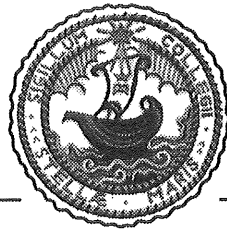


LITERARY JOURNAL



TRUTH

CHARITY

STELLA MARIS COLLEGE
(AUTONOMOUS), CHENNAI, INDIA

SPECIAL ISSUE ON HUMOUR

STELLA MARIS COLLEGE
(AUTONOMOUS)
CHENNAI - 600 086

Vol. 36

March 2013

Faculty Editors:

Dr Miruna George

Ms Deepa Krishnamurthy

Student Editors:

Ms V Shruthi, I MA English

Ms Hafsa Mariam Fathima, II BA English

Humour

Hafsa Mariam Fathima
II B.A. English

There's a reason we laugh.

Basic biology aside.

There's a reason why we clutch at our sides, why we clap our hands, doubled over with tears streaming down our faces.

Humour's admittedly not the greatest of arts. If you're a stand-up comedian, you're a little better than broke; if you work on a sketch show, you had better have all the holy power of Lorne Michaels (the quasi god who gave us Saturday Night Live) backing you up before you inevitably get kicked off air, and when was the last time the Academy ever showed a little golden love to a rom com? That's what we've been told anyway. That this genre is the biggest joke of all, where nothing is sacred or honoured or serious.

And that is the point of it all. A sitcom is what we switch to when the news gets too morbid; a good joke is the best ice breaker there is; a long laugh the best solution to a bad day. Nothing relates as well as comedy does; it's bigger than life, with caricatures of people we see every day, if we look hard enough.

The slightly hysterical, third wave feminist in gender neutral clothes? 30 Rock's Liz Lemon. The smooth talker at every party you go? Have you met Barney Stinson? The neurotic neatness freak with a slight case of OCD? Monica Geller. And that six year old smart mouthing you and testing your every strand of patience? Total Calvin. They exist. There's a little bit of all of us in the thousands of characters humour has given us over the course of the year, and that is what makes us love them as much as we do.

So that's what we hope to do in this year's edition of the Literary Journal. Make you remember what it is that is so innately special about Humour; that it makes us stop to look at ourselves, our silly, naïve, primate-evolved selves, before we take ourselves too — what's the word?

Seriously.

**“Reality continues to ruin my life”:
Growing Up with *Calvin and Hobbes***

S. Annapoorni and V. Shilpa

In the (post?) postmodern world we live in today, it is customary to acknowledge the simultaneous existence of multiple realities and differing perspectives. While this might sometimes be too liberating for comfort, it is also true that often, despite such co-existing pluralities, we implicitly acknowledge one reality as more real and one truth as being truer than the others. The validation of this reality often comes from the position one is in, and positions, perceptions and perspectives form an inextricable web, the interstices of which shape each reality. This paper seeks to explore such interstices of the child-adult in the world of Bill Watterson’s *Calvin and Hobbes*.

There is a certain charm about a six-year old boy (and a tiger), freewheeling through life, commenting on everything from the education system to neodeconstructivist art(!), channelling the spirit of existential philosophers, transmogrifying himself and people around him into werewolves, monsters and dinosaurs, creating alternate versions of everyday occurrences as a superhero spaceman, making an army of mutant snowmen, time travelling in a cardboard box while also being grossed out by girls and entertaining a healthy dislike for baths. He is a precocious kid, with views and a vocabulary beyond his years. He is also a kid who dislikes the monotony of school-classes-homework. To a child who finds even the normal boring, the routine is just not acceptable. With a characteristic spirit of curiosity and adventure, Calvin seeks to explore the possibilities that his imagination offers. The need to escape from the mundane instigates most of the imaginative escapades and it often becomes an alternate version of reality, reality as Calvin sees it, where the mother, father and teacher become monsters, and wearing underpants and adding numbers become a matter of survival. It does not help that Calvin declares math a religion and himself a math atheist!

This series is simultaneously a celebration of childhood and the artist, Bill Watterson’s, commentary on aspects of family, society and culture in America, thus making the series a “cultural artifact” (Brabant and Mooney 114). Calvin is a typical American Kid, and despite the series being rooted in American culture, his views on life and growing up transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, making him “Everykid.” A natural comparison can be drawn to Hank Ketcham’s *Dennis, the Menace* series which also deals with the life and adventures of a mischievous six year old boy, who lives with his parents and whose mischief and wisecracks celebrate the All-American boyhood. The difference in these two comic strips is the presence of Hobbes, a stuffed tiger toy who is Calvin’s live companion in all his exploits. Whether one considers Hobbes Calvin’s alter-ego or an anthropomorphic extension of Calvin’s Self, it is true that Hobbes is as real as he is imaginary.

To understand Calvin's relationship with Hobbes, we need to understand the purpose and nature of Calvin's imagination. Considering the series as a whole, Calvin's need for Hobbes arises from the fact of his being a single child in a nuclear family, with an obvious lack of friends in the neighbourhood. It represents Calvin's need to fill this void and his attempts to make sense of the world around him. Calvin thus exhibits, as Marjorie Taylor observes, a child's need for an imaginary companion, indicative of a deeper psychological need and an expression of "intellectual and creative potential" (4). The nature of Calvin's imagination is determined by its purpose. His imaginative potential does not limit itself to bringing Hobbes to life. It extends to creating worlds – either alternate or "transmogrified" realities – blurring dimensions of space and time.

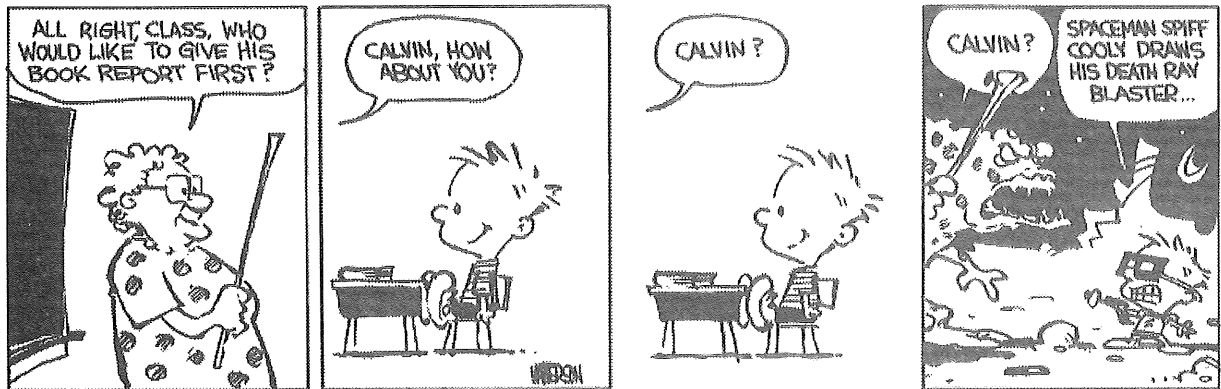


Fig.1. An alternate world with elements of the real world transformed



Fig.2. Reality is 'transmogrified' — across dimensions of time

Figure 1 is an instance of how Calvin's imagination transforms the classroom ordeal of a book report into an intergalactic face-off between an alien and Calvin's persona of Spaceman Spiff. While this is an example of Calvin's escape into a world of fantasy, it also serves to ironically foreground and subtly comment on the alien nature of the education system. Calvin's deceptively benign smile masks an imagination that combats rigorous pedagogy with death ray blasters.

Figure 2 is an instance of Calvin's imagination literally cutting across the dimensions of space and time, where a simple cardboard box (with flaps open outward) transforms into a time travel machine that takes him into new worlds. While Calvin here is the child, to whom time travel is natural, Hobbes is a child-adult who accepts snacks as a worthy reason for time travel, but also questions the logic of existence prior to one's birth.

It is often Hobbes's voice of reason that grounds Calvin in the reality both within and without Calvin's world. The perspectives of the child and the adult are sometimes seen through Calvin positioned as the imaginative child and Hobbes as the realistic, logical adult, arguably seen best seen in Figure 3 below.

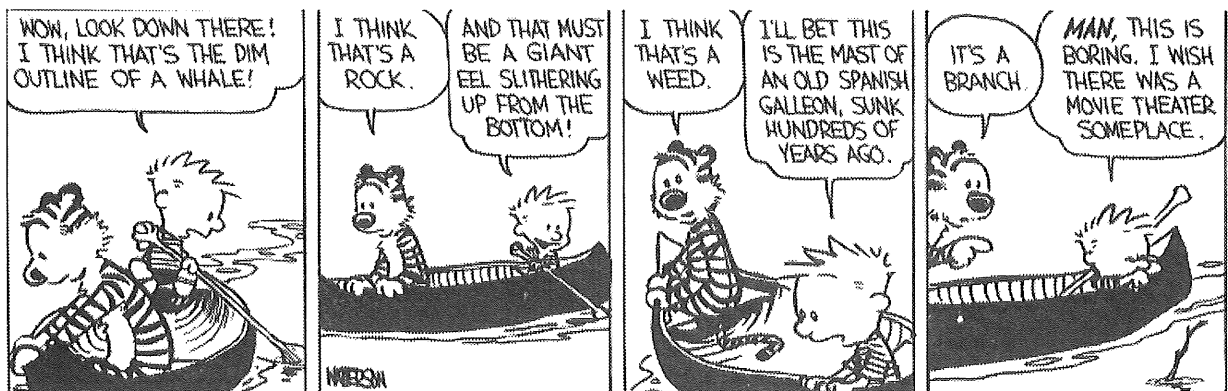


Fig.3. The dichotomies of child-adult and imagination-reality combine effortlessly

Figure 3 also suggests Watterson's ironic self-reflexivity where the dichotomies co-exist as equally 'real' perceptions and the adult's need for a rational explanation is offered by a character of, in the artist's own words, "dual existence." (McGavran 7-8). This aspect of Hobbes's "dual existence" as real and as subjective to Calvin's reality is depicted in the strips where Calvin is with adults. In Figure 4, while Hobbes is alone with Calvin he is a fuzzy tiger. (The brush strokes suggest furry liveliness) and while adults are around, he is just a floppy toy.

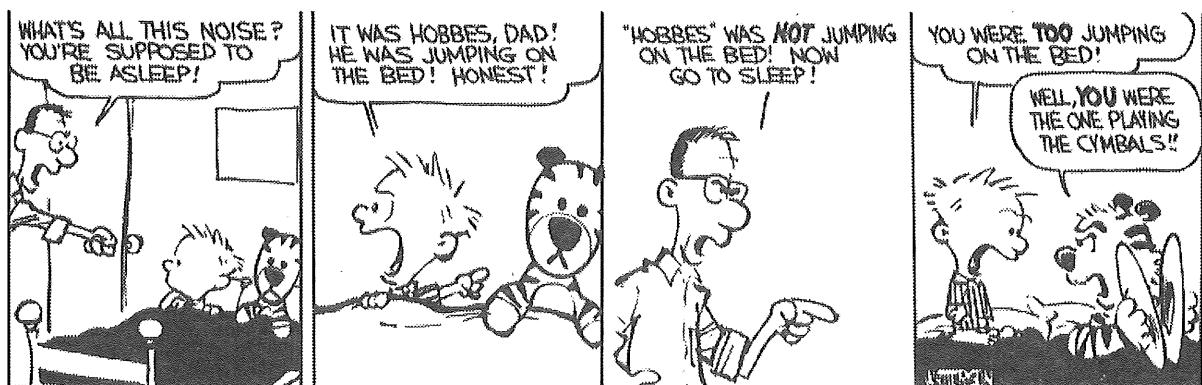


Fig.4 The first two panels present Hobbes as a toy, while in the last, he is alive

Even in the presence of Susie, a child, Hobbes remains inanimate, as seen in Figure 5, where Calvin's description of Hobbes is incongruous with the lifeless toy next to him.



Fig.5. Hobbes's duality of existence – it is Calvin's perception that brings him alive

Hobbes-the-toy is odd, and the static features belie the Hobbes who is a part of Calvin's reality. In a strip where Hobbes is taken by a dog, Calvin is both vulnerable and scared for his friend, and the way in which he instinctively describes Hobbes is seen in Figure 6, as his mother gently nudges him to be literal in his description.



Fig.6. Calvin loses Hobbes the friend, not Hobbes the toy

Calvin's understanding of his world is mediated principally through his interactions with Hobbes. It is these interactions that help the readers to make sense of Calvin's world, making Hobbes integral and indispensable. Comparisons with other opinionated anthropomorphic creations such as Charles Schultz's Snoopy ("Peanuts") and Jim Davis' eponymous Garfield foreground the symbiotic nature of Calvin and Hobbes' relationship. While Snoopy has a life and opinion apart from his owner Charlie Brown, Garfield's thoughts dominate his owner Jon's. Hobbes' dual nature (as stuffed toy and live comrade) is one reason why Hobbes complements Calvin. Though it is Calvin's imagination that brings him to life and keeps him alive, in strips like Figure 7, it seems impossible to rationally or logically explain how Calvin could have tied himself up and Hobbes cannot exist there as a mere figment of the imagination.

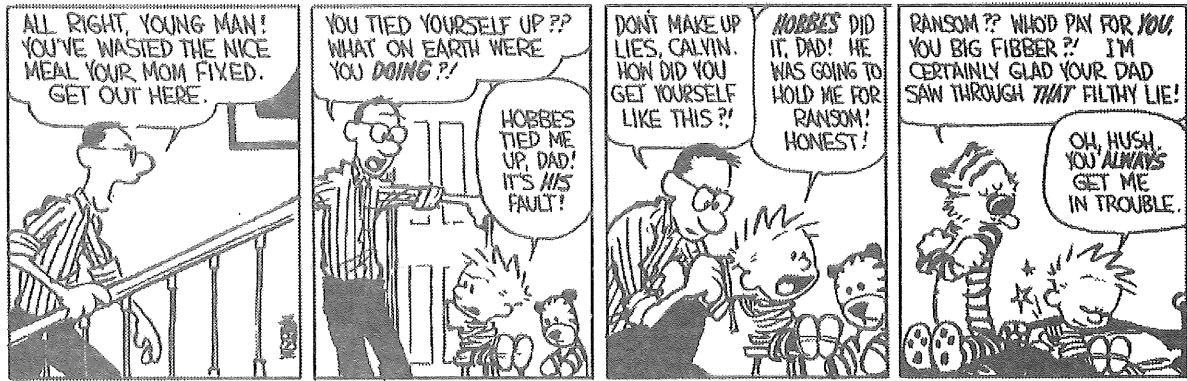


Fig.7. Calvin's "Houdini" act gone wrong, with no rational explanation of being "tied up"

Hobbes' existence certainly is more nuanced than a mere reality-imagination opposition and Bill Watterson's comments suggest the same. "I don't think of Hobbes as a doll" he states, "that miraculously comes to life when Calvin's around. Neither do I think of Hobbes as the product of Calvin's imagination. The nature of Hobbes' reality doesn't interest me, and each story goes out of its way to avoid resolving the issue." (qtd. in Mcgavran 7) The unresolved nature of Hobbes' existence adds variety and depth to Hobbes' personality, Calvin's imagination and the reader's stance, where Hobbes becomes what the reader and Calvin believe him to be.

Calvin and Hobbes complement each other to become personalities integrated in the vision of the artist. The artist uses his vision to comment and this commentary is both pictorial and verbal. In contrast to the subtle comment on the education system as seen in Figure 1, Figure 8 provides a scathing indictment of the same. Calvin's thoughts and words exceed his age, as is typical of him but the strip also reflects Watterson's views, making Calvin his alter-ego. The artist uses humour and a six-year old to make a stinging remark palatable.

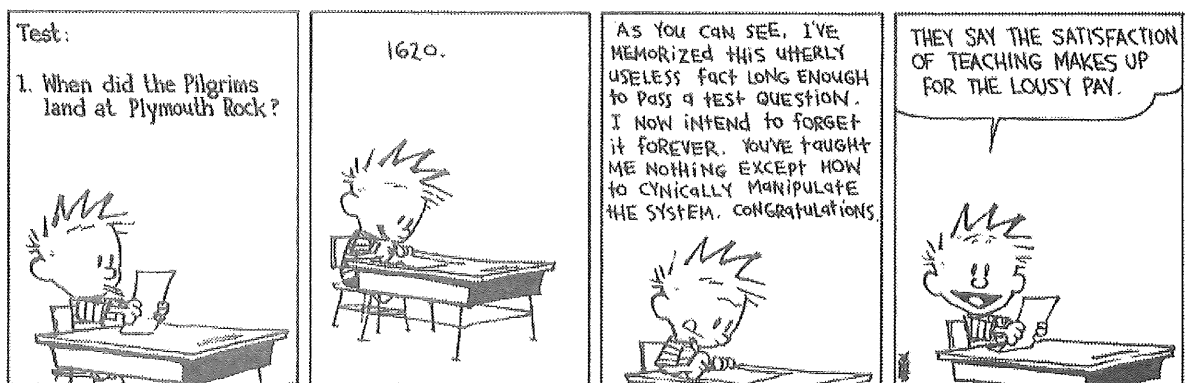


Fig.8. The humour and Calvin's expressions lighten and veil the strong comment he makes

The artist also uses Calvin's literal imagination (which makes the father's evil eye a gigantic eyeball) to capture the prison-like environment that the education system encourages. In Figure 9, the comment made is purely pictorial and it is only in the last panel that the reader understands that it was Calvin's day in school. The reader is impelled to go back and understand in 'adult' terms what school activity each panel of Calvin's imagination translates to.

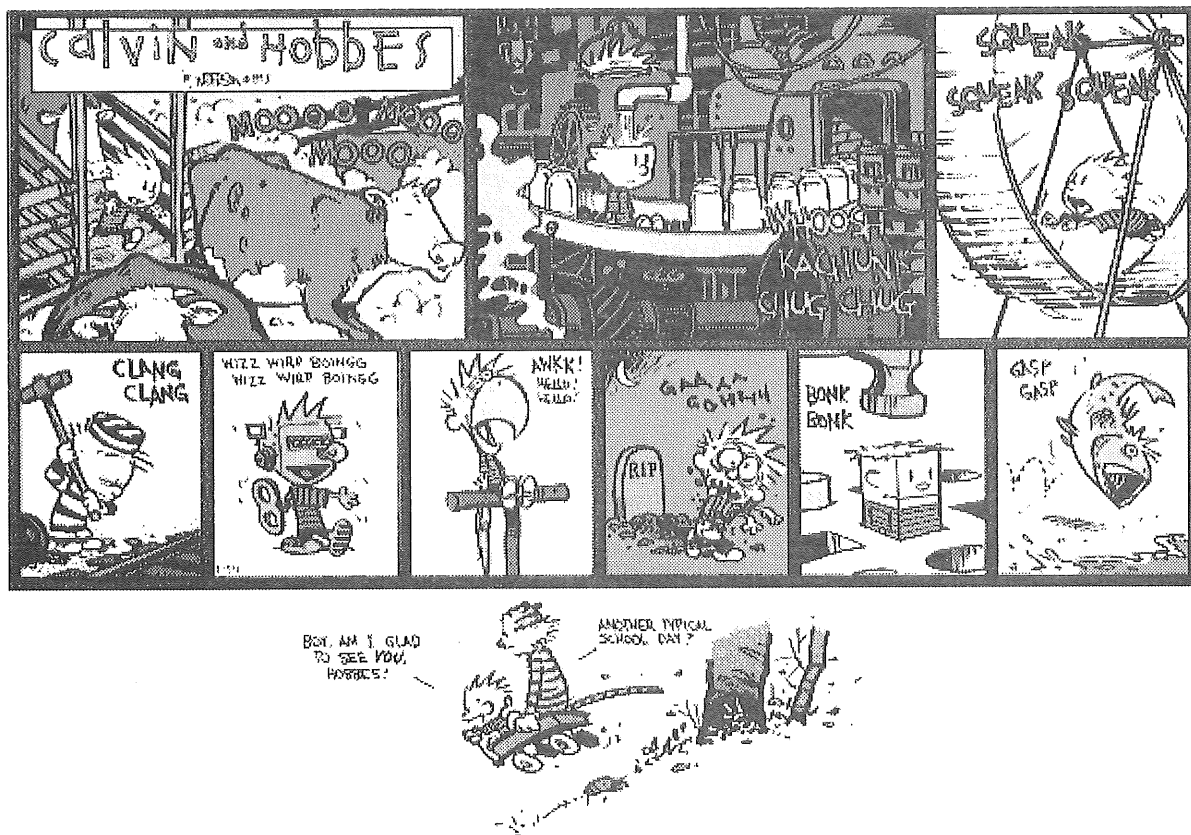


Fig. 9. An insight into Calvin's mind as he goes through a school day

Given that his life in school and routine of homework-bath-dinner-bed at home is excruciatingly mundane and robotic with no space for outlandish fun and creativity, Calvin's imagination usually transforms outside reality to a completely different version, as he sees it. The need to escape the world around into the world within is best exemplified in his Spaceman Spiff adventures. In Figure 10 for instance, the first panel begins, as most Spaceman Spiff adventures do, with Calvin in school, moves on in the next two panels to his version of reality where the teacher is, again, an alien monster. To escape from the alien monster, Calvin attempts a literal and imaginative escape, both of which are foiled in the fourth panel.

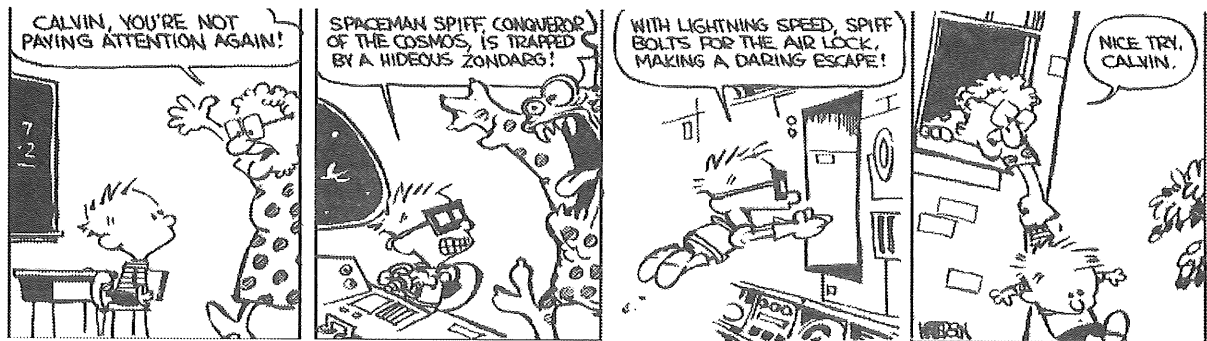


Fig.10. Calvin trying to escape an uninteresting class, again

It is interesting to note Hobbes' absence in all Spaceman Spiff adventures. One possible reason is that most of them occur in school, where Hobbes is not present. If so, then this would be Calvin's juxtaposition of reality and imagination. In the few Spaceman Spiff adventures at home too, Hobbes is conspicuous by his absence. This seems to suggest the nuancing of Calvin's imagination, which is self-reflexive, as he is made aware of the juxtaposition of reality and imagination and Hobbes; often the voice of reason and logic, is deliberately absent.

The transformation of mundane reality that Spaceman Spiff (and often, Stupendous Man) offers is the transformation of an adult reality. Mundane acts such as eating popcorn, walking around the house inspire imaginative make-overs as a predatory T. Rex chomping, werewolf stomping or octopus creeping, while his father becomes a monster when he comes to check on Calvin in the night and his mother a gorilla when she asks him to clean his room. As mentioned earlier, Calvin's imagination is quite literal and some of the mutant creatures are expressions of how he is feeling then. For instance, when he feels full after a meal, the metaphor is made literal, as seen in Figure 11.

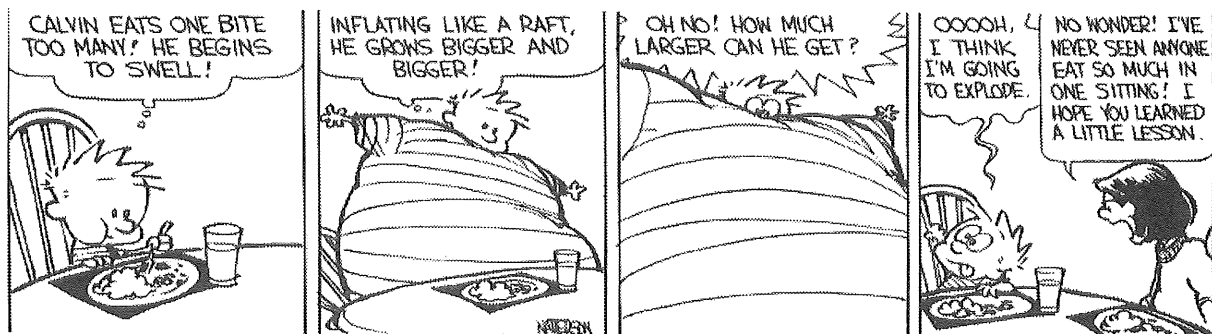


Fig.11. Calvin swells up like Aunt Marge

Food and bath-bubbles become monsters, when they threaten to overpower him against his will. Calvin is a truly free spirit and uses his imagination to deal with a reality that often curbs his spirit. It is an ordeal to survive and fight against such realities, even if the reality is as uncomplicated as eating something he doesn't like and his mutants are merely a part of an escapist, creative, "magical ol' world" that he creates for himself.

Also a part of this world, and a mode of escape, is the cardboard box, a seemingly dull object, which becomes a time-travel machine and a transmogrifier. As a time travelling machine, it can travel into the past and the future depending on which side Calvin and Hobbes are facing while sitting in the box. Hobbes is always present in all the cardboard-box adventures, unlike the mutants and Spaceman Spiff escapades. This seems to indicate that the latter is a product of Calvin's imagination when he is overcome with loneliness and a need to survive while the former is a happy creation induced by a sense of exploration. The transmogrifier is also an exploration, which allows Calvin (and Hobbes) to be anything he wants to be. As Figure 12 indicates, it's the same time-travel cardboard box that's upturned to make it a transmogrifier.

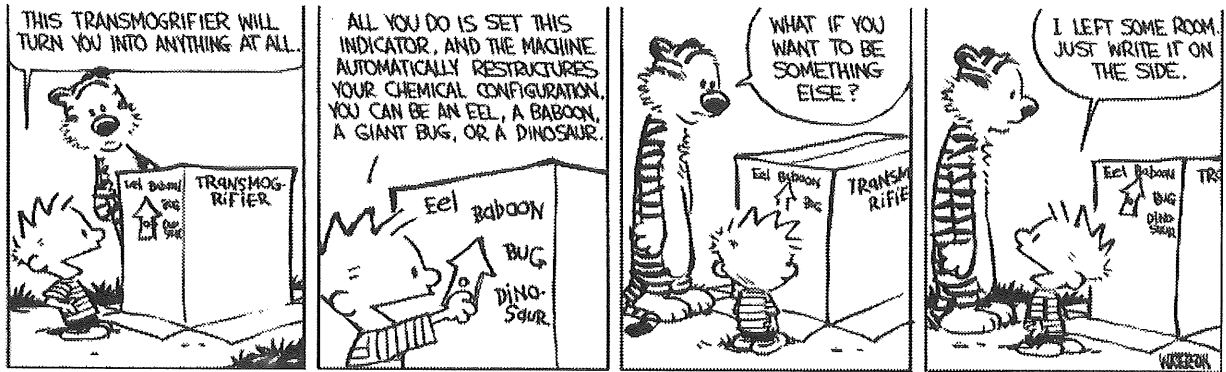


Fig.12. Chemical reconfiguration simplified

In the series, the reader is constantly required to re-position himself/herself. While reading transmogrified realities — the Spaceman Spiff adventures or Calvin's mutants — the reader's positioning is as an adult, all the while trying to find a rational(e) for the imagining and to ground it in 'real' terms. The last panel, especially in the strips where all the previous panels depict Calvin's reality, gives the reader pleasure because it gives the rationale he/she was looking for.



Fig.13. Across dimensions of space, on a swing

In other strips, either regular strips or those which feature time-travel or the transmogrifier, the reader-adult indulges in Calvin's imagination. The reader also realises that his imagination is not merely the creation of an alternate universe. It is real to Calvin and therefore real to the reader,

who can position himself/herself along with Calvin at least in the time and space of the panel. In the Spaceman Spiff adventures, it is easy for the reader to be the logical adult, but in strips where there is no clear dichotomy and the child and the adult are juxtaposed, the imaginative and real aspects of Hobbes also co-exist and they co-exist in the interstice.



Fig. 14. Reality ruins life... but there's always Hobbes

Seeking logic here will ruin both the reality and the imagination. Hobbes is Calvin's friend, defying reason, despite logic. Hobbes is alive to the reader because the reader chooses to see him that way. The reader is drawn into their world and willingly so, as he/she resolutely refuses to grow up.

Bibliography

- Brabant, Sarah and Linda A. Mooney. "The Social Construction of Family Life in the Sunday Comics: Race as a Consideration." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*. 30.1 (2003): 113-133. EBSCO. Web. 14 Feb. 2013.
- McGavran, James Holt. "Romantic Continuations, Postmodern Contestations, or 'It's a Magical World, Hobbes, Ol' Buddy .. Crash'." *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuations, Postmodern Contestations*. Ed. James Holt McGavran. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999. 1-19. Google Books. Web. 8 Feb. 2013.
- Watterson, Bill. *The Complete Calvin and Hobbes*. n.p., n.d. Web. 5 Feb. 2013.

Hāsyā: The Most Important Rasa

Maria Benjamin
M. Phil. English

What can be more ironical than an overwhelming sense of dismay gripping a person who has set out to write an article on humour? Various thoughts clouded my thinking. *I? More writing? Humour? Can something as ephemeral as laughter be described, let alone defined? Should I make the article funny?* Writing an article on humour had effectually wiped the smile off my face. The irony of the situation made me chuckle. *Ridiculous!* I told myself. *This is Farce!* my mind shot back.

“This is Farce!” - an echo of the cry of the *vidhūsaka* in the classical Sanskrit play *Bhagavadajjukkam*. I remembered that the comic sentiment had already been discussed in the farces *Bhagavadajjukkam* and *Mattavilāsa-Prahasanam*, by no less a personage than King Mahēndravikramavarman (and this centuries before Stella Maris decided to bring out a journal on the theme). *Thank you Muse.*

The primary aim of the performance of Classical Sanskrit plays was the evocation of a particular *rasa* or sentiment in the minds of the audience (Keith 314). The *Nāṭyaśāstra* identifies eight sentiments or *rasas* which correspond to eight basic emotions or bhavas (Haksar xvi). The sentiment *śānta* was added to the original eight outlined in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* by later authorities (Keith 324). As Haksar points out, the audience does not experience the “actual emotion” the characters are portrayed as experiencing, but “an aesthetic appreciation of its *rasa*” (xvi).

One of the original eight *rasas* is *hāsyā*, the comic sentiment, which corresponds to *hasa*, the emotion of humour. Although *hāsyā* is considered an appropriate sentiment for drama, critical treatises such as the *Nāṭyaśāstra* recommend that dramatists choose the *śṛīngāra* (erotic) or *vīra* (heroic) *rasa* as the predominant sentiment to be evoked through their plays. Interestingly, Mahēndravikramavarman challenges this popular view. The following passage from the prelude of the *Bhagavadajjukkam* clarifies this:

Director: I’ve been trying to reason this out. Critical treatises on the drama have distinguished ten different types of plays: the androgynous parent, *nāṭaka-prakarāṇa*, and its engendered progeny, the series, *ihāmṛiga*, *ḍīma*, *samavakāra*, *vyāyōga*, *bhāṇa*, *sallāpa*, *vīthī*, *utsrīṣṭīkāṅka*, and the *prahasana* or farce. I’ve considered the respective dominant *rasas* of these ten types, and as I see it, the most important one is the *hāsyā rasa*, which provokes laughter. Therefore, I’m going to put on a farce. (41)

It is clear that Mahēndravikramavarman uses the character of the *sūtradhāra* or stage director to articulate his own convictions. When the *vidhūsaka* claims that he knows “nothing of farcical comedy”, the *sūtradhāra* proceeds to instruct him through a practical demonstration of farce - i.e., the play proper of the *Bhagavadajjukkam*. This also provides the dramatist with an opportunity to simultaneously school the uninitiated and perhaps sceptical audience members in the superlative merits of *hāsyā*. Through *Bhagavadajjukkam*, Mahēndravikramavarman provides several reasons that support his claim that the *rasa* “which provokes laughter” is “the most important one” (41). This article shall examine two of these reasons, which comment on the nature of humour itself.

Firstly, Mahēndravikramavarman demonstrates that humour has subversive capacities. The

uniqueness of the *hāsya rasa* rests in the fact that it is capable of subverting any of the other emotions to produce laughter. The comic sentiment, unlike the other *rasas*, is not restricted in terms of its choice of subject. Nothing is sacred; neither the pangs of love nor the expression of grief is beyond its mockery. The *śringāra* and *vīra* rasa merely become food for amusement.

Death, something that one would imagine is the exclusive prerogative of tragedy, is also part of Mahēndravarman's farce. In *Bhagavadajjukkam*, the courtesan Vasantasēnā dies suddenly from a snake bite, a circumstance arranged by Yama's agent, who remains invisible to the mortal characters. However, the audience does not experience *karuṇa*, the sentiment of compassion corresponding to the emotion of grief associated with death. Rather, a mood of hilarity is evoked by the confusion that results from the courtesan's death. In order to teach his disciple Śāṇḍilyah a lesson, the ascetic Parivrājakah secretly places his soul in the body of the dead courtesan. She is revived, but much to the astonishment of the onlookers, her personality is completely altered. At the same time they are alarmed to find the ascetic lying lifeless in his turn. Amidst this mayhem the agent of death returns, himself an object of ridicule, for he belatedly realizes that he has caused the death of the wrong woman. Perceiving the ascetic's trick, Yama's agent decides to play along and mischievously places the soul of the courtesan in the ascetic's lifeless body. The result is utter chaos, with the courtesan behaving like an ascetic and the ascetic behaving like a courtesan.

It is at this juncture that the *vidhūsaka* playing the role of Śāṇḍilyah exclaims: "All right. Now I've seen the ludicrous taken to the limit. This is Farce! This is neither the Bhagavan nor Ajjuka. Better call it 'Bhagavadajjuka!'" (85). This points to a second characteristic of *hāsya*: laughter springs from a realization of incongruity, as I discovered when attempting to write this article. Perhaps this is why Mahēndravarman foregrounds incongruity in his farce. The overt example of incongruity in the play is of course the exchange of the souls of two very different characters, an ascetic and a courtesan, resulting in incongruous behaviour. This incident only makes obvious the hidden incongruities that already exist in the characters of the courtesan and the saint. The play portrays the ascetic as a person who is not above carnal desire. On the other hand, the courtesan demonstrates ascetic detachment in her relationships. There are many other examples of incongruity in the play — a disciple who is unwilling to learn from his guru, a guru who lacks the competence to teach his disciple, and a doctor incapable of healing – to name a few. By portraying the universality of incongruity, a catalyst for laughter, Mahēndravarman implies that there is unlimited potential for the evocation of *hāsya*. In doing so he adds another argument to the defence of his hypothesis of *hāsya* as the most important *rasa*.

It is evident that *Bhagavadajjukkam* is not merely a farce; it is also a critical treatise on the mechanisms of farce and humour. Mahēndravarman created a new genre – dramatic criticism that is conveyed through drama itself, or the *nāṭaka-prakarāṇa*. The fact that his works continue to 'instruct and delight' today testifies to the greatness of his artistic skill and insight.

REFERENCES

- Haksar, A.N.D. Trans. Introduction. *The Shattered Thigh and Other Plays*. Bhasa. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2008. ix-xxx. Print.
- Keith, A. Berriedale. *The Sanskrit Drama in its Origin, Development, Theory & Practice*. London: Oxford UP, 1954. Print.
- Mahēndravikramavarman. *Bhagavadajjukkam*. Trans. Michael Lockwood and A.Vishnu Bhat. *Metatheater and Sanskrit Drama*. Tambaram: Tamabaram Research Associates, 2005. Print.

Dark Humour and *The God of Small Things*

Catherine Shilpa
II B.A. English

“Razors pain you,
Rivers are damp,
Acids stain you,
And drugs cause cramps,
Guns aren’t lawful,
Nooses give,
Gas smells awful,
You might as well live”

— Dorothy Parker (“Enough Rope”)

Anyone having read Dickens’ *David Copperfield* is not likely to forget Uriah Heep—the diabolical villain with his claims of servility and ‘umbleness’ or ‘The Joker’ from Batman comics with his famous sadistic sense of humour. Admittedly there is in all of us a fascination for things that are wickedly funny like this excerpt from Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*:

Estragon: Why don’t we hang ourselves?

Vladimir: With what?

Estragon: You haven’t got a bit of rope?

Vladimir: No.

Estragon: Then we can’t.

Vladimir: Let’s go.

Estragon: Wait, there’s my belt.

Vladimir: It’s too short.

Estragon: You could hang onto my legs.

Vladimir: And who’d hang onto mine?

Estragon: True.

Vladimir: Show me all the same.

In fact, the Theatre of the Absurd to which this play belongs is one of the literary movements that relied almost entirely on dark humour or black comedy to impart its message — that life is absurd and meaningless. But if you are not existential, don’t let this example mislead you into concluding that dark humour is on the whole bleak and pessimistic. The best evidence to the contrary is one of the cartoons from my childhood *Courage the Cowardly Dog*. I was entertained by the eerie adventures of the constantly shivering and cowering pink dog named ‘Courage’. I ‘got’ what was funny about this series though I wasn’t at that time familiar with scholarly terms like ‘irony’, ‘wordplay’, ‘mock-seriousness’, not even ‘humour’ for that matter.

The eternal human preoccupation with tragedy and the concomitant desire to laugh are reconciled in dark comedy, making it one of the hardest kinds of humour to conceive of. This probably explains its popularity with acclaimed novelists and playwrights (in fact a lot of Booker prize winning novels are black comedies).

If I am to pay homage to black humour the literary text that immediately springs to mind is Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* — the story of a dysfunctional family and lost childhood that accommodates universally morbid themes like social discrimination, patriarchy, domestic violence, sexual abuse and betrayal. But before you resolve never to read such a dreary book, I assure you that Roy treats her story and characters with so much humanity and humour that this will be one of those rare books that make you laugh and cry at the same time. The 'world view' of the protagonists — the seven year old twins — Estha and Rahel is what forms the essence of the novel. In order to understand this view the readers must see the happenings of the novel through the eyes of the two children.

The twins attend the funeral of their cousin Sophie Mol (for whose death by drowning they are held responsible). Not understanding the solemnity of the situation and being unable to stand the sorrowful atmosphere and the accusatory glances directed at them, they choose to occupy themselves with things like the length of the altar candles, the mystery of how anyone could paint a church ceiling and the death of a bee in Sophie Mol's coffin — all of which assume the greatest importance in their minds. During the burial, the twins imagine the plight of Sophie Mol to be thus:

Inside the earth Sophie Mol screamed, and shredded satin with her teeth. But you can't hear screams through earth and stone.

Sophie Mol died because she couldn't breathe.

Her funeral killed her.

They are also convinced that, The Government never paid for Sophie Mol's funeral because she wasn't killed on a zebra crossing.

The twins are constantly disappointed in their pursuit of the love and approval of their elders who criticise them for 'blowing spit bubbles' and 'shivering their legs like clerks'. As their mother is a divorced single parent the twins are taunted for being 'fatherless'. So, they long for a father figure who would love them like their Uncle Chacko loved his daughter Sophie Mol (in their mind she is always 'Hatted Bellbottomed and Loved from the Beginning'). While watching *The Sound of Music* the twins fantasize about Captain Von Trapp becoming their father, while harbouring a fear of being rejected by him:

Baron von Trapp had some questions of his own.

(a) Are they clean white children? No. (But Sophie Mol is.)

(b) Do they blow spit bubbles? Yes. (But Sophie Mol doesn't.)

(c) Do they shiver their legs? Like clerks? Yes. (But Sophie Mol doesn't).....

"Then I'm sorry," Baron von Clapp-Trapp said. "It's out of the question. I cannot love them. I cannot be their Baba". Oh no. Baron von Clapp-Trapp couldn't.

Roy is unrelentingly irreverent and satirical while thrashing social prejudice and religious hypocrisy. Baby Kochamma (the main antagonist of the novel) is a jealous, embittered spinster who had in her youth nursed a great passion for a Jesuit priest. In her pursuit of him she had even risked scandal by following him to a convent as a novice. The same woman's 'indignation' when she hears of Ammu's relationship with the 'untouchable' Paravan Velutha is thus described:

She said (among other things), How could she stand the smell? Haven't you noticed, they have a particular smell, these Paravans!

And she shuddered theatrically, like a child being force-fed spinach. She preferred an Irish-Jesuit smell to a particular Paravan smell.

By far. By far.

Ammu reads to her children the story of the assassination of Julius Caesar by Brutus and the conspirators (Et tu Brute?-Then fall Caesar). Later in the novel, she dies all alone, scorned and bearing the stigma of a 'depraved woman'. She is cremated unceremoniously with only her indifferent brother and her little daughter to bear witness. Rahel, seeing her mother's body wrapped in a dirty bed sheet, is reminded of a Roman senator. She smiles and thinks, "Et tu Ammu?" This instance of dark humour, arising from a child's simplicity in the face of this scary and absurd world, is almost heart breaking in its poignancy.

A fisherman mistaking the dead body of Sophie Mol floating in the river for a mermaid, Mammachi's silly incestuous love for her son, Ammu's fierce protectiveness over her children that leads her to be paranoid about "impeccable manners", Chacko's assertion of his masculine superiority over his sister with the declaration, "What is yours is mine, what is mine is also mine"; Pappachi's life-long angry obsession with not having a moth named after him, these are just a few of the hundred Small Things in the novel that reduce Big Things like Death, Sex, Marriage and Fate to insignificance.

Dark humour may not be as popular as slapstick comedy or catchy quips but when done well it is as ghoulishly funny and as irresistible as *The God of Small Things*.

The idea of black comedy remains elusive until you find a good specimen. It hit me when I saw a comic strip in a newspaper: A plane is about to crash and a voice from the cockpit announces, "Well folks, the good news is that we'll be landing way ahead of schedule..." And yes, it can be quite shocking.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006. Print.

Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. Mumbai: Wilco Publishers, 2005. Print.

Parker, Dorothy. *Enough Rope*. Horace Liveright, 1930. Print.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New York: Random House Inc. 1997. Print.

Little Green Men — A Review

Candice Rozario

III B.A. English

Literature students might agree with the commonly held opinion that most literary texts prescribed in their syllabus are depressing. Forget the romantics and their pastoral poetry; I'm referring to contemporary texts, the ones that open your eyes to the stark unforgiving nature of life and human behaviour. Reading *Great Expectations* in the first semester was the first taste of the continual despondency that was to follow in the following semesters. The play *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen threw light on the performance we all play to justify the falsehood 'I'm fine'. Even Gabriel Garcia Marquez's magical realism in *Light is Like Water* ends on a morbid note. *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye* were downright depressing. American Literature was interesting but there again, racism, the fallaciousness of the American dream... I can go on and on.

Thereby a book which gives you a chuckle or two in class while seated in the last row faking the 'Yes, I'm definitely listening to the lecture' look is Christopher Buckley's *Little Green Men*. It has the most unexpected components combined together in one novel – alien abductions and political chat shows. The book begins on a sober note and you're left wondering "Alright... I'm not laughing yet" and before you know it, you're laughing (stifled laughter if you're reading it during a lecture hour). Apparently there are a lot of references in the book satirizing real life people but lack of knowledge of them while reading the book does not leave you in another cosmos. This odd ball recipe for laughter centers on a political talk show host, John O. Banion, who denounces the whole idea of extra-terrestrial life and is 'abducted' by aliens. Or is he really? The 'abductions' are the brainchild of Majestic, a secret government agency that wants the public to believe in aliens so that they would fund NASA's endeavours. The author's conjuration of these 'alien abductions' is not quite a novel, out of the box idea, but the absurdity that he injects into the 'abduction' episodes is hilarious. The humour that runs through the book is woven and warped with a not so ridiculous plot. It actually urges you to pause in your somber life and think 'What if NASA wants us to believe in aliens?' and then you start thinking what if most of the hyped up issues are a big laugh behind the scenes? But then, who's having the last laugh? Ah never mind, do not let the analytical side of you that Literature hones get the better of you when reading this book.

On second thoughts, do not read the book during a lecture hour, the gleeful smile on your face would give away that you are not reading the prescribed text.

The Nope-o-calypse

Shilpa Sajeev
III B.A. English

The 13th Baktun was over. The clock struck twelve and the world was on tenterhooks as it awaited its end. Doors bolted. Windows shut. Curled up in the safety of my bed with a bowl full of potato wafers for sustenance, all geared up to witness the alleged apocalypse, I logged on to Facebook. Frantic statuses à la mayday calls and a barrage of very ‘insightful’ shares welcomed me.

The Russians had stockpiled candles, salt, matches and torches. The French gendarmes kept watch at Bulgarch that was flooding with esoterics who believed this sleepy little French town was a ‘safe haven’. Apparently, French towns with somewhat pronounceable names were completely impervious to the effects of an apocalypse. An Italian lawyer was reported to have built a bunker under his house. NASA was bombarded with questions by people on the subject on their public outreach website, some asking whether they should kill themselves, their children or their pets. And we? Yes, we were ready with our Facebook statuses and tweets. The end was truly upon us.

The constant discussion of this cataclysmic end of the world seems to have been mostly inspired by the Mayan calendar. With televangelists coming up with doomsday predictions on a daily basis and Discovery telecasting “quasi-documentaries”, and the recent multitude of hoax internet pages, offering costume suggestions et al for the doomsday, the furore was inevitable.

Though it is what would truly seem like a cynic’s nightmare, frankly it was a little disappointing. It was almost like a morbid fascination for thoughts of extinction or simply an appetite for buzz. Whatever it was, everybody was preparing their best for the apocalypse; armed with salt and candles and suited up in their sequined cocktail dresses. Even though this turned out to be just another of the many doomsdays we have had in history, people haven’t stopped believing.

Don’t fret, if it didn’t happen on the 21st December 2012 it’s not the end of the world! So cheers! (Till the next Nope-o-calypse!)

The Adventure of a Frog at Night

B. Deepika

III B.A. English

I was dozing on one of the flat, soft surfaces the smaller ones, not the big one that the large, hairless ones that walk on their hind legs sprawl over. I had just finished licking my paws and scratching that spot behind my ears. The One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head, one of the large ones that had a long bushy black tail sprouting out of the back of its head, was sitting, as usual, in that ridiculous pose the large ones do in front of the big glowing object, making some strange clicking noises. All was quiet and then...

I saw the little-green-jumper hopping across the ground. It was big for its kind and was moving quickly. I sat up, but the large one reacted faster. With a yelp, it leaped toward the little-green-jumper. Another of my kind, He-who-has-no-tail, had just come in. The One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head immediately chased him away. The large ones are pathetically poor hunters, they never catch anything but they are so territorial that they always stop us from chasing our prey, be it little-green-jumpers or small-brown-bald-tails. The One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head had longer claws than the other large ones, but it was unable to catch the little-green-jumper, which was too fast for it. He-who-has-no-tail bravely appeared again, but the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head chased him away immediately. It seemed to be attempting to capture the little-green-jumper in its paws instead of just swiping at it with its claws or catching it with its teeth as one should do. I've only seen One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head use its claws to scratch its own head or us when we permit it, which feels pleasant when done right. I do not want to interfere in this atrocious spectacle so I fall asleep. However, I am woken up by all the noise. The One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head was getting frustrated from what I could see, but I couldn't feel sympathetic. The large ones were clearly useless, except for when they poured out our food from those big rustling things that they carried it in, but even this they would only do after we spoke to them or bit their hind paws. They don't like that, but they would give us our food. We sometimes rub ourselves against their legs in order to encourage good behaviour like this. However, their territorial nature shows in almost everything — they would even ban us from the biggest of the flat, soft surfaces, when the outside world was dark. Then, only they were allowed to sleep on it. It was bad enough that I had to share it with She-who-is-white-and-impertinent, who always tries to chase me off when we do not feel too tired and who eats even more than I do. All she had to do was look at the large ones and make squeaking noises and touch them with her paw, and the large ones would immediately feed her or rub her or put her on the biggest soft, flat surface. I deserve that soft surface more than they do; I spend the most time there. Sometimes, when they also lie on it and take up space I curl up against their legs, because it is warm, but mostly because this seems to make them happy and so I hope they might curtail their barbaric natures and let me stay. Of course, She-who-is-white-and-impertinent also does this and this makes them even happier. However, the large ones are so impertinent that they get up after some time, interrupting my sleep and taking away my source of warmth, acting as if my needs weren't more important than theirs. They would also hiss and snarl about the little black creatures that would crawl on our fur and would then crawl on them and bite them, as if it were torture. The large ones are weak; it must be why they are such bad hunters. And they still carry me out after darkness settles, ignoring my protests and demands. The indignity of it! My only consolation is that they also carry out She-who-is-white-and-impertinent. I would not mind sharing with He-who-has-no-tail, but the large ones don't even let him near the soft surfaces.

He is a man and, as a man, must mark his territory on every possible surface, especially because there are so many other men around in the territory, but this makes the large ones howl.

Anyway, the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head was having no success. It tried to sneak behind the little-green-jumper with its usual lack of grace, but the little creature would always get away. I decided that the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head looked stupid. All this movement was making me tired again and I resolved to jump on the largest, flat surface before anything could stop me. It (behind the little-green-jumper) was presently hiding in the narrow space between two large objects, and could be barely seen. The One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head ran away and then came back after a few moments with a large round object in its paws, that I frequently see used to cover the unappetizing smelling food they eat. It used a long, thin object to carefully rummage in the back of the space and presently the little-green-jumper hopped out and was trapped inside the strange object. Maybe the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head was not so bad a hunter after all. My opinion of it changed again when I found it dragging the object across the ground and towards the small opening to the outside world. It was now clear to me the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head did not know how to hunt at all and was entirely lacking in instinct. It did not seem to realize at all that if it was taken there and uncovered to be eaten, it would escape and leave this place. However, when it lifted the object the little-green-jumper hopped away in the opposite direction, away from freedom. The little-green-jumper was even stupider than the large ones. The One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head let out a wail, almost as if this turn of events wasn't fortunate, and somehow managed to trap it again, and moved it once again in the same direction, with the same results. This large one was more foolish than I had thought it to be. This time the little-green-jumper hopped away into hiding. Making a noise that was similar to the one I make when woken up abruptly, the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head left after searching uselessly for a while, signalling the end of this whole disgraceful business.

I actually managed to nap for a while, but when I opened my eyes, I saw the little-green-jumper hopping outside its hiding place. This was my chance! This was my turn to have the hunt, with no interference from anything, the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head or She-who-is-white-and-impertinent. I slinked stealthily down and crouched to pounce. I was the hunter and that was my prey. It would not stand a chance. Alas, the little-green-jumper just hopped away, just an inch away from my paws as I landed. Apparently it had stayed alive, not only because the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head was clumsy, but because it was a quick little thing. It hopped quickly towards the set of small, flat, hard plains that formed a path that slanted downwards towards a long plain. I ran after it but I was dismayed to hear a shriek that could only have come from the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head and I saw it charging towards the small flat plains. I ran back, who knew what it would do in its mad territorial rage? The little-green-jumper hopped down where it promptly was trapped again, and this time dragged toward the largest opening to the outside world. I decided not to watch this travesty happen — this proved that the large ones would eventually go extinct out of sheer stupidity — and crept onto the largest soft, flat surface. I curled up in the place where the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head rests its head, and carefully scratched myself where I most felt the biting little black creatures on my fur so they would fall off, and then gave in to my exhaustion and fell asleep, secure in the knowledge that the One-with-a-tail-behind-its-head would be the one scratching next...

Battle of the Princesses

P. Sai Prasanna

III B.A. English

In the wonderful land of magic and imagination known as Fairyland, a long awaited battle was to take place. It was a battle between the princesses – Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Rapunzel. They wanted to find out who could defend the country the best in times of trouble and the best way to settle that was with a race to see who was not only the prettiest but also the strongest and the smartest. In order to win the race, each of the contestants had to overcome three challenges. The first was the obstacle of beauty, the second was the obstacle of strength, and the third was the obstacle of knowledge.

On the day of the race, the crowd gathered to cheer their favorites. The hare and the tortoise were the referees. The tortoise held the flag and the hare had the whistle hanging around his neck.

“Get ready, get set, go!” yelled the tortoise and the hare blew the whistle so hard the tortoise had to retreat into its shell and the crowd had to cover their ears to block the noise. At the sound of the whistle, the princesses started running at full speed. Soon they reached the first obstacle. There was a magic mirror floating in mid-air. When they approached it, the instructions for using the mirror appeared on its face. To use the mirror, each of the contestants had to ask “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of us all?” Then the mirror would decide who was the least fair among them and eliminate that contestant from proceeding any further.

Snow White was the first to ask, “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of us all?” and sighed. “I really don’t see the point in asking. It’s obvious I’m the prettiest amongst all of us.”

“Sorry, not this time,” replied the mirror irritated by her vanity.

“What! How dare you insult me!” said Snow White with a red face. She took out her heel to break the mirror but the mirror magically captured Snow White and imprisoned her within itself.

“Since you admire your beauty so much, you can now spend the rest of your life doing just that,” said the mirror.

“Let me out. Let me out,” screamed Snow White from inside the mirror but it was of no avail. The words *“Beauty is only skin deep”* appeared on the mirror.

The other contestants ran towards and reached the second obstacle. There was a small battle arena in the race course. There were three swords and three shields placed on the side of the arena. The White Rabbit stood in the middle of the arena with a stopwatch.

“The first person to hit the ground will be eliminated,” he explained.

“Three...two...one...fight!” yelled the rabbit and he hopped out of the arena to give the princesses space to fight. When the countdown was over, the three contestants charged at each other with full speed. But before they could even swing their swords, one of the contestants hit the ground.

“I’m too sleepy to fight,” Sleeping Beauty yawned. Before long she was fast asleep. The remaining princesses ran past Sleeping Beauty towards the last obstacle.

“Looks like someone was up late last night,” said the White Rabbit looking down at Sleeping Beauty. The others shook their heads.

“A wise man once said ‘*He who sleeps late shall have short days*’”, whispered the rabbit. Rapunzel and Cinderella cleared their throats loudly to get the White Rabbit’s attention. “Oh,” said the White Rabbit upon seeing the impatient looks on their faces. “Right, now all you have to do is keep going north and you will find your next challenge waiting.”

“Which way is north?” asked Cinderella. Rapunzel looked around and realized they had been running for so long they had completely lost their sense of direction. Everything looked the same in the forest. It was hard to tell which way was in and which way was out.

“That way,” the White Rabbit said pointing to his right. “I *think*,” he added.

“You *think*? You’ve been inside the forest all this while not knowing where you were?” asked Cinderella looking surprised. The White Rabbit shrugged gave out a nervous laugh. He quickly looked at his clock and widened his eyes saying, “Oh good god! I’m late! I’m late! I’m sorry ladies but I must get going. I’m late! I’m late!”

“Late for what?” asked Rapunzel but before she could get an answer, the White Rabbit took off with lightning speed. “Hey! Wait. You can’t just leave us here,” she yelled but he was long gone. “Great! Now what?” she asked Cinderella.

“Well, looks like we have only one choice. Let’s go that way.”

“Do you really think it’s wise to trust that rabbit?”

“No but right now it’s the only option we’ve got,” Cinderella explained and Rapunzel nodded in agreement. They both ran in the direction the White Rabbit had pointed towards, not knowing what was waiting for them.

Rapunzel and Cinderella reached an intersection where the race course branched out into two paths. A Fairy Godmother appeared with a wand and a piece of parchment in her hand. Cinderella was relieved on seeing her Fairy Godmother and thought she would ease her way through the challenge. She was going to be proved wrong.

“Now the rules of this challenge are simple. If you know the answer to my questions, simply

raise your hand,” explained the Fairy Godmother. Cinderella was too busy singing to herself that she didn’t bother to listen to the instructions.

“Your first question: What does Princess Fiona turn into during the night?” the Fairy godmother read out from the parchment.

“That’s easy; she turns into an ogre at night. Even a little kid could answer that question,” said Cinderella.

“I’m sorry dear but your answer doesn’t count even though its right,” said the Fairy godmother in a disappointed tone.

“Why not?” asked Cinderella.

“Well because your hand wasn’t up. You broke the rules my dear,” replied the Fairy Godmother.

“Rules? I didn’t know there were any rules!” Cinderella exclaimed in shock.

“Pay more attention next time,” advised the Fairy godmother.

“That’s not fair. I refuse to lose just because my hand wasn’t up. I’m going to get a lawyer and sue you,” Cinderella threatened the Fairy Godmother.

“You wouldn’t even be in this race if I hadn’t transformed your life. I don’t expect you to be grateful but the least you can do is behave yourself.”

“I never asked you to *transform* my life.”

“Very well then, I shall change it back,” said the Fairy Godmother and with a wave of her wand changed Cinderella from a princess to the ordinary girl she once was.

“Oh no!” exclaimed Cinderella with grief. “I thought Fairy Godmothers were supposed to be kind.”

“We are but only to those who understand the meaning and importance of kindness. Remember what I always say- *‘Always treat others the way you want to be treated yourself’*” and with those words, the Fairy Godmother vanished.

Rapunzel realized that she was now the only contestant left. The Fairy Godmother told her that the path on her right was the path that led to the finish line. Rapunzel ran as fast as her feet could carry her. The finish line came into view. She could almost taste victory. She felt like she had been running forever. But the thought of reaching the finish line kept her going. She ran and ran till her feet could no longer carry her. Just as she reached the finish line, she tripped on her long hair and fell on the ground. She thought she had lost the race for sure. When she opened her eyes, she heard people screaming her name. She looked at the finish and noticed that she was half over the finish line. Fortunately, the tripping on her hair had helped her across the finish line. *‘Hair is the richest ornament of women.’* said *Martin Luther*. Apparently it was also the luckiest!

THE END

Gaining Our Ground

Madhure Akilla. C
III B.A. English

Gaining our ground from the minds of mine:
Wading amidst the crowds singing the tales of time;
Marching in the dunes to print the paces of mine;
Looking to the thriving world with squeals of silent mystery,
Encompassing the ills and wells of time:

Stepping to look--
A look too suspicious,
Cracking the walls of silent mystery;
Confronting the resounding voices of misery;
Gripping my nerves in fear,
Soiling the souls in unavoidable despair;
Waxing and waning to end the mysterious quest,

Stepping out and stepping in --
Unmasking the thrills and veils eclipsing time,
Pacing in craze in an unending maze;
Fighting our way out — to contribute to a difference,
A difference in the face of indifference
To be an object of change before being subject to change
Leading the march forward — a step for mankind,

To,--
Leave the lasting world, a word to inspire;
And a moment to desire.

Sophomore

I know, I was a dead bore:
To everyone in my sophomore;
Because I asked them if they studied,
And spoke nothing more!!

Redefining Humour

B. Abirami

III B.A. English

I've always thought that humour means cracking jokes or laughing at jokes. When I was asked to do a write-up on Humour, I needed to zero in on its exact meaning. I grabbed Longman by his neck and looked it up. It said that humour is the ability to think that things are funny. I wondered if I possessed humour. Suddenly it dawned on me that humour is subjective because what seemed very solemn to my father looked very funny to me during our visit to a death-house last September.

My father's maternal uncle bid adieu to the world. News came via the phone and my father shed tears and we, that is, my younger sister, mum and myself, tried to share his mourning by keeping a straight face while his shoulders were heaving in grief as tears cascaded down his cheeks. Straight face, because we, the trio, were not exactly fond of this man in Malaysia, dead by now. Grapevine had it that this Malaysian *mama* was the befitting person to be awarded the title "the tight-fisted man in the whole universe." When I was busy wondering inwardly which mall I would be able to cruise around with my jolly-good friends during my father's absence at home on account of his impending trip to the village for the funeral, a thunderbolt landed on my head when he said, "Get ready. We are all leaving early in the morning." Saying so, he resumed his uncontrollable sobbing. His affinity for his uncle can be traced back to his childhood days when his uncle taught him grammar and my father was called, no, called himself an expert in English. He says, "If my voice thunders in the court halls, and people look at me in awe of my English, it is because of my *mama's* English tuitions for me." We usually chuckle to ourselves whenever he blows his own trumpet. This time, I was overwhelmed with grief at the prospect of going to a village. My sister whispered in my ears, "Looks like Mr. Tight Fist made daddy's tongue a silver tongue." We usually don't argue with our father, because arguing is his full-time job and we would rather toe his line. Otherwise, he would harass, sorry, harangue us. Early next morning, at 4 a.m., we crammed ourselves in our rarely-used Nano with grim faces. The car wouldn't start. Nano was obviously very reluctant to visit Mr. Tight Fist. But Mr. Silver Tongue was adamant. At last, Nano succumbed to dad's constant tweaking of the ignition key and it ultimately came to life. We set off early to avoid traffic but the mist made the journey more perilous until the sun came out. We all could have easily accompanied Mr. Tight Fist, but for my daddy's sluggish driving. We reached the death-house after 12 hours on the serpentine roads full of potholes, bumping and bouncing all the way.

Much to our agony, we were given to understand that Mr. Tight Fist hadn't landed at his original abode as yet from Malaysia where he had been working as a doctor for 40 years. The airlines had found it difficult to accommodate him. I couldn't help but whisper in my sister's ears "The man has departed the world but he can't depart Kuala Lumpur." News came at last that the family and the deceased were on the way from Kuala Lumpur and they were due to arrive around

midnight. Well past midnight, Mr. Tight Fist came in an ambulance. His family members came in an accompanying car. He looked very stiff. There was a little wailing from some quarters of the house. The body was laid in the hall and incense sticks were lit. Midnight! Gloomy atmosphere! A few relatives were sitting here and there. My sister and I were staring at the body through sleepy eyes. My mother was completely asleep and my father lied through the teeth to the family that she had been crying all the way and was now nearly dizzy from grief. My sister and I avoided looking at each other. Everything was quiet all around us, except for the crickets screeching and frogs croaking. Adding to the misery, it was drizzling. I remembered my sister once asking me the meaning of the word 'eerie'. I told her that this is exactly what eerie meant.

Morning came. Hordes of relatives came streaming in. A musical troupe sprang from nowhere and started playing sad music. Close relatives came storming and hollering. Some came in silence until the entrance point of the house and managed to erupt into wailing and screaming as they came into public view. We woke up to this sudden change of atmosphere and the eerie setting slowly changed into an occasion akin to some festivities. Men of importance arrived in cars and draped garlands on Mr. Tight Fist. Some brought dhothis and spread them across him as a national flag decorates a departed leader. We two sat wondering when this hullabaloo would ever get over. My sister has a nasty habit. She would start sniggering at the most inappropriate moments. A look at her would trigger me off. This time was no different. Suddenly, flailing and wailing, an old lady came running and jumped onto the corpse and started banging the passive body of the deceased and screaming at the top of her voice. I was somehow reminded of Kamal Hasan in *Nayagan*. I wouldn't dare look at my sister, for I knew how she would be reacting to this emotional scene. I was very scared that this lady pummeling on the chest and stomach of the body might cause the chemicals the Malaysian doctors must have used to embalm the body with might spill out through the ears as the nostrils had been properly plugged airtight with cotton. Now this lady rose from the dead man and took one look at my dad. She let out another scream and jumped onto him and flung her hands around his neck and wept bitterly, pummeling my father's paunch like Lady Rambo. She ran her shriveled hands all over the face of my father and started narrating past stories of how Mr. Tight Fist and Mr. Silver Tongue used to play football in the courtyard and she used to bring the outgoing balls back to them. My father had a tough time breathing assailed by her neem-oiled hair and I could see he was practicing breath-stopping exercises. His ordeal was over when some more ladies dragged the oldie away from my dad and liberated him. Suppressing the smile on my lips, I turned to look at my sister who had her face buried on my mother's shoulder and was blissfully giggling. People must have thought she was crying bitterly. This scenario continued on for a few more hours. My mother looked dazed from fatigue. Dad was busy chatting with old friends and relatives.

Music reached a crescendo when time it was for the much departed man to depart his childhood house and ladies were all hollering, hitting their heads and crying their eyes out. The dead body was anointed. All queued up to apply oil on the head of the body. Mr. Tight Fist had that

cunning look on his face. Some patted his head hard by way of putting oil on his head. He would have enjoyed the head massage, had he been alive. He was carried on the hearse amid blaring of trumpets, beatings of drum, bursting of crackers and outbursts of wailings. As custom dictates, the daughters of Tight Fist and other ladies folks followed the hearse up to the entrance and bid him a final farewell. He was too cold to reciprocate. My father and other men accompanied the dead body to the cremation grounds on the outskirts of the village.

As soon as the body was removed, the ladies got busy washing the floors of the house. We heaved a sigh of relief and stopped short of saying 'good riddance'. All cry-scene thespians suddenly desisted from crying. Some of them were actually joking. And the lady Rambo was spotted sitting with her legs fully stretched and chewing betel leaf. They served plastic like *parotta* to all the guests. We sat cross-legged, a feat which we usually don't do back home and were actually happy to swallow the last bite. The happiness was short-lived because from out of the blue a girl came hurrying with a bucketful of *parottas* and before we could realize what was happening, she tossed onto our leaves two *parottas* each, submerged them with *kurma* and vanished. My father's face became ashen and we sisters had a tough time containing our laughter. My mother face turned red with anger. I was chuckling while munching the plastic. The mastication continued for nearly 45 minutes. My father was keeping a close look-out for the parotta dispensing angel. Luckily, we spotted the same parotta girl coming rushing towards us but we beat her to it by pulling our leaves shut before she could drop parottas. A less macabre night set in. We crashed to the floor in a small room provided by the folks and slept well, to speak the truth, from exhaustion.

People including the wife and the children of Tight Fist were actually cheerful in the morning. So much for bereavement! Well, it was time to leave. As is wont, we were not supposed to take leave of the kith and kin of the deceased. We sneaked out quietly, single-file. Though it looked odd, I was greatly relieved to get out of the *menagerie* and return to civilization. On the way back, my father reprimanded, "Why girls, don't you have manners? I saw you both giggling. Should you both demonstrate your sense of humour at a death-house?" That's the time I realised that I possessed humour but the slight difference is that I overflow with black humour. Black or white, humour helps you undergo pain less bitterly. Try it!

9½ Things That Change After Joining College

M.V. Amudha
I B.A. English

1. Your ID card becomes your most important accessory – at least it does, after you become tired of running away from the watchman every morning.
2. No more ranks! For the rest of your life nobody is going to ask you your rank ever again. Umm... unless you join the military, then you are on your own fella.
3. Free from uniforms. You never have to make your family or your maid or, when you are really desperate, your doggie of high sniffing capability (please don't judge me) hunt for ribbons and socks every morning.
4. After surviving some near-flunk experiences, you start to realize the horrifying fact that Sparknotes has begun to mean more to you than the indispensable Facebook itself. Hey don't look at me; I totally take notes in class.
5. Teachers have better things to do than check your homework. Curiosity-slash-thirst for knowledge alone can help you here, my friend.
6. You can look up gossip about the writers, pry into their private life and actually get to call it background research. Cool, huh?
7. You finally get your parents to believe that all the hours you spend in front of the computer are for research. Bur ironically research is what you end up doing anyway (Facebooking excluded of course).
8. After twelve years of Matriculation schooling, you are actually encouraged to think for a change. I mean, your doubts would no longer be "cleared" with an impatient "it says so in the book".
9. Your opinion FINALLY matters! You get to criticize the finest writers and be awarded marks for it. You have to admit, it kinda adds to your self esteem.
- 9 ½. The final change I'm talking about is, well, you! No, not entirely of course and hence the whole half thing. Whether it's the way you look at life or at yourself, you'll find a change, barely significant yet very much present, inside you. And if you are on the quest to finding yourself like I am now, this half-a-change is the best thing that could happen to you.

Anatomy of Humour

Upaasana Suresh

I B.A. English

Wikipedia defines 'humour' as 'the tendency of particular cognitive experiences to provoke laughter and provide amusement'. Laughter is a spontaneous, involuntary expression of happiness. Robert Provine, author of *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, is the first researcher to conduct a full-scale investigation of laughter, analyzing this everyday occurrence scientifically, and discovered (amongst others things) that, women laugh more than men. We also laugh more at men than they do at us! Ha-ha!

I began to think, what exactly are these 'cognitive experiences' that make us laugh? I came up with a few that always work for me:

1. I have to shame-facedly agree that, quite often, I laugh at the cost of others; if someone falls down the stairs, walks into a door, gets shat on by a crow; or any other of these super-embarrassing things, I become, quite literally, a quivering mass of jelly.
2. Friends (read pals, *dosts*, *nanbans*)
3. Friends (the TV show). Joey's adorable stupidity, Chandler's sarcasm, Phoebe's awesomeness, Ross's drama, Rachel's bloneness and Monica's OCD never fail to bring tears to my eyes.
4. New Girl (Schmidt!), That 70's Show, Two and a Half Men, The Big Bang Theory, Modern Family, Community. Yes, I watch a lot of TV.
5. Calvin and Hobbes. If you didn't read Calvin and Hobbes as a kid, you did not have a childhood. I'm sorry, but it's true.
6. Phobias. When I'm bored, I do a pointless reading about weird phobias. There are people who are afraid of peanut butter sticking to the roof of their mouth (Arachibutyrophobia), of objects on the right side of the body (Dextrophobia), and even of long words (Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia). Whoever named the last one, probably had a personal vendetta against these long-words fearing people!

There are probably many more reasons why I laugh, but I wasn't able to pinpoint any other specific ones. So, I turned to Facebook, my go-to for practically everything. I asked my friends, and after brainstorming a bit more, here are four more reasons that make them, and me, laugh:

7. Clowns. (Did you know, the fear of clowns is called 'Coulrophobia')
8. Cats. Singing cats, dancing cats, angry cats, etc. YouTube has plenty of videos of cats. Check them out.
9. Tom and Jerry and Mr. Bean; classic favourites. How could I forget? Without even using words, these shows entertain kids and their parents too!
10. 'Friday' by Rebecca Black.

So at the end of my investigation I would like to share with you these words of wisdom that I strongly believe in: "The only way to get through life is to laugh your way through it." Unless, of course, you have Geliophobia!

Funny Issues in Life

Hannah Ivy Priya

I M.A. English

Word'ly wise

Once my friend and I went out for lunch. She was months away from getting married and so had quit her studies and was gearing up for her wedding. However just for the heck of it she was taking a course on 'ethical hacking'. While we were having lunch my mom called me and wanted to talk to the 'bride-to-be' friend. She elaborated on the preparations for her wedding to my mom. When she came to the part of taking a course on 'ethical hacking' she had to repeat the word quite a number of times. Obviously my mom was unaware of such a thing. Once the conversation was done I shared my insight with her, "Maybe my mom heard the course as ethical 'Hatching'!"

Desperation!

The usual custom is for the groom's family to visit the bride's house and then vice versa. Once the marriage was confirmed the families visited each other's house frequently. However the frequent visits between the groom and the bride are purely left to their knack and craftiness since it is not something that is openly encouraged. My friend had not even cleared the prelims but decided that on this particular visit he would somehow get the number of his fiancé with his sister's help. After silently celebrating his triumphant victory he sat inside the car and his family made their way to the car as well. First his aunt entered and beamed with joy and said, 'Hey, I've got a really good gift for you.' Wondering why the need for a gift before the wedding, my friend asked what it was. The aunt handed a piece of paper with a phone number on it. You needn't be Sherlock Holmes to guess whose number that was! She had apparently got it from the bride herself! My friend was touched by his aunt's concern for his 'love life' and pretended surprise and thanked her. Minutes later his dad entered with a cryptic air and said that he had something important for his son and would give it only when they reached home. You know how these things work right. When somebody says this you feel your brain turning into a time bomb, seconds away from blasting if they didn't tell the secret. Likewise it did for my friend and the dad finally budged and gave a piece of paper. Yep! You guessed it. It was the bride's number which he got from her father! My friend couldn't hold his own secret anymore. He showed the new addition to the contacts in his cell. It was really funny how the dad and aunt were quite shocked. Anyway I only wondered how the bride's family would react, once they realized each one from the groom's family got the number of the bride. Desperate!

Wedding Woes

On that one day when you are to look your best, you end up looking like a newly white washed house for Pongal or a teeth returning from its dental checkup, fully flossed and all. I am talking about bridal make up. How come every bride manages to look 'Rin white' during the wedding? We were discussing this problem when a lot of hard facts came out. Apparently bridal makeup costs Rs. 20,000 and more. Without any permission or any directions from the customer

6 to 8 layers of makeup is packed on the bride to last for the entire day. I say, I would rather look decent in one photo at least than look like a clown from a county fair throughout the album and in the video as well! It's best to go on a healthy diet of fruits, milk and vegetables and improve your complexion and not give into these beauty parlours that try to change your COLOUR on that day alone.

Have you ever noticed the girl standing next to the bride and looking much better than the bride? (In movies that's usually the heroine!) We figured there is no way to escape the beauty parlour train wreck but the way to work it out is to say you're the girl standing next to the bride. That way less of the white wash and more of the real you.

Revelation

The day I found that cello tapes can be easily torn away is one that I will never forget. My life's drama began as early as from the first standard. The teacher had warned us not to talk and the punishment was being plastered to the huge cupboards that almost touched the ceiling and the pipsqueaks that we were it really looked 'ginormous'. Anyway, as life would have it I desperately needed a sharpener right at the moment when Ma'am had her hawk eyes on our table which was wide and round. Hence I had to bend down under the table to get the sharpener from the opposite girl. Ma'am mistook it for stealthy talking and meted out my punishment. I had still not made the discovery of cello tapes and every bit of my nerves trembled as the cello tape was stuck across the cupboard, over my mouth and then to the cupboard. (Almost similar to the way you would have stuck a dead cockroach on your science notebook.) I felt like iron chains were bound to me and I did not stir and cried silently. It was the last hour and so the Ma'am casually wished 'Good evening' to the class and gave a fleeting glance (probably wondering why in the world was I making such a big fuss over a mere plastic cello tape) at me and left. The classroom was deserted and the prisoner was still in chains or in this case 'cello tape'. I used to travel in a tempo along with other girls from the school. These blessed girls came in search of me but looking at me stuck to the cupboards with just a cello tape they left. Seeing my last ray of hope become bleak I took matters into my own hands and mounted up all the strength in my five year old body and pressed forward but before I could think and act the cello tape came off! The lightning bolt of wisdom struck me. 'Cello tapes can be easily taken off. Gravity works only vertically!' (Okay. I added the second line.)

Dicey Dodging

Once my friend got a call from her uncle, who had just returned from a trip to London. He was relentlessly lauding over us and his luck on making a trip to such a place as London. My poor friend was quite bored with his in-depth lecture and finally when he was done, before she could think twice the words slipped from her mouth, "Well I guess every dog has its day." The uncle after a moment of silence asked her quite surprised, "Did you just call me a dog?" My quick witted friend replied, "Nope. I called London a day."

The Ironical Perfectionist

Catherine. D
I M.A English

“I don’t mind making *puri* for breakfast, but will it be too heavy?” Amma asked me. We were discussing the menu for the day as my Mama’s family was here to spend the weekend. “*Puri*? No, Amma. As it is they reached late yesterday night and are still in bed(time- 6:30 am), then there is the tea to drink, stuff to chat about, the bathing and then the breakfast, which would be very late. Probably, 9:30 am. We will not be going out...So no activity, and Lunch is going to be non-vegetarian! So, yes. *Puri* will be heavy for breakfast,” I reasoned out in a single breath. Amma raised her eyebrows, “Typical! Just like your Appa. Can’t stop with just yes or no to a question,” she fumed. I justified myself by saying that I answered two questions at one go since she will want to know the reason why I said yes or no. Amma shrugged and said, “Yea, Yea! Always trying to be *perfect*. Again, like your Appa”.

Appa is indeed a perfectionist and at times, he is horrible at it (like all perfectionists). Today he wanted to make sure that everything is perfectly planned for the guests. So he began by switching on the motor to fill the overhead tank. The house was filled with the motor’s drone and Amma frowned. “Your Appa lacks common-sense sometimes! Doesn’t he know that they are still sleeping?” she said referring to the guests. Eventually the motor was switched off, only to be replaced by the noise of water innocently *splashing* into the plastic bucket in the bathroom. Whenever water overflows from the overhead tank, we always open the tap in the bathroom to reduce the wastage. But today? While the guests are in a deep slumber in the next room? Amma sighed wearily and said, “Please educate your Dad!” Ruffled by his thoughtless action, I stomped silently across the hall to the bathroom and found Appa discreetly stepping out. “What do you think you are doing?” I asked him, scornfully. “What? Oh! You see the water overflowed and...” he began but I cut him short, pointing out to him the noise was is creating. I, then, marched into the bathroom and closed the tap. Appa protested but I faced him with a frown on my forehead and said, “It is no big deal. We can open the tap in the courtyard. Please don’t think that you are the only perfectionist around here.” Appa grimaced. Smirking at him, I stepped out of the bathroom closing the door behind me. DHUMMMM!!! Yikes! I had closed the door forcefully and now this *crashing* sound vibrated through the house. I was petrified.

Silence and then... faint tinkling sounds of the anklets! Sheesh! My Athai was stirring... I felt like someone just hit me in the face. Appa sniggered at me and this made me furious but not intending to begin a war of words, we proceeded to the dining hall. There, Amma looked at us with questioning eyes, which clearly asked, “Who was the genius that slammed the door?” Appa narrated the fateful incident with so much vigour and enthusiasm (for *Revenge is sweet*) while I sulked. Amma glared at us for a moment. “The day you both stop vying to be the ‘best’ perfectionist, peace will prevail in this home,” she pronounced saint-like. We blinked but before we could retort, the bedroom door opened and Athai emerged puffy-eyed and smiling. We greeted her with sheepish grins on our faces. Time- 6:50 a.m.

Mango Maniacs

V. Shruthi
I M.A English

Come summer, the apple of discord in my household is mango. Sounds strange? Wait till you hear the entire confession.

Born in a nation known for its varieties of mango and living in a family of avowed mango aficionados, I stick out like a sore thumb for my unreasonable and unpardonable (according to family) dislike for ripe mangoes. My feeble protests of loving raw mangoes instead is either met with weird glances or drowned in the cacophony of each relative drilling in the health benefits of ripe mangoes. Well I am probably the only such specimen in my family or even in the lineage or the worst, only one in the vast, wide world! The last proposition seems a little too farfetched. At least I sincerely hope so.

There is no rhyme or reason why I have such an aversion towards ripe mangoes. The golden yellow juice oozing out as you take a bite or the slurpy sounds when someone attempts to wipe the seed clean or the pulp sticking around the corners of the mouth are like nightmares to me. I can't stand the apple-pie order in which bags and bags of mangoes are stacked in the refrigerator every summer. I am forced to confront the different avatars of mango like milkshake, ice cream, sweets, juices etc. due to the relentless efforts of family members who wish to make the most out of the mango season. But for a person who doesn't care about the differences between an Alphonso and a Banganapalli or cannot tell a Rumani from a Neelam, I don't see the 'pleasures' I might be missing out.

Younger cousins are the most benefited by mangoes not being the apple of my eyes. They vie with each other for my share. Unfortunately the elders aren't that easy to get past, especially when they have innovative tactics, right from simple persuasion to downright emotional blackmail like *how* can I not eat mangoes grown in *our* backyard, just to make me at least taste the 'king of fruits' once every season. Nobody seems to be happy with my fetish for raw and sour mangoes. I am shooed away whenever preparation for pickles begin because I greedily grab handfuls of cut raw mangoes. I go ga-ga over *manga*.

The sight of fresh green mangoes bring nostalgic memories of a care-free childhood. Summer afternoons at granny's were spent stoning tiny mangoes and slinking away before it hit a glass window or a person or climbing trees and whiling away time atop them. I have often wondered why mangoes have been the moot point. Commercials for mango based drinks harp on the fact that they are 'all season' or teach you how to master 'aamsutra'. Apparently it is not just the mortals who battle it out for mangoes. The fallout between Ganesha and Karthikeya aka Muruga, the two sons of Shivji was due to a mango. I have also quizzed others and myself, why isn't there a 'queen of fruits'?

I have been a closeted raw mango lover for years. People have thought me to be a hypocrite or an attention grabber when I express my dislike for ripe mangoes. I think time is ripe enough to come out in the open about it and it is my earnest desire to find a companion who shares a similar dilemma. God knows if this public confession will fulfill my yearning or have an adverse effect. Come what may, here I take you 'mango maniacs' by the horn!

Humour in the Classroom

V. Shruthi

I M.A. English

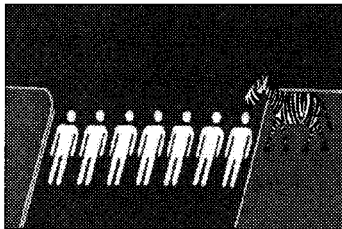
When was the last time you had a good laugh in the classroom along with your teacher and the joke was not at the expense of any of your classmate(s)? Humour is a subjective experience and within the confines of a classroom the scope of humour is even more limited. More so in the formal education system which is exam oriented. Fun and jokes are probably the last things on the mind of the teachers and the lessons prescribed are equally somber. This has a cascading effect. Each time students pick up their text books, the uninspiring lessons and pictures in monochrome that greet the children saps out their enthusiasm.

A splash of colourful pictures and a dash of humorous stories or poems can do wonders in sustaining the interest of the learners. But in case such luxuries aren't available then the teacher can make the best use of easily accessible materials such as comic strips, cartoons, posters, advertisements, etc. to get the students involved in their lessons. Incorporating such materials that we come across in our day-to-day life into teaching is advocated by the proponents of Communicative Language Teaching approach.

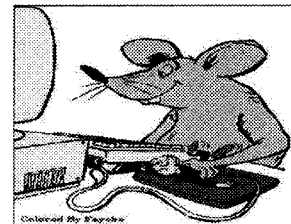
In an ELT practice teaching class I had picked a humorous poem about a lion cub who thought he was a sparrow. The class thoroughly enjoyed the poem as well as the activities because everything hinged on humour. I used cartoons that were thought provoking and was able to see the imagination and creativity of the students take flight. Humour is indeed the best way to kindle curiosity and to ensure retention of the concepts.

Given below is a sample of the cartoons I used in an ELT practice teaching class.

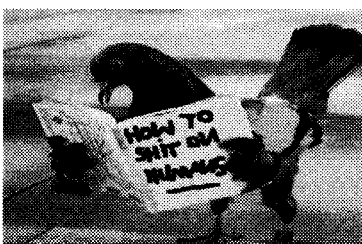
Animal Desires: Ever wondered what animals could be thinking of human actions?



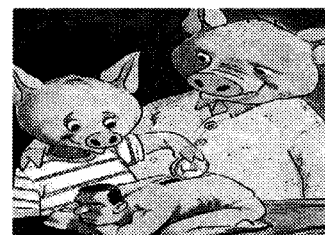
A zebra at a man crossing!



How nice to use a human 'mouse'.



A voracious pigeon reading to master the 'art'.



Will 'manny' banks fetch more interest?

IT'S MY TURN

Subiya Zainab
II M.A. English

The other day
On an intoxicating moonlit night
I went on a date with her
In a moment of romantic frenzy
I held her hands in mine
And out flowed the well-rehearsed words
I love you so much!... You are my doll and I...
Four elegant fingers landed hard on my cheek
And the next moment
The doll-turned-demon before me started to spew venom
Days of begging and pleading followed
And eventually we decided to meet in a mall
I got into a cafeteria and she followed.
She threw me a dirty look and finally,
What kind of a man are you? No manners whatsoever!
Chivalry! The voice inside my head echoed
A couple of minutes followed
I swallowed hard and uttered
But! I thought...
She cut me short and said
Precisely! You should learn how to behave when
After all, it's my turn!!!