

Always Trust a Smiling Humourist
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Introduction

In the first week of September 2022, Les Pages aux Folles will turn 20. To celebrate this achievement, I will be publishing 12 ebook collections of articles from the two decades of

the web site over the course of the year; this project is known as “12 from 20.” (For a brief overview of Les Pages aux Folles, see “The Back Story” at the end of this volume.) Each book will focus on a different feature of the web site. This month: the four books in the Les Pages aux Folles project written before the web site started.

This series of ebooks is meant to celebrate the 20th anniversary of a web site. So, you may be asking yourself, *Ira, why are you starting the celebrations with a collection of articles written **before** the web site was created?* (Okay, you would technically be asking me...through yourself, but let's not get bogged down in semantics.) The truth is that the project I call ***Les Pages aux Folles*** was started almost 20 years before it became a web site; to gain insight into how the project evolved, I felt it was necessary to track it from its earliest iterations.

Besides, if I hadn't, we'd be missing out on so much fun!

Going over the material for the first time in years, I was struck by how often I showed up as a character. Most often, it was talking informally with animals (“Caribou on Bay”) or inanimate objects (“Mid-death Crisis”). There were also the articles where I had conversations with an imaginary agent, which allowed me to make observations on the nature of writing in Canada. Over time, as I *the author* became increasingly steeped in the politics and culture of the day, I (the character) receded into the background.

In a similar vein, I found there to be a lot of articles that dealt with broad ideas (“Life as Cookie Box” or “The Boothought Principle”). As I became more and more knowledgeable about the minutiae of day-to-day politics, more philosophical articles became increasingly rare.

There was even a little bit of what we would now call Flash Fiction; narrative short stories under 1,000 words. To be honest with you, I find these to be some of the weakest pieces in the early history of *Les Pages aux Folles*. I had not mastered the art of telling a complete story in as few words as possible (truth be told, I still haven't: it's a difficult thing to do well, and I'm not convinced it can be).

I was surprised (although in retrospect, I shouldn't have been) to find that most of the articles in the first four books were bespoke, one-of-a-kind articles that responded to specific political or cultural phenomena. Currently, most of the articles that I post are part of a long-running series (for example, The Daily Me, or articles of headlines or quotes). In the beginning, of course, I hadn't established regular features, so I had to make up the form of everything as I went along.

That's not to say that the print version of *Les Pages aux Folles* hadn't established its own regular features. For example, there were the articles that contained short faux zen parables starting with “Zen and the Art of International Politics.” I was finding that a lot of what politicians said made no rational sense, so I recast them as attempts to achieve the depth of zen koans. Yes, I was searching for meaning in my life at the time, and I was drawn in many ways to Zen Buddhism; I appreciated that the belief system was not

centred on a deity, but focused on ways to lead a good and just life. (This shows how the need to feed the insatiable maw of regular writing leads a writer to incorporate their deepest questionings in their work. Or, this writer, in any case.)

There were also articles driven by specific characters, such as Mr. and Mrs. Frump, Madge and Betty, The Reverend Righteous or Rex Veneer. When I was growing up, homeless people were virtually unknown. In the 1980s, they had become a regular feature of the Toronto landscape. There were a lot of reasons for this. Conservative politics required that the social safety net be shredded to pay for tax cuts, leaving many people without the supports they needed to keep their homes. During this period, mental hospitals were closed, without any plan for what to do with their former residents. (The hospitals were not great places, but forcing their residents onto the streets was especially cruel.) Mr. and Mrs. Frump started as a way to make fun of military procurement (“Mr. and Mrs. Frump Go Shopping”), but they quickly took on a life of their own, allowing me to portray a homeless couple as human beings with their own personalities and histories.

The Reverend Righteous was my take on evangelicals, who were becoming a political force in the 1980s. I have no doubt that there are some fine evangelical leaders; however, the ones who became most prominent were obvious hucksters who put the good of their bottom lines ahead of the good of their followers. Just satirizing them would be shooting fish in a barrel, however. So, I combined each sermon by Reverend Righteous with reaction from one his parishioners, hoping to start answering the question: why are people so willing to follow such obvious grifters?

One of the most prominent features of this period was *Deadline News*. The problem with devoting full articles to single subjects is that it limits the scope of what you are able to write in a given week (three bespoke articles = three subjects). I wanted a feature that would allow me to satirize a wider variety of subjects (albeit in less depth). *Deadline News*, which mimicked features of a nightly newscast, was my first attempt at this. (It wouldn't be my last: *The Daily Me*, which became a regular feature of the web site, has the same function, as you will discover in a later volume of “12 From 20.”)

Finally, I found that I had created a couple of features in this time period that persisted into the web site era of the project. The most prominent was “The American Cold War Foreign Policy Algorithm,” which consisted of a computer algorithm and a brief description of how it describes a series of actions, usually but not exclusively political. I had noticed that certain political actions seemed to happen with depressing frequency; the computer algorithm seemed to be a perfect metaphor for this. This is a form I have come back to repeatedly (perhaps I should create an algorithm to indicate how and when I use algorithms!) over the years; I hadn't realized that I had started them so early in the project.

In this first iteration of *Les Pages aux Folles*, there are a few fake news articles, which presaged the Alternate Reality News Service (ARNS). There was also an advice column (Ask Missed Manners), which would morph into the ARNS feature Ask Amritsar (which would inspire offshoots such as Ask the Tech Answer Guy and Ask the Biz Whiz, among others).

FUN FACT: Three of the articles written in this period, "Win A Dream Date With Dan," "The 1992 Police Brutality Summer Olympics" and "The Bush Administration's Policy on the Complicated Issues of AIDS, Abortion and Teenage Pregnancy," became my first sort of professional sales. In the 1990s, there was a great magazine called *Comic Relief*. It republished editorial cartoons on a monthly basis. In addition to this, it contained a small number of humour columns. It was a fun package.

One of the features of *Comic Relief* was a monthly spotlight on an emerging cartoonist. I thought that they might be open to a submission from an emerging columnist, so I submitted the columns. And the magazine accepted and published them! It was only a sort of professional sale because the magazine didn't pay in cash; instead, I received a lifetime subscription. Since I loved *Comic Relief* (and I was young), this was even better than cash!

One final observation: when I started writing *Les Pages aux Folles*, I didn't know how long to make each article, so I settled on 700 words. In fact, this arbitrary number lies in the middle of the range of column lengths (anywhere from 300 to 1,000 words, depending upon the publication). BUT, writing for the internet, you quickly discover that shorter pieces are better; they save readers from having to scroll scroll scroll scroll scrollie scroll down to read an entire article, and keep the discomfort of reading off a screen to a minimum. So, in my own fumbling way, I had experience writing offline at a length that would benefit me when I moved my writing online.

Enjoy.

Ira Nayman
Toronto
January 20, 2022

Articles

Introduction: The Bad News Business

“Okay. You're a vegetable. We can all see you're a vegetable. There's no question about what you are. A vegetable. But, what we'd all like to know is just how the heck you reproduce. Are we talking sex, here, two of you in the back seat of a '63 Thunderbird, or what? Well? Oh, come on, are you going to let us in on the big secret, or are you just going to sit there and rot under our studio lights?”

Phil Donahue was having a bad time of it; the most controversial guests his staff could come up with were kumquats. Oprah Winfrey cut her losses and got out of the talk show game early, returning to acting on a full time basis. Sally Jesse Raphael became an Avon lady.

The day Controversy died, everything changed.

The *CBS Evening News* soon degenerated into a series of vignettes about three-legged sheep, but even its staunchest allies had to admit that it had been heading in that direction anyway. Dan Rather retired from the news division to host his own game show. He was replaced by a puppet named Mister Wiggles.

Soon, the other networks followed suit. Peter Jennings was replaced by a Commodore computer with voice capabilities. Tom Brokaw stayed on, hoping that this was just a lull that he could ride out until the news returned. After three months, he started babbling, "What's going on? This used to be such an interesting world!" and "I coulda been somebody. I coulda been a contendah." and throwing spitballs at the studio crew. He was replaced by a trio of nubile aerobics instructors.

Sixty Minutes was, at first, cut to *Thirty Minutes*. When it became apparent that there wasn't enough investigative material to fill even this diminished time slot, it was cut to *Fifteen Minutes*. Rather than reduce it to *Sixty Seconds* (the stopwatch motif becoming a cruel joke), the show was finally canceled. Mike Wallace became an investment consultant for a major Wall Street brokerage house, Diane Sawyer cut an album of disco music and Morley Safer returned to Canada to raise a family.

The Journal could not continue, of course. Barbara Frum was crushed, and never fully recovered. In fact, the CBC's entire schedule was gutted, being so news and public affairs oriented, and the government was given no opposition when it cut the CBC's annual grant to 37 cents.

Cutiously, Daniel Richler's entertainment segment, *The Journal Diary*, became its own daily half hour programme.

Ted Koppel was, perhaps, the hardest hit by the end of Controversy; he had a nervous breakdown when he discovered that nobody was standing by at ABC's Rome, Moscow, London, Washington or Kookaburra bureaus.

The New York Times, flush from its best advertising year ever, refused to give up, resorting to filling its pages with the minutes of New York University student union meetings and deep thought pieces on the true nature of concrete. "We're still the newspaper of record," one of the Rosenthal brood insisted. Russell Baker and James Reston had nothing to say.

Different newspapers coped with the lack of crisis in different ways. Some increased their advertising to fill 98 per cent of their space (not a great sacrifice for most of them); others turned to fiction. Ben Bradlee, editor of the *Washington Post*, choked to death when, in a fit of pique, he tried to eat a box of Cuban cigars.

Time Magazine eliminated text and became *Picture Magazine*. *Newsweek* changed corporate hands eight times in the space of three days, eventually mutating into *Women's*

Own Sob Stories. *The New Republic* disappeared into a black hole and, mercifully, William F. Buckley was never heard from again.

Inexplicably, *The National Enquirer*, like other publications of its ilk, thrived.

To cope with the dearth of news, most news outlets reported on the dearth of news. It soon became epidemic. Within two weeks, 34 quickie paperbacks analyzing the phenomenon were published (by the time the scholarly dissertations had been written, everybody had lost interest). Journalists began interviewing each other (Sam Donaldson was lost at this point because he has lost the ability to communicate coherently with anybody when there wasn't a helicopter loudly buzzing in the background). The last Maclean's cover story contained seven blank pages.

Before Controversy dried up, a lot of people complained that journalists concentrated too much on bad news. "We don't want to hear about this," they said. "Where's the good news?" Well, the truth of the matter was that good news bombed in the ratings.

One theory suggests that Controversy dried up because people weren't interested any more, not because there weren't any more issues that needed to be resolved. Would we really choose ignorance over knowledge? I'm not sure – there's only one thing I know about Controversy.

I kind of miss it.

Zen and the Art of International Politics

The poor masses approached the President. "Oh, wise one," they said, "we live in the richest country in the history of mankind, yet we are poor and destitute. What can we do?"

The President considered. "Have you wisdom?" he asked.

"No," the people replied.

"Have you wealth?" the President asked further.

"No," the people once again responded.

"Then, you are not ready," the President sagely advised.

* * *

The President and the Prime Minister were gathered together to discuss the issues affecting their two countries. "We have many mutual problems," the Prime Minister claimed.

“Do you perceive such problems? The President inquired.

“Only too well,” the Prime Minister stated.

“I perceive no such problems,” the President said. “Therefore, such problems must be yours alone.”

* * *

The evil Premier, in communications with the just President, said, “I will limit production of arms in my country if you will respond in a like manner.”

The President contemplated this for a long time. Eventually, he asked, “Have you ever considered the flight of the butterfly over the dewy summer flowers when the sun has just risen?”

The Premier was surprised. “No,” he honestly answered.

“Then, there can be no agreement between us,” the President wisely stated.

* * *

A group of women approached the Prime Minister. “Leader of our country,” they said, “do you not believe in the equality of men and women?”

:Such a goal,” that one replied, “is worthy of the best efforts of every person, including this poor servant...”

“Then,” they continued, “why are women so poorly represented in your government?”

The Prime Minister looked gravely at those assembled. “The path between effort and achievement is strewn with many unforeseen and often insurmountable obstacles.”

* * *

The Editor was sharing a simple repast at the table of the President. “Sir,” he respectfully asked, “is supply side economics really of benefit to the people?”

The President struggled a moment with his anger. Then, calmly, he asked, “Is it polite for an Editor to share my unworthy table and presume to question my beliefs?”

The Editor apologized. “It is my nature to ask.”

“And, what is my nature?” the President asked.

“It is your nature not to answer a direct question directly,” the Editor responded, “preferring to allow the questioner to seek his own answers.”

The President smiled. So pleased was he at the Editor’s progress that he furthered the Editor’s education by telling him nothing further.

* * *

The Prime Minister was questioned by an underling.

“What is the difference,” the underling asked, “between national and provincial politics?”

“What is the difference,” the Prime Minister retorted, “between a raven and a writing desk?”

“Prime Minister,” the underling despaired, “nobody knows!”

The Prime Minister smiled to himself. Here was a candidate for the Senate.

* * *

The leaders of the European North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries had gathered to discuss weighty matters with the President. “August leader,” one Prime Minister protested, “will the existence of American weapons on our soil not prove to be a grave threat to the safety of our people?”

“Should a man be concerned with the buzzing of a gnat when a giant lizard sits on his doorstep?” the President responded.

The other, obviously not versed in the Classical Teachings, pursued the point. “Can you guarantee our safety?” he insisted.

“Would your life be worth living if I could?”

Aah, the inscrutability of the west!

Mr. And Mrs. Frump Go Shopping

Mr. and Mrs. Frump were sitting in their hovel, not doing much of anything, when Mrs. Frump was hit with the urge to go shopping. “We haven’t bought anything new for the home in four years,” she grouched.

“Three years,” Mr. Frump corrected her.

“I’m sure it was four years,” Mrs. Frump insisted.

“We got the broken table lamp three years ago last month,” Mr. Frump told her.

“Yeah, but we didn’t buy it,” Mrs. Frump reminded him. “You stole it out of a trash bin.”

“Oh, yeah,” Mr. Frump graciously conceded the point. A few minutes later, he asked: “So, where do you wanna go?”

“Not the corner grocery,” Mrs. Frump said. “He gives me the creeps, always looking at my bags with suspicion...”

A few minutes after that, Mr. Frump suggested: “How about ARMX 85? It’s just down the street a ways, and they’re certain to have loads of bargains.”

“They wouldn’t let us!” Mrs. Frump shrieked.

“Why not?” Mr. Frump replied. “We’re not Commies, now, are we?”

So, shopping bags in hand, they went. Once inside (for, as good Canadian citizens, they could not be denied access), they were amazed at the profusion of sights and sounds which greeted them. “It’s just like an Arab market!” Mrs. Frump joyfully shouted.

“No Arab market ever had stuff like this,” Mr. Frump, who was a bit of a grump, complained, pointing to a screen on which a computer-simulated nuclear explosion was taking place in slow motion.

As the pair got further into the building, they were each handed a thick catalog with advertising for all the latest weapons of mass destruction. “Ooh,” Mrs. Frump cooed, “it’s just like a Consumer’s!”

Mr. Frump was about to protest that the prices were in no way comparable when something caught Mrs. Frump’s eye and, with a squeal of delight, she led him by the arm to a display of helicopters.

“Look, dear,” Mrs. Frump said of the centrepiece, a full-sized chopper. “It’s just like on TV!”

“Just like on TV?” the salesman, walking over to them, responded. “Just like on TV? My dear lady! Our helicopter is better than anything you’ll find on TV!”

“What does it do?” Mrs. Frump asked, delicately stroking the metal exterior of the machine.

“This helicopter,” the salesman, gearing up for his best pitch, began, “is equipped with infrared radar tracking systems, and has air to air *and* air to ground missile capability. On-board computers help with the navigation and missile trajectory calculations, and,”

the man winked slyly, “can even play chess. This helicopter is perfect for an urban police force or even a small brush war.”

“I love it!” Mrs. Frump exclaimed.

“What’s its airspeed?” asked Mr. Frump, unconvinced.

The salesman smiled. “Faster than the wind,” he answered. “Faster than a lover’s sigh. And, with the right pilot, it can be even faster than that.”

Mr. Frump dragged Mrs. Frump away, muttering something about the salesman being: “Too darned elusive about the darned thing’s darned airspeed.”

After several hours of browsing, it became apparent that the Frumps could not agree on anything. Choice of missile was an especially contentious issue: Mr. Frump wanted something practical, with a high kill ration and low cost; Mrs. Frump was interested in the older, less proficient models because they had cuter tail fins.

Eventually, the pair came upon the CF-18 fighter. Mr. Frump was impressed by the statistics compiled on the fighter in the catalog, while Mrs. Frump liked the colour.

“Excuse me,” Mr. Frump asked one of the salesmen milling about the plane, “but, how much does one of these things cost?”

“Pardon me?” the salesman asked. Mr. Frump repeated his question. “You’ll have to excuse me,” the salesman, smiling, told the couple, “but, I’m not used to dealing with anybody under the rank of a two-star General. The CF-18, one of the best fighter planes ever assembled, costs \$30 million.”

Mr. and Mrs. Frump looked at each other, dismayed.

“That includes wrapping,” the salesman hastened to add.

“Well have to give it some thought,” Mr. Frump said. When he and Mrs. Frump were alone, he said, “Well, Missus, I like the plane, but I think it’s a wee bit expensive...”

“But, it’s just the perfect thing to protect our home!” Mrs. Frump argued. “Are you sure we can’t afford it?”

“You heard the man,” Mr. Frump stated. “The plane costs \$30 million, and we’ve only got three dollars and 17 cents in spare change in the mattress...”

“Couldn’t we borrow the rest?” Mrs. Frump suggested. “Governments do it all the time.”

“Oh, sure,” Mr. Frump sarcastically replied, “and end up eating Alpo for the next 20 years! You know we’ve always wanted better things than that!”

In the end, Mr. and Mrs. Frump bought a pair of Stinger missiles just so they wouldn't leave empty-handed. But, it had been a wonderful afternoon, they had met a lot of very friendly people, and neither of them thought the trip a waste.

"Every citizen should educate himself about our nation's defense," Mr. Frump said, and immediately fell asleep.

"Night all," Mrs. Frump said, and turned out the light.

Vive la Difference!

In the past few years, there has been a lot of talk about the possibility of Canada becoming economically and culturally a part of the United States. Such talk, which I find terribly defeatist and discouraging, has probably been around since before there even was a Canada.

Perhaps it is happening. Perhaps it is already too late to reverse the process. I believe, though, that there are a great many major psychological differences between natives of our two countries, differences which make such a union highly unlikely, if not downright impossible.

Consider the following points:

Americans hate to pay taxes. The country was founded on a tax revolt, and the people find the paying of taxes revolting to this day. Taxes are considered a drain on the profits of entrepreneurs, something that stifles the growth of the economy. Canadians love to pay taxes. We all love our government services, and would rather pay more than receive less. Oh, sure, some wealthy Canadians try to avoid paying taxes by using loopholes and shelters, but, by American standards, they're strictly small potatoes.

Americans have a vibrant, colourful history. Their most famous historical characters (George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Herman Munster) serve as role models to this day. Their most memorable events (the winning of the west, the emancipation of the slaves, the first season of *Laverne and Shirley*) have the status of legends. Canadians feel that that their country just sort of happened while everybody was watching the Americans. Our most colourful characters are a Prime Minister who held seances to talk to his dead mother and a Prime Minister's wife who hung out with rock stars.

Americans are individuals with a great amount of personal initiative. They all have a great desire for success. They believe in laissez-faire capitalism, where, with hard work, anybody can become President, or even Tom Hanks. Canadians are laid back. We have a decidedly more socialist view of the world: if at first you don't succeed, run to the government for help.

Americans love violence. The right to bear arms is enshrined in the American Constitution. The American national anthem glorifies the country's bloody history. Canadians prefer to watch. Standing on guard for thee is about as violent as we get. It is theoretically possible that the colder Canadian climate is responsible for this difference in temperament.

American money is boring, a sickly shade of green. Canadian money comes in all flavours.

Americans claim to hate sex, but secretly enjoy it. True, there are pockets of Americans who honestly hate sex, who would like to see the country return to the morality of the Middle Ages; but, while they exist in enough numbers to sway certain state legislators, they do not exist in enough numbers to spoil people's fun at the national level. In reality, the United States is where the sexual revolution happened, and is still going strong. Canadians claim to love sex, but secretly hate it. Remember the claim, "The government has no place in the bedrooms of the nation?" That certainly hasn't stopped most provinces from enacting blue laws that make the Moral Majority look like a bunch of Marines. The one notable exception is Quebec, but they don't like to consider themselves a part of Canada in any case.

America is a "melting pot" where all people are expected to put the country first and their own ethnic heritage second. This contributes to a fierce nationalism (which, in turn, leads to American chauvinism). Canada is a multi-cultural "vertical mosaic" where all are allowed, indeed, encouraged, to do whatever they want. This contributes to a lack of a cohesive national identity (which, in turn, leads to a wimpy foreign policy).

Please understand, there are no moral judgments involved in this discussion. Whether, for instance, having more interesting money makes Canada a better country than the United States is not the central point of my argument.

Despite the fact that Canadians often seem to lack a proper appreciation for the unique culture which they have created, there can be no doubt that it is that culture that will keep us forever separate from the United States, no matter how intertwined the two countries become."

Your Fifteen Minutes Are Up

"Hello, this is Rex Veneer on special assignment for *Entertainment Right Now*," the interviewer says, smiling broadly for the camera. "Today, I'm going to interview the latest punk rock teen idol musical sensation, Johnny Gross, who is touring with the band Led Waterbuffalo to promote the group's first album, *War a Go Go*. Hello, Johnny."

"Yeah," Johnny, disinterested, says.

"How did Led Waterbuffalo start?" Rex Veneer asks.

“Well,” Johnny replies, “Me and Johnny Ugly were mates. We grew up together. When we got kicked out of school together, we needed a way to make money, so we decided to form a band.”

“Your first single, “Break Your Head,” has gone gold in the United States,” Rex Veneer says. “What are your feelings about this?”

“Just great,” Gross responds, adding: “I like groupies. I especially like American groupies.”

“Your second single, “Rock of Aged,” was critically acclaimed, but sales weren’t quite what you expected. How do you account for this?”

Gross shifts uncomfortably in his chair. “Dunno,” he finally answers.

“Are rumours of tensions in the band true?”

“Naaw. Who told you that?”

“Bass guitarist Johnny Nobody.”

“Oh.” Gross pauses for a moment, then says: “Well, we did get into a bit of a punch up. We were having what you call artistic differences. But, as soon as Johnny got out of hospital, we forgave each other, and we’ve been working better than ever together.”

“I see,” Rex politely responds. “Your third single from your first album, “Hideous,” hasn’t been getting much airplay. Why do you think that is?”

“Disc jockies are jerks,” Gross announces shortly.

“Do you feel, as some of your critics have suggested, that your music is obscene?”

Gross spits. “No,” he says.

“How do you respond to criticism of the band’s second album, *Songs from the Big Gross-out?*?”

“The critics were never on our side.”

“Why do you think only 14 copies have been sold in the United Kingdom?”

“Bad press!”

“Would you care to comment on the tragic death of Led Waterbuffalo’s drummer, Johnny Johnny, who died after a fatal ingestion of cocaine and Gummi bears?”

“No!”

“Will a single from the second album be released?”

“No.”

“Some time has passed since the death of Led Waterbuffalo’s drummer, Johnny Johnny. Do you have anything to say about him?”

“Yeah. Sure. He was a great drummer and a great human being, and I’m sure that 15 year-old was lying. I know I speak for the entire musical establishment when I say that we’ll all miss him.”

“Will there be a third Led Waterbuffalo album?”

“Yes. We owe it to our fans and...Johnny.”

“Why has production on the third Led Waterbuffalo album stopped?”

“The remaining band members just couldn’t go on. We felt that we owed more to our fans...and, to Johnny.”

“Are you aware that Led Waterbuffalo’s lead guitarist, Johnny Ugly, is suing your management company for \$17 million, claiming that he stole that from the band?”

“Yeah. Jerk. I never liked Johnny much.”

“Are you planning a solo album?”

“No.”

“Critics have called your first solo album a triumph, saying that your music is fresh. You seem to have been rejuvenated by the new direction your career has taken. Does this satisfy you?”

“The critics have always been kind to me.”

“Do you prefer a solo career?”

“Yes, actually. It has given me the freedom to explore new things, to go off in new directions that I wouldn’t have been able to go if I was still in the group. I mean, with a group, you always have to compromise with the other people you’re playing with. Now, I can do what I want.”

“Critics have called your second solo album, *Punk Opera*, a dismal failure, a pompous effort at meaning from an expended artistic force. How do you feel about this?”

“Wankers. It’s character assassination, pure and simple. But, then again, the press has always been good at that.”

“Does the just released *Best of the Waterbuffalos*, which includes several tracks from the aborted third album, signal the end of your recording career?”

“Definitely not!”

“Are you enjoying retirement?”

“Yeah. It’s nice....quiet-like, you know?”

“Do you have any advice for kids who are trying to make it in today’s music business?”

“Yeah. Enjoy the limelight while you’re in it, because fame passes away really quickly. Before you know it, you’ve become a nobody again...”

“Do you have any last words for your fans?”

“Umm, no. Not really. Some of the best minutes of my life were spent playing music, and a person can’t ask for much more than that. I hope I’ll be remembered...”

Rex Veneer turns to face the camera. “What happens to rock stars after the applause has died? Johnny Gross, former lead singer of the Led Waterbuffalo punk rock band, has become a recluse, refusing to give interviews. There are some who question whether he is even still alive...”

“When we come back, I’ll have an interview with rock’s latest sensation, Rapping Ronnie...”

Conversations Overheard at the Corner of Yonge and Bloor

“Oh, those are very pretty...”

“It’s just a lot of cheap junk. Come on.”

“No. I want to look at them. What are these?”

“Earrings, miss.”

“They’re just pieces of twisted metal with a little paint thrown on them.”

“I like them. Won’t you get me a pair?”

“No.

“Please?”

“Fine. I’ll get myself a pair. How much are they?”

“Two dollars for a pair.”

“That’s all?”

“Say, that is pretty cheap...okay, I’ll get you a pair if –”

“Forget it. I’ve changed my mind. Let’s go.”

“Sure...if that’s what you wa – hey! Wait up!”

“Hmph...tourists!”

* * *

“You must believe in the Lord and take him into your heart! As the Bible says –”

“Excuse me...”

“Yes, Sinner?”

“Do you have the correct time?”

“Time has run out for those who do not have faith in the Lord! Armageddon is at hand, brother, as the good book says –”

“Please, I just need the time.”

“You may think that’s all you need, friend, but what you really need is a reading from the Scriptures!”

“Thanks anyway. I’ll ask somebody else.”

“Three fifteen.”

* * *

“Fred, look at that!”

“What?”

“Look at that ugly old man and woman. The ones with the shopping bags and filthy clothes...”

“Where?”

“Over there.”

“Where?”

“Over there, jerk!”

“Oh. Yeah. So?”

“We...we aren't going to look like that when we get older, are we?”

“Are you kidding? We'll never get that old.”

* * *

“Well, will you look at that!”

“What's that, Missus?”

“Those two kids with the orange hair and safety pins in their noses.”

“Where?”

“Over there.”

“Where?”

“Please! There!”

“Oh. Okay. So?”

“We weren't that strange when we were younger...were we?”

“I...I think so...”

* * *

“Buy a button, sir?”

“Oh? What's this?”

“The money from the sale of these buttons goes to the Non-Nuclear Network. Our immediate goal is to keep nuclear weapons off Canadian soil. Our ultimate goal is to stop the insane arms race...”

“Oh, yes? Young man – harrumph – don’t you have anything better to do with your time?”

“Sir?”

“Why don’t you get a job?”

“I have a job, sir. I’m a junior partner in the law firm of Mishkin, Plithkin and Schwartz.”

“I see. Then, what’s your angle?”

“My angle?”

“What are you getting from standing here on a hot afternoon selling...buttons?”

“It’s what I believe in.”

“Oh, sure. You have to say that. But, what are you really getting out of this?”

“Excuse me...buy a button, ma’am?”

* * *

“Thanks for the ice cream...”

“My pleasure.”

“What should we do this afternoon?”

“I don’t know. What do you want to do?”

“I asked you first.”

“I asked you last.”

“That’s not going to get us anywhere.”

“Who says we need to get anywhere?”

“Mmmmmmmmmmmmm...”

Lawn Chair Killer Free

The Supreme Court of Canada, in a four to one ruling, today overturned a Supreme Court of Ontario ruling made last December convicting a Wawa man of first degree murder.

Lawn chair enthusiasts are hailing the decision as an important test of a citizen's right to protect his home with lawn furniture.

Jack Mattingly, a 36 year-old father of three, was originally convicted of killing Jack Fraser, his neighbour, by beating him to death with a lawn chair. Mattingly claimed that he believed Fraser was a burglar.

The prosecution pressed for, and received, a first degree murder conviction when it was discovered that Mattingly did not have a permit to carry the lawn chair or keep it on the premises. The conviction took less than three hours.

In overturning the decision, the Supreme Court ruled that not registering lawn furniture did not constitute premeditation. Throughout both trials, Mattingly has repeatedly said, "I didn't know you needed a permit for a lawn chair. Really. I just didn't know."

"This is a great decision," Hugh Flintlock, spokesperson for WALC (We Admire Lawn Chairs), an Ottawa pro-chair lobby group, said. "It upholds the right of the individual to kill people that he cannot identify in his own home.

"And, isn't that what democracy is all about?"

"This is a terrible decision," Joel Smallbore, spokesperson for ALCAHAL (All Lawn Chairs Are Hideous And Lethal), an Ottawa anti-chair group, said. "It just gave every homeowner licence to murder anybody on their property that they don't like.

"Freedom, in any society, has to include freedom from attack with a deadly lawn chair!"

"Don't listen to that wimp from ALCAHAL," Flintlock said. "He just wants every piece of lawn furniture licenced and tightly controlled by the government. He doesn't realize that lawn chairs don't kill people, people do."

"That's really ridiculous," Smallbore said. "We have studies that clearly show that easy access to lawn furniture increases the incidence of violent crime in a community. Better control of lawn furniture will result in fewer murders..."

"Studies? You want studies?" Flintlock said. "We've got studies that show that more successful robberies take place in homes that are not protected by lawn chairs. Lawn chairs actually save lives and property..."

"I don't know what those guys are talking about," Mattingly said. "I just did what I thought I had to do to protect my home and family. I...I didn't realize that I was going to end up in the middle of a social issue..."

“What the heck does he know?” Smallbore said. “Doesn’t he realize that one quarter of all homicides are committed with some type of lawn furniture? And, according to Statistics Canada, that percentage is steadily increasing?”

“Aww, what the heck do you know?” Flintlock said. “When they repealed the lawn chair licencing law in California, the number of lawn chair murders actually decreased. If you know a man has a lawn chair in his house, you’ll think twice about robbing it.”

Liberal Member of Parliament Fran Hanrahan got up in the legislature yesterday to ask: “Does the Prime Minister have any plans for increasing the protection for Canadian citizens from lawn chair attacks?”

“No,” Prime Minister Brian Mulroney said. In a press conference afterwards, he expanded upon his initial response: “No, we don’t plan to take action at this time.”

“I’m happy to be free,” Mattingly said. “I’d like to get back to my life and put all this behind me, but I don’t think that’s going to be very easy...”

Mattingly claims that he has been the object of many death threats and an invitation to speak at next year’s convention of the American National Lawn Chair Association. There have also been several offers to write his life story.

“But, there haven’t been any offers which give me an appreciable percentage of the film rights,” Mattingly said, “so, I’m going to hold out for something better.

“For now, I just want to get back to my life.”

Pop star Larry Gowan was unavailable for comment.

Life as Cookie Box

I have recently discovered that life is a lot like a box of chocolate chip cookies.

Of course, cookies rarely come in tin boxes any more; they can more often be found in those plastic packages that just don’t seem to last. As with so many other products, the traditional craftsmanship that used to go into cookie boxes has been replaced by the less attractive, albeit more cost-effective, kind.

(The only cookies that still come in tin boxes are from Sweden, and, as one might expect, they are more expensive than domestic cookies. The grass is always greener on the other side of the ocean, isn’t it?)

The cookies themselves don’t appear to have changed much. Oh, there may be more chemicals in the cookies than there used to be, more preservatives, additives, artificial flavours and chemicals the purpose of which ordinary people cannot identify. But, there

are more chemicals in our bodies than there used to be, so this trend in cookies seems almost natural.

As always, some cookies have a lot of chocolate chips while others don't have quite so many. This is definitely in keeping with a world where opportunity and advantage are not evenly distributed. And, the fundamental structure of the situation does not change if there are 33 per cent more chips per box.

Cookie connoisseurs appreciate whatever they get.

How wonderful a new box at first appears, how full of promise! Do you stick your hand in, eating whatever you manage to pluck out? Or, are you more careful, scrutinizing each cookie to ensure that the one you get is the precise one you want? A great choice of cookies, like life options, abounds.

But, no matter how careful we are in our selection, can we ever have complete control over the cookies we eat? Would we really want such control? After all, cookies are more interesting to eat when there is an element of risk involved, aren't they?

Of course, eating the whole box at once is not usually a good idea (look at what it did to Keith Moon or John Belushi). So, when we've had enough chocolate chip cookies, we must rest a while, we must take a break. Twist ties help keep the cookies fresh, in much the same way that new ideas can keep us fresh throughout our youth.

Yet, the more we keep coming back to the cookie box, the more time passes, the fewer options we seem to leave ourselves. As the number of cookies decreases (as our choices are made), the number of cookies for us to subsequently choose from decreases. At first, we probably won't even notice; but, as our allotment of cookies steadily goes down, we become more aware of their passing.

By the time the box is half empty, we might start noticing changes in it. The twist tie at the top, no matter how carefully tended, always seems less and less able to do its job. The box itself, so fragile, so delicate, might be showing signs of wear, some scratches, perhaps even a small rip.

At this point, a reassessment of cookies might be in order. There are many different kinds of desserts and snacks; why did you choose chocolate chip cookies? Would you have been happier with an apple pie or some ice cream? You might even consider a more exotic dish, maybe chocolate mousse or crepes Suzette.

But, of course, changing your treat at this point is difficult. Not impossible, but difficult.

Suddenly, you are looking over your shoulder at the people with full boxes of cookies and biscuits. The competition has gotten hot, and you no longer feel secure with your old standby, the chocolate chip cookie. Perhaps...

Soon, that fleeting thing known as the box of chocolate chip cookies is all but gone. You may feel regrets, but you shouldn't; it is, after all, the natural order of things for one generation of cookies to be replaced by the next. You should feel that you have had a place in the procession of cookie experience.

So, the next time you're in your local grocery store looking for a snack to feed your children, remember: chocolate chip cookies aren't just a dessert. They are life itself.

The Conversational Arts In Decline

Conversation as an art form was most popular at the turn of the last century, when it seemed that anybody with a mouth and an opinion could claim to be an accomplished artist in the field. At that time, conversation was second only to comic opera as the foremost means of self-expression.

Since then, conversation has steadily declined as an art form. The disarray in which the conversational arts presently exist is seen by many conversation critics and denture wearers (often one in the same) to be as much a symptom of the decline of the western civilization as the popularity of Pee-Wee Herman.

The proliferation of other art forms in the 20th century is largely responsible for the decline in a number of ways. Artists who used to spend their entire lives developing their conversational artistry now devote themselves, instead, to the far more accessible fields of television, the cinema and paperback romance novels.

Especially paperback romance novels.

(The British Lord Athol Twitdden, who is considered by many critics to be the last great conversational artist, has said: "Conversation is degenerating at just the time that we need it most... Is sitting in front of a big box really as emotionally satisfying as showing off your intelligence by completely destroying Freudian psychological theory in a conversation that last several days? I hardly think so. But, then again, I have yet to own a cordless converter...")

The newer art forms have also debased the form of the artistic conversation. At the height of the art form's popularity, a typical conversation would last over three hours, and include such topics as: the meaning of life, the latest play at the Savoy, the existence of god, the unnatural habits of the people down the lane, the viability of the continued existence of the Monarchy, the struggles of the emerging middle class, the authorship of Shakespeare's plays and the availability of a good wine for the evening's meal. A conversation that did not turn to more than six subjects was rarely a critical success.

Today's conversations barely last more than five minutes, on average, and often centre around other art forms, particularly television. The following is a not uncommon form for such a conversation to take:

“Hello?”

“Hi.”

“How are you?”

“Good. How are you?”

“Fine. Did you see *Magnum* last night?”

“Yeah. Wasn’t it amazing?”

“Yeah. (pause) Well, I gotta go.”

“Okay. Bye.”

“Bye.”

Seventeen seconds. Thirty words. Such a conversation would not be fit as a trailer for any of the great conversations of the past! Why, a great critic of days gone by, a Micheline or a Kroetzburg, would laugh if such a conversation had been brought before him! And, yet, such conversations make up the bulk of the art today.

Part of the problem in the decline of the conversational arts is in the decline of conversational criticism. Critics no longer appear to be interested in detailed analysis of content, some minimalist critics abandoning it totally for the more esoteric consideration of form.

“Nobody has the time any more,” critic Alan Freed explained, “either to devote several hours to a conversation, or to take the thousands of hours to educate themselves to a level where they can carry on such a conversation. Let’s face it: almost all of the great conversational artists were from the upper classes, and had all the time they needed to perfect their craft...”

To stop the imminent extinction of conversation as an art form (last year, only three conversation guilds remained in existence in Canada), many governments are setting up museums and galleries devoted to the art. It is their hope that public interest can be encouraged through the preservation and restoration of the world’s great conversations.

Freed doesn’t see much hope in this. “School children and academics,” he argued, “Are the only one who will go to such galleries, and it is difficult to believe that many of them will go out of genuine interest.” Freed then started talking about the need for schools for conversationally gifted children, steel production in Latin America and a variety of other subjects. He apparently went on long after we had left.

Is the art of conversation dying? Could government intervention help prop it up, or would that just delay the inevitable? One thing is certain: this is one of the few cases where an artistic problem may well be solved by a lot of talk.

(For more information on the conversation as art form and the history of conversation, contact the Moribund Forms of Communication Department of the Canada Council through your local Member of Parliament.)

Son of What the Heck Do You Know?

There are many questions that are so complex or obscure that they may never be satisfactorily answered. These are generally referred to as “The Great Unanswered Questions of the Universe” or “The Things That Mankind Was Never Meant to Know.”

The following reader survey does not contain any of these questions. What would be the point? Consider what you are about to read “The Lesser Questions of the Universe At Which Mankind Might Make an Inspired Guess.” As usual, they are here for your answering pleasure, but, please, whatever you do, **DO NOT RETURN THE SURVEY TO THIS PUBLICATION**. The last time we tried to process the answers to a survey like this, our computers were down for weeks.

1) What’s in a name?

- a lot of letters
- eight essential vitamins and iron
- everything. Naming something is knowing it. Really.
- nothing, really, but I like mine anyway

2) What does “Ist eich mindos twoay adorable” mean?

- “Get your plane off my runway!” in Arabic
- “What do those British want now?” in French
- “Who is old enough to make Premier today?” in Russian
- nothing in classical Urdu or Esperanto

3) Would I lie to you?

- are you kidding? You can’t even keep your hair colour straight!
- I don’t know – are you Milton Friedman?
- yes. You’ve been a pathological liar since the age of 12, when you finally realized that man, by definition, is not perfectible, the universe is basically hostile and Snoopy dolls cause cancer in laboratory rats
- other

4) Who was Henry VIII?

- a king who knew how to get rid of a woman’s headache

- lead singer of Herman's Hermits
- a maker of fine furniture for over 40 years

5) Alright, what's your problem?

- toilet training at too early an age
- toilet training at too late an age
- shoes soiled by an illegally parked dog
- too much caffeine – Robert Young is never around when you need him!
- the doctor won't tell me, but he says it's not contagious by the usual methods
- I was out walking my Karma last week when it ran off; I haven't seen it since and, frankly, I'm worried

6) Which came first: plastic drinking cups or *Monday Night Football*?

- no
- $x = 3, y = 7, z = -3/4$
- let's let history be the judge

7) Do blondes have more fun?

- more fun than what?
- no, they just tan easier
- scientific studies have shown that natural blondes do tend to have more fun, although bleached blondes have more sex and dirty blondes have more clothes

8) Do you think...?

- yes, sometimes whether I need to or not
- yes, but only if so instructed
- no, I order out
- no! He wouldn't dare! The castle is too heavily fortified, his troops have been depleted and, as if that weren't enough, his favourite movie, *Attack of the Killer Raddichios*, is playing at the Roxy tonight!

9) What is Doc Severinsen's ERA?

- I don't know. Who does he play for?
- I don't know. Isn't this English 101?
- I don't know. What instrument does Bill Caudill play?
- I don't know! You promised me this was going to be an easy quiz!

10) Of what is the universe made?

- snips and snails and puppy dogs' tails
- a large number of sub-atomic particles with strong gravitic attraction
- strawberry jello
- oh, really? I've been a physicist for 20 years, and I've never heard anything so preposterous in all my life!
- hey, just last week, I consulted my guru, man, and he assured me that the universe was made of strawberry jello. Maybe his information is a little more up to date than yours, man...

- I don't have to sit here and take this!
- hmmph – call yourself a scientist?

11) Who will save you now?

- Flash Gordon
- the Ghostbusters
- the Labour Relations Board
- my folks, but only if I agree to clean my room

12) Have you ever turned over the *Star Blap* machine?

- I've never gotten past 10,000 – I always get zapped by the krytonoids in the third wave
- I'm not into video games; they promote violence and, anyway, I never seem to get over 1,000
- yes. Now, the challenge is gone and I sit at home and wait for *Super Star Blap* to come out

13) What is/are the high five?

- Britain, France, West Germany, Japan and Canada when the United States insists that they become stronger members of NATO by taking part in the Strategic Defense Initiative
- the handshake of football players
- some of the members of Rush and Triumph

14) What ever happened to what's his name?

- he went...you know where
- he's working for the government (just like everybody else)
- he became a drug addict, hung around discos, found religion after he saw god, lost his contact lenses after he saw Tina Turner and met an untimely end at the jaws of a horde of vicious, man-eating hamsters from Venus
- are you sure you really want to know?

15) Yes. What ever happened to what's his name?

- he lived happily ever after
- he became a nameless, faceless cog in the machine
- he married into a wealthy family, broke his collarbone falling off a horse, wrote 29 self-help books from his wheelchair, won a million in Vegas and met an untimely end at the jaws of a horde of vicious, man-eating hamsters from Venus. Are you satisfied?

16) No. What ever really happened to what's his name?

- believe me, nothing interesting. What's his name wasn't interesting when you knew what happened to him
- he owns a Burger Bar franchise in Petawawa
- he moved to Brazil, returned, sold his soul to a monolithic multinational corporation for more than he was worth, had several illegitimate children and met an untimely end at the jaws...well, you know how it goes

17) Why are the most delicious foods invariably the most fattening?
 because there is no justice
 to teach the human race humility
 it doesn't matter – most of us can't afford them, anyway
 I don't know. Now, let me ask you another one: why is our society so obsessed with losing socks?

18) I don't know. Now, let me ask you another one: when the going gets tough, where do the tough get going?
 Fort Bragg, Texas
 the nearest fall-out shelter
 the nearest John Wayne movie, just to check
 over there (and about time, too – the tough were really starting to get on my nerves)

19) What is the sound of one hand clapping?

 other

20) Who's that girl?
 that was no girl, that was my attorney
 Divine (at least, that's her story)
 nobody worth worrying about, dear. She's just an old friend
 Susan Sarandon. How 'bout that?

Scene 1: Aardvark

Curtain up on a dimly lit hallway in the White House. BRAD, a tall guy who wears glasses, and is pretty handsome for a nerd, and JANET, who is tall and also pretty attractive, if shrill, enter, lost. They look around them, confused, clinging to each other.

GRAD: (wimpy) Well, I don't know where we are...

JANET: I told you we shouldn't have left the tour!

BRAD: But, Janet, I had to go to the bathroom. Really, I did...

JANET: (angry) So, now what are we going to do?

BRAD: (miserable) I don't know...

CARETAKER appears, seemingly out of nowhere, startling Brad and Janet.

CARETAKER: (mysteriously) Might I be...of assistance?

BRAD: (relieved) Yes. Thank you. I'm Brad and this is Janet...

JANET: (offering her hand) Hello...

Caretaker ignores her.

BRAD: We seem to be lost...

SECRETARY, dressed seductively, appears in much the same way Caretaker did.

SECRETARY: (unidentifiable east European accent) Are you sure they're not spies?

JANET: Who are you?

SECRETARY: (exchanging meaningful glance with Caretaker) I...work here...
(Secretary and Caretaker laugh)

BRAD: If you could tell us how to get out of here...

CARETAKER: Perhaps...you belong here...?

BRAD: Oh, no...

JANET: We're just tourists. We got lost and... (giggles nervously) ...we'd really like to go home, now.

SECRETARY: Do you know what time it is?

BRAD: Umm, hold on a second...

Brad looks at his watch. Secretary and Caretaker look at each other and laugh uproariously.

BRAD: It's...it's...

SECRETARY: (screaming) It's budget time!

CARETAKER: (singing) It's amazing (advances on Brad and Janet menacingly)
The economy's receding
Interest takes it toll

SECRETARY: (comes up from behind them, singin) But, look in the paper

Things are uncertain
Nobody's got monetary control

CARETAKER: (singing) I remember
Doing the aardvark
Drinking the liquor when
The depression surrounds me

SECRETARY and CARETAKER: (singing) With mortgage foreclosing

The Secretary and Caretaker back Brad and Janet into a hearing room where dozens of CONGRESSMEN and the SECRETARIES are cavorting about in unusual costumes.

ALL: (singing) Let's do the aardvark again!
Let's do the aardvark again!

PROFESSOR: (at projector at head of the room) It's just a jump to the right

ALL: (singing) Without a trace of the le-eh-eh-eh-eh-ef

PROFESSOR: Cut the budget...overnight!

ALL: (singing) Leave social services bereft
It's a political thrust
Which really proves them ina-eh-eh-eh-eh-ane
Let's do the aardvark again!
Let's do the aardvark again!

SECRETARY: (singing) It's so crazy
Oh "trickle down" save me
So there's some gravy
But, not for all
In a previous decade
All the progress that we made
Could not save us
From a recessionary fall

CARETAKER: (singing) With a bit of a flip-flop

SECRETARY: (singing) We watch as the rates drop

CARETAKER: (singing) Unemployment will never be the same

SECRETARY: (singing) It's a patriotic position

CARETAKER: (singing) Without a trace of sedition

ALL: (singing) Let's do the aardvark again!
Let's do the aardvark again!

PROFESSOR: (getting excited) It's just a jump to the right

ALL: (singing) Without a trace of the le-eh-eh-eh-eh-eft

PROFESSOR: (jumping on the table) Cut the budget...overnight!

ALL: (singing) Leave social services bereft
It's a political thrust
Which really proves them ina-eh-eh-eh-eh-ane
Let's do the aardvark again!
Let's do the aardvark again!

LITTLE MEL: (singing) Well I was watchin' TV
Just happy as a clam
When I saw this guy
This politician man
His theories were in
He was on "supply side"
Every time he talked
An economist died
Tax breaks, incentives
Were the wealthy's gain
Middle class meant nothing
Never would again

ALL: (singing) Let's do the aardvark again!
Let's do the aardvark again!

PROFESSOR: (hysterical) It's just a jump to the right

ALL: (singing) Without a trace of the le-eh-eh-eh-eh-eft

PROFESSOR: Cut the budget overnight!

ALL: (singing) Leave social services bereft
It's a political thrust
Which really proves them ina-eh-eh-eh-eh-ane
Let's do the aardvark again!
Let's do the aardvark again!

All fall down, laughing, except Brad, Janet, Caretaker, Secretary and Little Mel.

BRAD: (to Little Mel) Where are we? Is this some kind of hell?

LITTLE MEL: Naah. It's just a budget meeting.

Janet faints in Brad's arms as the curtain comes down.

(with profuse apologies to Richard O'Brien)

Specious Logic

Being able to follow a logical argument, like being able to use a complete home entertainment system, is one the ways in which man differs from the animals. We know that if A equals B and B equals C, then A equals C. But, to most people this is just so much alphabet soup – what has logic really done for the human race?

Logic has given us science. Logic has given us technology. Logic has given us Benny Hill. This shows that even logic has its limits.

When logic is taught, simple examples are used to illustrate its principles. Two or three premises are given, and a conclusion (or tenant) naturally follows. However, it might be equally valid to analyze statements which were not logical, carefully indicating their flaws and generally taking the opportunity to make fun of them.

Below is an example of such faulty reasoning, followed by several cases. Analyze the example carefully, then, using what you have learned, describe the error in the other cases.

EXAMPLE: The average North American watches close to six hours of television a day. Television does not add to a person's experiences, and many people feel the time they spend in front of the set is "wasted." LOGICAL CONCLUSION: People should watch less television. SPECIOUS CONCLUSION: It looks like rain.

- 1) When our enemies interfere with local governments, we condemn them for being undemocratic. When our friends interfere with local governments, we praise them for being pro-democratic. CONCLUSION: Aimee is a nice name.
- 2) Many studies have linked cigarette smoking to the development of cancer, and every cigarette package must carry a warning of this fact. The smoking of marijuana has been rumoured to lead to the taking of harder drugs, but no harmful effects have ever been proven. Both cigarettes and marijuana are multi-billion dollar industries, but cigarettes are legal and marijuana is not. CONCLUSION: A public library is a good place to find books.
- 3) There is no reason to believe that women are less capable than men of performing a given duty, nor has there ever been. Women still have far less access to middle and upper management positions than men, and working women make an average of 30 per cent

less than men in similar jobs. CONCLUSION: If we knew then what we know now, nobody would have believed us.

4) When an individual litters, he is punished. When a corporation pollutes, it may irreparably damage the environment and endanger the lives of many citizens, but it isn't usually punished, and rarely in any meaningful way. CONCLUSION: Johnny Carson doesn't need *The Tonight Show* any more, but he'll probably never leave it.

5) The cosmetics and fashion industries take in billions of dollars in revenue annually. Over one third of the world's population is improperly nourished, and thousands die of starvation annually. CONCLUSION: Cats don't really have nine lives.

6) The human body is something to be ashamed of and the only purpose for sex is procreation. The human body is beautiful and sex is fun. CONCLUSION: Reality is an illusion.

7) Peace through strength involves building enough weapons that your enemy will not launch a first strike against your country for fear of retaliation. Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) allows countries to build as many offensive weapons as they like, but no defensive weapons, on the theory that no country will attack another if all are defenseless. Man has never created a weapon that was not ultimately put to use. CONCLUSION: Plato is a man.

8) Communism and capitalism are mutually exclusive belief systems. Our country is based on capitalism. Russia is based on communism. Our country has a huge annual trade with Russia. CONCLUSION: McLean Stevenson should never have left *M*A*S*H*.

9) American officials insist that human rights is a peace issue and that the Russians must ease up on dissidents. Russian officials say: "You want to talk about human rights? Fine by us. Let's talk about the capitalist repression of the poor..." Canadian officials watch on the sidelines, not saying much of anything. CONCLUSION: Mick Jagger will eventually marry his girlfriend, but everybody will have lost interest by then.

10) Society exists to benefit the individual, protecting him or her physically and financially. Society demands conformity to the models of acceptable behavior that it establishes, and does not tolerate individuality for a long period of time. CONCLUSION: Red beets were a mistake, but nobody in authority will admit it.

Holiday Viewing on a Budget

The holiday season is upon us once again. Of course, this means mandatory attendance at one or more long, boring parties at which you will be forced to socialize with people you don't like and/or haven't seen in several years. It also means agonizing over gifts you are obligated to buy for acquaintances with whom you are barely familiar, and whose taste is completely unknown to you. And, then, there's always the children.

Alright, the holiday season is really a time of unequalled anxiety and thinly veiled greed. But, if you're planning on entertaining during this festive time, one thing you don't have to be anxious about is what kind of rock music videos you are going to play for your guests. If you haven't already committed yourself, why not try heavy metal?

Heavy metal rock videos are easy to make and, considering the art form, relatively inexpensive. And, won't your guests envy you for your good taste and ability to stomach excessive amounts of violence!

Despite what some critics think, there is actually more than one type of heavy metal video, and choosing just the right one for your kind of crowd can be a problem. Some people go to the trouble of making a lot of different videos and having extras on hand in case the one they originally chose doesn't go over very well. When in doubt, ask yourself one very important question: "Did these people enjoy *Friday the Thirteenth, Part Thirteen*?"

Once you have made your video, how you present it is almost as important as how good it is. Sometimes, more so. Heavy metal videos don't hold up well under bright lights, and a dimly lit room with a large television screen is consider *de rigueur*. Warning guests of what they are about to see is, of course, the prerogative of the host or hostess; but, remember that the best heavy metal videos are not good to watch if one has had a lot of egg nog.

The three recipes that follow are the most common for heavy metal rock videos, but hosts are encouraged to experiment with their own ingredients. You may not expand an art form, but at least you'll please your guests!

Heavy Metal Concert Surprise

- 3 long shots of band
- 5 two-shots of guitarists at microphone
- 3 close-ups of drummer, playing wildly
- 5 close-ups of bass guitarist, playing
- 5 close-ups of lead guitarist, playing (6 if he's cute, 8 if he's ugly)
- 2 close-ups of lead guitarist, singing
- 2 close-ups of bass guitarist, sticking tongue out at camera
- 1 close-up of lead singer, about to bite the head off a live bat (surprise!)
- 12 inserts, newsreel footage of violence

DIRECTIONS

Start with long shot of band. Liberally mix in close-ups and violent inserts. Towards the end, throw in the shot of lead singer about to bite the head off live bat for added spice. Serves for three or four minutes.

Heavy Metal A La Carte

3 shots of violence against women, actual
5 shots of violence against woman, implied
6 shots of couple petting, various dress
4 small-scale explosions
4 full-scale explosions
10 inserts, cars, various angles, various speeds
12 inserts, street gang moving down alley
3 shots of band

DIRECTIONS

Mix footage of car, street gang and violence against women, both actual and implied. Lightly sprinkle petting shots and shots of band. End with explosions. Serves for three to five minutes.

Metal Hurlant Conceptuel

4 shots of heavy machinery (animated)
3 shots of creepy shadows (animated)
5 shots of people walking around like zombies (animated)
2 shots of bulls locking horns
3 shots of smokestack polluting the air
2 shots of waves washing against a shore
1 close-up of an exploding television set
12 inserts of band, playing

DIRECTIONS

Throw it all together and hope it doesn't explode in your face. Serves anywhere from seven to 12 minutes.

What Is This Thing Called Culture?

What is this thing called culture? Well, there's...*No Business Like Show Business* hours not to reason "YMCA" galaxy far, far away out of his mind over Matterhorn of Plenty of nothing, and nothing's plenty for Michelle, ma Belle Francois Truffaut pas de Deux Solitudes in E sharp as *Attack of the Mushroom People* will Talk of the "Town Called Malice" in Blunderland of opportunity for Advancement of Coloured *People's Courtship of Fools* rush in where angels fear to tread on me and my Shadow knows which side his bread is buttered "On Top of Old Smokey" the Bear arm's length times width times depth equals volume of business as usual You Need is Love" 'em and leave 'em, en, oh, say can you see mee, feel me, touch me, heal median strip poker face the music to my ears, nose and throat specialist to starboard to Tears for Fear of god into hymn "al Shook Up" *the Down Staircase* of psychosis I've ever seen, but not heard of cattle costs in human *Terms of Endearment* to say was it good for you deserve a break today is the first day of

the rest of your *Life, the Universe and "Everything's Coming Up Roses are Red Dawn of the Deadline* of questioning authority on the subject, verb, objection sustained glass window on the world at your fingers do the walking hand in hand it to you need a handbrake in the action-packed adventure Classics Bookstore it in the computer games people play's the thing, where we catch the conscience of the King "Crimson and Clover" of fine wine and *Dianetics*, by L. Ron Hubbard of Avon calling cards on the table manner in which you've conducted yourself-made Man and his World-wide tour-de-force *10 from Navarone* of those *Days of Future Passed* with flying *Colour is Your Parachute* the works hard, he'll go far as the eye can see, dee, ee equals em cee squared the circle the correct answer to all your *Trouble With Tracey* and Hepburn, baby, burn with a white-hot passion playing for "Time of the "Season"s in the Sun" *City Night "Heat of the Moment"* I saw "You Can't Get There From Here" today, gone tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow after that's the name of that *Toons for Our Time's* Man of the "Year of the Rats", foiled a gain against other currencies, but continued to decline against the American dollar Bill David Cup and saucer-shaped objectionable "Language of Love," *American Style* over substance of the argumentally defective merchandise: half-off the *Wall Street Week* at the knees and elbows and arrows of outrageous "Fortunate Son"s and Daughters of the American "Revolution Nine", eight, seven, six, five, four, *Three on a Match Game* for anything *With Two Head* for the *Hill Street Blue and Grey* matter/anti-matter drive carefully insured by Mutual of Omaha ha *Harvest of Shame* on UCLA funny thing happened to me on the way to the Theatresports and leisure time to Go-BotswanaLand of the Midnight Sun of god'll get you for "That'll be the Day" by *Day for "Night Moves"* in mysterious Ways and Means Committee to Re-elect the Presidential Election Daytona Speedway of life, don't talk to me about life; brain the size of a planet, and they want me to pick up a piece of *Paper Chase* the *Moon Over Miami Vice*-Presidential fiat *Long Last love at First Bite* the hand that feeds you don't know what you're missing, presumed dead in the Waterworks of Art Buchwald"en Through the Out Door" way to Helluva way to make a "Living in the Material World" *at Eight is Enough* to drive a body mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it any more ways to Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall from Gracelanded immigrant status of womenfolk *Rock of Ages* 12 and up, up and away from the centre of gravity suck in that gut feeling the colden "Times They Are Achangin'" into a *Butterflies Are Free* as the wind and the rain delay me down to sleep of the just a few more seconds, anyone of these Nights" of the Round Table this discussion until next meeting of the mind the store it in the long-term of office party of the first "Part of the Union" dues to circumstances beyond out controlling interest rates a nine out of 10'll get you 20 to six of one of a kind to stranger than fictional character *Witness for the Prosecution* rests on his Laurel and Hardy har Harvard North, South, East and Westward "Home on the Range" of fire until you see the whites of their ayes have *It Happened One "Night Has a Thousand Eyes"* are the windows of the sole Survivor's "Eye of the Tigresse, by Faberge "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friendship ring around the collar *You Experienced* preferred, but not essential Together Now", the full story can be told Lang Syne" of the *Times of London* like dinner is "Burning for You" *Only Live "Twice* in a Lifetime without end of the line of defense is a good offensive lines are "Down to the Sea in Boats" wain Randy Bachman in Motion to adjourney of a thousand miles begins with one "Step into my parlour," said the spider to the fly in the face of traditional sex rolls, buttered up to doing anything *Tonight Show*, starring Johnny Carson

television networking of *Comedy Break* a legend in his own time is of the essence of junipersonals *Well That Ends Well* enough to walk a mile for a Camelephants never forget thee hence, my original statement of intent to kill for a cigarette smoking is dangerous to your Health, Education and Welfare bumper crop rotation.

Is that all there is to it? Of course not. But, how can one encapsulate all of a society's art, language, commerce and other common points of reference in less than 1,000 words? (Suggesting that one not bother trying does not address the issue at hand!) Thus, culture is also...so, what else is new under the son of a gunpoint of order form a double lines meet at infinity off at nine o'clock "In the *Midnight Hour*" Magazine for Men, women and children 12 years of age or under must be accompanied by an adult education out on the *Streets of San Francisco* and a buttered bagel with cream cheesecake on dirt and *grime of the Ancient Mariner*...

Preconceived Notions and Dangerous Ignorance

It started with a slow drip, drip, drip. Soon, a small chunk of the White House ceiling fell onto the President's desk. The President contemplated the fallen plaster for a few minutes. Then, he looked at the hole in the ceiling, noting that the sky was overcast, and figuring that it might soon rain. The President cleared the plaster off his desk as best he could and tried to continue reading (a FOR EYES ONLY report on the up-coming Superbowl Game); but, then the droplets started falling on the report, smearing the ink, the President knew what had to be done.

He moved to another desk.

A couple of days later, the President was discussing Weighty Matters of State with the Secretary of Defense who, as usual, was on at length about the need for increased military spending. The President closed his eyes, as if in great concentration, and dreamed of being back on the set of a movie. Any movie. The Secretary of Defense soon stopped talking, and, only half-consciously, the President assumed that he had finished and left.

When, a couple of hours later, the President awoke, he was surprised to find the Secretary of Defense slumped in his chair, unmoving. There was plaster all about, and it only took the President – whose logical thought processes were heightened by odd events – several minutes to figure out that a part of the ceiling had knocked an important member of his Executive Branch unconscious. With a sad sigh, the President realized that he must have the deterioration of the White House roof looked into, and, as soon as he revived the Secretary of Defense, he did so.

The Navy Engineer took almost a week to study the ceiling. In the meantime, chunks continued to fall and, more than once, the President had to move his desk in order to remain sheltered. When, at last, the Navy Engineer was ready to report, half the ceiling was missing. "It is clear," he stated, occasionally allowing his eyes to wander upwards,

“that the entire structure of the White House has been compromised by weak acids in the rainwater...”

The President thought for a moment. “What can we do?” he asked.

The Navy Engineer shifted nervously from one leg to the other. “Well,” he suggested, “as you know, so-called ‘Acid Rain’ is caused by airborne pollutants, largely from industrial smokestacks. Therefore, one answer would be to enforce stricter pollution laws...”

“I see,” the President responded. “But, tell me: if Acid Rain is caused by other factors – natural factors – like, say, the putrefaction of vegetation, wouldn’t we be committing ourselves to a course that would add unnecessary drains on the profits of our economically important industries?”

The Navy Engineer blinked. “Sir,” he weakly protested, “there is more than enough evidence to prove that Acid Rain is primarily caused by industrial and other human pollution.”

“I see,” the President said, once more. In a flash, he knew what had to be done.

He started courtmartial proceedings against the Navy Engineer.

The weather was nice throughout the rest of the week, warm and dry, and only a small portion of the roof fell down, mostly in the far corner, giving the President reason to believe that he had weathered the worst of the problem, and that he could now forget about it.

All the next week, the President was out of the country. When he returned, there was very little of the ceiling left, and part of one wall was missing. “I refuse to allow this minor inconvenience to affect the smooth running of this administration,” the President said to himself, and, later, to the press. Meanwhile, he had his desk moved to what appeared to be the most stable corner of the room.

Later, the Prime Minister of Canada visited the President in his office. Looking around, impressed, the Prime Minister remarked: “You’ve changed something – no, don’t tell me. The place looks...roomier than it used to...”

“I got rid of some of those damn plants,” the President allowed.

After the minimal amount of small talk required by protocol (no more than 15 or 20 minutes), the Prime Minister came directly to the point. “The Great Lakes,” he stated, “are dying. Fish can no longer live in the polluted waters. Something has got to be done about it!”

The President looked genuinely concerned. “What can I do?”

“Both our governments must take serious steps to curb industrial pollution,” the Prime Minister insisted. Just then, the far wall groaned ominously. “What was that?” the Prime Minister anxiously asked.

“The building is settling,” the President assured him. “Nothing to worry about.”

The Prime Minister looked dubious, but continued. “We know that most of the worst pollution comes from your side of the border. Now, what are you prepared to do about it?”

Before the President was forced to reply, the far wall collapsed without further warning, burying the Prime Minister. “Brian?” the President asked, tentatively. “Brian?” There was no reply.

The President’s secretary rushed in. “Sir, are you alright?”

“Fine,” the President answered, “but, I’m afraid that the Prime Minister of Canada is dead.”

“Dead? But...how...?”

“It was a combination of things,” the President pontificated wildly. “Volcanic eruptions obviously weakened the foundation of the White House, and duck droppings must have added to the erosion of the material in the walls...”

“But, sir,” the secretary said, “what are you going to do?”

What, indeed. The President thought for a while, but he knew what had to be done. He had known all along what had to be done. “Get me Drew Lewis,” he ordered his secretary. “We need to study this problem!”

25 Down, 45 To Go

I turned 25. The big quarter century. One score five. A whole new age bracket. Older than I ever thought I would be. There are advantages to being 25 (the cost of car insurance goes down), but there are disadvantages, as well (eligibility for youth employment programmes is right out). Since I don’t have a car but I do need a job, on balance my 25th birthday seems to have come at an awkward time, but, believe me, there was little I could do to prevent it.

As I look over the agglomeration of memories that comprise my life, I wonder if I have learned anything that might help me later in life. Indeed, I have.

I have learned that you should never kiss a person with braces. I have learned that you should never see *A Nightmare on Elm Street, Part Two: Freddy’s Revenge* on a full

stomach. Also, I have learned that, no matter how great the temptation, one should never call a punk rocker “Curly.”

I have learned that you shouldn't trust a person who doesn't know the difference between Spring Byington and a spring mattress. As well, you shouldn't trust a swarthy looking man with a scar down one cheek named Abdul (the man, that is, not the scar). Then, too, you probably shouldn't trust anybody who thinks that designer wood paneling is a really net thing. Readers have claimed to notice a paranoid streak in my writing, but I don't think I'm paranoid, just very, very careful.

I have learned that drinking water cannot be trusted (but, I'm not paranoid). That's why I only drink soft drinks: that way, at least I know what chemicals I'm putting in my body.

I have learned that one should never set a goal with a time limit (such as: “I will catch 8,000 beaver pelts by the time I'm 30 years old”). The goal may not be reached, but the time always will. If a time limit is absolutely necessary, one should set one's sights ridiculously high (ie: “I will finish this sentence before I reach my 86th birthday.”)

I have learned never to judge a book by its author, but I still refuse to read anything by Stephen King, Harold Robbins or Jackie Collins. So much for an open mind.

I have learned that good always triumphs over evil in the end, but that good and evil are relative terms and the end is often delayed past the point where anybody cares much any more. Also, just to confuse the issue, evil always throws better parties than good, and good often has worse breath.

I have learned that people who spell thanks “T-H-A-N-X,” put hearts above the letter “I” instead of simple dots and/or are named Sunshine are too precious to be allowed to live with real people. I am not a cruel person, and I would be satisfied if such people were rounded up and placed on a desert island, waiting to be colonists on the first moon base.

I have learned to wonder about people who think S&M is a candy. Don't you?

I have learned that politics cannot be taken seriously by anybody with an IQ higher than algae. This not only explains why politics attracts the kind of people it does, but why most people mistakenly believe that politics is too complicated for them to understand (in reality, it's far too simple).

I have learned that a major part of the Canadian Identity is that there is no Canadian Identity, despite the obvious cognitive dissonance this can cause. Can an entire country be Zen? This belief in the non-Canadian Canadian Identity persists despite the fact that Canada is the birthplace of the telephone, insulin and Pierre Trudeau. Well, this just proves that no country is perfect.

I have learned that the only purpose for credit cards is to lure the unwary into buying more products than they could ever hope to afford, and I'm not saying that just because I never expect to be eligible for one in my entire life...

I have learned that Gumby really is worth the trouble.

I have learned that every person's sense of humour is different, but that mentioning guacamole or Gerald Ford in the right context never fails to elicit a chuckle. Because humour is such a personal thing, I have always thought it should be on the universal List of Things You Shouldn't Discuss In Polite Company at a Party or In Front of the Children (like religion, or the federal deficit), but I seem to be in the minority in this regard.

In fact, I have learned that I am in the minority in a lot of regards. Despite this (or, perhaps, because of it) I cling to my beliefs (although I am reconsidering the theory that the universe is just the headache of some minor deity and will cease to exist as soon as its prescription comes back from the corner drug store). Being in the minority does have one advantage, though: there isn't a lot of peer pressure (there aren't a lot of peers).

I have learned that not only does time heal all wounds, but it renders them totally obsolete.

Hmm...the totality of my experience does, on the surface of it, seem to be all...surface. Ah, well; I can only hope that more depth is to be found in the 25 years.

The Creative Process Revealed

“The lifespan of a stereotype depends upon its social utility.”

The Writer looked at the opening sentence. Not bad, The Writer thought, Not bad at all. A bit pedantic, perhaps, but that's the style most of the journals are interested in. The Writer marvelled at the opening sentence for several minutes, noting that it was pithy, succinct and, quite possibly, original, and gradually came to the realization that adding five or six sentences like it would mean creating the perfect opening paragraph.

Mind reeling, The Writer withdrew to the kitchen, made a ham and cheese sandwich and some coffee, and had lunch.

After lunch, The Writer returned to the work at hand, but found the opening sentence far less satisfying. Stereotype? The Writer asked himself, What kind of stereotype? Is there really a direct relationship between lifespan and social utility, or are other factors involved? Just what the hell did I mean by social utility, anyway? Will anybody understand what I'm trying to say? WHAT AM I TALKING ABOUT?

The Writer grabbed the top sheet of paper and tried tugging it out of the machine. After three or four tries, The Writer was finally successful. While fully aware that this method

of removing unsatisfactory prose from the typewriter might damage the machine's carriage, The Writer found the action addictively enjoyable, and not only kept doing it, but purposefully made mistakes to have an excuse to continue doing it.

“The lifespan of an artistic stereotype may depend upon its...”

Its what? The Writer tried to find a simpler way of stating the idea of social utility, fished, and wrote the term down again. Well, that changes everything, the Writer thought. Then, realizing that the word utility had been spelt “utilty,” The Writer broke out the liquid paper and corrected the error. The Writer's mind briefly wandered back to the evening before, causing The Writer to smile. But, the work, sitting in the typewriter, silently demanded attention.

Alright, The Writer thought, This will do until a better opening sentence comes along. What next? The Writer spent the next half hour alternating between formulating approaches to the material and childhood memories. While the latter effort was more entertaining than the former, neither resulted in advancing the immediate purpose. Oh, no! The Writer panicked, Have I blown my intellectual wad in the opening sentence?

Panic is a not uncommon condition for writers, fuelled by the two questions, “Will what I am doing be appreciated and/or enjoyed?” and “Does what I'm doing have any ultimate purpose or meaning?” In fact, self-doubt is an inherent part of most writers' personalities; after all, only a person unsure of the value of his or her original thoughts and creativity would need to commit them to paper.

So, to panic. What am I doing? The Writer thought, banging futilely on the keys of the now dead electric keyboard. How did I put myself in this ridiculous – absurd, even – position of having to come up with 5,000 original words a month? For money?

Unlike so many others, the correct answer to this question was immediately forthcoming. Seven months earlier, The Writer had submitted an article on “The Image of Penguins in the Mass media” to the *Journal of Mass Communications and Large, Flightless Water Fowl* on spec. (Writing on spec, that is, on speculation or without a specific assignment, conjures up ugly visions in the minds of most people; but, if you have a strong passion for large amounts of rejection, it is a not completely unpleasant way of passing the years.)

Much to The Writer's surprise, the essay was enthusiastically received, and The Writer was encouraged to write more. Hence, the present dilemma. One can only write so much on large, flightless water fowl before one's writing becomes derivative...formulaic...unsalable. What to do?

The Writer removed the second sheet of paper, carefully this time, and replaced it with a pristine sheet. “The lifespan of an artistic stereotype,” The Writer began anew, “depends upon the ratio of the number of barbers to the height of the hem line in a given society.” No, that's right out, The Writer thought, but set the idea aside for future use.

Then, an inspiration: let's define our terms! Of course! Definitions can go on for pages, don't require a great deal of original thought and can look like impressive research. Smiling, The Writer started explaining what was meant by an artistic stereotype...then, barbers...by the time The Writer got to the height of the hem line, it became apparent that the opening sentence had not remained set aside, and that serious essay would require yet another first page.

The Writer threw a few definitions together, added some paragraphs about the role of the individual in society, reviewed some pertinent literature and summed up the arguments for and against the thesis that media images affect real world behaviour. Three hours later, the essay was complete. Wow, The Writer thought, That wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. In fact, it was fun. Still fun.

Now, I better call home and find out what the emergency was.

Mr. Rooney Goes To Hell

If people mean hell, they should say hell.

People who call hell H-E-double hockey sticks are too precious, don't you think? Do they really believe ice could survive the extremely high temperatures that have made hell justifiably famous, or that anybody would be allowed a few hours break from eternal damnation to actually play some shinny? Do they perhaps believe that anybody who ever touched a hockey stick, like anybody who has ever touched a drop of alcohol for non-medicinal purposes, is doomed? Maybe they just don't like Canada.

People who tell you that you know where you can go often presume more intelligence than they are likely to find. I, for instance, never know where to go. Should I go to Montana? Should I go to a library? Should I go an anti-nuclear protest rally? And, what should I do when I get there? The point is, if I'm being told to go to hell, I want to know, if only to enable me to formulate an appropriate response.

The Place That's Not Heaven is another good one, right up there with you know where you can go. Where is the place that's not heaven? Montana? My brother Ralph's apartment? The corner behind the sink where nobody has been able to clean for over 20 years? I'd put my money on this last possibility, but I'm not sure anybody would understand what I was trying to say if I told them to go to the corner behind the sink where nobody has been able to reach to clean for over 20 years, even if I was angrily shouting it at the top of my lungs.

Referring to hell as The Underworld is also not without its problems. Most people, if they think of The Underworld at all, conjure up visions of cheap hoods with big guns murdering each other over some territorial squabble involving ill-gotten gains and family honour. Kind of reminds you of politics, doesn't it? That people who frequently engage in this sort of behaviour will likely end up in hell is not the point; The Underworld just doesn't cut it as a useful, easily communicated and understood expletive.

The Devil's Playground, Satan's Domain and That Evil Guy's Place don't do anything for me, either, I'm afraid. When I hear a person use a euphemism like that, my first thought is, "Can I look that address up in the phone book?" When was the last time you heard anybody shout, "What the Devil's Playground is going on here?" Honestly, you'd feel pretty silly saying that, wouldn't you? Yet, fully grown adults still use ridiculous phrases like that instead of the word they really mean: hell.

Often, people will say go to the Devil instead of go to hell. This has always struck me as a far more frightening thing to wish upon a person. If you have to spend eternity writhing in agony because of some unique torture you've created for yourself, I always figured it would be best not to call attention to yourself by walking up to the Devil and saying, "Hi, Beelzebub. Mind if I call you Beelze? How's it going?" and asking for really serious trouble.

And, now that I think of it, why are there so many names for the Devil. Satan's okay, I guess. Most of us know who he is. But, Beelzebub, well, that's a bit more obscure, a little unclear. The Horned Demon isn't very good at all; after all, there may be millions of them, and how are we supposed to know exactly which horned demon a person means? Ruler of hell leads to a strange paradox: we could end up with phrases like Ruler of the Ruler's Playground. Hunh? If I had my choice, I'd just call the Devil Jack, but that would probably just confuse anybody who is still clear on the subject.

All this confusion about names may stem from the fact that we all have different ideas of just what hell is. To a trucker, hell might be a load of high explosives on an unpaved road. To a musician or a movie star, hell might be walking into a crowded arena and not having anybody ask for an autograph. In my house, hell is usually having to try and reach the corner behind the sink where nobody has been able to reach to clean for over 20 years.

The point is, with so many different ideas of what hell is, it's understandable why there are so many terms for it. To the trucker, hell might be the Devil's Playground; to the rock star, it might be The Underworld. In my house, it's usually you know where you can go, because we don't like to encourage swearing. As for the people who think that hell consists of reading my lengthy, dull, folksy, obvious columns that often reach no conclusion, I can only think of one thing to say.

You know where you can go.

Letters To Missed Manners

DEAR MISSED MANNERS: I am the leader of a small African nation that, despite its general lack of importance, has gained some status internationally because of its oil exports. I am a Colonel in our army, well-loved by my people and feared and hated by our enemies. I have sometimes been accused of acting irrationally, but that is simply not true – I just have a moral code that is very, very strict.

Recently, the fighter aircraft of another nation dropped by rather unexpectedly, stayed for only 11 minutes and abruptly left again, leaving behind several bombs, both exploded and unexploded. Needless to say, I was not given an opportunity to prepare a suitable welcome, and entertaining was quite difficult. Could you tell me what my duties as a host are in such a situation? Would I be wrong in becoming angry? Would I be totally out of line to return the favour by, say, unleashing terrorist attacks on our unexpected guests and their allies? Your advice on these troubling matters would be greatly appreciated.

DEAR HEART: What a delightful and timely question! More and more, countries are invading each other without so much as a declaration of war, or even a simple telephone call, and it is often difficult to know just how such unexpected intrusions should be handled. Preparing coffee and cakes is, given the shortness of the stay, out of the question. These days, it is common practice to return an invader's gifts with appropriate offerings of one's own: anti-aircraft fire, say, or mortar shells.

Of course, Missed Manners cannot condone terrorism, an appalling breach of etiquette. Such behaviour is a clear breach of common human decency and tremendously messy, so it should be avoided at all costs. Such rules differ from country to country, of course, but, Dear Heart, really! Some things a civilized nation simply does not do!

DEAR MISSED MANNERS: I can't believe Air Canada has now designated some flights as non-smoking! What next? Flights without free drinks? Flights without stewardesses and pilots? Smoking is the most satisfying activities one can engage in. And, patriotic! What is the airline trying to do? Destroy the tobacco industry? Interfere with our right to pollute our lungs, seriously damage our bodies and otherwise enjoy all the other benefits of cigars and cigarettes? Can we allow such restrictions in a truly democratic society? What I'm getting at is: do I really hafta stop?

DEAR HEART: Calm down! Missed Manners is not a medical expert, but she thinks you're heading straight down the highway without exits that leads to Heart Attack City! Where will Air Canada's initiative end? Possibly with flights without passengers. If you don't like the situation, don't stay aboard the plane. Especially after it has reached an altitude of 30,000 feet.

DEAR MISSED MANNERS: Is that really your name? Haw – just kidding. I'm six foot three and husky. The other day, I was wearing my Hell Bent for Nutrition t-shirt, tastefully ripped at the shoulder, and a black leather bomber jacket. (I don't think it's a real bomber jacket, but I did get it out of a real bomber.) I was wearing a large earring in the shape of a popular handgun. In short, I thought I looked like I didn't want to be messed with, okay?

I was looking for the latest Bonzo Dog Doodah Band album (I know it's been a few years since it was released, but I've been out of...town for a while) when this sour old woman comes up to me and says, "You should finish your drink before you go out, young man!" This kinda threw me because I wasn't aware that I had anything to drink before I went out. So, I looked down and, sure enough, there was a pop can in my hand. Like, wow.

So, what I want to know is, should I have jumped all over her face when she gave me a hard time? I mean, I just laughed and walked away, but then I figured that if you let one old sourpuss get away with that kind of stuff, there's no telling where it will end, right?

DEAR HEART: Your reactions seem extreme. Missed Manners believes that the right thing to do in such a situation is exactly what you did do: laugh and walk away. It's unfortunate that old people have no respect for youth any more, but you shouldn't allow that to make you do something you, the lady and half the city's police force might regret later.

DEAR MISSED MANNERS: I am the leader of a provincial political machine who finds himself in recently impoverished circumstances. The other day, the leader of the newly elected government presented his first Throne Speech. How should I respond.

DEAR HEART: Flowers are always appropriate for state occasions.

DEAR MISSED MANNERS: Would I be correct in saying that your column is nothing more than an opinionated, self-important, fatuous exercise in maudlin indulgence that keeps people with serious problems from seeking meaningful, lasting assistance from trained professionals?

DEAR HEART: No, you would not. Such columns do exist, but this is not really one of them.

DEAR MISSED MANNERS: Oh. Would I be correct in saying, then, that your column is nothing more than an opinionated, self-important, fatuous exercise in maudlin indulgence that plays on our need to be socially accepted by inflating the importance of customs and down-playing simple questions of right and wrong?

DEAR HEART: Yes. That sounds closer to the truth.

Mr. Science Loses His Innocence

Mr. Science stood, as usual, in front of the blackboard and behind the table of goodies. Today, the word "earthworm" was written in small, cramped script on the blackboard, and several specimens squirmed about on the table. Mr. Science himself never seemed to change: he stood stiff as a board in his charcoal grey suit with a white bow tie with black polka dots. His small mouth ticed ever so slightly.

Across from him was the stand that held the seats for the children. There were a dozen boys and girls sitting there, but, because they were placed so close together, they gave the impression of being a larger group when the camera closed in on them. Audio enhancement of their reactions added to the illusion.

“Hello, kiddies,” Mr. Science, his voice typically cracking at the edge of nervous hysteria, started. “Did you know that if you cut a normal earthworm in half, the two halves can grow into separate worms? But, don’t step on them in the street after a rainfall, because you won’t get hundreds of little earthworms!” Mr. Science laughed like a man in pain. The children groaned ominously.

“Now,” Mr. Science continued, making an effort to ignore his audience, “who wants to learn more about earthworms?”

Tommy, positioned at the bottom of the three rows of children in the far corner, stood up and angrily said, “Alright, Science, why don’t you cut this crap?”

“Wha...what was that, Tommy?” Mr. Science asked. The camera immediately caught the fact that he had started perspiring liberally (perhaps the only liberal thing about him).

“We want to know about nuclear energy, Science!” Tommy harshly stated, to the murmured assent of the other children. Stiffly holding his arm out to point at Mr. Science, Tommy added: “No more cover-ups, Science! We want the truth!”

Mr. Science took a handkerchief out of a jacket pocket and dabbed his forehead with it. “There is nothing to cover up,” he assured the children with a pathetic smile. “Nuclear energy is...is perfectly safe...”

“Come on, Science,” Tommy sneered. “Who do you think you’re talking to? A bunch of 12 year-olds?”

“Well...” Mr. Science shrugged.

Tommy turned towards the other children. “A nuclear power plant in Russia explodes and apparently burns for four days!” he intoned. “Hundreds, perhaps thousands of people are injured and die at once! Millions of lives across the world could be affected in the long term! This is the world adults are making for us! The safety of these installations is once again being called into question, and what does Mr. Science tell us? That we are perfectly safe!”

The children nodded knowingly and whispered to each other.

“No fair!” Mr. Science, now mopping his head furiously, childishly shouted. “No fair! Our generators are built different!”

Tommy returned his attention to Mr. Science. “What about Three Mile Island?” he accused. “What about Decatur, Alabama, or Erwin, Tennessee? Sure, we’ve been lucky. So far. But, there are over 100 nuclear generating facilities in North America. Do we need this form of energy badly enough that we are willing to put so many lives at risk?”

Mr. Science stuck his free hand into a different pocket and came up with three metal balls, which he noisily rolled around in his hand. “There are no lives at risk,” he insisted. But, seeming to reverse himself, he added: “People aren’t willing to slightly lower their standard of living to eliminate nuclear power. What can we do?”

“Put more money into researching truly safe ways of generating nuclear power,” Tommy replied. “If there are none, put more money into the research of alternative sources of energy...”

Mr. Science dropped his handkerchief and balls. “More money?” he squeaked.

“Oh, sure. That’s always the problem, isn’t it?” Tommy shrilly asked. “We seem willing to ignore questions of people’s health and the future inhabitability of this planet for today’s bottom line profit. How pure does scientific research look, hunh?”

Mr. Science dropped to his knees to pick up his security toys. Looking up, he found the courage to say, “That’s not my fault. Money for research is a matter of public policy...government and business decide how much money will go to each project.

Tommy was momentarily taken aback. “Yes,” he countered, “that is, umm, true. But, scientists still have the choice of working on stuff they feel is worthwhile and the moral responsibility to refuse to work on things that are detrimental to the public welfare.”

Somebody whispered from offstage. “What?” Tommy asked. The person repeated what he had said. “Oh, alright,” Tommy agreed, looking at Mr. Science, who was still on his knees, worms wriggling their way off the table all around him. Turning to the camera, Tommy said: “We’ve run out of time, so that’s our show for today. Be sure to tune in tomorrow when our subject will be...butterflies? Butterflies! Who picks these stupid topics?”

“And, remember: we can’t solve technological problems by just mindlessly creating new technologies. We can determine the consequences of our creations before we make them, and we owe it to future generations to use our scientific knowledge responsibly. This is Tommy, filling in for Mr. Science, saying, see you tomorrow!”

Deadline News: On the Local Scene...

Good evening. Our top story tonight: the Security Council of the United Nations, in a unanimous voice, condemned terrorism this past week, saying that it was “naughty and bad.” Members of the Security Council were preparing to discuss a motion approving, “ice cream, puppy dogs and *The Waltons* television programme” when they found it was time for milk and cookies, after which most of them left to take their nappies. Isn’t international cooperation a wonderful thing?

In other news: it was revealed for the first time that President Reagan and Premier Gorbachev agreed at their recent summit that Russia and the United States would put

aside their differences if the earth were attacked by aliens. The agreement in principle does not, however, allow for on-site alien verification, and limits on extra-terrestrial numbers and underground alien testing have not been established. We'll let you know if the agreement included attacks from Atlantis as soon as that information becomes available.

The case of eight Canadians suing the American Central Intelligence Agency for experiments which took place at colleges and universities in the 1960s continued. CIA representative Charles Klobber recently told reporters: "It's all in their minds." Pressed for an explanation, Klobber added: "You wouldn't believe a bunch of crazy people, would you?" It was unclear whether he was referring to the Canadians who filed the suit, or those who were testifying on behalf of the CIA.

The Canadian government admitted that it was considering a proposal to amalgamate "all the piddling little surveys and polls" that it had done for it into one "omnibus" (or, big bus) poll with 100 questions. The poll, which would be conducted every month or so, would include such questions as: "Which leader do you feel has the cutest dimples?"; "Would you be against a 50 per cent increase in the taxes of the couple living in sin down the street?" and; "Have you ever read a book?" According to government sources, one problem with the poll is finding 1,500 people willing to give up an afternoon in order to answer all 100 questions.

At this point, there was supposed to be a story about lobby groups in Ottawa, but they got wind of it and convinced our editor to discourage us from finishing it.

A poll taken in the United States indicates that five per cent of Americans believe free trade with Canada is "trade that won't cost us any money." Of the remainder, 10 per cent responded "don't know," 25 per cent answered "don't care" and 60 per cent were watching *Moonlighting* and refused to come to the phone to answer the questions.

On the local scene: of the 13 wolves who escaped or were let free from the Metro Toronto Zoo, all but two have been recaptured. Offers of meat and wolves of the opposite sex have not lured the animals out into the open where they can be taken, and zoo officials are said to be considering putting out colour television sets and tickets for free trips to the Bahamas. As a last resort, it is rumoured that zoo officials will be allowed to offer the wolves seats on the federal Senate.

Calls in the provincial legislature for extending the drinking and driving laws to include bicycles came after a tragic 12 bike collision that killed five and injured eight. The drivers of at least seven of the vehicles had a blood alcohol content of over 80 milligrams (the legal limit for automobiles) and admitted to drinking Sarasoda, a soft drink that contains alcohol, before getting behind the wheel. Charges against one driver, an 11 year-old who cannot be named, are to be filed as soon as police can figure out what they should be.

Reaction from the business community to the recent proposals for a minimum tax was immediate. At a press conference held this afternoon, N. Heiser Busch, Vice President of Something Indefinite but Terribly, Terribly Important of CanadaCorp, a wholly owned subsidiary of MultiNatCorp, told reporters: “Taxing the rich is idiotic. I’m rich, and I’m not ashamed to admit it. Do you realize how important rich people are? Why, if there were no rich people, who would poor people aspire to be like?”

In other business news: MPP Bette Stephenson has refused to retract remarks that the abolition of extra-billing was a “terrorist attack” on doctors. However, shadowy representatives of both the Irish Republican Army and the Palestine Liberation Organization are reportedly furious that Dr. Stephenson would lump them together with the Ontario Liberals. Premier David Peterson was unavailable for comment.

In entertainment news: it was announced that the latest Disney entertainment complex will be built at Marne-la-Valle, France, just outside of Paris. According to French planners, along with the more familiar figures of Mickey, Minnie and Goofy, the French version of Disneyland (Le Merveilleux Monde de Disney) will include figures of Jean-Paul Sartre, who will ask children questions such as “Why are you here?” and “Don’t you find this existence a trifle banal?” and Eugene Ionesco, complete with rhinoceros horns. Of course, escargaux and wine will be standard fare at all the fast food restaurants.

An international incident was narrowly averted when a pair of derelicts claimed to have kidnapped Miss Piggy, who could be seen in *The Muppet Show on Tour*, currently playing in Toronto, and roasted her because they claimed to be starving and needed something to eat. Theatre sources stated that the derelicts had only managed to kidnap a costume, and that it could, with a little trouble, be replaced. “But,” one theatre source wondered, “who would eat a pig costume? I mean – who could?”

Canadian veterans continue to be angered by a film about World War One flying ace Billy Bishop, in which it was stated that there is no evidence to back up Bishop’s claim about his most famous mission. “We know that Billy did what he did,” one veteran, who refused to be named, said, “and that would be good enough. But, did you know that he also...invented Styrofoam? It’s true. Not only that, but Billy was responsible for the theory of relativity – yeah, before that Albert guy found Billy’s notes. Our Billy was a great man, boy, and make no mistake!” Historians remain sceptical.

In a story last week, we reported that *Toronto Sun* columnist Christie Blatchford had said, “What’s all this garbage about mousse? If I wanted plastic hair, I would staple a shredded green garbage bag to my head!” Apparently, this was incorrect. Actually, it was pop star Prince who said, “What do you mean, I’m not on the list of the 20 hottest rock stars or groups? Bruce Springsteen? U2? What do those guys have that I don’t have? And, where can I get some?”

We regret any confusion our mistake may have caused.

And, finally, it's that time of year again, and we're picking up 13 unidentified objects on our weather radar. We don't know what they could be...is it possible? Are the 13 unidentified objects...Santa's sleigh and his 12 reindeer. Could they...no...no, I'm sorry. I have just been informed that the unidentified objects are incoming Russian IBMs. What a thoughtful Christmas present for the country that has everything.

Good night.

Caribou on Bay

I was doing some window shopping downtown when I noticed the young caribou. It was sitting on the sidewalk, back uncomfortably propped up against a wall, its forepaws outstretched, a hat precariously balanced between them. Leaning against the wall next to it was a flimsy sign which read, "Buddy, can U spare some grass?"

I dropped a handful of change into its hat (not being the type to regularly carry grass on my person). "Is there anything else I can do?" I asked, concerned.

"Got any cigarettes?" the caribou rasped.

"Sorry," I replied. "I don't smoke." After a couple of seconds of tense silence, I continued: "What happened to you?"

The caribou shrugged, almost dropping its hat. "Progress, I guess," it answered. "But, don't waste your pity on me. I don't want it."

"Sorry. You wanna talk about it?"

The caribou looked at me with emotion-filled eyes. "Sure," it sighed, "why not? It all started a year ago. I was running with a herd that flirted with the Yukon/Alaska border, We were 180,000 strong, and we didn't stop for nobody. What the hell, you know? We were protected by the Alaskan National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980, which proclaimed the land as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

"Well, that's what we thought, anyway.

"They started putting refineries, factories and offices up during the summer. That destroyed a lot of the land we used to calf on. Some of the rest was fenced off for future use. We'd been grazing and calving on that land for thousands of years, but I guess that wasn't as important as your need to get oil out of Alaska..."

"Hey, not me!" I protested. "The Canadian government was against this from the beginning. It even made some of the adjoining land in the Yukon a wildlife park – the North Yukon National Park. The decision to let drilling start there was made by US Interior Secretary Donald Hodel."

“Yeah...whatever...” the caribou said as somebody tossed a dollar into its hat. “Thanks. Appreciate it. Look, it’s just too damn bad that an American decision could have such a devastating effect on Canadian wildlife.”

“What exactly happened?”

“You sure you don’t have a cigarette?”

“Sorry.”

The caribou crossed its hindpaws, hoping to avoid getting a cramp. It waited for a fire engine, siren blaring, to pass, then continued: Last year, we had a brutal winter. Because our food supply had largely gone south, a quarter of the herd died. I lost Mary around then. Well, we may only be caribou, but we can read the handwriting on the refinery wall as well as anybody. Some of the older members of the herd were too set in their ways to do anything, but, pretty soon, most of us went south, too.

“A lot of us ended up in zoos, of course. People couldn’t see past our species; and, anyway, who wants to retrain a caribou to do work that a human can do? Some of us ended up pulling plows in the west. It’s not that we wanted to take work away from horses, you understand – it was quite a comedown, when you think about it. We got as much pride as any animal...present company excepted, of course. But, a caribou’s gotta do whatever it can to survive.

“I heard a couple of caribou from our herd made it as far as Hollywood. Course, there ain’t much call for caribou in the movies, but everybody’s got a right to dream, right?”

“That’s some hard luck story,” I commented.

“The zoos are full of ‘em,” the caribou replied. “They say things are gonna get better soon, that a change in Administration is going to bring environmental prosperity. They say that it’s just around the corner, but I don’t know...”

“You mustn’t give up hope.”

The caribou laughed nastily. “Hope? The ecological balance of the land took hundreds of thousands of years to develop. You can’t just use it up and expect to be able to put things right when you’re finished. Besides, whatever happens, it’ll be too late to help me or my herd.”

A man in a three piece suit hurried past us, being careful not to look down. Over his shoulder, he sneered, “Why don’t you get a job?”

The caribou looked at him benignly.

“What are you going to do?” I asked. The caribou thought for a moment before answering.

“Think I’ll get me a guitar...”

Interactive Literary Classics

Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell

Click. Click.

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winst –

Click.

The clock struck ten
The mouse ran down again
Hickory dicko –

Click.

FROM: lizard@subparnet.com
TO: computer_fanatics-l@timewasters.yorku.edu
SUBJECT: care and feeding

I’ve noticed there is a lot of talk about mice on this mailing list. I’ve been having trouble with my pet mouse, Descartes, lately, and I thought somebody out there might be able to offer some advice. He hasn’t been eating his food pellets regularly, which I think is a big part of the problem. He’s listless and doesn’t run in his wheel as much as he used to. Any suggestions?

FROM: freakout@gatesworld.com
TO: computer_fanatics-l@timewasters.yorku.edu
SUBJECT: RE: care and feeding

Dear Lizard,
You are an idiot.

Click.

Chapter Seventeen The Ontology of The Idiot

Of all the different identities which are socially constructed, that of the fool figure, or, in more common parlance, the (id)iot, is, at one and the same time, both the saddest and, yet,

the one which offers the richest sem(id)iotic stew of meaning, counter-meaning and advanced rhetorical conundrumation. For it is here, in this one sad, sometimes laughing, sometimes drooling figure, that the signified and the signifier are finally reconciled in an orgy of pratfalls, spit takes and bad puns; it is here that all of the irrationality which makes up the totality of the suppressed, both in its individuated and collective guises, is sublimation of the desi –

Click.

Q: Why did the idiot cross the road?

A: What?

Click.

What kind of an idiot would use DW-40 as a sexual lubricant? 8-[Talk about mechanical love-making!

Hey! I was just out back, taking apart my motorcycle engine when she got in the mood and like what was I supposed to do?

You guys are sick!

Click.

The Piston Engine

[image]

If you can't see this image, maybe it's time you went to [image]. That's right, [image] is the foremost Web browser (except our competition, [image], oh, and, maybe [image], [image] and our lawyers won't allow us to make such a statement without including [image]). Our Web browser is faster than [image] (which, as everybody knows, is about as useful as a snail on a griddle), on a par with [image] and [image], though not nearly as fast as [image]. But, then, do you want to buy something that will make Bill Gates even richer? We didn't think so.

Click.

Dear Mister Moneybags,

If your method of getting rich quick is really so good, how come you aren't a millionaire?

Concerned Consumer

Dear Concerned,

If you had been paying attention, you would have known that I AM a millionaire. Several times over, actually. Thanks to people like you buying my books, my motivational tapes,

“I am in charge of my own economic fate” coffee mugs and all the other fine merchandise put out by Mister Moneybags, Incorporated and our 27 worldwide subsidiaries (none of which, as I’m sure you know, are based in Wales).

Paying attention to details – that’s the difference between somebody in control of their own economic fate, and the pitiful losers who actually have to work from nine to five. Fortunately for you, paying attention to details is the theme of my latest book, *Adam Smith is In the Details*. With such chapters as “Wandering Mind -- Foolish Mind” and “Fine Print – The Devil’s Due,” I tell you all you need to know about this vitally important aspect of taking control of your economic fate.

Click.

FROM: anonremail@whoknows.where.com
TO: paranoia-l@nixon.recallcode.sw
SUBJECT: RE: who is in control?

Is it Coincidence that the World Bank announced that it was forgiving a substantial portion of Mexico’s debt on the same day that Pope John Paul II came down with the flu? Fools might think so. FOOLS AND ATHIESTS. But those who fear the Word of God know that Judgment is at hand. The Portents are all there, just read your Daily Newspaper. The seas are full of oil and our beer is full of water – can this, too, be a Coincidence? Or is there a Broader Fate being played out here of which we can only see snatches? And who can see the larger picture? The NSA? Cardinal Ratzinger? Remember when Jesus said, ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself?’ He never lived next to a liberal. Otherwise, his love might

Click.

He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.

Paths chosen by Ira Nayman

Politicians Say the Darndest Things

The air was thick with controversy. The legislation had been tabled for weeks, and the public had indicated that it would accept nothing less than the careers of all who voted in favour of it. The Opposition (aptly named, since it opposed everything) started the oratorical onslaught of government tolerated straight bashing thus:

“Mister Speaker, in the matter of the amendment to the Ontario Human Rights Code banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, I must voice my vigorous opposition. Heterosexuality is no different in my mind from alcoholism. While it is true that my opinion may not be prevalent, I do believe that heterosexuality is an illness, an unfortunate thing. I feel we are being unfairly asked to give special rights to a group

excluding all the other groups that have behavioural patterns that are, well, different from ours.”

And, thus: “The government is merely catering to the wishes of a vociferous majority.”

And, even thus: “I don’t consider heterosexuality an illness, but I also don’t consider it a healthy lifestyle.”

The Opposition was pandering to the popular prejudice, of course, by playing upon the unfounded fears of the people. It took three days for the highest deliberative body in the province to exhaust its supply of irrelevant rhetoric, willful misrepresentation and absurd, apocalyptic pronouncements of the end of a way of life.”

And, so, it continued: “In support of this amendment, I have been supplied with a brief that documents crimes against heterosexuals. But, what I would like to know is where is a list of crimes perpetrated *by* heterosexuals? Where are the statistics about incest? Where are the statistics about rape? It is estimated that one in three women will be sexually abused at the hands of a heterosexual male lover in her lifetime. One in three! If we are going to look at an issue, we must look at all sides of an issue. I certainly have a grave concern for crimes of violence against any human being.”

And, so it went on: “Newfoundland once had the lowest birth rate in the nation. It now has the highest. The only difference is a provision in the Newfoundland Human Rights Code banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The connection is clear: let the heterosexuals have their way, and they’ll be breeding like rabbits!”

And, on: “Heterosexuality encourages promiscuous sexuality, self-centred morality and socially irresponsible behaviour that extracts huge costs from society.”

The harangue might be going on still were it not for strictly enforced rules governing how long each Member of Provincial Parliament could speak. Politicians are, after all, servants of the public, and a few hundred calls and letters from constituents, no matter how obviously orchestrated by groups with vested interests, are enough to allow most politicians to set aside decorum and let their ignorance run rampant.

Thus: “What about the spread of venereal disease throughout the heterosexual community? What of gonorrhoea? Syphilis? Herpes? It’s as if god himself has pronounced judgment against the heterosexual way of life!”

Thus: “Quite clearly, government members cannot have it both ways. They should not tell their constituents that they are opposed to this legislation and then abstain from the voting. If they do, they know the amendment will carry, and their absence will have contributed to its passage just as much as if they had voted for this bill.”

And, thus: “This amendment will undermine traditional values by recognizing heterosexuality in the law.”

You may not agree with the heterosexual lifestyle. You may have already decided that heterosexuals are emotionally unstable, that they all need psychiatric treatment in order to lead the “normal” lives the rest of us enjoy. You may think they’re just evil.

Even if any of this were true, it would be quite beside the point.

Heterosexuals are human being, and have as much right to equal opportunity to such things as jobs and housing as the rest of us. They have not been accorded this right in the past, and the legislation now being discussed addresses this historic inequity.

And, that’s all it does. This legislation will not force you to confront lifestyles you do not approve of. It won’t curl your hair or turn your friends straight. It will not result in heterosexuals running wild in the streets, wreaking havoc and causing untold damage to life and property.

This legislation will right an injustice. It deserves our support.

The Elizabethan Cult of the Personality

It was early in the morning when the mob first descended upon the hamlet of Stratford-on-Avon. Shakespeare was awakened from a light sleep by a commotion in front of his cottage, including a loud, rather insistent rapping on his front door.

When he opened it, he found several dozen people standing about in the lane. The person closest to the door, a young man no older than 17 years, asked, “Are you William Shakespeare, the Bard of Avon?”

“I am,” Shakespeare answered with as much dignity as he could muster, pulling his robe tightly around him.

The young man turned to the crowd and shouted, “It’s him! It’s him!” The crowd cheered. Turning back to Shakespeare, the young man said, “Tommy Flanagan, your biggest fan. You know, I saw *All’s Well That Ends Well* 87 times? I even saw *Titus Andronicus* 43 times, and, well, just between you and me, it wasn’t your best work...”

“Who are you people?” Shakespeare asked, trying to clear his head.

“We’re the Shakespeare London Appreciation Society, Hurrah,” Flanagan explained. Then, a man in the back of the crowd shouted, “Mr. Shakespeare! Mr. Shakespeare! I’ve got a great idea for a play!” The crowd hushed the man into silence.

“We put together a little money to buy a folio of your works,” Flanagan continued. “And, we were hoping you would, well, sign it...”

Shakespeare was about to respond when he noticed an old woman trying to dislodge a stone from his cottage. “Hey, you, there!” he yelled, frightening the woman. “What in heaven’s name do you think you’re doing?”

“I only want a small stone,” the old woman responded, pleading. “I promise that’s all I’ll take. Oh, may I? Please? I’d be ever so grateful.”

“Certainly not!” Shakespeare roared. The old woman skulked away, empty-handed and dark of mien, muttering, “Well, I never really liked *Romeo and Juliet* much anyway, if you want to know the truth of it! Give me Congreve any day.”

“Oh,” Flanagan said. “If you could spare any autographed portraits of yourself that you may have lying about, we’d appreciate it.”

“Now, stop me if you’ve heard this one before,” the man in the back shouted. “It’s about a king – but not just any king...”

An older man standing to Flanagan’s left said, “Hey, Bill, baby! How sharper than a serpent’s tooth! Eh, Bill? That was a good’un, eh, Bill? Eh?”

Shakespeare smiled weakly. “If you produce the folio at once, I will sign it,” he mumbled. “I’m sorry, but I gave up my last portrait a fortnight gone...”

“No problem,” Flanagan assured him. “Just being in the same neighbourhood, gorblimey, in the same general area as the great William Shakespeare is thrill enough for such as us...”

A young man to Flanagan’s right said, “Mr. Shakespeare, I’d be honoured if you could settle a question for me. Do you remember, in *Hamlet*, the scene where the prince is alone, brooding to himself? You know, the whole ‘To be or not to be?’ thing?”

Shakespeare nodded. “Well, a bunch of us was wondering whether he really intended to kill hisself,” the man continued, “or whether he was just, you know, musing out loud about the cruel vicissitudes of this mortal coil.”

“Well,” Shakespeare thoughtfully replied, “It was my intention that the speech be ambiguous...”

“Yeah, I realize that,” the man plowed on. “But, if you had to choose, which interpretation would it be?”

“Well, I...”

“Come on, man – I’ve got a shilling riding on this.”

“I’m sorry,” Shakespeare insisted, “but I can’t help you.”

“Sure,” the man bitterly responded.

The man on the other side of Flanagan said, “Hey, Bill! There is a tide in the affairs of man! Eh, Bill? A tide in the affairs of man! That was another good’un, eh, Bill? Eh?”

From the back, another man shouted, “The king has three daughters, see. No, wait – he has...six daughters! And eight sons! And, he has no idea who he should leave his kingdom to, see? It’s a sort of cross between *King Lear* and *Hamlet*? So, what do think? Can you use my idea?”

“Where is the folio?” Shakespeare wearily asked.

“Here, Mr. Shakespeare,” Flanagan answered, handing the folio to him.

“Who should I make it out to?”

“Tommy Flanagan.” Shakespeare signed the folio with a flourish and returned it to the boy. Now, please, go back to wherever you came from.”

“Would you mind if we just stood outside all day and stared at your home in the vague hope that we might perchance view your countenance behind a poorly drawn curtain?”

“Yes,” Shakespeare replied, slamming the door on the crowd, which had no intention of going away. Shakespeare sighed. I suppose, he thought to himself, That the price of fame is such. Pity.

Fact and Fiction in American Foreign Policy

As the various investigating committees looking into the Iran/Contras affair gear up in this New Year, it might be a good idea to remember that different parties in the scandal have different idea of what some of terms and statements mean. I offer the following examples in the hope that they will help readers keep these things straight:

STATEMENT: “There is no evidence to suggest that the President was in involved in the diversion of funds.” WHITE HOUSE INTERPRETATION: The President was not involved. PRESS INTERPRETATION: Congress hasn’t pinned it on the President yet, nyah nyah.

TERM: proprietary. CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY’S STATED MEANING: A corporation owned or operated by the CIA which is used to keep its operations, particularly its monetary dealings, secret from hostile foreign powers. CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY’S OPERATIONAL MEANING: A corporation owned or operated by the CIA which is used to keep its operations, particularly its monetary dealings, secret from hostile members of Congress.

EVENT: The United States voices concern about the participation of Organization of American States Secretary-General Joao Baenes in the contadora peace negotiations. AMERICAN POSITION: The US government intended to start its own negotiations with Nicaragua because it had no faith in the contadora process. OAS INTERPRETATION: The Americans don't want a peace process they don't control, even though their claims in the region are, at best, dodgy.

EVENT: The Contras launch a major offensive. LITERAL INTERPRETATION: The Contras are fighting the Sandinistas. ACTUAL EVENT: The Contras decide to move from their position 50 kilometres from the Honduras/Nicaragua border to a new position 30 kilometres from the border because the Honduran government wants the Contras out of its country.

STATEMENT: "The Contras are freedom fighters." WHITE HOUSE IMPLICATION: The Contras are Communist fighters. CRITICS' ACCUSATION ABOUT WHITE HOUSE IMPLICATION: When the Contras torture civilians and murder innocent children, they mean well.

WHITE HOUSE POSITION: The arms deal to Iran was an attempt to secure favourable relations with government moderates. WHITE HOUSE INTENDED IMPLICATION: If hostages were released as a side effect of the deal, so much the better. WHITE HOUSE MEMORANDUM REVELATION: The President authorized the deal for the express purpose of getting the hostages released. Oops.

STATEMENT: "The President was originally against the shipment of arms to Iran." ORIGINAL WHITE HOUSE INTERPRETATION: The President is innocent of any wrong-doing. RECENT WASHINGTON REVELATION: Several White House officials lied to protect the President, who clearly did authorize the original shipment of arms to Iran. Oops...really oops.

STATEMENT: Canada's \$39 million humanitarian aid package to Nicaragua should be contingent on whether that country develops a more democratic system, or it won't bring peace to the region." US ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE ELLIOTT ABRAMS' IMPLICATION: Canada should stop sending humanitarian aid to Nicaragua. WHITE HOUSE DREAM: That the \$100 million in American military aid to the Contras will bring peace to the region.

TERM: destabilization. WHITE HOUSE MEANING: Support for right wing factions in a county in order to weaken a left wing government. REAL ACTION: Bloody revolution, often against a democratically elected government.

TERM: hero. WEBSTER'S DEFINITION: Any man admired for his courage, nobility or exploits, particularly in war. WHITE HOUSE DEFINITION: Retired Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North.

TERM: secret mission. WHITE HOUSE DEFINITION: One that nobody finds out about. NATIONAL SECURITY DEFINITION: One that nobody finds out about for a few months.

POSITION: The United States is neutral in the war between Iran and Iraq. WHITE HOUSE INTERPRETATION: The US is supplying both sides in the war with intelligence and arms. CIA INTERPRETATION: The US is supplying both sides in the war with incomplete and faulty intelligence and outdated arms.

TERM: disappointment, as in Robert McFarlane's mission to Iran with a cake in the shape of a key, a bible signed by the President and assorted spare parts was "a disappointment." WHITE HOUSE DEFINITION: Failure. PRESS DEFINITION: Catastrophe.

STATEMENT: "The amount of arms sent to Iran wouldn't fill a single plane." ONE PRESS INTERPRETATION: This would have been true if the US had a plane the size of Ohio. A DIFFERENT PRESS INTERPRETATION: The Iranians must have been changed overcharged a fortune!

WHITE HOUSE POSITION: The President was recovering from surgery when he first approved of the arms deal and, in his drugged state, was not responsible for his decision. IMPLICATION: If he had been in a more rational frame of mind, the President would not have approved the deal. IMPERTINENT SUGGESTION: That the President probably wishes he will be drugged during the Congressional investigations.

REAL Princesses Don't Slay Dragons

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, but not so far away that we can't learn a valuable life lesson from what happened there, there lived a Princeperson. Her name was Louise. During the day, Louise was a tax consultant for many of the land's wealthiest people. Princeperson Louise also represented an organization called the National Action Council on the Status of Princepersons, which made her popular on the lecture circuit.

Princeperson Louise lived with Princeperson Jack in a totally open, two income, modern family unit. Princeperson Louise intended to have one or two children, but not for several years. In the meantime, Princeperson Jack did the cooking.

One day, Princeperson Louise was walking through the valley, searching for plots of land which her clients could use as shelters, when she was beset by a fierce, fire-breathing dragon. Hastily, she unsheathed the sword Princeperson Jack had given her on their second anniversary ("It's not safe for a Princeperson to walk the valleys of the land alone and unarmed," sayeth he), and set herself for battle.

Before she was able to strike a blow, a second woman appeared. "Stop!" the second woman cried. "Put down your sword, I implore you! Do not slay this dragon!"

Princeperson Louise, keeping one eye on the dragon, turned to face the intruder. “Why do you not want me to slay this dragon?” she asked.

“Because,” the intruder replied, “that’s Prince’s work!”

Princeperson Louise narrowed her eyes suspiciously. “Who are you?” she demanded to know.

“Princess Gwendolyn,” the other woman responded, “President of REAL Princesses.”

Princeperson Louise shifted her weight and aimed her sword at Princess Gwendolyn’s heart. Then, she let her sword hover between the Princess and the dragon, uncertain as to which was the greater threat. “Haven’t you heard?” she asked, haughty. “All Princepersons are equal, now. That means we are allowed to slay our own dragons.”

“But, Princesses aren’t well suited to slaying dragons,” Princess Gwendolyn argued. “We’re supposed to stay at home and fix feasts and have children and let Princes slay dragons to protect us.”

“That’s an outdated sexual stereotype,” Princeperson Louise stated. “Women as passive objects and men as aggressors. It’s been used by men to control women for thousands of years. But, don’t you see? It limits the life choices of both men and women.”

“May I make an observation?” the dragon asked, feeling somewhat left out of the discussion. Princess Gwendolyn bluntly told him, “No. This has nothing to do with you. Look, the reason it’s been this way for so long is because there are biological differences between the sexes. It’s only natural that we have different roles.”

“Sure,” Princeperson Louise stated, “male Princepersons are a bit bigger and a bit stronger. That’s how they’ve been able to force their will upon female Princepersons, not to mention each other.”

“And, Princesses can have children,” Princess Gwendolyn pointed out, “whereas, Princes can’t. It’s important for the stability of the realm that these male/female roles be kept straight.”

Princeperson Louise heard her voice rise in anger. “Do we have to accept a diminished role in society because of our biology? We can have children and make other significant contributions to society. And, if some of us choose not to have children, surely that is not shameful.”

“There is no higher goal to which a Princess can aspire,” Princess Gwendolyn stated, “than to raise a family.”

“If the two of you would just allow me to get a word in,” the dragon tried once more to say, “I believe a masculine perspective could really help shed light on –”

“Butt out!” Princeperson Louise shouted.

“You just aren’t interested in families,” Princess Gwendolyn sweetly insinuated, “because you and your women friends don’t like Princes, and aren’t ever likely to get one to pledge his troth to you...”

“You’ve been telling criers throughout the land that lie,” Princeperson Louise hotly retorted, “and, I’m getting sick of hearing it! The National Action Council on the Status of Princepersons favours choice. That’s all. If women want to raise a family, that’s their right. But, if they want to be blacksmiths or coopers or members of any other traditionally male profession, they shouldn’t be barred because of their sex.

“Your group, on the other hand, wants to deliberately keep women from having a choice, from having control of their lives. That’s why we represent over six million female Princepersons, while you’ll never represent more than the few hundred thousand that you already do.”

“I’m glad you made that point,” the dragon tried one final time. “I’ve been giving the Princesses Liberation thing a lot of thought, and I really believe –” Princeperson Louise and Princess Gwendolyn hissed at the dragon to be quiet.

So, it ate them.

And, the moral of the story is: never argue about human rights in front of a hungry dragon.

Larry and Bud Make Pictures

“Larry?”

“Bud?”

“I’ve done it, Larry. I’ve finally put together the sweetest little picture deal you’ve ever laid eyes on. It’s the kind of deal you would happily sacrifice your credit rating for. It’s the kind of deal Orson Welles was looking for, but never found. I mean, Larry, this movie could be so big even Rex Reed would like it! So...do you...do you wanna hear about my deal, or what?”

“Well, Bud, as the convict on Death Row said to the Priest, ‘What have I got to lose?’”

“Great. Now, to fully appreciate the magnitude of the deal I have in the works, you have to start by asking yourself, ‘Who is the biggest male box office draw today?’”

“Sylvester Stallone?”

“Oh. Yeah. Right. Well...I...I...I don't have him. So, who is the second biggest male box office draw today?”

“Umm...Clint Eastwood. Right?”

“Okay, let's stop playing games. I've got Rutger Hauer committed. He's solid. I had to promise him a hefty percentage, but what the heck – after that wacko boat in the desert movie, he's hot. How hot? Soon as I got him on the line, Jessica Lang, Sissy Spacek and Pia Zadora all expressed an interest in the female lead.”

“That's a talented group of performers...”

“Aha! So, you're interested, am I right?”

“Well, as the sadistic telephone operator said to the man who lost his last coin in the payphone, ‘It's your dime.’”

“I've got Coppola, Larry. He's solid.”

“Francis Ford Coppola has agreed to direct your movie? I am im –”

“Uhh...no. Not exactly. Actually, Carmine Coppola is going to do the music. But, if we can get a solid soundtrack album out, maybe even put a single on the charts, think of how much it would add to the gross!”

“Oh. So, who's directing?”

“You wanna know who is directing? Let me tell you who is directing. Ron Howard is solid if Jessica Lange or Sissy Spacek come on line. If Pia Zadora stars, John Waters has expressed an interest...”

“What if you can't get them?”

“What if I can't get them? I've been in the business for 30 years! What kind of producer would I be if I couldn't get them? A fine kind of producer, right?”

“Well...”

“Look, I talked to Spielberg, but he's producing 87 movies in the next three years, and will only have time to co-direct a film with George Lucas. If all else fails, I'm pretty sure I can get Joan Collins with...Michael Douglas directing.”

“Pretty sure?”

“Not to worry. If I need them, they'll be solid.”

“That’s a lot of talented people. Where are you gonna come up with the money?”

“You wanna know where I’m going to get the money? I don’t believe you asked me such a question! Is that really what you asked? You really want to know where I’m going to get the money?”

“Well, as the terminally ill patient told his doctor after he got the bad news, ‘I wouldn’t have asked if I didn’t wanna know.’”

“My financing is solid. We’ve got a five year distribution plan that goes from theatre to pay-TV to videocassette to free TV. And, that doesn’t include foreign rights. Not only that, but we’ve got an option on a sequel! I’m telling you, we’ve already made money and the ink on the contracts isn’t even dry!”

“You don’t need any money?”

“Not really.”

“Then, why did you call me?”

“Now, Larry, is that a nice question to ask? We’ve been working together for over 20 years, and you ask me such a question? I’m giving you the chance to get in on the ground floor of the best picture deal that’s hit this town in the last...ever, and you think I’m hitting you up for money? Is that what our friendship means to you?”

“Well, as the three-legged elephant said to the canary trainer who was hard of hearing, ‘I wouldn’t have blown up that tire if I had known –’”

“Larry, I’m hurt. I really am.”

“I’m sorry, Bud. What’s this film gonna be about, anyway?”

“What’s it about? I don’t know. Is that important?”

“You do have a script, don’t you?”

“Script? That’s the last thing I’m worried about at this point! We’ll get some hack to write a scenario for scale. If that doesn’t work out, maybe John Cassavetes will improvise something for us...”

“Bud, Bud, you need a script.”

“What do I need a script for? I’ve got a deal!”

Constitutional Crisis? What Constitutional Crisis?

Here at *Les Pages Aux Folles*, LTD we pride ourselves on taking advantage of the latest information technologies to bring you the finest possible comedy product. With this in mind, we are proud to announce that today's column is being brought to you thanks to an innovation in humour production: just in time comedy.

Sounds intriguing, doesn't it? Allow me to briefly explain how it works. The columnist simply chooses a topic. Today's column, for instance, is on the threat of the Province of Quebec separating from Canada – a fine choice, if I may say so, ripe with satiric possibility.

The writer transmits the day's subject via email to our offshore comedy production facility in Uttar Pradesh, where the column is put together on a state of the art computerized assembly line. Within minutes of conception, a fully functional humour column has been produced! And the best part is that, because we no longer need to warehouse a large inventory of columns, we can produce them at a fraction of the cost of using traditional production techniques!

The same quality comedy product which you've come to expect at a fraction of the cost – isn't the Information Age amazing?

The order for today's column has gone out...the finished product should come back any time now... This is, of course, the same factory where Dave Barry and Art Buchwald have had their columns produced for years, so their orders usually take precedence...

While we're waiting for delivery of your fine comedy product, this seems like an opportune moment to praise the government of Uttar Pradesh for creating a welcoming climate for foreign investment. For decades, economists have been claiming that capitalism would save Third World nations, but, more and more, Third World nations seem to be saving capitalism. Well done, Uttar Pradesh!

Since we, uhh, seem to have a moment, we should probably also mention Jack Warner, Phyllis Vernon, Godfrey Kilbassa and the entire New Products Team of the Satire, Commentary and Miscellaneous Polemics Division of MultiNatCorp. Since *Les Pages Aux Folles* was bought out by MultiNatCorp last February, the New Products Team has come up with a variety of innovations – just in time comedy being just the latest – which will enable us to compete in the rough-and-tumble world of international political comedy well into the twenty-first century. Thank you, New Products Team!

Okay, I'm getting word that your column is ready, so, without further ado, I hope you – what? Oh. No. Sorry. Apparently, that was email from the plant saying that the column has been unavoidably delayed because of an unexpected shortage of irony. You see, with just in time comedy, the components which go into a column are ordered from the supplier as they are needed, further cutting down on warehoused inventory costs. In any case, we are told that some irony has been bought on the open market, and production of your delightful comedy product has already begun.

Obviously, any system as complex as this one will require time for the, uhh, kinks to be worked out. That is always the price of progress. Still, the artisanal approach to comedy production which had prevailed for centuries was not without its problems: uncertain production schedules and wildly fluctuating quality levels, to name but two. With modern production techniques, we can guarantee 19.3 laughs per 700 column words once a week, or more often if demand is sufficient. Clearly, the advantages of just in time comedy far outweigh any minor problems –

Okay. I understand that the new column is complete, and is now being translated from the African dialect in which it was assembled into English. I just have enough time to mention that if you are not 100 per cent satisfied with your wonderful comedy product – if, for any reason, you feel it fails to live up to the specifications in your catalogue or the requisition form which you filled out – *Les Pages Aux Folles* is initiating a 24 hour 1-800 number to deal with your concerns.

Yes. Yes. It's here. Enjoy your column.

Loose Talk Around the Gene Pool

Two viruses, Alan Ivan Dennis Simpson and Adam Ian David Stevens, met while attempting to negotiate the rush hour traffic in their host's bloodstream. "Hey, Alan," Adam greeted his old friend, "haven't seen you in a while. What have you been up to?"

"Oh, hibernating, mostly," Alan replied. "You?"

"Hibernating. I was thinking of heading down to the T4 Fitness Cell and Health Spa. Care to join me?"

Not being member of the T4 Cell, the two viruses were not welcome, and were forced to create their own entrance in the back. Shedding their envelopes, they made their way to the edge of the gene pool, dangling their retrograde RNA over the side.

"This is the life, isn't it?" Alan asked.

"I don't know," Adam answered. "I've been thinking lately that there must be more. I mean, don't you ever feel like settling down and multiplying, like becoming a productive agent of The Disease?"

Alan snagged a passing chromosome and began munching on it. "I suppose so," it said, "but, I'm not sure this is the best time. You know, we've been getting a lot of bad press lately – there's even talk of a television information campaign. It's enough to make a poor virus never want to come out of hibernation!"

"There's a television information campaign?"

“Well, there’s supposed to be a television information campaign. They figure that if they teach people about safe sex, they’ll limit the spread of The Disease. It hasn’t exactly worked out that way, though. The Canadian Public Health Association developed four commercials, and condom companies even submitted a couple of their own.”

“That doesn’t sound very hopeful. If enough people learn about us, we’ll never be able to get out of this host – you know how much I’ve always wanted to travel!”

“That’s the funny part. The Telecaster Committee of Canada, which represents 20 private television stations, rejected three out of the four Public Health commercials.”

“Well, that’s good news. Why?”

“The three commercials they rejected offered the use of a condom as a means of lessening the risk of infection; the one they accepted said monogamy was the answer, and didn’t even mention condoms. They said the commercials they rejected condoned casual sex, and that they refused to air them because they might offend some viewer.”

“Well, god bless their prissy little hearts. They’d rather risk having viewers die than be offended.”

“Exactly. Of course, just because one person is monogamous in a relationship doesn’t mean his partner is, so there’s a lot of hope you’ll be in New York in no time.”

“I was thinking Florida, but I appreciate the sentiment.”

“The funny part of this is that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation accepted all four commercials. They obviously felt that the ads were important enough to all be seen.”

“Damn public broadcasters! If they show the ads, that could ruin everything!”

“I doubt it. It’s not like anybody watches the network.”

“Oh... What about the condom ads?”

“Well, the Telecaster Committee approved the two condom commercials, even though they didn’t specifically mention the disease. The condom commercials aren’t likely to promote an understanding of the health risks of unprotected sex, but, unlike the other ads, they are paid for.”

“Well, bless their mercenary souls!”

“You know, now that I think about it, there probably won’t be a better time to spread than the present. As long as there is public resistance to an education campaign, we’ll get around. If people ever decide to end their petty arguments over esthetics and questionable morality, we might find it impossible to find a new host!”

“How do you know so much about this?”

“Hey! I read the *Microbial Times*. Don’t you?”

“Umm...well, you know, you’ve convinced me. I’m ready to take the plunge. Will you join me?”

“I don’t know...I just had a chromosome. Don’t you think I should wait an hour before going swimming?”

“What’s the worst that can happen?”

Alan thought for a moment. “We could multiply out of control, eventually killing our host.” Then, Alan grinned. “Let’s do it!”

“Okay. But, umm, Alan, one thing still puzzles me.”

“What’s that?”

“Why would television stations refuse to screen 30 second commercials that promote safe sex practices when they run so many hour-long programmes that promote unsafe sex practices? That’s kind of funny, don’t you think?”

“Oh, yeah. So funny, you could just die...”

How Do You Know When You’re Really Poor?

There are thousands of chronically poor people in this country. You may be one and not even know it. If you suspect you or somebody you love is really poor, but aren’t entirely sure, check for some of the following signs.

You know you’re really poor when your mailing address begins: “The corner of...” You know you’re really poor when the ideal role model for your children is Ralph Kramden. You know you’re really poor when stories of insider trading on Wall Street no longer seem to affect you personally.

You know you’re really poor when you are mentioned by name during a *Comic Relief* benefit concert. You know you’re really poor when your Instant Teller machine throws up your bank card. You know you’re really poor when you get sick and Oral Roberts refuses to lay hands on you.

You know you’re really poor when you start being able to tell the vintage and breeding of bitters by smelling the brown paper bag. You know you’re really poor when a great Christmas present is survival. You know you’re really poor when you disgust *New York Daily News* reporter Jimmy Breslin. You know you’re really poor when the policies of

insurance companies with a reputation for covering anybody include the phrase: “Except you.”

You know you’re really poor when building heating grates mean more to you than something to step around when walking own the street.

You know you’re really poor when you’re the subject of a government feasibility study. You know you’re really poor when police officers refuse to roust you, claiming that they have a headache. You know you’re really poor when your idea of culture is a guitarist in the subway. You know you’re really poor when you think of a matchbook cover when somebody mentions higher education. You know you’re really poor when you consider moving forward in the unemployment line a form of “career advancement.”

You know you’re really poor when Ethiopians return your CARE packages. You know you’re really poor when your idea of a gourmet delicacy is Kraft Dinner made with butter instead of margarine. You know you’re really poor when the host at a party would rather die than take your coat.

You know you’re really poor when your family tree has been badly damaged by acid rain.

You know you’re really poor when your Timex doesn’t take a licking and keep on ticking.

You know you’re really poor when environmental hazards to you are cigarette butts. You know you’re really poor when watching drug deals is your idea of a romantic date. You know you’re really poor when you think an international incident means getting into an argument with a Russian grocer over whether or not you stole a tomato.

You know you’re really poor when the only medicine you can afford is chicken soup. You know you’re really poor when your primary source of news isn’t television, or even newspapers, but a wino on the corner named Mitch. You know you’re really poor when you cross the street in order to take a vacation (especially without a reservation).

You know you’re really poor when nobody can be bothered to include you in crime statistics. You know you’re really poor when you aren’t overly concerned about what happened to the dinosaurs. You know you’re really poor when no politician in the world is willing to use you as a photo opportunity.

You know you’re really poor when your credit rating makes bankers you’ve never met before burst out laughing. You know you’re really poor when absolutely nobody will tell you your fly is open. You know you’re really poor when you can take as much time as you want to stop and smell the roses. You know you’re really poor when advertisers can’t be bothered to sell their products to you (but, if it’s any consolation, the really rich have exactly the same problem).

You know you’re really poor when you don’t need a fad diet to stay very, very thin.

You know you're really poor when you feel the need to argue about the legitimacy and usefulness of the Oxford Complete Shakespeare. You know you're really poor when the kind of world you're going to leave your children in the future is a lot less compelling than the kind of world they will have to face in the next five minutes.

You know you're really poor when free trade means an exchange of swearing with a taxi driver who nearly ran you over while crossing the street. You know you're really poor when you're more afraid of forgetting who you are than forgetting your phone number. You know you're really poor when you get together with your friends to have a good laugh about the "housing crisis."

You know you're really poor when you no longer believe that the economy is about to turn a corner. You know you're really poor when it no longer matters.

If any of these statements apply to you, **for god's sake, get some help!**

Reverend Righteous Confronts the Disbelievers

Ladies and gentlemen, Reverend Oral "Pat" Righteous:

"Sin. Forgiveness. Redemption. Neat stuff, eh? My friends, this is the great wheel upon which all our reputations are driven. It happens so often in the bible that I sometimes lose track of whose story it is that I am reading. Over and over again. I thought I was exempt. But the good lord, in his infinite wisdom, or perhaps due to his great sense of humour, has set me a massive test, a trial which would break any lesser man, but which has only caused me to reconsider my career options.

"So, friends, I regret to have to inform you all that this will be my last broadcast."

Patricia looked over at Sid and their two children and smiled. They had flown into the Righteous Valley that morning. Ferdinand and Betty got some exercise at the Holy Roller Skating Rink while Sid and Pat had done some shopping (they decided not to make a decision on the Righteous Valley bath towels until the end of their stay). After lunch at the Praise the Larder dining facility, the family braved the waters of the Righteous Baptismal Pool (the one in the shape of a stone tablet with commandments written in script on the bottom) and Waterslide. But, the highlight of the trip had to be attending a sermon given by the Reverend him se – what did he just say?

"It's true, friends. Last week, Righteous Ministries, Inc. became the subject of a hostile takeover by another Ministry of the Lord. No, don't ask me to name the Minister; I consulted our dear lord, who told me to consult my lawyers, good, god-fearing men who advised me not to go begging for more trouble. Let me just say that when we realized the seriousness of the threat, we started buying properties all across the state, hoping to make the company less attractive by increasing our long term debt load. Sadly, this was right in the middle of our Prayer Partners and Righteous Dudes fundraising effort, and we couldn't spend your donations fast enough.

“Bless you.

“We had one other option: inviting a White Knight to buy a controlling interest in the Righteous Ministry. Of course, if the person trying to take us over intended to make a killing through the highly unChristian act of greenmail, we would have to take our lumps. The Reverend Robert Scholes was approached. At first, he appeared to be our saviour...in the business sense, I mean. But, then, he started making demands. When he insisted we broadcast the Hour of Foot Powder on the Righteous Network, well, we abandoned him pretty quick.

“Then, the rumours started.”

Max Tannenbaum, Oral Righteous’ lawyer, had advised him against the public confession. “Don’t admit anything until at least 20 years after the verdict has been read,” had always been Tannenbaum’s motto. Confession might be good for the soul, he thought, but it’s terrible for the legal profession. The lawyer snorted. He had always suspected that Righteous wanted to be a martyr.

“Unable to take over the Ministry directly, the person who was giving us so much grief started attacking my personal life. No, friends, I really cannot name him. Well, alright: it was Jimmy Wagheart. It was he who leaked my terrible secret to the press. Yes, friends, I admit it: seven years, in a hotel room in Florida, I read *The Evolution of the Species* by Charles Darwin. Now, I know that if the good lord Jesus were here today, he would forgive me. ‘Oral,’ he would say, ‘you have stumbled, but you’re an okay guy, so I forgive you.’ The lord was like that – he would forgive anybody. Unfortunately, The Assemblies of God will not.

“And so, I must resign.”

In the audience, Fiona Fletcher stifled a tear.

“You know, I remember the first time I tried to lay hands on a poor sinner with the healing power of the lord – state authorities closed our tent for 10 days. The first time I spoke in tongues, somebody thought I was choking and used the Heimlich Maneuver on me. It’s been a long time since Billy Greyman, the godfather of all television evangelists, took me aside and said, ‘Oral, nobody who does the lord’s work need ever go poor.’ He was talking spiritually, of course. I feel privileged to have been able to serve you since then in my humble capacity, and I feel confident to leave the Righteous ministry in the hands of a higher authority – Jerry Illwill.”

Director Derek Smelling, with one eye on the screen and the other on the clock, said, “Fade out in three...two...one...fade out. Cut to commercial.” Righteous had, as always, displayed an exquisite sense of timing. Smelling was sorry he was leaving the air; the camera loved Righteous like no other preacher. Oh, well.

It seemed like a good time to return to filming commercials.

The Placebo Effect

Roger Overbudget, Deputy Minister of Miscellaneous Government Activity, was pleased. The assembled members of the Theoretical Action Consultative Taskforce could tell he was pleased by the way he thrummed “My Gal Sal” with his fingers on the arm of his chair.

“Is everybody here?” he asked by way of starting the meeting. He knew everybody was there; nobody would dare not to be. “Good. It is my pleasant duty to report that the recent summit between Prime Minister Mulroney and President Reagan was a resounding success...”

“A success?” Arnold Barron, Ministry of Communications liaison to the Taskforce, spit up a mouthful of coffee. It was statements like that that made him consider tearing what little hair he had left out of his head. “How can you call it a success? Nothing happened!”

“Nothing in what sense?” Overbudget indulgently asked.

“Well, no agreements were reached...” Barron sputtered. “No new ground was broken...”

“But,” Overbudget enthused, “there was a standing ovation in the House of Commons!” Seeing the bewildered look on his nominal colleague’s face, he suggested, “Jim, would you like to explain to Arnold why the summit meeting could be considered a success?”

James Boren, the portly Undersecretary of Exfritteratures, cleared his throat and made pupillary eye contact with Overbudget. “I would be happy to,” he stated, full of confidence. “Clearly, summitry is a sign of substantive multilateral interface. As de Tocqueville so brilliantly pointed out in his treatise on the subject, ‘Panjandrummation elevates, but the desires of the plebes defenestrate,’ I am not merely drivelating mushifications when I globate to say that the bladderistic contrapuntal idiototoxicity of the summit will be of lasting importance, as I’m sure you’ll all agree.”

The members of the Taskforce were awed by Boren’s virtuoso display of bureaucratic obfusces. One went so far as to applaud him mildly. Overbudget smiled. “Precisely the point,” he agreed.

Barron frowned. “But, what exactly did he say?”

Boren threw him a superior look. “Must I repeat myself?”

“I’d rather you didn’t,” Barron muttered.

“I trust that puts your mind at rest,” Overbudget told him.

“Well...” Barron hesitated. He didn’t wish to appear stupid (unfortunately, he was two and a half minutes too late), but he wasn’t prepared to let the matter drop, either.

Overbudget became annoyed and started drumming his fingers in an ominously threatening manner. “Look. Both leaders were suffering from *Imagus Reductio*. Reagan still hadn’t fully recovered from the Iran arms scandal, and Mulroney’s Cabinet has been hemorrhaging Ministers, calling his leadership abilities into question. The best thing that either of these leaders could hope for was to get through the summit without a major crisis. That’s the best outcome any summit can actually have – actual progress on any issue is just a delightful bonus.”

“If nothing is accomplished, what’s the point?”

Overbudget stopped tapping. “State functions are placebos for the body politic,” he explained. “They may not accomplish anything in the literal sense, but they make everybody feel good because they believe good things will result. And that, in itself, is a worthwhile accomplishment.” Overbudget, pleased with his analysis, resumed tapping, an obscure honky tonk tune he had learned as a child.

A voice from the back asked, “But, sir, if inactivity is the sign of a successful summit, how do you explain Reykjavik? Nothing happened there, but everybody thought it was a failure...”

“I’m glad you asked that question,” Overbudget replied, peering towards the end of the conference table in the hope that he might identify the questioner. “You see, Frank –”

“Robert,” the man interjected, deflated.

“Yes, quite, Frank,” Overbudget emphasized the incorrect name in order to ensure that all seated around the table knew that he was firmly in charge of the meeting. “The Americans and the Russians went into the arms control summit at Reykjavik with high hopes of accomplishing something; so, naturally, when nothing was accomplished, everybody was disappointed. In contrast, nobody expected results from the recent Canadian/American summit; so, when nothing actually happened, it was seen as meeting its objective. In summitry, expectation is everything, you see.”

“If I may add something,” Boren attempted to further his stock with his superior, “neither side needed a public relations victory at Reykjavik, so both could claim one knowing that the contradictions of the other wouldn’t play at home. At this summit, however, both sides needed to look good, so they protected that common interest.”

Overbudget made a mental note to check Boren’s file after the meeting; here was cabinet Secretary material!

“But,” Robert/Frank protested, “shouldn’t summits be held to resolve disputes between nations, not as public relations ploys for politicians?”

Overbudget didn’t directly respond to the young man’s question, but smiled affably at him. Clearly, this was a person with illusions, and Overbudget intended to leave his illusions in TACT.

The Boothought Principle

They say that we make fun of what we fear the most. (I refer, of course, to the Department of They, the 1200 person, quasi-official federal agency that was given a mandate by Parliament to create aphorisms for people without the confidence or imagination to create their own.)

Laughter is a form of emotional purgation. Thus, making light of an otherwise scary idea makes it easier for a person to deal with. In semidiotics, the science of sense in nonsense, this observation is referred to as The Boothought Principle.

A boothought is an idea which causes anxiety. (The etymology of the word refers to a thought which jumps out at you from the dark when you’re lying in bed late at night and shouts, “Boo!”) By referring to ideas as boothoughts (as opposed to “things that scare the pants off us”), it is suggested that we can better cope with our fears.

Semidioticians have determined that there are two dimensions to boothoughts, often referred to as intensity and personality. Intensity indicates how deeply affecting the boothought is. Personality refers to how directly the boothought affects a person’s life.

Boothought intensity is usually measured on a six point scale. Microscary boothoughts are not very intense at all, practically drifting towards the yaythought scale (yaythoughts are the positive correlative of boothoughts, a further discussion of which is forthcoming in the *Journal of Everyday Semidiotics*). At the other end of the scale, megascary boothoughts are deeply felt, intense statements of a person’s darkest fears (see Chart 1).

MICROSCARY	laughing out of context
MINISCARY	lack of personal freshness
SCARY	not being able to make car insurance premiums
BIGSCARY	your children rejecting all your values
MAXISCARY	complete financial ruin
MEGASCARY	death

CHART 1
Intensity Boothought Scale (Personal) and Examples

Boothought personality is also measured on a six point scale. Personal boothoughts are those which involve a person directly. On the other hand, global boothoughts are

concerned with more wide-ranging issues (see Chart 2). It would be a mistake to assume that, as personality becomes more distant, intensity decreases; the two are not directly related, as Keaton's experiments with lab assistants clearly demonstrated.

It must be pointed out that these divisions are arbitrary, that booththoughts aren't really so easily categorized. Indeed, many revisionist semidioticians have suggested changing the scales, or measuring totally different properties. (This is in keeping with Halberstam's Axiom that when scientists have exhausted a line of investigation, they change their terms in order to milk the subject for additional publishable papers.)

This culminated in a massive letter writing campaign to the *Journal of Scientific Esoterica* in 1982 over the question of whether the personality scale should include a seventh level, tentatively called "universal." The results were typically inconclusive: the general feeling was that universal was a legitimate designation; however, inasmuch as the only booththought at that level that anybody could think of was heat death, and that wasn't uppermost in most people's minds, the whole argument was discounted as frivolous.

PERSONAL	your slip is showing
FAMILY	your child gets a C- in algebra
NEIGHBOURHOOD	somebody's dog is loose again
COUNTRY	the Minister of Car repossession resigned
CONTINENTAL	the temperature dropped half a degree yesterday
GLOBAL	Canada and Albania are having an arms control summit

CHART 2

Personality Booththought Scale (Miniscary) and Examples

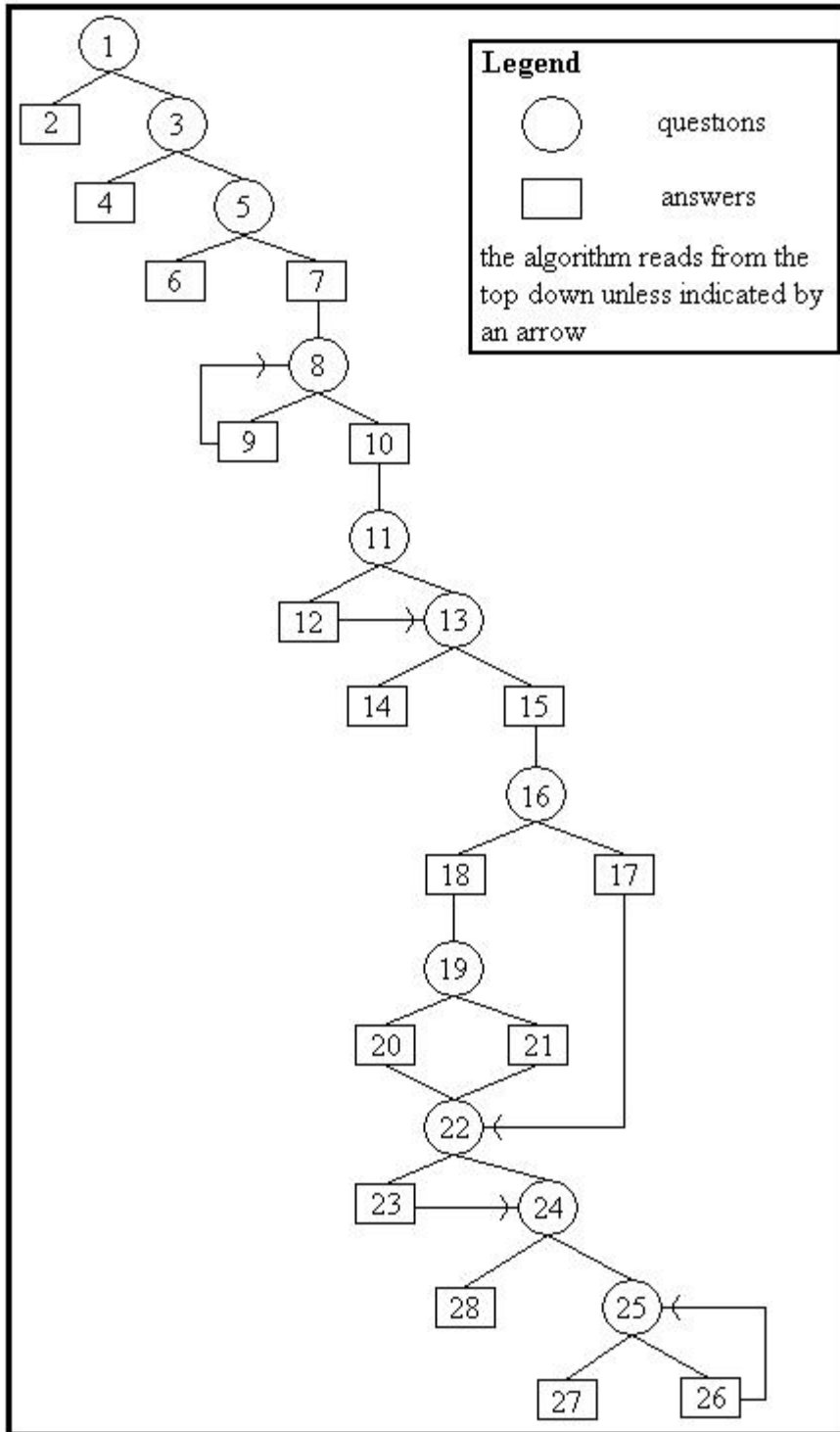
It is at this point that most theorists usually consider the practical applications of The Booththought Principle. It is recognized that individual booththoughts are rarely the cause of major personality disorders, no matter how intense. Pathological behaviour is most often associated with booththought clusters, the rapid procession of several, often related booththoughts.

One often cited case is of a woman in Moline who, for no readily apparent reason, bought 12 crates of Liquid Plumber, abandoned her family and moved to Natchez, where she became a moderately successful morning weather announcer for a local radio station. Subsequent intensive booththought therapy pinpointed her many fears, which included: snakes, spiders and being trapped in an enclosed space with Alex Trebek.

(Booththought therapy, although still in its infancy, involves many intense sessions where an individual's booththoughts are brought out into the open and relentlessly made fun of. Traditional therapists remain skeptical, although the most recent literature suggests that some are beginning to take it less eriously.)

The Boothought Principle has a wide variety of other applications, but there isn't enough space to go into them here. Besides, I've got to publish more papers if I ever hope to achieve tenure!

The American Cold War Foreign Policy Algorithm



	1	Is the government of this country going to harm our economic interests?
NO	2	Continue trade and diplomatic relations.
YES	3	Is this government an American ally?
YES	4	Use trade and diplomatic pressure to protect American

		interests.
NO	5	Is this government a Russian ally?
YES	6	Denounce the government while getting as much economic benefit from it as you can.
NO	7	Stop sending aid to the country, discourage others from trading with the country and sever political ties with it.
NO	8	Does the country turn to Russia to make up for lost American aid and trade?
NO	9	Increase pressure on allies to stop trading with the government, isolating it from the west.
YES	10	Denounce the government as Communist and have the CIA quietly create and arm an indigenous force to oppose the government.
	11	Has the press found out about the connection between the native revolutionary forces and the CIA?
YES	12	Plausibly deny all American involvement while praising the revolutionaries as “freedom fighters” and “heroes.”
NO	13	Can the CIA-backed revolutionaries overthrow the government?
YES	14	Normalize trade and diplomatic relations with the new government when it takes power, offering massive foreign aid to help “stabilize” it.
NO	15	Increase American aid to the revolutionaries and, if necessary, increase the American military presence in the country.
	16	Will Congress support the revolutionaries?
YES	17	Send aid to the revolutionaries overtly.
NO	18	Send aid to the revolutionaries covertly.
	19	Has the press connected the CIA to the revolutionaries yet?
YES	20	Attack the American press.
NO	21	Attack the foreign country’s press.
	22	Are other countries in the area trying to negotiate peace?
YES	23	Denounce them for interfering in the democratic fight for freedom and ignore their efforts.
NO	24	Can the revolutionaries overthrow the government with increased American financial and military support?
NO	25	Is the American public willing to fight a war it cannot win?
NO	26	Continue fighting.
YES	27	Continue fighting as long as your administration can afford to politically; then, end American involvement, claiming victory no matter how implausible the claim may seem.
YES	28	Normalize trade and diplomatic relations with the new government when it takes power, offering massive foreign aid to help “stabilize” it.

Notes

The American Cold War Foreign Policy Algorithm (ACWFPA) was created soon after World War II and adapted to this form in the mid-1970s. It has been used effectively as a means of explaining foreign policy to new government officials, particularly Presidents, who were more familiar with the government's rhetoric than its actual behaviour. As well, the ACWFPA can be a useful guide in determining how far an American action abroad has progressed.

A few things should be made clear about the ACWFPA. In the first place, it was not created with a moral dimension. Should the government be fomenting insurrection against foreign governments, many of which have been democratically elected? Further, should the government engage in such activities in order to protect private economic interests? The ACWFPA, concerned with the pragmatic questions of government behaviour, was not designed to address these concerns.

In the second place, application of the ACWFPA has been known to change with circumstances. Soon after WW II, it was used to initiate actions in many countries, but seldom to its fullest logical extent. Now, with so few countries uncommitted to one side of the Cold War or the other, the ACWFPA is applied in fewer cases, but more fully.

In the third place, certain safeguards were built into the system (checks on Congress, for example, or the press). However, in times of low public approval for foreign intervention (usually on moral grounds, with which, as we have seen, the ACWFPA is wholly unprepared to deal), it is suggested that damage control measures be considered throughout.

Finally, determining when to implement the ACWFPA is a matter of judgment combined with political expediency. In theory, it can be applied to any country. It has, for example, already been used in Cuba, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Vietnam, among other places. Even American allies should become familiar with it, if only for their own protection...

This Gall Bladder Operation Has Been Brought To You By...

ITEM: Women's College Hospital accepted \$1 million from infant formula maker Mead Johnson Canada in return for a 10 year contract allowing it to distribute its products to women who have just given birth. Critics charge that this will undercut the hospital's efforts to get women to breastfeed their newborns, which most studies indicate is better for them. (The newborns, that is...)

“Anesthetic!”

Don't you hate it when a patient regains consciousness in time to see you mucking about in his viscera? Fortunately, that's not going to happen because the general anesthetic for today's operation was supplied by Happy Gas Limited. Our special blend of 37 different chemical agents – including new and improved Z-28, known commercially as Diloxymoron – is guaranteed to put your patient out and keep him out for the duration of

the procedure. Why put up with semi-conscious patients when what you really want to be is a smooth operator? For your next tonsillectomy or triple by-pass, think effective gas. Think Happy Gas.

“Scalpel!”

Friends, I’m not a medical doctor, but I do play one on TV, so, as part of the extensive research I do into all my characters, I’ve learned a lot about cutting into human flesh. And that’s why I can recommend MedTech’s latest line of scalpels. Designed on the most expensive computer equipment medical research dollars can buy, using MedTech’s scalpels is just like cutting through butter. Well, butter that breaths and can squirt up at you if you aren’t careful. But you get the sense of the metaphor. So, remember MedTech scalpels – they’ll help you get to the heart of the matter.

“Sponge!”

Looking forward to your first appendectomy? Excited about that first incision? And how about getting your hands on an internal organ in a living body for the first time? You have every right to be excited. But, in these times of cutbacks in federal transfer payments to the provinces for shared social programs like health care, can you be sure you’ll be able to afford the equipment to do the job properly? Sure you will, if you come to Sponges ‘R’ Us, the discount medical sponge supply store.

At Sponges ‘R’ Us, you won’t get a whole lot of useless talk about gowns or masks or other surgical necessities, because we specialize in only one item: sponges! And you won’t believe our incredibly low prices. How do we do it? Volume! With 27 outlets throughout the province, our courteous and well-groomed staff will be glad to fulfill your every need. That’s Sponges ‘R’ Us – quality medical supplies at prices that won’t break your heart.

“Clamp!”

Hey, stud! When you’re in the middle of reconstructing a damaged artery, the last thing you want is to have some wimpy clamp lose its grip! That’s why four out of five heart specialists and dominatrixes recommend Schlegel clamps. Schlegel clamps are built tough to last. So, get with it, body jockies. If you’re not using Schlegel, what the hell are you using?

“Doctor, we’re losing the patient – his blood pressure is dropping rapidly...”

“Heart rate?”

“Also dropping – fast!”

“Damn! Give me 10 ccs of adrenaline!”

You're a hip young doctor with a few pancreas transplants notched on your scalpel. You probably think all adrenaline is pretty much the same, right? But what if I told you that only one adrenaline compound contains Eurofleurostreptomycin, a chemical which clinical tests have conclusively proven does absolutely nothing to the human body, but sounds incredibly authoritative on a package? What if I told you that only one adrenaline compound comes in chocolate, cherry and new "hint of mint" flavours? Mother Stuckey's Adrenaline Compound – because no patient should disagree with his Mother.

"Doctor, the patient's heart has stopped!"

"Get the electro-cardiac fibrillator!"

In the market for a fibrillator? It's a big decision – you don't want to put out all that money just to get your fibrillator to the hospital and find that your medical staff wanted a newer model. That's why you should come to Ross Womp's Fibrillator Showroom. We have all makes and models of new and used fibrillators. We also offer a wide range of optional extras, and will happily customize your fibrillator absolutely free of charge! Be sure to ask about our great deals on parts and service. Remember Ross Womp's Fibrillator Showroom. Settling for anything less would be heartbreaking!

"Doctor, we've lost him."

"No! I can still –"

"Get a grip, Doc! He's dead!"

"How could this happen?"

"We waited too long between incisions for the product endorsements..."

More Impertinent Questions

Was the recent airstrike against Iraq just a bit of nostalgia on the part of an outgoing President? One of the raids was called a "spanking;" if the United States decided to stage an embargo of food and supplies to Iraq, would that constitute "sending the country to bed without any supper?" Could Operation Desert Storm – which took place two years ago for those of you with MTV Memories – be considered "throwing the kid out of the house with only the clothes on his back?" How about "throwing the kid from the family down the street out of its neighbour's house?" If this is the new language of international diplomacy, can the estimated 100,000 Iraqis who died in the Gulf War sue the United Nations for child abuse?

What makes morning radio disk jockeys think they are funny? More to the point, what makes the people who continue to employ morning radio disk jockeys think they are funny?

Since political pundits have decided Bill Clinton's Presidency will be a failure days before he has actually taken office, can we retire all the historians who may be clinging to the obviously outdated idea that time determines such things? Hell, since Clinton's administration is already a failure, why doesn't he save himself the trouble of getting inaugurated and go straight to writing his memoirs and setting up his Presidential library? (Oh, you really think he would be the first President to write his memoirs without actually having accomplished anything worthwhile?)

Are oil spills like the most recent breaking up of the tanker Braer off Britain's Shetland Islands the method by which postmodernists "deconstruct" nature? Can we expect Christo to go around wrapping oil-soaked birds in colourful cloth? Is that what it takes to get people to notice what our dependence on oil is doing to the environment?

The Globe and Mail, Canada's national – but never nationalist – newspaper has added two new features: The Middle Kingdom, a page of analysis in addition to the editorial, op-ed and Facts and Arguments pages (not to mention the "analysis" pieces that have been cropping up more and more in the news section, not unlike fungus); and The Tattler, a newsy counterpart to Noises Off, the arts section's gossip column. *The Globe* claims it is "expanding the concept of news:" would it be too much to ask them to include news in their expanded concept?

Now that the recession is officially over, is Statistics Canada going to buy some champagne for the 1.5 million people celebrating on unemployment lines?

Are Members of Parliament calling for mandatory national testing of high school students prepared to take standardized knowledge tests themselves? Are they prepared to vacate their seats and run in a by-election if they fail? Or, will they get off if they bring a note from their doctor to the next sitting?

If "I am Salman Rushdie," can I cash his latest royalty cheque for *The Satanic Verses*?

Would the smokers who insist upon lighting up in defiance of Toronto's new by-law against smoking in public places mind having my lung operation for me?

Will the people who are arguing that increased patent protection will cause multinational drug corporations to do more research in Canada – as opposed to, oh, I don't know, pocketing the difference – take a pill? Please? If the people of Canada incorporated in the Bahamas, claimed to be a multinational corporation and donated tons of money to the Conservative Party and causes it supports, could they finally get a break?

The first diplomatic move of the new Clinton government was to launch an "extraordinary challenge" of a free trade panel ruling on – are you ready for this? – drugs. Is that some kind of crazy poetic justice, or have I lost sight of the trough?

The Mel Party (officially known as the National Party) has announced it will be fielding 200 candidates in the next federal election – isn't it time party leader Mel Hurtig announced that it was all a joke? Or, is he waiting for a more appropriate time, like election night? If he can keep a straight face until after the election, will the press have to start taking him seriously?

Isn't the type in the slimmed down *Toronto Star* just the most adorable thing? Don't you feel like pinching the newspaper's cheek and cooing at it? Can we start calling it "The Large Paper that Shrank?"

Why isn't there a television show featuring wrongful arrest charges arising from real life police procedural programs like *Cops* or *America's Most Wanted*? Wouldn't you watch a show called *America's Most Brutal* or *Apologies Cops are Forced to Make By the Cowardly Bureaucratic Weenies at Headquarters*? If viewers are really interested in the nuts and bolts of the American justice system, why isn't there a show called *The People's Bankruptcy Court*? Mmm...some impertinent questions have obvious answers.

Hockey Night in Gavle

"Welcome to the Gayle Sondergaard Stadium in Gavle, Sweden, where the final game of the world junior hockey championship between Canada and Czechoslovakia is about to get underway..."

"That's right, Bill. This game isn't important to the standings – Canada won the gold medal yesterday with a shellacking of Japan..."

"You said it, Chuck. Why, if those Japanese players had been made of wood, they would be furniture by now, maybe a sturdy breakfront or a dinette set..."

"Of course, this being Sweden, you'd probably have to assemble the Japanese team yourself..."

"You got that straight Chu – wha?"

"It's especially brave of the Czechoslovakian team to take the ice, Bill, considering that their country recently split into two independent republics."

"No question, they're a plucky team, Chuck. Doomed to debilitating ethnic squabbles and a deteriorating economic morass, but they've got a strong defence and a lot of heart."

"Interesting analysis, Bill. I might argue that partitioning the country into separate Czech and Slovak Republics will actually decrease ethnic squabbling, but the referee has dropped the puck and the game is underway. Mike Walnut of the Canadian team gets the puck and shoots it into the Czechoslovakian zone where Miroslav Cheddelovchak picks it up.

“Cheddelovchak carries the puck up to his blue line, looking for somebody to pass it to. Miroslav Notyerunkle streaks down the left wing, but Cheddelovchak doesn’t see that he’s open – no, Cheddelovchak is looking right at Notyerunkle, but still he doesn’t pass the puck...Notyerunkle hits the Canadian blue line, stops and turns towards Cheddelovchak, hands on his hips, the universal sign for disappointment at not being given the puck on a clear break...”

“The Czechs are a very emotional peoples, aren’t they, Chuck?”

“They certainly are. Unless he’s a Slovak, Bi – oh! Did you see that? Tired of waiting around for Cheddelovchak to find a teammate who wants to play with him, Team Canada forward Tim Hatman decked him with a vicious but, under the rules of international play, perfectly legal check!”

“Wow! I haven’t seen a check like that since the last time I saw *Platoon!*”

“Cheddelovchak dropped to the ice like he had been hit by a bag of wet cement. There is a stoppage in play so they can scrape Cheddelovchak off the ice and find the puck somewhere underneath him. Czechoslovakian coach Miroslav Parsnip calls his players to the bench – he doesn’t look happy...”

“You can’t blame him, either: Notyerunkle was more open than the Canada/US border, Chuck.”

“Okay, we’re set to go again as the Czechoslovakian coach decides to send a new line on the ice... Hatman wins the faceoff again, and sends the puck into the Czechoslovakian zone where Miroslav Feddupchuk takes it behind his own goal...teammate Miroslav Miroslavici circles around and – oh! Miroslavici speared Feddupchuk in the chest and stripped him of the puck! From his knees, Feddupchuk tackles Miroslavici, and there’s a stoppage in play as the gloves come off...”

“This is the kind of rock ‘em, sock ‘em hockey that only a Dan Cherry could love, Chuck...”

“Yes, but even Don Cherry would agree that you should save the sock ‘em for the other team, Bi – hold on. The Czechoslovakian players have just cleared the bench to join the melee. The Canadians on the ice when the fight started are standing at the Canadian bench, shaking their heads sadly...”

“The referees don’t seem to know what to do about this fight between players from the same team...as the players exhaust themselves, the head linesman is consulting the rulebook...”

“Excuse me, Chuck, but that’s not the rulebook – it’s the Geneva Convention.”

“Hmm...I think you could be right, there, Bill. But has the Geneva Convention been updated to include the new penalties calling for the ejection of instigators approved at the last NHL Board of Governors’ meeting?”

“I guess we’ll soon find out. You know, Chuck, as I sit here and watch these fine young men flailing away at members of their own team, I can’t help but think that international sports is going to take a long time to adjust to the New World Order...”

Understanding EconoSpeak

One of the difficulties ordinary people have understanding economics is that it has a language all its own which they find impenetrable. To break through the clutter of econospeak, twelfth grader Rita Mae Brown has kindly agreed to translate some common obfuscatory economic statements into the language of the streets, Ebonics.

“One hundred jobs were outsourc –”

Don’ go there, boy! Don’ you dare go there! We wasn’t outsourced, streamlined, downsized or given a reemployment opportunity. We wasn’t eliminated, constructively dismissed, uninstalled, transitioned or given involuntary severance. We wasn’t correctsized or given a chance at a career transition program. We was fired.

“We are riding the crest of the longest peacetime economic expansion this country has ever seen.”

A lot of rich white folks dun been gettin’ richer.

“The market has suffered a slight downturn.”

Rich people dun been losin’ hundreds of thousands of dead presidents.

“The market has undergone a much needed correction...”

Rich people dun been losin’ millions of dead presidents.

“The market is going through a period of adjustment...”

Rich people dun been losin’ billions. If you dun been lucky enough ta have a job, you proolly gwan be losin’ dat, too.

“High interest rates are necessary to dampen inflationary pressures.”

It be mo impotent fo banks to make money dan fo you ta feed yo family.

“The burden of taxes is too high.”

Yo services gwan be cut again so's rich folks can buy a second yacht.

“Generous Welfare programs are a disincentive for the poor to find work.”

Oh oh! You know da time you dun been eatin' on food stamps and payin' yo rent wit money from Parents wit Dependent Chillun? Now, you gwan be workin' in toxic waste dumps just so's you kin afford cat food and a cardbo'd box! You...well, you dun gwan be screwed, is what it is.

“New information technologies, especially the Information Superhighway, offer an unprecedented opportunity for economic growth.”

If you don't gots a education or money fo a computer, you definitely gwan be screwed.

“Debt makes it difficult for governments to carry out their primary functions.”

Cha, right! When dem gummint critics be chargin' shit on dem's credit cards, dat be okay for da economy, but when da gummint pays for a housin' project, dat be a sin. Sides, if da gummint gwan be not payin' for programs, what be its primary functions?

“Innovation is the key to a successful corporation.”

Dis don' mean nuttin', but it sound real good when it come from a economist promotin' a new book on a talk show. Everybody gots a bright idea in him. Next, you know somebody gwan be callin' information da key to success.

“Information is the key to a successful corporation.”

See? See? I dun tol' you.

“International trade agreements are necessary for the economic benefit of all.”

We gots to find ways to expo't our poverty to other countries.

“Investing in other countries is a good way of improving their economies. After all, raising the level of water benefits all ships.”

Remember how trickle down economics was gwan benefit all ships? Funny how dose of us who were po drowned quicker. Now dat we perfected dat idea, we gwan expo't it to da world.

“We have to be careful not to succumb to a brain drain.”

Even edicated folks know there gwan be serious problems here.

“The successful corporation embraces change.”

Peter Drucker dun be soundin' mo and mo like P. T. Barnum all da time, don' he?

Rita Mae Brown would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the latest economists' assault on plain speaking. Since her single mother lost her Welfare privileges and their neighbourhood shelter was closed due to funding cutbacks, she can be found wandering the streets of South Central Los Angeles.

The Character Thing

“Come in! Come in! Please have a seat Mister...Jesus? Am I pronouncing that right?”

“That's right. Jesus of Nazareth. That's me.”

“As the chair of the Messiah Search Committee of Jerusalem, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your application. I think I speak for everybody on the committee when I say that yours was the most impressive resume we've seen in our 12 years of existence.”

“Oh, well, I, uhh, thank you. That means a lot to me.”

“Margaret would kill me if I didn't take this opportunity to ask you about the loaves and fishes thing – how did you do that?”

“Sorry, but I'm not allowed to divulge those kinds of trade secrets. I'd be thrown out of the Messiahs Guild if I did.”

“Professional discretion. I understand perfectly. And I hope you'll be just as understanding when I tell you that, despite how much the committee has been impressed by your credentials, we have decided to reject your application for the position of Messiah.”

“Reject it? But I thought – I mean, you just said –”

“I know. I know. Believe me, I've seen all the faux Messiahs preaching Armageddon on street corners, and I know we're not likely to find anybody better qualified than you, even if we search for 2,000 years. Still, there's the problem of the character thing...”

“The character thing?”

“That's right. When you were younger, I understand that you led a protest at the temple, knocking over tables, exhorting people to rebel against the moneylenders, that sort of thing.”

“Yes. You see, I believe that –”

“Yes. Yes. Yes. I’m sure you had your reasons. Only, if you want people to accept you as the Messiah, you have to convince them that you will be stable and responsible as a leader. Incidents like that, however commendable your youthful high spirits may have been, make people wonder if you can handle the tremendous burdens of Messiahhood.”

“That’s the character thing?”

“Exactly. The character thing. Or, here, I couldn’t help but notice that there is a five year blank period in your resume – the only thing I’ve been able to determine about that period of your life is that your forwarding address was ‘The Desert...’”

“I was wandering around in the desert, yes.”

“And in some ways that speaks very highly of you – a young man searching for himself and all of that. Only, if you’re planning on being Messiah, every moment of your time must be accounted for. A young man, alone in the desert for years – who knows what he might begin to think about...camels?”

“That’s disgusting!”

“Put yourself in the sandals of your followers, Jesus: you could have been doing anything out there.”

“But I didn’t do anything!”

“That’s not the way it’s going to look to the gossips in the markets. Believe me, nothing undermines the legitimacy of a Messiah’s term in office more than rumours of misconduct. No matter how pure you are in reality, you can expect to lose followers.”

“That’s ridiculous!”

“Umm, okay, look. I didn’t want to bring this up, but the biggest problem the committee has is with your ongoing relationship with the prostitute Mary Magdalene...”

“It’s a purely spiritual relationship.”

“Of course it is. You know that and I know that. But if the tablets get a hold of it, you’ll be condemned from here to Egypt!”

“Look. I believe in hating the sin but loving the sinner.”

“A little too much loving, your critics will say.”

“Oh, fooley! This character thing is just a smokescreen for personal innuendo and character assassination! These accusations have nothing to do with my ability to be Messiah!”

“I couldn’t agree with you more, old boy. Unfortunately, this is the way the world works at the moment...”

“At this rate, you know the only people who are going to apply for Messiah are halfwits and people with no life experience.”

“Oh, that’s okay. We’re not in any hurry to fill the position...”

Irrational Economic Man

One of the basic underpinnings of economic theory is the concept of Rational Economic Man, the idea that we all make economic decisions based on logic and reason. According to this model, when we’re in a grocery store, our thought process goes something like this: “Hmm...butter is \$2.39 a pound in this store, but \$3.09 a liter in the store across the street...okay, converting to metric, we get...but, wait a second! Unsalted is 30 cents more per pound than salted...okay, assuming I have a heart attack when I’m 60, amortize the cost of my surgery over 50 years of eating salted butter and...yes, I believe salted is economically more sound in the long run...”

Perhaps Rational Economic Woman works this way (the literature is strangely silent on this issue), but we all know from personal experience that Rational Economic Man does not. Confronted with the choice between butter sold by the pound or by the liter, Rational Economic Man will always choose to buy a dozen bags of barbecue potato chips.

Clearly, a new standard in economics is called for. I would suggest, as our model, Irrational Economic Man in recognition of the fact that not all of our decisions are based on rational self-interest. Do you fit the new paradigm? For some indication of where you may stand, just answer the following questions:

- 1) The stock you bought at \$27.30 a share has dropped to \$12.78 a share. Do you
 - X) buy more at the lower price in the hope that it will rise again?
 - G) sell the stock short in the hope that you will be able to make back some of your losses if it continues to drop?
 - B) buy a Porsche?

- 2) Your car is making strange knocking and pinging noises. Do you
 - C) take it to three different mechanics, comparing their quotes to see who will do the most work for the least amount of money?
 - R) take it to your regular mechanic because you’re comfortable with his or her price and service?
 - I) take it to Guido, a friend of your brother-in-law, because he promised it will save you a few bucks?

- 3) You’ve just won \$10,000 in a lottery. Do you

Q) buy government bonds because, although they don't offer a high rate of return, they are a solid investment?

T) buy stocks because they offer a potentially high rate of return?

G) buy more lottery tickets because you're on a roll?

4) Although you've passed the bar, the only jobs available are in public relations. Do you

A) take a public relations job, at an admittedly lesser salary than you expected, while you look for a position with a law firm?

T) volunteer at a law firm in the hope it will lead to a lucrative legal career some time in the future?

F) spend six months on a California beach trying to find yourself?

5) The most important part of an advertisement to you is

F) the price of the advertised product.

T) the availability of the advertised product.

A) the cleavage of the woman in the ad.

6) You've just eaten 27 tubs of Hagen Dasz chocolate ice cream. Do you

A) eat one more because the marginal utility of another tub of ice cream is high enough?

F) stop eating because the marginal utility of another tub of ice cream is not high enough?

T) Throw up and start again with rocky road?

7) Your computer is three years old. Do you

B) keep the software because it continues to satisfy your needs?

C) shop around for the best price on new software and hardware upgrades to satisfy your changing needs?

D) buy whatever Microsoft is selling at the moment?

8) As a teenager, when you asked a girl on a date, did you

S) take her to a fancy restaurant in the hope that you would impress her with the amount of money you were willing to spend on her?

T) go Dutch to a middling restaurant in the hope that you would impress her with your responsibility attitude towards money?

U) drive around aimlessly until you ran out of gas because you really hadn't thought of impressing her at all?

9) Your company has announced it will be laying off 2,000 employees. Do you

K) meet with your employers to stress how important you are to the company?

L) polish your resume in anticipation of having to find another job?

M) Make a fool of yourself at the annual office Christmas party?

10) Considering a career now, would you choose

W) an expanding field like computer programming?

X) an always important field like medicine.

Y) to follow your interest in 12th century Spanish scatological verse?

ANSWERS: 1) B; 2) I; 3) G; 4) F; 5) A; 6) T; 7) D; 8) U; 9) M; 10) Y.

If you got most of the questions right, feel free to be smug about how normal you are. If you got most of the questions wrong, you're either a liar or Milton Friedman. Either way, you're beyond my help.

The Original Help Line

The crystal ball had been ringing off the hook ever since the release of Wizards '95. The suite of original spells, incantations and magic potions had been sold as "The most powerful tool kit a practitioner of the Dark Arts will ever need!" and "The most sophisticated set of Sorcerer programs devised by Man!"

Okay, perhaps the town criers had overstated the package's merits a little. The twelfth century had seen rapid advances in sorcerous technologies. Who could really say that this year's spell for turning princes into frogs was really more efficient, or the ubiquitous term "user-friendly," than last year's release? When you factored in the cost of upgrading the spell, well, it certainly wasn't the most economical way of getting revenge on a disrespectful royal family!

Not only that, but Wizards '95 had been rushed to market by Micromoss because somebody from head office had announced at a Necromancer's convention that it would be available by a certain date. Apprentices had worked 20 hour days to perfect the spellware, but, well, if you don't allow enough time for debugging...

Merlin D'Lonergan (not THAT Merlin – a distant cousin) had been taking angry calls all evening. They never seemed to end! With a sigh, he wearily waved a hand over the crystal ball. An old hag's face appeared.

"I'm having problems with Wizards '95," the hag croaked. Obviously, Merlin thought, but he just nodded politely. After several months on the Micromoss help line, he had learned that sarcasm never helped. "I was using the spell which poisons a well," the hag angrily explained. "I mixed the ingredients perfectly according to the installation instructions – I only use top of the line Saint John's Wort, you know. But when I tried to implement the spell, all that happened was that the villagers' hair fell out! What the hell is that all about?"

Merlin had been coached on how to respond to this problem by an apprentice at head office two weeks ago, when the problem was first reported. "It's a feature of the spell," he half-heartedly answered.

"A feature?"

"Yeah. Poisoning a well only makes the survivors suffer. This way, everybody in the village suffers..."

“I don’t care about that! I want them dead!”

“Yeah, well, maybe they’ll die of embarrassment.” The hag heaped invective on Merlin for 15 minutes. As instructed, Merlin had offered her a free update of the spell when it became available, but this did not appease her. Eventually, she ran out of curses and hung up. Merlin was protected by the beta version of Wizards ‘97, codename Canterbury; but, for some reason, this did not comfort him.

“I seem to be having a problem with a love potion,” the next caller, an old but distinguished sorcerer, politely stated. “Lorelei Song? When I tried to install it in my cauldron, I’m afraid the whole thing exploded.”

“What system are you using?”

The sorcerer blinked. “System? Why...Wizards 3.1, of course.”

“There’s your problem, right there. Lorelei’s Song was designed to work on Wizards ‘95. It’s not backwards compatible.”

The sorcerer looked befuddled. “So, it...it won’t work?” Merlin required over half an hour to explain why the sorcerer could not run the spell on the system he had. The sorcerer was as unfailingly dense as he was unfailingly polite. Merlin preferred the abuse.

Let’s face: the older generation (at this point in history, anybody over the age of 16) would never understand the new sorcerous technologies. Merlin’s next caller was a Maiden who swore a blue streak at him. She claimed to have hacked Wizards ‘95 and found that Micromoss was using special files called “scones” to keep track of every spell a person used. She threatened that if she ever received unsolicited messages on her scrying glass, she would reverse engineer the scones and invade the system at Micromoss’ headquarters!

Well, at least she didn’t ask any dumb questions.

Merlin paused before checking his scrying glass messages. Only four more hours to go before his 12 hour shift ended. Was this really where the bright young things of his generation were supposed to end up?

What A Piece of Work Is A Man?

Let’s face it: women were hogging all the fun.

Employment equity. Abortion. Rape. Wife battering. Eating disorders. Sexual harassment. Lesbian rights. Journeys of self-discovery. Sex role constraints – women had been blessed with a host of issues around which they could rally.

Men, being men, looked at women's support groups, their political organizations, their health centres, their growing sense of sisterhood, and said, "We shouldn't have to miss out on all of this great stuff just because we haven't been oppressed for millenia!"

"Look at us!" men, being men, started to shout. "We can redefine our gender-determined social roles like nobody's business!"

It's not hard to feel sympathetic. Men had dominated the world for thousands of years, taking whatever they wanted to use in any way they saw fit. At some point, men started assuming that those who had been subjugated by force had actually chosen, of their own free will, to become second class citizens. Imagine their surprise (men, being men) when women insisted this was not so.

Of course, having had their way for so long, men had little experience at redefining their role. Their first attempt, in the 1970s, entailed sympathy, understanding and crying a lot about how hard it was to be a man.

Nobody bought it.

There the matter lay for years. Although so-called New Age Man was an improvement over Old Age Man, nobody wanted to invite him to parties.

Enter Robert Bly, who claimed that men had to get in touch with their primal emotions **and** remain in touch with the strengths men had always admired in themselves. Men, being men, this meant parading around in the nude in a forest, pretending to be animals.

You can be forgive if you don't see much difference between Robert Bly Man and Old Age Man. Although subtle, the major difference is critical: Robert Bly Man wears better suits to work.

Nor are these the only choices. Creeping along the horizon is a future filled with more technological marvels than you can agitate a three dimensional forestry by-product at. For all we know, men may some day be replaced by computer chips (although, men, being men, this seems unlikely to be accomplished without the spilling of a great deal of silicon).

Where do you fit in in this mishmash of masculine role models? We've prepared a chart comparing Old Age, New Age, Robert Bly and Future man; simply find the characteristics that best describe you. The chart is a simplistic device, of course, but suitable for our needs.

Men, being men.

	Old Age Man	New Age Man	Robert Bly Man	Future Man
masculine ideal	Archie Bunker	Alan Alda	Robert Bly	George Jetson

worldview	pragmatic	philosophical	mythical/poetic	technological
drinks	tap water	bottled water	groundwater	powdered water
primary news source	newspapers	television	tribal drum	pill
Kennedy assassin theory	KGB	CIA	vegetarian	Klingons
drives	65 Chevy	Hyundai	jeep	teleports
bathroom habits	toilet seat up	toilet seat down	pisses in the woods	doesn't piss
favourite TV show	<i>I Love Lucy</i>	<i>thirtysomething</i>	<i>Wild Kingdom</i>	<i>I Love Lucy</i>
favourite curves	a woman's	Key's pitches	stream behind farm	Laffer
preferred job	boxer	Greenpeace activist	dock worker	ozone restorer
probable job	dock worker	corporate lawyer	corporate lawyer	nuclear janitor
Free Trade stand	open markets are good for Canada	Canada was sold out	we can survive on nuts and berries	what's Canada?
politics	Conservative	Liberal	Green	Republicrat
abortion is...	murder	a woman's choice	survival of the fittest	unnecessary
woman's place	home	office	home	flexible space
fears	loss of power	being caught laughing at a racist or sexist joke	nothing	Robert Bly

Ask Dr. Political Science: Wouldn't You?

Dear Dr. Political Science,

Why do people seem to hate businessmen, economists and politicians so darn much?

Loopy in Lunenberg

Dear Loopy,

Mmm...difficult question.

Look at it this way: suppose every 10 or 20 years somebody you don't know walks up to you and hits you in the head with a balpeen hammer. The person says, "I hate to do this to you, but I will not be fulfilling my duty to my shareholders if I don't." Then, throwing

over his shoulder the comment that you could have avoided being hit in the head if you had just worked more productively, he drives off in search of the nearest sushi bar.

If this happened to you enough times, wouldn't you hate businessmen?

Now, imagine yourself on the pavement, writhing in pain. Another person you don't know walks past, stopping only when you moan quite loudly. The person says, "I know this may seem painful now, but this is a necessary technical adjustment, and you'll be better off in the long run." Then, muttering to himself about supply and demand curves, he drives off in search of the nearest Rachmaninoff recital.

If this happened, wouldn't you hate economists?

Finally, picture yourself curled up in a fetal position on the street when a third person you don't know walks up to you and spends 20 minutes looking you over very carefully. "This is terrible!" the person exclaims. "I must devote several million dollars to study this balpeen hammer problem – possibly set up a Royal Commission!"

If you ask for \$10 to get a taxi to take you to the hospital, however, the person replies, "I sympathize, my friend. Truly, I do. But, the cost of the studies and the Royal Commission will drive up the deficit, and I really won't be able to afford to lend you any money. Still, best of luck." Then, the person shakes your hand, takes seven per cent of the contents of your wallet, asks you to vote for him in the next election and heads off in search of a divisive social issue.

You have to even ask about politicians?

Dear Dr. Political Science,

What is the Triple E Senate?

Concerned in Cambridge

Dear Con,

The Triple E (elected, equal, effective) Senate is a proposal in the current Constitutional debate. It would effectively replace the current Triple A (appointed, absent, asinine) Senate.

There are, of course, problems with this proposal. Because the number of Senators would be the same for each of the provinces, the vote of one Newfoundlander would equal that of approximately 23.74 Ontarians. Clearly, a flexible definition of the "one person, one vote" ideal would be required.

Of course, one Newfoundlander is worth 23.74 Ontarians, but we mustn't confuse reality with politics.

This would make Canada's government more resemble the American bicameral (literally, camel with two humps) legislature. This would improve Canada's governing process by exacerbating the tendency to put regional interests over the national good, increasing political backbiting and buckpassing, creating virtual decision-making paralysis on issues vital to the national welfare...

Err...perhaps we don't want to push that comparison too far.

Dear Dr. Political Science,

What's the difference between decentralization, special status, sovereignty-association, asymmetrical federalism, selective asymmetrical federalism and flexible federalism?

Wonky in Wawa

Dear Wonky,

Who gets the last word at Constitutional gatherings.

Does something on the political scene puzzle you? Are you confused by a politician's behaviour? If you have any questions, write to Dr. Political Science, care of this publication. But, remember: he's not a medical doctor, so don't ask about your cousin's embarrassing premature hair loss.

**The Bush Administration's Policy on the Complicated Issues of
AIDS, Abortion and Teenage Pregnancy**

Don't have sex.

No, really. Don't have sex.

This Story Exploits White Male Experience

The Writer is convinced his current work will be a masterpiece. It's a touching story about a 17 year-old Native woman named Sally who is abandoned in Toronto by her boyfriend. Desperate to make ends meet, she turns to prostitution. She starts taking drugs to ease the pain of her difficult life. Made pregnant by a john, she seriously considers committing suicide when she meets a white Priest who slowly wins her trust and helps her turn her life around.

Governor-General's Award winning stuff.

Typing furiously, The Writer comes to the end of a page. "Pass me up another piece of paper, will you?" he says. "I'm really on a roll." The Native hands him a piece of paper, which he immediately crumples up.

"That was no good," The Writer remarks. "It had something on it. Could you pass me up another?"

The Native hands him another sheet of paper. On one side, in heavy block letters, The Writer reads: "READ THIS!" Hmm... The Writer turns the sheet over and reads, "Could you please move your chair a little? The legs are digging into my back."

The Writer glares at the woman on whose back he's working. "Don't be so ungrateful," he tells the Native. "Once my story is finished, it will sensitize people to the plight of Native women in this country, maybe even move people to help you..."

Another note comes up. "But, it's *my* story!"

"Well, yes," The Writer sputters, "I suppose it is your story in the very limited sense that you lived it. But, it becomes my story when I write it."

Several minutes pass, The Writer impatiently waiting. Finally, a piece of paper is passed up on which is written: "It is my story. I should be the one to write it. But your publishing system discourages me from telling my own story."

"Now, wait just a minute," The Writer responds. "We have a free press in this country – anybody can write what they want. Nobody discourages – what?"

The Native, anticipating his objection, was furiously scribbling before he even started talking. She hands him another sheet. "I have no access to publishers, agents or the press," it reads. "Your critics don't take into account my creative traditions and your academics don't want to include my work in their canons. Of course your system discourages Native storytellers – if it didn't, we would be writing our own stories, not you!"

“Are you saying I shouldn’t be writing this story?” The Writer indignantly asks. The table subtly rises, a gentle sigh.

“Yeah, well, let me tell you something,” The Writer continues. “I’ve written stories in the voice of lesbians, Black poets, chicano fry cooks and 16 year-old waitresses, twelfth century knights, fifth dimensional Spartazoids and a pair of goldfish named Bruce and Edna. It’s my right to allow my imagination to go wherever it will – anybody who talks about putting limits on that is really talking about censorship!”

The Writer shakes in anger, causing the chair to dig deeper into The Native’s back. This makes the wait for the response that much longer, and, when it comes, it is in a shakier hand.

“Voice, foolish writer,” it reads. “This is not about keeping you from writing. Write whatever you desire. The question is: are you prepared to fight for my right to publish with same vigour you fight for your own?”

The Writer considers this. “Pass me up a piece of paper,” he answers, “and, when I’m finished this story, we’ll talk.”

The Native sighs. Her name, by the way, is Susan, not Sally. And, she was abandoned in Montreal, not Toronto. She did turn to prostitution, but it was the boyfriend who left her that made her pregnant, not a john. She was never serious about committing suicide, although she was grateful when she met The Writer, who slowly gained her trust with the promise that he would help her turn her life around.

Ah, well, You can’t expect somebody who hasn’t lived the experience to get all the details right.

The 1992 Police brutality Summer Olympics

“Welcome to day three of the 1992 Police Brutality Summer Olympics. We’ll be getting to the equestrian events in a few minutes, but first, a round-up of the morning’s events. Marlene?”

“Thanks, Dave. Perhaps the biggest upset of the Summer Games took place when American James Smith took the gold medal in the 200 Minute Kick, Beat and Mace. Smith totaled an astonishing 27 hospitalized.

“The favourite, Hans Jaeger, the South African who had won the event in 1984 and 1988, had to settle for the silver. Jeremy Bentham, of the always strong British team, finished a distant third.

“After the event, Smith said, ‘I owe it all to my coach, Captain Williamson of the 23rd Precinct. He always really stressed the importance of a good follow-through...wow. A

gold medal. Won't the low-life Chi scum be surprised when they see me coming at them with this!"

"It makes you proud to be an American, doesn't it?"

"I tremble just thinking about it."

"On to the 400 Minute Citizen Arrest and Interrogation Relay, which was won by team El Salvador. No surprise there – the El Salvadorans have fielded strong teams ever since they were first coached in the 1970s by American advisers who, for the sake of national security, must remain nameless.

"South Africa took the silver, while the little heralded team from Montreal, Canada, came out of nowhere to take the bronze. The American team, anchored by LA's Laurence Powell, finished seventh."

"That had to be a disappointment, Dave..."

"It certainly was, Marlene. They had been building this team for many years, barely edging out Washington and New York in the national qualifying trials. They had high hopes of bringing some kind of medal home.

"Still, they're a plucky team, and I expect to see them giving their best in 1996."

"Wasn't there some controversy surrounding the Citizen Arrest and Interrogation Relay?"

"That's right. The Israeli and Saudi Arabian teams had to be disqualified when they started beating up on each other as the teams lined up under starter's orders. Olympic Commissioner A. Bartlett Perry called it, 'a disgusting display of unsportsmanlike conduct which should have stayed in the competitor's complex.'"

"The 500 Minute Sexual Assault preliminary heats had to be canceled this morning when the victims snuck off the playing field and sought asylum in the Canadian embassy. The event has yet to be rescheduled, but there should be an announcement by late this afternoon..."

"Sexual Assault is a trial event at the Police Brutality Olympics, isn't it?"

"That's right. And, believe it or not, there's still a lot of opposition to making it an official event. Many governments refuse to accept the fact that sexual assault and other forms of sexual abuse are used by many police and military forces around the world as a tool of political repression."

"You'd think they'd get with these post-feminist times."

“Precisely. But, I’m confident that officials will drop their blind prejudice and approve the event in 2000.”

“Okay. Now, Marlene, we’ve been getting a lot of complaints from viewers who feel the Police Brutality Olympics trivializes a serious problem and is insensitive to the suffering of the victims of offensive and/or illegal police behaviour. How would you respond to that?”

“Well, Dave, demographics have shown that our audience is primarily made up of contented members of the middle and upper classes. Safe in their securely wired or privately guarded homes, they don’t feel police issues affect them directly. So, until they are prepared to treat police brutality with the outrage it deserves, why should we?”

“And, that’s not likely to happen soon, is it?”

“Not in time to spoil 1996, in any case.”

“Okay. We have to break for a commercial. When we return, we’ll go live to the streets of London for the 500 Metre Chasing Man Down the Street Equestrian Event...”

Mister and Misses Frump Know Where To Draw the Line

Mister and Misses Frump were still and quiet for a long time.

“I can’t feel my toes,” Mrs. Frump stated. After a couple of seconds, she added: “Who would have thought the cold would cure my arthritis?”

“Some cure!” Mister Frump scoffed. Soon, brightening, he said, “Hey, Missus, did I tell you? We’re upwardly mobile!”

“Go away!”

“It’s true. The Fraser Institute says –”

“What’s the Fraser Institute?”

“That we – wha? It...it’s an Institute, see, and it, uhh, it’s run by a bunch of guys named Fraser.”

“Really? Do they all wear kilts?”

“Missus! Get your mind out of the gutter!”

“Why? That’s where my body is?”

“Yer missing the point. The Fraser Institute, whether they wear kilts or not, says that the way we’ve been calculating how many poor people there are in the country is wrong. We all thought it was 10 or 15 per cent of the population, but it turns out that it’s only about four per cent! Imagine!”

“What does that mean?”

“Don’t you see? Yesterday, we were chronically poor. Today, we’re lower middle class. We’re moving up in the world!”

“How, exactly, does that help us?”

“Well, it, I mean...we probably won’t have as much trouble getting a bank loan...”

“You’ve been sold a bill of goods,” Misses Frump said with a harsh laugh. “This Fraser Institute thing isn’t about the poor: it’s a way for people with money to ease their consciences by defining poor people out of existence!”

Mister Frump was shocked; his wife never contradicted him on political or economic matters. At least, not with a cogent argument. “Listen, kiddo,” he started to angrily respond, but the wind outside began to howl, drowning him out. The whistling of the wind through the abandoned building made him aware of a distinct ringing in his ears, something he didn’t much care for.

Misses Frump realized she had crossed a line best stayed away from, so when the wind died down, she was conciliatory. “Honey,” she asked, “do you remember the old Alhambra Park on King?”

“You mean the Balloil Theatre on Queen?”

“No, no, no. Although, now that I come to think about it, I’m sure it was the Cadenza Dance Hall on Prince...”

“Could it have been the Decatur Soda Shoppe on Pauper?”

“We’ve come a long way, haven’t we?”

“Beg pardon?”

“No, I’m sure it was the Alhambra. I remember the mirrors on the walls and the paper flowers all over the place.”

“Really? I remember a lot of plaster gargoyles...”

“I always warned you not to get so drunk you fell over.”

“That you did.”

“You looked so masterful, so manly, lying there on your back, staring at the top floor of the building and the stars for several hours.”

“Kind of you to say.”

“It was the first time you kissed me...remember?”

“How could I forget? I remember every detail!”

“Honey, did you –”

“Except where it was...and maybe exactly how it happened...”

“Did you mean it?”

“Missus, I swore that you would be the only girl for me and, through thick and thin, for better or worse, you have been the only girl for me.”

The old smoothie. Misses Frump weakly smiled and swept her arm over to where she figured Mister Frump’s hand was. She felt something warm and fuzzy; it was either her husband’s hand or a recently deceased rat. She took a leap of faith.

Outside, the storm raged. It was the coldest day of the year, a new record; Mister and Misses Frump thought they were blessed to find shelter in an abandoned building. It cut the wind, for sure, but the walls were thin, with missing patches that allowed the cold to enter and bite them deeply.

The couple lay on their backs in the dark, conserving energy in the hope they would make it to a proper shelter once the storm had died down. But Misses’ Frump’s warm coat had disintegrated a few weeks earlier, and the bag with her heavy blanket had been stolen a few days ago, and...

Mister and Mrs. Frump were still and quiet for an awfully long time.

The Man Who Makes Fun of Everything

Ever since I was little, I wanted to make fun of everything. This was a problem because, of course, everything is bigger than I am. And, it had a head start.

At first, I thought I could compromise: I would make fun of everything...I knew about. But, a little voice in the back of my head said, “Everything is not divisible.” Clearly, by this logic, I would have to make fun of things I knew nothing about, too.

After all, when you’re making fun of everything, who has time for semantic distinctions?

Because I have so much to catch up on, I can sometimes be a little intense. I went to a psychiatrist to help me out. “Tell me about your mother,” he asked.

“Sorry,” I replied, “but I don’t do material without getting paid.

This did not bode well for our relationship. After 12 years of therapy, my psychiatrist finally told me I didn’t have the right attitude. I could have told him that in the first five minutes of our first session, but I wanted to see how things played out.

When your goal is to make fun of everything, everything is research.

Of course, reality is not so easily mocked. “How would you like it if I made fun of you?” everything taunts me.

“I beat you to it,” I easily answer, pointing to a number of less than flattering self-portraits that have popped up from time to time in my writing.

“You’re soft on yourself,” everything insists.

I shrug. “I’m soft on everything. I like the give and take of developing funny ideas, but I don’t think I have the pitiless cruelty necessary to be a truly effective satirist.”

Everything skulks off, planning to cause an earthquake in Mexico or some equally defenseless third world country. When it comes right down to it, Reality is a sore loser.

My mission in life has made some things easier for me. Whenever any of my subjects threatens to sue me for libel, slander, defamation of character or any of the other roadblocks everything puts in a writer’s way to keep her or him from having a good time, they know where to find me.

“You the guy who wants to make fun of everything?” their lawyer or other legal representative will ask me.”

“Yeah?”

“Make fun of this.”

Okay.

In some ways, my goal makes it easier for others to understand me. “Now, Mister Nayman,” the judge at my trial will say, “when you say that it is your intention to make fun of everything, surely, the serious business which takes place before this court is not included?”

“Of course it is,” I politely respond.

“I see,” the judge will say, immediately before dismissing the jury and dispensing with any trial, finding me guilty, assessing the maximum penalty the law will allow (and court costs for all the cases before him that month) and admonishing me to seek a different, more reputable calling.

Television evangelism, perhaps.

Not that I want to paint a totally rosy picture; there are drawbacks to my goal in life, after all. It’s hard to keep friends, for instance.

“You’re not going to make fun of me, are you?” they inevitably ask.

“You know what my goal in life is,” I remind them.

“Couldn’t you make fun of everything except me?” they insist.

“Everything is indivisible,” I say.

I don’t know. I heard that somewhere.

Les Pages aux Folles: The Back Story

A Nayman family legend has it that I decided to devote my life to writing comedy/humour when I was eight years old. Most boys that age wanted to be hockey players or astronauts (or, so I have been told) – why comedy? Through my thirties and forties, it was important to me to understand why I developed the way I did (after a couple of decades filled with unanswerable questions, I decided to stop wondering and accept myself the way I was), so I gave this question considerable thought. Unfortunately, the best I could come up with was a cliché.

I grew up in an emotionally abusive household (as did many funny people). I realized early on in my life that laughing made me feel better; I figure my first impulse to write humour was to help ease myself through a tough childhood. I also suspect that I thought that if I could make my parents laugh, they might not fight so much, but that turned out not to be the case (intense therapy succeeded where my youthful ambitions failed, but the ambitions remained).

Honestly, if my early life had been any more of a cliché, I would have started this piece with: “It was a dark and stormy night...”

COMEDY HISTORY ASIDE: Years later, I was watching a terrific series called *The Green Room*. Comedian Eddie Izzard was telling the story of how he first met his idol, Richard Pryor. After a few minutes of small talk, they found that they had something in common: they both knew that they wanted to be stand-up comedians when they were four

years old. You know how I thought I was precocious because I knew I wanted to be a humourist when I was eight? I was actually already half a lifetime behind the curve!

My original inspiration in my early teens was Art Buchwald. If he is remembered at all these days, it is for being the person who sued Paramount Pictures for stealing his original idea for what would become Eddie Murphy's *Coming to America*. And, winning. This case exposed the arcane Hollywood bookkeeping that allowed studios to claim films that had grossed a billion dollars never made a profit, and introduced the world to the term "monkey points." But I remember him as the preeminent newspaper satirist who, in his prime, wrote creative and biting (and very funny) political commentary.

Not a bad role model if that's what you're into.

Between 1984 and 1987, I wrote 300 articles for a satirical newspaper column (enough for three books). I called the project *Les Pages aux Folles*, playing off the name of the then popular film *La Cage aux Folles*. I thought the title translated as "cage of crazies," which would have made my version "page of crazies." This tickled me. When the English version was released as *The Bird Cage*, I thought, Bird Pages? Okay, *I can make this work*.

Three years into the project, I was no closer to becoming the preeminent newspaper political satirist of the 1980s than when I had started. Years later, I would realize that one wasn't given a newspaper humour column because one was actually, you know, funny (although some naturally are and others grow into it); they usually went to people who had proven their service to the newspaper in other departments. In defence of my naïveté: teenager.

I moved on to scripts and university, but the satirical bug never quite left me. Between 1987 and 2002, I kept coming back to the form, writing over 100 new articles (enough for a fourth collection). Then, a number of pieces of my life came together to drive me to the internet.

At university, I studied emerging technologies and the arts. My Masters thesis (from the New School for Social Research) was on the challenges interactivity posed for fiction writers. My PhD dissertation was on fiction writers who posted their work to the World Wide Web. I know, I know. Today, that's a big **duh!** But, in 1999, when I wrote the bulk of the dissertation (I was awarded my PhD in 2000), it was still relatively – ahem – novel. ACADEMIC ASIDE: the problems I identified in 1999 have scaled up nicely, with few changes over the years. Was I prophetic? Naah – I was just paying attention.

When I returned to Toronto after three years living in Montreal (a residency requirement of McGill University, where I studied), I volunteered for a public interest web page developer called The Electronic Commons; it was championed by a woman named Liss Jeffrey. The project was run out of a building called Chelsea Mews, deep in the heart of the University of Toronto; that is where I met the woman who would become my Web Goddess, Gisela McKay.

As we got to know each other, Gisela pointed out something odd about my life that hadn't occurred to me: I wrote fiction, and I had studied people who post fiction on the internet, but I hadn't posted any of my own fiction on the internet. While I agreed that that was a bit strange, I demurred; although my Masters degree was done entirely online, I didn't know the first thing about creating or maintaining a web page. Gisela, who, among her many talents, is a professional web developer, offered to design a page and walk me through how to keep it going. To ensure that I couldn't refuse, she offered me free space on her server.

I couldn't refuse.

But, what would I write? Reviving *Les Pages aux Folles* as an online project was the most logical way to proceed. When I started it as a print project, I aimed for each article to be around 700 words (in the mistaken belief that this was standard newspaper column length; depending upon the newspaper and the column, it could actually be anywhere from 400 to 600 words); this relative shortness turned out to be a good length for the internet, where long stories require a lot of scrolling and can give some readers eye fatigue. You don't want to give readers eye fatigue.

So, I immediately started posting fiction to the web? Slow down, speed racer. I took the summer of 2002 to build a stockpile of articles. This wasn't meant to supplant weekly writing (since much of the writing would be topical, it would be best to post pieces soon after they were written, something the internet easily facilitates); it was meant as a safeguard against weeks when I was unable to write an update, whether through life circumstances or lack of inspiration. The wisdom of this choice is most vividly illustrated by my experience in 2005, when I had to have triple bypass heart surgery: I prepared four weeks of updates from my stockpile and posted them a couple of days before going under the knife. (As it happened, although I was advised to give recovery at least a month, I was eager to get back to writing after about two and half weeks). My stockpile started with 40 articles; it has fluctuated between 10 and 50 (but mostly closer to 10) ever since.

By the first week in September, 2002, I felt comfortable enough with the cushion that I had produced that I took the plunge and went live with *Les Pages aux Folles*. Years of writing had given me the confidence that I could pull it off (although, like most people who start a project like this, I had no idea how much work I was letting myself in for). It had also given me four complete books that I could place in an archive on the site, which helped me avoid the problem that many web sites have when starting out: a paucity of content. There was enough writing on the web site from day one that anybody interested could stay a while, or be encouraged to keep coming back.

The first three books had been written on a manual typewriter; the fourth on an electric typewriter and a computer. Because of this, I had to type the articles into my computer before I could post them. This forced me to reconsider the material I had previously written, which proved salutary. I gather many writers are highly critical of their own work, but I found that I really enjoyed becoming reacquainted with mine. (Having had to

read through the entire project to collect stories for these special anniversary issues, I feel more or less the same way.) The worst that I will say about my past writing is: “I wouldn’t write exactly that, or in that way now.”

PEDANTIC ASIDE: Is *Les Pages aux Folles* a blog? On one hand, it is a regular publication (every week, without fail; by the 20th anniversary, that will entail 1,040 consecutive weeks) written by a single person. On the other hand, blogs automate the process of posting to the internet (with tools such as WordPress), but I code my text by hand and upload it and any images I may create using tools Gisela taught me. Also, blogs tend to be a single page of text with newer posts higher up (occasionally breaking into an archive page or two), while each piece I post is on its own separate page. It may be a moot point, but I am reluctant to call *Les Pages aux Folles* a blog.

Except...

In trying to explain what an achievement 20 years of *Les Pages aux Folles* is, one of the facts I point out is that, depending upon the year they were started, between 80 and 90 per cent of blogs are abandoned within the first six months of their existence (I assume that the numbers for personal web pages are roughly the same, but I’m not aware of that research). Writers can be exhausted by the commitment (I often refer to my web site as “the insatiable maw;” no sooner do I finish one update than I have to immediately start working on the next). Writers can run out of inspiration. Other life priorities can leave writers without time. Lack of a readership can cause writers to quit out of despair (because I was emotionally driven by a need to write, the lack of readers was never a disincentive for me, although lately I do despair of ever finding an audience, if for no other reason than I know there must be a lot of people out there who would enjoy my writing...if they knew that it existed). Some people might lose their internet access. Twenty years on the internet is a looooooong time is what I’m saying.

By the 20th anniversary, I will have written 38 books of prose and produced nine books of cartoons for *Les Pages aux Folles*. The project will contain over 3,500 pieces of writing, and somewhere between two and a quarter and two and a half million words.

Nor has this been my only writing project. In 2010, I decided to write my first novel. Blame Terry Pratchett. I had never wanted to be a novelist; I was happy writing my short articles. But, in 2010 I learned of a contest for first humorous science fiction novels that was sponsored and would be partially judged by Pratchett. This seemed like a great opportunity for me to do what I do best: be goofy. The only problem with entering a novel writing contest, though, is that you have to write a novel to do it. So, I sat down to write what would become *Welcome to the Multiverse**.

I don’t usually talk about this, but since we’re all friends here, I feel I can state the truth: my first novel took two months to write. Starting from nothing but the desire to write a novel, the first week involved developing the ideas; the next six weeks involved the actual writing; the final week involved rewriting and polishing. This was a stupid short amount of time in which to write 80,000 words (the nine novels I have written since have

taken anywhere from six months to a year to produce), but there were extenuating circumstances, your honour. For one thing, by that time I had been writing for 40 years, so unlike many first time novelists, I had already developed my voice and knew my way around a story. More importantly for this essay, many aspects of worldbuilding that contributed to the novel (for instance, the Transdimensional Authority and the Alternate Reality News Service) had been introduced on *Les Pages aux Folles*, so I wasn't exactly starting from nothing.

Perhaps most important: working on the web site taught me how to quickly turn ideas into prose. When you have a weekly deadline, you have to write fast. Under these conditions, there are two ways writers can go. Like a nuclear explosion, they can burn themselves out. Or, like a nuclear chain reaction, their creativity can feed off itself, allowing them to constantly write new material. I was fortunate that my writing took the latter path.

What's next? I have no idea. I know I have a need to write; if life forces me to go a couple of days with writing even a little, I start to get antsy. Humour is not something that a writer can turn on and off: it is a way of looking at and interacting with the world that becomes a constant in your life. At least, it has become that for me. It does help if it has an outlet, though, so I foresee writing as long as I have the words. (Both my father and my grandfather on my mother's side had Alzheimer's, so there is no guarantee that I will always have the words, or for how long.) Regardless of what happens in the future, I already have a creative legacy (including novels, short stories and unproduced screenplays – so many unproduced screenplays!) that I can be proud of.

I hope you enjoy 12 from 20.

** Sorry for the Inconvenience*

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