the man under the cloud before going to sleep; the image of him wandering around from town to town was a sure soporific.

Not so the mental picture of a certain Mrs. Huston, who had been terribly cut up when her daughter died on the operating-table. I could see the doctors too vividly, just before they set upon Mrs. Huston with their knives, and I could hear them. "Now, Mrs. Huston, will we get up on the table like a good girl, or will we have to be put there?" I could usually fight off Mrs. Huston before I went to sleep, but she frequently got into my dreams, and sometimes she still does.

I remember the grotesque creature that came to haunt my meditations when one evening my father said to my mother, "What did Mrs. Johnson say when you told her about Betty?" and my mother replied, "Oh, she was all ears."

There were many other wonderful figures in the secret, surrealist landscapes of my youth: the old lady who was always up in the air, the husband who did not seem to be able to put his foot down, the man who lost his head during a fire but was still able to run out of the house yelling, the young lady who was, in reality, a soiled dove. It was a world that, of necessity, one had to keep to oneself and brood over in silence, because it would fall to pieces at the touch of words. If you brought it out into the light of actual day and put it to the test of questions, your parents would try to laugh the miracles away, or they would take your temperature and put you to bed. (Since I always ran a temperature, whenever it was taken, I was put to bed and left there all alone with Mrs. Huston.)

Such a world as the world of my childhood is, alas, not year-proof. It is a ghost that, to use Henley's words, gleams, flickers, vanishes away. I think it must have been the time my little Cousin Frances came to visit us that it began surely and forever to dissolve. I came into the house one rainy dusk and asked where Frances was. "She is," said our cook, "up in the front room crying her heart out." The fact that a person could cry so hard that his heart would come out of his body, as perfectly shaped and glossy as a red velvet pincushion, was news to me. For some reason I had never heard the expression, so common in American families whose hopes and dreams run so often counter to attainment. I went upstairs and opened the door of the front room. Frances, who was three years older than I, jumped up off the bed and ran past me, sobbing, and down the stairs.

My search for her heart took some fifteen minutes. I tore the bed apart and kicked up the rugs and even looked in the bureau drawers. It was no good. I looked out the window at the rain and the darkening sky. My cherished mental image of the man under the cloud began to grow dim and fade away. I discovered that, all alone in a room, I could face the thought of Mrs. Huston with cold equanimity. Downstairs, in the living room, Frances was still crying. I began to laugh.

T T T T

Mon âme à l'automne - Jean-Marie Brandt, 2010

La feuille détachée qui tournoie dans l'espace,
Et mon âme à l'automne effarée par l'hiver,
Dans une virevolte, au gré des vents divers,
Se donnent rendez-vous sur une vaste place,

Où des bancs dépeuplés et des bassins de glace,
Fantômes du passé prostrés dans un désert,
Evoquent, hébétés, le grouillant univers
D'un monde que l'oubli sous son linceul efface.

Flocons du souvenir, carrousels silencieux,
Qui farandolez sur la terre et dans les cieux,
Entraînez dans le rythme abscons du temps qui file
Ces résidus de vie tourbillonnant dans l'air,
Mes souvenirs, mon âme, et tout ce qui m'est cher,
Comme un spectre figé qui devant moi défile.

La musique s'écoule - Jean-Marie Brandt, 2009

Comme un fleuve tranquille emporte ses secrets
D'une source inconnue jusqu'aux mers éloignées,
La musique s'écoule en courbures soignées :
L'origine et la fin fusionnent dans l'abstrait.

Comme une vie s'écoule emportant les déchets
D'un passé agrippé à de fausses poignées,
L'illusion tisse d'or sa toile d'araignée :
La naissance et la mort confondent leurs décrets.

Du piano ou des mains, qui donc fait la musique ?
Jamais ne connaissons l'auteur ni la réplique
Des rapports fusionnels où l'espace et le temps,
Mêlant à l'infini les perceptions du monde,
Unissent ces courants à l'humeur vagabonde
Qui fouettent le rivage et jouent à contretemps.

Au Cimetière - DC, 2013

(A ma mère bien-aimée)
Telle une dentelle,
Les feuilles mortes cisèlent
Les terres d'argile
Et les dalles graniteuses
En ce lieu de mémoire,
Où se croisent l'éphémère
Et l'ardeur des prières ;
Les cœurs en exil
Et les délivrances ;
Les gloires oubliées
Et les grandeurs fanées ;
Terroir d'abandon,
Sous le lierre foisonnant.
Et les ombres opalines,
Des voiles de brume,

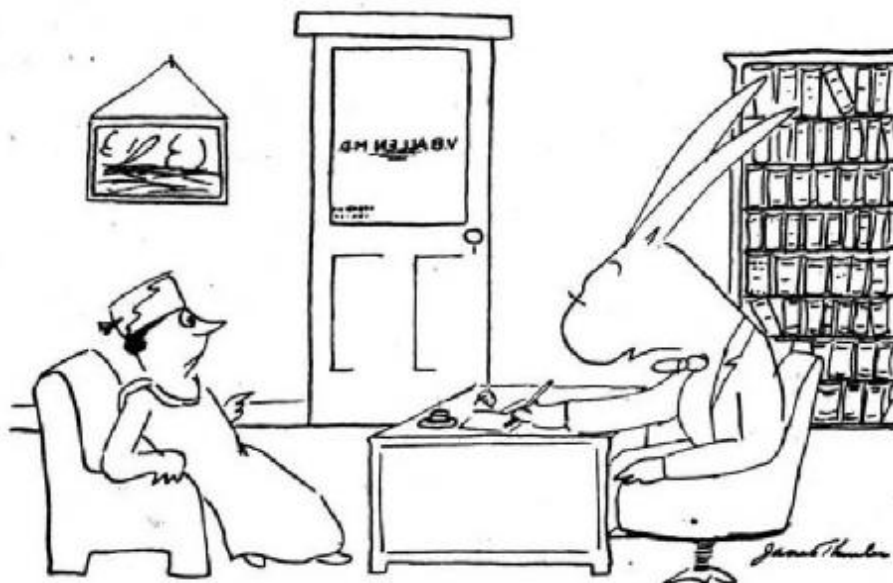
Habillent de mystère
 Ce vieux sanctuaire,
 Et glacent les larmes,
 De l'âme orpheline,
 Où rayonne en silence,
 Et pour l'Eternité,
 La tendre présence
 D'un visage aimé.

T T T T

Just Thurber



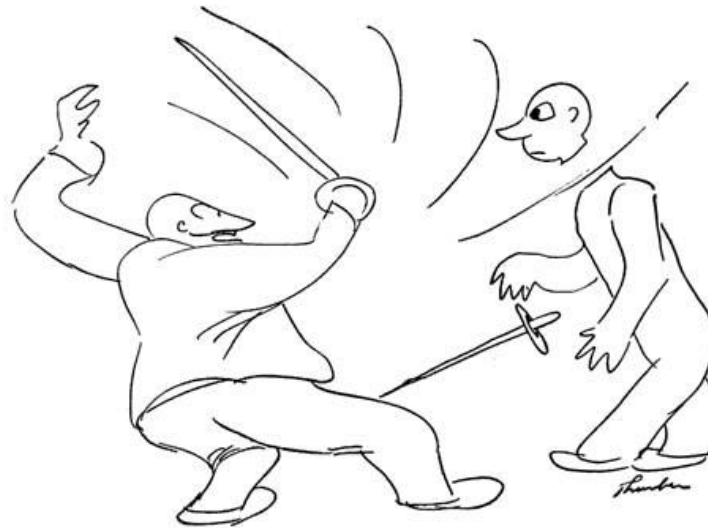
"It's a naive domestic Burgundy without any breeding but I think you'll be amused by its presumption."



"You said a moment ago that everybody you look at seems to be a rabbit. Now, just what do you mean by that, Mrs. Sprague?"



"Well, if I called the wrong number, why did you answer the phone?"



"Touché"



"I don't know, George got it somewhere."

The Story of Sailing (James Thurber)

People who visit you in Bermuda are likely to notice, even before they notice the flowers of the island, the scores of sailing craft which fleck the harbors and the ocean round about. Furthermore, they are likely to ask you about the ships before they ask you about the flowers and this, at least in my own case, is unfortunate, because although I know practically nothing about flowers I know ten times as much about flowers as I know about ships. Or at any rate I did before I began to study up on the subject. Now I feel that I am pretty well qualified to hold my own in any average discussion of rigging.

I began to brush up on the mysteries of sailing a boat after an unfortunate evening when a lady who sat next to me at dinner turned to me and said, "Do you reef in your gaff-topsails when you are close-hauled or do you let go the mizzen-top-bowlines and cross-jack-braces?" She took me for a sailor and not a landlubber and of course I hadn't the slightest idea what she was talking about.

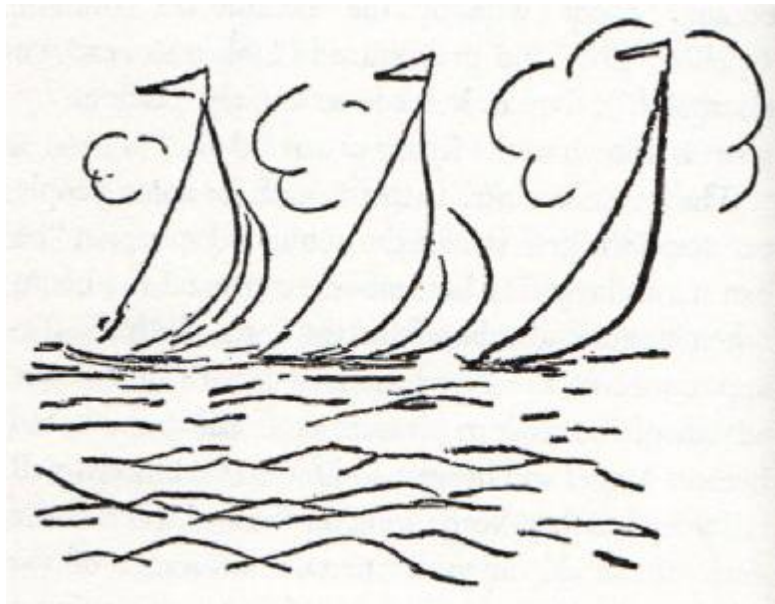
One reason for this was that none of the principal words (except "reef") used in the sentence I have quoted is pronounced the way it is spelled: "gaff-topsails" is pronounced "gassles," "close-hauled" is pronounced "cold," "mizzen-top-bowlines" is pronounced "mittens," and "cross-jack-braces" is pronounced "crabapples" or something that sounds a whole lot like that. Thus what the lady really said to me was, "Do you reef in your gassles when you are cold or do you let go the mittens and crabapples?" Many a visitor who is asked such a question takes the first ship back home, and it is for these embarrassed gentlemen that I am going to explain briefly the history and terminology of sailing.

In the first place, there is no doubt but that the rigging of the modern sailing ship has become complicated beyond all necessity. If you want proof of this you have only to look up the word "rigging" in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. You will find a drawing of a full-rigged modern ship and under it an explanation of its various spars, masts, sails, etc. There are forty-five different major parts, beginning with "bowsprit" and going on up to "davit topping-lifts." Included in between are, among others, these items: the fore-top-mast staysail halliards (pron. "fazzles"), the topgallant mast-yard-and-lift (pron. "toft"), the mizzen-topgallant-braces (pron. "maces"), and the fore-topmast backstays and top-sail tye (pron. "fras-santossle"). The tendency of the average landlubber who studies this diagram for five minutes is to turn to "Sanskrit" in the encyclopaedia and study up on that instead, but only a coward would do that. It is possible to get something out of the article on

rigging if you keep at it long enough.

Let us creep up on the formidable modern sailing ship in our stocking feet, beginning with one of the simplest of all known sailing craft, the Norse Herring Boat. Now when the Norse built their sailing boats they had only one idea in mind: to catch herring. They were pretty busy men, always a trifle chilly, and they had neither the time nor the inclination to sit around on the cold decks of their ships trying to figure out all the different kinds of ropes, spars, and sails that might be hung on their masts. Each ship had, as a matter of fact, only one mast. Near the top of it was a crosspiece of wood and on that was hung one simple square sail, no more complicated than the awning of a cigar store. A rope was attached to each end of the crosspiece and the other ends of these ropes were held by the helmsman. By manipulating the ropes he could make the ship go ahead, turn right, or turn left. It was practically impossible to make it turn around, to be sure, and that is the reason the Norsemen went straight on and discovered America, thus proving that it isn't really necessary to turn around.

As the years went on and the younger generations of Norsemen became, like all younger generations, less hardworking and more restless than their forebears, they began to think less about catching herring and more about monkeying with the sails of their ships. One of these restless young Norsemen one day lengthened the mast of his ship, put up another cross-piece about six feet above the first one, and hung another but smaller sail on this new crosspiece, or spar (pronounced, strange as it may seem, "spar"). Thus was the main topsail born.



After that, innovations in sails followed so fast that the herring boat became a veritable shambles of canvas. A Norseman named Leif the Sailmaker added a second mast to his ship, just in front of the first one, and thus the foremast came into being and with it the fore mainsail and the fore topsail. A Turk named Skvar added a third mast and called it the mizzen. Not to be outdone, a Muscovite named Amir put up a third spar on each of his masts; Skvar put up a fourth; Amir replied with a fifth; Skvar came back with a sixth, and so it went, resulting in the topgallant foresail, the top-topgallant

mizzen sail, the top-top-topgallant main topsail, and the tip-top-topgallant-gallant mainsail (pron. "twee twee twee twa twa").

Practically nobody today sails a full-rigged seven-masted ship, so that it would not be especially helpful to describe in detail all the thousands of different gaffs, sprits, queeps, weems, lugs, miggets, loords (spelled "leewards"), gessels, grommets, etc., on such a ship. I shall therefore devote what space I have left to a discussion of how to come back alive from a pleasant sail in the ordinary 20- or 30-foot sailing craft such as you are likely to be "taken for a ride" in down in Bermuda. This type of so-called pleasure ship is not only given to riding on its side, due to coming about without the helmsman's volition (spelled "jibe" and pronounced "look out, here we go again!"), but it is made extremely perilous by what is known as the flying jib, or boom.

The boom is worse than the gaff for some people can stand the gaff (hence the common expression "he can stand the gaff") but nobody can stand the boom when it aims one at him from the floor. With the disappearance of the Norse herring fisherman and the advent of the modern pleasure craft sailor, the boom became longer and heavier and faster. Helmsmen will tell you that they keep swinging the boom across the deck of the ship in order to take advantage of the wind but after weeks of observation it is my opinion that they do it to take advantage of the passengers. The only way to avoid the boom and have any safety at all while sailing is to lie flat on your stomach in the bottom of the ship. This is very uncomfortable on account of the hard boards and because you can't see a thing, but it is the one sure way I know of to go sailing and come back in the boat and not be washed up in the surf. I recommend the posture highly, but not as highly as I recommend the bicycle. My sailing adventures in Bermuda have made me appreciate for the first time the essential wonder of the simple, boomless bicycle.

T T T T

Kid's jokes

In *CP 2009* I included some jokes in French from Carambar wrappers. Here are some in English from a book of kid's jokes.⁷

Why did the farmer put bells on his cows? Because the horns didn't work.

What kind of snake is good at math? An adder.

"I've got a cat that can say his own name." "So what's his name?" "Meow."

"We have a new dog." "What's he like?" "Anything we feed him."

⁷ *Why do Bees Hum?*, Derrydale Books N.Y., 1990

"What did one math book say to another?" "We both have problems."

"I always carry a spare pair of trousers when I play golf." "Why?" "I might get a hole-in-one."

"Why did you go to the football game?" "I thought the quarterback was a refund."

"My father went hunting today and shot three turkeys." "Were they wild?" "No but the farmer was."

"Why don't you play golf with Terry any more?" "Would you play with someone who cheats?" "No." "Nor will Terry."

Three fat men were walking with only one umbrella. Why didn't they get wet? It wasn't raining.

Why do bees hum? Because they don't know the words.

What goes faster, hot or cold? Hot, anyone can catch a cold.

Knock, knock. Who's there?

Howie. Howie who? Howie doing with these Knock-knock jokes.

Celia. Celia who? Celia later alligator.

Letter, Letter who. Letter in it's cold outside.

Jose. Jose who. Jose can you see by the dawn's early light?

Freeze. Freeze who? Freeze a jolly good fellow.

O'Shea. O'Shea who? O'Shea can you see by the dawn's early light?

Philip. Philip who? Philip my tank please.

Butter. Butter who? Butter late than never.

Reed. Reed who? Reed this book and find out.

T T T T

Huckleberry Finn

... here comes a couple of men tearing up the path as tight as they could foot it. ... One of these fellows was about seventy or upwards, and had a bald head and very gray whiskers. He had an old battered-up slouch hat on, and a greasy blue woollen shirt, and ragged old blue jeans britches stuffed into his boot-tops, and home-knit galluses -- no, he only had one. He had an old long-tailed blue jeans coat with slick brass buttons flung over his arm, and both of them had big, fat, ratty-looking carpet-bags.

The other fellow was about thirty, and dressed about as ornery. After breakfast we all laid off and talked, and the first thing that come out was that

these chaps didn't know one another. ...

Nobody never said anything for a while; then the young man hove a sigh and says:

... "Ah, you would not believe me; the world never believes -- let it pass -- 'tis no matter. The secret of my birth." ...

"Gentlemen," says the young man, very solemn, "I will reveal it to you, for I feel I may have confidence in you. By rights I am a duke!"

Jim's eyes bugged out when he heard that; and I reckon mine did, too. Then the baldhead says: "No! you can't mean it?"

"Yes. My great-grandfather, eldest son of the Duke of Bridgewater, fled to this country about the end of the last century, to breathe the pure air of freedom; married here, and died, leaving a son, his own father dying about the same time. The second son of the late duke seized the titles and estates -- the infant real duke was ignored. I am the lineal descendant of that infant -- I am the rightful Duke of Bridgewater; and here am I, forlorn, torn from my high estate, hunted of men, despised by the cold world, ragged, worn, heart-broken, and degraded to the companionship of felons on a raft!"

Jim pitied him ever so much, and so did I. We tried to comfort him, ... He said we ought to bow when we spoke to him, and say "Your Grace," or "My Lord," or "Your Lordship" ...

Well, that was all easy, so we done it. ... But the old man got pretty silent by and by... So, along in the afternoon, he says:

"Looky here, Bilgewater," he says, "I'm nation sorry for you, but you ain't the only person that's had troubles like that."

"No?"

"No, you ain't the only person that's had a secret of his birth."

"Bilgewater, kin I trust you.....

"Bilgewater, I am the late Dauphin!" ...

"Yes, my friend, it is too true -- your eyes is look-in' at this very moment on the pore disappeared Dauphin, Looy the Seventeen, son of Looy the Sixteen and Marry Antonette." ...

Yes, gentlemen, you see before you, in blue jeans and misery, the wanderin', exiled, trampled-on, and sufferin' rightful King of France."

... he said it often made him feel easier and better for a while if people treated him according to his rights, and got down on one knee to speak to him, and always called him "Your Majesty," and waited on him first at meals,

and didn't set down in his presence till he asked them. So Jim and me set to majestyng him... This done him heaps of good, and so he got cheerful and comfortable. But the duke kind of soured on him...

T T T T

Do have some more Port

Johnny comes back from school after his first civics class and asks his father to explain Politics to him.

"Well," says father, look at it this way. "I bring the money home - I am Capital. Your mother manages it and spends it - your mother is Government. Your grandfather who lives with us checks that everything is done in the best way - he is the Trades Unions. Anna, our maid is the Working Class. And all this is for you - the People. And your little brother, who is still in nappies, is The Future. Did you get all of that?"

"OK," says the boy, "I'll have to think about it."

He goes to bed and is woken up by his little brother who has a full nappy.

So he gets up and goes to his parents' bedroom, but only finds his mother, fast asleep, snoring.

So he goes to Anna's room to get help for his brother. And there he finds his father in bed with Anna, and his grandfather is watching from outside through the window.

He goes back to bed, frustrated.

In the morning, at breakfast, his father asks him whether he now understands what he told him yesterday about Politics.

"Yes," says Johnny: "Capital abuses the Working Class, the Government is sleeping, the Unions stand and watch, the People are ignored and the Future is in deep shit."

T T T T

What's in a name?

Most of us remember Kofi Annan. Older generations may remember Kwame Nkrumah, first president of independent Ghana. What most of us probably don't know is that in Ghana first names indicate the day the child was born.⁸

Male

Sunday: Akwasi, Kwasi, Kwesi, Akwesi, Sisi, Kacely, Kosi

⁸ I learned this from my much regretted late colleague and friend Dr. Robert Oteng, whose two sons were called Kwadjo and Kwasi. I never knew his name day.

Monday: Kojo, Kwadwo, Kwadjo, Jojo, Joojo, Kujoe
 Tuesday: Kwabena, Kobe, Kobi, Ebo, Kabelah, Komla,
 Kwabela, Kobby
 Wednesday: Kwaku, Abeiku, Kuuku, Kweku
 Thursday: Yaw, Ekow, Yao
 Friday: Kofi, Fifi, Fiifi, Yoofi
 Saturday: Kwame, Kwamena, Kwamina
Female
 Sunday: Akosua, Akasi, Akos, Esi, Awesi
 Monday: Adwoa, Adjoa, Adzoa, Adwoma
 Tuesday: Abena, Araba, Abenayo
 Wednesday: Akua, Aku, Kukua, Akuma
 Thursday: Aba, Yaa, Yawa, Baaba, Awo
 Friday: Afua, Afia, Afi
 Saturday: Ama

T T T T

Please Have Some More Port?

A mouse was sitting by its hole in the skirting board and could smell cheese. It listened for the cat.

The only sound was a "Woof, Woof".

The mouse ran out of its hole and was immediately eaten by the cat, who purred: "Who said language courses weren't useful?"

T T T T

Herbert Grönemeyer - *Der Weg*⁹

Ich kann nicht mehr seh'n
 Trau nicht mehr meinen Augen
 Kann kaum noch glauben
 Gefühle haben sich gedreht
 Ich bin viel zu träge
 Um aufzugeben
 Es wär' auch zu früh
 Weil immer was geht

 Wir waren verschwor'n
 Wär'n füreinander gestorben
 Haben den Regen gebogen

⁹ One of the best contemporary German poetic songwriters. Hear this lovely song on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC81i2M30Bc>.

Uns vertrauen gelieh'n
Wir haben versucht
Auf der Schußfahrt zu wenden
Nichts war zu spät
Aber vieles zu früh

Wir haben uns geschoben
Durch alle Gezeiten
Haben uns verzettelt
Uns verzweifelt geliebt
Wir haben die Wahrheit
So gut es ging verlogen
Es war ein Stück vom Himmel
Dass es dich gibt

[Refrain]

Du hast jeden Raum
Mit Sonne geflutet
Hast jeden Verdruß
Ins Gegenteil verkehrt
Nordisch nobel
Deine sanftmütige Güte
Dein unbändiger Stolz
Das Leben ist nicht fair

Den Film getanzt
In einem silbernen Raum
Vom goldenen Balkon
Die Unendlichkeit bestaunt
Heillos versunken, trunken
Und alles war erlaubt
Zusammen im Zeitraffer
Mittsommernachtstraum

[Refrain]

Dein sicherer Gang
Deine wahren Gedichte
Deine heitere Würde
Dein unerschütterliches Geschick
Du hast der Fügung
Deine Stirn geboten
Hast ihn nie verraten
Deinen Plan vom Glück
Deinen Plan vom Glück

Ich gehe nicht weg
Hab' meine Frist verlängert
Neue Zeitreise
Offene Welt
Habe dich sicher
In meiner Seele
Ich trage dich bei mir
Bis der Vorhang fällt
Ich trag dich bei mir
Bis der Vorhang fällt

T T T T

Odds and Ends

An old couple applies for a divorce. The judge asks them: "At your age, 97 and 98, why a divorce now?" Reply: "We had to wait until the children died."

"Familiarity breeds trust, not contempt." James Coleman, *Foundations of social theory*, 1994.

"O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed: Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; that both our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments, and also that by thee we being defended from the fear of our enemies may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen." (Thomas Cranmer's *Second Collect at Evening Prayer*)¹⁰

"He said there were many more cases, particularly in younger females between the ages of 20 and 40, with three to four times as many women in that age group going to hospital as men, because they were being exposed to the virus in hospitality, retail and some educational settings." *The Guardian*, 31 October 2020. [*Now why would women in that age group decide to go to hospital as men?*]

"Chaque année il y a de plus en plus de cons. Mais cette année, j'ai l'impression que ceux de l'année prochaine sont déjà arrivés !" Patrick Timsit, French comedian.

¹⁰ It was Cranmer's intention that what was said in church should be 'understood of the people'.

"Anarchy is only three missed meals away" *Reilly - Aæ of Spies* (Wait for CP 2021)

"And here comes the affectedly shambling figure of Boris Johnson – not so much a statesman as an Oxfam donation bag torn open by a fox ..." Marina Hyde *The Guardian* 17.1.2019 ¹¹

"Si l'on n'est plus que mille, eh ! bien, j'en suis ! Si même ils ne sont plus que cent, je brave encore Sylla ; s'il en demeure dix, je serai le dixième ; et s'il n'en reste qu'un, je serai celui-là !", Victor Hugo, *Les Châtiments* (1853), expressing his undying opposition to Napoléon III.

" ... the amateurish and chaotic regime that has stumbled from calamity to U-turn to debacle to disaster throughout the epidemic." Andrew Rawnsley on the Johnson government, *The Guardian* 16.11.20

The sexual desires of the camel are stronger than anyone thinks.
One day when the hot sun was shining, down on the banks of the Nile,
In a fit of insatiable passion he attempted to bugger the sphinx:
Which accounts for the hump on the camel and the sphinx's inscrutable smile. (Sung to the tune of the *Eton Boating Song*)

Le Carré, as he accepted the Olof Palme prize (see above on May Sarton, p. 29): "I want a Palme for *my* country, which in my lifetime hasn't produced a single statesman of his stamp. I want him *now*. I'm not just a remainer. I'm a European through and through, and the rats have taken over the ship, I want to tell him. It's breaking my heart and I want it to break yours. We need your voice to wake us from our sleepwalk, and save us from this wanton act of political and economic self-harm. But you're too late." – (*The Guardian*, 2 February 2020)

Know him? "Robert Middleton spent much of his youth astride a horse and listening to real cowboys telling their stories. He was lucky enough to grow up where life was slow and the fences were few. Later, he was fortunate to meet Theodore Mason and his disciples. They formed the writer's group, "Works In Progress," and all were generous with their talents. After three Diamondback McCall western adventures, he is currently developing his first thriller. Robert and his wife, Denise, live in Hemet, California." This is the author entry in *Google Books* for *Tajikistan and the High Pamirs* - [N.B. I do not have a wife called Denise and I don't know Theodore Mason or his disciples, nor do I want to.]

¹¹ For caustic wit and biting irony, read Marina Hyde every day in *The Guardian*.

Charlemagne: "To know another language is to possess another soul.
Parler une autre langue, c'est avoir une autre âme."

Jean-Jaurès: "La tradition ne consiste pas à conserver des cendres mais bien à entretenir une flamme."

I'm sure you know the smell just after a summer rain shower. But do you know the name for it? The Oxford English Dictionary defines *petrichor* as: "A pleasant, distinctive smell frequently accompanying the first rain after a long period of warm, dry weather in certain regions."



My breakfast dream



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