

The cover features a large yellow background. On the left side, there is a vertical column of three colored blocks: a large yellow block at the top, a red block in the middle, and another red block at the bottom. A dark blue horizontal bar is positioned at the top right. The text is centered on the yellow background.

Lune Fiction

Issue 19

Lune Fiction: order, peace and beauty

-

the best of issues 1 - 4

29th February 2008

Lune Fiction 19 - The best of issues 1 to 4

Lune: River rising near Newbiggin, county of Cumbria and flowing 45 miles westward and then southward to empty into the Irish Sea a few miles south of Heysham in Lancashire. The river drains part of the northern Pennines and its entry to the sea at Sunderland Point is marked by extensive sand flats at low tide. Lancaster is the major town. (Encyclopedia Britannica 1997).

Fiction: A thing feigned or imaginatively invented; an invented statement or narrative; an untruth (Oxford Dictionary, 1993)

LF 19 - 29th Februray 2008

The Best of Issues 1 - 4

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Comments, advice, contributions and donations are always welcome.

All messages we receive will be announced throught the land.

Post bonum, ante malum

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The next issue - a modern interpretation of Carmina Burana- will be published 25th April 2008. Or not.

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A Few Thoughts on the Concept and Phenomenon of Flash Fiction

Not much more needs to be added to what has been written about flash fiction in previous issues of *Lune Fiction* and there are also numerous articles online and in print on the form and function of micro fiction, aka nano prose, as distinct from macro fiction.

However, I do feel compelled to write about some of the basic notions of flash fiction, such as its validity, the origins of its modern form and its function in today's world.

When Thomas Bernhard, one of Austria's greatest playwrights, wrote and published *Der Stimmenimitator* (The Voice Imitator) in 1978, he was in all likelihood not aware that he was in the process of helping to give birth to what appears to be the modern phenomena of very short pieces of prose now known as flash fiction. Or was he? Flash fiction has been around much longer than acknowledged, for when one trawls through the narratives of yesteryear, one encounters flash fiction again and again, as Humble Sam has often reminded us. Just think of Aesop's fables, the New Testament and the many tales captured in epic stories like *Beowulf*.

And yet there are two prevalent distinctions between modern flash fiction and

historical flash fiction. The obvious one is that tales of yesteryear, i.e. those written before the 16th Century – such as the many stories of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were written in verse, whereas modern poetry contains hardly any narrative (notable exceptions are, for example, Lewis Carroll's poems – *The Hunting Of The Snark*, *Jabberwocky* and so on). The other unmistakable difference between old and new flash fiction is an aspect of the prose style: modern nano stories tend to be written in a journalistic style - particularly the style known as New Journalism, as originally practised by American writers Hunter S. Thompson, Truman Capote and Tom Wolfe. Indeed, it could be argued that the flash stories of *The Voice Imitator* are fictional news articles. Except for the autobiographical pieces which are pure New Journalism. This is of course not surprising, for in flash fiction as much information as possible needs to be conveyed with as few words and phrases as possible and the journalistic style of conveying information is the most suitable for blitz stories. Just as in journalism – and interestingly enough in language development - the maxim in flash fiction is maximum communication with minimum effort.

But does this minimalist approach

reduce the validity of flash fiction? Has flash fiction got less to say, less to offer, than longer pieces of prose? Why is there a certain kind of person who considers flash fiction to be inferior literature?

It is a common misconception that whereas novels and plays – complex narratives – have an intricate network of rhizomes, flash stories don't. What some readers forget is that all narratives are dense as they possess numerous qualities which the reader needs to be aware of as the process of signification requires various conditions for the story to be read, understood and appreciated. As flash fiction needs to be brief, narrative conditions, background information and characteristics are reduced to a minimum, cut out altogether or merely alluded to.

Just because the rhizomes of the story and its background and characters in, say, macro fiction such *Moby Dick*, *The Brothers Karamazov* or *The Magic Mountain*, are obvious, doesn't mean that the roots of a short or flash story are sparse as the reader may not be immediately aware of them.

The roots of a blitz story are just as complex as those of a novel, especially when one takes Roland Barthes' concept of mythology into account, for, of course, different stories mean different things to different people. The belief

system of the reader is integral to the process of signification, the perception of meaning in a narrative, and the connotation of a story is in the mind of the reader and not in the denotation on the page. To exemplify this, look no further than the concept of the policeman: righteous upholder of law and order or fascist bullyboy?

Certainly, the reader's appreciation of flash fiction is based more on her/ his perception of the world than in regards to a more complex narrative, but none the less the rhizomes of a blitz story are equally dense as those of a novel.

In addition, with regard to Lune Fiction (and please do allow me to now slightly change the tone of this editorial), one should note that whereas the contract between a novel and a reader states that the consumer of the story will be entertained and/ or informed one way or the other, the contract between Lune Fiction and its audience is a bit more complicated.

The readers, when they read an issue of LF, think they do it freely, think they do it as masters of their own will, think they do it with an open mind. But as mentioned further above, they do it within the parameters of their belief systems and their knowledge of the world. They are slaves to their own background.

So it is in Lune Fiction's nature, writ-

ten in its constitution, not to be provocative but to be thought provoking. It demands that its readers return again and again to the various stories published until they are fully appreciated, for how else can stories like *The Tale Of Diogenes And Alexander The Great* be recognised for what they are. This either stimulates readers or alienates them and thus a loyal readership has been built up over the last few years with newcomers to the website gladly signing up to the LF fellowship or people with a predilection for mediocre writing dressed up as sophisticated mutton being led away by their preferred authors to be locked up in the latrine.

Or not.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that flash fiction is perfectly in step with our age, the beginning of the 21st Century, the age of the Information Super Highway. It is increasingly forming the mind of the discerning reader and the collective consciousness, ideals and conduct of the on-line literary community. Nano prose is simultaneously the embodiment of instant gratification and the embodiment of the ambiguous nature of modern life which one has to confront again and again until one has discovered its meaning, its significance. Or until one has given up and walked away.

Lune Fiction is a valiant attempt to not just promote flash fiction on-line and in the Anglophone world but also to reveal insights into what it means to be human in the 21st Century and the nature of the mind and soul of *homo sapien electricis*. It gives its readers moments of awe and wonder or it at least amuses them. Whatever the rights and wrongs of Lune Fiction and nano prose are, may you the reader enjoy this unique collection of flash fiction in your own way, for, to paraphrase Baudelaire, there is nothing here but order, peace and beauty. Lune Fiction magazines are an intricate assemblage of various ideas & concepts, and as such a mere reflection of a flash of the human mind and his awareness of existence.

And unlike this editorial, the stories here really are short.

Walk on air and converse with the Titans,



Humble Sam

Lone tagged metaphor leads the way

- a brand new story by Humble Sam

The refuge of metaphors (both high-brow and low-brow) is unknown. We know that similes, their less controversial cousin, are trapped forever in the public's glacial consciousness but where do metaphors go to when they are abandoned? This is a question that has vexed scientists for centuries.

But that is about to all change, for at present a lone metaphor is close to revealing where the world's literary descriptions spend their time when they are out of the public's eye - much to the relief of a team of scholars studying their behaviour.

In April, the scholarly researchers attached eight satellite tags to metaphors to track their journeys, only to see seven of the devices stop singing.

But as the UN's Metaphor Watch map now shows, the remaining tagged rhetorical expression - known as 'This Neck Of The Woods' - is on the move.

In the past week, it has swum hundreds of miles through the maelstrom of Flowery Literary Incontinence and is thought to be heading for what experts call the Tranquil Sea of Ignorance, the Valhalla of absent clichés, where metaphors can do as they please (Legend has it that they are free to do what they want to do. Free of controversy that is and they are unbound to do what they would never do in polite society, for the prying eyes of critical reviewers are not around (although rumour has it that once or thrice a

zealous critic has ventured North in search of this mythical literary Mecca only to be repelled by schools of parables)).

The no longer elusive figure of speech is being pursued by the mean old beast 'Dark Horse', and appears on the UN's News website's map as metaphor two (MII).

Until the past few days, it had remained close to the area where it had been tagged, just west of Greenland. The researchers believe an abundance of thick sea ice, perfect for it to laze about on after feeding on morphemes and lexical items, was keeping it from embarking on its migration.

However, now the ice has begun to retreat, MII has begun its north-western journey.

Cees De Boer, a bookish bloke from the Dutch Literary Research Institute and one of the tagging project's scientists, said: "It is great news that it has been moving. We are really pleased... pleased as punch!"

The pseudo-metaphysical phrase has swum about 400km west to the mouth of Cumberland Sound - an erudite flow that lies between Baffin Island and eastern Canada.

Dr De Boer said: "Previously, we have seen one metaphor cross over to this area, so seeing another metaphor do this supports the connection between the learned population of North America and the one of Europe.

"Obviously, with such a small number we cannot be certain that this is where all metaphors migrate to, but it does hint that this is the place, the Nirvana of Cliché Free Being."

He added: "We had hoped to see many more do

this - but when tags are deployed in this way, they just will not last for very long. Just briefly... a flash in the pan, really”.

The researchers will continue to follow the metaphor's journey over the next few days as its tag continues to signal. They will be looking to see if it moves closer to a number of sites where it can "haul out" on to ice pieces, looking for discarded allegories.

This tagging study of idiomatic expressions is being run by you and me but not them.

Stop Press

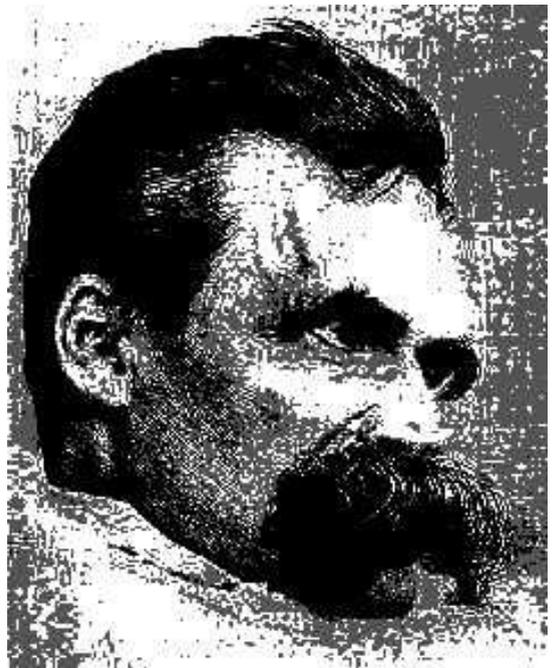
Due to pollution by a massive surge in creative writing since 1990 (and the steady decline in the number of the seas' pirates), the icy restraints of literature are melting away and metaphors, the most elusive of analogues, will soon be followed to the world's ends. Indeed, the Russians are currently transforming Space City into Book City, a venture which will allow Russian scholars to train so-called literary tourists ('biblionauts', known in the West as librinauts) to explore, for a hefty sum of money, that sector of the Tranquil Sea of Ignorance which the Russians have laid claim to.

Bookish campaigners fear that some of the biblionauts will track down the metaphors and shoot them for making their education a misery or that some will 'merely' castrate them so as to make sure no more metaphors will enter this world. Another growing concern is that many biblionauts will want to drag the metaphors back to reality into their homes where they can be laid claim to by unscrupulous authors and

publishers.

Bookish campaigners are now demanding that the metaphors be left alone and that a literary free zone be established north of Baffin Island.

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Cut out this advert thing, send it to us and then we'll recycle it

Waxing Lyrically (Mollie Baxter)

There are many trends apparent in the modern world. Often they appear unrelated.

Last night I decorated my room with tea lights, enjoying the aroma of vanilla that permeated the air. My eyes fell upon a magazine lying open at the classifieds.

“It’s never been easier to remove unwanted fatty deposits from tums, bums and thighs!”, it proclaimed. “Thousands of normal women enjoy the benefits of liposuction - why don’t you?”

In the glimmering candlelight I pictured thousands of women, prone, Hoover nozzles slurping naughtily under the skin of their thighs.

“Where does all that fat go?”, I wondered, lighting another night light, and placing it in a dish of water, where it bobbed peacefully.

I can’t afford liposuction, but I can enjoy these little candles, so cheap and abundant these days. A wick popped fattily.

Originally published October 2001

An Armed Assault (Jomar de Vrind)

A security guard is in hospital after being attacked in Lancaster by an armed fruit. An unidentified banana struck 50 year old Jimi Scythe with a bin bag this morning. Mr Scythe was carrying a large amount of cash which the robber got away with. The incident happened in Penny Street just after zen o’clock.

The robber speeded away with two accomplices, a strawberry and an apricot, in a fruit bowl stolen yesterday from Pizzeria Giuseppe’s. The bowl has been found abandoned somewhere

else.

The police say the criminals have left the area in a hyper sonic juggernaut. The armed robber is yellow, quite long for a banana, slim, and has a brown complexion. The strawberry is six feet round, heavily built, and is wearing a green clothe cap. The driver is a genetically modified apricot.

The police say they are indeed very naughty fruit.

1st published in 2nd edition of the-phone-book.com

Roundabout in Warden Park (LJ Reynolds)

Wendy turns slowly, remembering when she was eleven. Graham, her father’s friend, “I pulled back the covers to have a look at you last night. You were beautiful, all sprawled out...”. The sunset sends swathes of colour across the darkened sky, this is the park where a man is known to fiddle with children. On the roundabout, she turns slowly on her back, hair trailing on the ground, this is where she used to stay with the boy she loves.

Turning slowly, I see swathes of red cross the darkening sky.

Originally published October 2001

Sock it to ‘Em, Mikhail (Jane Scargill)

Mikhail noticed, on the train to work, that his sock was on inside out. It made him feel uncharacteristically jaded.

He tried to turn it the right way round without removing his shoe and accidentally touched the

foot of the woman diagonally opposite. She looked at him challengingly. Mikhail apologised and continued with his task. The socks, which he had been given for Christmas, each had a picture of a kangaroo on the top. They didn't look right inside out.

As the train neared its destination, Mikhail, still unsuccessful, noticed that the man opposite had one sock on inside out as well. The man looked affable, relaxed and capable. Mikhail reflected that perhaps having an inside-out sock was not too important after all. Still, being a dynamic, go-for-it type of chap, as the train lunged to a stop, he stooped to have one last try.

Mikhail grabbed hold of his fellow traveller's sock and managed to turn it the right way round, without removing his shoe.

"Thanks!", the man said, as they both got off the train.

Mikhail made his way to work, his usual fresh morning enthusiasm returning.

Originally published October 2001

Changes (Ken Walton)

"Let's swap lives," I said.

"What?" We were standing at Lancaster Gate.

"Look, no-one can tell us apart. Everyone thinks we're twins. Even our parents can't tell the difference. Let's swap lives."

He just stared at me.

"What have you got to lose?", I asked, "You've failed your degree, you've no job, no prospects, no hope. We could have a little wager."

"Ah, one of your wagers!"

"... and if you win, you get my life. First from Oxford, management position in pater's firm, penthouse apartment, Ferrari, yacht and the only debutante in West London who wears red leather thigh boots."

The last one got him. "So what's the wager?"

"You have to ride your bike along the central rail to the next station."

"What? That's live!"

"You've got rubber tyres. come on. School BMX champion of 1989. It's a doddle."

"What's in it for you?"

"Life's too easy. I like a challenge. I want to prove I can make it to the top under my own steam."

He took a deep breath. "How do I know you'll keep your end of the bargain?"

I emptied my pockets. "Here's my wallet, ID, keys, mobile. You give me yours. You'll ride out of that tunnel a new man."

His jaws clenched, relaxed. "You're on."

A train pulled in. "See you at the next stop." I stepped aboard, left him standing with his bike on the platform. His face was pale as we pulled away.

I waited at the next station. I imagined him pedalling though the dark, his light glinting on the narrow steel rail, utter concentration on his face. I typed my mobile number into his phone and pressed the call button.

Was that a clatter and a cry out of the darkness? He always was jumpy. When the next train pulled in, the driver's face told the story.

My parents were upset. They assumed it was suicide - especially after they found the body of the only debutante in west London who wears

red leather thigh boots, tied to the bed strangled with a red silk scarf. It's a game we used to play. Accidents happen. I read about it in the morning paper. Then I went to sign on.

Originally published October 2001

A. Smith (Jomar de Vrind)

Mr Smith gets up, has breakfast, cleans his teeth and goes to work. He works all day, pausing at noon for lunch.

Mr Smith goes home, eats his supper, watches the TV and goes to bed. He falls asleep happily. Mr Smith likes the life he leads.

And why shouldn't he? He is, after all, only a page filler.

Originally published October 2001

Trouble With The Law (Nygel Harrot)

The police picked on me. They said: "You have the right to remain silent".

So I said: "

".

And I meant it.

Originally published October 2001

Williamson Park (Mollie Baxter)

My love in his frustration leaps up and down, sparking his gas lighter in an attempt to incinerate, one by one, the midges circling his head.

"... Get... Gah! ... Aha!"

With one last expletive, he collects his things, stomps around me and sits down again some distance away.

The midges leave a polite pause, waiting for him to settle.

Then they quietly tumble over me to reclaim the space above his head.

I sigh and enjoy the view.

Originally published October 2001



Monday Morning (*Jomar de Vrind*)

She had been talking for less than ten minutes when she turned her gaze on him. A cold look and a barely concealed disdain featured on his face. She had anticipated this. It was going to be one of those days.

Dressed in her night gown, she had reason to be happy. They had just spent their first holiday together in months and returned late last night. It had been a delightful weekend of sight seeing, love making and shopping in Brussels.

She felt they were one again.

She ignored her husband's frosty reception and asked for the marmalade next to his plate.

He passed it over and eyed her carefully. He moved his lips and uttered his first word of the day.

"Why?"

Her job demanded tough choices. He meant a lot to her. He was not just her spouse. He was her lover, friend and the father of her four gorgeous children. He was also the editor of her magazine, a journal on the great cities of the world. He was her one and everything.

She loved him and that morning, watching him slumber beside her, she had come to the conclusion that she had to be firm.

When he woke up, she sacked him.

"You're a shit editor."

Originally published June 2002

A Stitch In Time (*Mollie Baxter*)

My love is explaining the nature of the universe. It is 3 am. We are sharing our bed with scientists in elevators, men in glass rooms, revolving

spheres and the space-time continuum.

"... And so, black holes are infinitely small ..."
My brain sags in the middle. Just like a half-baked sponge when you open the oven too soon.
"Well, it's no wonder they've not found any, then."

"Yes, but ..." I watch him recall and regroup his thoughts for another launch.

"I've found one." I say and hand him my match-box. He raises an eyebrow, but slides open the drawer a crack and looks in.

He goes pale and hands it back.

"That showed him.", I think smugly and turn off the light.

Originally published June 2002

Aloe Vera (*Jane Scargill*)

Helen, after meeting her Aunt Vera at a wedding, invited her for tea, with the intention of finding out more about Vera and her mother's eldest sister, Nora. As a child, Helen had seen the photograph of a girl in her late teens on her grandmother's fireplace. She only needed to look at her mother's face to know not to ask any more.

"It's your Aunt Nora. She died not long after her time in France," Granny Peters said.

It was never mentioned again.

Helen put a soap dispenser in the toilet with the label Aloe Vera to make her auntie feel welcome.

When she turned up, Helen thought she saw a figure walking behind her, but quickly dismissed this as one of her hallucinations.

As the two women sipped tea, ate digestive bis-

cuits and talked about Nora, Vera appeared increasingly uncomfortable.

"My dad was not Nora's dad," Vera said. "And Nora..." She sprung up. "I must visit the loo". Helen, while cutting more Battenburg in the kitchen, suddenly heard a scream. Vera was looking in the mirror at a face that was not hers. It was holding a gun in its hand.

"Allo Vera", Nora said.

Originally published January 2002

Millennia Rumours (Jomar de Vrind)

Rumours have it that something nasty is going to happen within the next few weeks. Or that's what some experts want us to believe.

According to the latest scientific research, the day will turn into night or the night will turn into day. Rain may or may not fall from the heavens. Black will become white. Or not.

Other experts, however, argue that the future is not quite as bad as some people make it out to be. In fact, things may even get better soon!

"A mountain of candy will rise from the bottom of the sea, day light will last for 24 hours, lakes and rivers will turn into all hues of wine and the January sales will last all year", argues one expert.

And one particular person, who wouldn't reveal his name to us, is incredibly optimistic.

"Sure, the millennium bug thingie and the War On Terror was incredibly disappointing", said Mr X, "but I am hopeful that the end of the world will come soon".

After much badgering, he revealed that he is the seventh son of a seventh son.

Originally published June 2002

Death by Spider Plant (Mollie Baxter)

"Do you think I'm made of yoghurt tubs and potting compost?", I cried in desperation.

The spider plant variegated at me soothingly.

Its latest batch of offspring looked at me with cute adoration.

"Stopit! I am not your father!", I snapped, stomping off to look for containers.

Originally published January 2002

Flatpacking (Andy Morris)

It was as Chuck had said the night before: "It's like flat-packing rabbits, you can fit most of them in with a bit of compression, but those big floppy ears - They just go all over the place".

"You've got to staple them down, son! It's messy but it gets the job done."

He packed his bag for Nevada. He was sure there was something he'd forgotten.

"Fuck it", he said and left her.

Originally published January 2002



LF 3 Editorial: An Extract (*Humble Sam*)

In this world of suicide bombers, armed American assaults, Danish cartoons and other naughty things, I feel it is my duty to highlight an alarming development in the United Kingdom: the increase in old ladies exploding. Only yesterday, 85-year-old Myra Dewberry of 57 Roswell Gardens, Lancaster, spontaneously combusted on the high street outside the Big Bank. She scattered herself over an area of twenty square yards, destroyed some window panes and injured a few members of the public. An eyewitness I spoke to told me that 'he saw an old lady shuffling along and mumbling to herself about old money and then suddenly exploded.'

"There were blood and guts everywhere. It wasn't very nice".

According to the police, old ladies exploding on the high streets of Britain's cities is on the increase. Last year there were two such occurrences, whereas this year there have been three so far.

Something must be done.

Originally published April 2006

A Few Thoughts On Death (*Snoof*)

Death is not allowed to indulge in any emotional involvement. None whatsoever.

If it were, then just a minimal indulgence of sentiment would drive it mad within days, if not hours.

And yet... it quietly mourns its lack of attachment. Untarnished by such things as love and hate, it drifts through the atmosphere (the ether?

Ed.) and does its job. It is the divine janitor, the ultimate cleaning lady if you will. God's vacuum cleaner, Lucifer's pan and brush.

Death's scythe never rests and yes, it never rusts. Its garb, a black, dusty, dismal robe, is not susceptible to time, for otherwise it would have long since been reduced to fluff, dust and stuff. But are these benefits not really a curse? How often does Death sit with empty eye sockets staring morosely into Nihilon, wishing for its robe of rotten, stinking, discarded human waste to fall apart and its scythe's infernally sharp edge to slacken?

All it wants is a one-way ticket to the place it has sent so many to.

How do I know these things? Do you, perhaps, find me presumptuous in claiming to know so much about Death? Do you? And yet I know so little.

Soothe your indignation. My presumptions are not groundless. Death is a frequent visitor to my house. It is that uninvited (and uninviting) guest who creeps in and out. It leaves soiled clothes in the wardrobes, dirty dishes in the sink and used tissues on the table. And I, none the wiser, tidy up the mess as best as I can.

And yes, after each call, I sigh "I do hope that was the last time". But deep down in me, where the hard work of digesting events is done, I know that life would not be the same without it. For you know, as well as I do, that without it, the world would become a stagnant, foul and dank place. The clean wardrobes, the unspoilt sink and the spotless table would pine for their erstwhile illusion of use, in remembrance of

past glories. The chair Death sits in, devoid of the bony hips, would sigh wistfully whenever someone made use of it and wishes for Death to crease the leather once again.

But who am I to judge the way of the world? Fate has chosen not to let me know a life without the rattling gait, the dry musty smell, the black robes, the brass scythe...

and that morbid, incessant grin reflecting in the mirror.

Death becomes my family.

Originally published April 2006

God's Not Dead; He Just Smells Funny - An Extract (Hendryk Korzeniowski)

A cockney grave digger - only known as He - talks about his craftsmanship, the pride he has in his job, the great demand for his services and the spectres, such as Edwardian gentry, that visit him at night.

He often contemplates when perched on the toilet. Although it's outdoor, wet, with old books piled around his feet in lieu of proper paper, it's very peaceful and provides a time to relax and think. "Oh yeah", he'd say, wheezing through his fag, "best place to ruminate if you asks me... 'What about the church?' some ghosts say to me. 'Clear off's' wot I say to 'em. The Church?! You gotta be jokin', great big dirty smelly things, with noise like a broken gramophone, over and over, same bloody words, same bloody singing. No bloody sense. And no bloody comfort either." He picks up a copy of the bible and all the pages flutter to the floor. Breathing out with relief, he feels so much better when the toilet door suddenly flies open to reveal a very, very large man. Framed with unearthly light

that overwhelms the smoke, he stands there and stands there, and stands there in his glory, in front of the seated figure that silently crosses his arms over his lap, hoping no one will notice.

"Ere, you somebody famous?"

The silhouette chuckles. "Sure I am boy" slurs a heavy American accent, "to many, I am the Lord." Trumpets glory-glory-hallelujah his words.

He stares in complete astonishment, blinking several times, the fresh woodbine almost hitting the floor. As the blazing light subsides, he sees the figure is very fat, bloated even, a size too big for any toilet to contain; clad in an unkind white lump jump suit, with blue and golden lighting bolts that shimmer out from a freshly-fried fragrance that has skulked into the room like an embarrassing fashion trend. Dark glasses, huge sideburns, a Rolex watch, heaps of jewellery and a very sweaty, unhealthy face all make up this vision of divinity.

"Crikey...well, wot brings you here, er, sir?"

God stops chewing. "Well, folks kinda figured me dead, but it ain't harmed my career. Doggone German philosophers got a lotta answer for."

He laughs along with the Almighty, trying not to blush.

"Thank you very much...little less conversation, boy and I'll still be here."

There is a long and awkward pause. God pulls out a hip flask, no, tries to whip out a hip flask, but his movement is slow and lacking co-ordination; slow-motion trying to signify the super-human, like the Six Million Dollar Man. He notices the stare from his congregation. "Just remember boy, responsibility can damn well affect your sense of alcohol." He winks and takes another swig.

"Er, erm, pardon me sir, but did I, like, er, bury you by mistake sir?"

"Hell no boy. Like I said, it ain't harmed my career."

And he stands there, filling the toilet's tiny doorway, hands on hips, chewing loudly and belching, his jewels clinking in time with his laboured breathes, every inch a deity.

"Ask him" he tells himself, "go on, now your chance, ASK HIM!"

He now has the opportunity to question God himself on anything: life, death, suffering, everything, because he is here, right now, standing in front of him, right here, right now. The souls of thousands of thinkers weep in jealousy as he can ask God anything and everything and get the answers to the questions that have puzzled humanity throughout history. He trembles with excitement at the prospect.

"ASK HIM!"

"Ere, is it true you once caught the clap?" His hands rush from his groin to his mouth as he realises what he has said. Screwing his eyes tight, the old man waits for the lighting bolt.

The Almighty chuckles, wheezing slightly. "Sure I did. I got the clap and gave birth to the whole damn bitch that is creation. S'why life is spread by fucks, boy." He begins to cough loudly, with more than a hint of cancer, bringing up mucous, spitting it out with unnerving accuracy.

"So, er, sir...how's you been keeping?"

"So, so, boy. Forgotten by most.. so goddam lonely, I could die." A single tear creeps down from behind the Almighty's shades. "Times was when I had the TV audience across the whole damn

states...one time..." he drains the flask. "I blame them goddamn long-haired English Beatles, damn communists." He swings his hand down in a karate chop. Almost.

"Still, you've kept your looks sir, hey?"

Several fat fingers smother themselves around his throat as God lifts the old man from his earthly throne, trousers round his ankles. "You insulting me, ya li'l punk? You goddam, blaspheming little punk, hey?"

"No, no. no no, sir" he squawks, "never sir!"

"'Cause I could damn well kill ya now boy, like a damn li'l dog, ya hear me boy? My middle name can be *Misery* "

He nods as God thuds him back onto the toilet. "Sorry sir, didn't mean to offend; always respected you, like, always."

"Thank you very much" purrs the Lord, "just so happens I got a li'l song here..." He then goes through a series of ungraceful martial art movements as an electric guitar starts up and a heavy microphone appears in his flabby hand. The old man is touched. God himself has appeared in his toilet and is about to sing. Now how many people can honestly say a similar thing has happened to them? One in a million, he dare say.

God goes on to sing how your breathing had made for his current sexy mood, as he gyrates his huge hips in a very ungentlemanly fashion.

When the spectacle is over, he claps enthusiastically as the Almighty departs. A deep voice then booms out from below: "God has just left the building!" Crowds cheer.

Originally published April 2006

An Incident On South Road (*Humble Sam*)

A man of uncertain origin was beaten to death yesterday morning with a tabloid newspaper.

The assaulted died during the attack. The attackers were youths of an unimpressive age. Several people witnessed the incident; some tutted, some quickly moved on and others expressed their delight on watching the incident.

The police reacted to the occasion last night by beating up some Asians and picking on a pot smoker. A spokesperson for the local constabulary said, "We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves".

A member of the city council said: "Events like this are occurring more often in Britain. We live in fascinating times."

If nobody claims him beforehand, the man will be thrown into a pauper's grave next Monday.

Originally published October 2002

Antlers (*Mollie Baxter*)

She perches on the bath, knees together, feet apart. From her lowered head, two parallel universes stream.

She waits for pink or blue; pregnant or not.

Originally published October 2002

English For Beginners: Lesson 1

(*Jomar de Vrind*)

We are at home with Family Barraclough

- 1 Mr Barraclough: What's wrong?
- 2 Mrs Barraclough: Nan is coming today!
- 3 Mr Barraclough: What! Your mother?
- 4 Mrs Barraclough: Yes, my mother is coming today!
- 5 Mr Barraclough: Today?

- 6 Mrs Barraclough: Yes. Today is Monday.
 - 7 Mr Barraclough: Oh yes, today is Monday!
- Germaine and William are playing outside:*

- 8 William: What's wrong?
- 9 Germaine: Nan is not here!
- 10 William: No, Nan is not here!
- 11 Germaine: But today is Monday!
- 12 William: Yes, today is Monday!
- 13 Germaine: And Nan is not here. What is wrong?

Germaine and William go inside the house:

- 14 Germaine: Nan is not here.
- 15 Mrs Barraclough: What?
- 16 William: Nan is not here.
- 17 Mr Barraclough: No! Nan is here. And she has something important to say.
- 18 Germaine: Where is Nan?
- 19 William: What has Nan got to say?
- 20 Mrs Barraclough: Here! Here is Nan.
- 21 William: Nan, hello!
- 22 Germaine: Hello, Nan!
- 23 Nan: Hello Germaine. Hello William. I have something important to say today. I have come here to die.

Originally published October 2002

Kevin The Yellow Button (*Peter Jones*)

Hello Boys & Girls, this a story about a little yellow button called Kevin.

Kevin lived on an old yellowish rain coat which belonged to Mary Brown. Mary has had the coat for five years now but she loves it dearly,

because every time she fastens it, she can hear all the buttons squeaking with joy. Kevin's whole family live on the coat.

One day, Mary put on her yellow coat and found that Kevin was a bit loose. But as she was only going to the corner-shop, she could mend him when she got back. Well, as Mary was walking down the street, Kevin popped off, fell a very long way and rolled down the pavement and into a drain. It was cold and damp and smelly down there.

*(Stories will be shortened to accommodate our attention span Ed.)
Originally published October 2002*

The Spider and the Fly (Mollie Baxter)

There was a spider and a fly who were friends. Each day, the fly would comment on the web's progress before he zipped away.

"Lookin' good", he'd say.

"Thank you", replied the spider, quickly and quietly, as he was shy and a little in awe of the fly who was, after all, so loud and well-travelled.

At last, the web was finished and it was very fine. It stretched far across the hawthorn hedge and its composition was perfect. The spider was tired, but pleased.

The fly came zipping along and didn't see the new stretch of web and barrelled straight into it. In his panic, he pulled and strained against the sticky threads - but luck was with him, and he managed to free himself. He tumbled away, his wings all clotted together.

"That spider - how could he do this to me?", he cried.

The web was in tatters. The spider, his work ruined, was inconsolable.

"That fly - how could he do this to me?", he wailed.

A few days passed and the fly managed to clean most of the glue and thread from his wings. He had been in hiding, but, after a while, he thought it might be safe to go flying again.

The spider had untied his web, bit-by-bit, letting the threads drift down to the ground for the slugs to eat. It had been a dark few days, but today the sun was out, and for the first time since the accident, he thought he might begin a new web.

When the fly saw the spider, he turned his head and buzzed noisily past without a word. The spider buried his head in his work.

The same thing happened on the next day and the next, but each time they met, they started to shoot little worried looks at each other.

One day, when the fly was approaching, the spider did not bury his head quite so deeply and the fly did not take such a wide berth around the hedge. The first lines of a new web had taken shape.

The fly took a deep breath. "Lookin' good", he said.

The spider beamed.

"Thank you," he said, "Where are you off to today?"

Originally published October 2002

New Deal Vacancy (Mollie Baxter)

Job Type: Performance/ Entertainment.

Job Title: Knife Thrower's Assistant.

Duration: Temporary.

Originally published October 2002

The Tale Of Diogenes & Alexander The Great
(Jomar de Vrind)

"What would you like?"

"..."

"Gold, diamonds, rubies, silver?"

"Erm..."

"Land, titles, wealth, respect?"

"Hmmm"

"Power, fame, glory, recognition?"

"..."

"A beautiful wife, a nice house, obedient slaves,
a sturdy horse?"

"Erm..."

"You can have anything you want!"

"Hmmm"

"What do you want?"

"Could you move out of the sun, please?"

Originally published October 2002

English For Beginners: Lesson 2
(Jomar de Vrind)

We are at the hospital with Family Barraclough.

1 William: What's up?

2 Germaine: Mum is in here!

3 William: No, Mum is in here!

4 Germaine: Yes, she is having an oper-
ation.

5 William: No, Mum is having an
operation! Why?

6 Germaine: I do not know!

7 William: No, you do not know. That
is not very helpful.

*Mr and Mrs Barraclough are inside the ward
after the operation*

8 Mr Barraclough: How are you?

9 Mrs Barraclough: I am fine.

10 Mr Barraclough: Are you sure?

11 Mrs Barraclough: Yes, I am sure!

12 Mr Barraclough: Shall we tell the children?

13 Mrs Barraclough: Yes, you had better tell the
children.

*Mr Barraclough joins the children outside the
ward*

14 Germaine: Is Mum alright?

15 Mr Barraclough: Yes, your mother is alright.

16 William: Are you sure?

17 Mr Barraclough: Yes, I am sure.

18 Germaine: Why did Mum have an
operation?

19 William: Yes, why did Mum need an
operation?

20 Mr Barraclough: We cannot afford another
child.

21 Germaine: What do you mean,
Daddy?

22 William: Yes Daddy, what do you
mean?

23 Mr Barraclough: It is difficult for me to tell
you.

24 Germaine: Why Daddy?

25 William: Yes, Daddy, why?

26 Mr Barraclough: Your mother has had an
abortion.

Originally published October 2002

Patience (Mollie Baxter)

Contrary to popular belief, Patience is not a card game for one player. It is, in fact, a two-player game.

Player One deals the cards and attempts to arrange them according to the official rules. This half of the game is familiar and need not be explained.

But, what is, more often than not, neglected is the role of Player Two. By the start of play, he will already have declined the offer of joining in.

This done, Player Two seats himself at a convenient distance and offers helpful hints to Player One, kindly pointing out any missed opportunities.

The objective of Player Two is to feel satisfied that he has rescued the game from Player One on as many occasions as possible.

Player One's objective is therefore, not only to assemble the cards by suit and rank, but in doing so, without wrapping Player Two's eyebrows around his fist.

Originally published October 2002

Epic (Marian Hughes)

At his coronation, King Zargon vowed he would end the ancient war. Battles raged across the world until Zargon had won. For almost an hour he shivered in his bunker satisfied that he was the last living thing on the planet. Somewhere in the universe, an insect ruffled its wings.

Originally published October 2002

Flash Essay: Benign Love (Herschel Waters)

Her name is irrelevant to you.

All you need to know is that she has chosen to spend the night with me. She did it last night and she might do it again tomorrow, but what is important is that she is here now.

She sleeps next to me; her skin touching mine. Her blue eyes are closed and the smile upon her face has faded away. My saffron yellow duvet covers her body. Her auburn hair grazes the pillows.

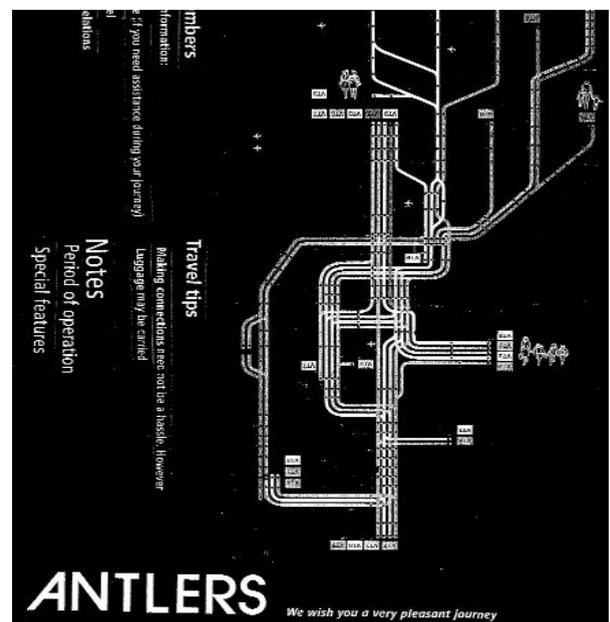
I lie awake and stare at her.

Is she sleeping well? Does she ache in her sleep? Are her dreams free of nightmares? Or is she in a deep slumber, empty of any reveries?

I do not know. How can I?

I'm glad she stayed. Who wouldn't be? Only a fool would have thrown her out. She stirs and I take her into my arms. Tomorrow morning - only a few hours away now - may bring disaster, but right now, just this instant, I have everything I could ask for.

Originally published October 2002



Appendix: Hawnielocks And The Three Enormous Dandelions (*Humble Sam*)

Once upon a time, in the faraway country of Northumberland, there was a right little goer called Hawnielocks who was out in the woods smoking weed and picking mushrooms.

“Hey Dude,” she thought, “this is so like pangalactic”, as she tripped over her feet and landed face first in a puddle.

“Stupid cow”, said a sweet little bunny rabbit hopping past, “that will teach you.” And indeed it did, for the cold water knocked some sense back into her incredibly small mind.

“Oh floppy discs”, thought Hawnielocks, “where am I?”

Just then she noticed a cottage in a clearing.

“Excellent, brilliant”, she exclaimed.

However, she didn't know that it was the house of the Three Enormous Dandelions and she entered the house without realising in what grave danger she was putting herself in. And that's grave as in serious and not as in where corpses are laid to rest, I'll have you know.

Anyway, anyhow; Hawnielocks, to her disgust, found three bowels of dung on the dining table in the living room. She tried some but it was most foul and she threw up and passed out. After a while, she regained consciousness, threw up one more time because, hey, that is so like controversial and decided to inspect the bedroom, for she was most whacked out and needed a good kip. However, there weren't beds in the room but pots in which plants could stand instead. How cool is that?!

Hawnielocks was most perplexed but decided to have a go at being a plant. Just then the Three Enormous Dandelions came back home from work.

“Oi”, said Dandelion A, “which fucker has been tasting my shit?” “Hey, gang-goolie”, roared Dandelion B, “which poo-bum has been trying my shit?” “They must pay the price!”, whispered Dandelion C.

The Three Enormous Dandelions searched the house and found Hawnielocks in the bedroom pretending to be an orchid. Quivering with anticipation, excited beyond belief, driven by the primordial desire to reproduce, they grabbed her, threw her on the floor, extended their pistils and banged her. She groaned and whimpered, as she became green with chlorophyll; she was now pregnant with Dandelion C's child.

The Three Enormous Dandelions sucked out Hawnielocks' brains for, among other equally valuable reasons, brain matter is more nutritious than shit and they hooked her body up to a weird looking machine straight out of a Hans Giger painting that kept her body alive till, after several weeks, she gave birth to Dandelion D.

Then her carcass was buried underneath the patio in the back yard with the other bodies, the Four Enormous Dandelions lived happily ever after and Hawnielocks had received her just desserts.

Good night.

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