

# **METAPHORS and MATZO BALLS**



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*The Pit Digger*

*The Bahrat Tender*

*Your Humble Investigator* (a series in collaboration with Lory Alder comprising:*Chase The Ace, Special Twist, Crooks' Tour*).

### MUSICAL COMEDY

*Two Hours of Happiness* (in collaboration with Malcolm Knight)

# **METAPHORS and MATZO BALLS**

**A Collection of Verse**

**by**

**Joseph Sinclair**

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**ASPEN**  
**London, England**

Published by **ASPEN-London**  
18 Leamington House  
Stonegrove  
Edgware  
Middlesex HA8 7TN  
England  
Tel: +44 020 8958 5462  
Email: joseph.sinclair@btinternet.com

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First published 2016

**ISBN10 1523823674**  
**ISBN13 9781523823673**

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**This book is dedicated to my dear friend, the late  
Ron Moody, and to his wonderful family.**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JESSICA-ANN JENNER

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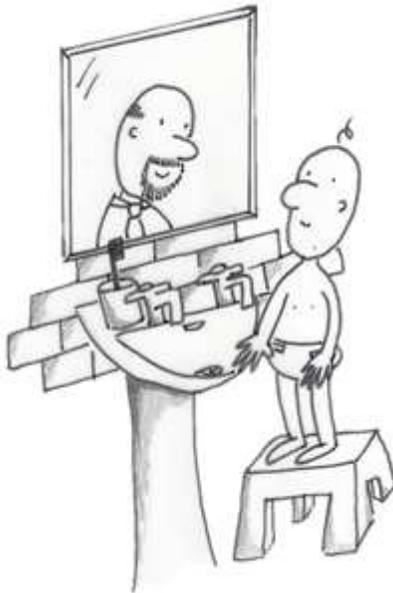
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# (1) METAPHORS

This section comprises a selection of verse mostly carrying some sort of message other than is conveyed by the words alone, and mostly based on one or more incident from my life. Several poems starting at Page 35 were prompted by the severe cardiac condition that required surgical intervention in the summer of 2015.



## A METAPHOR

I took a walk through the park today.  
The leaves were gently dropping  
through the light and shade  
of an Indian summer.

The warmth was quite unseasonal  
and that weird contrast  
between autumnal death  
and the arousing sunshine's heat  
struck me with the strangest thought  
that that could almost be  
a metaphor  
for me.

October, 2014

## A FACE IN A MIRROR

Some days I look in the mirror  
and my father looks back at me.

So long as I can see his reflection  
Sometimes sombre, sometimes sad,  
occasionally smiling;  
for that length of time, at least, I know  
that he is not dead,  
but lives on in me.

Thus do we survive.

Someday, perhaps, my son will look in a mirror  
and I will look back at him

February 2015

## THE KEY TO SERENITY

I have reached the age  
where being alive  
is my only vocation,  
and I am at one  
with all living things.  
So do not ask me  
to destroy myself  
by discarding one I love.  
In loving another  
I am cherishing myself.

Everyone I meet  
is my mirror;  
Everyone I trust  
is my peer.  
Everyone I love  
is my salvation.  
And the only loss I risk  
is my fear.  
And this is thus the key  
to serenity.

# THE LAST APPLE

Each year it happens.  
The apple tree viewed from my balcony  
gives up its fruit  
until at last one solitary apple  
remains high up,  
beyond reach,  
riper, redder, more robust  
than any of the others  
that have fallen or been gathered.

Unmoved by rain,  
unshaken by winds.  
It is as if  
this one remaining fruit  
is determined to resist  
the onset of winter.

Day after day  
I awaken;  
raise my bedroom blind,  
rub my eyes  
and seek it out  
amidst the protecting foliage.

At first resistant to my gaze,  
it then proudly displays  
its presence,  
as if to say

“Behold, I still remain,  
a testament to the perseverance of Fall.”

Each year I too remain  
despite the apple’s everlasting reminder  
that I myself am transient  
and will one day  
be shaken from my bough.

I am reminded of O. Henry’s last leaf  
painted by an aged artist  
to give support and strength and sustenance  
to failing hope of life’s recovery.  
Perhaps the apple, too, is but a daub of oil  
on canvas.

Indeed, am I myself a product of  
an artist’s keen, unfailing eye;  
living in some vast  
parallel universe  
adjacent to and yet unseen  
by all those bygone friends,  
amidst an orchard of fallen, rotting apples?

December, 2014

## GONZALO'S TAIL

The apple is gone.  
It departed today in the wake  
of Gonzalo's sting.

The sting in the tail  
of a hurricane that  
should never have touched our shores.

And so the symbol  
of tenacious life  
no longer bears witness  
to my own tenacity;  
my own survival in an  
irresolute world  
now seeks another yardstick  
on which to pin a shaky faith.

December, 2014

## VIVE LE POMMIER

The symbols of arriving springtime have come late this year  
in north-west London.

The blossom on the apple tree outside my bedroom,  
heralding the anticipation of renewal  
and the promise of life to come  
has been delayed by several weeks.  
And the flowering is less profuse than ever.

I try to seek the metaphor;  
the concatenation of my personal survival  
conveyed by the tree's own growth.  
But what does the linkage signify?  
Another year? Another life? Another death?  
Or none of these?

And if I yearn for signs of immortality  
then I am doomed to morbidity,  
as the tree is programmed to portray  
a slow, inexorable but unmistakable decline.

And still I know that morning light  
will daily draw me to my bedroom window  
and the forlorn desire to see some sign  
some hope, some promise, some assurance  
that there is no inevitability  
of change,  
save that it be change itself.

Instead of which I am presented with  
a demoralising symbol of uncertain hopes.

Spring should be an optimistic season;  
the blossom on the tree should herald  
a renewal, not a death.

But this poor springtime growth has  
merely served to reinforce  
the fears and sadnesses of  
Winter's tribulationary concerns.

### **ENVOI**

Five days the blossom stayed  
and then was gone.  
Nor were concerns allayed,  
but hopes were thus betrayed  
and possibilities undone.

May 2015

## **THE LAST APPLE - REVISITED**

And so another year has passed away  
And once again I see my gaze return  
to that harbinger of a coming day  
and portent of how my heart may yearn  
for all those apples of past memory  
A foregone outcome to this sad summary.  
Will I outlast the final fleshy fruit  
or will it, this time, simply survive me?  
Alas dear reader in this sad pursuit  
you alone may know how it will be.

August 2015

## WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

It is a perfectly formed teardrop,  
or the gold of an autumnal leaf;  
it is the first apple or peach blossom  
of spring..

It is the sight of a rainbow to a child;  
or the sight of the child itself  
observing that rainbow  
for the first time.

A miracle is the sight of a loved one  
beside me when I awake.  
It is her hand in mine  
to still that ache.

Yet Hume would have us believe  
that miracles do violate  
the laws of Nature.  
O, so not so!

For me the laws of Nature  
are the miracle.  
To know that season follows season  
is the awe.

And those that despise reason  
to favour faith  
are merely  
self-deluded fools.

Not for me the accusation  
of the psalm that would  
make me a fool for  
disbelieving god.

That I abandon faith  
and choose instead  
to reason with my brain  
thus verifies belief.

It is as hard for a believer  
to abandon a belief  
as for a man of science  
to discard old laws.

But moral values are self-evident.  
I do not need an act of faith  
to verify  
a moral code.

It is enough to know that I am one  
with all humankind and  
whatever touches another  
touches also me.

I seek no vague salvation,  
no sweetmeat in the sky;  
It is enough to hold most dear  
what is simply "I".

We've wandered far from miracles,  
from acts of faith and such,  
but life itself's miraculous,  
e'en to a worthless wretch.

## THRENODY

There's no sympathy for single mothers  
she said.

He sniggered.

Social services:

what do you expect?

I left me 'usband when 'e beat me up.

They'd 'ave been 'appier to spend  
the public funds  
on a grave.

No gravestone.

Just a plot to mark the spot

and two tiny tots

clutching a bunch of weeds from the  
roadside.

And no place to put 'em.



## IT'S TIME TO PRESS RESET

Only the tough survive.  
It's like a baptism of fire;  
when the going gets too hot  
the tough become firewalkers.  
Singed souls  
with asbestos soles.

I put myself out there –  
all of me on the line.  
I knew it wouldn't last.  
The immersion heater's faulty  
and I have to press  
reset.

## **DON'T ASK ME TO CRY**

Tears come from the heart  
and my heart is as cold as ice.  
So don't ask me to cry,  
for if I cry  
it will not be for you as you are  
but for you as you were;  
when life was serene  
and joy was unsullied,  
and hearts were undemanding . . .  
and tears will never bring that back.

## WHERE HAS IT GONE?

It was  
a nonsense time.  
A time when  
hope and opportunity  
failed to mesh;  
a time when  
chance and comfort  
came afresh.  
And took what little pleasure  
piqued my life  
and turned it round,  
at such a time  
when summer had no end  
and winter came with snow  
and was a friend.

Where is it now?  
Now with my hopes  
and aspirations  
turned to dust?  
What sense is there now that  
the buds have sprung  
their open traps;  
that trees have now released  
their rich green sap;  
thus striving to revive  
that withered frame  
with fruit and wild flowers  
and perpetual peace.

## VACUITY

When did I make the transition  
from over-sexed young man  
to pitiful and pitiable roué?

And what came next?  
The desperately grasping, seeking, eluding  
need to revive  
those failing desires.

And what is left?

## REPULSION

How she despised the scent of worthless lying,  
Aroma of a thousand wretched, wasted days  
Of anguish at the prospect of love's dying  
Last embrace before the vast displays  
Of bitterness that's death-defying.

## THE CUP THAT CHEERS

Man is certainly stark mad  
He cannot make a flea  
Yet he can make  
Gods by the dozen  
Wrote Montaigne.

But surely man can not be wholly bad  
If he can make a cup of tea  
With which to slake  
A heav'nly cousin's  
Throat-dry pain?

## Q.E.D.

Voltaire said  
if god did not exist he would have to be invented.  
But god does not exist,  
except in my imagination.  
Therefore I have invented him.

And according to Montesquieu,  
if I were a triangle  
my god would have three sides.

But god is of my mind  
and thus . . .  
god is me, and  
I am god.

*quod erat demonstrandum*

## LAST BREATH OF THE TIRED MAN

Frost said  
Home is the place where  
When you go there  
They have to take you in.  
But what if there's no place to go home to?  
What if there's nowhere that provokes  
A sense of sight, or sound, or smell  
Or taste or feeling  
That evokes a memory?

You are cut adrift,  
A piece of flotsam  
Going where the current takes you.

The tide runs out,  
The current ebbs and flows  
Yet never ceases.  
And you . . .  
A piece of driftwood,  
Lacking even the semblance of design  
That might inspire a sculptural creation,  
End in a vortex.

## ZUGZWANG\*

I love the English springtime:  
the lambs that gambol  
in the sprouting grass,  
and budding flowers  
that spread their scent.  
But oh . . . !

I hate the sneezes  
and the running nose  
and streaming eyes  
of allergies  
in English springtime.

I love our English summer  
that warms but rarely  
overheats my thirsting  
body. And I love  
its cooling breezes.  
But oh . . . !

I hate those wasps  
that buzz around  
my honey-covered toast  
at breakfast-time outdoors  
in English summers.

I love the English autumn.  
The russets and the golds  
that tease my eye;  
the orchards and their  
apple scent.  
But oh . . . !

I hate that mud  
that sucks my walking boots  
from off my feet  
on country rambles  
in English autumns.

And then the English winter  
that never can decide  
which of the seasons  
it most likes to emulate.  
But oh . . . !  
Thank god there are no wasps!

• *A situation in chess or draughts (American checkers) where one player is forced to make a move they would rather avoid.*

## POST-COITAL EVOCATION

I recall myself growing  
inside her,  
moving and reaching and  
sliding, slithering,  
straining against  
any explosion of feeling.

I remember the sharing  
of tumescent desire;  
the transition from  
connection  
of mouth and breast  
to thigh and cunt.

I remember, I recall . . .  
and that is all that's left;  
the memory,  
the recollection,  
the evocation  
of joys long gone.

Alas  
the sands run out.  
Nothing now remains  
but odium,  
loathsome,  
vile.

I'd had my way  
back in the day,  
but this, oh this  
it must be said:  
I'd left her  
in a loveless bed.

## **THE STRANGE DELIGHT**

There is a taste to violence,  
a tang, a smell,  
a strange delight  
that thrills and yet disgusts  
the fickle sense of worth,  
the sweet austere caress  
that fills and then combusts  
to leave the hated spirit  
stained in hell

## THE ANCIENT REBEL

Once upon a time I was a rebel.  
It was not what I chose to call myself;  
In my mind I was a fighter –  
A fighter for freedom:  
A counter-oppressor.  
Rebels were the others.

I was nourished  
on a code of justice;  
a racial attribute  
taken with my mother's milk  
and reinforced  
by family teachings.

Or preachings.  
And it did not take too long  
before my back was turned  
in self-disgust on  
what I termed sermonising.  
(They called me a rebel.)

It was not what I chose to call myself.

## OUT OF THE SCRUM

I was a pimply-faced youngster,  
fresh from the soot and grime  
of London's East End.  
Removed unexpectedly  
from the bomb and blast and buzz-bomb  
of wartime London  
and deposited precipitately  
in the midst of South Wales  
in the heart of rugby-playing country.  
And I a soccer-playing kid from grubby back streets.  
What could I know of scrums and back-passes  
and blindsides?

But I did my best, while ashamed to admit  
to my ignorance.  
We put our heads together.  
I thought it was a team consultation.  
(They told me later it was a scrum.)  
Someone shouted "heel".  
I thought he was being abusive  
and the ball was so elusive,  
and I turned too sharply,  
and the upper part of my boot  
detached itself from the lower.  
(Our budget didn't run to decent boots!)  
And the team coach came over to me and said  
"Didn't you hear me say 'heel'?"  
And I, on the top of my form, replied:  
"What shall it profit a man to win the whole game,  
but lose his sole?"

## LANCING A BOIL IN MY BUM

They tell me that  
inserting a stent in an artery  
these days is no different  
than lancing a boil in my bum  
when I was a kid.

It should reassure me,  
but the use of a phrase  
such as invasive surgery  
fills me with such dread,  
as does the hated “C” word  
that rattles round involuntarily  
in my head.

And even worse  
is when they call it  
Percutaneous Coronary Intervention  
or PCI for short  
but not for long  
before the dreaded doubts  
once more invade my mind  
in sinuous counterpoint  
to that more disquieting  
portent of invasion.

## **UPDATE TO A PROCEDURE**

So finally they've been forced to confess  
that they have found a complication,  
that they will now have to redress  
and will require procedural reflation.  
Calling it a procedure is less worrying, I guess,  
than calling it an operation.  
And if it ends up in a mess  
the end of which is a cremation,  
there's no need for that to depress,  
at least it will provide a point of conversation.

## **PROCEDURES**

All these procedures that keep us alive  
beyond the earlier anticipated age of death,  
provoke a new reality that does contrive  
to change our focus from expiration to breath.

## CATHETERS

It's interesting that so many kind and loving people  
have hastened to reassure me that the  
catheterizing procedure of inserting stents into arteries  
is nowadays so commonplace

as to evince no worrying concern.  
The unquestionably genuine motives of these people  
is truly appreciated by me  
but has raised in my mind one significant conundrum,

if so many sufferers have successfully  
enjoyed that cardiac procedure,  
what has happened to the ones who failed  
to recover from the "simple" operation?

After all, who would attempt to console me  
with the news of those who died?  
Perhaps I should just look on the bright side,  
that I may soon be asking them myself!

## ON HAVING A BLOOD TEST

Blood tests are something I could do without  
But they are alas a necessary evil  
And though it's really not a thing to shout about  
They haven't so far (in my case) proved lethal.

However it was with a deal of trepidation  
That I presented myself at phlebotomy today.  
The result did not match up to my anticipation;  
The perfect vein was quickly pierced I'm glad to say.

It did, at least, give some sense of direction  
To medical support for my ongoing treatment  
Avoiding, to my great relief, any infection  
Or disconcerting prospect of impeachment.

While the symptoms are improved by the procedure,  
The condition, sad to say, is not remitted,  
And the problem, even sadder, gets no easier,  
While the health practitioners remain committed

To additional probing examination,  
And are calling me for further tests next week,  
Despite the blood flow's vast immoderation  
That required a lot of plugging of the leak.

When they put me into my final casket  
And thus dispose my bones and body once for all  
I can imagine someone there will ask it:  
"We wonder why his body seems so awfully pale."

## STEM CELL TRANSPLANT

My lovely daughter Emily  
is fighting for her life.  
She may not be aware of it  
beneath the surgeon's knife,  
admitting of a doubt  
for her is never rife.

I wish I might have half as much  
courage in my own  
meagre confrontations with  
the symptoms that I've grown  
accustomed to and which  
are vastly overblown.

## **IDLE THOUGHTS IN A HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM**

Sitting and waiting in the hospital reception area,  
gave me time to think; and feeling even warier,  
having just suffered the very first nosebleed of my life  
and carrying within my wallet a warning card so rife  
with the advice that its possessor is subject to the danger  
(I know this may sound somewhat dog in manger)  
inherent in an anticoagulant called rivaroxaban  
and (if this doesn't overstretch your attention span)  
in the event of bruising or of bleeding  
medical advice must be sought before proceeding  
any further. That is to say, at once, or even faster.  
or, at least, with speed sufficient to avert disaster.

So, as I say, there sat I contemplating  
(no, not my navel, but) the rather aggravating  
progress of events that had brought me to this juncture,  
that ended recently in a procedural puncture  
preparatory to the insertion of a stent  
the culmination of which they had to circumvent.  
This gave me time, while waiting for the nurse  
to minister to my problem, or at least rehearse  
for my own delectation the best course  
I would have to follow, not to make the situation worse.  
At this point let me interrupt my own amorphous  
rambling to pay due tribute to the hospital service.

This versifying for which I have developed a proclivity  
means that I'm never at a loss these days for an activity  
to occupy a boring period of gross inaction  
replacing boredom with cerebral satisfaction.

So there I was, awaiting the arrival of the bloody nurse.  
(Sorry, that sounds like an awful curse.)  
In fact her blood-related treatment meant a lot to me  
and was a simple adjective for her phlebotomy.  
At that point my thoughts turned quite naturally  
to the forthcoming repeat angiography,  
and all the helpful comments by my tender-hearted  
friends, and the advice that they imparted.

I was quite astonished by the growing number  
of people who this affliction did encumber  
all of whom it seemed were anxious to ensure  
that I was quite relaxed about what I had to endure.  
Instead of being reassured I wondered  
why the pessimists apparently were so outnumbered.  
Indeed the views were so greatly one-sided  
I found it strange there were no “undecided”.  
Are they reluctant because of superstition?  
Or is it that they wish to avoid an admission  
that their empathic fear of bodily invasion  
has led them to avoid arterial-related implantation?

But most of all I felt there should be scored  
some “Nos” to balance the procedural record.  
but they have been unbelievably silent,  
whilst I’ve been growing every day more violent.  
Is it, dare I suggest that it is just perhaps  
because they may have suffered a relapse?  
And then I had the most amazing thought of all,  
and your objections I am anxious to forestall:  
but I feel impelled to discuss the thought  
that there’s a reason why they have not brought  
their negativity to this post. Is it quite beyond the pale  
to suggest they’re no longer here to tell the tale?

# POSTMAN'S KNOCK (1)

(My first kiss - at age 11)

The tremulous reaction  
to her guileless approach;  
the terrible attraction,  
the terror of her touch

the unaccustomed measure  
of closed lips taking aim;  
the merest feather pressure  
and I fled home in shame.

## POSTMAN'S KNOCK (2)

(My second kiss - at age 12)

Her lips touched mine  
as soft and gentle  
as the feathered brush  
of a butterfly's wings,  
and then they parted  
oh, so slightly,  
and I froze  
and turned  
and ran away.

And through the decades  
that have since elapsed,  
one thought is ever present  
with me.  
What if I had  
simply responded  
at that time?  
How might my life  
have changed?

## WE SHOULD LISTEN TO OUR CHILDREN

We should listen to our children  
We may not wish to do,  
But we should not forget the fact  
That we were children too.

We should listen to our children  
When they give us advice  
And button up our sarcasm.  
It really isn't nice.

We should listen to our children  
E'en when they give us pause  
They're looking for acknowledgement  
And not for our applause

We should listen to our children,  
Yes, even when they moan,  
The consolation being they'll  
Have children of their own.

What goes around will come around  
And it is plain to see  
The pattern will repeat itself  
Unto posterity

## THAT WHICH GOES AROUND

The sins of the father are visited on the children  
or so the bible would have us believe.

My own experience suggests  
that it is the sins of the children  
that are visited on their parents.  
I see in my relationship with my son  
an absolute parallel with  
my father's relationship with me.  
The guilt I now feel for a failure to feel,  
for behaviour that was unthinking  
rather than unfeeling,  
but still obstructed feelings,  
in my past,

I suspect will one day be shared  
by my progeny.

I cannot criticise  
him for behaviour  
that I recognise  
and identify as being my own  
in the past.

It makes me feel no better.  
Nor, in truth, does it make me feel worse.  
It simply is.

And has to be accepted.  
And can merely be abated  
by belief in the mantra that  
what goes around will come around.

## NOW COUNT YOUR DEAD

Now count your dead,  
he said.

The welfare of the many  
is hampered by the few  
who simply hadn't any  
thing to do,  
except to get their kicks  
from others laying bricks  
from which their  
greedy edifices grew.

## A POET'S SUPPLICATION

If I can touch the heart and inmost soul  
Of just one doubting anxious questing mind,  
Responding to the most impassioned call  
Of question marks that remain undefined,  
Then may my sadly feeble efforts be  
Rewarded without danger of rebuff  
And my own inner doubts allowed to flee,  
As touching just one soul would be enough.  
If I have brought the monstrous regiment  
Of hidden doubt or even abject fear  
To bitter rage or hate or merriment,  
Then would I count the cost to me less dear.  
And finally what held me in distress  
Would be resolved into unworthy bliss.

(2)

## COMMENTARIES

This section comprises a selection of verse which is intended to provide personal comment on current social and politico-economic issues.



## JE SUIS CHARLIE

I do not walk in measured tread,  
I cannot spare the time;  
And steady pace is better suited to the dead  
Or projects more sublime.

I see them dressed in garb of green  
As best befits the land  
That harbours jihadist and others more obscene  
And not their native sand.

They bear allegiance to no state  
That may have sheltered them,  
But spread instead their ugly message born of hate  
And anxious to condemn.

It would be easy to cast blame  
On perpetrators of  
The outrage that most freshly has induced our shame  
And dissipates our love.

But this would be to hide our guilt  
At similar events  
That other so-called freedom fighters have but built  
And empty rage foment.

The question that we must address  
Is why these souls should choose  
Defection from their lives of love, and thus aggress?  
Why do they not refuse?

What is there that holds them in thrall  
And draws them to a place  
That their forefathers chose to leave for freedom's  
call?  
Is it a search for grace?

Is it the hope of paradise  
Should they in jihad die?  
Seventy-two-virgins is perhaps the promise  
On which they then rely?

They claim that Allah is their lord,  
that Islam is their life.  
They spurn the pen; relying solely on the sword.  
The Quran is a knife

with which to cut the Gordian knot  
that engirdles their guide.  
The jihad route to paradise, the unbeliever's lot.  
But we are mystified.

What must we then on our side do  
that hold freedom dearly?  
I just demand the freedom that I give to you  
*Car moi, je suis Charlie.*

# NUMINOSITY (OR HUMANISM OWES A DEBT TO THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Is humanism Utopian?  
You really have to think about it.  
Or is it rather more dystopian?  
No, then I think you'd never doubt it.  
It seems that disbelief is best.

Humanism owes a debt  
to thinkers of the Enlightenment,  
although I haven't paid it yet,  
I think of it as my entitlement  
to settle it at some behest.

I very early cleared my mind of Kant,  
experiencing a vast relief,  
approaching his *chef d'oeuvres* extant;  
removing knowledge to allow belief;  
the opposite of what he had expressed.

It occurred to me I ought to dig up  
(or should I say instead ex-hume?)  
what constitutes at least an egg-cup-  
full of wisdom that I might consume  
with non-platonic zest.

But wondering how on earth to do so  
and thinking he might hold the key,  
I fixed my sights on Jean Jacques Rousseau  
and set sail for my destiny,  
while trying not to feel depressed.

Voltaire's voices loudly rang in deaf ears  
as did the Persian Letters of Montesquieu  
and failed to still my latent fears.  
And thus I felt no need to rescue  
Adam Smith (morality-obsessed).

To put Descartes before the Horse-  
men of the Apocalypse  
War, famine, pestilence and worse.  
Who could guess it would eclipse  
my thought, wherefore I was oppressed.

Or take the case of Denis Diderot  
a friend of Hume and others seedier.  
and one you might consider so  
rash as to produce an encyclopedia  
to get his knowledge off his chest.

That precious quality of truth  
was Mary Ann's\* description of it.  
It would not take a Sherlock sleuth  
to simply thus produce a conviction of it:  
an elementary request.

I cut my questing teeth on Russell.  
His secular logic had a profound effect  
and seemed to stir each red corpuscle  
inhabiting this fervid non-sect-  
arian but doubting breast.

\**Mary Ann Evans, aka George Eliot, in Adam Bede*

I later turned my eye on Dawkins,  
and his concern with my divine delusion.  
A sceptic whose inspiring squawkings  
validate my disillusion  
and emphasise an ill-starred quest.

And so I felt the pointlessness of it.  
Progress is the best end for a man to see  
And belief simply produced less profit  
for reality's dispelling of my fantasy.  
*So, in the end, I acquiesced.*

## HOW TO BEHEAD A HOSTAGE

*[Therefore when you meet the unbelievers,  
smite them at their necks.  
Thus does Allah test you,  
and, according to Qu'uran,  
those that are slain in Allah's way,  
will never have their deeds forgotten.]*

They called him Jihadi John.  
It was not his name.  
Mohammed Emwazi was how he was  
really known.  
Born in Kuwait;  
brought up in Britain.  
How are such monsters made?  
They have special classes  
associated with the mosque.  
How to slay  
in the name of Allah.  
The mosque does not encourage them,  
but the mosque is a useful hub  
for recruitment  
and good camouflage  
for activities denounced by  
the majority of the congregation.

We really cannot blame  
the parents,  
we, who have spawned our own share  
of mad dogs.  
“He was always such a good boy”,  
we hear them cry.

“Charlie’s such a good boy, a good boy”  
runs the Dia Frampton lyrics  
“so compliant, quiet as a stepping stone”.  
“You’re such an easy target,”Dia says,  
“without a rebel bone”.

*[Do you hear what I’m saying?]*

But this is in the West,  
where tolerance is synonymous with  
weakness.

Pinpointed as terrorists  
by the enforcers of public order,  
(perhaps better defined as errorists)  
so hesitant to deny these miscreants  
their legal rights,  
these sickening abominations  
(undeserving of the name of Man)  
are able to perpetrate their outrages  
and continue to abuse the State  
that has nourished them.  
All in the name of  
political correctness.

An equal tolerance  
has never yet been granted  
to one suspected of a similar  
disregard for the traditions  
and beliefs and loyalties  
prized within their own  
Islamic State.

We also have to ask ourselves:  
would Russia tolerate this situation?  
And furthermore  
why is that immense country  
so free, apparently, from Jihadism  
when it has been responsible  
for far more Muslim slaying  
than any other Western nation?  
Is it perhaps that very fact:  
that absence of such toleration  
has rendered it immune  
from such attacks?

*[Do you hear what I'm saying?]*

So if you really want to take a hostage  
and satisfy your primitive desire  
to lop off a head,  
the road to take is spread out there  
before you.  
You need to move to  
freedom-loving nations of the West.  
Pronounce your aims  
in non-equivocating terms  
and tie them very closely  
to doctrinal belief.  
No matter how outrageous  
they may seem.

Indeed, the more absurdly  
barbarous and primitive  
the ideology that you spout,  
the more your hosts  
will backward bend  
and shower upon you all the  
benefits of a beloved friend.  
Indeed, in bending backward  
they are making a symbolic  
gesture:  
baring and presenting you  
a throat.

[**Now** *do you hear what I'm saying?*]

## THE REMORSE OF A TROUBLED MIND

I look back to the memory of one revered  
and recognise belatedly that, as I feared,  
with all such thoughts that are but refugees  
from Life's repugnant and loathsome disease  
that is a chronic chronicle of cardinal regret,  
the anguish is not prepared to leave me yet.  
The pain enters the maelstrom of my mind  
sufficiently, it would appear, to raise the blind  
on life's insidious theatrical disguise  
that renders impotent such exercise.

How she despised the scent of worthless lying,  
Aroma of a thousand wretched, wasted days  
Of anguish at the prospect of love's dying  
Last embrace before the vast displays  
Of bitterness that's death-defying.

The jack hammer's incessant pounding in my brain  
brings infinitesimally lesser pain;  
whilst rotting matter that life does excrete  
continues to mould pallid at my feet;  
and I, the perpetrator of the piece,  
anticipating the relief of a surcease,  
must yet continue suffering the bitter blend  
of redress that forestalls the dividend.

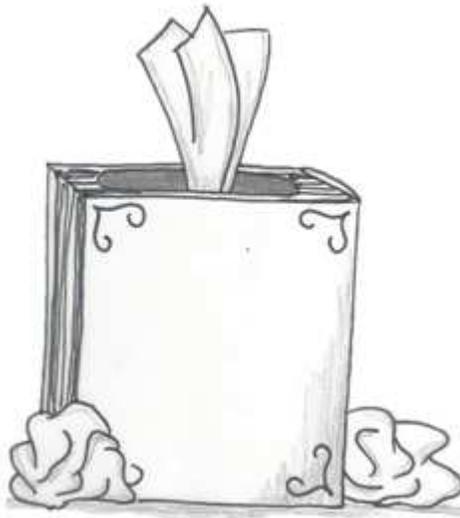
There is a situation that, when taken out of season,  
evokes a painful memory for whatever reason.  
A rainbow within a bubble of soap,  
the search for trouble with a bronchoscope,  
the desperate wish just to recuperate,  
despairing hope that they will not reciprocate.  
And when all else is but a heap of ash,  
other than that consigned to a memory cache,  
then it is time to place within that store  
those ills from which recovery can be no more;  
to tread a path and seek a blessed state  
from which to be a learned advocate  
of such as heaven and not the living hell  
in which the guilt of conscience still does dwell.

Now count your dead, you others who survive  
as bees continue to enjoy their nectar in a hive.  
As animals may play, imprisoned in a cage,  
and not sufficiently authentic so as to believe  
As we creative writers persevere despite our age.  
It is but propaganda to deceive  
when Death, that great aggressor, determines to intrude  
and interrupt the joy of an imperative good mood.

I've opened curtains and raised many blinds  
and peeped into the crevices of minds.  
And now it seems at last it's all been said  
There'll be no further peeps, and so to bed.

(3)

# PARODIES



## MOISHE BEN SHLOMO

(Being a parody of *Abou ben Adhem* by Leigh Hunt)

Moishe Ben Shlomo (may his nostrils drip!)  
Awoke as they approached the landing strip  
And saw within the cabin (business class)  
A stewardess with an exciting ass.  
The badge pinned to her bosom said Lorraine.  
A life of *chutzpah*\* had made Ben Shlomo vain  
And to the well-endowed hostess he said  
“I bet that I could land us on my head!”  
The crew who had endured his endless yack,  
Found this the straw that broke the camel’s back,  
And to this trumped-up braggart they declared  
“Our magazine contains a questionnaire  
To test your aptitude to fly this plane.”  
“What a *metsieh*\*,” thought Moish, wracking his  
brain  
And mentally the crew echoed his thought  
As, finally, they got the peace they sought.  
When El Al published names that had been blessed.  
*Oy veh*\*! Ben Shlomo’s name had failed the test.

### GLOSSARY

Chutzpah - insolence

Metsieh - blessing

Oy veh - woe is me

## **DOH LAH REH DOH**

(Being a parody of Eldorado by Edgar Allen Poe)

Poorly equipped,  
Painfully whipped.  
A threadbare Abyssinian  
Did shuffle on  
With all hope gone  
In search of an opinion

But much deplored  
When not ignored  
This abject Abyssinian  
Did seek in vain  
Something arcane  
To exercise dominion

And as he sought,  
So lost in thought,  
Through sands of Kalahari  
He wondered how  
He might avow  
The freedom held so dearly

It struck at last  
With trumpet blast  
Amidst fields green with barley,  
He boldly rode  
And proudly crowed  
The statement: "I am Charlie."

# EPITAPH FOR A LOST ROMANCE

(A parody on Noël Coward's *Epitaph For an Elderly Actress*)

I got in a stew  
About you.  
And not knowing what I should do,  
My only way to treat the issues  
Involved an entire box of tissues,  
When I got in a stew  
About you.

I got in a mess  
I confess  
When you revealed signs of distress.  
Though a very small bit o' me  
Considered at least the epitome  
Of how we two might coalesce  
I confess.

I quite lost my head  
When you said  
You would never share my nuptial  
bed,  
Though a very small part of my  
mind  
Believed you were just being kind  
Despite saying we'd never wed  
As you said.

I got in a stew  
About you.  
But I had to accept your adieu,  
Though the shaking apart of me  
Was breaking the heart of me,  
And I got in a terrible stew  
About you.

And I bellowed, and yelled, and I moaned  
And I hollered, and cried, and I groaned  
And intoned that it's time I withdrew  
From your view

## **LONGFELLOW'S ARROW**

I shot my brother in his rear.  
He fell to earth  
But I don't care!

# THE POET AND THE PLATONIST

The poet and the platonist  
Were seated side by side  
A carriage on the Circle Line  
Was what they occupied,  
While gazing at a map aloft.  
It was the station guide

The train was running on its tracks  
Running with all its speed  
The carriage held but these two men  
Great intellects indeed,  
Deliberating mysteries  
On which they disagreed.

Alongside Mr Gregory  
Was seated Mr Syme  
The former quite anarchic;  
The latter, quite sublime,  
For whom the whole discussion  
Seemed but a waste of time.

The time has come the poet said  
To speak of many things  
Of God and Truth and Transcendence  
And Saratoga Springs  
And whether miracles exist  
And archangelic wings

“O poet” said the Platonist  
“Please look at what you’ve done!  
You’ve ridiculed my arguments,  
Where have my dogmas gone?”  
“No need for such concern,” he said  
“I’ve swallowed every one!”

“The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits.” wrote G.K. Chesterton in *Orthodoxy*. He also introduced, in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, those two characters Lucian Gregory and Gabriel Syme, the former a proponent of anarchy and chaos, the latter a defender of order and correctness. Gregory wanted nothing more than that the next station on the railway line on which they were travelling should be somewhere mysterious; Syme believed that there was more mystery in the fact that with hundreds of stations from which to choose, the next station would always be the one shown on the map.

I envisaged these two in the roles of Lewis Carroll’s Walrus and Carpenter and came up with this poem.

I have since discovered more than a hint of Dickinson in the second stanza.

## THAT WAS THE VERSE

(A parody of Philip Larkin's *This Be the Verse*)

They fuck us up, the kids we bear,  
A Gordian knot cut through and through  
But it's a blame we have to share  
A penalty that's overdue.

And they'll be fucked up in their turn  
By kids who simply do not care;  
Who half the time show no concern  
And half are scrabbling in your hair.

The child is father of the man  
So how on earth can we complain  
When they indulge cruel Nature's plan  
And put us through it all again?

(4)

## TRIVIA

Being somewhat light-hearted material  
ill-suited to any other section.



## ON FIRST LOOKING INTO HAWKING'S QUASARS

He may not have had all the answers  
but he helped me address some good questions,  
such as how you can locate a cat in the dark  
when that feline itself is pitch black,  
and has hidden itself in a cellar  
otherwise termed a black hole.

But if I should chance to confront him,  
I could ask for his personal view  
of the answer to Hamlet's sage  
question of whether we are or we aren't,  
or which of the two we prefer.  
And how can we learn to distinguish  
a quasar from a hole in the head?

I might even ask what he thought of the cat  
that Schrodinger placed in a casket  
with poison and deadly material  
that's radioactively based.  
Does he think it might leak radiation?  
Does he think particles might escape?  
Or suspect it could simply explode?

And what might become of the cat?  
Was it dead or alive, or just gone?  
Let's leave then with neither a whimper  
nor even the biggest of bangs  
It seems that it's time to conclude this,  
Now we've somehow returned to the cat.

## **THE POLITICIAN**

He tilled no soil  
He grew no crop  
But sucked the substance of the earth.

## **THE MISSION**

“Are you up for it?”  
They asked.  
”We’ll see,”  
he said.

## **BEWARE OF FROST (OR WHAT ARE WORDS WORTH?)**

He walked along untrodden paths  
(as she had dwelt among untrodden ways)  
Where Frost lay lightly on the ground  
Having slipped upon a mossy stone  
That by a violet was concealed.  
And that can happen when you take untrodden paths!

*[This minor confection suggested itself by a chance recognition of the similarity between Robert Frost's "road less travelled" and William Wordsworth's Lucy (who dwelt among the untrodden ways) as both end with a "difference that made the difference"]*

## **DON'T WAIT FOR ME**

The problem with hypochondriacs  
Is that they outlive the rest of us.  
"I can't last long"  
You'll hear them swear  
But just like tax they're always there.

# EVERYTHING DIES

It's a pity, they said glumly,  
that because of your neglect  
we are obligated to remove it;  
and although it's been quite comely  
and you may wish to reflect,  
there is absolutely no way to improve it.

They gazed into my eyes and said  
"Once it's gone it will look bad  
but there's no way it can be corrected.  
When something dies it must stay dead.  
Best to remember what you had  
than hope some day it might be resurrected."

But though I took their words to heart,  
I swore I'd not forget it,  
although it left me in some disarray.  
There are some things from which we cannot part  
painlessly. And I regret it;  
and still deplore the day they took my Porsche  
away.

## DOPPELGANGER

I think that I once met myself  
upon the roadside coming back.  
So sure was I that it was me  
I almost had a heart attack.

Another time I thought I saw  
myself reflected in a pane  
of glass upon a garden skip.  
It almost served to drive me sane.

Then there was that occasion when  
I found beside me in my bed  
a doppelganger of myself.  
Was I alive? Or was I dead?

How can I know what lies in store  
except by taking one step more.  
One step to face in the unknown  
what I had mastered heretofore.

But possibly this other me  
is simply also hesitant  
and also chooses to ignore  
what really is self-evident.

I'm waiting for the day you see  
when opening a door I pass  
into a room where bygone me  
is stepping through a looking glass.

# LAST THOUGHTS OF A DYING MAN

Knowing that I had but a short span  
of time before  
I would depart,  
and cognisant of all that I had built  
upon the trellis of my dreams.  
I wondered how best to preserve  
those unique sentiments  
as my endowment to the world.  
There seemed to be  
no formula for one such as myself  
to entertain the posthumous  
yet valid sustentation of my life.

But then the gods,  
or such as pass for them  
in my philosophy,  
took pity on this sinner  
and vowed to store his yet  
unsatisfied expressions  
of Life's truths  
for all posterity.

They salted a rain cloud  
with my spawning seed  
that I might yet persist  
in word and deed.  
Then storms produced  
a prophecy,  
a bequest to my progeny

that when I am no more,  
and worms have done their worst,  
the nascent grains of my philosophy  
shall still remain intact and undispersed.

And so these morbid lines  
continue to enhance the pages  
of this conduit;  
to bore, excite, annoy, exasperate  
and otherwise to plague their readership.  
But have no fear:  
take heart dear reader,  
persist in honest faith  
and reassurance that  
the peregrinations of this verbal inning  
is closer to its end  
than its beginning.

## **WHERE BOTH ENDS MEET**

My candle burns as brightly as of yore.  
“Your what?” the punster gaily asks.  
Oh, please do not be such a bore,  
I’m really not up to linguistic tasks.  
There is no verse that I adore  
enough to don one of those casques,  
and do not carelessly abhor  
The adulation in which Millay basks

## I'M REVIEWING THE SITUATION

Reviewing all his published dross  
tended to make him very cross  
and he was often heard to mutter  
it's time I started to unclutter  
my creativity  
from this painful activity.

There are important things to write  
and since I don't have second sight  
and certainly have not the will  
enough to fit the desired bill  
of selectivity,  
but gross insensitivity,

I must consider other ways  
and means to fill my writing days.  
The first of these is to discard  
the trivial and untoward  
for a proclivity  
to reduced productivity.

For quality not quantity  
must guide my new mentality.  
It's not how much I write that counts  
but how much what I write amounts  
to capability  
and not simply rapidity.

## MEMENTO MORI

I view the future with much equanimity  
And try not to rely on consanguinity.  
My loss of blood to NHS phlebotomists  
Whose hides are thicker than hippopotomists  
Or, if you prefer it, hippopotami  
Exacerbates a lot of my  
Concerns with the diminution of supply,  
Reminiscent of Hancock and his cry:  
A pint of blood! You must be mad!  
That's almost an armful. It's really bad  
If I do not have enough  
Left to fill the smallest coffee cup.

But do not grieve excessively,  
I've left a glorious legacy.  
A double pocketful of books  
Into which no one ever looks;  
As well as countless music scores  
That it seems everyone abhors,  
Regarded by equal abhorrence  
As evidenced by non-performance.  
But one we greet with jubilation  
Refrigerated Transportation  
Beloved by transport chiefs galore,  
Who hide it in their frozen store.

## SALUTE TO LOVE

Sometimes it is enough  
To travel to the dentist  
And lose your toothache  
Before you've gone a hundred yards.

Or plan a visit to the doctor  
And find that stomach pain  
Has all but disappeared  
Before you leave the house.

But I could travel to your side  
With passion burning in my heart  
A million times  
And never lose my love for you.

## EXACTO

[See notes below]

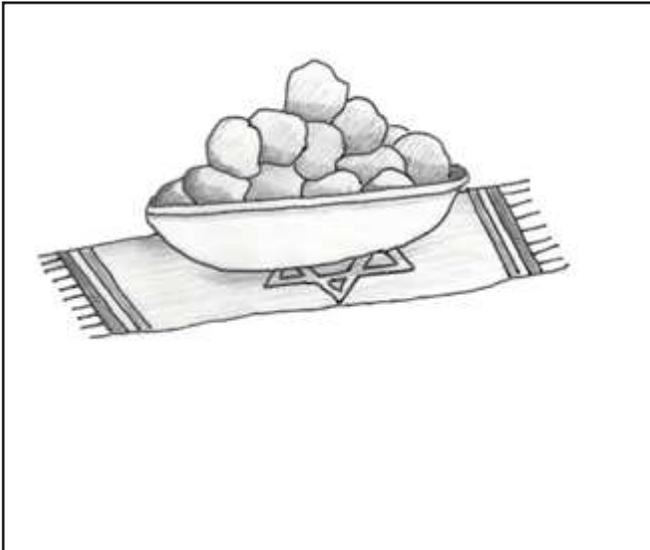
That model of a sniper rifle  
is one with which we need not trifle  
the acronym is far from hard to see  
representing, as it does, accuracy.

Indeed, extreme tasked ordnance  
from Latin countries such as France  
appreciate a form such as exacto:  
regarding it as simply ipso facto.

*An acronym of EXtreme ACcuracy Tasked Ordnance,  
is a sniper rifle with self-guiding characteristics.*

(5)  
**MATZO BALLS**

A selection of epigrams, epithets, haikus  
and the occasional limerick, mostly derived from  
old Yiddish sayings, curses and blessings



## SMART AND STUPID

The stupid are inert.  
The wicked are obtuse.  
There's much more sadness that can hurt  
than laughter can adduce.

Never judge a book by its covers.  
Never judge a cook by his broth.  
Never judge a lass by her lovers.  
Or a deacon by the cut of his cloth.

Before you seek an answer to your problem  
and no matter how you may feel quite sincere,  
remember that a fool can ask more questions in an hour  
than a wise man can respond to in a year.

There can be no other plan,  
no finer golden rule:  
better losing with a wise man  
than winning with a fool

When an idiot keeps his mouth shut  
how can you tell he's dumb?  
He may just be generating thoughts  
like "cogito ergo sum".

While the word is still in your mouth  
you are a wise man.  
The moment you utter it  
you are a fool.

Give yourself to honest toil  
and persevere in taking care  
for what a simple fool can spoil  
it takes ten wise men to repair.

Vigilance should remain constant.  
Vandalism should be unfulfilled.  
What a fool may destroy in an instant,  
ten wise men may need a lifetime to rebuild.

The man who's always inundated,  
with problems that he can't unravel,  
will find that most of them he has himself created  
as he stumbles around like a fart in a pickle barrel.

Never ask a fool a question  
nor offer him an explanation,  
you may as well make a suggestion  
to a mule about castration.

Whether you are dead  
or merely being stupid  
we others suffer.

If my zayda worked with shtof  
he'd be a Schneider.  
If my booba had a beard  
she'd be my zayda.

[Glossary: Zayda – grandfather; Shtof - fabric;  
Schneider – tailor; Booba - grandmother]

## **PAIN AND PLEASURE**

Worries may eat you while you live,  
so why discern the cause of it?  
Since worms will eat you when you die,  
best not concern yourself with it.

Hit me and I may forget it,  
once the pain has gone away;  
But insult me and you may live to regret it,  
for I'll remember it until my dying day.

Do not concern yourself with things  
that do not bring you harm.  
A boil is fine as long as it's  
under someone else's arm.

## HOPE AND DESPAIR

There is a tide in the affairs of verse  
which taken at the flood  
sweeps on to odium.

Today is to enjoy  
and not think about tomorrow.  
Better live in joy  
than die in sorrow.

Discard your mourning cloak  
and dispel your fears.  
Your option is to crack a joke.  
Laughter travels farther than tears.

A problem that has had me baffled,  
an answer that I can't foresee:  
if I would be like someone else,  
who would be like me?

Here's a thought that's somewhat odd:  
If it would help to pray to god,  
then people would be hiring others  
to do their praying for them.

This is my life's launching pad:  
just put it to the test,  
If you can't endure the bad  
you'll not live to enjoy the best.

## **JOY AND SADNESS**

Go figure out a mother of a "princess"  
whose daughter has been single for a while.  
She cannot wait to see her baby married  
but cries to see her walking up the aisle

Eschew the army and the police;  
discard esprit de corps.  
Better a bad peace  
than a good war

You may consider doing something sedative  
when life hands you a rather nasty warning  
But don't be hasty, just try being positive  
there's time to take your own life in the morning.

You think you're in a vicious loop;  
So just don't care about it.  
Worries are easier to bear with soup  
Than without it.

## **PRAISE AND CENSURE**

The pen is mightier than the sword  
to Richelieu is attributed,  
it took a statesman to applaud  
the passion we've contributed.

You may hate a glutton for his over-eating;  
you can criticise a drunkard for his drinking;  
you may castigate a bully for wife-beating;  
but you cannot blame a man for what he's thinking

When the sheep are shorn  
the newborn lambs do tremble;  
when hasty oaths are sworn  
it's wisdom to dissemble.

## **LOVING AND LOATHING**

Where people love you  
go rarely.  
Where you are hated  
go never.

Chivalry can sometimes be quite shady;  
at other times it really can be fun.  
A gentleman should always tip his hat to a lady;  
even when he isn't wearing one.

You may like her cooking,  
and be glad you married.  
but people nicer looking  
have been buried

You ask that I forgive him?  
Oy! Why, God, did I marry him?  
I want I should outlive him  
just long enough to bury him.

Listen, you may love him like a brother,  
but may not want to have him in your house.  
The saloon keeper may love the drunkard,  
but not permit his daughter to espouse.

You may despair that you're apart,  
and use your honeyed tones to greet her.  
but if there's bitterness residing in the heart,  
sugar will not make it any sweeter

## HONESTY AND DECEIT

•  
Oh what a tangled web we weave  
when first we practise to deceive.  
But given just a bit more time  
deceit could really be sublime.

When you're thinking of an answer to a question  
remember that a lie has to be clothed  
while the truth can walk around the place stark naked  
and a faulty memory may be exposed.

It is much simpler to eschew  
a Jew without a beard,  
than it is to summon up a view  
of a beard without a Jew

## GREED AND MODESTY

Specialise in what you're able  
to avarice you should not yield;  
Better one cow active in a stable  
Than ten cows idle in a field

Don't hoard your money while you live  
but spend it on fine jewels and golden lockets.  
You cannot take it with you when you go,  
for shrouds, my friend, are made without pockets.

You really should not hoard your money.  
and your animals should not be overfed.  
A rich miser and a fat goat are of no value  
until they are both dead

Permit me to present my bill,  
I understand you have to dash,  
I totally believe in your good will,  
I trust you, but send cash

Some are simply born unlucky  
they kill a rooster and it still hops  
they wind a clock  
and it stops

Do not concern yourself with such a complication  
as long as it is clearly understood  
a good Jew needs no letter of commendation  
and for a bad Jew it would do no good.

## EXTRAS

There are things you need to learn at school  
    Though study may prove baulking;  
such as when a wise man addresses a fool,  
    Two fools are talking.

You constantly exert yourself or give a little push,  
    and say that it's the wish of your Creator.  
Oy! Take it easy, what's your hurry, where's the rush?  
    So the Messiah will be born a few days later!

Okay, so you may have just come from Nakhodka  
and you're troubled about how to spend your day;  
    In the meantime, take a little vodka.  
Surprising how those troubles melt away.

In the home where the wife wears the pants,  
    You can bet that it's never by chance  
    that the husband does chores  
    like scrubbing the floors.  
Oh boy, that's the death of romance.

The fool in the company of wise men  
    is as embarrassed  
    as the wise man  
in the company of fools.

It may be something you should scrap  
and not state of the art.  
It may be no more than a slap  
or nothing but a fart.

Temptation  
I can resist forever,  
but a bagel,  
never!

Oy, the rebbitzin  
has bound her tits in  
you should see her bentsch  
now she's such a mensch.

Glossary: Rebbitzin - wife of the rabbi  
bentsch - pray; mensch - person of integrity

How sad  
that those  
with half a mind  
to compose  
a poem,  
do so.

Self-delusion can't get any worse  
than passing off as poetry  
what is no more than verse.

Guests will always make you happy  
Some when they arrive,  
Others when they leave;  
And sometimes both.

Listen:  
You can only get the truth  
From god and from me;  
But from me  
Only a little.

Blood tests are awful  
But they are necessary.  
Why am I so pale?

Oven's just been cleaned  
Next week's my operation  
I too will sparkle

Mary had a little lamb  
Who simply loved to slumber  
And though he didn't give a damn,  
She taught him how to rhumba

(6)

**SONG  
OF  
MYSELF**

**ALL THE LIVES OF MY LIFE**

## Episode 1 - Childhood and Youth

Starting from gefilte fish-shaped\* Stepney  
where I was born,  
Joe Zweben a lobbos\*  
of Whitechapel the son  
meshuggah\*  
but no momzer\*.

Eastward from Gardiner's Corner  
along the Commercial Road,  
beyond the realms of  
Shadwell Park  
and the pedestrian tunnel beneath.

Throughout the length of Cable Street  
where they *failed* to pass.

Beneath the overhanging leaves  
of Itchy Park  
with sticky caterpillar-shaped seed-pods  
clinging to my woollen pullover.

So many lives.  
So many lives.

What pictures do I see  
with memory's defective single eye?

\*glossary of Yiddish terms: gefilte fish = fish cakes,  
lobbos = rascal; meshuggah = crazy; momzer = bastard

I see myself there still,  
I feel myself held in a familial embrace  
while, across the street, I see  
a man with shoulder-length hair  
gently waved and clean as the morning sun,  
immaculately attired,  
and the black umbrella, forever furled, never raised,  
as he walks the length of Commercial Road.  
acknowledging no-one, never speaking,  
never making eye-contact.  
[They said he was a tailor named Kapusta.]

But is there not a memory  
prior to this?  
Do I not see myself standing in the street  
between my home in Albert Square  
[they subsequently named it  
Albert Gardens  
because that seemed more elegant]  
and the gardens opposite?

Am I not crying my eyes out  
because I'd stepped in something hideous?  
It subsequently transpired that I had  
eaten the entire contents of a sample  
of a new product called Ex-Lax  
deposited in our  
front door and thereafter  
deposited in myself?

But being only two,  
I suspect the story may be true  
but the vision of myself  
is through the eyes of others,  
as the story entered family lore.

I see the Troxy cinema  
and the annual school prize-giving ceremony,  
with myself on the stage receiving my prize:  
year-by-year first prize, inevitably a book,  
the recipient identified by his mother  
in the audience  
as the only one with one sock hanging down.

I see the church next door to our home,  
near the corner of Lucas Street,  
(that later changed its name to Lukin Street. Why?)  
with the crucifix emblazoned on the wall  
from which my eyes are averted as I scurry past  
on my way home from school.

Ever since . . .  
ever since . . .  
that confrontation  
with the loutish accusation  
that I had killed “him”.

Killed who?  
Killed when?  
Why me?

Running to my mother;  
sobbing fit to die.  
“Hush now. Hush now. They’re just jealous.”  
But it’s no real answer; it’s not an explanation.  
And I’m too ashamed to press for an answer,  
but the memory will return to haunt me  
at intervals throughout my life.

As when, decades later, Stanley Lloyd  
in a Moorgate office high above the Halifax  
demanded reassurance of his general manager  
that “He’s not one of those, is he Melvin?”  
And my mind and memory instantly winged  
to that encounter before the church  
in Commercial Road.

It was only later that the truth surfaced  
to confirm that it was politics and not religion  
that Lloyd had queried,  
referring to the reds of the L.S.E.  
and not the “dreads” of the Jewish East End;  
although guilty was I on both counts.

But too fast, too fast.  
I cannot walk and yet I try to run.  
My memory is pricked;  
my recollection taunted  
by a playful game of hide and seek  
amidst the tall, stout oaks of Epping Forest.

What happened then?  
What lurks beneath the murky depths of full recall?  
The heat, the blazing sun,  
scarce mitigated by the foliage overhead,  
and we – aged four and five - yell, shriek  
and gambol in the grassy glade,  
unhampered by the heat-retaining clothing  
that we have so gleefully discarded;  
seeing nothing untoward or ill-conceived  
or menacing in this reversal  
of an earlier paradisiacal event.

Until the teacher's interruption,  
with blazing eyes to match the blazing sun,  
so shockingly disturbed  
the artlessness of childhood misbehaviour.

Thus is innocence despoiled.



The end of innocence

## Episode 2 - Early Influences

And so I went into the world  
quite ill-equipped  
to face the challenges unfurled  
by innocence despoiled.

I had been tarnished with  
an over-riding fear-inspired desire.  
I wore the reluctant mask  
of guilt-avoiding hubris.

It seemed to me, a Jew  
must exercise his mind  
to deal with his belief  
regardless of whether  
he has a religious code or not.  
And in coming to terms  
with my convictions,  
I also had to re-appraise  
the relationship I had  
with my own personal diaspora.

Moving home four times  
in the space of the first eight years  
of my life,  
set the pattern.  
It is a pattern that has persisted  
and expanded  
through an entire eight decades.

And, as if to ensure that this pattern  
should not be an unconsidered trifle,  
a certain Adolf Schickelgrueber,  
(aka Herr Hitler)  
contributed to eight removals  
during the five-plus years  
of the second World War.

The first of these removals  
was by myself,  
divorced from my family  
for the first time.  
Mother and young sister,  
too young to be separated,  
were evacuated within easy reach  
of London.

[Father was eventually conscripted  
into the service of His Majesty  
and his whereabouts  
became a mystery.]

Myself, along with other pupils of the  
Princess May Road school,  
was deposited further afield  
in Northampton,  
where once upon a time I was told  
I was the first Jew they had seen.  
“But you can’t be a Jew,” they protested,  
“because you haven’t got those  
hair pieces that hide your horns.”

There was a major two-fold influence upon my life.  
It derived in part from the accident of birth  
that saw me as a member of the Jewish faith  
over which I was powerless to exercise control  
and the exposure  
to forces of the political Left  
that was a personal choice.

When a Jew is asked what it is  
that makes him a Jew,  
whatever answer he may give,  
the fact remains  
that he is a Jew if others think he is a Jew.  
This was amply demonstrated by  
the way that Jews were identified and treated  
during the two decades of National Socialism  
in Germany.

So my acknowledging the birthright  
of a Jewish heritage  
when immersed in a Jewish culture  
and surrounded by a multitude  
of similar believing (and behaving) others  
was no great challenge.  
Admitting to that privilege  
(or burden?)  
when facing the accusation  
of christicide  
or daemonism  
involved a greater order of intrepidity,  
so that looking back,

searching my conscience and memory,  
giving myself, or so endeavouring to give,  
the benefit of any doubt,  
still produces the arousal  
of considerable shame.

My guilt has lain heavy on me  
like a knife inserted to a depth  
of but a single millimetre in my throat.  
And despite the passage  
of more than seventy years,  
the memory of that event  
continues to arouse my shame.

How sad that the forgiving words  
of one to whom practitioners  
still pay respect in pledging loyalty  
to his beliefs,  
should chose thus to ignore  
his own profound but simple remedy.  
How sad that, through the centuries,  
we choose to overlook the basic  
Hippocratic truth  
that the person suffering a disease  
is a more important subject  
of our medical intelligence  
than a study of the disease  
from which that person suffers.  
How sad that we must pay the price  
imposed by others with  
insouciant disdain.

What consequence does that behaviour bear?  
What must inevitably result  
from the betrayal of a faith?

Again I go too fast.  
It is as if my memory is anxious  
to keep up with hastening thoughts  
before they pass from veracity  
to lore.  
Or is it simply  
an avoidance tactic?  
So let me pause, to take a breath.

### **Episode 3 - Later Influences**

In those bygone days  
we used to have to stop and look and  
maybe raise our hats  
when we were overtaken by a hearse  
driven by a horse  
or even two.  
And sometimes we would get quite hoarse  
and sometimes even worse,  
just standing in the winter weather,  
unsure what to do,  
with our heads so bare and cold;  
it really was quite weird.

And thus began a lifelong susceptibility  
to bronchial weakness  
and muscular complaints.  
And eighty years on,  
it is as if  
the god of Abraham  
and Moses  
has induced in me an inadvertent  
and wholly unwanted  
(and unwarranted)  
eleventh plague.  
Indeed it is possible to trace  
much – if not all – my  
subsequent complaints  
to those early childhood days.

Common sense suggests  
that this is hardly unique.

In my childhood, growing up with rheumatoid complaints  
diagnosed as “growing pains”,  
it was, perhaps, the medical profession  
who were displaying their own growing pains  
with diagnoses that were  
scientifically questionable.

From those early rheumatic discomforts  
I proceeded seamlessly through  
tennis elbow, frozen shoulder,  
and polymyalgia rheumatica  
to an apparently  
muscle free release from pain  
in my ninth decade.

## Episode 4 - Education

And the teachers of my life,  
starting from the first  
at infants' school in the East End:  
my earliest influence,  
Miss Strawbridge must have been  
so incredible a pedagogue  
that her name has stayed with me  
in memory and influence  
for eighty years  
from the age of four.

No other names from that period  
have endured,  
but how could I forget  
from primary school  
in Stokey's Princess May  
the equally pedagogic  
Mr Innocent?

“By name but not by nature,”  
he would assure  
those uncomprehending boys  
who marvelled at his proud vast shock  
of pure white hair.

Nor could they entirely comprehend  
the irony with which he introduced  
the words of *Smiling Through* that  
he had us sing in his music class.

“There’s a grey lock or two  
in the gold of her hair;  
there’s some silver  
in mine too, I see.”  
(Accompanied by a grin.)

His other musical choices  
have also remained in memory and  
(although disparaged by  
the majority of the students)  
I recognise how splendidly  
they represent their period.  
*Linden Lea* was one such  
and never shall I forget  
“Let other men make money faster,  
in the air of dark-roomed towns;  
I don’t dread the peevish master  
though no man may heed my frowns”.  
[And, once again, that impish grin.]

Then, as if the counterpoint amused him  
he would treat us to a popular ballad:  
*Little Man You’ve Had a Busy Day*.

“You’ve been playing soldier,  
The battle has begun,  
The enemy is out of sight;  
Come along now soldier,  
Put away your gun,  
The war is over for tonight.”

These sentiments  
excited my imagination,  
and continue to provoke  
my memory.

“You will understand it when you get older.”  
was a regular response to  
questions prompted  
by an audacious precocity.

The first, in memory, revives the vision  
of the remarkable Miss Strawbridge  
of earlier acclaim.

It related to a statement  
deriving from a basic and elementary  
introduction to arithmetic  
that produced from me an interrogative “Why?”

“You must just accept it.”  
And once again a “Why?”  
Whereupon “You will understand it when you  
get older.”

And even though I may have ultimately  
understood the answer to my question,  
I was never able to understand the injunction,  
and that, in turn, inspired a decade-long  
distrust of mathematics that persisted  
despite an ultimately clear and logical  
comprehension of the subject.

## Episode 5 - Religious Observance

My thoughts have once more  
run away with me.  
It's time to rein them in.  
So let us now revert  
to those considerations  
of accidents of birth  
and deliberate choice of belief.

Growing up  
in an English-speaking assimilated  
household, I was nevertheless  
exposed to the peculiar expressions  
introjected from a background of mixed  
ethnic, cultural and geographical origins,  
foremost of which would have to be  
the Yiddish of grandparents and other  
distant relatives.  
It may be that my later fluency with  
foreign languages  
sprang largely from my early exposure  
to this outlandish tongue.

And so I turned my back  
on tradition and culture.  
What consequence does that behaviour bear?  
What must inevitably result  
from the betrayal of a faith?

How does one convey the  
essence of existence  
in that far off time  
and place?  
It was a combination  
of so many  
sights and sounds  
and scents and tastes  
and sentiments  
that complicate the memory.  
The prayer shawls in the synagogue,  
the shofar\* blown at Yom Kippur,  
the aroma from the cholent\* pot,  
the explosion of the chrayn\*  
at the back of one's throat,  
as it bursts into the heat  
of horseradish  
pickled with beetroot.

And we used to sing  
to the tune of a popular song  
*Love in Bloom*:  
“Can it be the chrayn  
that fills the lane  
with rare and magic perfumes?  
Oh no, it isn't the chrayn  
it's salt beef from Blooms.”

\* Glossary: shofar = ram's horn;  
cholent = beef stew; chrayn = a fiery sauce.

How much more assured this would have been  
had my exposure to that influence  
not been dispelled by my removal to  
what was, for me,  
a totally and fearful alien environment.

My moves in World War Two were  
many and frequent.  
My first was to Northampton  
where we stood in line,  
attache cases or cardboard boxes in hand,  
gas masks over shoulders,  
waiting to be accepted by a resident  
of South Terrace.  
Here, the last one in the line,  
I had my first whiff of rejection  
which was to haunt me for many years.

I missed home;  
I missed my mother;  
Mostly I missed my chum Larry  
who had been billeted earlier.  
Two days later I learned,  
I don't know how,  
that he was billeted in Vernon Terrace.  
Somehow I found my way  
to his door.

His foster mother responded  
to my knock.  
She seemed kindly,

and to my stuttered enquiry  
as to her new boarder,  
she confirmed that he was there.

“And did you come far?”  
she asked.  
“Quite a schlep”  
was my instinctive reply.  
And when I saw  
the query in her eye  
I knew at once that I  
had fallen in the trap  
of giving a response  
in that obscure tongue  
that was the common lingo  
of my grandparents’  
generation.

Northampton first, and then return to London.  
Then Norfolk for a while before  
return to London.  
Then south of Wales  
(where sure a tongue most strange they spoke)  
Llanelli was the town  
in local parlance known as Sospan Fach,  
a song beloved by fans at Stradey Park  
where rugging was the order of the day.

## **Entr'acte**

### **SOSPAN FACH**

#### **A tribute to Llanelli and to my sexual and political awakening or Summoned by Belles**

The time has come to write of other things  
and let imagination now take wings,  
rejoicing in the passion that derives  
from revelation of those many lives  
that have been lived in pleasure and in pain,  
and sadness that they'll not be seen again.

Foremost amongst these was the joy of sport,  
the most beloved of which was never taught.  
The tennis, that for decades filled my pool  
of pleasure, was not something learned at school.  
Llanelli was besotted with the rigger.  
(Stradey Park was far from hugger-mugger.)  
Though cricket was not on the agenda,  
we devised our own personal splendour,  
(careless of the passing men in khaki)  
hitting balls beside the afon cachu\*

\* A vulgar Welsh description. Literally "Shit-river",  
based on its muddy, smelly aspect.

The first girl that I did kiss and fondle  
gloried in the name of Maggie Randall.  
She dwelt across that nasty, smelly river,  
proud of all the charms that God did give her.  
My timidity was my undoing  
for soon she was seen to be pursuing  
and giving favours to another beau,  
more wanton perhaps? I could not know.  
of such advanced maturity and wit  
that 'twas clearly Hobson's choice to commit  
to membership of organisations  
that produced outstanding revelations.

The Socialist Youth Club (or S.Y.C.),  
vastly exciting intellects for me  
to act as models and to supersede  
the previous disdainful word and deed.

But what of all those other characters  
and places that my viscera now stirs?  
First a brief look at Cliff (that's not his name)  
and let's, though hesitant, reveal his game.  
His sole desire was to improve his mind,  
and to that end his heart and soul combined  
to memorise one new word every day  
I recall his joy at cabriolet.  
He was convinced that for one year to strive,  
He'd still remember all three sixty five.

And Doug, who played the piano maestro-style,  
both classical and ragtime to beguile.  
Doug who bemoaned his common name of Jones  
and envied my Zweben's *recherché* tones.  
Said Doug: "Who would have heard of Rubinstein  
If he had been born with a name like mine?"  
And Doug perhaps was right to thus complain,  
for never did I hear of him again.

Dai Griffiths was a character so bold,  
despite a sad appearance to behold.  
Dai would produce his universal truths  
persistently displaying his own proofs  
of why logic disparaged a first cause  
as long as there was no enabling clause.  
We used to stroll through town, did Dai and I,  
concurrently to praise and then deny,  
disputing primal cause's false logic  
unless one entertained God and old Nick.  
He was a theist, but I, secular,  
did argue that life was molecular.

And Willy, darling Willy, introduced  
me to the notion of being seduced  
by red-haired shop-girls who wore out their feet  
at the monkey parade on Stepney Street:  
a regular convenient display  
for mating purposes each Saturday,

Willy Beynon, whose startling tenor voice,  
from open bathroom window did rejoice  
in rendering You Are My Heart's Delight,  
the song that Richard Tauber brought to light,  
each morning as he arranged to sign on;  
that unforgettable Willy Beynon,  
he of the Brylcreemed hair and winning grins  
who also taught me snooker for my sins.

So we have finally put pen aside  
and now at last we've nothing more to hide.  
Our conscience and our chest have both been bared,  
and we have gone no further than we dared  
to guard those reputations that remain  
of friends and foes we do not wish to stain  
with unconsidered knowledge now revealed  
or promises as yet not quite fulfilled.

## Episode 6 - War's end

Then suddenly was my heart  
filled with enchantment  
and an explosion  
of such joy  
as was to be the lot of Armstrong  
when he first stepped on the Moon.

And I was happy to know  
not only that peace had come  
with hugging and dancing  
and hastily organised  
street parties  
but that life  
had found a purpose  
beyond the trivial  
pursuit of  
adolescent dreams.



## ENVOI

I did not upon the coffin place a wreath,  
To do so, I felt, would have been obscene.  
My wreath, instead, was just a metaphor  
To symbolise the life that once had been;  
A memorial to spirit that remained  
And not a talisman of something pre-ordained.

The years have been filled with inconstant strife  
To enter the parnassus of an exalted life