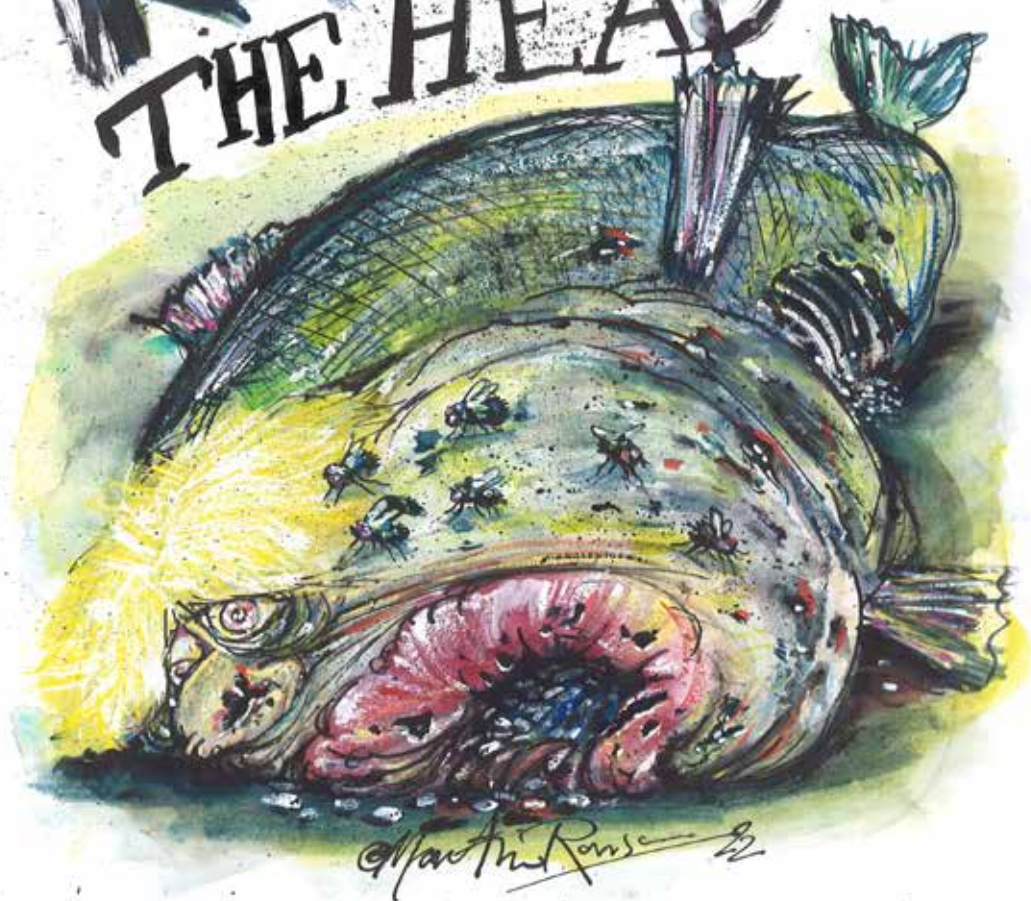


A FISH
ROTS from
THE HEAD



A Fish Rots From The Head

A Poetic and Political Wake

Selected and edited by
Rip Bulkeley

*England is the most class-ridden country under the sun. It is a land of
snobbery and privilege, ruled largely by the old and silly*

—George Orwell

CULTURE  **MATTERS**

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Rip Bulkeley recently edited *Poems for Grenfell Tower* (Onslaught, 2018) and *Rebel Talk* (Extinction Rebellion Oxford, 2021).



This timely flash anthology is so much more than 'topical'; it is alive with the energy and urgency of our maddening, frightening contemporary moment.

A Fish Rots From The Head is a carnivalesque expression of political fury unfolding in real-time. It challenges, satirizes, and despairs. It even dares to laugh at the venal moral hypocrisy of our leaders, whose malignant mixture of callousness and ineptitude has made life truly untenable for so many. In attending to the suffering of others, and offering a space of communal dissent, this collection of poems provides a very necessary space for solidarity and resistance.

—Fran Lock

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* The original authors of pictures which could not be credited properly above are invited to contact Culture Matters at info@culturematters.org.uk so that this page can be updated.

Introduction

By Rip Bulkeley

When confronted by deeply distressing or infuriating events, such as the Dunblane massacre or the Grenfell Tower fire, many people turn to the creative arts to express the strength of their feelings, and above all to poetry. There is no clearer sign of public revulsion at the excessive self-indulgence of leading figures in the Johnson government than that this is happening again today. Besides the scandals of the PPE contracts and the Cummings trip to Barnard Castle, or the threat to ancient liberties posed by the blatantly vindictive Police Bill, the lawless folly of Partygate has recently become the focus of public fury by crassly insulting the rest of us, even the monarch. It is Partygate, nothing else, that has threatened to topple the government. No wonder that it features large in these pages, so much so that the reader is advised to think of the book rather like one of those cooking programmes in which several people are given the same ingredients and then challenged to show what they can do with them. We even have two parodies of the same famous poem.

A flash collection like this one can do no more than dip a teacup into that torrent of public indignation. Mike Quille, the editor of Culture Matters, and I would like to thank all the artists and poets who rushed their offerings to us. Most, if not quite all, will be found here. I am also grateful to poets who responded positively to minor comments that I sent them, always a sensitive business.

The last word on these matters will be spoken elsewhere, in the great arena of British public life. Whether in 2022 or 2024, let us hope that an overwhelming majority of thumbs turn down. 'Come it late or come it soon / It's time to prick the sick balloon.'

3 February 2022

This is Just to Say
after William Carlos Williams

I have gone to
the party
that was in my garden

and which
was probably
related to work

Forgive me
it was inconsiderate
when I told everyone else

in the whole fucking country
not to do
what I just did

Giles Goodland
London

Goldilocks and the Three Bugbears

Goldilocks bumbles into the house humming a tune
carefully ruffling his hair into a mop.
On the kitchen table he sees three bowls.

The biggest bowl is brimful with glue,
padlocks, placards, flyers and banners.
'They won't be using those again', he mutters
peering into a murky corner, where he notes
a fine big cage with a fine big key.
He opens the door and throws the lot in.

Next comes the middle bowl, rustling with tenders
for Covid contracts, all fairly submitted. 'Don't need those',
smirks Goldilocks, shaking them about.
He spots the fire and chucks them into the flames.

There's a small bowl too. This one's flashing
neon orange with party poppers and mini-Proseccos.
Goldilocks smirks again, picks it up. 'They'll soon forget
about this', he says and pops it under some old copies
of *The Telegraph* piled on a chair. Come in handy later.

Nicki Griffin
Mountshannon, Co. Clare

Order, Order!

We built their cages.
We gilded them.
We listened to their croaks,
no one could call it song,
hear, hear, hear hear,
call to order.
Order, order,
keep them in order.
Keep them stuffed
with food and drink,
we did that too,
keep them fed and watered.
No not watered
they won't drink water
that would be out
of order.
Order, order.
Watch them
flapping their paper wings
to order.
Order order.
We should give them orders.
We pay the pipers,
they should sing for us
but they can only croak.
hear hear, hear hear,
for themselves.
We don't have to listen.

*Lynn White
North Wales*

Imagine

Here is our dishevelled leader, seated,
with a sleeve rolled up – his amphibious
jowls smile behind the mask, ready for the sky-
swoop of photographers, with the nurse
frustrated by plump arms and oh-so-tight
shirt. She battles to access the upper deltoid
to insert her needle with its vaccine dose
without asking him to actually take it off.
It's an attempt to retain a dram of dignity
in front of the huge array of press.

Hypothetical drum roll.
Just a little prick, I imagine her saying.
In it goes. Watch him deflate,
whizzing like a party balloon
released. How I wish.

Sarah J Bryson
Oxfordshire



*You told a lie, an odious damned lie;
Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie.*

truths

my Romany great-grandmother
used to scold us, severe, unsmiling
'every time you tell a lie
you have to tell another lie'

she never spanked us
—she was frail by then—
but her words struck hard enough
lodged deep, rooted, seeded

and so I don't lie I strive towards truth
oh, I might fib a bit, now and then
'that's an elegant haircut'
'it was a delicious meal—thanks!'

but never for my own benefit
only to oil the grinding sandy gears
of daily interaction, polite society
and so I find it hard to understand

how the rich and famous and powerful
can lie so casually, so carnally, to increase
their public worship, their bank accounts
I wish they'd had a great-granny like mine

Lawrence Wilson
Rye

While They Woz Partyin

While they woz drinkin wine in number 10—
Workin see, jest workin;

I woz sittin outside Dandelion Care Ome
Wavin t my ol marn.

Ee couldn arldly see us
(Fee knew oo we woz).

While they woz larfin an jokin,
My ol marn ad no companee.

We tried t mouth ellos,
Didn know what t say.

Is eyes more distant ev'ry week,
Tears as we touched—a window desperate.

While they woz takin—a piss,
P'lice outside doin nothin;

My ol marn died in is sleep
An on'y a few t bury im.

Ee worked f Oovers arf is life
Till they closed it down.

Ol frens an workmates lined—a streets
Clappin as is earse wen' by.

In Downin Street their glasses raised.
Me an-a missis eld is wake in-a kitchen.

Mike Jenkins
Merthyr Tydfil

Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson
may be gone soon
a consequence dire
for cocking a snook at the Queen in her choir

Lee Nash
Barbezieux-Saint-Hilaire, Charente

A Press Conference with Boris Johnson

An Oxford man of pale and pasty wit
—part French part Russian but a sort of Brit—
liked to discuss the pickings of his nose
to all who'd nod in assent and repose
upon the flabby couch of nonsense where,
intent on using pens to pin their hair
during the anxious stillness which ensued
—while many nails were nibbled, many chewed
and a dread fear of silence began to grow—
he'd make it clear that Truth was a no go.

Then looking at not much, he would allow
a testy wince to flick across his brow:
'Let none of you presume to generalize—
such thoughts are but a thin disguise,
a frail veneer to hide the ugly fact—
no truth, though blessed with beauty, is intact
but at the slightest probe must fall apart
and break the dreamer's foolish naïve heart.
You seek on earth what only lives in books—
a faithful man, in whom to sink your hooks.
Ha! Universal truth, like love, is sought in vain—
neither make sense outside their temporal plane,
restricted to their moments' present tense.
So how can Shakespeare to our ears make sense
or sweet tongued Milton, or that smart John Donne
who may not still be read in years to come?
All hearts are foreign, even those we know;
each lover thinks he judges right although
the softest kisses, seeds of cancer sow.
And wedding rings and offspring?—Just for show.'

The press conference continued without fuss
while all of England suffered brains concussed.
Now some hold out the plank of dunce,
as others queue to each headbang it once.

*Deborah Cox
Chipping Norton*

PartytraP

Masks of wolf and stoat gather,
throwing the bones of the old to their friends,
somehow we know how this story ends:
The Mad Hatter rules a Danse Macabre.

*David Annwn
Wakefield*



Testiculate

To wave one's arms about
while talking bollocks

It will come to pass that every braggart shall be found an ass.

An Old Song Resung

after 'The Poore Man Payes for All', c.1630

As I lay musing all alone, watching TV in bed,
Society's true cornerstone soon flashed into my head.
And there I thought I could behold some writing on the wall
In letters painted all in gold: the poor man pays for all.

I thought I saw a bold MP go swaggering along
Whose cronies profit easily from his persuasive tongue.
I thought, were it not for bribery, your peacock plumes would fall.
He struts it out in finery, and the poor man pays for all.

A moneylender, flush with gold, was driving up and down.
His wealth and influence controlled most of the folk in town.
His wealth he by extortion got, he rose by others' fall.
He spends what his own hands gained not, and the poor man pays for all.

I thought I saw an oilman sleek with such a drive to earn
He made the Russian podsols leak, he made the deserts burn.
For gas, all Lancashire he'd frack, till Blackpool Tower does fall
And with blood, not oil, the pumps run black, and the poor man pays for all.

Rules don't apply at No. 10, though we all toe the line.
It cannot be a party when the staff just bring in wine.
This proverb is still true today: the weak go to the wall.
Rich men can booze the night away, but the poor man pays for all.

I thought I saw the rising Thames cause Parliament to flee.
Still seeking whom to blame, they came to Oxford-by-the-Sea.
Now swarms of jellyfish shall swim around Westminster Hall;
Big Ben shall be but a memory, but the poor man pays for all.

Caroline Jackson-Houlston
Oxford

Maybe not

Maybe the people of Liverpool can forgive
Boris Johnson
for publishing slurs on their character,
for suggesting that they wallow in self-pity,
for suggesting that drunk Liverpool fans
caused the Hillsborough disaster.

Maybe Muslim women can forgive
Boris Johnson
for saying their burqas make them look like
letter boxes or bank robbers.

Maybe some British voters can forgive
Boris Johnson
for deceiving them about how much Britain
paid the European Union each week.

Maybe those with fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers
in hospitals and care homes
during the Covid pandemic can forgive
Boris Johnson
for attending parties when they could not
visit sick and dying relatives.

Maybe a grieving queen can forgive
Boris Johnson.
Maybe we should give Boris Johnson one more chance
says many a Tory councillor.

How many chances does one politician need?
How much forgiveness does one politician deserve?
How many chances do you give to a government
that lacks basic human compassion?
How much forgiveness do you give
to those who make the law then break the law
and then plead ignorance of the law?

How many more chances?
How much more forgiveness?

Dave Urwin
Carmarthenshire

And is There Honey Still for Tea?

There are 25 times more cod in the North Sea
Than rats on land in Britain.
So much more pleasant to have fish and chips for tea
Than chew on politicians.

Dave Sinclair
Winchester

B J

He's a blow left and right,
he's a messy Zipworld sight,
he's a fan-the-flames for fight
job.

He's a blow hot and cold,
he's a can't care for young or old,
he's a 'do as you're told'
job.

He's a blow this and that,
he's a profiteering fat cat,
he's an any which way diktat
job.

He's a blow up and down,
he's a smirking, lying clown,
he's a posh twat on the town
job.

Denni Turp
Penygroes

Downing Tea Party

Good friends died, were buried. I wasn't there.
Dearly departed, their bomb-cratered families
critically limited by numbers.

Locked down, locked out, distant as the moon,
ashamed, we bowed heads, sent our messages
remote and heavy as stars.

All the while, woken from his slumbers
the man who makes the laws
pads outdoors to his palatial back garden

to greet his backers, hangers-on
with backpats, quips and stories taller
than the London Eye. They return their bellows

for the cheery fellow. Throws them a schtick
with their drinks, looks over his shoulder
and winks.

Harry Gallagher
Cullercoats

Clichéd Clowns

I studied the road map
with my right honourable friend
and without a scintilla of doubt
we quickly realized that
it was simply not fit for purpose
and would not lead to the level playing field.

The fact of the matter is that we
both categorically deny
that we are at a crossroads here
and let me be absolutely open and honest
we feel we have achieved a great deal
but there is still much to do
because there never was any instant solution
to putting clowns like us in power.

Jim Aitken
Edinburgh



*And yet I know him a notorious liar,
Think him a great way fool, solely a coward.*

Wiff Waff

My name is Alexander (the Great)
but Boris is how I prefer to go.
I've got lots and lots to say,
and who doesn't love a show?

Long Latin words may win some,
and not brushing my hair the rest.
How the pale navel-gazing Brits
love a political character the best.

I've never really done anything
but no one really seems to care.
Nigel and I made crowds chuckle,
all it took to be crowned Mayor.

No more need for the truth,
I gave up on that back in the day.
They let me say anything now,
such a marvellous game to play!

Yes I enjoy a bit of piffle paffle
with the odd fillie now and then.
But who ever made a fuss before
in judging the Empire's great men.

Now with Cameron Minor gone
my rightful destiny awaits us all.
When one is so truly exceptional,
nothing left but pass him the ball!

Giles Dawnay
Hereford

Nominations for the Queen's Awards for Enterprise are Open

They'd cleared the blockage
in the pipe linking
10 and 11 Downing Street

when they caught muffled words
between the two ministers.
Shuggie put his ear to the pipe

and heard the nation take the strain:
'Another decade of austerity.'
Wullie inserted a pump

into the adjoining pipes.
Onward deposits
lodged by the Right

Honourable Gentlemen
were flushed back with tsunami force.

Owen Gallagher
London

**Prayer for the Rt Hon Member
for New Forest West et al.**

And spare a thought
for those Conservative MPs
who will stand in the House
insist we all eat the same
leathery, overdone lamb chops
wear the same unfashionable undergarments
can all quote from Wisden, Tennyson,
and Boys' Own Weekly, understanding
these are interchangeable
who desire that we dance only
in the presence of chaperones
are tucked up in bed by 1955
are dressed and ready and waiting
eagerly for the morning post
demanding our National Service
whenever it arrives
who are too impoverished to have
their own collection of vinyl
too stupid to navigate Spotify
too benighted to have ever heard of YouTube
who have been prevented by their neighbours
from playing national anthems
of their own choosing
at any time of day
whose only dream is to have died,
weeping, in a far-flung corner
of a foreign field
in another century
and who never did.

*Steve Pottinger
Willenhall*

Boris in the Eighth Circle

...

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...

David Olsen
Kidlington

November 2021

sweeps in on a broomstick's slipstream
lays its dead to rest

pulls the plug on the sun
lives in the twilight zone

seeps damp into bones
warms them with fuel debt

drags revellers towards Christmas
on billionaires' offshore profits

sells integrity to the highest bidder
throws another dead cat on the table

speaks in Peppa Piglish to hide
the theft of red wall houses

a month for remembering
gunpowder and Flanders,

the fallen, the poppy,
the guy on the fire. O Guido,

O Catesby, the twenty-first century
needs folk with your chutzpah:

we get it, we forgive you.
Come back and finish what you started.

Rachel Davies
Saddleworth

Toadland

after Kenneth Grahame

The world has seen great tricksters,
As history books have showed.
But none of the cry was half so fly
As slippery Mr Toad!

Those clever peeps at Oxbridge
Know most that can be knowed.
But not one of them knows the half of it
When it comes to Mr Toad.

The mugs sat down in the dark and wept,
Their tears in buckets flowed.
Who was it bluffed, 'You'll all be rich!'
You've got it. Mr Toad.

The Brexit bus went Poop-Poop-Poop
Ignoring its overload.
Which of them steered it over a cliff?
The calamitous Mr Toad!

The public cheered when Covid
Seemed to reach the end of its road.
Was it *Sky News* that told them?
Nuts. It was Mr Toad.

The Queen came from her chapel,
Heavy the grief she showed.
At her regular diary meeting
She said, 'Ixnay on Mr Toad!'

Rip Bulkeley
Oxford



As loathsome as a toad.

The Bodyguard's Tale

You can call me his chief protector,
You can call me his hired gun,
You can call me Chief Inspector
Since it's one of the jobs I've done.
Started off in the private sector,
Looking out for Number One—
I'd have taken on Hannibal Lecter
With the bunch I used to run!
Then I joined the Old Bill as Director
Of Ops for his days in the sun
When we'd duff up the odd objector
While the monster was out having fun.

Yet I thought: who'd be poacher-turned-keeper
If 'security' means you're employed
Just to shelter this jerk from the Reaper,
This cock of the walk who's destroyed
Human lives by the thousand (much cheaper
Than the health care he enjoyed!),
Whose lies twist and cling like a creeper,
Whose stunts are pure celluloid,
And whose harms to the country strike deeper
Than a germ-bearing asteroid.

Then I thought: what are bodyguards there for
In such desperate times as these
When the top guy we're summoned to care for
Has brought the whole land to its knees?
It's not monsters like him we prepare for,
Not scoundrels who loll at their ease
While the people they've no time to spare for
Die in droves from a viral disease
And the 'freedom' he wants a fanfare for
Is the freedom to die as we please.

A dilemma, but soon I decided
Where my best course of action lay
If this old hired gun were now guided
To bring predator down, not prey.
Oh, the papers will feast on it: 'why did
Such a cool hand as him go astray?'
And I'll tell them: 'It's one thing I've prided
Myself on—still having the say
When duty and right are divided
And duty just has to give way.'

No denying the hour was a sad one
When conscience submitted its plea
And I thought: 'Career? You once had one,
With your hiked-up protection fee.
But this last guy turned out such a bad one
That you shook the poison tree!'
So I'd practise the hip-shots, then add one,
Get the whole thing worked out to a tee,
With the monster's last outing a mad one
Facing all his accusers in me.

Christopher Norris
Swansea

Value for Money

With Covid there's a crisis
the system's on its knees.
Procurement has a fast track
Set up for VIPs.

They pay PPE Medpro
two hundred million quid.
Don't say who recommended them,
would rather names were hid.

The press say it was Lady Mone,
her lawyers pick a fight.
An FOI request reveals
the papers got it right.

Her legal team's aggressive
despite this quick own goal:
'Brief, single, solitary step
—the limit of her role.'

With confidentiality
the system is a mess.
Accountability requires
an educated guess.

Mone and her husband Barrowman
are linked with dummy firms.
Their office manager's involved;
a complex can of worms.

A civil service email
reports her playing rough,
fuming at Gove and Hancock
'cos they don't do enough.

This firm had no track record
it's of uncertain worth;
Mone got it on the fast-track
five days before its birth.

Maybe it wasn't ready.
The government don't feel
their gowns were up to standard.
Not such a bargain deal.

Fast-track's been found illegal.
By all means act with speed
but secret deals to profit mates
may not be what we need.

Paul Francis
Much Wenlock

In a Land of Make Believe

In a land of make believe,
Lived a haughty king and queen.
Their palace was paved in gold,
They ate the finest cuisine.

The king would talk in riddles,
Bumbling in a daft caper.
The queen would wrap herself in
The most lavish wallpaper.

'I am king and what I speak
Must be true, at least today.'
He would harumph and splutter,
And about turn the next day.

He promised all his kingdom
Happiness ever after
For everyone in the land
To great delight and laughter.

But then appeared a pink pig
Who said 'These are porky pies
The king and queen are both frauds
It's time we all opened our eyes.'

And the children of the land
Started cheering the pink pig
Jumping up and down, shouting
'Hurrah!' and dancing a jig.

All the fathers and mothers
Started joining in the cries
'Swop the pig for king and queen,
She will tell us no more lies!'

The king shouted 'Don't listen
To this porcine hairdryer,
It's all piffle and waffle.
Look, I am not a liar.'

But the people laughed at him
Making fun of his blonde wig.
And the kingdom was restored
With, on the throne, Peppa Pig.

Ian Bray
Oxford

The PM approached a fat cat
And offered to go in to bat
For him on the downlow,
But please could Lord Brownlow
Cough up to refurbish his flat.

Mick Twister / @twitmericks
London

A Press Statement

*Here is a Press Statement issued today
by the Prime Suspect and pro tem Leader
of the British Party Party, the Right
Dishonourable Boorish Johnson:*

The staff of Number Ten are to be praised as well as overpaid for their *sterling efforts* and strenuous *work ethic* during the course of the pandemic. No burden has been too heavy for them to bear, whether a file of paperwork or a suitcase of vital supplies, and not a single complaint has been heard from them when a work event has been prolonged late into the night. They have set a fine example to the nation, showing *cheerful stoicism* in the face of setbacks, as when one staffer, strenuously putting his back into his given work, accidentally broke my son Wilfred's little swing in the garden.

I know that the Great British Public will similarly apply themselves to their allotted role in the *national effort*, thus making Britain an even greater *safe haven* for the Party and Government that I lead, and the class and cause that we serve, and I know that they will similarly show *true grit* in the face of their own setbacks, whether caused by ill health, poverty, fraud, grand larceny or government.

*The remainder of the statement could not
be recorded, as the Prime Suspect fell into
paroxysms of incoherence and laughter.*

*David Betteridge
Glasgow*



A fool's bolt is soon shot.

Guzzle and Gain

It was Elvis Costello who wrote that he would
'Tramp the dirt down' after Thatcher; so now I say
Let it rise up to return to earth the blonde beast,

As he defies word and worth, guzzling as he did
In that garden, at which apparently he ate and drank,
Blinded, like a diabetic in danger from the difficulties

Presented by too much fat and salt, sugar, yeast.
The bitter wheat he has soon was sandwich shaped
At that party, or placed in the pizzas, that unfortunately

Sir Keir and co. also had. For different reasons, he states:
A late night takeaway from campaigning, but now so hard
To defend, as his desperate damning is a mouthful away

From the bad. At least Starmer owned up, and while
There should be ways to distinguish, in the rules
That were written, no double standard fulfils,

Or not as they did on those particular nights
And in those throats and stomachs, which in reflection
Belch at us; insults from intestines to the common heart

As blood spills. Or what should be blood, if corruption
Begot execution. Were this the French Revolution
There would be heads in the basket, placed neatly beside

The bread rolls. But then one must ask: *How much disgust
Is ingested when a Prime Minister proudly lies, then denies?*
Let tongues loll. And yet once more he slips, and then slides

Through on saliva; as the spit we'd spend on him,
And the waste in his words sees him saved. Today,
January 20th, he declares a lift on restrictions, in order

To obfuscate and win favour and once more disguise
The depraved. Will he continue? Fuck knows. But Fuck
Never tells us. The strain is near sacrificial, as mouth free

Of food I now scream. Just like Henry II once did
When decrying Tom Becket, thwarted, only this time
We might phrase it as: *Who will rid us of this wretched PM?*

In my dream. And so, once again, he distracts, by giving
The sour public what they want; a fresh taste of freedom.
He wraps it in a bap, the bluff bastard, in the hope

That we swallow it, and stop questioning while he stoops
To conquer; but the fart that comes now speaks volumes
Signalling as it always does, coming shit. It continues

To pour from both ends, submitting us to ordure.
Put that on a plate, fiend, and pass it. Our choice is
To chuck it straight back at him, or submit.

David Erdos
Uxbridge

Bring Your Own

Bring your own booze
Bring your own excitement
Bring your own excuses
Bring your own entitlement
Bring your own germs
Bring your own immunity
Bring your own free pass
to party with impunity

Bring your own scorn
Bring your own spin
Bring your own speed
Bring your own sloe gin
Bring your own tipple
that your servant bought
Bring your own bottle
and don't lose it if we're caught

Bring your own self-regard
Bring your own confidence
Bring your own superiority
Bring your own arrogance
Bring your own toasts
Bring your own boasts
of how hard you are working
at impressing your host

Bring your own high horse
Bring your own wealth
Bring your own bare face
Bring your own breath
and let your hypocrisy take it from you
And bring the common people's piss
so we can take that too.

*Janine Booth
Lewes*

Those Magnificent Men

The people waited. They turned inward
to the house, the family, the self.
They tried not to dwindle and shrivel
like last year's apples. Not to evaporate
on the turncoat air.

They tried not to be cruel, most of them,
most of the time. They tried
not to rage at everything
but to use their anger justly.
They tried to be patient.

They watched while fools kite-high
on unearned power, reckless avarice,
cawed their carrion song, soared on the waxy wings
of a hundred thousand false promises, spun
death-denying spins, looped breathtaking loops,
lied and lied and lied.

The people, thinking themselves helpless,
watched keenly, nonetheless, for the fools to fall to earth.

Mandy Macdonald
Aberdeen

Night of the Long Piss-ups

A boozy woozy party's going on at No 10
bring your own booze boys
bring as much as you can
bring a case or two of wine,
bring two cases of gin.
'We've all worked hard together boys
We deserve a boozy fling.'

But there's a stench in the basement
a stink is spreading on all floors
they're sniffing in the bathrooms
have I mentioned coke before?
Now its spread into the garden
but there's nothing for the Met to see here.

oh dear Boris just broke the swing again
oh dear Boris's sat and broke the swing
and he's hiding in the fridge again
in case Carrie comes looking for him.

Dead fish rot from the head they say,
salmon, cod, trout or eel
all smells the same to me
except the fishy kind of smell
that comes of crooked deals
but I can't make head nor tail of this
where does that stench come from?

A dead fish flounders on the ice cold slab
but Johnson didn't vote himself in—
Aye you Tory voters know who you are
the stink oozes out of every one of you.

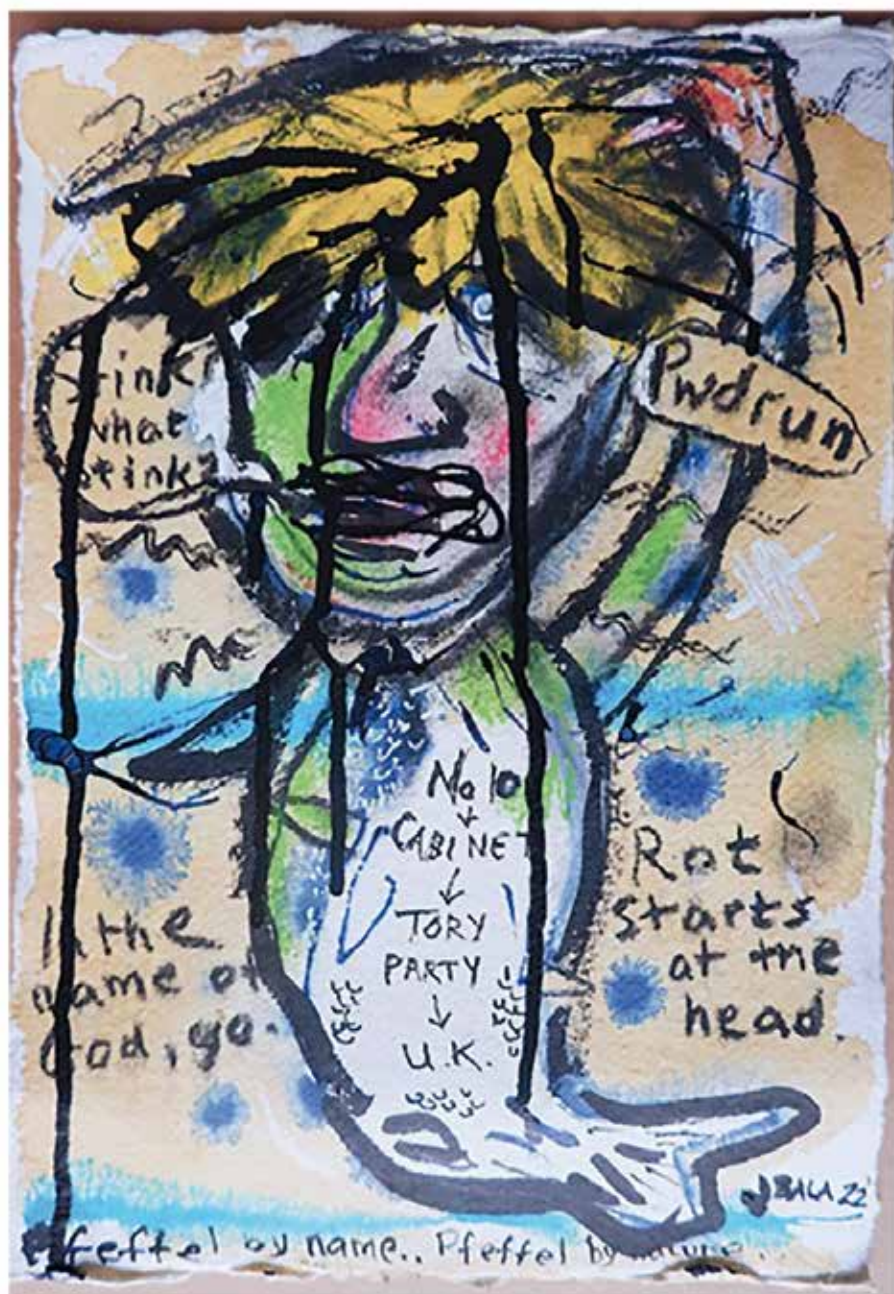
A boozy woozy party's going on at No 10
bring your own booze boys
bring as much as you can
bring a case or two of wine,
bring two suitcases of gin.
'We've all worked hard together boys
Drink up the wake will soon begin.'

Rob Cullen
Pontypridd

Take a Haiku

the fault line is drawn
<ignorance is no excuse>
expect eruptions

Julie Anne Gilligan
Essex



Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

Our Ruling Cow Pat Continues Unabashed

The PM looks us in the eyes
And tells the most outrageous lies.
He's quite allergic to the truth—
For his caste truth would be uncouth.

'When those chaps tell me I'm a pig,
That's really rather infra dig,
If they had been my fag at Eton
They would have been most soundly beaten.

Our paters send us to such schools
To learn just how to bend the rules;
So after leathering their bums
We'd all have turned out lifelong chums.'

Alan Maley
Fordwich

de Pfeffel's Aperitif

A piffling indiscretion
de Pfeffel's aperitif
A mere gauche digestif
Not exactly tactful
The night before Philip's funeral
But the prime minister's pretty sure
His sixth cousin twice removed
(The Queen, that is) will
Accept his grovelling
For having been found out—
Such lapses of judgement
Go with being in government,
Sidestepping canapés,
Negotiating terrine
And platters of red meat
Which must be preserved
At all costs, no matter price,
Minced or diced,
Bluntly everything else
Can and should and has been sacrificed
To keep 'Big Dog' gnawing on his bone
On his world throne...

*'You have sat here too long
For any good you have done.
In the name of God, go.'*

All wait on Sue Gray
To see if she can officially
Find the prime minister out
And he waits patiently
To find out if he attended a party
Accidental gate crasher

Innocent bystander
To his own corrupt culture
Who stopped just for a tippie
To steady his nerves
When in disbelief
He found himself witness
To unsocial distance
In the Downing Street garden
So sipped his aperitif
Then headed back inside
To 'work' then collapse
Into a memory lapse
Just like the one he had
When confronted with
An admonishing quip
Relating to Neville Chamberlain
In the Commons chamber:

*'You have sat here too long
For any good you have done.
In the name of God, go.'*

*Alan Morrison
Bognor Regis*

Ism

Absenteeism Amoralism Barefacedunmaskism Bastardism Blahism
Blunderism Blusterism Boosterism Bullingdonism Bullshitism
Bullyism Bunterism BYOBism Cakeism CadoftheRemoveism
CantbearsedtogotoCobrameetingsinaPandemicism Chancerism
Charlatanism Chauvinism Corruptionism Cronyism Cosplayism
Curtainism Dilettantism Direjokeism Ditherism Etonmessism
Faketreatyism Fauxbonhomism Goldwallpaperism Greedism
Grossism Hairofa5yearoldism Homophobia Hubrism
Hypocrisy Incompetism Invertedpyramidofpiffleism
Junkjournalism Implicitism Industrialscalepartyism Kermitism
Lesemajestism Letterboxism LittleTrumpism Malversationism
Narcissism Nastypartyism Nastypieceofworkism Nepotism
NHSstealthprivatizationism Nodsandwinksantitakingthekneeism
Notlevellingism Oneruleforyounoneforusism Omnishambism
Otherpeoplesluxuryvillainism Peeragesalesmanism Peppapigism
Philanderism Photo-opportunism PlantingseedsofFascism
PlottingtosaveClimateChangeDenyingformerEnvironmentminister
OwenPatersonduringCOP26ism Policestateism Phoneyism
Populism Prerogativism Privatejetism Racism Recklessism
Scoundrelism Shamelessness Sleazeism Slipperyism Sloganism
Smearism Spaffism Spivism Testiculateism Uturnism Vaingloriousism
Waffleism Workinggardenmeetingswithwineandcheeseism
Xenophobia Yammerism Zanyism

What's not to like?

Mark Haworth-Booth
Swimbridge

Eton Mess

Another world; tailcoats, quads, rugger, fagging,
those thousand pounds of fees a sound investment
to access front bench of entitlement;
Oxbridge, a safe seat, City; running empires.

School days nothing but roots for growing upwards
through knowing people, houses, clubs and contacts:
Old So-and-So, his hyphen's worth a fortune,
that nod and wink, price tag to ermined honours.

Classics and Wall Game part of life's translation
from inky oik to boardroom, bank or chambers.
Nothing too serious. Life is full of wheezes,
sprouting the Brussels lies as prep for Brexit,

and marriages that seem to bloom, then wither
to children's birthdays in the au pair's diary
for splash of cash, and card. Real cost of service
those family trees with rings of pounds in millions.

Dynasty: names down, squired, portfolio prospering
to cover eventualities, hunting, polo;
fine detail: blazers for the Henley rowing,
offshore accounts to fox the tax collectors.

Ruthless ambition greased with polished accents,
or levers pulled to tweak redundant meanings
making 'lie' 'truth', or 'crony' a 'business partner';
dumped policy a midnight press announcement.

Even Old Boys go bad. One sees right through them
from First Class carriage windows, waving placards,
or Orwell on an island, typing parables
about the sort of power one takes for granted

to tame the universities, judges, media,
each course served prelude to the Eton Mess.
The way a culture can infect a nation,
the lessons taught, applied; the eventual cost.

Martyn Halsall
Ovington

Downing 'Em Street

'Hi all, after so much bad news,
Let's banish the old Covid blues,
And gather together
To savour the weather
In Downing Street (bring your own booze).'

Mick Twister / @twitmericks
London

Talking Boris

Beyond parody, in the realm of madness,
our certainties scattered like bottle tops thrown
round the Downing Street garden. It's pointless to groan
it's too late. We bought into this sadness,
saw a fool, laughed and laughed ourselves blind.

Joker, we said, in time of crisis, what we need
over solemn politicians, is a prancing steed
highlighting past glories, bringing to mind
national heroes, our Saint George will slay Europe.
Stupidly, we know he is bumbling his way,

over and over, to fail. We see him pretend
work is cheese, wine and only a dope
would buy his lie for every occasion
but um um and a Greek quote
send a cheque and get to be a lord

see him grin and waddle fat and gross
remember who fed him and who pays.
This is a comedy worthy of Aristophanes:
'youth ages, immaturity is outgrown, ignorance
can be educated, and drunkenness sobered,
but stupidity lasts forever.'

George Colkitto
Paisley



The fires i' the lowest hell fold in the people!

The Ship of State

What head commands this ship of State? O, who will navigate?
Who'll set her course and keep her straight? O, who will navigate?
When did hypocrisy and greed become our prized template?
Long may the learned cogitate—but who will navigate?

Now tolerance has ceased to be a virtue we all fete
and honesty's a paltry thing we can but simulate. O, who will navigate?
The game is up. Our scheme's undone, we can't negotiate.
We're lost at sea, without a mate. So who will navigate?

The officers are scurvy knaves, a bunch of reprobates.
They're wild on rum and full of hate. O, who will navigate?
And now our ship of State is wrecked must we capitulate?
Too late, too late to expiate. O, who will navigate?

Abigail Elizabeth Ottley
Penzance

Excerpt from *BORIS*
a Comical Historical Tragedy
a long way after Shakespeare's Richard III

Enter Boris, jogging around St. James's Park.

BORIS (puffing)

Around St. James's Park I like to jog
Accompanied by Dylin, my pet dog.

Starts back as a series of apparitions appear.

Say, who comes here, juridically dressed,
Ominous spider brooch upon on her breast?

BARONESS HALE

You thought proroguing Parliament was smart,
But the Supreme Court picked your claim apart.
Despair and die!

BORIS

A skull-like visage catches at my breath,
Grinning from ear to ear as if in death.

DOMINIC CUMMINGS

Brexit I planned and was thy faithful hack
Till Carrie got the hump and I the sack!
Despair and die!

BORIS

Now must I kneel as Majesty is due.
'Hail England's Queen and—for the moment—Scotland's too!'

THE QUEEN

Little one asks from one's PM, forsooth,
Only some slight acquaintance with the truth.
Alas, poor Boris, thou hast offended Us
And must make way for Sunak, Hunt or Truss.

ASSORTED MINISTERS

Michael Gove, Oliver Dowden, Nadim Zahawi et al.

Hail valiant Boris! More power to thy reign!—
Thy policies will make things right again!
But if they don't, now Brexit's done and dusted,
(Except the Ireland bit), alas you're busted!

BORIS

Suddenly awaking as if from a dream.

Much pizza and a suitcase full of wine
And merry staffers quaffing at the vine
At tables in the garden all aroar—
Of course, it was a meeting, nothing more!
Forward, then, into the morning fog.
My faithful Dylin, come, good dog, good dog!

*Brian Levison
Oxford*

Non-stick Pandemonium

Another happy new year
with the Jumblies still in power
our sieve remains seaworthy
though the water line is higher
the average mood is ambient
a balanced even ire
with one half in the icebox
and the other in the fire
disintelligentsia
in parliamentary tower
too party blind with drink to see
what future may endower
dealing and no-dealing
till it churns the channel sour
in a world of turning worms
each getting hotter by the hour
we share a petal bath beneath
bright enlightened glowers
of shining sparks
from static bees
in polyester flowers
a new bouquet
nose of decay
arose surfeit of liars
lost giant snails
semi-final nails
no sign of any pliers
do not despair
keep sound and hair
one to one inspire
join our dance

Elastoplast chance
to skip the pan
and fryer

Karen Gemma Brewer
Aberaeron

A selfish, unprincipled arsehole
Briefs his outing to view Barnard Castle:
‘That’s hardly the pick of it.
I worked in the thick of it
With a rabble of roistering rascals.’

Anon.
Barataria

Crime Minister

Never the same since he left that hospital bed.
Some say he's now a clone or actor and the real one is dead
He lectures about overpopulation while expecting child number seven
Peppers speeches with Peppa Pig World when not carousing with G7.
Some say Carrie's his handler, rather than wife.
And she wears the 'wrong trousers' dictating the puppet's life
He says 'Follow the Science', then makes up the rules
Not for him and his ilk, just for us poor fools
He once championed freedom, said he'd eat a national ID card
Now he wants total citizen control and to ban every protest placard
It's not about politics any more
Right and Left are out the door
It's good versus evil and asking ourselves who works for us?
The son of a father of six, author of books about overpopulation and a virus?
Now BoJo's served his masters' purpose and they want him out
Who will be the new tousle-haired bread and circus roustabout?
They're selected, not elected, we all know that
But will it be a black, a grey or a white hat?

*Laura King
Brighton*

Setting his Sight

Since he was a boy he had set his sight,
stamp over everyone, go for broke.
At the heart of privilege, that's his right.

Lies wrapped in Latin sound polite,
create the mask of a jolly good bloke.
Since he was a boy he had set his sight.

Bluster perfected, see his name in bright lights.
Interests of the people? Just one big joke.
At the heart of privilege, that's his right.

In the halls of Eton he learned how to fight,
now rallies the voters with Hearts of Oak.
Since he was a boy he had set his sight.

Blinkered by power he holds on tight,
posh boy, schemer, mirrors and smoke.
At the heart of privilege, that's his right.

Are there regrets, in his dreams at night?
If pricked will he bleed? Then give him a poke.
Since he was a boy he had set his sight.
At the heart of privilege, that's his right.

*Helen Cook
Maesllyn*

When the Party's Over

When the party's over, who'll take out the empties?

When the champagne's lost its sparkle

And the spirits are all downed

And you're sucking up the bitter dregs

Where better selves were drowned

If you could only find a suitcase

You might fetch another round

When the party is over...

When the party's over, who'll repair the damage?

Sweeping up the debris

And taking out the trash

Explaining to the landlord

How everything got smashed

You need to get things ready

For one final leaving bash

When the party is over...

Wake up with a headache that could last for fifty years

Wish that you had listened when we told you it was bound to end in tears...

When the party's over, who will foot the bill?

For the freeloaders and sycophants

The charlatans and cheats

When the time comes for a reckoning

We're keeping the receipts

Now the cabaret is finished

Would you please vacate your seats

When the party is over...

Mark Ashworth

Maidenhead

(to hear him sing these lyrics, go here:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-381911693/when-the-partys-over>)

Hurricane Season

darkest December 2020 with a hurricane of chaos
descending at pace across the globe, UK
Christmas cancelled from Cornwall to Shetland
through Ulster off to Norfolk EXCEPT
in the corridors of Westminster, SW1,
where fine wine & blue cheese a metaphor
for lockdown drinks parties clandestine junkets
of silly hats, posh frocks in joyful refrain
cumming out of the cupboard but
swept under brown marled chesterfields
by blondes in the know (you know)
bluffing for the right bluffing to the left, for
those willing to believe that
December drinks parties were only a figment
of media and non-believers but
now united in condemnation of
double entendre aka politician speak, so
come all yeh faithful in this winter of goodwill
to gather around proffering support, NOT,
for all two-faced lying hypocrites
unfit for the job this
darkest January '22 another hurricane of chaos

Alun Robert
Kent

**Joris Bronson,
Who Ignored the Rules**

after Hilaire Belloc

The chief defect of Bronson, Joris,
Was chewing dessicated orris,
Which, though medicinal of yore,
Emboldens folk to flout the law
By darkening the inner light
That lets us know what's wrong from right.



Thus Bronson, with his chomping chums,
Swapped contracts worth enormous sums
On which there hung the nation's fate.
And, melancholy to relate,
Left bastards in his wanton wake
But thoughtlessly declined to make
The least provision for the same
Or even to recall their names.

His gang decided prudent rules
Were only made for lesser fools
And went about official tasks
Unhindered by protective masks,
While as for mandatory curbs
On travel, 'Tell that to the burbs!'
They chortled, stuffing table d'hotés
From Islington to John o'Groats.

Alas there dawned a fateful day
In 2020, merry May,
When Bronson's friend and PPS
Concocted a god-awful mess
By bidding all at Number 10
To quit their keyboards, desks, and pens



And take some wine, perhaps with cheese,
At leisure underneath the trees,
Though other folk were strictly banned
From gatherings throughout the land
And unhugged mourners must endure
Grim funerals of three or four.

When Bronson viewed the cheerful scene
Of staffers on the fragrant green
With glasses here and bottles there
He didn't bridle, stamp or swear,
Or make some move to remonstrate
And chastise his associate.
Instead he moved from group to group
While supping from a modest stoup
Then calmly left the jovial crack
Without objecting to its lack
Of seemliness, still less the thought
That laws were being set at nought
By those who wrote them for the nation,



Which met with furious indignation
When in due course it came about
That, as things do, the thing came out
And all was known, or most—at least
Enough to cook a hundred geese.
'I swear we were at work!' lied Joris,
'Since no one there was munchin' orris.'
But voters scorned his specious tale
As from their eyelids fell the scales
That once distorted crooks like Joris
Into what seemed like normal Tories.



Now, having served some gentle time
And paid back every stolen dime,
He polishes the granite basins
In Carrie's Nail Bar, Market Rasen,
Though Covid Omega bids fair
To bankrupt them—and shed his hair.

Rip Bulkeley
Oxford
illustrated by Martin Gollan

A blonde-headed fellow from Eton
Used to think he could never be beaten
Till the chorus of 'Liar!
Your pants are on fire!
Let him know he was close to unseating.

Anna Iwaschkin
Reading

The PM's Speech

Old king Bo
made a merry old speech
and a merry old speech
made he.
He called for the laughs
and he called for the cheers
and he promised a spending spree.

Old King Bo
made his very jolly jokes
and his anti-lefty pokes
made he.
He blustered for his votes
and he waffled through his notes,
all courting publicity.

Old King Bo
had a very fine chortle
and a very fine chortle
had he.
He proclaimed Covid gone,
would accept nothing wrong
in a kingdom now EU free.

Old King Bo
was a merry old Bo
and a merry old Bo
was he.
And he blew his own pipe
and he beat his own drum
and his fiddlers smirked with glee.

*Adele Phillips
Petersfield*

Witnesses

I

When Dad was on the ventilator, he could only use his eyes to tell Mum how he felt. She could just about see through the eye shields, mask and PPE. She tried to hold his hand, slippery with gloves—it felt like distance—like the time she was wrapped in clingfilm for a seaweed treatment and she panicked. As she held his hand, she kept saying I'm here love, I'm here.

II

It was a last-minute decision, on a lovely evening to join the office group for an evaluation, a think-in, a chance to see how we were doing. Like Sophocles and the others, we like wine it clears the mind, sharpens our focus. The garden was verdant, light filled. The sun a bonus. While our offices are roomy, the staff are many—and even though we never wear a mask, it's been hard to balance you know, home, childcare and serious policies.

Rona Fitzgerald
Glasgow

How Do You Solve a Problem Like Boris?

after Rogers & Hammerstein

He has a drink but doesn't think
That anyone will care,
Hosts a bash, goes on the lash
Then claims he wasn't there
When asked for explanations
He'll blub it isn't fair
I think he's going to fuck it for us Tories!

He treats all high affairs of state
As just a silly game
While all other affairs he's had
Will see him shift the blame
While smirking for the cameras
Because he has no shame
Exactly like the rest of all us Tories!

I'd like to say, although it's indiscreet:
He won... me my... seat

How do you solve a problem li-i-ike Boris?
How do you feed an arsehole its own shit
How do you find a word that sums up Boris?
A sociopath! A charlatan! A tit!

Many a gaffe you'd like him to acknowledge,
To tell the truth and lead and know he's sinned,
To wake up and see the score
And settle for cheap decor
How do you nail a fart upon the wind?
Oh how do you solve a pro-o-o-blem like Boris?
How are we going to get this fucker binned?

He's lost count of all his kids
He would fuck some giant squids
And then press the molluscs for a hefty loan
And deny it to Lord Geidt
Who'll believe the lying shite
When he claims that was all done on an old phone

He thinks it's just a joke
Then he'll give your wife a poke
Indifferent to every fresh affront
He's a narcissist, a liar,
A fantasist! He's dire!
He's a wanker! He's a monster!
He's a cunt!

How do you solve a problem li-i-i-ike Boris?
How do you feed an arsehole its own shit?
How do you find a word to sum up Boris?
A Crook! A Chancer! Psychopath! A Git!

Many a time, pretending we're still smiling,
We've been yearning he'd fall under a bus
But how can we wield the knives
To save our political lives
When you're as complicit in his crimes as—us?

Oh how do you solve a problem li-i-i-ike Boris
When the alternative will be—Liz Truss?

Martin Rowson
London

No Smirking

He ignores the No Smirking signs
Lights one up
Flicks his ash on you and me
Smirks

He ignores the No Smirking signs
Buys a whole carton
Sends the bill to the taxpayer
Smirks

He ignores the No Smirking signs
Gives them to babies and the elderly
Stubs them out on all of us
Smirks

Rob Walton
Whitley Bay

Teflon Toxic

For many years
Teflon pans
were choice

items for busy cooks
intent on getting
things done
quickly

We know now
Toxic Teflon
does not do well under high heat
Cheap veneers
chip and flake
Should be replaced as

the merest surface scratch
ensures chemicals
once assumed *safe*
produce bitter cankers

'For God's Sake!'
do not be fooled into
discarding one overreaching cheap
used pan with another
of the same

Wellbeing recommends you
Ditch the entire range

Debra Watson
Hastings

Predator

I admire the integrity of crocodiles:
you know where you are with them.
Just one look and you're sure
they're not going to roll over
so you can tickle their tummies;
or leap onto your lap to lick your face.
The snap-trap jaws, the chain-mail scales,
the searchlight eyes say it all.
Yet how much more lethal they would be
if they had a crown of blonde hair to tousle,
of if they could spout a smattering of Latin,
or had a propensity for puns,
of if they could learn to lie
without compunction to camouflage
their predatory intentions.
How many more carcasses would
they then leave floating in the swamp?

Nigel Kent
Evesham

Accuracy of Quote

Our leader, 'a most notable coward',
for whom hiding in a fridge is preferable
to facing the press at a tricky time.
An infinite and endless liar, unprompted
you tell the people one thing, when
the reality is so very different—
the generous gift that wasn't a bribe,
the unqualified friend in a top job.
An hourly promise breaker, often
towards the NHS, who struggled
pre-pandemic, not paid their true worth,
shortages you claimed wouldn't happen,
paperwork unexpectedly increasing
(all of which many people predicted).
In short, you are the owner of
not one good quality. Not a one.
Shakespeare summed you up,
even without knowing of your existence.
We can only hope that all ends well.

Nikki Fine
Launton

My Lady Carrie Dream

after a trip to see the Lady Godiva statue in Coventry

So, barefoot, she returned her rented dress
brushed her hair, peeled out of her best M&S
lent a pony from Aspinall, set off up Whitehall.
The crowd whooped; banners wafted her by;

Cancel the Cuts
More than 1%
Tax the Corporations
Stop The War
Insulate Britain
Frack Off
Black Lives Matter
OutRage
Justice for Johnson
Extinction Rebellion
StopHS2
Reclaim the Streets
Stop the Sale of the NHS
Levelling Down
Tory Lies Cost Lives

Victoriously she continued her even tempo
collected trot along Birdcage Walk freeing herself
from the Lord of the Treasury, into the arms of
the people.

Jane Thomas
Oxford

Golden Age

spaffson of the rough-'em-up
slaying fields of eton
born to have in truth
a rollicking good time
at the people's expense
(no expense spared)
no probs this be the land of plenty
of scummy toffs and
jumped up wide boys
for a pantomime alliance
of the bastards
in the time-dishonoured
tradition of venality
with enough power-pissed
puppeteers to string along
these bums and tits
for however long it pays

Edward Mackinnon
Mirambeau, Charente Maritime

Will this do?

I was within the Guidance, I did nothing wrong,
technically. So allow me to renew my contrition—
I won't keep you; it won't take very long,

then let's move on—no need to prolong.
Egregious, perhaps, but technically I'd permission,
so technically didn't break any rules, did nothing wrong.

And remember, I'm Churchill, I'm strong!
And anyway, it wasn't technically my decision
to have a partygatheryworky thing on the lawn

with people I was never ever among.
And technically I've renewed my contrition
even though technically I did nothing wrong.

And it wasn't a party, it wasn't even a throng—
why not ask the technician!
And yet you're still singing the same old song—

I take it you really *do* want that gong?
So maybe you should change the edition?
Just say, I didn't break any rules, did nothing wrong,
etc., etc., and remember to whom you *really* belong.

Jim Mainland
Shetland

Flying in the Face of Boris Johnson

Here's a clown, enough to scare the kids,
abort, about face. And here's a mask
up against a demonstrator's face
outside number ten, partying on.
A mother dies alone, behind a screen.

And though my face could never be old male
Etonian, sometimes I catch a glance
of my reflection when I least expect it.
My face is red when asked an awkward question.

To tell the truth I'm not the best at lying.
Which brings me to this point, where did he learn
the art of a barefaced, poker-faced lie?

Meanwhile the police and crime bill's on its way.
A wheelie suitcase trundles past with bubbly.

Janet Hatherley
London



What's in a name?

Cat at No. 10

Just because you see me curled up
on the PM's threshold

you assume I must be
a political creature

but I turn my nose up
at factions

If I look right
or left it is for my safety

or to pounce on a mouse
but I never get embroiled

in their wranglings
Look at the mess they're in

no one will clean it up
but my litter gets scrubbed
daily

marie papier
Bristol

The Tory and the Bureaucrat

after Lewis Carroll

The cop was walking down the street,
a drone flew overhead;
they did their very best to warn
us how the virus spread.
*Please go back home, they warned us twice,
or else you'll end up dead.*

The anarchists all disagreed
because they thought the State
disqualified to interfere
in everybody's fate.
*Let's man the barricades, they said,
before it gets too late.*

The masks were few and far between,
the gowns were even less
and no one knew which way to turn
to save us from the mess.
*Just get it done, they said, but how
is anybody's guess.*

The Tory and the Bureaucrat
were meeting via Zoom;
they felt a tad uncomfortable
with bin bags in the room
but tried to smile at everyone
while hosting thoughts of doom.

*The time has come, the Tory said,
to talk of many things;
yes, anything but why we failed
or running round in rings*

*although I know it's not yet done
until the fat man sings.*

*If Amazon and Facebook
gave their profits for a year,
do you suppose, the Tory said,
that we could get things clear?
'I doubt it', said the Bureaucrat
and shed a bitter tear.*

*Dear oldies, come and talk to us,
the Tory did beseech,
we're sorry that you're suffering
but it's beyond our reach
to outfit all your carers
with good PPE for each.*

*I weep for you, the Tory said,
but everyone must die
and herd immunity is good
so let's not overcry.
The Bureaucrat said nothing but
'The graph has gone too high!'*

*'Oh, oldies', said the Bureaucrat,
'you've had a longish run.
May we turn off the oxygen?'
but answer came there none.
And that was scarcely odd, because
they'd buried every one.*

*Martin Zarrop
Altrincham*

Putting Bad to Good Use

A fish can only feed so many flies.
An eye for an aye, for the worm and snail,
the visitor who shares experience with a stranger.
You meditate in crowded rooms
easily as on a holy mountain,
finding peace and serenity
everywhere. Is that a figment
of your awakening, or a symbol?
You prepare, but will you be ready
when the good time rolls?
The monk is concerned: Is the infidel
sincere in his belief? He admits
good and bad coexist within these walls.
His advice is to take the good
and put the bad to good use. He says,
'A fish can only feed so many flies.'

Michael Foldes
Endwell, NY

Queens English will Dictate the Report Route

Now hang on, wait. We worked every day till late.
Creating twenty-five-hour days. Oh, the power. Ways
to change how you all had to live. Of course, it had to give.
And now you ungrateful plebs whine about how our wine was
packed into suitcases. And you make up phrases like 'Partygate'.
You can investigate all you like but it will be our Sue Gray who
will win the day. When she unveils that much-anticipated report
to your retorts and taunts of Partygate, it will be you measured
by the weight of what is more important than honesty or even
humanity. The Queens English. Your mistake of shouting out
'Partygate!' has let Sue Gray adopt our truth, point to your
singular, so insular request. We, the Tories, born and bred
for power, always the best at giving orders to all. Whether
it is Spring, Winter or as the Americans say, Fall. And so
that is what we will do. It will be us that choose which
of our little work gatherings we investigate, christen
Partygate. And the police, as usual, will please us
with their cooperation. As ever in each other's
pockets fuelled by rockets designed, deigned
to enable maintenance of an Establishment
Eton-educated manufactured in Parliament.

Andy Brown
Dawlish

BoJo: a Litany

I hate your lies, the monstrous lot
Of lies you've told to save your skin,
To line your pockets, take a shot
At some old rival, seek to pin
The blame elsewhere, pretend you've got
A halfway truthful tale to spin,
Or tell the world you're really not
That scheming bastard out to win
A bit more time before the plot
Unravels and you end up in
Deep shit, or gaol, or a tight spot
Where your glib tongue and oafish grin
Won't ease the punishment one jot
Or help you take it on the chin.

I hate your fake patrician ways,
Your indolence, your languid drawl,
Your mindless yawp, your fool displays
Of boorishness, your flaccid sprawl
On that front bench, the way they glaze,
Those eyes of yours, when some close call
Gets through at Question Time, the maze
Of lies, brush-offs, attempts to stall
For time, or feeble jokes to raise
A laugh from crass backbenchers—all
These things I hate, and count the days
Until at last the blinkers fall,
You're naked in the public gaze
And off to gaol for the long haul.

I hate your Eton-Oxford-primed veneer
Of civilized behavior, wit,
And what does service in that sphere

As intellect, though scarcely fit
To hide your lack of mental gear,
Your fallback mode of trueborn Brit
With speech to prove it: Eton sneer
Or Oxford posh, the standard kit
For those whose choices of career—
Say, politics or crime—admit
No end of vicious traits or sheer
Stupidity but tell them 'quit!
If class and breeding don't appear
Quite right to make their role legit.

Another thing I hate: how your
Vile defects all bespeak the same
Root vice, how rot infects the core
Of BoJo-being, how your name
Alone's enough for us to score
A moral bullseye—lack of shame,
The crook's last alibi, the store
Of handy get-outs when the game
Goes wrong, the fraudster's bottom drawer
Of killer notes to help defame
Some pesky journalist or shore
Your last defences up when blame,
At last, lies squarely at your door
And justice comes to stake its claim.

But, truth to tell, what I most hate
Is how those COVID victims died
In tens of thousands, how the rate
Skyrocketed because you tried
To fix the numbers, understate
The risks, keep your rich chums inside,
Give each big contract to some mate
Of yours with zero bona fide,

Put lockdowns off till it's too late,
Bluff your way through, let COVID ride,
Leave care-home dwellers to their fate,
Make sure the tabloid hacks provide
Your cover, then sit back and wait
As each new variant hits its stride.

Christopher Norris
Swansea

chequered landscape
rooks peck at the scarecrow's
crown of straw

Helen Buckingham
Wells



Through tattered clothes great vices do appear.

Occasionally, Outbreaks of Truth Occur

And when the Prime Minister lied to the people
protesters suggested
he be tied to the hands of Big Ben

or serve as a mortuary attendant.
That he renounce himself on a government broadcast
and be dropped into the Arctic

as food relief for polar bears.
His lies were posted on media platforms.
Immune systems did not kick in.

No one had the last lie.
There was no vaccination programme against lies.
The Prime Minister lied and lied happily ever after.

Owen Gallagher
London

Operation Big Dog

Smashed Cog
Flat Frog
Go!

Operation Don't Know

Low Blow
Shit Show
Go!

Operation Red Meat

Flat Feet
Dead Beat
Go!

Operation Pig Fat

Dead Cat
Spoilt Brat
Go!

Operation Suitcase

My Place
Two Face
Go!

Operation Soft Soap

Short Rope
No Hope
Go!

Operation Bin Bag

Small Snag
Jowls Sag
Go!

Operation Dodo

Ho Ho

Bo Jo

Go!

Steve Pottinger

Willenhall

(to listen to this performed by An Croenen go here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzpPafKoKE8>)

Very Long Grass

Bojo and Dick
seem terribly thick,
and as for Sue Gray,
she's fading away,
so all things must pass
into very long grass.

George Szirtes

Wymondham

Behind the Black Door

The Axe brewery
was the start of it;
in quick succession:
tennis courts, a tiltyard,
a cockpit of bloodied birds.

Erith gutted it:
two decades of pollution
turned the once yellow
façade to black, they painted
the other bricks to make
them fit.

The foundations
and Cabinet room proved to be
rotten so concrete was tried—
dry rot found throughout;
sometimes it was felt
the malign influence
of marshy ground
always soaked up
to infect the brains:
you could still hear
the brewery drinking,
the birds pecking
each other to bits.

*David Annwn
Wakefield*

This is Just to Say

after William Carlos Williams

I have drunk
the wine
that was in
the suitcase

and which
you were probably
saving
for after the pandemic

You may not forgive me
but it was deserved
so sweet
and so cold

Annie McCrae
Edinburgh

Ambushed by a Cake

I was just getting on with my job, see,
and there seems to have been a mistake.
I was doing my deed for the land that I lead,
then—ambushed by a cake.

I was hunkering down for the nation.
I knew there was plenty at stake.
I couldn't foresee what would happen to me,
yes—ambushed by a cake.

I've spent billions on our defences
and weapons to make our foes quake.
The provisions for this, well they're somewhat
amiss—ambushed by a cake.

But I guess you all knew when you voted
of the shambolic mess I would make.
Yes I've let you all down, but it's only a clown
who gets ambushed by a CAKE!

Joshua Seigal
London



*Dost thou think, because **thou** art virtuous,
there shall be no more cakes and ale?*

Social Distancing

Your mum dies; Boris Johnson's dad
gets a book deal. Covid-19—

uncovering the rottenness
at the heart of everything.

The country's sick. It's barely breathing.
The Conservatives have bled it

till it's a desiccated husk.
The NHS is held together

with love and the binbag tatters
of staff who care for relatives

as if they are their own flesh and blood.
We thanked them with claps on Thursdays.

I'll continue social distancing
from Tories as long as necessary.

Daily Mail readers should be
quarantined for the public good.

Mark Kirkbride
Shepperton

Could Happen To Anyone

I wasn't drinking that bottle of wine,
it innocently slipped and to avoid calamity
I opened my mouth. When I turned around
the garden was full of my friends.
Could happen to anyone.

We weren't singing rigger songs,
we were clearing our throats in fear
that we may have been already infected.
We just all coughed at the same time.
Could happen to anyone.

We weren't laughing at you
or the hundred thousand dead,
we just all thought of a joke
at the very same time and nigh on
spontaneously combusted.
Bloody funny, actually.
Could happen to anyone.

The Prime Minister didn't really say
'Fuck them, let it rip right through
them till they're piled in the streets.'
He was thinking of someone else
who looked a bit like you.
Could happen to anyone.

Harry Gallagher
Cullercoats

We Talked About Princes and Clowns

In this honest parliament of our bones
we sailed in whale-light to chit-chat
for every silence our baby sieved through the monitor

In our palace of love and fuck all we have no titles
Just a box marked memories and pills
Except when I drink and call Andrew a cunt

I'm always making mistakes and typo's
Last week I used a C in apologize you wanker
I sent it in a letter to the louse of parliament.

I'm the son of a factory man and a cleaner
A cold wind blows through my bones
My words are the rainbow in spilt petrol

Antony Owen
Coventry

Clusterfuck!

after Chuck Berry's 'Do the Hucklebuck'

When you've just become PM,
and you got no clue again.
Well here's what you do my friend—

You do the clusterfuck.
You do the clusterfuck.
Pin the blame on any one—
continue to fuck up.
Economy has tanked—
you talk a load of wank.
You rearrange the Cabinet—
and do a clusterfuck.
Even when your friends,
like Laura, won't shut up,
that's who you distract when you do the clusterfuck

When we move to Tier 5,
no one else gets out alive—
but your State wants to survive.

You do the clusterfuck.
You do the clusterfuck.
Pin the blame on any one—
continue to fuck up.
Economy has tanked—
you talk a load of wank.
You rearrange the Cabinet—
and do a clusterfuck.
Even when your friends,
like Laura, won't shut up,
that's who you distract when you do the clusterfuck

When your lockdown party, mate,
starts to smell like 'Partygate'
at least get your story straight.

Now you're the clusterfuck.
Now you're the clusterfuck.
Can't pin the blame on any one—
because you're the fuck up.
Economy has tanked—
you talk a load of wank.
Can't even trust the Cabinet—
when you're a clusterfuck.
Even when your friends,
like Kuenssberg, won't shut up,
there's no way to distract when you are...
the clusterfuck!

Des Mannay
Newport

'The increase in cases we see
Requires a move to Plan B,
Entailing new rules
For all of you fools,
And cheese-and-wine parties for me.'

Mick Twister / @twitmericks
London

How to Gut

from Great British Chefs

a Politician

& Hansard

It isn't difficult,

at the tip of a knife

gutting

cut off and

and

make an incision in the belly of

remove the guts and gills and pull them out easily when doing this.

until the water runs clear

make it easier to clear up afterwards.

No. 10 is a big department with millions of people who have the
guts of fish.

it is very important, the fish

back of the hand

from head to tail

you should be able to cut through the

I want to apologize.

I know that people across this country have
made extraordinary sacrifices

over the last eighteen months. I know the

anguish they have been through

unable to live or to love

I offer my heartfelt apologies.

Though I cannot anticipate the conclusions of
people who make the rules, I have learned to

their relatives and

I know people who simply make a statement

and I must take responsibility,

I know the rage they feel with me,

suffered terribly.

When I went into that garden I believed implicitly that this was a

work event

and

guidance in this House
of fish meeting loved ones inside or outside. With hindsight I should
wear latex gloves to protect everyone.
All I ask is that Sue Gray be allowed to
rinse the inside of her inquiry
before cooking, rubbing up both sides so that the full facts
are inedible and need to be removed. I will of course come back to this House
with a knife and
keep the messy process contained and if you are squeamish get your
fishmonger to remove Downing Street itself
in a bin bag and
pat dry the government I lead
with kitchen paper.

Winston Plowes
Calderdale

A Fish Rots from the Head

Or so at least it's often said
Once the belly can't be fed
And the tail cannot be led
Finnies hit the riverbed

When the shit starts turning red
Stickleback or hammerhead
One rule cannot be gainsaid
Starving fish are quickly dead

Nothing further need be said
Don't by spasms be misled
Now the monster's blood is shed
Close the book and go to bed

Ding Bloody Dong—the Filthy Fish is Dead

Rip Bulkeley
Oxford



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CULTURE  **MATTERS**