



## August 2016

### Funny thing, laughter

Neil Wilson

Cue a Mexican wave of nervous giggles that rippled round the room, after my suggestion that we write on whatever came into our heads after the starting phrase of “it started with a kiss”. (See below for some results of that June meeting of ours).

Funny thing, laughter. What tickles one irritates another. I know – and you will too – folk who frown and declare “just don’t get it at all” whereas others risk abdominal muscle injury from violent belly laughs, on hearing or reading particular prose or poetry.

My personal *bete noir* is – or rather, was – the late Bob Monkhouse, who conveyed (to me, at any rate) all the oily fake charm of a second-hand car salesman. By contrast I laugh a lot at the scatty characters portrayed by P.G. Wodehouse and his prose so imaginatively peppered with hilarious similes and metaphors, but I know those who find his work “just rather silly”. There are however several mirth-rousers who are surely universally loved, such as Morecambe and Wise, and Victoria Wood.

Whatever the source of the amusement laughter has been shown to be good for you. A hearty guffaw leaves muscles relaxed for up to an hour, reduces stress hormones and boosts the immune system. Moreover it burns calories! – though only 50, the same as a *small* piece of chocolate.

So keep on tittering, chortling, giggling, cackling, chuckling and of course laughing.

*At our **June meeting** members had just twelve minutes to compose a piece which started with that phrase “It started with a kiss”. Three of you were “brave” enough to send in your efforts – of great prose despite the time constraint. Mine follows, although it could be said I “cheated”, in that as it was I who set the opening phrase I had that much more time to mull over what to write!*

It started with a kiss. Not any old kiss. Just a peck on the mouth but it was a total shock to me. We were on a walk with the U3A, the usual thing, a bunch of retired people with little else to do on a Tuesday, gathering in a windy car park beside a lake, beneath the trees, looking forward to a day chatting and walking, walking and chatting, trying to get meaning in their lives, trying to pass the time. I hated these walks. If I walk I like to do it alone, or with my late partner - she and I never talked as we walked. We looked at views, at flowers, at animal tracks, listened to birds. She and I had a connection through each other to nature with no need of words of other communication. Since her death I've found walking very hard, alone or otherwise, but someone persuaded me to come, an acquaintance who clearly felt here was an elderly lady in need of company, help and talking therapy. I did my best to avoid the other walkers without looking completely antisocial. As I lingered beside a pond, the woman who'd invited me came up to me and gave me a peck on the mouth. This woman had a husband, a family, a respectable life. I froze in my tracks, my blood hot in my veins. I shook like an aspen tree as she stood smiling at me. “I know,” she said, “I know how it feels.” And so we went on together.

**Joan Nicholson**

‘It started with a kiss redolent with garlic - I backed away without looking at him, not that I dislike garlic, but I hate the smell emanating from others, especially on public transport.

Having recovered slightly from the onslaught I looked in his direction, noticing that others had also found the intrusion into their senses not exactly pleasant, and had handkerchiefs hovering over their nostrils. But Wow! What an attractive figure he posed, neither young nor old, slim not skinny, olive skinned face with a charming smile on his face and an easy manner with male and female guests. My imagination

placed him as originating from near the Mediterranean, and although I'd already forgotten his name, I wondered if he were an entertainer - but oh that breathe! I wouldn't be caught again, so slipped out of the exit, and went home to my non-garlic-eating partner.

**Pat Farley**

*It started with a kiss.*

Came the want-to-be Errol Brown, his dulcet tones from the karaoke machine breaking the mundane silence of a former West Yorkshire mill town. This was to be no 'Full Monty', no tale of South Yorkshire steel in the throes of adversity. For if it was, 'Errol' would be singing *I believe in miracles*.

In a slightly stilted style, his tonsils that had been eased by the best bitter being served at the (un) working mens club. Singing, slurring to the musical backdrop of karaoke kitsch; not quite Chinese, for that would be too ironic, in the steel stakes. But a Japanese invention, (their South East Asian cousins) even more insidious for its death knell of live music and working class English tradition. Doom and gloom abounded, deep seated, under emphasised but present throughout.

'*Who'd have thought it would come to this*'. Sang the chorus of disenfranchised humanity cried. Choose your poison £1.90 a pint, 'Happy Hour', former fun, former frolics, former laughter, former lives. These half formed beings sombre at their inadequacies, singing to each other reminiscing one better day.

*'You don't remember me do you, You don't remember me do you'*

A pint was spilt, an insult made and the fighting started. The recurring nightmare continued, it started with a kick, or had I misheard?

**Mark Charlton**

It started with a kiss. And ended up in court. Now you'll be thinking this is a sorry tale of a heady romance which then went sour and ended up in all the entanglements of a divorce court.

But you'd be way off the mark. I'll explain why: that kiss – although a weirdly cold one – somehow gave me a tremendous self-confidence. I was only sixteen at the time and uncertain as to just what illustrious career I was going to pursue. That kiss inspired me to join the school's debating society, where my love for justice too prompted me into studying law at university. A passion for oratory then led to me becoming a barrister, with even more to say than Rumpole of the Bailey.

And to think this all arose from that kiss, which took place in rural Ireland while I lay down on a castle roof with someone holding my ankles.... as I leamed out to touch the Blarney stone with my lips.

**Neil Wilson**

For our **August meeting** the twelve members present read out passages of their favourite prose or whole (short) poems. These ranged from the hilarious to the harrowing and were as follows:

*Bon Appétit* by Peter Mayle

*Three Men in a Boat* by Jerome K. Jerome

*The Purple Pileus* – a short story by H.G.Wells

*Let Sleeping Vets Lie* by James Herriot

*What we talk about, when we talk about* by Raymond Carver

*Right Ho! Jeeves* by P.G.Wodehouse

*The Lonely Bones* by Alive Sebold

*Dulce et Decorum Est* by Wilfred Owen

*The Damned United* by Anders Lustgarten (adapted from the novel by David Peace)

*Old Man (or Lad's Love)* – a poem by Edward Thomas

*Mermaid* – a poem by Alison Chisholme

*Merlin's Cat* – a poem by our Eugenie Normanton

*On writing* – Tony Rossiter's column in the Writing Magazine's September 2016 (sic) issue

That last piece – on the crucial importance of the first sentence of a work, whatever its genre – was headlined by this quote from the irrepressible “Bard of Barnsley” Ian McMillan: “ If the opening sentence doesn't grab you by the throat and thrust you into the swirling world of the book, then the chances are it won't be for you.” It was read out by Rita Barsby who added that she has subscribed to *Writing Magazine* for some twenty years. For the last few years I too have pored over each issue and agree with her it's always a deep mine of useful tips, information, suggestions, events, competitions and news about the literary world, with some excellent examples of the best prose and poetry form both established authors and the magazine's readers.

## **New Creative Writing Group**

Established artist, writer and tutor Hilary Roper-Newman is starting a creative writing group next month and has sent me this flyer about it:

**New Creative Writing Group**

**Cobbles and Clay Café, Haworth**

## Wednesday Afternoons 2pm

**Beginners/Professionals All Welcome.**

**Writing Techniques, Discussion, Read Out Aloud, Character Building, Opening Paragraphs, Descriptive Writing, Poetry etc.**

**By qualified tutor. Ring and book yourself in.**

**Tel: 07428773772**

**start date**

**wed 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

Google her name and you'll find this, written by herself: "Hilary Roper is an artist, teacher, writer, and author and illustrator of children's books. She lives in West Yorkshire. Her famous book Macfaddion's Finest Hour was published in 1990. It was chosen by the Lancashire Children's Librarian Association as their entry for the Children's Book of the Year Award, 1991. The illustrations were valued by Sotherby's at over ten thousand for the set, a few years ago. The illustrations display over sixty species of natural wildlife. They are of a composite contemporary nature displaying magnificent detail of subjects such as children's toys, antiquities, and the cultural inheritance and folklore of the English countryside. They are painted in jewel-like colours and textural detail.

Hilary said that, she wanted every child to be able to turn each page and feel that each creature came alive, the detail would be so microscopic and animated. Hilary is now writing novels and painting large contemporary oil paintings of sweeping landscapes and she travels and uses photography to do her research."

Hilary is not charging a fee for attendance – in an upstairs room above the café, which is also free... though of course the owners hope participants will enjoy the refreshments on sale there!

She would prefer that folk phone her to express interest, so that she has an idea of possible numbers attending.

## Events

**Ilkley Literature Festival:** September 30<sup>th</sup> to October 16<sup>th</sup>. Booking opens for the public on August 30<sup>th</sup> but – if you act quickly! - for £25 you can become a Friend, entitling you to priority booking from August 18<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>. This certainly ensures getting tickets for the "Big Names" speaking (eg this year Andrew Davies, Sian Williams, Alan Johnson, Ian McMillan, Simon Armitage, Alan Titchmarsh, Ken Livingstone, Nick Clegg, Jenni Murray... and others!). There are *free* fringe events and a Children's Festival too. See the (*very full*) programme at

www.ilkleyliteraturefestival.org.uk and for enquiries email [info@ilkleyliteraturefestival.org.uk](mailto:info@ilkleyliteraturefestival.org.uk) or phone festival office on 01943 601210 or box office on 01943 816714

## **AWC Meetings:**

September 13<sup>th</sup>: Guest speaker Peter Higginbotham will tell us all about “The Workhouse” (which should help us count our blessings?!)

October 11<sup>th</sup>: Members’ evening...format to be confirmed but probably a manuscript one.

November 8<sup>th</sup>: Guest speaker Richard Wilcox on his research into the history of Military Hospitals.

## **And Finally...**

**The Other P45: Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis:** this 45 letter word is known by nerds as the “P45” and was invented in 1935 by Everett Smith, president of the *National Puzzlers’ League* in the USA, in order to have created the longest word in the dictionary. It describes the effect on the lungs of inhaling the very fine silica dust that can be blasted out from volcanos. Chest physicians however are much more likely to refer to this disease as simply “silicosis” and definitely would not write out this invented word in full – let alone legibly!