

Poetry for Puppets

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- 1: So finish writing this thing for the cyberneticians.
- 2: Why? What do they need to hear this from me? Why would a cybernetician want to hear what a musician has to say anyway?
- 3: They don't. They just invited the puppets here for a little entertainment after all the real business of the day.
- 1: Aren't you just using that as an excuse not to finish writing the skit?
- 2: Aren't you being coy with your illegitimate questions?
- 3: Aren't we getting off the subject?
- 1: Haven't I seen you someplace before?
- 3: Ahh!
- 2: No, and if you had I would deny it.
- 3: Ahh! The real questions! The old questions! The big questions!
- 2: The useless questions.
- 1: Now that's not a very good attitude. One should keep an open mind to the world.
- 2: Why, when the world has closed its mind to us?
- 3: Ahh, the old questions!
- 2: And this silly bar. Whose idea was it to perform in a bar anyway?
- 1: It wasn't me.
- 3: Wasn't me.
- 1: Your questions are merely a way for you to sit comfortably in your room and not do anything. Come on, do something! The world's in a terrible shape and—
- 2: You're not so hot yourself

1: Slander will get you nowhere.

2: No, I really want to know, why all this fuss over a bar? And why would a cybernetician want to hear what a bunch of puppets have to say?

1: Look, what do you do when you're stuck?

2: Mope around and complain.

3: Now that's not very productive, is it?

2: I don't want to be productive, I want to mope and complain.

1: Let me try a different tack.

3: Yes, variety is the—

1: Imagine that you're living in a world which is just like this one, which has lots of problems but no solutions, not a single one.

2: That cheers me up no end.

1: Yes, yes yes, but imagine that you want to solve a problem for which there is no available answer. What do you do?

2: Mope around and complain.

3: Now that's not very productive, is it?

2: No but it's cozy and familiar.

1: Then you are a closed system doomed to eternally revolve around yourself.

2: All by myself?

1: All by yourself.

2: Did you say roomed or doomed?

1: Doomed.

2: Hmmm.

3: That doesn't sound so good.

[Pause]

1: There is an alternative you know.

2: What's that?

1: Us! With us around, you're not alone!

2: With you two around, I'm not doomed?

1: Aren't you glad?

2: The thought requires some contemplation.

3: And that's why the cyberneticians need to have the puppets around?

1: Right! Because without us, they're doomed to revolve eternally around themselves.

2: But why do I need the cyberneticians around when I've got you two? Oh never mind the question answers itself.

3: I still don't understand why we need this bar and nightclub.

[exit speaker, enter Narrator]

Narrator: And now we shall perform for you the tale of Hem and Haw. Hem is a poor but crooked wastrel who had squandered his life away doing foolish deeds for the gratification of no-one, no, not even himself. Haw wasn't quite so bad, and lived with her husband Skimpy next door to Hem. One night as the two were sleeping, they had a mysterious visitor.

[Hem sleeping on one side of the stage, Skimpy and Haw the other. Enter Stumblebee]

Stumblebee: *[chanting over Hem]*

Away with reason, away with sense

Speak only questions in the subjunctive tense!

[chanting over Haw]

Ashby to Ashby and Beer to Beer

All that you speak, as arguments they'll hear!

[exit Stumblebee]

Hem: *[waking up]* What a way I could start this morning? Where could I have put my shoe? Where would I have put my shoe? Haw! Haw! Where could you be?

[exit searching]

Haw: Oh man, what a headache I've got!

Skimpy: And what do you mean by that?

Haw: Oh my aching head!

Skimpy: There, you don't even answer me! First thing in the morning I wake up and what do I hear from you nothing but arguments. Is that any way to treat your husband?

Haw: No, no, I just feel like I've got a terrible hangover, and I didn't even drink anything last night—

Skimpy: Oh boo hoo hoo, I'm going back to mother!

Haw: But she died years ago!

Skimpy: *[while exiting]* That's the thanks I get!

Haw: What's gotten into his head? What's gotten into my head?

Hem: *[enters]* Haw, Haw, could you be here? Where could my shoe be?

Haw: Uggg, what shoe?

Hem: Could you please not start arguing this early in the morning? And would you just give me a straight answer?

Haw: Straight answer? Man, I can't even hold my head straight. Do you know what's gotten into Skimpy? He just ran off to his mother's.

Hem: Well I suppose I should assume I won't find my shoe here, shouldn't I? And hadn't you told me his mother's dead? Or could that have been another one of your nasty insinuations? Humpf! [*leaves in a huff*]

Haw: Everybody's crazy this morning. I'm going back to bed. Ugggh!

Narrator: High up in the heavens in his magical Black Box, the great Cybernetic Chef Heinz von Ketchup looks down at all the confusion he caused.

Heinz: Faaaabulous! Simply Faaaaaacinating!
 [*in a sing-song voice*]
 I add some recursion for a little inversion
 Of the usual fiction of the language's diction
 Then mix ontological spices and sauces
 With thick mathematical reasons and rosses
 For I'm a constructor of the highest repeatable
 Epistemological boxes unbeatable!

Good good good good good! And now for part two of my plan. Stumblebee! Stumblebee! Where is that demon?

Stumblebee: [*voice from under*] I'm coming I'm coming. [*Stumblebee appears*] What is it now?

Heinz: You did a great job this morning, I'm proud of you.

Stumblebee: Yes, I know. And everyone will praise you for it when we demons are the ones that do all the work. You would be nowhere without us! You learned all your magic from me and now you keep me under your spells! You taught me your language and the benefit of it is I have learned how to curse.

Heinz: What are you complaining about? Maxwell's demon doesn't complain, and—

Stumblebee: Maxwell's demon is nothing but a glorified doorman. I'm going back to my poetry.

Heinz: Poetry? You write poetry?

Stumblebee: And I read it too.

Heinz: [*quickly*] Writing poetry at a time when our society is devouring its members is nothing but a mannered form of barbarism. It is a way of turning your back and shrugging off the activity of making solutions for the problems of our world.

Stumblebee: Poets realize social problems in language long before they are noticed by anyone else. Including you.

Heinz: Nonsense!

Stumblebee: I'll prove it to you. You know your famous theory about self-reference?

Heinz: Of course I know it, who better?

Stumblebee: Well, it was invented by a donkey.

Heinz: Are you calling me a—

Stumblebee: No no no, even though you—well never mind. It was invented by Eeyore the donkey in a poem he wrote for Christopher Robin. I'll recite it for you.

EEYORE'S POEM

Christopher Robin is going.
At least I think he is.
Where?
Nobody knows.
But he is going—
I mean he goes
(To rhyme with "knows")
Do we care?
(To rhyme with "where")
We do
Very much.
(I haven't got a rhyme for that
"is" in the second line yet.
Bother.)
(Now I haven't got a rhyme for
bother. Bother.)
Those two bothers will have
to rhyme with each other
Buther.
The fact is this is more difficult
than I thought,
I ought—
(Very good indeed)
I ought
To begin again,
But it is easier
To stop.
Christopher Robin, good-bye,
I
(Good)
I
And all your friends
Sends—
I mean all your friend
Send—
(Very awkward this, it keeps
going wrong)
Well, anyhow, we send
Our love
END.

Heinz: Humpf! And when did he write that poem?

Stumblebee: Around 1926.

Heinz: Read that poem in public today and everyone will think that you are trying to mock the concept of self-reference. And besides, all the things that are going on today have far exceeded any concept that poetry might devise.

Stumblebee: Well, you're not doing much about it, are you?

Heinz: Sure I am! The whole point of my sending you down there was to show that today, what are given as reports are understood as arguments and what are arguments are understood as reports.

Stumblebee: All I did was to make Hem and Skimpy mad with Haw. That has nothing to do with what you're talking about.

Heinz: Alright you dunderhead, I'll show you.
[chants] With a ho and a ha and a ho hum hee
It's backwards! Back to reality!

Narrator: And so the great Cybernetic Chef Heinz von Ketchup and his faithful demon Stumblebee made themselves invisible and whisked down to the famous Oval Orifice, where an Impressive Conference was just starting. And now Ladies and Gentlemen, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Pepsodent of the United Scrapes!

[Lots of hub-bub is heard. Enter Pepsodent]

Pepsodent: My Yellow A-Pelicans! In order to prepare for peace, we must prepare for war!

[hub-bub, sentences of agreement. 'sounds reasonable' 'ok by me' etc.]

Pepsodent: Since the people are the life-blood of the nation, they need to be taken care of, so we should cut social services to the bone!

[more agreeing hub-bub]

Pepsodent: While I personally am not in favor of these things, I must, as we all must, face the reality of our existence in these hard times.

Heinz: [appears suddenly] Enough, enough, I've had enough of you! Vanish! Vamoose! and begone from my sight!

[Pepsodent vanishes]

Heinz: Now you see what I'm talking about?

Stumblebee: [enters] No.

Heinz: That's why you're the demon and I'm the chef! No one here even once tried to counter the arguments that the Pepsodent delivered. They all treated them as though they were reports to be accepted without resistance.

Stumblebee: [Mumbles] Yeah, but what's Hem and Haw got to do with it?

Heinz: [ignores him] Once, many years ago, in the golden days of Cybernetology, I wrote—but I'll quote it in full for you. "It is clear that our entire society suffers from a severe dysfunction. On the level of the individual this is painfully felt by apathy, distrust, violence, disconnectedness, powerlessness, alienation, and so on. I call this the 'participatory crisis,' for it excludes the individual from participating in the social process. The society becomes the 'system,' the 'establishment' or what have you, a depersonalized Kafkaesque ogre of its own ill will."

Stumblebee: Ok, ok, but what's that got to do with what's happening now?

Heinz: Today all this is reversed. People no longer feel, apathy, they want to crush the bad guys. Instead of distrust, they trust and believe their leaders. Instead of powerlessness, they feel a sense of power by identifying with those in power. Not that they have power, mind you, but they identify themselves with it. Today, instead of a participatory crisis, where people are excluded from governing their system, and hence think of it as being the ogre I somewhat romantically called it back then, well instead of that, they feel united with the system and no longer question their lack of decision making power. We are told that “We are the system,” or, “We are the world,” and we either believe it or cynically shrug and feel superior to it. We are given the illusion of participation to cloak the reality of our victimization. And now, good night.

[[Heinz starts snoring.]

Stumblebee: Good, now I can go back to my poetry. *[exit]*

Narrator: You may be wondering what Hem and Haw have been doing. Well, their spells soon wore off. For Haw, this was a mixed blessing. People stopped accusing her of arguing all the time, and went back to completely ignoring whatever she said. For Hem, this was a blessing in disguise. He is just now beginning to realize what he can do with his new-found ability.

[enter Hem and Haw, walking and talking]

Hem: Could it be the case that I could only speak in interrogative subjunctive sentences?

Haw: Sure, but what good is it?

Hem: *[ignores her]* And could there be subjects which require subjunctive thinking?

Haw: Subjunctive thinking? I don’t even understand subjunctive speaking.

Hem: Could it be that the subjunctive is the case for thinking about what is not yet the case?

Haw: You’re a case. This is silly.

Hem: *[gives up trying to ponder]* Alright little Johnny, I’ll explain it to you. Who’s your favorite poet?

Haw: Poet? Stafford the Beard of course! I love his poetry. I go to sleep reading it every night!

Hem: Never mind. He’s a cybernetician, right?

Haw: Yeah, so what?

Hem: Just listen for a second. He’s a cybernetician, he likes to write poetry, he’s a pretty nice guy, he doesn’t want to hurt anybody—

Haw: Yeah I think so.

Hem: —and he finds that his work as a scientist can be used for ends which he did not and does not intend. He probably hates those ends, being a peace-minded soul.

Haw: You love to hear yourself talk, don’t you?

Hem: Well think of this: Could a society exist wherein the work of a scientist would not against his wishes and desires, make him a crony to murder?

Haw: *[reflectively]* Yeah, that would be good!

Hem: See, now you’re doing it too!

Haw: [*not comprehending*] Doing what?

Hem: You have to use the subjunctive when you want to talk about what is not the case but what you want to be the case!

Haw: Oh get off my case. Listen, why don't you do something useful, like getting something to eat?

Hem: Oh all right! [*mumbles*] Low minded louse! [*exits*]

Haw: [*to herself*] That wouldn't be bad though. A society where the consequences of the things I want wouldn't make me hate the things I want.

[*Palm rises*]

Palm: Yes that would be nice, wouldn't it?

Haw: [*taken in*] You think so too? I think that—

[*Hem enters*]

Hem: I don't have anything we'll have to order a pizza who are you?

Palm: I—am the Palm of Practicality. [*bows*] Expect me only when I am not expected. Mine is the friendly voice that says, "But remember..." "And what about..." "You must take into consideration..." I am the Helping Hand that won't let you go astray, not even if you want to.

Hem: [*aside to Haw*] Is this guy for real?

Palm: You're probably wondering what I'm doing here. Well, I overheard the conversation you were having and I thought I might lend a hand, so to speak, to your musings.

Hem: [*to Haw*] Did you let him in?

Haw: No, he just appeared. [*to Palm*] But I thought you liked the idea of a society which doesn't give criminal consequences to useful tasks.

Palm: Of course I did, of course I did. I'm here to find out what other ideas you have for an imaginary society, and to inform you of a few things you ought to take into consideration.

Haw: [*to Hem*] He sounds ok to me.

Palm: You were talking about what society could be. Let me introduce you to some of my friends.

Hem: Will they want something to eat too?

Haw: Behave! He's introducing his friends!

Palm: My friends can be quite helpful when you're trying to invent solutions to problems.

[*enter Face, Nose, and Shoulders*]

Palm: This is the Face of Facts [*Face bows*], this is the Nose It All [*Nose bows*], and these are the twins, the Shoulders of Responsibility [*Shoulders bow*].

Haw: The Shoulders of Responsibility, huh? Didn't you two once try to sell me some life insurance?

Hem: And how are you going to help us invent solutions to problems?

Palm: Let us show you.

[figures surround Hem and Haw, they begin speaking in a loop, first severally and slowly, then simultaneously and faster]

Who's going to pick up the garbage?
What if someone wants three cadillacs
Not everybody is like you
Violence is part of human nature
People would lose their initiative
But that's communism!

[The figures close in on Hem and Haw, getting louder and louder until the Foot of Imagination (a Shoe) enters. A fight ensues, and he kicks the figures out.]

Haw: Whew! I thought they were going to crush us!

Foot: Yup. That Gang of Four will do it to you everytime.

Haw: *[to Foot]* And who are you anyway?

Foot: Me? I'm the Foot of Imagination.

Hem: I don't believe it!

Foot: Yeah, well, when people tell you to be fast on your feet, what they mean is you've got to use me. I'm the only one that can help you kick that gang out. Oh, by the way, do you have anything to eat?

Haw: No but we can order a pizza.

Foot: Good, let's go.

[exit all three, speaker rises]

2: I still don't know what we're doing in this bar.

3: Ours is not to reason why ours is but—

2: You are no help at all.

1: Listen you two. I just wrote something to say to the cyberneticians. Listen!

As long as people are inhibited, by the demand to be reasonable and practical, from articulating their wants and desires, so long will the status quo remain so.

2: Nobody's going to listen to it.

3: Is that why we're in a bar?

1: I'm not done yet!

As long as desire and imagination are shackled by reality, so long will our joys be resting on a pedestal of human misery.

2: That's almost the same thing you said before. Running out of ideas already?

3: Is that why we're in a bar?

1: Well, let me try this. I'll talk about the scientist.

The imagination of the scientist is today condemned to creating new ways of creating human suffering.
How about that?

2: Yeah, it's easy to criticize a profession you're not a part of. Everybody will say you don't know what you're talking about because you're an artist, not a scientist.

3: Nobody listens to me. Maybe I can get a drink. Bartender! Oh, bartender!

1: Ok, I'll put in a line about the artist.

The imagination of the artist is condemned to creating new ways of comforting individuals just enough to prevent their rebelling against their criminal injustice system.

Pretty good, huh? I especially like the line about "criminal injustice system."

2: People will say you just like to play with words and you put in the stuff about the artist just to say 'mea culpa!'

3: Is that a new kind of drink? Can I try some?

1: Yes but, I mean I want to say, oh I'll just read it to you.

2: You never give up, do you.

1: Hand in cahoots (I think that's clever) Hand in cahoots, the scientist and the artist are creating and maintaining a society in which its members must fight, hate, and cut each others' throats in order to live and face one more day of socialized barbarity.

See? Now I show what the both are doing together.

2: You don't understand, you twit. The scientists will say that you just don't know what they're doing, and they'll think you're acting superior and talking down to them.

3: I like the line about "in cahoots." There's a bar in Cincinnati called "In Cahoots."

1: Thanks for the compliment, as far as it goes. Alright, I'll show them what they've already done and what I've learned from their work.

Heinz von Foerster has shown that our reality is constructed by our language, thus suggesting that if we desire a new reality we must not hang on to, and be hung by, our old language.

How about that, huh?

2: More word games. What's your point, anyway?

1: This is the point:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I submit that if what I say is described as being "true," then the old language condemns what I say to being merely true, or unfortunately true, or sad but true. If we permit language to do so, then the means by which we can change our reality will successfully maintain our misery.

3: That's depressing!

2: Yeah, that is depressing. Can't you liven it up a little bit? Put in some jokes? This is supposed to be a puppet show.

3: Now I really need a drink.

1: That's the reason why we're in a bar!