

From the Back Verandah

Like many people of my vintage, I was a child at a pantomime when I first learnt of Dick Whittington and his famous cat. Well, it's precisely on stage and in children's books where the cat business belongs, since it was no more than a piece of folklore that sprang up about 200 years after his death. To an adult, the story of his philanthropic deeds is far more fascinating than the legend of his cat.

Richard Whittington (c1358-1423) was the youngest son of the wealthy Sir William Whittington of Pauntley in Gloucestershire. Richard became even more prosperous when he set up as a mercer. In fact he became the richest merchant of his time. He even traded with and lent money to Henry IV and V, a mediaeval practice (whereby the City of London made loans to an insolvent King) that lasted until 1694, when the Bank of England was established.

Whittington was a generous benefactor in his lifetime (for example, he built a library at Greyfriars, established a ward at St. Thomas' Hospital for unmarried mothers and rebuilt the Church of St. Michael Paternoster Royal), and an even more munificent one in his will.

Here are some of the diverse purposes for which his vast fortune was bequeathed:

the building of a library at Guildhall,
the rebuilding of the squalid Newgate Gaol,
the foundation of an almshouse and college at East Grinstead,
the construction of a College of Priests.

His most extraordinary bequest to London was a public lavatory near the mouth of the Walbrook River at Dowgate. It had a row of 64 seats for men and a similar one for women.

— Fizzgig

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The richest merchant of his day was a generous benefactor in his lifetime and left a munificent will.

Off the Beam?

When we first published the *12 Billiard Balls* puzzle (Issues 4 and 6, November 1997 and March 1998), reader response consisted of little more than a stifled yawn. In contrast, on the Internet the puzzle is a worldwide favourite. Person after person is looking for a solution, and most find it at *Bikwil*.

The downside of all this is that I may have stated the problem inaccurately. I quote (verbatim) from an affronted U.S. searcher:

A beam scale usually has one tray where a balance scale has two. This obviously makes a big difference in how the problem is solved! . . . I have wasted hours trying to solve with a beam scale . . . Maybe you'll consider rewording your question.

Yes, I did say *beam balance* — the phrase I'd swear we used in high school science. These days, though, the term for the "sea-saw" two-pan scales is *balance scale*, while *beam balance* seems to apply the device with one tray and one or more weights that slide along the beam(s).

Do any readers have more information on the matter?

This current issue of *Bikwil*, by the way, is loaded down with contrite behaviour. Far too much for its own good, perhaps. For other examples (if you must) see *Another Apology from the Front Porch* (p. 7) and *Mistaken Identity* (p. 16).

Colophon

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Back Issues Are Still Available

If you really want to cheer me up, bring money. And never mind the gift wrapping. A large rubber band will do nicely.

W. C. Fields

I am sitting in the smallest room in the house. I have your review in front of me. Soon it will be behind me.

Max Reger

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

Matthew Arnold? Poor Matt, he's gone to Heaven, no doubt — but he won't like God.

Robert Louis Stevenson

The murals in restaurants are on a par with the food in museums.

Peter de Vries

The denunciation of the young is a necessary part of the hygiene of older people, and greatly assists in the circulation of the blood.

Logan Pearsall Smith

the same day from a friend who produced them from his shelves to search for clarification of a couple of points that had arisen in conversation. From that moment they've been inextricably interconnected in my mind, so much so that whenever a question comes up that either authority might conceivably answer I have to quickly ask myself which I should call upon.

But despite their differences, the occasional overlap does occur. When it does, you can bet your sweet bippy that Fowler will say something contemptuous, while Brewer will stick to the facts. All of which is consistent with their aims, I suppose.

Here's a case in point: the Italian phrase *dolce far niente*. Brewer gives the translation ("delightful idleness"), plus a similar Latin phrase, and leaves it there. Fowler, on the other hand, relegates the phrase to the rubbish-heap he entitles Battered Ornaments. There it languishes to this day, along with such phrases *alma mater*, *in durance vile*, *gang agley* and *sleep of the just*.

Another example of an overlap occurs with Fowler's entry on Sobriquets. You know, such "secondary names" as *Coeur de*

Lion (for Richard I), *Gilded Chamber* (House of Lords), *Senior Service* (Navy), *Warrior Queen* (Boadicea), etc.

Many of these can be looked up individually in Brewer without occasioning any risk of rebuke, but Fowler sternly advises against their use, since they're "a very serious symptom of perverted taste for cheap ornament". Typical.

Don't get me wrong: Fowler is not my pet aversion. There are parts of *MEU* that are actually worth reading. Articles I particularly like include Humour, Love of the Long Word, Metaphor, Subjunctives . . .

Here are some favourites from Brewer: Black, God, Heretic, Horse, Seven, Tricolour . . .

Well, as you've long since deduced and precisely as I'd feared, the limerick information is a Brewer quote. I can only assume that on the day in question in 1998 I had been looking in both, and later forgot which had supplied the quotation.

As far as the email request went, then, there was little I could do but draft an apology to my enquirer, together with an abject entreaty for forgiveness.

— Harlish Goop

How to Write a Soapie

As the Antipodean winter approaches, why not try your hand at writing? Nothing too taxing, mind; something light airy would be best; something like . . . a soapie.

A Soapie is just like every other genre of writing — it has its conventions and key elements: a sonnet must have fourteen lines; a Shakespearean drama must have an exposition, a climax and denouement; a Three Act play must have . . . well, three acts.

Here's a list of Must Haves if you're planning to write a Soapie:

Number 1

A square-jawed hero — it's absolutely essential that you make it crystal clear in your directions that the actor playing the hero must be able to show the whole gamut of emotions from A to B (. . . sorry, I pinched that line).

He must be able to look:

a) sexy — this is done by half-closing the eyes and parting the lips

b) anguished — this is done by furrowing the brow

c) puzzled — (this is where you really test the acting abilities of your hero) — the eyes must be half-closed AND the brow must be furrowed (phew . . . challenging stuff).

For academy-standard actors, those who know that less is more and that subtlety rules, learning how to twitch that little muscle that runs down the side of the jaw is well worth the effort. Then, as a writer, you simply have to give your directions thus:

Hero (hearing that lover is leaving): You're leaving? Now? (twitches muscle in jaw)

Hero (receiving news that child he thought was his is really his father's): Not mine? (twitch)

Hero (watching plane bearing his wife, mother, new lover and

father off to Paris for the week-end): (twitch twitch)

Number 2

Forget the nuclear family with its 2.2 children — family relationships must be as tangled and convoluted as is humanly possible. Allow me to illustrate: Mum and Dad have two grown-up sons; Dad trades Mum in on a younger, spiffier model and has two children with her. Mum hates new wife and vows to bring ruin down upon her pretty, blonde head.

New wife ditches Dad and takes up with son number one (her step-son as it happens . . .) Just before the wedding, new wife is in a plane crash and is rescued by . . . wait for it . . . a billionaire sultan who decides to keep her for his harem.

Hero, being a tad thick, continues to plan the wedding, apparently not realising that a wife is somewhat *de rigueur* for such events. When the hour of the nuptials arrives, hero decides to cut his losses and marry nearest available female who has been consoling him through recent episodes.

Wedded bliss must then be interrupted by the unexpected return

of spiffy blonde. Unperturbed by the fact that she's ditched Dad and missed out on son number one, Spiffy sets her sights on a hat trick and seduces son number two.

Mum, meanwhile, has hatched a plot, with number one son's second-choice wife, to finally rid themselves of Spiffy. Plot must backfire and son number one must ditch second-choice wife and marry Spiffy.

Now toss in a disputed paternity for one of Spiffy and Dad's children — could it be that son number one is the father? (While Spiffy was married to Dad, she was already making it a family affair.)

Number 3

Any baby of disputed parentage must have a birthmark. This birthmark has only ever been seen by the natural mother, the adopting mother and the nurse who was present at the birth but who has since left the country for an exotic location.

The baby, naturally, has been secretly adopted by a key member of the family who must be kept on tenterhooks in case someone

Mistaken Identity

It seems ages ago now — *Bikwil* Issue 7 (May 1998) — since I wrote what I considered a more than adequate introductory note when we inaugurated our series *Down Limerick Lane*.

My article includes the following passage:

H.W. Fowler helpfully gives us a specification of the limerick's form:

A nonsense verse in the metre popularized by Edward Lear in his Book of Nonsense (1846), of which the following is an example:

*There was a young lady of Wilts,
Who walked up to Scotland on stilts;
When they said it was shocking
To show so much stocking,
She answered, 'Then what about kilts?'*

Fair enough, you say. Indeed, so it seemed for years, during which time the quotation lay quietly in waiting among *Bikwil's* archives, handy, perhaps, as a background piece for the casual limerick-attracted passer-by, but presumably unregarded as anything constituting a problem.

Until our editor received an email late in 2001, that is, which politely enquired as to which exactly of Fowler's books Harlish Goop's paragraphs came from.

Well, all too happy to oblige, I looked it up in the obvious place (his *Modern English Usage*), and guess what?

So I checked again, this time flicking back and forth through those pedantic pages, hoping to find a hidden reference to limericks — all to no avail, of course. While I was repeating the humiliating procedure (with equal success), an appalling idea suddenly occurred to me.

What if they weren't Fowler's words at all?

Oh, oh.

What if they were Ebenezer Brewer's, say, from his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (1870+)?

Yes, I know what you're all thinking. How on earth, you're marvelling, could bookish old H. G. have mixed up such dissimilar works? They are, after all, designed for different purposes: the one to give counsel on the proper use of English, the other to provide a compilation of otherwise hard-to-track-down literary, historical and miscellaneous other information (e.g. English idioms).

The simple reason for any possibility of my confusing the two works is this: I learned of both on

Harmony of Contrasts

[From Her *Poems for Azimuth*]

Colour, rhythm, image and design
on canvas and in sound,

what felicitous fusion of elements
astounding senses, heart and mind,

a joyful polyphony of arts
in praise of the dance of life!

Let us praise while we have it.
In love and peace go on with the dance.

— Bet Briggs

discovers that the baby isn't really hers.

Number 4

Despite the advances made in telecommunications, and the various devices used by characters in every episode — mobile phones, telephones, hands-free phones, lap-top computers etc — it's imperative that every vital phone call goes unanswered. In fact the only person who ever hears the phone ringing on these occasions is the camera-man, and he knows exactly where the ringing is coming from.

Number 5

It goes without saying that every character must be either a Mover or a Shaker. Normal human beings do not a Soapie make.

The medical profession is always a good choice — plenty of opportunities for your hero to look anguished and puzzled here — and there's nothing like a white uniform to get the pulses racing. The Law too allows you scope for intrigue and passion. But the hands-down winning field has to be Fashion — no other background gives you quite the

same scope to deck out the heroines in flash frocks or to liven up the settings with foreign locations.

Number 6

One or more medical emergencies are required, preferably occurring at a crucial point in the plot — before a court case, prior to an important meeting, when a birth is imminent. Don't feel at all inhibited here — who knows what advances medical science is going to make? Be in the vanguard of modern technology and technique.

It's quite permissible for your hero or heroine to die at the end of one episode and then to miraculously come back to life in the next (see "advances in medical science" above). In Soapies, unlike real life, death is not always permanent.

Number 7

On the subject of medical emergencies . . . don't overlook the dramatic potential of amnesia. It's an undisputed law that a hit on the head will cause amnesia and a similar hit on the head (after a suitable passage of time) will cure

it. The amnesia is of a special kind, it never causes the victim to forget how she did her hair or how she applied her make up, only who she is.

Number 8

Some criminal activity is, of course, essential. A stalker is good — giving ample opportunities for your heroine to be seen walking around in a flimsy negligee; a hunky cat burglar adds a little spice if he's hurt while getting away and forced to take off his shirt while the heroine (still wearing that flimsy negligee) dabs cotton wool soaked in that lotion that causes grown men to grimace, on his brow.

Best of all, however, is a kidnapping. And best of all kidnappings are the ones that nap kids! For the ultimate plot twist, have the kidnapper take the child of disputed parentage (come on now . . . keep up . . . remember the birthmark?) If the kidnapper happens to have connections to the nurse (remember her?) and the billionaire sultan (you must remember him) and be doing all this because . . . but I don't want to give you too many ideas . . .

Number 9

All your characters will be self-educated — they must be, because none of them ever goes to school, not even the little children. This is just as well, since it provides excellent training for their later lives when none of them ever actually works. They'll all spend a great deal of time organising meetings and conferences and flying around the world, but no-one ever really does anything.

Number 10

All your characters must have a fondness for talking to themselves, expressing all their innermost thoughts, deepest desires and dastardly plots — but only when the one person in the whole world they don't want to hear them is standing outside the half-opened door or under the half-opened window.

Good luck!

— Jennifer Stewart

[Jennifer's successful Internet-based writing business, which she runs from her Queensland home, may be found at <http://www.write101.com>]

Sweet reserved his loudest sneers — Shaw called it “his Satanic contempt” — for university dons who thought that the study of Latin and Greek was the only linguistic goal worth pursuing and who considered the English language undeserving of any academic attention whatever.

Perhaps it was this outsider feeling that drew non-academics Sweet and James Murray (chief editor of the *Oxford Dictionary*) together. At any rate, Sweet was the leading comparative philologist of his generation, just as his disciple Murray would become its greatest lexicographer.

Today, though largely forgotten, the name of our phonetics professor has been at least resuscitated in the Henry Sweet Society, founded in Britain in 1984 and dedicated to the history of linguistics.

Before we leave the subject, I should add that by the time Shaw died he had become so engrossed in phonetic spelling that he left provision in his will for further studies into the question. Like Andrew Carnegie before him, Shaw wanted his name and money to add credibility to The Cause. It wasn't just a small sum, however; it was in truth the

bulk of his fortune, together with provisions for a competition.

This competition was for the design, primarily for writers, of a new phonetic English alphabet — which meant, as far as Shaw was concerned, one based on the speech of England's King George V. The contest was held during 1958, and the alphabet selected was designed by Kingsley Read. It has 48 characters, all different in appearance from Roman letters and with no upper/lower case distinction. Four characters each singly represent the common words *and*, *of*, *the* and *to*.

Although now moribund, the Shaw/Read alphabet has been espoused to such an extent that desperate aficionados can download the whole font from the Internet. Today known as the “Shavian” alphabet, it nevertheless owes a great deal to Henry Sweet's exertions on his “Romaic Phonetic Alphabet”.

And it leaves us wondering whether that old scorn merchant would appreciate the alphabet's not so “legible script”, let alone its name.

Not bloody likely.

Tennyson, Charles Darwin, Andrew Carnegie, Theodore Roosevelt, Richard Feynman and Isaac Asimov.

But no literary personage became better known in this advocacy than George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), and nowhere is his interest in it more apparent than in his “anti-romantic” comic masterpiece *Pygmalion*, the basis for the musical comedy *My Fair Lady*.

In *Bikwil* Issue 8, July 1998, Harlish Goop reminded us that the Pygmalion role of Professor Henry Higgins was based on the Oxford philologist **Henry Sweet** (1845-1912). A pioneer of Anglo-Saxon studies, Sweet wrote widely on phonetics also, his *History of English Sounds* (1874) being regarded a landmark in the field.

As far as Shaw was concerned, it was Sweet’s phonetics work, especially his “Romaic Phonetic Alphabet” of 1900, that was of most fascination.

Indeed, look at the Preface Shaw wrote to the play. *Pygmalion’s* purpose, he argues, is to draw people’s attention to the importance of phonetics, because

. . . [t]he English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it. They cannot spell it so abominably that no man can teach himself what it sounds like . . . The reformer England needs today is an energetic phonetic enthusiast: that is why I have made such a one the hero of a popular play.

In the Preface (entitled *A Professor of Phonetics* and published the year after Sweet’s death) Shaw includes a lengthy description of him, though he warns us that Higgins was not intended to be a caricature — Sweet was just a starting point.

For one thing, Sweet’s disdain and chip-on-his-shoulder attitudes made him far less likeable than even the know-all Higgins. Shaw wrote of him,

He was about as conciliatory to conventional mortals as Ibsen or Samuel Butler . . . the adventure of Eliza Doolittle would have been impossible [for him, but] . . . [with] Higgins’s physique and temperament Sweet might have set the Thames on fire . . .

. . . His true objective was the provision of a full, accurate, legible script for our noble but ill-dressed language; but he was led past that by his contempt for the popular Pitman system of shorthand, which he called the Pitfall system.

Another Apology from the Front Porch

In Issue 16 (November 1999) I wrote playfully of 19th-century father-and-son scientists William and Francis Buckland. William was a pioneer of scientific geology, while Francis was an authority on fish.

There’s little point regurgitating any more of my article here, save to remind you that I clearly made a point of highlighting that the investigative pair dedicated themselves to eating anything, no matter how bizarre.

Many of you, I know, judged it quite hilarious and an appropriate contribution in the Bikwilian quirky spirit. But here’s the rub.

Thanks to the Internet, an author’s errors of fact or judgement can be all too readily exposed. I have already learnt this to my mortification from comedian Tim Brooke-Taylor. (See Issues 7 and 26, May 1998 and July 2001.)

That lesson concerned erroneous facts. This time it’s a question of emphasis.

There’s no escape, so I’d better jump right in and face the music. I’ll quote directly from the email that brought me to gustatory book. It was sent by a bona fide descendant of those resourceful Bucklands.

. . . it makes a great story, but the list of strange [disgusting?] animals etc. eaten really had a serious purpose: this wasn’t the normal food of the household, but a serious attempt to find other forms of animal life which could be cheaply produced to feed the world’s hungry.

Only [surely] in the interests of scientific research would *anyone* eat a mole, bluebottles or — to complete the list — a particular carnivore which London zoo obligingly dug up 3 days or so after its death, when asked for a sample.

— Fizzgig

Web

This time I want to give a couple of poetry sites a brief but enthusiastic plug. Actually, they are both run by the same person, and while each can be appreciated on its own, for the poet or serious poetry devotee they can profitably be seen as a complementary pair.

The man's name is Colin Holcombe and he lives in England. His sites are called *Poetry Portal* and *Poetry Magic*.

Regularly updated, *Poetry Portal* offers a very useful directory of ezines, poetry sites, literary appreciation sites and much, much more.

There are, for instance, separate sections for beginners and advanced poetry lovers. Selecting any of the subsections takes you to *Poetry Magic*. Being no more than a poetaster myself, I really enjoy the educational sections



Line

under the Beginner heading.

These include things like “What is a poem?”, “Poetry as pleasure”, “Poetry as art”, “Poetry as therapy”, “Themes”, “Originality”, and so forth.

There is a list, too, of current poetry conferences in the U.K. and the U.S., as well as info on poetry competitions and publishing news, to say nothing of the links to poetry in languages other English.

Poetry Magic I can only describe as a magnificent resource centre on the theory and craft of writing poetry. Beginners and experienced poets alike are very well catered for, as are all poetry sub-genres. This is a huge and thorough site, chock-a-block with worthwhile information.

— TR

Internet sites referred to above:

<http://www.poetry-portal.com/>
<http://www.poetrymagic.co.uk/>

was dropped after the 14th edition. Only Dewey's Introduction kept using his spelling (at least up to the 18th edition).

But the truth is, Dewey was unable to express all 42 sounds of English using an alphabet of just 26 letters, and this limitation made some of his spelling as ambiguous as the standard spelling. Furthermore, trying to use a simplified spelling classification was especially troublesome in countries in which English wasn't the first language. Native speakers might instinctively see what the heading *Jeology* means, but that is because they know that *g* sometimes sounds the same as *j*.

While some traces of simplified spelling are still to be found in American English (e.g. *catalog*, *nite*, *program*, *thru*), the more extreme recommendations of Dewey and his group have yet to find wide acceptance.

He was indeed obsessively passionate in his desire for spelling simplification, and so although born Melville Louis Kosuth Dewey, for consistency's sake he made sure he dropped his middle names and changed the spelling of his first name. So it's Melvil Dewey the librarian,

then, now and forever — but just remember this: for a short while, our orthographical reformer even spelled his last name *Dui*.

And on it has gone, this gallant but hitherto ineffective endeavour to change our spelling into something simpler and more consistent.

On occasion, such attempts have become the butt of jokes (like the *Five Year Plan* for EuroEnglish contributed by landoc to *Bikwil* Issue 14, July 1999). Mind you, for the best humorous piece on the debate, I recommend Mark Twain's very funny address at the Annual Dinner of Associated Press in September 1906.

English has not been the only language that reformers have zealously attempted to adjust spelling-wise over the last century or so, as the Man from Abdera pointed out in relation to German in *Bikwil* Issue 6, March 1998). Yet it seems that English has needed the most help from influential people.

In addition to Mark Twain, we could list the following celebrities who endorsed spelling simplification: Alfred, Lord

classification tries to put all books on the one subject in the same place, it is a fact that not all books on a subject cover the same aspect of it. Take automobiles, for example, where *auto engineering* belongs in one spot in the classification while *auto accident prevention* goes in another and *auto transport* is in a third.

The same year as he issued his booklet, Dewey also helped found the American Library Association. A year later he established Columbia University's School of Library Economy, thus launching the discipline of library science in America. Indeed, he probably contributed more than any other individual to the development of librarianship in that country, and is today regarded internationally as one of a handful of giants in the profession's history.

But Dewey's reformist zeal did not stop with librarianship. He also saw himself in the vanguard of a revolution in education.

It was his belief that elementary education was being held back by two things: the American system of weights and measures

and English's complicated spelling.

Accordingly, with the objective of solving the first problem, Dewey (also in 1876) became secretary of the American Metric Bureau, an organization promoting the use of international decimal weights and measures.

Again in 1876 (a mighty busy twelve months for our Melvil, it seems), he involved himself in the foundation of the American Spelling Reform Association, which arose out of the International Convention for the Amendment of English Orthography held during the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia earlier that year. He remained the Association's Secretary for almost all his life.

And Dewey did not take this work half-heartedly by any means:

Speling skolars agree that we hav the most unsyentifik, unskolarli, illojikal & wasteful speling ani languaj ever ataind.

He even went as far as to use his simplified spelling throughout the second edition of his *Decimal Classification*, where it remained in the classification tables until it

A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

Here's the solution to our *Music Dabblers* challenge from Issue 27 (September 2001). The puzzle's bare essentials are as follows.

Each of the famous people listed used to occupy him or herself performing music as a hobby.

The solution is a series of instruments. Shaded letters were already provided. The column indicated by the arrow contains a two-word phrase describing the fruits of such music dabbling.

— Harlish Goop

1 Hermann Goering

2 Benito Mussolini

3 Robert Baden-Powell

4 Frederick the Great

5 Mary, Queen of Scots

6 James II (Great Britain)

7 Nero

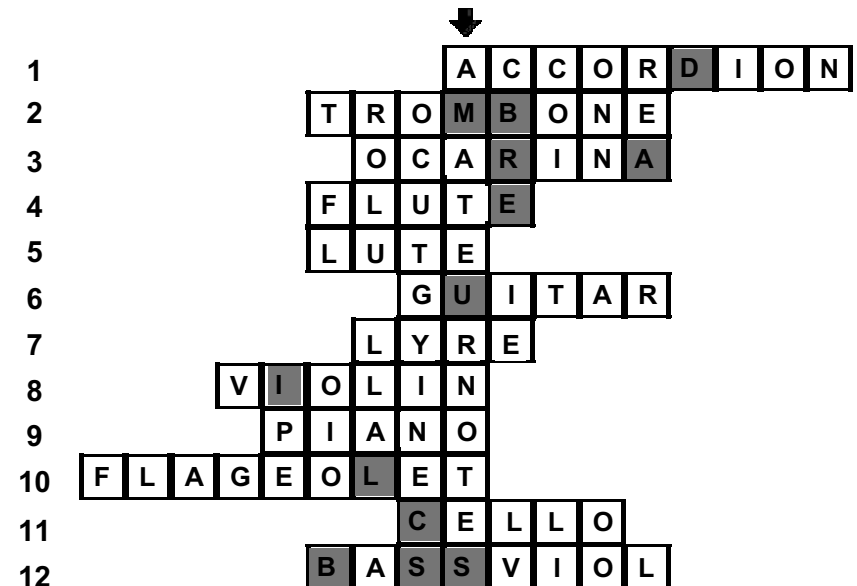
8 Albert Einstein

9 Vincent van Gogh

10 Samuel Pepys

11 Bonnie Prince Charlie

12 Laurence Sterne



Arts and Sciences

This man was Italian, the illegitimate son of Piero and Caterina. He had a stepbrother, Bartolomeo who was his junior by 45 years. He lived to the age of 67, and died in the arms of a French king. He was generous to his friends, he wrote riddles, he was a practical joker. He was tall and handsome, he was muscular and athletic, he was a homosexual.

Leaving aside his personal background and traits, however, I must perforce ask another question: did he achieve anything worth mentioning in these pages?

Did he ever. Although he was an inveterate procrastinator, he managed to get enough things done to be remembered — among numerous other roles — as an anatomist, an architect, an astronomer, a botanist, a geologist, a musician, a painter, a philosopher and a sculptor.

Giorgio Vasari (1511-74) wrote of him, “He might have been a scientist if he had not been so versatile.”

“Versatile” was right. He was also a prolific inventor, whose devices (about 1000) include such

wide-ranging creations as the alarm clock, the bicycle chain, the deep-sea diving suit, the flame-thrower, the helicopter, the parachute, the tank and the variable-speed drive.

One of his musical inventions was his “lyra”, which he designed to accompany him when he sang. This was a sort of lute, which he fashioned in silver in the form of a horse’s skull, where the teeth served as the frets.

A certain portrait he painted (on wood) was of a Florentine woman, but her husband, who had commissioned it, did not think much of it and refused to pay. Today it is could well be the most valuable painting in the world.

I dare say you won’t be surprised when I tell you that this Lion of a man was born in a little Tuscan town called Vinci, which lies between Pisa and Florence.

Why not spare a few minutes next month (April), to reflect upon the legacy of the definitive Renaissance Man? It will be his birthday on the fifteenth.

His 450th.

— TR

Dr. Strangelove and Friends

[*Stepping Stones* No. 2]

(This essay has previously looked at the movies *Dr. Strangelove* and *Threads*, X-ray crystallographers Rosalind Franklin and Dorothy Hodgkin, and psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin.)

Sure, “Alzheimer’s” may be a household word these days (albeit whispered), yet Kraepelin’s psychiatric classification is now scarcely known as such, even among educated people. But of course history is not particularly kind to the memory of classifiers. Take the 1753 botanical landmark of *Species Plantarum* by the Swede Carolus Linnaeus (1707-78), for example. This classic remains the foundation for the modern classification system of living organisms, but how widely remembered is Linnaeus’ name today?

The name of **Melville Louis Kossuth Dewey** (1851-1931) will possibly be unfamiliar to the world at large too, though I dare say from time to time we all have been helped, directly or indirectly, by the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), used in

thousands of libraries throughout the world.

Dewey was only 21 when he devised his scheme for classifying library materials, which he first issued in 1876 in a 42-page booklet. In it he introduced two unheard-of features to the library world: relative location and relative index.

Prior to this, books were numbered according to their fixed locations on library shelves. The Dewey system, on the other hand, allocates book “call numbers” that reflect their logical relationship to one another without regard for the shelves or rooms where they are placed. It thus follows that relative location permits the open-ended insertion of new books without altering the call numbers of existing ones.

What Dewey meant by the “relative index” was an alphabetical list that brings together under one term the locations in the scheme of a subject that falls in several fields of study. While the