FLYING
At Bidmouth last week, there was a four soul pile-up. A spokesman for the Astral Plane Flying Association said: “While meditating and encountering out-of-body experiences, four novices got as high as kites, but somewhere just outside of Nirvana, they got their tail ribbons entangled.” Luckily none of the victims were seriously injured, all are recovering from superficially bruised alter-egos. The spokesman added: “It’s clear that each has issues with the self as in the astral plane there should be no physical obstacles to self-fulfillment.”

DOGS
At the Lower Tone dog track, one of the dogs was withdrawn just before race number 7. It is thought that the dog became self-conscious about chasing what was clear to any animal with a semblance of brain-matter, a mere motorised rag doll of a hare, steeped in cheap musk. The owner Bill Fold, not surprised by Kabala Keith’s sudden change of heart, said that the dog always was a thinker and it was only recently that he’d been able to drag it away from the bins where it used to read the latest headlines in the discarded newspapers. “I’m sure he thinks he’s other than a greyhound; the way he expects me to cook his dinner after races and give up the chair nearest the fire. It’s sometimes hard to tell who owns who.” Bill quipped.

FOOTBALL
Doug Pork-Scratchings has been seen recently at the shops in his home town. Bless him he’s not mastered the Internet yet. He was seen loading 700 left boots into his 4x4. He intends to use his left exclusively for the rest of the season so he needs plenty, considering the dubious machine-made advertising hoardings football shoes have become. His agent could only negotiate half the ad deal, but it still amounts to a tidy sum for the lad. It will come in handy for his defence in the IGBH trial at court next month.

His golden boot is now exhibit A in the case brought by Doug’s victim from last month’s Automobile plc Utd’s clash with HKIT.tp City. The law suit has taken the gloss off Doug’s late equalizer; the freak-kick that snuck under a bewildered goalie who was unable to lift his oversized gloves due to the moss that had formed on them.

TICK RACING
At The Foetid Calf.
The competitors were certainly under the microscope in this intense inaugural Tick Tock Championship hurdle meet.
The event was watched via Web cam by approximately twelve people from thirteen countries around the globe.

After the excitement had died down, the race began but the logistics of the event were shown to be problematic. Even though the course was long: 26 millimetres, the combatants were so evenly matched that there was a stewards’ inquiry involving approximately two hundred of the little tykes. Consequently the result will not be known for another two months, but the organisers have said that all winning bets will be inflation linked and that they will pay each-way bets down to 101st place.

The only conclusive thing in the race was the British tick, called Life Insurance was placed 2134th. It had run well on soft, rotting flesh before, but in this instance had struggled on the cross-hairs that sometimes stick up in the cold conditions.
A softer wind blew and this time brought with it the scent of heather and jasmine and honeysuckle and wild rose. A curious frown appeared on Mr. Clark’s face as he filtered each fragrance. A moment later it lifted to be replaced by a gentle smile of recognition: “Helen,” he sighed.

He traced her image on the inside of his eyelids, lingering over the curve of her cheek, the pertness of her nose, the fullness of her mouth, to ensure that their beauty was captured precisely. He listened intently as his memory replayed their conversation this morning:

“Try not to be late home tonight, darling.”
“I’ll try, but I’ve a lot to do. Veronica wants a meeting - damn, where did I put those figures. Ah! There they are - but, yes, I’ll try, dear.”
“Good. Today should be special.”
“Eh! Oh yes, yes, it should. If Veronica likes these calculations I’ve produced, we’ll improve the efficiency ratings at a stroke.”
“No. Something a bit more important than that, I think.”
“My end of year grade?”
“Now, Adrian. Don’t tease!”

He recalled how the hall mirror had reflected his blank expression and how Helen had looked at the floor then proceeded to busy herself with trivial tasks. He remembered how he’d said: “Goodbye, dear,” lightly, but did not receive a reply. Finally, he recollected the feeling of his heart turning to lead as he closed the door and heard the gentlest of sobs coming from the open living-room window.

“Are you going in today, or not?” The Voice again.

Silence.

“They’ll be out to see what’s wrong, any minute now. I think you’d better get in there right away. Say you felt faint or had a sudden attack of nausea. They’ll believe you.”

“We shouldn’t they?” Mr Clark said.

“Right at this moment it’s not too far from the truth.”

“Well, then.” The Voice paused. “Surely you realise how important today is?”

(continued on page nine)
**Theatre Critic**

I was both appalled and thrilled by the innovative series of one word plays at the Criterion Theatre last night. I couldn’t make up my mind whether the opening of *What?* was too derivative of the old Irish master, Sam Beckett, but I was quickly reassured by the gem of T.W.A.T that played with the idea of acronyms to extend the plot and give those juveniles in the audience a good giggle. One could not say that it was too long: total running time for 90-plays coming in at one minute-fifty-five due to a costume change between *Help* and *Disgenuousness*, the latter being an acerbic and lengthy piece that tested the patience of the audience with fully five syllables. Tim Smithereens was majestic in thirty of the performances and Melinda Bing-Pippin was brilliant despite her not having any dialogue. Her silences are a Denchmark of genius.

**AN INTERVIEW WITH THE A DEVIL:**

“Hello, hiya and bienvenue.”

“Just call me B.”

“Aren’t you here in London to collect more souls like a demonic philatelist?”

“That’s your first cliche; you’ve only four more before I leave the studio, I, or at least we, never were even in the early days. It’s logical that now, when you can get so little mulah for souls on the market (even ebay doesn’t accept them on their site anymore), that we should modernise and go for winning hearts and minds of the public. That way they’d be ours but it would be their choice. What we provide now is greater choice.”

“How?”

“A great place for devilry is the pseudo-collective. That half-arsed sense of belonging to a random notion of T.W.A.T that played with the idea of acronyms to extend the plot and give those juveniles in the audience a good giggle.”

Dear Sirs,

I want to know why no matter how vigorous I am with an hoe, the earth only moves in one direction. I wouldn’t mind so much but it’s always the opposite direction to the one I want it to go in. Also, when I talk to my plants they never listen; I can tell because they always contract and change colour before I’ve had chance. If you can’t help I’ll have to attend the next edition of *Gardener’s Question Time*, and you know what that means? Yours in green, Bill O. Wrights

Dear Sirs,

I’m really worried about the treatment of Lil in the *Ethics Girls*. It seems unfair to constantly reject all of her culinary efforts just so the others can take the moral high ground: even Lil has fillings, like the rest of us.

Could you pass the enclosed letter and latticed apple pie to her as I want to voice my support for the moral high ground: even Lil has fillings, like the rest of us.

If I see that Mavis, I’ll give her a piece of my rock cake; that’ll settle her.

Yours supportively
Mr Biddy Biddy

**Letters**

Dear Sirs,

I had never been in a room where there was so much stillness. What a great place for devilry is the pseudo-collective. That half-arsed sense of belonging to a random notion of collective T.W.A.T that played with the idea of acronyms to extend the plot and give those juveniles in the audience a good giggle.

**WHERE ARE THEY NOW?**

**This Month: My Thoughts**

You know, I had them when I left for work this morning because I thought I was late. However...

I remember when...

Accrington Stanley...

This ring on my finger suggests I’m married; to...

That looks like a bus coming very fast towards me...

**STARS**

**Love:** If you’re single, a lasting relationship is starred. If you’re already in one, you’ve had it.

**Work:** Promotion is a strong possibility in October; due largely to the position of Uranus last month.

**Home:** Pluto enters your house from mid-October and will cause no end of damage.
More than 57 varieties but not as full protein as beans. It should be funny but it isn’t. What exactly is the purpose of ruining a perfectly good narrative with a falsified inducement to join in with taped, usually forced and definitely irritatingly repetitive forms of laughter? Some cans even have a mix - remember the beans and sausage in a can?! of applause and laughter as if it is spontaneous and discerning.

There are times I could swear the laughs are the same now as they were in the ’fifties and ’sixties, in fact all of the latter half of the 20th century. After all, would we really notice. Do we, when we watch a comedy programme, suspend our attention on the words, the edgy programme, suspend our reading whilst the host spews out inane cliched puns, the coercion to laugh and applaud is still the same. You must have at some point stopped rolling about in the aisles to notice when the camera pans out to show the live audiences, that the responses to the entertainment is significantly less than the canned variety. The deafening hush at times would at least make an honest man, or woman, out of the punning character. Even they must know in their heart of hearts, when they see the audience responding very spasmodically with feeble laugh and embarrassed applause, that the deafening and raucous canned variety is a sham. Why must this disingenuousness be played out? Especially when it is supposed to be a laughing matter.

To create a healthy balance there should be canned heckling, canned derision, and canned booing. There might be an opportunity to market laughter and applause in a ring-pull can out of vending machines, or even peddle it in recyclable cartons with wing-pull opening so we can introduce it into those corpse conversation moments. You know the times I mean; when we say something and the listener is singularly unimpressed. Perhaps at political rallies, authentic dissent could be drown out by using taped ovations. Manufactured laughter and applause as response to infatuation is more serious than you might think. Go on, complain, they want you to; after all, it’s only an e-mail or text away. It has never been easier to dissent, yet the agents get away with something as innocently insidious as persuading us to respond positively to untalented nobodies.

On top of this wholly unnecessary institutionalised deception, some of the ingredients of the cans are so inappropriately used as to actually drown out some of the might-be funny dialogue: counter-productive or what! Of course, the term canned laughter is an old-fashioned term for what is an audience tape added to the soundtrack, or played in a studio. However, the point is that disregarding the modernity and so-called sophistication of the method, theproduct is still mass deception. It is to all intents and purposes a peace-time propaganda to promote a cult of personality and elitism that should have no part in an early 21st century so-called mature and highly developed democratic society.

For those marketing types that sell us dummies on DVD, I say they should offer us two products: one with the propagandist tittering and coercive fake response to the material that is more akin to so-called authoritarian regimes, and one without, so that us as so-called free individual citizen, consumers, can make up our own minds as to whether or not the material is funny and or entertaining. My message to those dismal folk working in the mass deception industry to falsely promote funny is: CAN IT!

Sharkey was famished. “I could even eat a politician.” he murmured to himself. It was a month since his last meal. Why? He thought. He could sense flesh, about 200 m away, but his sense of anticipatory anxiety had grown more acute still. Swimming casually, more dignified than before, Sharkey approached the would-be meal, but, on sight, he stopped (he’d perfected this manoeuvre now) stunned, sickened. The meat was in a metal construction with bars: IT WAS A CAGE! A trap? Why? Before he could move, the other sharks missed themselves into the cage and down came the door. They were probably going to be on TV now. “What a grizzly prospect.” Sharkey mused, before turning tail and putting much water between himself and an appearance on The Discovery Channel.

Feeling somewhat saddened but still ravenous, Sharkey contemplated his appetite some more. “Why do I eat my fellow creatures? Don’t they have a right to a dignified life and even a dignified end? What gives me the right to survive ahead of them? This law of nature makes me feel superior yes, but ultimately isolated and alienated. Just because I’ve many razor-like teeth and have super sensory powers, it doesn’t mean I should exploit others. With great power comes great responsibility. I must think more about this.” He did but over a meal of epic proportions.

**THE MAN THAT LOOKED UP (from page two)**

“Oh yes! Although I didn’t until just a few minutes ago. Up until then I thought that productivity and efficiency were the most important things in the world, nothing else mattered.” Mr Clark opened his eyes slowly and turned to face the Bank. Veronica was no longer at the window. “In some circles perhaps they are, but then again, who wants to travel in circles?” Mr Clark allowed himself a brief smile, then continued, “To be productive, but to produce nothing of value: to be efficient, but to produce nothing of value: to be efficient, but really, do you think you’ve gone mad?”

“The Voice remained silent.

“...but true madness lies with those in their barless prisons who can live in the midst of all this beauty,” he gazed about him, almost in awe, “yet see only balance sheets or short-falls.”

“Adrian! Adrian! What on Earth’s wrong?” Mr Clark turned sharply to see Veronica flitting across the bridge towards him accompanied by a security guard. “Are you in trouble? Do you need help?”

“Ah! Veronica.” Mr Clark smiled benevolently. “No, there’s no trouble, no trouble at all. Quite the reverse in fact.”
A Democratic Ventriloquist
I hear my voice on the radio every day
In the newspapers I see myself quoted
An expert or two argue for me
As if they both know
That I want peace and happiness

So why do I hear and see
The passing of bucks
From sea to sea
And conflict rocketing
An obscene exchange system
And canisters of hurt and suffering
With rolled up dollars deep within?

I’m beginning not to recognise myself
These days
I thought I only hated me

*****

HIGH, ALERT
Gentle request, making a tab
Receipted by a name
And a face I’m supposed to forget
Eyes, alert for once
Dart side to side
Like fresh wheat stalks in a bluster
A heart, leaded chest
Making sure there’s no fall-out
These past years and years
And years
And yet, all it would take to cause
A lachrymose leak
Is an unprimed, unambiguous
And beautiful missile,
Or a head-on collision
Of eyes melting the core,
Splitting an atomised cell
Fusion reigns conversely
Yet, once more, those wise
Emergency services avert a disaster:
The all clear sounds;
Now it is OK to look.

The good thing is,
Even though there’s snow on the silos,
I can guarantee other such high-
Alert events

Dawn’s Early Lights
Dispensing the dead
to feed the fortunate living,
Importing meat for the counter culture
Making lean, successful cuts

Baring the bone that goes to the dogs
Shedding ne’er a profit tear
For the needy and the lame
Wheeling and dealing meretriciously

Inducing the water from the flesh
That it might shrink
On impact with its tormenting pan
Or dish

Beware the fat cat that would devour
Any independent liver
And there, in the dawn’s earliest light
It stands, unfurling

The red and white candy
Its stars, those that serve at,
Till the homing of the brave
And those that feel free
To naturalise such butchery

*****

There once was a lad named Aloysius
Whose behaviour was somewhat too vicious
Like a bull at a gate
He just could not wait
At a cliff met his end inauspicious

* * *

Once was a man from Porthcawl
Went to a bank to make a withdrawal
Though when faced with a cashier
He trembled in fear
And went away with nothing at all

*****

Standing outside the Vitreous Enamel was
Percy Cution’s luxury coach, waiting for the
usual guilt-trip, well patronised as it always
was and would be, by the residents of the Oval.
“‘Oh, Gawd, it’s a self-drive. That means one of
us can’t have a jar or twenty. Oh, it’s all my
fault,” explained Barb Surplice - the one-time
soap queen and nun, ringing her hands and
washing clean her tortured soul.

“You must do it, ‘though I feel terrible about
not being able to drive, even though I’ll enjoy
a drink,” retorted Posa Barr

“What about your liver?”
“I’ll have it later with some onions.”
The next ones to board were the chemical
brothers, looking shady and yet oozing cha-
risma as well as scraping their knuckles on the
carpeted aisle.

“I see they’re all ready here.” said Olive Lamp
between gritted teeth.

“There’s got more to feel guilty about than
most.” replied Vera. Then she turned to an-
other yellow-looking woman and barked out:
“‘You not coming, Yamac?”
“No, I’ve got a long lost relative coming to stay
indefinitely and he’s up to no good, I’ll be
bound.” hissed Lil Cream

“Where’s your Sunlight?”

“She’s going back to RADA to act out her
grief; besides, she ‘as nuffink to feel guilty
about.”

“Nope, ‘e’s been struck by lightning again. That
last storm we ‘ad; struck five times ‘e were.”

“Always were a good conductor.”

Earlier that Christmas Eve:
Sunlight, in her grief turns her misconceived
attentions to the other Emin brother and Frew
Saga is investigated by the police who believe
he may have killed off any interest in the soap.
Meanwhile, Charlie Cheek is given an award for
best employer of the year; he employed 366
people in the last tax year, on 365 separate
occasions. He even employed the same person
twice in the same day, not recognising them
from morning till afternoon.

“It’s a changin’ world. “ Charlie is fond of say-
ing.

Meanwhile a man in a redsuit with white
trim, carrying a large sack is being bur-
dled into the back of a van.

8

5
Mavis: Hello, Lil. Come on in. Ooh, what’ve you brought us this time?
Lil: Hi, Mavis. Hi, girls. I thought I’d treat you to a double chocolate fudge gateau with fresh double cream!
Gladys: Wow! That’s impressive. You can certainly bake, Lil. Perhaps afterwards, we can all go down to the hospital’s cardy..., cardiovas..., er, heart unit and listen to our arteries hardening!
Lil: Very funny! I’ve included a healthy option.
Gladys: Healthy!!?
Lil: Yeah. There’s a strawberry on that bit.
Mavis: If we can get back to business, ladies. Lil, we were just discussing this year’s WI Christmas outing.
Lil: Well, how about Julian in the Council’s Accounts Department. I know he plays rugby, but I happen to know he’s also into musicals and needlepoint. He’s definitely hiding something!
Sheila: Not quite the outing we had in mind! I was thinking more of a weekend in Blackpool, do a bit of Christmas shopping, see the lights...
Gladys: Edinburgh might be nice. Or we could really push the boat out and book a couple of days in London.
Lil: Blackpool? Edinburgh? London might be okay, but why not think a little bigger? My husband’s just booked a week in New York for the two of us, the week before Christmas, in fact.
Mavis: I don’t think we’ll quite have the budget for New York, Lil!
Gladys: Old York might be a push! There are fifteen of us, you know!
Lil: I wasn’t suggesting you all go to New York. It was just an example!
Sheila: A boast you mean! I don’t know how you can afford the time or the money. That cleaning business of yours can’t pay that well - and who’s going to run it?
Lil: My brother-in-law will keep an eye on things. He’s in the police force, you know. The staff won’t try anything while he’s in charge.
Sheila: I was thinking more of who’s going to look after the staff if they have any problems.
Lil: Oh, they’ll be all right! They’re a hardy bunch. Most are in their sixties, but they can still scrub those office blocks at six in the morning. Coincidentally, they’ve just arranged a little staff trip themselves. Only a day in Skegness, but it’ll be nice for them to get away.
Mavis: Bit of a difference, Lil! New York and Skegness.
Gladys: That’s the beauty of the minimum wage, Mave! Don’t have to pay a penny more if you don’t want to.
Lil: Minimum wage! Don’t mention that to me! Caused Clive no end of problems. Had to let five of our best workers go just so he could afford to keep the other ten on. It broke Clive’s heart, it did.
Gladys: Why? Did he want to get rid of those ten as well?
Lil: What? I mean he regards them all as his little extended family. Do you want some of this cake, anyone?
All: No thanks!
Sheila: So why don’t you take your ‘extended family’ to New York with you?

Lil: We’d love to, but, er...it’s more of a second honeymoon, really. Since retiring from the stockbroking business at 38, Clive’s managed a real holiday only every other year.
Mavis: A ‘real holiday’.
Lil: Yes. You know, a fortnight away somewhere hot, or perhaps, skiing in the Rockies.
Gladys: You poor things.
Lil: Oh, don’t worry about us. We could still manage a week away every now and then. Even more so since Clive started the cleaning business with some of his Golden Handshake. Besides, if things get a little tight, Clive just sells a few shares and we’re fine again.
Sheila: And what about your employees? What do they do if things ‘get a little tight’?
Lil: They can’t be doing too badly! They can afford a trip to Skegness!
Gladys: Watch it, Lil! They’ll be getting above themselves!
Lil: Look, ladies. We’d love to give our girls a little more each week, but as Clive says, they’re lucky to have a job. The Government wants us to work ‘till we’re in our seventies, but there are not many employers willing to take people on at that age. We’re giving them a golden opportunity to earn a few pounds for the little luxuries in life.
Gladys: Like a trip to Skegness? Or food?
Lil: Exactly! Er...pardon?
Gladys: Never mind. What would your client’s think if they knew how you exploited your workforce?
Lil: Exploited is a bit harsh, isn’t it? Anyway, they have nothing but praise for the level of service we provide.
Sheila: That’s down to the professionalism and integrity of your cleaners. They still have the dignity to take some pride in their work despite being paid peanuts.
Lil: Our clients aren’t interested in how much we pay our staff. Were the cheapest cleaning firm in the area and they’re happy to use us for that reason.
Sheila: If that were the only reason, they’d be equally as guilty of exploitation. Perhaps more so, since they are helping to perpetuate the problem. Surely, there’s room for morals in business?
Mavis: Choosing a more expensive service provider because you think they look after their workforce may be ethically sound, but does it make financial sense - from a company’s or individual’s point of view?
Lil: A very good point, Mavis!
Mavis: I mean, how would you know anyway, if they were paying better wages or providing better working conditions? They may just be making larger profits.
Gladys: And taking TWO weeks in New York.
Mavis: And many choose the cheaper option out of necessity. They may sympathise strongly with the poorly paid, but simply don’t have the money to go anywhere else.
Lil: Exactly! Whether you’re a business or an individual, as Clive says, it’s all about minimising your costs. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to get to the Post Office and apply for two new passports. Our old ones are full. See you, ladies.
Mavis: ‘Bye, Lil. Another cuppa, girls?
Sheila: Please, Mave. And here, take this cake away. It’s making me feel quite sick!
Mavis: I understand. I’ll go and grab my Garibaldis.