

RHYMES FOR OUR TIMES- SEVEN COME ELEVEN

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"Rhymes for Our Times" are elaborations, meditations and sometimes confabulations based on the news of day expressed in light verse form. Each short poem is an extension of an actual headline that has appeared in a newspaper, magazine, or on the internet.

Why light verse? For me it's mostly about word- play, thought compression, and a fun format in which to express a personal brand of social commentary. The Wikipedia definition of "light verse" states it this way, "... while light verse is sometimes condemned as doggerel or thought of as poetry composed casually, humor often makes a serious point in a subtle and subversive way..."

Tonight, I'll explore with you a splatter of topics; finance, politics, sex, security, ecology, religion, the law, history, technology- representative of the seemingly chaotic array of news items that daily confront and sometimes confound us. A sense of humor surely helps to cope with this information assault.

The semi-cryptic "seven come eleven" reference in my title serves as notice that this is seventh consecutive time I have come with a paper in this "Rhymes For Our Times" genre- the first delivered to this august audience in the latter part of the last century- in 1991 to be exact. As you know the "seven come eleven" phrase is a gambling term from the craps table. And, frankly, I'm gambling that I can pull this off one more time- roll 'em!

CNN.com- January 12, 2008

POLICE FIND THAT "HOLY SAND" WAS DRUGS

A man dressed as a priest caught at Amsterdam's airport with three kilos of cocaine under his vestments claimed to police that his packages contained "holy sand".

**He crossed himself and bowed his head
Then spoke- his voice was steady,
"From 'holy sand' to pure cocaine-
A miracle already!"**

The Wall Street Journal- February 5, 2008

MOODY'S WEIGHS WARNING LABELS FOR ITS RATINGS

Credit-rating firm Moody's Corp.. .is considering major changes in how it rates mortgage-

related bonds and other securities hit hard by the credit crunch. The possible changes include new labels that would make it easier for investors to distinguish structured finance vehicles such a collateralized debt obligations from less-volatile corporate and government bonds...

**Can't sell it, transfer it or park it?
Your bond is a drug on the market.
Now Moody's says soon you'll be able
To check out their new "warning label."
Every bond should be carefully viewed
For all "side effects" that might include;
Wallet pain- sometime sharp and acute
When your sell order won't execute.
Stomach cramps or a clutch in your throat
When the value declines on your note.
Screams that can set you on edge
When you're pushing your broker to hedge.
If "dejection" lasts more than four hours
Call your lawyer, or head for the showers.
When it comes to your personal wealth
Your bonds are a hazard to health.**

The Wall Street Journal-Dec 8, 2007

SNAP-HAPPY CROOKS INCRIMINATE THEMSELVES

... Camera-phones seem particularly well suited to spontaneous self-incrimination. Unlike traditional cameras, cell phones are always brought along, increasing the temptation to snap a picture and boosting the likelihood that the phone will be on or near the criminal upon arrest... drug dealers just naturally take pictures of their drugs, and their money and their significant others...

**Ego, plus perverse temptation
Produces self incrimination.
Cute cell phone pictures leave a trail
Leading crooks right into jail.
Proverbs 16:18 said it all;
"Pride cometh before a fall."**

CNN-July 15, 2007

PHONES DIRTIER THAN TOILETS

"... Your cell phone maybe doing more than just making a call. It could be making you sick..."

**Here's morbid news designed to shock us
About that deadly staphylococcus
Now lurking on each phone display
Prepared to steal our health away.
The Feds, those stealthy cell phone stalkers
Will find we all are dirty talkers!**

Yahoo News- August 2007

CHINA INSISTS ON NAMING LIVING BUPDHAS

Ratcheting up its control over Tibetan Buddhism, China asserted the sole right to recognize living Buddhas, reincarnations of famous lamas that form the backbone of the religion's clergy.. All future incarnations of living Buddahs must get government approval...

**Now, each reincarnated lama
Will be involved in heavy drama
With Chinese agents acting oddly
Who'll tell who is and who's not godly.
They'll choose the boy, the time, the venue
From some obscurant Chinese menu.**

AP International - August 25,2000

CONNOISSEURS TRY 300-YEAR-OLD WFNE

Almere, Netherlands- The connoisseurs held the ruby vintage up to the sunlight, swirled it in their glasses, and put their noses to the rim. "It smells like cow dung!" one exclaimed. But so strong was the temptation to sample a 300-year-old bottle of wine recovered from a 17th century Dutch warship that none of the experts on the panel was able to resist... "There's a hint of fruit in it-orange peel, marmalade and caramel said wine commentator Lucette Farber, swishing the liquid in her mouth as a fetid odor wafted through the tasting room...

**I toast this heroic oenophile
Who managed to flash a knowing smile
While tasting with her practiced tongue
Midst fetid odors of bovine dung.
"Vintage rating" for her I'm thinking
For the power of positive drinking..**

The Island Packet- January 13, 2008

TUPPERWARE IS OUT. IT'S TIME FOR A TASER PARTY

... Dana Leigh Shafman ... talks about the new Taser C2 at a Taser Party... Shafman is an independent weapons dealer who sells Tasers the way her mother's generation sold plastic food containers... Shafman says many other women customers love that the C2 is small enough to fit into their purses and that it comes in a variety of colors. When it comes to choosing weapons a lot of women want them in pink.

**Forget that Tupperware collection.
Girls, we are talking REAL protection.
Not stupid lids that seal so tightly
But "tazed" intruders glowing brightly.
And after tea and fruitcake slices-
Improvised explosive devices!**

CNN.com July 8, 2007

BANK BRANCH BANDIT WEARS TREE DISGUISE

Manchester New Hampshire- Leave it to New Hampshire, where a bank branch was held up by a man disguised as a tree.... Although the branches and leaves obscured much of the man's face, someone who saw images from the bank's security camera recognized the robber and called police.

**In the annals of crime who could have foreseen
A time when a robber might want to "go green."
He stated the cause of this curious whim-
"Banks have branches-1 went out on a limb."**

Associated Press- Jan 10, 2007

MISS NEW JERSEY USA REPORTEDLY RESIGNS

Trenton New Jersey- Another Miss USA tiara is changing heads, Ashley Harder, Miss New Jersey USA, has resigned because she is pregnant.

**The exchange of tiaras is not an exception
It just another unfortunate Miss conception!**

Yahoo News- June 20, 2007

FIRST GUNSHOT VICTIM FOUND IN PERU

The first person killed by gunfire in the Americas, very likely by Spanish Conquistadores, nearly 500 years ago was found in a burial plot near Lima, Peru.

**It's now unearthed- a deadly first
That started with a musket burst
About five hundred years ago
And launched an endless bloody flow.
This hidden grave broke its silence
To tell its history of violence.**

The Wall Street Journal- Editorial Page February 13, 2008

GREEN HOUSE AFFECT

Ethanol exacerbates global warming. Whoops.

The ink is still moist on Capitol Hill's latest energy bill and, as if on cue, a scientific avalanche is demolishing its assumption. To wit, trendy climate-change policies like ethanol and other bio-fuels are actually *worse* for the environment than fossil fuels... Our guess is that these new revelations will also be ignored... They're too embarrassing...

**Could it all be in error?
It's a thought that strikes terror
In wonks fighting the energy duel.
Is it wrong to recoil
From coal, gas and oil?
Maybe there's no fuel like an old fuel.**

The Wall Street Journal- January 30, 2008

LAWYERS IN-COURT READING GETS BOOK THROWN AT HIM

.. .Todd Paris, a solo practitioner in Salisbury, N.C., was seated on a bench in court reserved for lawyers when District Court Judge Kevin Endinger caught him reading Maxim magazine according to the contempt order... (Maxim) depicted prominently on the cover... a topless model .. .Judge Endinger slapped Mr. Paris with a \$300 fine and a 15 day suspended sentence...

**Long winded speeches and boring pleadings
Led Counselor Paris to "classic" readings.
He was merely passing the time of day**

**While perusing some rousing T&A.
But clearly the judge deemed it mal intent-
Which affected "judicial temperament."
He saw the behavior as abhorrent.
While" Justice is blind"- the judges aren't.**

The Cincinnati Enquirer-July 18, 1993

CIRCUMSIZED FORESKIN USED IN WOUNDS TEST

... Researcher says tissue is better than skin graft...

New York Times Magazine, January 14, 2007

A REAL-WORLD AIDS VACCINE

COULD CIRCUMSICISION TURN OUT TO BE AS GOOD AS A SHOT?

**Now here's the newest episode
It's from the old Mosaic code
What's on is off- what's out is in
How's that for foresight-and foreskin!**

The New York Times- January 12, 2006

SCIENTISTS LINK FROG DEATHS TO GLOBAL WARMING

The New York Times- April 24, 2007

BEEES VANISH: SCIENTISTS RACE FOR REASONS

**It's just one vast infernal joke
The frogs were just the first to croak.
And now the bees themselves are stung
Hives are empty- the trap is sprung.
With frogs and bees now neatly hexed
Sit back, relax, and guess- who's next?**

I'm now going to declare a short intermission from this unrelenting onslaught of alleged cleverness- after which I will return to the "Rhymes for our Times" theme.

About four years ago I moved permanently to Hilton Head Island in South Carolina. I'd like to now present a few descriptive poems about the unique environment of the "low country" with its distinctive flora and fauna. If I lived here, I'd likely submit these verses to some budget paper- but that not being the case; I'll share them with you now.

LOBLOLLY PINES

Stilts of pine
Emerge stiffly from the earth
Naked-shorn of branches
Clad only with barky brown scales-
A towering cohort of slender sentinels
Set among the bristling palmettos.
At top- piney sproutings
Unruly clusters
Of green, spiny brushes
Studded with pinecones
Tickle the underbelly of the sky
As the lanky trees sway to the muted music
Of a gentle summer breeze.

SAW PALMETTO

Clusters of shiny, emerald-green daggers
Splay in menacing fans of vegetative aggression.
Slender leaves, needle- tipped
Saw-tooth edged, erect, vigilant,
Challenge in every direction
Fiercely guarding root and crown.
Yet, stealthy forest creatures
Find refuge deep within its spiny keep.

THE OCEAN

A mighty wave
Roars across the trackless sea
Relentless, surging –
Unaware that on a distant shore
It will be dashed into foam
At the feet of a child
On Folly Field Beach.

SPANISH MOSS

DAY

Elephantine oaks
Limbs grey and gnarled
Claw skyward.
From leafy branches
Incongruous beards
Hang limply
Long wispy, unshorn
Stroked by the wind
Nourished by the air
The color of shadows
Sepulchral.

DUSK

From sturdy branches
Mossy veils drip and flow
Like melting garlands of gossamer.
Ethereal, grey/green shawls
Drape girder-like limbs
Blurring craggy lines.
Enrobed- the mighty oak stands passively
Awaiting the dark.

JENNIFER AND JULIA DISCUSS SUNBURN ON SOUTH FOREST BEACH

Jennifer

I never burn, I never burn
I never burn, not really
I just turn tan, a toasty tan
Not puffy, patchy, peely.

Julia

I'll never learn, I'll never learn
I'll never learn, not really
I'll just turn red, a rosy red
And squirmy, scorchy, squealy.

Islandpacket.com August 10, 2007

COUPLE SHUN SCALY VISITOR

.. Use the peephole. You never know who or what will knock on your front door. For the Loretta's it was a big "what" that came knockin' at their Sun City Hilton Head home Friday night. A 6-foot-long alligator pounded on the front door of their Penny Creek Drive home at around 7:45 PM... "It looked like he was going to ring the doorbell."

**Yes, Hilton Head is a charming place
You are greeted here with Southern grace
Neighbors smile- and a little later
"Hi" from you local alligator.**

The New York Times- August 7, 2007

TO PUNISH THAI POLICE, A HELLO KITTY ARMBAND

Bangkok-It is the pink armband of shame for wayward police officers, as cute a can be with a Hello Kitty face and a pair of linked hearts.. "Simple warnings no longer work," said Pongpat Chayaphan, acting chief of the Crime Suppression Division, who instituted a new humiliation this week for police misdemeanors)... "It will be very embarrassing to walk around with a Hello Kitty armband on your arm..."

**Harsher than a reprimand
And more hated than a fine
More stinging than a truncheon blow
Or your rank in steep decline.
The sharpest pain?- an ego bruise
As Thai policemen think
There's no greater punishment
Than an armband colored pink.**

**Excerpt from the book "Machiavelli" By Ron King
(describing Machiavelli's likely meeting with Leonardo Da Vinci
to discuss the building of fortifications)**

Leonardo, later worked for the Sforza Court... designing (through not actually building) military hardware such as crossbows, machines guns... and even a four wheeled tank armed with cannons and sheathed in metal plate. He also studied ballistics so cannonballs could be aimed more accurately at the enemy. Somehow he (Leonardo) managed to find time amid all these activities to paint The Last Supper and invent the first toilet seat.

**Eternal fame has been justly bestowed
On Da Vinci's art, his genius, his code.
Additional praise is certainly owed
For his most "touching" design -the commode.**

The Economist- April 1, 2006- Tender Offers

**THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA ANNOUCE THE
FORTHCOMING PRIVATIZATION OF THE NATIONAL AIRLINE COMPANY**

BULGARIA AIR

Bulgaria Air successfully operates 30 regular air-routes and charter programs due to the highly experienced and qualified pilots, skillful maintenance stuff and modern aircraft pool.

**This airline's "for sale"- and do we have a deal-
It's Bulgarian Air- the price is a steal.
You get pilots and planes- if that's not enough
We'll even throw in that "maintenance stuff."**

The Wall Street Journal

CONFESSION MAKES A COMEBACK

Redemption Online- Confession is no longer a private matter between a sinner, a priest and God. More than 7,700 people have posted their sins on ivescrewedup.com...

**On-line confession made short and sweet-
Google "Sin"- type it in - click "delete."**

The Wall Street Journal- January 5,2008

EXTREME BAGGAGE

Giant handbags are getting bigger- and are a growing concern

One the biggest fashion trends of 2007 is going to get more extreme in 2008. Some of the largest bags. shown by everyone from Louis Vuitton to Chanel and Prada, now measure up to 2 feet in length... the size of a small garbage bag... Karen Erickson... spokeswoman for the American Chiropractic Association estimates that the number of purse-related injuries and sprains she treats has risen 30%. "When people come into my office complaining of neck pain, shoulder pain and headaches, I go over and pick up their handbags and give it a weigh test.. it's amazing how heavy they get..."

**Like Marley's ghost hauling its chain
The "Fashionista" suffers great pain-
Backache, neckache, and even worse
Schlepping her huge, and pricy purse.
A Zen-like voice booms this rebuff-
"Don't weigh yourself down with your stuff!"**

The New Yorker, April 16,2007

The Annals of Transport
THERE AND BACK AGAIN
The soul of the commuter

...Commuting makes people unhappy, or so many studies have shown. Recently, the Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman and the economist Alan Krueger asked nine hundred working women in Texas to rate their daily activities, according to how much they enjoyed them. Commuting came in last. (Sex came in first.)...

**Does one require a Nobel prize
To re-discover the non- surprise
That "sex" would outrank "a long commute"-
A finding I think beyond dispute.
To me, the data is simply showing
That "coming" is better than "going."**

The Wall Street Journal- January 8, 2008

RISK OFFICERS IN CROSSHAIRS

Banks Look For Scapegoats

Should Wall Street's top internal cops be thrown in the clink?.. In the most obvious sense, many bank risk managers have failed in their task-keeping losses within predetermined levels.. .Of course, the limits of their toolkits are partly to blame.. .it is the unknown (scenarios) -like the rapid and severe subprime meltdown- that catch them unawares.

**It's a comfort to know that your upstanding bank
Has safeguards in place so your nest egg won't tank.
But unforeseen error can swoop in to wisk
The disguise from the guys who claim they tame risk!**

Spiegel Online- August 21,2007

NORWAY'S MOOSE POPULATION IN TROUBLE FOR BELCHING

Norway is concerned that its national animal, the moose, is harming the climate by emitting an estimated 2100 kilos of carbon dioxide a year (through belching and farting)... equivalent to the CO2 output from a 13,999 kilometer car journey...

**A stand of virgin timber
A sylvan forest glen
A meadow in the moonlight
Far from the sight of men**

**A rustling in the bushes
A stealthy herd of moose
Swing their mighty antlers
And collectively let loose**

**A cloud of deadly methane
And ecologic fear
Of CO2 disaster that
Pollutes the atmosphere**

**Who sounds the cry of danger
On this distant, Nordic shore
The scientists of Norway
And the AI who's last name's Gore.**

Label on an expensive tartan design shirt in a Saks Fifth Avenue Men's Shop

(Main Label- Brand name) **McGEORGE**

(Smaller, secondary label) **A Division of the Ballantyne Company Scotland**

(Very small label) **Made in Romania**

**Descendants of Vlad the Impaler
Now meekly stick needles in shirts
Both frilly and Spartan
But all of them tartan
Plus kilts and wee bonnets and skirts.**

**Once Wallace and Bruce battled bravely.
There were kings, the clans, the Black Watch.
Now, there's little remorse
When you choose to outsource
(Just avoid Romanian scotch!)**

CNN Money.com- July 14, 2007

STARBUCKS OUT OF CHINA'S FORBIDDEN CITY

After years of controversy, and a protest by one of China's most popular TV personalities, Starbucks has finally closed its door in Beijing's imperial palace... (the) TV anchor complained that the American chain's presence in the symbol of the Chinese nation was trampling on Chinese culture.

**Now Starbucks has big trouble brewing
With coffee the cause of its undoing.
The Chinese show no hint of remorse
With "culture" not coffee grounds for divorce.**

The Wall Street Journal-August 16,2007

"SORRY" IS THE RAREST OF WORDS

Hedge Fund's letters blame losses on others

In the past few weeks, some of the biggest names in Hedge- fund land have lost as much of a third of investor's money. None of these highly paid managers are prostrating themselves before their clients, begging forgiveness. Instead, in letters to clients, they point fingers at other hedge-funds, once-in-a-lifetime events, and their own computer programs.

**As head of the fund, I duly pledge
I'm innocent of trimming this hedge.
Blame it on fate-don't blame it on me
(But don't forget to pay me my fee.)
I get 20 percent of any gain.
You -100 percent of the pain.**

The Wall Street Journal- October 30,2007

WHEN IT TAKES A MIRACLE TO SELL YOUR HOUSE

Owners, realtors bury statues of St. Joseph to attract buyers.

Don't forget to dig him up.

Methods for burying the statue vary. Instructions give buyers several options, including burying it upside-down next to the "For Sale" sign

**Prayer is good for the soul
And may even prevail**

**When invoking Saint Joe
In a real estate sale.**

**It seems rather odd
That the Saint thinks it's fine
To be buried head down
Near a real estate sign.**

**May he answer my prayer
And my realtor's petition
And I hope he'll forgive
All sins of commission.**

The Daily Mail Online- October 24, 2006

**MEN WHO USE MOBILE PHONES FACE INCREASED RISK OF
INFERTILITY**

.. .A new study shows a worrying link between poor sperm and the number of hours that a man uses his hand set... Doctors believe that the damage could be caused by the electromagnetic radiation emitted by the handset or the heat they generate...

**Men must take care to protect their cojones
From evil effects of cellular phones!**