

RHYMES FOR OUR TIMES - DEFYING GRAVITY

May 13, 2002

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This is my fifth foray into light verse territory, where I attempt to wring rhymes from the news of the day as expressed in headlines appearing in newspapers, magazines, and now. . .the internet. Beyond the wordplay, the proliferation of news sources and news pontificators have increased, exponentially, the opportunities for generating a personal brand of social commentary. . .and inflicting it. . .upon you!

Several members of this club have asked me if the grim events of war, terrorism, economic and social upheavals, which have so dominated recent "news" coverage, has affected by penchant for constructing verse which is certainly "light" by intention or not. It's a thoughtful question.

The celebration of celebrity, and the economic euphoria, which had dominated the news in pre-millennium times, has yielded somewhat to more "gravity" in subject choice in the news featured on front pages of every newspaper. The headlines of just 18 months ago about "Shark Attacks in Florida" seem almost quaint, or even "idyllic", compared to war, terror, and the collapse of great corporations.

I do note that the "darker" events of the day have probably increased the "irony factor" in some of my verses. The tidings in Afghanistan and tinges of

"weltschmerz". . .world-weariness. . .have informed the choice of some subjects. Fortunately, stupidity and silliness have not entirely disappeared. . .allowing me to "defy gravity" even in these troubled times.

CNN.com - October 18, 2001

Lawrence Lindsey, President Bush's top economic adviser, said in a speech to a Schwab Capital Markets symposium in Washington that. . .he expected "small negative growth" for the third and. . .fourth quarters of this year. . .The technical definition of a recession is two consecutive quarters of negative growth. . .

What a generous term is "negative growth"
 Mouthed by economists generally loath
 To articulate words perceived as confession
 That the economy slinks toward recession.
 Lulled, I'll admit by this comforting call
 I thought "negative growth" beats no growth at
 all.
 Then reality struck. . .I adjusted my thinking
 "Negative growth" means MY assets are shrinking!

The Cincinnati Enquirer - April 25, 2002

SMOKERS MAY BE OHIO'S SAVIOR
 EXTRA 50 CENTS/PACK WOULD GO TO BUDGET HOLE

The cost of a smoke may go up in an effort to close Ohio's \$1.2 billion budget deficit. . .A 50-cent increase would raise \$372.9 million next year. . .

When next you pass that lonely band
 Who huddle in the cold and stand
 Through rain and sleet and hail and snow
 To puff their Camel or Marlboro

Remember to extend your thanks
 To those within the smoker ranks
 Encourage them to buy more packs
 For each will help reduce your tax!
 The State now shoves a begging cup
 Toward smokers told to "cough it up!"

Obituary - The New York Times - February 5, 2002

Robert Chapman, 81, Roget's Thesaurus Editor

Robert L. Chapman, an editor of Roget's Thesaurus who built a distinguished career on the difference between the right word and the almost right word. .
 .died in Morristown New Jersey.

Robert L. Chapman now is dead.
 "Dead" is so harsh - one could have said
 He "bought it" taking "his last breath"
 Or, "croaked" or "taken unto death".
 "Cashed in", "checked out", "turned up his toes"
 At length he found "his last repose".
 One thing is clear; Bob's truly "gone"
 It's nice to know his words live on.

The Wall Street Journal Online - February 25, 2002

Designers Hope to Coax Back
 Shoppers with Messy Clothes

. . .What's new in fashion this spring? Try scruffy. From Lee Jeans to Kenneth Cole, manufacturers and designers are hoping to coax back shoppers with clothes that look plain-old-messy. . .Ragged hems. . .and. . .\$550 jeans that have been splattered with paint. . .After seeing sales shrink by almost 7% in 2001 analysts worry. . .

The fashion wheel begins its spin
 "Neatness" is out "Messy" is in
 For the cool, the hip, the smarmy
 The "look" is Salvation Army
 Raggedy hems, paint-splattered jeans
 So burn your Brooks and L.L. Beans.
 "Scruffy" is the latest wrinkle
 Press IN every artful crinkle
 This "Messy" call is tinged with panic
 "Messy" may not prove messianic.

Obituary - The New York Times - January 21, 2002

Charles Ditmas, Clock Keeper, Dies at 91

Charles Ditmas, the honorary keeper of clocks at Harvard University. . .believed that each antique clock had a personality as distinct as the one he so assiduously cultivated for himself - with his jet-black dyed hair, Edwardian sartorial style and cherished black bag of ancient tools. . .He was 91, although for years he had claimed to be 110, an odd turn for a man obsessed with the precise measure of time.

A man who loved the clocks of old
 Would surely tick a tock if told
 The Times would print his own obit
 In "time" was where his psyche fit.
 At ninety one (or one hundred ten)
 The heavenly sound of some Big Ben
 Tolloed the knell and chimed a chime
 And Mr. Ditmas knew - "it's time!"

The Cincinnati Enquirer - February 12, 1998

Afghan Quake Victims Vastly Outnumber Supplies

Rustaq, Afghanistan - Thousands of people huddling against the cold, overwhelmed aid-workers reaching earthquake-wracked northeastern Afghanistan with supplies too meager to ease the enormous suffering. . . Villagers from. . . tiny hamlets gathered on a cliff to watch a Red Cross aid convoy approach. They quickly realized that their suffering was far from over. The convoy consisted of only one car full of supplies. . . and three cars bringing reporters. . .

Through the eyes of the starving one might see
 "The Press" as feeding on misery.
 Peasant throngs from desperate quarters
 Cast hungry eyes on plump reporters.

CNN.com - October 18, 2001

Text of a leaflet air-dropped in Afghanistan preceding
 air delivery

Attention People of Afghanistan

Aid is being dropped by planes at very high altitudes. Parachutes slow their descent. . .but the bundles will still fall very fast. They may appear small - but they are in fact large and heavy. Do not stand directly below them. If you follow these instructions you will not be injured.

Even "manna from heaven" in plastic containers
 Require the requisite legal disclaimers!

Wall Street Journal.com - October 26, 2001

States May Loosen Gambling Rules
to Shore Up Their Depleted Coffers

The post-September 11 economic softening may have an unexpected side effect: looser restrictions on gambling in a number of states. . .The New York state Legislature agreed to permit new Native American casinos. . .The deal is part of legislators' attempt to raise new revenue.

It's a long way from Kabul to Vegas
But, there's linkage that's destined to plague us.

Moral fiber feels suddenly sodden
Much thanks to Osama bin Laden.
With more treasury balances sinking
Old objections to gambling are shrinking.
When downstate "ground zero" was burning
Upstate the "tables were turning".

Afghanistan On-Line - Web Site Slogan

Afghanistan: The Friendliest Nation in the
World - If Not the Universe

As an old, experienced tourist
I've learned not to act like a purist
When reading most travelogue copy
Well known as indecently sloppy.
But, it takes a most positive stand
To describe this most violence prone land
As the "friendliest" in the extreme.
I'd guess that a poppy field dream
Induced this linguistic mutation
Or mangled and tortured the translation.

Most likely, the poor writer instead
Wrote down "friendly". . .a gun at his head!

The Cincinnati Enquirer - December 25, 2001

The Most Overrated Books of 2001

#3 FURY by Salman Rushdie (Random House) This novel proves what may have been suspected all along. . .If certain Islamic radicals hadn't put out a "fatwah" (death sentence) on Mr. Rushdie, nobody outside his family would ever read his turgid, confusing fiction.

From something "bad" came something "good"
(A fact not clearly understood)
Promised death and mystic's curses
Bestowed upon "Satanic Verses"
By Mullahs and madrasa dwellers
Turn turgid prose into best sellers!

Various Headlines in the Cincinnati Enquirer - December 2, 2002

Weekend Suicide Bombings Kill 25
Bombing Heavy Near City - Taliban Pinned Down
Bombers Fall in Clash of the Saints
(These latter bombs are from St. Xavier battling St. Ignatius)

Who's bombers, what clashes and which saints?
In this world of diminished restraints
Self-proclaimed "saints" may be "sinners"
And losers transformed into "winners".
Where "Bombers" are boys from St. Xavier
Displaying aggressive behavior.
While "Bombers" with bombs fill the pages
With news of their latest outrages.

And "Bombers" rain death with great science
 To the joy of the Northern Alliance.
 Our world is a place of confusion
 It's hard to sort fact from allusion.

The Economist - July 6, 1996
Item on the page "Business This Week"

A chimpanzee in Poland earned a 10% return on investments in the Warsaw Stock Market over three months, beating a good local brokerage. Karoline (the chimp) picked the five winners from 70 Tangerines - each inscribed with the name of a firm on the main market.

Some vindictive fiscal jokers
 Love making monkeys out of brokers
 In Poland, droll investment junkies
 Are making brokers out of monkeys!

The Wall Street Journal - October 25, 2001

In Picking Stocks, Monkey Outshine Big-name Pros

In this dark season, the carefree monkey scampered to the top perch in the investment jungle. . .Amateurs, professionals and the monkey have now completed five rounds of competition. . .A blindfolded monkey throws darts at a newspaper stock listing. . .The monkey is ahead. . .the professionals are next, the amateurs are third.

There's some thing amiss in the stock market
 jungle
 When simian gurus cause humans to bungle
 Not just one time - but five times - what does
 this portend?

It's more than coincidence - it seems like a trend.

It appears that investors are clustered in clumps
There's a group you call "chimps" and a group you call "chumps!"

The New York Times - March 17, 2002

Less Than Meets the Ear

With the revival of (hairstyles, such as) newsboy, caps and asymmetrical bobs, it was predictable that the one-earring look wouldn't be far behind. The fashion began resurfacing earlier this year, when Chole designer Phoebe Philo introduced (a) supersized single rhinestone arrow (shaped) earring

What genius! A single earring
Frees the other ear for hearing
Rings and beeps, web based crashes
Songs and signals, dots and dashes.
No earring means there's greater space
To screw your cell phone into place.

The New York Times - December 25, 2001

Retailer's Desperation Sales Fail to Lure Holiday Shoppers

"Merchandise is not like a Merlot", said Michael Gould, chief executive of Bloomingdale's. . ."It is not going to get better with time"

Most merchandise is not Merlot
And "wishing" will not make it so
Proclaimed a worldly retail sage

Aware that trinkets do not age
 With grace and promise of fine wine
 Which justifies an "on sale" sign
 Intent of which is to cash in
 Before the goods go out of fashion!

Obituary - The New York Times December 8, 2001

George Hansen, 92, Designer of
 Popular Swing-Arm Lamp

. . .The Hansen (wall-mounted) lamp, which he introduced in the 1940's, has become known as the classic swing-arm. It is still ubiquitous, illuminating everything from boudoirs to presidential libraries. . .

In this puzzling world of quantum effects
 It is quaint - but undoubtedly right
 To honor a man - who swung out an arm,
 Turned a switch and said, "let there be light!"

The New York Times - Sunday Style Section - April 7,
2002

On the Shelf of a Goddess, Gathering Dust

. . .Fashion glossies, which have shunned unglamorous pursuits like cooking and cleaning, have begun to embrace homemaker chic. . .New coriander dishwashing liquid (\$9) and Filigree Fine Fabrics Wash (\$19). . .These. . .are aimed at homemaker voyeurs. . .people who don't want to do their own cleaning. They just want to watch. . .

The thought is father to the deed.
 Declared an older, stricter creed.
 Now, it seems the pressure mounts
 To claim it's just the thought that counts.
 Do buy the stove-but never cook.
 Read the review-but not the book.
 Fancy the gloss, cherish the sheen
 As long as you don't have to clean.
 To do the work might be a botch
 It's so much simpler just to watch!

The Wall Street Journal - March 4, 2002

Disney Publishing Unit Settles Suit
 Over Claim of Beardstown Ladies

". . .(The Beardstown Ladies), the investment club (comprised of folksy, elderly investors) claimed to have beaten the market by 23.4%. . .Their book, "The Beardstown Ladies Common Sense Investment Guide" (sold about a million copies). But after the Wall Street Journal (and others) raised questions about the accuracy of the group's claims. . .an audit that their average return was only 9.1% at a time when the Dow. . .went up an average of 12.1%. The (Club) apologized publicly and attributed the error to a miscalculation by the club treasurer. . .A class-action settlement. . .would be about \$16 million. . ."

The Beardstown Ladies sing this song
 Doo Dah - Doo Dah
 We claimed huge gains - but, we were wrong
 All over the Doo Dah day
 We over claimed somehow
 Of course we're sorry now
 Go bet your money on a bobtailed nag
 Then maybe you'll beat the Dow.

Obituary - CNN.COM - March 24, 2002

Creator of Famed Footwear, Dr. Scholl, Dies

William Scholl, (an orthopedic specialist, designed) a contoured wooden sandal. . .to exercise the feet and legs, toning the muscles. It was worn for nearly two decades by millions. . .Scholl said it would prevent podiatric ailments.

Clap you hands (and feet) for Dr. Scholl
He toned your muscles, to save your sole.

Wall Street Journal.Com
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Ratchet your mind up to high alert
Call out the "grammar police"
Keep your "parsing tools" nearby
When reading a press release.
It may not say what it seems to say
Leaving but these actions for us
An eye on the dictionary
Hand on a handy thesaurus.

The New York Times - February 14, 2002

Uproar Over a Sliced, and Revered, Meteorite

When The American Museum of Natural History opened its gleaming new planetarium two years ago, it gave its highest place of honor to the Willamette meteorite, the pitted, 15 ½-ton boulder that fell to earth more than 10 millennia ago. . .The meteorite has a flat spot at the top created by museum curators in 1998 when they cut off a 28-pound chunk and traded it to a private collector for a half ounce of Mars. . .(This) dismayed the Clackamas Indians of Oregon who regard the meteorite as a spiritual union of earth, sky and water.

When water, sky and earth do clash
 With institutions flush with cash
 Discussions can be eons long
 Sorting meteorite. . .from wrong!

Reuters - Oddly Enough News - October 26, 2001

Fish Need to Relax to Taste Better

Athens, Greece - It's a stressful job, living in a fish tank and waiting to be grilled. . .Fish living in water tanks under artificial lighting tend to suffer stress and depression (according to the) Athens Geoponic University. This changes the way that fish taste. . .To make them taste better, customize water tank color to species, provide "play time" and improve the quality of their food.

For each fish that is broiled or fried
 There are issues of "taste" and of "price".
 Before donning it's thick coat of batter
 There are things that, to fish, really matter.

Do not hope for a succulent morsel
 If there's tension in gill or in dorsal.
 And fillets won't be tender or flaky
 If fish psyche is stressed-out or shaky.
 So if you yearn for sweet delicate taste.
 Do not feed fish on pellets or paste.
 Some piscine compassion should be the goal.
 Even flounder has a fillet of. . .soul!

The New York Times Sunday Supplement - November 25,
2001

Hooray for Gaultier

The genius of John Paul Gaultier's fall couture collection was its splendid ordinariness.

Fashion shows its bankrupt state
 Its very core upended
 With nothing new on fashion's plate
 "Ordinary" equals "splendid"!

Yahoo! News - December 15, 2001

Pisa's Leaning Tower Reopens

". . .Pisa's Leaning Tower reopened. . .after a decade-long renovation. . .The soil underneath its foundations began sinking before workers completed the third (of eight) levels. The builders forged ahead, however, completing it in 1360. . .The tower has recovered, but like elderly people it needs treatment,' said Michele Jamiolkowski, the head of the \$27 million project. . ."

In this world of grief and woe
 It's encouraging to know
 That even when foundations sink
 And things are at disaster's brink
 It's possible to stop a crash
 With time, resolve and tons of cash!

The New York Times - Metropolitan Diary

(A reader reporting on a sign encountered in a Vermont museum)

The Life of Little - Decomposition
 Rates for Trash

Orange Peel	6 months
Cigarette Butt	10-12 years
Disposable Diaper	75 years
Styrofoam	Never

Latte at Starbucks has meaning beyond
 Just a warm and comforting brew
 It wakes us up and its Styrofoam cup
 Let's us touch eternity too.

The New York Times - November 6, 2001

Budget Cuts May Foul Sidewalks of Paris

. . .On any given day (in Paris) you can find yourself dodging a municipal worker on a bright green motor scooter with a vacuum-cleaner hose attachment. . . honing in on exactly what you are trying to avoid - dog droppings. . .While Londoners and New Yorkers were forced to clean up after their pets or pay huge fines, Parisians have been able. . .to stare into space as their dogs did their business. . .A lot of rethinking

has been going on. . .a new law will require the city's
200,000 dog owners to clean up after their pets. .
.Fines begin at \$180 and go up to \$420. . .

While walking their pets to the park
Parisian dog owners now bark
No longer just "staring in space"
While their pets make "deposits" in place.
Pooper scoopers and bags are a sign
Of Parisians avoiding a fine
While snarling one singular word
Which in French sounds something like "merde"!

BBC News - December 15, 2001

Fossilized Rain Drops Found in India

An Indian geologist says he has discovered
imprints of some of the oldest raindrops on earth,
dating back more than a billion years.

A raindrop, glistening and wet
Eons later is with us yet.
Incredibly, its form impressed
Like some rare geologic crest.
When all of us are dead and gone
And those who knew us have passed on
What imprint will we leave behind
For brave discoverers to find?
Club papers have reduced such fears
For one hundred and fifty two years.
