

GRAVY





MAY EDITON

2023

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KITCHEN STAFF:

<i>Lucy Reis, as zine chef</i>
<i>Tristram Fane Saunders as poesie maître d'</i>

WELCOME

It's Bartholomew Fair, and everybody is here. Listen to 'the spit-snarl of the rabble, half-cut with pale ale' – in the words of our guide Dzifa Benson, as she introduces us to the tall Dutch 'daughter of a stilt-walking titan', Miss van Dyk, and the 'glory of corpulence' embodied by the estimable Miss Crackham.

Meanwhile, Joe Carrick-Varty mooches with a melancholy Minotaur – brought to life, like the ladies of the Fair, in our guest artist Lee Hybrid Desire's magnificent illustrations. Elsewhere, Edgar Kunz nervously fries potatoes in a cast-iron pan, and Tristram Fane Saunders malingerers in the rain, selling his moth-eaten silk umbrellas.

Stop for a moment with Camille Ralphs to admire the anti-carpentry of Gavin Munro, an artist who can grow a chair from a single living tree – not to be confused with the bracken chair in which Caroline Bird finds herself perched, precariously high, above a sudden drop.

Welcome, in other words, to the very first outpouring of GRAVY – a performance night and accompanying zine, "cobbled in mid-air from whatever we had in our pockets at the time", to steal a line from Caroline. (This bit is the zine, not the performance, if the paper wasn't enough of a clue.)

At future events, you can expect live music and lively art in unlikely places – and a rich, strange helping of poetry. Food for the imagination. Keep an eye on www.gravypoetry.com for news.

THE MINOTAUR

By Joe Carrick-Varty

1. SIX LIES

The Minotaur tells his sixth lie of the day
to a colleague, seventh to the bus driver,
eighth to himself as he pays for a Twix,
smiling down at the woman behind the till.

His ninth he tells to a pooing dog,
tenth to its shadow, eleventh to its walker
who nods gravely, opening a pink plastic bag.
The Minotaur finds a bench by a fountain

and there he unwraps the Twix, promising
as he peels away the shiny paper
that he won't eat chocolate again for a month.
A man in a suit and six o'clock stubble is asking

where the nearest train bridge is and *are they frequent?*
In the corner of the room the radio speaks words
like rips of Velcro. The Minotaur pads the landing,
golden wrapper rustling in his pocket like a bird.





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2. ALL THE DEVIL'S MESS

Because this is any other Saturday
the Minotaur is walking his invisible dog
in the park, clumping through snow
towards the iced brown pond

where the quilted backs of silver-
haired men huddle at the jetty, whizzing
their remote-controlled boats
across its island of melt water.

Because this is any other Saturday
the Minotaur is unsheathing
a tennis racket and ball. He's winking
at the men, his eyelashes lined with snow.

This evening, in a pub's dark corner,
hear them whisper of horns, of a bark and a ball
and boats lost and ice snapped like chipboard,
of a pond folded once, like a table.

3. THE MOON

The Minotaur is convinced he has swallowed the moon.
He googles *irrational fear of moon swallowing*
and walks the park at night looking up at the moon,
touching the spot where he knows

the real moon is lodged. A baby on the tube
pokes the moon in his throat
and the Minotaur's flinch short-circuits
the carriage lights, makes the baby cry.

The Minotaur tells this story to Dr Reynolds,
swallowing it deeper and deeper with every word.
Have you ever tried throwing up the moon?
On his 40th birthday the Minotaur lifts the moon

from its place above the dusty paperbacks.
He pockets it, takes it swimming
the following day with his six-year-old daughter,
forgets the moon in a café one afternoon, tells no one.





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ENGLYN BYR CRWCA FOR THE WORKS OF GAVIN MUNRO AND NERI OXMAN

By Camille Ralphs

He, timbered and time-biding,
sidles through his lush plant, his pared, bushy,
hardened garden, guiding

germination's jammed notions
and unbridled form with his enormous
patience – stations motions

as knot-striped things: not striplings
but lampshades or chairs fit for kinged fairies –
sap frond-wrapped, long ripplings.

~

For no chair or furniture
will know worlds to come without this woman's
work to nurture nature,

so mothering smithereens
with the whys that bind that she starts finding
essence in sense; in scenes

of printed, glacé-prunted glass
homes grown and not made, silkworm-brocaded;
in place of grace, the grass.



LITTLE LOVE (IN THE MANNER OF EDMUND SPENSER)

By Camille Ralphs

A world in which she knows me as I am
Is one in which this artefact runs wild
From me, shepherds are herded by the lamb,
And lamping stars with sun are reconciled;
For I have so my paramour beguiled
That she thinks me, affrighted, not affrayed
And pacts the wit with which my tongue is filed
With that which blazoned world in light and shade.
If my true faults and unfayre be displayed –
My rubies gobbets and my humours blacke,
My human Passion not begot but made
And every lot I promised land I lacke –
I fear my lady's love will come to smart,
So, for her heart's sake, shall not break my art.

NIGHTINGALE IN A VOID* (FROM THE RUSSIAN OF GAVRIIL DERZHAVIN)

By Camille Ralphs

On a tall fell I fell asleep
tuned in to those vocals, nightingale;
even in sleep nightest of deep,
you came plain as day to my soul:
now wobbling, and now zag-zigging,
now sobbing, now cackling-giggling
into my head out of distance;
I was pinned beneath lit Callisto
as song, sigh, tick and whit-whoo
enchanted my candied suspense.

If, following my snuffing out
in the stodgy, finaleless snooze,
I cannot, sounding out nought,
listen to these black-skied blues;
if clap-happiness, and fun,
bops and smacked gob, sounds of “well done”
will mean nought, sound silent to me, –
I must now take up love of life,
not miss a kiss with my life’s love,
and listen as nightingales be.

* In the Russian original, Derzhavin avoids using the letter “p” or “r” to demonstrate the musical possibilities of the language. I have retained this constraint (as well as the original meter and rhyme scheme) in my English version, whose title alludes to A Void, Gilbert Adair’s translation of George Perec’s *La Disparition*, a novel written without using the letter “e”.



FREAK SONNETS FOR LUSUS NATURAE AT BARTHOLOMEW FAIR: NATURAL-BORN, MAN-MADE AND COUNTERFEIT

By Dzifa Benson

1

*Miss Crackham would rather quaff a quart of beer than listen
to a tedious sermon in church*

From the O's of your slack jawed gawks, I'd wager
you're flabbergasted by this glory of corpulence.
I'm no performing monkey sitting on this stage
two feet high in this bedlam of necromancers,
knife-swallowers and monster mongers but your rapt
attention is more than my skin can hold. When I aged
out of being the Largest Child in the Kingdom, I had
to live like an outcast but that's not a tale for this display
of fat. In the meantime, I've learned how to model
my skin from the inside out, how to constitute this flesh
in the act of posing all my rolls, my flab and folds
for the merriment of you, the audience, that fickle beast
who always rolls over to let me tickle its greedy belly
as it buries its head in my bosom's bounteous valley.

2

*Miss van Dyk, the tall Dutchwoman, thinks of her face
as an unexplored, difficult to ascend place*

I cannot stand silence so it's the din of the stage
for me where I can sway among the rafters to the spiel
of the gaffer and stalk the boards to the rasp of hurdy-gurdy
and gauge of long drum. I have stumbled and fallen
many times but I am also a spiritual sister of giraffe-necked
women, daughter of a stilt-walking Titan. You all want
too much for your shillings but I bear this greatness
which has been thrust upon me on a graceful scaffold
you all want to scale. Home is sawdust and greasepaint
kin is the spit-snarl of the rabble, half-cut with pale ale.
In my dreams, I always dance a minuet with someone
tall enough to make my audacious proportions feel
petite and delicate without having to bend and stoop
even as the plume on my hat, once so tall, now droops.





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3

*Miss Sidonia married twice then retired a very wealthy woman
who lived a long life*

When Nicu was twelve days old God sent me the downy fuzz that sprouted into this chestnut-coloured beard. I will not take it off! How else would you, the hoi polloi notice me? Not quite wolf, this capricious fork in the course of evolution is a church of marvels, an edifice fashioned for your insistent titillation that has made me rich. So if this visage is to be my inheritance, let it be a diamond in the sty, a lure to hook into the lip of the mob. This hirsute stunner means I cheated death, I fought and won. I am a sight to silence the baying crowd and I believe in beating my own gong. That makes me beautiful and owing no favours. I bow now to the deities who gambol in my whiskers.

BEFORE WE GO ANY FURTHER

By Tristram Fane Saunders

Let's tether our hot, sore hearts
to the post. Tie up our lungs,
leave our breath to catch itself.
Lighter and calmer, we'll walk
up to the crest of this hill
and stop. Place your hands
to my empty chest, knock twice
for luck, for luck, as I raise
mine up under your hair, stroke
the nape of the neck that crooks
to one side as you listen
until we hear nothing beat
slower. Then and only then
will we turn back, hand in hand,
to unhook the soft bronchi
that buck, still hoarse from shouting,
scoop our hearts cool from the trough,
pick up right where we left off.



SILKWORMS

By Tristram Fane Saunders

At 28 I have more pets than friends
and do not give them names. I cut them off,
or try to, when they're too glued to the web
unspooling from whichever of their ends
has means. Their faceless faces look appalled:

a silk pall, peppercorned with tiny leavings,
or starched Elizabethan collar stitched
with fine black pearls, against the velvet blebs
of thick green putty – mulberry chow,
it's all domestic silkworms live on now.

Full of themselves, underground-white and full,
fed up inside their home-spun terminals
at the end of the line, survivors hear a strange,
insistent, tinny voice: all change, all change.
(I meant to write to you. I'd like to call.)

As we grow older we forget to talk.
Mermaidlike, the flightless adult moth
to buy its heavy legs has sold its mouth.
Those miracle-white angel wings are props.
They must pick up the beds they are and walk.

UNDER

AFTER JONAS HANWAY

By Tristram Fane Saunders

My love, come on in out of the outdoors
into a room whose walls are beaded curtains,
whose roof relies on one supporting beam,
whose swift collapse is all but guaranteed.

We'll let whoever's taller take in hand
the rain-black, wordless question of its curved
cedilla handle. Listen to its Morse;

O kettledrum for drunk percussionists!
O wandering gazebo, wayward tent!

Look up, my love. We'll scry its nylon starmap –
the constellations Spoke and Spoke and Spoke
bespeak a world of worse alternatives.

Yonder – the walking damp, and those who turn
to unarticulated surrogates,
unfashionable hats, etc.

Behold the phantom of a headless man,
his collar yanked up over his wet hair,
sleeves flapping like an unloved spaniel's ears...

But pity more the wretched few caught short
with only, say, a newspaper for shelter,
or, worst of all, a single sheet of paper –



what good's a page against the whole damn world?

But if you're ever under, really under,
nothing between you and the falling sky,
dearest, take this poem. Hold it up
like you hold me, that it may lead you,
however far it's able,
homeward, dry.

INTERIM

By Edgar Kunz

On the glassed-in back porch
of a friend's house on Folsom,

I slept three weeks on a heap
of patterned wool blankets,

a large ziploc of granola
and a jar of pistachios on the sill.

I woke to bus traffic
in the floorboards and sun

on my face, drank thin coffee
and scoured the listings

for a studio someplace more
possible. Each day nothing

and each day I paced
the bright narrow sidestreets

with my friend, who was taking
time off and who was an expert

in digital currencies.
I'd tell him about the collapse

of my marriage and he'd tell me
about the distant servers



that mine electronic coins
by solving complex equations.

The specialized equipment
required for this kind of work.

I would ask him basic questions
and he would answer patiently:

*The coins are encrypted code.
The code is the currency. Value*

is determined by speculation.
Those days, every detail

had the glimmer of potential
cruelty: hot pink curtain

caught in a shut window,
drainpipe signed KING BABY

in white-out pen, paper bag
of potatoes rotting in the trunk

of the car I borrowed to retrieve
a crate of books from storage.

I called a man about a place
above a Thai restaurant and lied

about how much I make in a year.
He was from Pittsburgh. We talked

about rain. He said he'd call later
to tell me if I got it. On another walk

I asked my friend more questions.
Will it replace cash? Yes.

Is it untraceable? Yes. What happens
when they run out of equations?

A bus hummed past, skimming
the lowest branches of the ficus tree

giving us shade. *It's not like that,*
he said. *It could go on forever.*

(first published in Ploughshares)



PIANO

By Edgar Kunz

I held him together
as long as I could, she says.

He stopped working,
stopped coming upstairs.

He was like tissue paper
coming apart in water.

Like smoke in my hands.
It had nothing to do

with you, baby. You left
when you had to.

I met a woman once
who worked on pianos.

Said it was a hard job.
The tools, the leverage.

The required ear. I love it,
she said, but it's brutal.

The second I step away
it's already falling out of tune.

(first published in The New Yorker)

NIGHT HERON

By Edgar Kunz

What now? You'd flown in
from a Midwest city named
for its rowdy summertime
abundance lying saying you
were coming to visit friends
in San Francisco and I had taken
the train from chilly Oakland
to meet you and we rode north
carefully not touching I took you
to the tiny one-room apartment
I had escaped to after the
divorce and fried us nervously
some potatoes in a cast iron pan
a little rosemary which we
did not eat because you kissed
me hard and we went in a rush
to the mattress I bought off a guy
in a semi-famous band and had only
the day before gotten off
the floor and onto the pinewood
bedframe I'd found and hoisted
on my back and carried
down out of north Berkeley arms
wide weaving through the side-
streets toeing the center line to avoid
snagging the buckeyes leaning out
it was about suffering
in public it was dramatic
sure but the dramas of my life
those days were pitched
as high as I could stand higher



sometimes I said breathless I want
to taste you and you said please
yes and later out at the edge
of the lake huddled against
the damp wind hot grease
soaking through a paper bag
licking salt from each
others fingers obscenely a night
heron peered up at us from
the reeds small hunched dipping
its shining beak in the shallows not
particularly beautiful but a heron
nevertheless the same one
we were sure we saw perched
on the awning outside the theater
whose marquee shouted slogans
like WE LIVE IN A FAKE
DEMOCRACY and PREVENT UN-
WANTED PRESIDENCIES
WITH HAND COUNTED PAPER
BALLOTS and later the cabin
we rented with friends
in Calaveras snowmelt vaulting
the redwoods to magnificent
heights drinking rye and each
of us practicing our best
wolf howl at the waning
moon which was ridiculous yes
but once we started it became impossible
to stop waking up next morning
hoarse and happy and you moved west
and we lived together in a ground
floor apartment anyone
walking past could see into and then
back east to Baltimore on a dream
of a house and a garden and then
my father died and at almost
the same age yours did and both

from drink and an unnamable
sadness I went back to Connecticut
alone three and a half days
my mother said before anyone
had found him in his apartment
on the far side of town and going
with my brother which we
should not have done and dragging
the mattress out and clearing
the maggots off the ceiling
with a shop vac and so on and later
you came and we walked through
the basement of my mother's house
I wanted to show you where for
a while he lived and how and you
slung your arm around my waist
and we moved slowly together bare
fluorescent bulb shining
on the Budweiser ashtray
the carpentry tools I would
inherit the ratty couch he crashed
on for years you held up
an old calypso record he loved
and sang out softly Jump in the line
Rock your body in time and I
sang back softly Okay I believe you
and after a while mom at the top
of the stairs shouting what
are you kids doing down there
and climbing the steps you pinch
my elbow and ask if I'm
okay and I hear myself
say yes which is not a lie though
I'm not listening I'm letting
myself feel how astonishing how
astonishing what our love can make
of a place like that

*(originally published in
American Poetry Review)*



URBAN MYTH

By Caroline Bird

Do you remember the one about the bomber plane during World War II, riddled with bullets from enemy fire, and the plucky pilot who took five packs of Wrigley's peppermint gum from his pocket and told his crew to chew – "Chew, Crew!" – so they chewed, ripping strip after strip from their foil sleeves to bung the bullet holes, plugging each perforation with a tooth-marked blob like a wax seal, wet and glistening, stamped with their personal crest. Six lads on the plane, or four, or five. Seven strips per pack – so that's thirty-five pieces of gum, it'd take at least three minutes, or maybe it'd just take a minute, their jaws would ache and they'd be ridiculously minty, smoke and fire out the window, planes spiralling down out of the sky, towards the ocean. I don't even know if that's how planes work, or if gumming punctures keeps you airborne. I guess you can't have all that wind shrieking through it. Well anyway it's not a true story. If it were true, you'd have heard of it, maybe I saw it in a cartoon. I like it because it's literally the only idea I'd have if asked to bung a bullet hole. We played our love like that for a while. Chewing then stoppering. A patch-up-job cobbled in mid-air from whatever we had in our pockets at the time, fighting fire with blobs of miscellaneous optimism, aiming only for temporary insulation, to stopper the sky whistling through us, stay airborne, unofficial and miraculous, cork each new wound with a wad of sweetness freshly printed from the panic of our mouths.

THE GROUND

By Caroline Bird

You land on a ridge, six-feet down the cliff
and believe you have fallen from the dread
summit and survived, you think,
this is the ground.

until you notice the larks passing at eye-level,
drop a cufflink and fall
fifty-feet into the open palm of another ridge,
deeper in, scratched, clothes torn,
you've lost a shoe but you think
this is the ground,

I can bake that lasagne now
till a kite gets snagged in your hair,
your feet meet a plunging carpet
now you're hanging by your necklace
from a branch thinking

this is the ground,
let's buy a puppy

as you sit in your bracken chair,
as you fall in your chair like a lopped flower head
face-planting – *Yes! Ground!* – in a tree,
wind-burnt from momentum, whip-
lashed by your own screams, oops, then oops,
oops, straddling a lamp-post, a pillar, a shed, each time
believing *this is the ground*, believing
you've survived, falling, landing, falling out,
who knows how long you've been travelling
down this thing, incrementally, held in the loosening-
tightening fist of a giant with a featureless face.

Thud. At last
I can put up that shelf. Make that baby.
You lie and let your bones heal, looking up



at the distance, experiencing plateau
for the first time, cold, hard, real, the opposite
of air. You shake like a prodigal astronaut.
I could build a house on this, you think,
staggering off.

EMILY DICKENSON

On Cake

One of Emily Dickinson's poems begins by listing Things lost forever: "The Things that never can come back, are several — / Childhood — some forms of Hope — the Dead —" Yet other Things remain, salvaged from the wreck of time. Chief among those that can come back: Mrs Carmichael's coconut cake.

Dickinson's poem was drafted on a small scrap of paper. On the other side, she included a recipe she learnt from one Mrs Carmichael:

1 POUND SUGAR
1/2 — BUTTER
1/2 — FLOUR
6 EGGS
1 GRATED COCOA NUT

There are, alas, no instructions. We cautiously suggest scrambling the lot together and hoping for the best. Some historians argue it is actually a recipe for cookies, rather than cake. We leave this vexed question to Drs Berry, Hollywood and Leith.

Like Joe Carrick-Varty's Minotaur, Dickinson had a sweet tooth. One of her more cryptic fragments was written on the back of a chocolate-wrapper: "necessitates celerity/ were better/ nay were immemorial/ may/ to duller/ by duller/ things". She believed in sharing her sweet treats: when she saw children playing outside, she would lower a basket of cakes or candies to them from her window, via a rope.



Her niece Martha once recalled: “[I] well remember being escorted by her down to the cool hoarding cellar, past the wine closet to a mysterious cupboard of her own, where she dealt me such lawless cake and other goodies, that even a child of four knew it for excess.”

Our attention was drawn to Dickinson’s recipes by a 2017 article (on lithub.com) by Emily Temple, which also includes her most famous recipe, for Black Cake:

2 POUNDS FLOUR	½ PINT BRANDY
2 SUGAR	½ — MOLASSES
2 BUTTER	2 NUTMEGS
19 EGGS	5 TEASPOONS
5 POUNDS RAISINS	CLOVES—MACE—CINNAMON
1 ½ CURRANTS	2 TEASPOONS SODA
1 ½ CITRON	





Here, unusually, the poet actual gives directions for how to make the thing:

*Beat Butter and Sugar together—
Add Eggs without beating—and beat the mixture again—
Bake 2½ or three hours, in Cake pans, or 5 to 6 hours in Milk pan,
if full—*

If you don't have six hours and 19 eggs to spare, a more modest challenge might be her gingerbread:

1 QUART FLOUR
1/2 CUP BUTTER
1/2 CUP CREAM
1 TABLESPOON GINGER
1 TEASPOON SODA
1 TEASPOON SALT
MAKE UP WITH MOLASSES

No instructions, alas, but *Emily Dickinson: Profile of the Poet as Cook*, a 1976 pamphlet, offers this reasonable guess on how to combine it all: "Cream the butter and mix with lightly whipped cream. Sift dry ingredients together and combine with the other ingredients. The dough is stiff and needs to be pressed into whatever pan you choose. A round or small square pan is suitable. Bake at 350 degrees for 20–25 minutes."

Dickinson often sent baked goods to friends by post. We admire her example. If you should find yourself with excess gingerbread, donations sent to this address would be gratefully received: GRAVY, Flat 20, Blakewood Court, Anerley Park, London SE20 8NS.

TS ELIOT

On Salad

In August 1936, in a letter to Enid Faber, TS Eliot enclosed “my directions for making a salad, which I have never released to anyone before”.

For the edification of GRAVY epicures, we share a soupçon of Eliot’s secret culinary wisdom. The recipe appears in *The Letters of TS Eliot Volume VIII* (a snip at £50). The book is 1152 pages, many of which are almost as thrilling as this.

Eliot’s full salad guide runs to almost a thousand words. This is an edited, low-fat version.

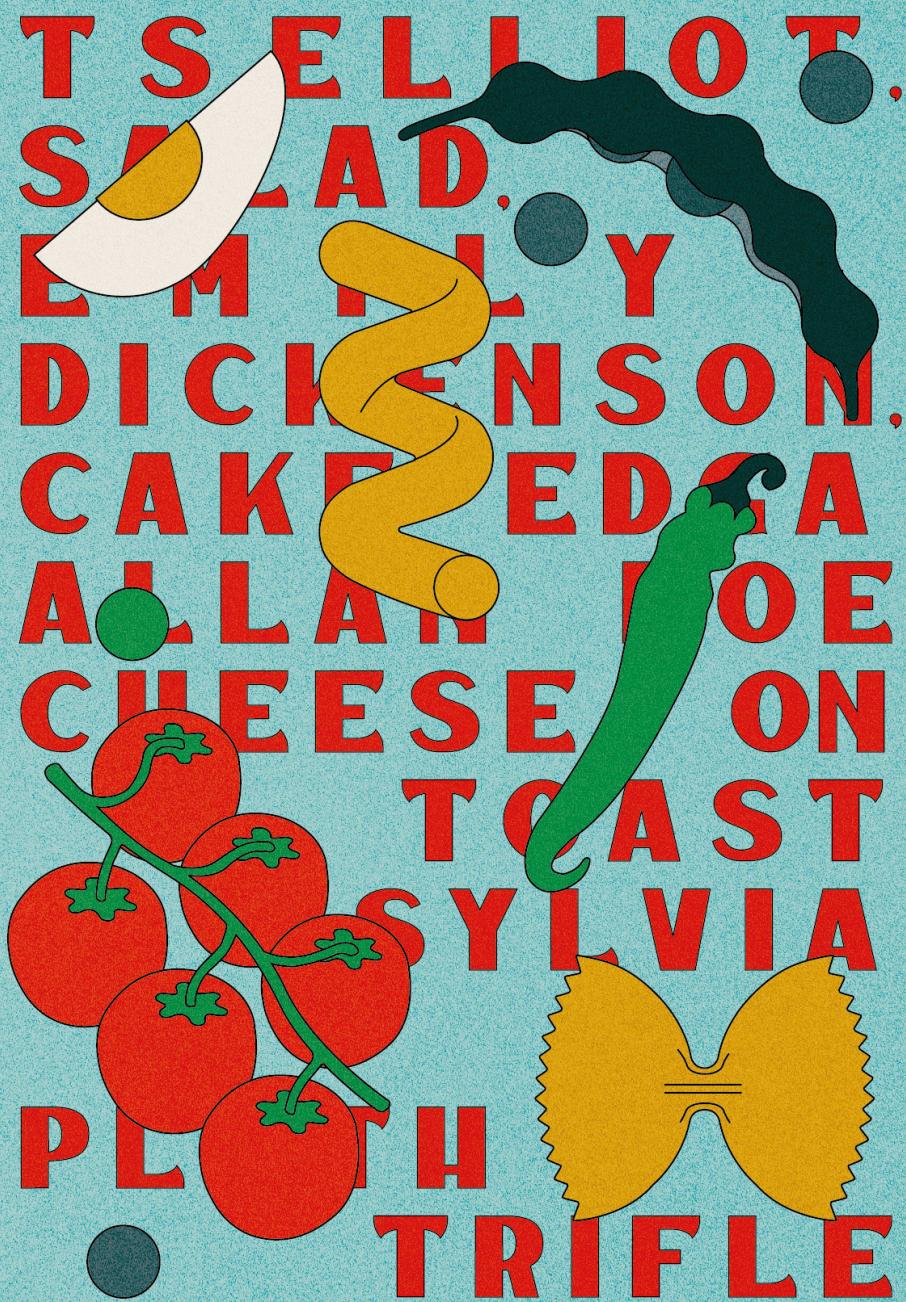
HOW TO PREPARE A SALAD

A good head of lettuce having been chosen, the salad-maker is to wash his/her hands with some scentless soap, rinsing thoroughly afterwards in running cool water. The lettuce should then be carefully plucked apart with the hands, placed in a colander, and rinsed for several minutes. Each leaf should be examined and freed from slugs etc. The lettuce should then be dried by tossing briskly in a linen napkin, if possible in a current of air. Artificial methods of drying, such as blotting paper or electrical fans, are to be avoided.

Salad dressing is made in a tablespoon, preferably of horn, but a silver spoon, or silver plate if well plated, will do.

The choice of bowl is a serious matter. It should not be too shallow or two deep, and its interior should form one curve, so that the back of the spoon can pass freely from one edge to the other. Experience is one’s best guide.





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I am assuming that this is to be a lettuce salad. There are other salads permitted, such as chicory, chives, Batavia, endive, dandelions, nasturtiums. What is important is not to mix the different salads, and not to introduce foreign substances, such as hardboiled eggs and beetroot. What is fatal to a salad is tomato, as the juice of this fruit completely upsets the balance of the dressing.

We now come to the dressing. There are four ingredients, viz.: **SALT**, **PEPPER**, **VINEGAR**, and **OLIVE OIL**. I shall not attempt here to deal with the more exotic dressings, such as those which include Roquefort cheese, or lemon juice instead of vinegar. Let us take these ingredients in order.

SALT: Any table-salt will do, but the best is rock-salt ground out of a salt-mill. Salt-mills are unobtainable in England, as far as I know.

PEPPER: There is no alternative here. The pepper should be ground out of a pepper-mill, from fresh peppercorns.

VINEGAR: Three kinds should be used. Chili vinegar, tarragon vinegar, and malt vinegar or wine vinegar.

OLIVE OIL: I prefer French to Italian, but this is a matter of opinion. Anyway, you cannot tell the difference. Now, place in the tablespoon as much salt as will cover a threepenny bit. Grind over it enough pepper completely to cover the salt with a slight margin of a couple of millimetres. Pour on

CHILI VINEGAR: *9 drops*

TARRAGON VINEGAR: *12 drops*

MALT VINEGAR: *15 drops*

Fill the spoon to the top with olive oil, so that a very little runs over. Stir briskly for several minutes, and continue stirring while emptying the spoon onto the lettuce. After three spoonfuls have been made and poured on in this way, fatigue or tease the salad with the spoon and fork for several minutes. I should mention that the measuring of vinegar by drops is only intended for the beginner or learner. The practised salad-maker



develops an instinctive psycho-physical co-ordination, which rectifies an excess of one vinegar in one spoonful by an excess of another in another. The practiced salad-maker, in fact, never makes two salads exactly alike. He will not expect to succeed equally well every time, because it is a matter of inspiration, and a number of imponderable and incalculable elements enter into the preparation of any salad. But it is this uncertainty that makes the preparation of salad so exciting, and that renders the great salad so memorable. Personality plays a large part.

*Cooked up by Tristram Fane Saunders
Plated up by Lucy Reis*



POSTCARD

HOW ASTONISHING HOW
ASTONISHING
WHAT OUR LOVE CAN MAKE
OF A PLACE LIKE THAT
X



17 MAY 2023

MOROCCO BOUND

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