CHILDHOOD SEEMS GOOD IN RETROSPECT, BECAUSE WE WERE NOT YET AWARE OF THE BASIC TRUTH: THAT WE'RE ALL LOSERS, THAT WE'RE DESTINED TO DIE, AND DEATH IS A DEFEAT.
—JEAN SHEPHERD

A COLLECTION OF CARTOONS AND JOKES BY MARK NEWGARDEN

LIFE DOES NOT CEASE TO BE FUNNY WHEN PEOPLE DIE ANY MORE THAN IT CEASES TO BE SERIOUS WHEN PEOPLE LAUGH.
—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
BASICS OF HUMOR

1. CHILDISHNESS: Example—Diligent looking man at Directors’ Meeting two of whom sharing a look at each other.

2. IGNORANCE OR STUPIDITY: Example—Spanish bullfighter is too undisciplined in bullfighting; it is really a shame that a bull is Spain. Woman gets a new dress. Male says, “It looks pretty good.” Woman says, “Yes, but in Spain it is really a shame that a bull is Spain.”

3. ANIMALS DOING OR SAYING HUMAN THINGS: Example—Woman is buying children’s clothes in a store. When a cow looks at her, she says, “You are looking at me the way you would look at your dog.”

4. VANTITY: Example—About fifty chess clubs all dressed and looking alike. One of them is saying to the manager: “If you fare well, what will happen to you?”

5. OBVIOUSNESS (saying something so obvious that it is ridiculous to mention it): Example—Men in heat sitting on corner. Streams of dirty water flow, blood, die, etc. Men to the native paddles and say: “Some day, boys, we’re going to be mighty careless.”

6. FLATTERING (empty): Example—Cerst is really selling to women with terrible figure. Says to women: “Just look what the right cloth has done to your figure.”

7. DECIEVING EXPECTATION: Example—Picture of two women in positions on top of very high buildings. The captions are very diaphanous and sad. Woman says: “They only have the top with a view on the lake.” (What the woman says is entirely true.)

8. INDIFFERENCE (in reference to: to war, to nation, to woman, to children, to accepted customs, to marriage, to class, to being wealthy, etc.): Example of indifference to nationalities-Little colored boys singing his big-bad-steel in diaphanous churches.

9. MISUNDERSTANDING OR MISUSE OF WORDS: (On pay or word): Example—Middle-aged woman comes on board a ship with valise in her hand and asks the captain: “You advertise for a mate, didn’t you?”

10. DOING EASY THINGS THE HARD WAY (or hard things the easy way): Example—Two painters in a scaffold—one of them was a very complicated boy, soon began to kiss his hand of the scuffal-rather than the simple twist which is all that is necessary. Result: scaffold falls.

11. LOSS OF DIGNITY: Example—Police officer walking in a street that has been painted. The police officer is walking in a street.

12. USING AN EXCUSE: Example—Stevens station having so many gas pumps that attendant has to go out to get people out. Man walking two cigars at once, or wearing two suits. Person having too many stops in an act.

13. ARROGANCE: Example—Spend up steps spending limousine. Arrogant woman leaves the house forward and talks so loud—“Will the man you're sorry and get going.” Note—this is also partly indifference to law.

14. IGNORING: Example—Little girl walking through a dog show carrying a cat on her shoulder.

15. ORDER OF THINGS REVERSED: Example—Well-dressed man walks up to street beggar and asks if (the beggar) would return the dire that he gave him a day before.

16. FORGETFULNESS: Example—Starting on vacation trip, sells car. “Oh, Hello! Say, the car, I forgot to turn on the electricity, to which beggar replied: “Nothing wrong—I’m afraid to burn the summer house.”

17. UNREAL: Invented reason being reverse of the literal sense of the world): Example—Man saying he did not want to be wealthy because of difficulty of paying income tax.

18. CURIOSITY: Example—Man asking check room attendant, “Have you seen the passport of Smith in my coat pocket?” (Attendant is too drunk to answer.)

HOW TO USE THE LAUGH-FINDER: Read These Directions Carefully

The purpose of the Laugh Finder is to suggest combinations of characters, places, actions, and the humor of humor for cartoons. All these essential elements of a character and place, the action taken, and the humor of humor, of humor for cartoons. After the Laugh operation the meaning of the joke is clear, you spin the arrow according to these steps:

1. Choose your first character, what number it points on the base or diagram. From here on, you develop the idea from three elements. You will get a typical example which follows:

   2. Look for your first character, we will call it A. Choose a number next to the red center. It is broken in the color box. (The color box A.)

   3. Now you have all the elements of the idea: exactly how to create an idea from three elements. You will get a typical example which follows:

   4. Refer to that number under “Basis of Humor” and you will see what number it points on the base or diagram. From here on, you develop the idea from three elements. You will get a typical example which follows:

   5. Choose your first character, we will call it A. Choose a number next to the red center. It is broken in the color box. (The color box A.)

   6. Remember, we spin fast for two Characters, then for one Place, then for one Accessory, and then for the Idea Base.

   For the Idea Base, we use only the all-blue circle, as there are only 50 Idea Bases. So, starting again, we get No 1 on the blue circle, and our chart labeled “Bases of Humor,” we find that No 1 is “Less of Dignity.” Write this down.

   Now we have a lot telling us that our idea is to be based on “Less of Dignity,” and that the other elements are an Admiral, a Side-Show Barker, a Swimming Pool, and on Ice Sidewalk. Now the fun begins, as we have to come to our mind is
One September day in 1987, Mark Newgarden drove to Plainville, Connecticut, with two of his friends, played miniature golf, ate hamburgers, entered a nondescript auction house, and purchased several of cartoonist Ernie Bushmiller’s worldly possessions. Something of a patron saint to Mark, Bushmiller spent six decades drawing Nancy, which some called the dumbest comic strip in America and others a work of authentic American genius.

On that autumn day, Mark bought a box of miscellaneous Nancy publications and artwork by cartoonist and Bushmiller confidant Milt Gross, including a drawing of a large dog, inscribed to Bushmiller’s wife, and three 1930s British comic magazines with markings where Bushmiller noted that “I’m ready to go back and recheck.”

After making his purchases, Mark sat in Bushmiller’s wheelchair, and smiled for the camera.

Although Ernie Bushmiller has been dead now for over two decades, his work and the Nancy comic books, paperbacks, and coloring books produced still sit on Mark’s vast comic library and continue to provide inspiration for him, part of the fertile ground on which Mark has built his artistic life. The two most important factors in his life have been Nancy and humor. Humor he immerses himself in the work of his cartoon forebears and furthering the traditions that work represents.

Bushmiller, the ultimate humor architect, was a formalist, whose strips sacrificed all concern to the daily gag. Nancy has little characterization, the boys and girls in the strip never age, and reality rarely intrudes. Instead, Nancy and friends exist solely to produce outright humorous situations capable of a reader’s quick chuckle before he tosses the daily paper into the garbage. The strip is disposable entertainment created day in, day out, by a quiet, unassuming man in Connecticut.

In a former funeral home in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, New York, Mark embraces similar formats and executes them perfectly, but rather than a throwaway laugh he insists on profound meaning. Bushmiller’s comics are mainly concerned with the functionality of a joke that is constructed like an engine. Mark’s comics, on the other hand, are about being alive, which is not to say they are grim, but neither are they an easy laugh.

Six feet tall, and generally clad in head-to-toe black, Mark is a wry, kind, and generous man with the loudest, most exuberant laugh in any given room. He is also an insomniac, prone to depression, and somewhat moody by nature. When Mark announces, “We All Die Alone,” he means it, but he means it with a smile. All that’s said, tragic, and distressing, Mark insists, is funny, and vice versa. When asked what constitutes a “profanely getten,” he responds, “Suffering, regret, compulsion,
UNNY: AN INTRODUCTION

humiliation, disappointment, betrayal, decay, death.
And big noses." Mark’s comics, like many of his efforts,
because he is trying to point to an important social commentary
on modern life. This sensitivity has accompanied him throughout the
years of work in a variety of media, including the design of novelty
items, a syndicated weekly comic strip for the New York
Press called Mark Newgarden, innumerable illustrations, the
invention of Garbage Pail Kids, and the creation of several
animated cartoons.

Mark’s 1992 New York Press comic We All Die Alone (see page 33) uses the old form of the gag cartoon to explore his
personal concerns. It epitomizes his mix of humor, tragedy,
and formal play in four panels on a single page. The punch
line implies that we all die alone, each of us is left with two options:
either to sleep all day because we’re going to die alone anyway,
or to get up and begin the struggle, since there’s nothing to lose. It’s a basic existential choice boiled
down to a one-liner. This choice is mirrored in the structure of the strip. Three of
the four panels are each signed by a different literary eminence—"Joyce," "Beckett,"
and "Samuel"—while the last is signed "Me," a common pseudonym for a low-level
gag cartoonist. These signatures level the conceptual distance among these
artists, whose achievements and shortcomings don’t alter the existential
dilemma they must eventually confront. With a caption and a picture, Mark says a
gag cartoon can communicate an idea of which Samuel Beckett himself would
be proud. And most importantly, We All Die Alone is funny. It uses the traditional
gag cartoon form—a caption illustrated by an image—and the gag cartoon staple of
a comically deformed big nose to tell a basic truth. All of Mark’s work uses these
categories of carefully constructed formal structures to describe delicate emotional
situations. And like many artists before him, Mark channels his own experience
of life through his work. Every tear, paranoia, chuckle, and pleasure informs his
medium of choice. That medium has, for most of his life, been comics.

Mark was born on August 1, 1959, in Brooklyn Heights. His father, Albert, was

(Nobel Mark’s pencil sketch for his prototypical funny/gag cartoon, We All Die Alone (opposite) & Mark Newgarden)

NOTHING FUNNY THIS WEEK.

Kids
- *New* "Violence Instruction," a
  cartoon about an outburst at
  school. In *The New Yorker*,
  February 9, 1990.
- *New* "Violence Instruction," a
  cartoon about an outburst at
  school. In *The New Yorker*,
  February 9, 1990.
- *New* "Violence Instruction," a
  cartoon about an outburst at
  school. In *The New Yorker*,
  February 9, 1990.
- *New* "Violence Instruction," a
  cartoon about an outburst at
  school. In *The New Yorker*,
  February 9, 1990.

Other Events
- *Creating All New Yorker*,
  exhibit by graphic design
  section of 1980s, at Federal
  Hall National Memorial, 26
  Wall St., through May 1990.
- *Creating All New Yorker*,
  exhibit by graphic design
  section of 1980s, at Federal
  Hall National Memorial, 26
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  section of 1980s, at Federal
  Hall National Memorial, 26
  Wall St., through May 1990.
the director of communications for a large accounting firm, and a rare book collector. As a young man, he published poetry in the New Yorker. Mark's mother, Dorothy, studied art in college and played den mother to all six Newgarden children. Mark's family moved to Staten Island in 1960 to be closer to his maternal grandparents, who lived in a house filled with pre-World War II domestic relics. In those years before the completion of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, linking Staten Island to Brooklyn, Staten Island was fairly remote from the other four boroughs of New York City, and retained some of the old island characteristics of mid-century weird America, including bountiful flea markets and junk sales. With six kids and only a suburban island to keep them busy, the family spent weekends consuming by shopping—in malls, junk shops, and at flea markets. There Mark developed an obsession that separated him from the rest of the kids and engaged him with a world of discarded culture—and also made good use of his predilection for long silences, depressions, and an apparently genetic collector's appetite.

Mark's most vivid memories of the comics he read as a kid include the work of the obscure cartoonist Burr Shafer, a banker by trade, whose graceful black smear recalls the gay cartoonists Peter Arno and Jefferson Machamer; and the iconic "dog pissing" comic strip, first rendered by Bushmiller and badly copied a thousand times hence. And, not surprisingly for a kid that age, Mark found the gum-wrapper comic Bazooka Joe and His Gang equally affecting. The mysterious charisma of its characters—a boy with an eye patch, another with a turtleneck up to his nose—was matched only by the fragmented and idiosyncratic drawings by the strip's artist.

![A Boro Shalier model in repose, circa 1920s: perhaps dashed off between loan foreclosures? (Said) Ernie Bushmiller's immortal guide, How to Housebreak Your Dog. (Right) The stuff Newgarden dreams are made of: A formal portrait of Bazooka Joe by Wesley Morse, circa 1934.](image)
Weisner, an ingenious modern primitive whose erratic, charming lines were more de Kooning than Disney. Early on, Mark’s taste was formed by such bits of cultural derision, much of it already marginal by the time he came upon it. “As a kid I was predisposed to any comics and graphic styles that looked outdated or archaic,” he says. Such tastes were, he says, “more amusing than any contemporary media of my youth and ‘youth.’” Thus, new comic strips, comic books, and superhero stories didn’t do much for him, and it was primarily characters from older comic strips and animated cartoons that fascinated him. And unlike the superhero fantasies of most children’s comic books, Mark’s drawings were largely populated by “noses with big noses” and other oddball cartoon characters.

Mark’s father, a first generation Sicilian-American, inadvertently had a great influence on his son’s developing sense of humor: “I’d be sitting on the floor reading comic strips and laughing along, and at the same time talking about my relationship with my father. He’d say, ‘You’re just like your father!’”

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GAGS Wanted
for Newspapers, Radio, Movies and TV

ARE GAG WRITERS BORN?

that other peculiar something else they must become. I think part of a good cartoonist's job is to suss out the specific material he has within him that best
benefits from that combo. If something can be more efficiently expressed as image
or text or anything else I think it oughtly should be.

Mark's comics career was slow at first. Before his weekly comic, Mark
Newgarden, began in the New York Press in 1988, he published a mattering of
work in the East Village Eye, the Village Voice, RWK, and other anthologies and
magazines. In these early years, Mark combined rigorous formal experimenta-
tion with manic dialogue inspired by radio, comedy routines of the past, and the
ever-current meme for consumption and information. In those days, Mark
says, "I was trying to express something of my own personal experiences and
some inner truth in a way that was attractive and amusing enough to get
people to look at it. I was trying to say something and push the boundaries of the formal medium and still be funny—all at the same time."

Pad and Spud (see page 140) exemplifies this approach. It is a series of
two-page comic strips published throughout the 1980s in Red New and RWK.
It follows the two brothers of the title, Pad and Spud, through nonsensical
conversations about the minutiae of life as they are slowly and unknowingly
engulfed in a fire, flood, or some other disaster. The dialogue is based, in part,
on what Mark calls the Newgarden family dynamic. By using identical tiny
panels to convey the already frantic dialogue, Mark manages to split a single
conversation into scores of individual compressed moments. This elongation
of time creates a feeling of claustrophobia and frenetic monotony, all of which
makes Pad and Spud an absurd depiction of the dynamics of denial—our
inability to rise above our brain's endless banal chatter and glimpse the seri-
ously problematic realities around us. A few other cartoonists had attempted
this treatment of time and layout in comics before, but none achieved Mark's
emotional payoff.

An urban, adult Pad and Spud, What We Like (see page 158), is a two-page
strip that appeared in Red New in 1987. It also uses small, identical panels,
but in place of the cartoon profiles of Pad and Spud are graphic-style informa-
tional symbols. The dialogue is about a couple's favorite things, which, it turns
out, include sadistic fantasies. As the strip progresses, Mark equates the cou-
ples' media-speak patter and catsup popcorn ritual with their nonchalant atti-
dude toward their sadism. The rhythms of the strip imitate staccato media-
and advertising-speak while drowning us in chorused and meaningless "likes,"
depicted as a succession of blandly forgettable logos and irreducible icons. In the
violent, insular world of What We Like, torture and snark food are one and the same,
and self-absorption is the norm. The strip uses the formal language of comics in combina-
tion with reductive visuals to create a work that is visually identical to its themes:
the numbing effect of contemporary culture.

These two artistically accomplished stories explore the possibilities of rhythm,
time, and representation in comics. Until Mark's 1988 breakthrough with his
weekly comic strip, these were his primary formal concerns, and he mined them
most extensively in the three-year process of completing Lord's Savage Fury (see page
162), the four-page romance between Nancy and Bazooka Joe that appeared in 1986.
in the pages of RAW #8, Lewis Sovey Fury is a demonstration of the mutability of the comics form, the iconography of comics, and a commentary on love itself. It was initially inspired in part by a classified ad in the Village Voice that Mark, for a second, thought was directed at him. It read:

DAVID AND LENNY!!!

With this text Mark paired the two mainstays of his cartoon daydreams: Bazooka Joe and Nancy. Blank and irredeemably weird, these two icons became the protagonists of a brief but epic encounter.

The story follows Bazooka Joe, who sees Nancy on the train, smiles at her, and diagrams their potential romance. His enthusiastic need literally pouring out of his thought balloons like gum. But then she vanishes. The next two pages chart Bazooka Joe's frustrated attempts to remember her face. These attempts are enacted across multiple tiers of panels, each governed by a different rule, each a different trick of Joe’s memory: one tier alters only the position of Nancy’s features, while another changes only the size of them; yet another changes only her head; and so on. Nancy’s face reforms correctly only when Joe sees her, as though Nancy did not exist until Bazooka Joe once again laid eyes on her. More poignantly, it demonstrates how the language of comics functions: a few geometric shapes are instantly recognizable as a face. On the final page, awestruck and demonstrative in both punctuation and memory, Joe snaps five shots of his obsession (the panels here replicating the view through his Polaroid camera), dropping one print, a square that flutters poetically through the panels before falling the final frame and ending the story in darkness.

In constructing the comic, Mark developed an ad hoc set of rules that governed its creation, including: All of the texts and images had to come from an existing source; every action had to have a reaction; every single line had to justify itself. The other major formal concerns are that the panels act as train cars and windows, and that the page numbers are indicated by the number of black panels on each page, which also double as light failures in the train. “I was trying to capture memory graphically and diagram it,” he says. “Nancy’s face is so simple, but if you just alter one little thing, it’s the easiest bit off, it stops being Nancy. It’s about how the mind can blow something you’re not so sure into something incredible and then back down again. And about the object of your obsession never knowing a thing about it. That was romance for me at the time.” Lewis Sovey’s Fury is unique in his body of work because it uses every aspect of the medium to propel its story forward—every graphic element of comics is employed, with two iconic characters at its center, while the mood runs from funny to sad to wistful in just four pages.
It is a perfectly realized comic: no part of it could possibly exist in any other medium. It was a revolutionary piece in 1986, and, in its formal audacity, remains unsurpassed today.

After an abortive attempt at a strip that would graphically represent déjà vu, Mark moved on: "The Savage Fury was a breakthrough for me, but I didn't want to go in that direction anymore. I was repeating myself." He only returned to that formal and graphic terrain fleetingly in his weekly comic strip, with a series called "The Little Nip" (see page 92). This three-panel strip chronicled the humorous adventures of a bumbling nun in a classic multi-panel format. It was inspired "on the one hand by the midget nun in Fellini's Amarcord, and on the other, by my Catholic grandmother, whose compulsive reaction to life's questionable turns was immediate and devout prayer." A masterpiece of comic timing à la Bushmiller and Otto Soglow (of the Little King), these strips are perhaps the closest Mark has come to straightforward comic entertainment.

In 1988, Mark also edited, together with the cartoonist Paul Karasik, the second of three issues of the School of Visual Arts-distributed comics anthology, Red News. Initially a vehicle for Spiegelman's 1988-89 comics class, the title was revived by Mark and Karasik as a stand-alone anthology featuring work by their peers. In 1988, the editors produced a third issue, this time mixing student work from the SVA experimental comics class they co-taught with contributions from their more established friends.


Around this time, Mark's sporadic comics production (conducted while continuing with Topp's and pursuing a magazine illustration career) suddenly became prolific when he began his syndicated weekly comic strip for the New York Post and ultimately a score of other weeklies around the country, ending in late 1990s. Mark Newgarden alternated titles, formats, characters, subjects, and styles at Mark's whim. From week to week, a reader never knew what he was going to get; it could be "The Little Nip," or a gag cartoon, or a gallery of toilet-paper wrappers, or something else entirely. Mark's primary motivation for the weekly strip was, as he puts it, "a ticking clock and a looming deadline." The pressures of the gig, though, forced him through an artistic evolution. A couple of years before, he had written captions for a special gag cartoon section in RAW #3 and found that his childhood passion for the punch line had been reawakened. After learning to pare down and condense his work with "The Savage Fury," he was looking for ways to make concise statements in comic form, and in a world of comics history at his disposal. The single-page gag format seemed a natural. For Mark, brevity has an inherent value: "I find a single page a much more satisfying unit than an entire book. Anyway, I'm better at being succinct than being expansive. And drawing is hard. Cartoonists are lazy."

Gag cartoons such as We All Be Alone are where Mark gained the most traction in the late 1980s and early '90s. In those years and since, his most fecund source material has been the kind of low-down cartoons most prominently featured in the 1950s and '60s Humorama line of publications, published by a wing of what would later be called Marvel Comics. Humorama was the largest buyer of gag cartoons in the world, purchasing work from, as Mark says, "televangelist operators who wanted to be cartoonists and ex-household names on their way down." Tikis like Gee-Whiz!, Comedy, Joke, and Jest were packed with lowest-common-denominator laught and..."
STRIP TIME:

TOO MANY ODDS
UNCLE MARKS FUN ACT
LEAGUE COMIC
IT'S TIME TO LAUGH
WHORT TO ENS? I
DON'T GET IT
COME WHAT MAY
PLAYING OF CAD:
DEVILS PLAYING
IT MUST BE A JOK
NOT THAT AGA
MAKE HIM STOP ECE
YOU CAN'T COVER IT
THE LITTLE CAKE DON'T CIOU
SOON WAS YOINT
MONEY HAAI BOX
FUN SOMETHING
NOT AGA
I'M NOT IN
SPACE FOR RENT

STOCKY OF CIVI:
UNCLE MARKS FUN
IS ME MORE FUN
WE ARE BEGIN NAJ
I HOPE MY MACE IS
BOOYAH IT MUST MEAN DOING
WHAT YOU WANT

SAMBOY OF CULLY

THINKING ON PAPER: PRELIMINARY SKETCHES FOR THE LITTLE BOX COMIC STRIPS (SEE PAGES 89 AND 91) WITH NOTATIONS MADE FOR TIMING AND STRUCTURE; A LIST OF POSSIBLE TITLES FOR COMIC STRIPS. USING LISTS LIKE THESE, MARK WOULD RENAME HIS WEEKLY PANELS, AMENDING HIS FOLLOWERS AND CONFIRMING HIS EDITORS.
low-budget nudie pictures. Sometimes identifiable stylists like Jeffem Merkel, Basil Wolverton, Jack Cole, and Bill Ward appeared, but more often than not the art was signed by anonymous pseudonyms like TUP, Bix, Stern, and even Mol.

Innumerable instruction manuals for the aspiring professional were published at the time, such as 500 Clue Caprions for Cartoonists and Cappers. Choice nuggets include the gag captions:

“Why were the chickens crossing the road?” “They were trying to get to the other end of the comic strip!”

The topics for the Humorama gag cartoons included work, marriage, alcoholism, homelessness, daily dilemmas, sex, and more sex. The drawings were often crude, and featured the big-nosed characters so often a staple of generic cartooning. Mark, whose lifelong fascination with big noses is complemented by his inability to smell, had been entranced by the work for years. To Mark, gag cartoons are “A fictional moment frozen in time. The ultimate ephemeral medium. Instantly forgettable yet enduring, instantly recognizable yet nearly invisible. Inherent sense and nonsense. Inherently blur, Inherently loaded. Yet perhaps infinitely flexible. Inherently generic. Never really covered, collected, catalogued, quantified, rarely studied or considered as such. Never as badly or specifically pigeonholed as the lowbrow or child’s medium that comic strips were called. Creatively below even that radar. Creatively on the permanent watch for decades yet still on an ongoing viable career for many practitioners. The perfect player of a sorry medium.”

In his weekly comic and contributions to various anthologies, Mark employs both the form of the gag cartoon and the denizens of its world in different ways. His Big Noses comics (see page 56) encompass single-punch-line gag cartoons populated by big-nosed characters, which are printed alone or in thematic groups, such as We All Don’t Have, Honor Theorists, and etc. Usually, they use gag cartoon conventions to convey a more sophisticated, multi-layered version of the same kind of themes that Machamer, TUP, Bix, and their peers were drawing. The Big Noses comics also encompass lengthy dialogue-driven cartoons with a single drawing above. These cartoons are like expertly visualized comedy routines, allowing Mark to indulge in the kind of offbeat patter he’s always loved. Finally, there are Little Stories (see page 102). Each of these stories comprises a narrative capsule understood in a single piece of found or clipped art. These texts read more like short stories than captions, their spark coming from the interplay between the image and Mark’s seething extended prose.

These last two series bear a resemblance to a group of cartoons published in Judge by the humorist S. J. Perelman at the very beginning of his career. Perelman continued, the drawings grew stranger and stranger and the wordplay more and more outlandish, making the disconnect between word and image all the more severe. Perelman, like Mark, belongs to a long line of artists who have subverted

“May I borrow a cup of sugar?”

“Darling, there’s no one in the world but you.”

“Say, are you following me?”

“Stop me if you’ve heard this one.”

“Follow that car!”

“A simple yes or no will be sufficient.”

“Standing room only.”

“I’ll make a man of him yet.”

“It’s as clean as a whistle.”

“Grindall is under the weather today.”

“Taint a fit night out for man nor beast.”

“Pull over to the curb.”

“Oh, I can’t complain—”

“I smell something burning.”

“How about one for the road.”

“Fish biting, today?”

“He carries his office in his hat.”

“May I quote you?”

“Two leaves are cancelled.”

“Have you read any good books lately?”

“What’s the good word?”

“I’m just browsing.”

“You men are all alike.”

“Is my slip showing?”

“Selling out—must vacate.”

“It’s a specialty of the house.”

“I don’t know anything about art, but I know what I like.”

“She’s quite a home body.”

“Either he goes, or I go.”

“Don’t tight it, just let yourself go.”

“Two containers of coffee—go.”

(195) Come on for Mel Miller’s cartoon series, still being hushed up in 1950, a decade before the author’s demise. (195b) Hawking Humorama: The cream of the lowbrow human crop (apart from Mol “Tubby” Miller himself hard at work on the yokkas in 1948: an excerpt from 500 Clue Caprions for Cartoonists and Cappers (1953) by Jack Markow, Harry Lumppert, and Don Kozner.)
Em, in each episode of Meet the Cost (see page 134), Mark created a collection of these characters for his own amusement. Crowded onto a page with little order was "an endless parade of characters minus any narrative or a specific context," as he puts it. Meet the Cost is about identities without homes. It represents the ultimate disavowal of a cartoon reality: dozens of perky, unlike characters adrift and poured onto a page without a story line or even a product in sight. They are only a step away from the fame of Nancy. If only a kindly cartoonist would give them a gag home to step into.

Em® (see page 152) features Em®, a cartoon glyph composed of a big head peehed atop an indistinguishable, amorphous body. Em® first appeared in Meet the Cost, and like so many of those characters, was a brand mascot without a product—a symbol without a meaning. The strip consisted of multiple panels of the same drawing of Em® complemented by marketing slogans. There was no action, no progression, just the constant selling of Em®. "The idea behind Em® was very much a pet theory that while the public is basically indifferent to the comics medium itself, people absolutely adore cartoon characters, the more generic the better. The classic 'medium' is the message concept. So Em® was created as a lowest-common-denominator, 'give 'em what they want' cartoon character. Em® is universal—thylak and me (spelled backward). The design was part cute (smiley face), part gross (piggly nose)—the basic Garbage Pail Kids formula, really. Em®, essence was as minimal as possible. Em® said 'Hi.' And that was it."

It was also an ahead-of-its-time satire on the hollow randomness of brand identity—before there was obesity Giant there was Em®. The Cost and Em® don't have all the merchandising they made commercial realities, but Em® did have his/her/its moment. Em® became the New York Press's mascot for a season; readers sent in photos of their Em® tattoos; and there was even some discussion of an Em® toy line. But Mark did not want to become what I was satirizing. I believed in content and wanted to succeed by that, not by cynicism or the vacuity of hip cuteness."

Had the creative winds blown differently, though, Em® and the rest of the Cost would each have their own comic strip, action figure, bubble gum card set, and soda tie-in. They would be items included in Mark's collection.

One actual collection of objects did manage to leap from Mark's archives onto the printed page. Over a period of weeks he collected (and asked for contributions of) examples of toilet paper wrappers from New York City and eventually across the globe, simultaneously creating both a new collection and new content. He then printed the examples as a series of twelve Installments of his weekly comic strip, entitled Industrial Toilet Paper Wrappers of NYC. Imagine a "comic," composed entirely of toilet paper wrappers. The toilet paper strips are just one example of found objects sharing space with original drawing in Mark's weekly strip. Other installations were devoted to earmuffs display box art, anonymous children's drawings, and various graphic discards discovered on his walks through New York.

These comics embody Mark's idea of the medium and represent what he feels is the common cultural link between all of his endeavors. "It's a comment on my work, the nature of all media—comics included—but not necessarily a negative one. I firmly believe all the greatest work of the twentieth century was..."
made to be disposable, he says. "I like toilet paper wrappers and I like comics. Both belong in the recycling heap and both belong in the Lounge. I loved seeing my New York Press work getting stepped on by muddy shoes on the subway and on the floor covered with dog piss. I loved seeing the wax wrappers for Topps products blowing along my block on windy days and getting rained on and shredded in the wire fences. I loved seeing cheap abandoned plywood kids' furniture in the Salvation Army completely mummmified in Garbage Pail Kids stickers. I even loved seeing Peter Saul and other 'Fine artists' reinterpreting Garbage Pail Kids images in their work. And I love seeing some deep half-forgotten project I worked on moldering in a grocery box under a table in a junky flea market out in the sticks. On one level, that's how I know my work was in the world and that I existed. That's success."

Of all his comic strips, the toilet paper wrappers elicited the greatest volume of reader mail; many other strips, including painstakingly forged parodies of other, more established weekly cartoonists, resulted in reams of hate mail, some of which Mark gleefully recycled into content for two more found object features, both entitled The Mail Box. Even if the hate mail didn't deter him, the non-traditional nature of his found object strips ultimately helped convince the New York Press to suddenly cancel Mark's strip on November 15, 1991, which left him contributing his gag cartoons to anthologies and magazines for much of the '90s, severely curtailing his comic output.

Cartoon characters, and the themes they embody, will always exist, regardless of the disposability of their media. Nancy and Bussola Joe are believable as a failed romance because their existence is a given. We are invested in such characters as meaningful icons, and they wait patiently for us to turn a page, open a pack of cards, or turn on a television so we can gaze at them. Why shouldn't these gag functionaries make eye contact in the subway? The cartoon rogues' gallery of Meet the Cast, with its nowhere characters, is a different version of a similar idea—these characters populate our consciousness and our dreams, but have no lives of their own; they wait to be activated by the punch lines Jack Markow and Friends identified. These five hundred clichéd gags are the cultural conventions that Mark carries on. What is life but exactly those captions? Troubles with your boss, your spouse, boost, depression, taxes, religion, and death. This is the stuff that fills up days and months and decades. Cheaply produced disposable publications filled with cartoon characters give a form to those thoughts that is as familiar as the troubles themselves, making them palatable and accessible to any reader. And while the paper may disintegrate, its themes are eternal. At any given time all of these worries may seem equal, for what's death when your wife is throwing a shoe at your forehead, and who needs religion when whiskey is just a reach away? By giving written and visual life to these thoughts, Mark's comics represent an artist looking inward to his own inspirations and ideas, and outward both to his chosen medium and its history. He is, quite literally, the anonymous guy who makes the funnies.—Dan Nadel
ADDENDUM: TOPPS NOVELTY CARDS

The Topps Company has a long history of housing eccentric talent, thanks to Woody Gelman, its creative director until the mid-1980s. Gelman was a former Max Fleischer Studio animator, a comic book artist, and the founder of the Nostalgia Press, the first major publishing effort dedicated to comic strip reprints. He was a great admirer and employer of talented cartoonists, giving steady work to Mad magazine and EC Comics artists like Jack Davis and Wally Wood, and spotting unpolished talents like the young Robert Crumb, who designed the Nostalgia Press stationary and logo, and the teenage Art Spiegelman. For most of his career, Gelman was collecting as much as he was producing, and was a lean or two ahead of his time in his omnivorous consumption and creation of pop culture. For him, as for Mark, the two activities went hand in hand, each providing inspiration for the other. Comics, animation, and the novelty card business were also part of the same game: each combined satire, drawing, and sleight of hand.

Mark's first significant job after joining Topps in 1984 was developing ideas for the venerable Wacky Packages, gum-card stickers that parodied consumer products of all kinds. Spiegelman had conceived them with Gelman and their colleague Len Brown in the late 1970s, and they were wildly successful for years—many of them were created with Spiegelman's underground cartoonist pals, including Kim Deitch, Bill Griffith, and Jay Lynch. Because of Spiegelman, and by extension, Gelman, Topps became a place that underground artists could go to make some money and hone their gag chops. In 1984, Mark produced a gag sketch for the latest revival of Wacky Packages and called it "Garbage Pail Kid," an obvious parody of the then wildly popular Cabbage Patch Kids dolls. It never made it to...
the Wacky Packages set; but the following year, Topps, seeing an opportunity to

Cash in on the Cabbage Patch Kids fad, released a series of stickers based on

Each sticker featured a character portrait on the front and a gag or two on

The creation of the cards was a group effort. After brainstorming, writing, and laying out the cards with

Cheap candy always came out of the strangest places at Topps: the Flugger gang

with removable outfits, 1977, and Poo! Candy, for the little anarchist with a

sweet tooth, 1985.

Tomas Runck, and James Warhola would paint the final artwork. The last step was

the character-naming meetings with Mark, Spiegelman, and Topps stuntman Len

Brown and Stan Hart; finally, the entire series would be presented to the Topps

executives for approval.

In the midst of the shiny, Reagan-era 1980s, Garbage Pail Kids emerged on the

scene as a shock to a largely conservative mainstream population. Purchasing

the grotesque and ingenious cards was, like buying Mad magazine in the 1950s, a first

act of rebellion for many children. The series taught kids to be suspicious, absurd,

satirical, and simply gross—all valuable tools in getting through modern life.

Their popularity and offensiveness did not go unnoticed, and the cards inspired a tremendous
details of public outcry. As Adam Bomb, Losing Faith, Acid Wayne, Jim Nauseum,

and their pals grossed out parents and delighted children around the world. And as with

children’s facts before it, barn, lineouts, and public condemnation swiftly ensued.

But more importantly, Garbage Pail Kids brought numerous newbs in “children”

entertainment that allowed later, supposedly child-friendly shows like The Simpsons

and South Park to go even further in their biting satire.

Mark said it, took a bonus or two from Topps (the company owned all of

the rights to the idea), witnessed a truly terrible movie adaptation, and went on to

other things, like Toxic High, a “teenagers of high school” trading card series created

with Drew Friedman, and such enigmatic novelty items as Pazzo, in which candy

candy was dispensed from the product’s belly button: Pick and Chew, a disembodied

noise that dispensed gum nuggets through its nostrils; Crummesome Greetings, a

scratch-and-sniff greeting card set; and the extremely unlikely Banzo, a limbless,

vomiting nuclear family of gooey candy dispensers. Hundreds of ideas never even

made it past the development stage and are remembered only by name, including

such sure-fire losers as Opal Sandwich Gum; Who Cares?; Cute Pork; Uggy Baseball

Statues; and Bob the Blue Pyramid Gum.

Compared to Mark’s more private and personal comics output, “this work

involved a much wider range of activity, including corporate responsibility and

professionalism. It was a job for a company that offered a certain creative leeway

but also had certain concrete expectations and requirements. It involved all kinds

of persuasive, collaborative, editorial, and political skills, art direction, design,

awareness of budgets, deadlines, production issues, and so on. Creatively, I always

tried to be true to what I thought would be funny—or at least what the eight-

year-old in me thought would be funny—and to try to bring things into the world

that maybe nobody else would ever try. The stuff I judge the most successful was

probably closest to my personal humor aesthetic. But there were a lot of other,

talented thumbs in those projects.”

Because of his success, Mark was given some creative autonomy, and, as

Spiegelman had done decades before, hired friends from the underground, including

Richard McGuire, Gary Panter, David Sandlin, and Kaz to work on ideas and products

with him. And while he never owned the properties he created, he says “the trade-

d-off was the creative freedommbine to push things further and further and see this

fly-by-the-seat of their pants novelty company manufacture some fairly crazy,

personally satisfying objects on a mass scale at a time when this was just absolutely

not going on in the culture anywhere else. It was a conscious compromise at a

certain point.”

In 1993, however, when Topps experienced some distribution problems and Mark

found that more of his projects were being shelved than produced, he moved on.

A memorable Gnomeome Greeting card from the 1992 Topps Scratch ’n

Stink series edited by Newgarden. Gag by Sam Henderson, painting by

John Pound.
Despite a lot of frustrations, Mark found the experience at Topps invaluable: “It taught me the discipline of sitting down and manufacturing ideas—often volumes of them on a single theme.” That kind of creative practice has served him well. After leaving Topps, Mark continued to plow the novelty fields. He used his developmental skills to sell humorous takes on toy ideas for cereal boxes and fast-food restaurants, software for Microsoft, and promotional gimmicks for Packard-Bell, among others. While churning out these concepts, Mark continued producing magazine illustrations, writing and designing for Nickelodeon and the Cartoon Network, and carrying on a long-standing collaboration with the avant-garde New York comedy trio the Poster Boys. His 1999 Cartoon Network Web Premiere Toon R. Happy was at the forefront of online Flash animation, and A Second Chance at Life and Cartoons were well-received follow-ups. These cartoons are funny and formally ambitious, not unlike his comics work. All of this work in collaboration with other people or entire companies is Mark’s contribution to the junk culture that raised him.—D. N.

A.T.S.

“NO NEW JERSEY IN TOXIC HIGH!”

ARTHUR T. SHORIN

ALL THROUGH LIFE, EVEN WHEN I WAS MAKING A FORTUNE ON ACCOUNT OF THE BIG BEAK, AND WHILE I WAS OUT THERE ON THE STAGE LAUGHIN' AND KIDDIN' ABOUT THE NOSE, AT NO TIME WAS I EVER HAPPY ABOUT IT.

— JIMMY DURANTE

BIG

NOSES
*Chaplin was a commie fag. Keaton was a drunk. Harold Lloyd was impotent. Arbuckle was a celebrated rapist. Hardy was a hoofer. Groucho was a pedophile. And so was Billy Bevan. Chico was a boy with a heart. Keaton was a commie fag. Fields was a drunk. Abbott was a con man. Costello was in with the mob. Ben Turpin molested puppies. Lloyd Hamilton had adolescent schoolgirl delusions. William Bendix had three nostrils. The Ritz brothers were Satan worshippers. Charlie Chan ate baby sparrows. Al St. John was a drunk. Mack Sennett was an uncultured liberal scab. And so was Billy West. Moe fondled neighborhood children. Curly fondled neighborhood dogs. Larry was a stigmatic. Shemp was in his bed. Joe Beiser's wife was ill. Snub Pollard was into whips, chains, nipple clamps and Chester Conklin. Leon Errol was a drunk. Bobby Clark beat his wife. McCullough was on the staff of a barber's chair. Jack Benny was a woman. From Philadelphia named Estelle M. Wilkinson. Every Saturday night Jenny Durante menstruated into clean white socks and ceased them from his hotel suite. Snub Pollard was a drunk. Billy Gilbert collected used toilet paper. Edgar Kennedy was a known pyromaniac. Mamie Moresland had the clap. Franklin Pangborn was a commie fag. Mackubiah, Chick Sahu ate his lunch from a colostomy bag. Eddie Cantor exposed his dink for a split second. Drugs Johnson sold babies. Joe Penner had an unborn twin named Goo-Goo growing from his abdomen. Bert Lahr was a pomposus ass. Danny Kaye was a commie fag. Ed Wynn was a drunk. Byron Foulger lived six trials and taught him the ways of the African jungle. So they all had their problems... funny guys, though.*

"Well yes, I am looking for an entry-level position. One with little intelligence required. I want something menial where I don't have to think very hard or at all, even. That would be nice. One where I'm only a marginal cog in a vast corporate machine whose ultimate function I could never begin to comprehend, let alone relate to. I want to be used, taken advantage of, beaten down, dicked around, given the shaft, exploited mercilessly and after a career of soul-breaking monotony I want to be flung away like an obsolete piece of plumbing. I want to be paid as close to minimum wage as feasible. I don't want any benefits, medical coverage or even a nurse on duty if I cut off my thumb. I surely don't want any challenges. I want to spend my time in this world laboring anonymously, consuming in misery with little hope of anything beyond. I also wouldn't mind something with potential health hazards, possibly something carcinogenic. And I'd like my meager intelligence regularly insulted—that's important. In fact, I'd be interested in regular on-the-job harassment—racial, sexual or otherwise. And if it's not too much to ask, I'd really appreciate a position on the verge of obsolescence, something where I'd stand a good chance of being replaced by a computer circuit or a third-world child, or a genetically mutated member of the mandrill family within six years. In short, Mr. Shorin, I'm not looking for anything special."
He just can't bring himself to hit it because he's a Scotsman; and golf balls are expensive.

He's lit multiple cigarettes because his attention is focused on the lady's mammary glands.

He's too lazy to initiate sexual congress because he's a marooned hillbilly.

Humor Theorists in the Ugliest Percents...

Nothing funny here... it must just be an illustration.

“When I was a younger man I deeply cared for a woman who, although she enjoyed my company, would not respond to my efforts to engender a romantic context between us. However, when I retreated from frequent contact (which was ultimately less painful), there she would be with phone calls in the night, flirtatious asides, steel blue eyes, and two of Nature’s better cheekbones supernaturally dropping and rising as she laughed the name of my soul. This pattern evolved into a sort of dance which we performed for over thirty-five years—a step east countered by a step west, likewise north and south and backward and forward and up and down, again and again. Meanwhile, I looked elsewhere, married, fathered four children (two of them highly paid professionals), and developed my own corporation from a modest egg delivery route in Rochester, N.Y., which I bought in the autumn of 1964. She married also and buried her husband, a concert pianist, in Easton, Pa., last year, shortly after the death of my wife, Elena. I loved this woman deeply for over thirty-six years and finally decided to take my stand. I requested her hand in marriage two weeks ago and, in answer to my prayers, she has agreed. She is going to be joining me here within ten minutes. I love this remarkable woman with all of my heart and soul. Please bring us both the fajitas.”
"Well Doctor, I don't know where to start today... hm... uh... well... starting reminds me of finishing. Finishing reminds me of furniture. Furniture reminds me of woodworking. Woodworking reminds me of Woody Woodpecker. Woody Woodpecker reminds me of the erect male penis... uh... the... er... hmmm. Let me start all over again. Well... again reminds me of repeat. Repeat reminds me of television. Television reminds me of atomic energy. Atomic energy reminds me of heat-seeking missiles. Heat-seeking missiles remind me of... the erect male penis... uh... oh... wait. Let me begin again, fresh. Now, fresh reminds me of spoiled. Spoiled reminds me of brat. Brat reminds me of bravura. Bravura reminds me of... um... the erect... uh... this isn't working. I'm going to start fresh. A fresh start reminds me of a French tart. A French tart reminds me of a Parisian prostitute. A Parisian prostitute reminds me of the... erect male penis... Darn! I keep getting back to that. Doctor, this is distressing. Perhaps I should start from scratch. Uh... scratch reminds me of sniff. Sniff reminds me of... Mexico. Mexico reminds me of Acapulco. Acapulco reminds me of chili. Chili on something. Vacation reminds me of work. Work reminds me of play. Play reminds me of ball. Ball reminds me of... Oh dear. There it is all over again. Doctor. Maybe this is significant. I keep repeating. Sex reminds me of death. Death reminds me of life. Life reminds me of time. Time reminds me of Newsweek. Newsweek reminds me of George Bush. George Bush reminds me of the erect male penis... Well, for goodness sake! How much longer do we have left, Doctor?"
“She cast a quick glance to the clock on the back wall and was gone. Just like that. Clouds. Children’s songs. Troubled dreams of the sea. The passing of time as reflected in the patina of a die-cast milk truck. Her voice in the dark, quietly listing everything that she had ever done right and everything that she had ever done wrong. One sweaty corn-chips kiss. Roadside stop in Upper Montclair, N.J.—when she was young and full of pepper. The sweet hum of sunlight on a red book spine. The full moon in heard it. Clouds. Rain. Snow People. Stuffed Spinach and Fontina sandwich—$5.95! Shit! Fuck! She cast a glance and hurts. Don’t sit on poetry—d hurts. She left her makeup. I took the last piece of fan. Held it in my mouth and tasted the easy Mexican dessert. Under my tongue. She was making an effort with a guy named Steve. She made the Poetry fail. Tell a story. Once upon a time there was a fellow. And a woman. And, well, time passed. It never came relationship. Kind of a bit. Not really. At all. Who am I to judge? “Did you see Twin Peaks last week?” “No, I didn’t. your heart.” She cast a quick glance. I dropped my car. We could never be happy. I hate people who say stuff like that. I bought a magazine about dogs. It stinks. It will go to smelling like Gene Shalit. She cast a quick glance. And we still keep in touch. Steve and her went to Alaska. She sent a postcard of snow.”

“A funny thing happened to me on the way here tonight, folks—a guy came up to me and said, ‘I haven’t had a bite in three days!’ So I said, ‘Neither have I!’ That was pretty funny. Y’know I just walked here from 126th Street . . . and BOY are my feet tired. Another funny thing is when you’re picking bottles out of the garbage—Y’know how there’s always just a little swallow of liquid left? Know what I mean? I just don’t get it! I mean . . . if they liked the first 98 percent of the stuff so much—then what’s wrong with the rest of it?? That’s pretty funny. Another funny thing is when you fall asleep on the subway, then you wake up in a pool of your own making? That never fails to generate a gentle guffaw from these quarters. And speaking of quarters, folks . . . can anybody spare one? But seriously . . .”
Kids—Say the Funniest Things!

“Feed ’em and Weep”

“My mommy wanted a tumor but she had me instead.”

“Broken Lives Gagorama”

“My entire family was recently burned to death in an exploding DC-10—how can I possibly make anyone laugh?”

“1990”

1991
HE: DO YOU LIKE KIPLING?
SHE: NO.
HE: NEITHER DO I.
I walked the streets. Scanned the back alleys. The globed elephant was my companion. Looking for a vengeful whisperer of another was looking for GIRLIE FUN. I had heard of GIRLIE FUN, but the year was 1990, and a stranger in a tuxedo pointed me in the right direction.

The book was in my hand. The title was GIRLIE FUN. I flipped through the pages. Arielle's writing was clear, but it didn't help. I didn't know what I was looking for. I was looking for GIRLIE FUN. I didn't care what was in the book. I just wanted to feel the power of its pages.

The pages turned, and I found myself in a restaurant. The menu was filled with stories. Arielle's words danced on the page. The stories were about girls doing things that were not expected of them. They were stories that were not written in books, but were whispered in the ears of the readers.

Arielle was a master of her craft. She wrote about girls doing things that were not expected of them. She wrote about girls who were strong and independent. She wrote about girls who were not afraid to speak their minds. She wrote about girls who were not afraid to be themselves.

I read on, and I was intrigued. I was captivated by the stories. I was moved by the emotions. I was touched by the words. Arielle was a master of her craft, and I was grateful to have found her book GIRLIE FUN.

I sat there, in the restaurant, reading the book. I was lost in the world of GIRLIE FUN. I was lost in the world of Arielle's words. I was lost in the world of girls doing things that were not expected of them.
"It was a lot easier to look at her after they took the tube out of her nose. You'd be surprised how far up those friggin' things go. Anyway, after leaving the hospital I had to go on at six and then get back to the hospital before visiting hours ended. It was a rough show. Froo-Froo Jr. wasn't making it any easier for me—he knew she was dying, lying there with the tubes and everything—and so when he comes out for the vacuum gag he has the nozzle attached to her rubber nose. I guess that was supposed to be funny. Anyway, it was for the crowd. The bastard wanted to see what I would do. I come out like always, do a 108, but instead of hitting my mark I kick the nozzle right out of his face and the damn thing lands right on his head like we were plannin' it all along. He falls back like he's dead or something. The crowd goes euphoric. And Lyle was shitting a brick back there—he was afraid we were going to just start kicking the shit out of each other. But that would be giving Froo-Froo too much satisfaction. I just did my job and got out of there. Froo-Froo was expecting some heavy scene after we got off but I just looked at him and laughed. The asshole. Anyway, I get back to the hospital and there she is sitting right up looking 100 percent better. I don't believe it. I said 'What happened?' She starts telling me a joke this Indian doctor of hers told her and it's the same fucking joke Froo-Froo started telling us last week on the train right before the crash. So anyhow, I'm laughing at the joke and she just stops and falls back down again. Boom. That's it. I couldn't believe it—like something out of a cartoon or some shit. The Indian doctor comes in and tells me she's dead—go home, Jesus. So I go home and I'm up all night watching TV and when Letterman comes on I can't believe it—he tells the same damn joke again. This is too much to take. I'm pretty messed up and I kick the fucking shit out the window. Well anyway, it nearly kills some couple out back screwin' around. The cops come and this one fat one gives me shit about how I should behave seen' as how I'm a clown. So I threw up on the guy. Well anyway, to make a long story short, I never did get to hear the end of that joke. Sad but true."
CRIME AND FUMISHMENT!

"Don't get me started. I'm so tired of the whole thing. 'Cutting edge'? I'm so sick of hearing about the 'cutting edge'? 'Cutting edge'? 'Cutting edge'? Exactly what is this phrase referring to? Knives? Razor blades? Are we all going to be like kitchen utensils in the future? The first time I ever heard about the 'cutting edge' was in 1972. It was in art school. My friend Nell introduced me to this girl, Cherisse, who was very, very, very 'cutting edge.' She was long, long twisted green and red thing on the top of her head. Ten years later! I found out it was her hair. Cherisse was a 'performance artist.' One of those magical words in 1972. You had to hang out with one 'performance artist' or you were OFF! Near the 'cutting edge.' Cherisse, God, I was hooked. She did a 'piece' where she talked about growing up on Long Island, dating with her boyfriend, having her period, and then she fondled herself with a wheel of Gouda cheese. And this was in 1975. She was THE MISSED. 'Cutting Edge.' She would walk around the halls dressed in black, scowling. She was a goddess... Well, before you knew it EVERYBODY was doing the exact same thing. EVERYBODY was claiming to be 'cutting edge.' So she said, what else could they do? Switch to Gouda? She wasn't 'cutting edge' anymore. All the girls were dressed in black doing 'pieces' with various cheeses of the world. She wound up marrying some guy who worked with tropical fish. Somewhere on Long Island. She's got a special on Pantone. But this 'cutting edge' business... I've got another guy they call 'cutting edge.' This guy's nineteen years old. A painter. He's been cutting edge for sixteen months now. He's been painting for a year. He paints great big, huge canvases with little pictures of Babar. And this guy's got sixteen dozen dollars and dealers and they're interested in him. And he paints. He's nineteen years old. And he's bald and has a face like Gene Gordon and these models offer themselves up. But he isn't interested in models. All he likes is Babar. So that's the 'cutting edge.' Where's this guy gonna be? Should I hold onto this 'cutting edge' dream? It drives me up the wall. Totally meaningless. I really couldn't care less. Just don't get me started, that's all. So what was the you wanted?"
To paint is to see. To paint is to love. To paint is to dance with small barefoot Gypsy children by the Seine in the moonlight. To paint is to fly, to grow, to skip, to soar. To paint is to drink of life to its fullest, daily immolating the bubbling froth of its rushing whirlwinds and swift black eddies. To paint is to dream. To dare. To swallow one’s very soul. To run naked in the streets with a loaded revolver, shooting randomly and murdering only those named “Jordan Bohachts.” To paint is to raise honeybees outside of Dussauville, to swim by night with a school of dolphins, to make love to a Turkish princess in a snug foxhole in the rain. To paint is to chant the song of the wild hummingbird, to surgically remove one’s own prostates with a golf club, to consume a stak of fresh young ceylon before an audience of six hundred rubies. Ah! To paint! To paint is to kindle one’s own sexual organ to a slow-moving upthrust, to re-shape a sleeping gnat’s profile with a Panzer tank, a pumice stone, a matchbook and an expired library card. To paint is to jump up and down on a small, dead childhood friend. To paint is to watch, to listen, to whisper the unnamable. To paint is to grill in Hades for one eternity, only to be alleviated in the next by the sweet cool ash swept in by a fragile, nearly imaginary gust. To paint is to call. To paint is to call. To paint is to insert forty-seven spoons in one’s anus and veal. To paint is to speak the name of the other’s disorder. To paint is to soar to the end of time on the wings of Nietzsche’s in Scarsdale. To paint is to be both parent and child, lawyer and criminal, horse and carriage, stove top stuffing and mashed potatoes. To paint is to consume a side order of saw while poking a rockette on a ceiling fan at the Taj Mahal. To paint is to reap the wild Naughydale. With you beside me, Mimi, my dearest, I have to go out and move the car.
“It would be funnier if his nose was bigger.”

“Humor theorists crack me up!”

“It would be funnier if the tide was higher.”

“Let’s go—our job here is done.”

“This is us. This is us waking up. This is us getting out of bed. Up out of bed. To put the water on. For coffee. This is us awake. We’re awake now. Here we are. This is us making water boil. Spooning our coffee. This is us up and awake and drinking our coffee. This is us awake and alert and not sleeping. Eating our bread with the coffee we made. Smell that coffee. Mimimimimim. Smells like coffee. It’s coffee. That’s why. This is us needing TV on. This is Bugs Bunny and Friends on. This is us. Watching an ad for Popeye. For Kellogg. For the Navy. You’re making an excellent point that Elmer Fudd is not Bugs Bunny’s friend. I’m knowing that you took the bigger of the two pieces of bread. I’m agreeing with your excellent point. And neither is Popeye. This is us agreeing. This is us totally agreed on a thing. This is us ready to wake up. We’re getting up now. This is us getting up. To put on some water. This is us getting up to make coffee. Here we go. This is us going. This is us doing. We’re making the coffee. To really wake us up. To go do. We’re getting up because we slept too long. We get tired of sleeping. We get so tired of it that we can’t stay awake anymore. So this is us getting up. Getting going now. We’re watching TV. We’re watching cartoons. This is up, alert and watching cartoons. There’s a cartoon about Bugs and Elmer. Elmer’s shooting Bugs. Not like friends, I agree. There’s a cartoon about Sniffles the mouse. In the cartoon Sniffles keeps falling asleep. So he drinks lots of coffee. This is us watching Sniffles drinking coffee, while our water boils. This is us agreeing: Elmer and Bugs can never be friends. This is me turning and seeing the way your mouth brushes the edge of the cup. The coffee is hot. This is me hating you. This is us drinking our coffee, eating our bread, watching cartoons and getting up and going. And doing. This is us. Here we go. We’re getting up now. The water’s boiling.”
“Your name is Marissa. You were born in Teaneck, N.J. and grew up outside Ronkonkoma. Your father’s name was Rolf and he studied endocrinology in Brussels after the war. Your mother was a Swede. You live at 341 East Sixth Street. In a corner apartment. You bring your laundry to a little place run by a one-legged woman every Wednesday at eight thirty or so. Sometimes earlier, never later. You drive an eggshell blue Ford Fiesta, work at a job you despise for a large legal firm and lunch alone, watching cartoons in your office with the door locked. You don’t laugh at the cartoons. You have loved deeply and been hurt badly by three men, each of them tall, brown-eyed and heavily involved in the arts. You shop at Farm Pride grocery, root for the Mets and regularly travel to Chilmark, Mass. to visit an elderly aunt who has no one else to turn to but you. Having turned thirty-six you are actively seeking a deeper spiritual commitment in your life. I am your soul mate, Douglas. I have been waiting for you here for all eternity. Nice juggs, baby.”
I don't want to know your name, your body, much less the porridge gray murmur of your soul's discharge. No offense implied. What I'd venture, however, is to provide one man's educated response to the mortifying carelessness of this curatorial blunder. I've noticed you for the last seventeen minutes. I've noticed your eyes roll. Your weight shift. The tip of your tongue escapes your lip's tight curl. Evidently you have detected the very problem. Perhaps we share a mutual interest in a rather undervalued middle period. Admittedly this is an unusual interest, much less a specialization, however I have positively devoted the last four years of my academic life to it. My masters was a critical investigation on certain, shall we say, less structuralist readings of this very piece. Although it was very, very well received by a small circle, I'm unhappy to report that it is yet unreadable to a wider public. No tragedy. However, a few basic points should be made...

SHE: Wait. I don't really like this kind of art, I don't understand it. To be truthful I don't like or understand any kind of art really. Most art is just beyond me. And the idea that people pay millions of dollars for this stuff. That money could be feeding starving babies here and abroad. I mean some art is OK, I like Dali. OK? But I mean really, I'm just trying to meet some halfway decent guy that won't come at you with a belt after he's had a couple. I'm thirty-four, divorced kid, work in a dentist's office. God, I don't know. My friend Kathy said I should go look at art. She's advertising. I guess she thought I might pick up some culture. And maybe an OK guy. But I'm not up for a lecture or even a talk on anything this advanced. I'm sorry. It would be too much for me. I like TV. I do need sleep. I read the paper. I've got my hands full with my kid. He's learning disabled. At least that's what they told me when I had him in public school. My refrigerator is busted and I'm leaking ozone. God, I don't know, maybe I should try party lines.

HE: So what agency does your friend work for?
"See—I got this piss problem. I don't exactly know how it all started, but ever since I was a kid I've had this very specific, very particular piss problem. It's like ... say I gotta piss. I gotta needy piss bad. Know what I mean? But I'm doing something else. Maybe playing ball. Maybe I'm on the job. Maybe I'm watching TV. And I gotta piss. Y'know? Sometimes I think I piss on an above-average basis. I really do hold quite a bit of water. Even when I was born my mom said I pissed like a spaniel. I drink a lot. I get thirsty. I'm an active kind of guy. So, here I am, doing something, and this urge strikes me. A little voice goes off in my brain sayin', "You gotta piss!" And I'd say, "Cause it's always correct. Guess it's sort of like my unconscious. They say it's the "Call of Nature." So I think, "Guess I better find a place to piss." Well, this isn't always an easy thing. Sometimes the facilities are unavailable. Know? But I know eventually I'll find one. I always have. So anyway—I gotta piss. I get to the men's room. Find a stall. Jump in. Unzip my fly. And you'd think, "Now here's a guy who's all ready to piss!" But y'know what? I don't. I just stand there like a statue. "Y'know what I mean? Frozen. And I can't do it. I just can't do it. It's some kind of block. A pissor's block. It just won't flow. So there's the problem. And this has been going on since I was a kid. So anyway, here's what I do. I've got this ... little thing ... I've got to say. Not really out loud. In my head. Or under my breath. If I'm all by myself. I gotta say this silly stupid little doozy thing. It's really goofy. I'm standing there ready to piss a whole bladder-full of piss. And I can't. So I gotta say: "You're an ape—urinate? Then—woosh! I can piss. Just like that. It's pretty weird I know, but it works. Isn't that something?"
“You know I wasn’t always called to medicine. I swear. So, I’ve been a naturally funny individual ever since I was a kid. So originally I was going to be a stand-up comic. I’ve always needed to make people laugh, lighten their load, the whole bit. Sounds corny, I mean it, though. That’s my thing. So I spent six years doing wait-er shifts, washing cars, driving cabs, living like a loser, just so I could hit the clubs at night and polish my act. I’d hang ‘til two, three, four o’clock waiting for my shot. Crazy days. Nudie days. Life. Well, it’s one of those things. It just didn’t play. See, I was born into the wrong era. My kind of humor is a dying thing. Now it’s all sickness and wax and death. Call me old-fashioned. What can I say? And I wasn’t managed properly. There’s a story. It’s who you know. And I didn’t know. Not then anyway. Your head hurt? But my mother always had this dream. My uncle was a podiatrist. My cousin discovered Beatrix. So I gave up comedy and went pre-med. Next to the clubs medical school was a piece of cake. I mean it. So, ten years later I’m a fabulously successful specialist. I know, sounds wacko. Hey, my mother’s happy. But you know what my secret dream is? I’ll tell you. It’s to really help heal people through the miracle of laughter. Not electrodes. Not surgery. I sincerely believe that laughter is the best bad medicine available. Ever hear of Norman Cousins? He says that too. A good joke is stronger than all the aspirin in the world. Wacky, crazy, but it’s an established fact. There’s been statistics, tests, paperbacks, the whole thing. And you know what? You need the right attitude. That’s critical. I think it’s a love thing. Love is laughter. Inseparable. Symbolic. Crazy. So, I see we’re having a bad reaction to the chemo, Mr. Klein. Lighten up. Did you know your doctor beat Danny Thomas at golf last week?”
“OK—up against the wall. Hands in the air. Freeze. I’ve been waiting a long time for this, so listen up, suckers. I won’t be saying it twice. First off—give me your undying love and devotion for eternity. Now I don’t mean no Whitman’s Sampler, John Boy Walton, syrup the Bartle and kiss Mr. Boo-boo goodbye. I mean UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE of every fiber of my fresh, yet tragically flawed little soul. No matter what. Cause I’m not gonna be a nice guy. Get used to that. I’m gonna puke on you, crap on you, pee on you and sneeze on you and all combinations thereof. Not just once, or sometimes, but thousands of times and in so many glorious multimodal variations that entire grave yards of Postimpressionist will spontaneously detonate and explode in their rotting embers. I’m gonna eat your food, suck your fluids, and scream your name in the right for years on end, without even the slightest expression of gratitude let alone acknowledgement that it could ever be any other way. I’m going to render your entire existence in so many insidious ways as to functionally render you my personal financial slaves for life. Pissing addictions. Day care. Pelvis: $163 character-endorsed yachting yachts. Woodwind lessons. Feline hunting. MFAs. Maybe a nose job if I wind up looking too much like you. The sheer overall cost is postcard alone will have you working your despised jobs a cumulative lifetime total of sixteen months. I don’t need to remind you how many bad/breakfast weekends in Cape May that will erase. And get this: before it’s all over I’ll have rejected every one of your goals, values, ideologies and deeply held beliefs utterly out of hand, whether it’s in my best interest or not. And there’s nothing you will be able to do to dissuade the entire world from the conviction that every one of my malicious inequities is ultimately ALL YOUR FAULT! But the best part will be this: you’ll utterly convince yourself that you actually CHERISH EVERY HELLOUS MINUTE OF IT ALL! So let’s get moving. Now. I want my bae bea.”

“Sunday morning ... I had two soft-boiled eggs for breakfast on Sunday. With toast. Rye toast—the kind I like with the little seeds on it. And coffee. That Bustelo always makes me run. For lunch I had a can of oven-baked beans and a little salad I made up of leftover romaine and a nice plum tomato. I think I had Pepsi-Cola with that. No, no—it was Cranapple juice. I remember now because I spilled some on my blue-and-white shirt. The one that used to be my favorite. Before the pullover. It stained. Around four o’clock I believe I went to the pot again. Then dinner time I think I had a piece of fish, broiled. Scrod. I think. Yes, scrod. I complemented that with a portion of noodle pudding from Miriam’s that I defrosted and string beans too. I added a little chopped almond and wheat germ to that and it was very, very tasty. Come to think of it, I had Pepsi-Cola with dinner. Later I treated myself to a little dessert. I had a Wachamacallit candy bar with my coffee. The sun set very early Sunday. I was watching. The sky was red. I had my final bowel movement after dark. I fell asleep around ten. Then I got up and gard. I woke up early on Monday. For breakfast I opened that box of Raisin Bran I told you about last week ...”
MAKE THE BUNNY CUTER.
—BEN SOLOMON,
TOPPS ART DIRECTOR

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Sorrow is better than laughter:
for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning:
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.
— Ecclesiastes, 7:3-4

THE LITTLE NUN
HEY MR. LICENSEE...

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1988-90

1989

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LITTLE STORIES

BE OBSCURE CLEARLY.

—E. B. WHITE

It began simple enough: a new twist on an old punch line. I had been working out the joke for months. Private.Away from anyone who might be inclined to get curious. I like to keep to myself when I write, especially when I write jokes. Call it good luck. Then the phone calls began. First rings and hang ups. 3:00 in the A.M. Then long-distance operators connecting me with dead air. It smelled from the coasts. After that, postcards. From Linden, The Orange, Hamilton, Trenton, Cape May. Pictures of trees, Waterfalls, Bridges, Motels. Shores. Stewed stuffed buns. I couldn't make out. But the postcards gave it away. Aces...I knew I was on to something. Something funny. Trouble was some people else knew it too. Someone else in the Garden State. The punch line that is New Jersey is hardly fresh stuff. Corny. Old hat. In fact. But this new twist of mine. Was the dynamic. Guaranteed Life. Biggest Boy. Original. Different. Postmodern. This was hot stuff. Still, it needed time to tell. You don't just go writing this stuff down then run out and collect your yanks. Not if you're smart. You must like time to tell. You age it. It takes time. And you don't make too much money. That was the thing that gave me the Heel-Kickers. Someone was on to me. Then one PM, after a few tans I opened the door to my office. Trouble was, I opened the door with my head. Something ugly was waiting for me that night. Something with a Jersey accent. I saw feet, I saw stars. I saw moons. I saw clowns. I saw blue diamonds. When I came to next A.M. my pole was cracked like a pigeon egg. And the big thing that was gone was my memory. Somehow they erased that joke clean off my mental tape. Gone—like yesterday's tuna. But I still have a few tricks up my sleeve. I think I can still do it together. I just need some time. And a little luck. And a new door. And when I get it, you can bet I'm going public. Get ready to tell.
CONFLICT!

Brothers fighting over walnuts. Two brothers fighting over a cardboard box of walnuts. Gary and Harry. Make that a paper sack. So there's a fight going on. A big fight. Coming to blows. These guys are in their fifties. Big strapping dock-working lumberjacking truck-driving cement-chucking miners. Never collected stamps. Never even used 'em. Teeth the size of detergent boxes. Fists the size of state capitals. Gary punches his brother in the stomach. Make that the LABONZA. These guys play for keeps. Chips on their shoulders the size of German shepherds. "OK—OK—You can keep the goddamn walnuts." Tongues the size of veal flanks, "Damn right!" 611 tiny broken orange butterflies in the labonza of Harry make a sound neither crying nor singing but one that could pass for either in the garage in the rain in the night. Harry bends to pick up the walnuts. His brother kicks him in the chin. There goes his head. Clean off. Flying down the street. Past the mall. Over Terre Haute, Indiana. Sighted by thousands in Rome, Italy. Gary eats walnut meat tonight. Make that Fielding, New Zealand. His wife covers his aching, distended, abused torso with kisses and peroxide. Gary wins. To the victor belong the spoils. To Gary belong the walnuts. He don't even like 'em. Just likes to fight. Know what I mean?

I DON'T GET IT!

12:06 A.M.—Still awake, after trying to sleep for 3.5 hrs. or so. I stare at the ceiling. I stare at the urine stain on the rug. I clip my nails, open the window, turn on the TV, close the window, turn off the TV and cry.

12:45 A.M.—Try not to think about it.

1:24 A.M.—No sleep yet. I head for the bathroom and feign a bowel movement. I wash my face with used, day-old water. The bathroom sink is clogged again. I check for Liquid-Plumr. There isn't any. I pour it down the drain. Afraid I might drink it. Ha ha.

1:59 A.M.—Try not to think about it.

2:16 A.M.—I look for a book. It's the only book I own except the one with people's telephone numbers in it. I've read that one already. This one has jokes in it.

2:24 A.M.—Try not to think about it.


3:38 A.M.—Try not to think about it.

4:11 A.M.—I found the joke book. It was propping up a 3-legged bookcase. I decide to start at the beginning. Some Jokes by the I. & M. Otterheimer Publishing Co. ISBN 0-8230-4319-36. This is all too familiar fare to me. I quit.

4:47 A.M.—Try not to think about it.

5:09 A.M.—I'm back at the book again. I read a joke at random. It's the third from the top on pg. 319. For all of you who are going to follow along. The previous owner numbered all the jokes with a rubber stamp. This one is #40037.

Len—Young doctors are queer propositions.
Ben—How so?
Len—They are exceedingly good tempered, yet they lack patients. (patience).

5:12 A.M.—Try not to think about it.

6:37 A.M.—I repeat that joke over and over in my mind. I savor the rhythm, the construction. I time it. I sing it. I taste it. And I come to the conclusion that levity can help significantly in times of personal turmoil. I turn over, fall asleep with a clearer mind and a lust for life.
Shoe leather on weary tile; eleven steps. Weary clotted tile. Reiley hoisted Reiley one buttock then another and set, adjusting his balance with the maternal concern of a Looney Tune hen about to hatch a litter of chicks and maybe one reptile. Reiley had boils on his ass. They blossomed, popped and bled with the dread regularity of an expensive Swiss timepiece—nearly every night Reiley shifted his girth into that seat at Red's and nearly every night his Hanes betrayed the boil constellation which had visited him since some cool day in March. (Actually, nearly identical to the time when Lizzie had switched corn oils—maybe . . . ?)

The stool answered Reiley's soft anal spurts with an infinitesimal minute putting sound. Shiver, shift, exhale. A sound close of the left eyelid. A tongue on the gum. A thirst. The hands behind the bar made swift motion with a faded towel and deposited before Reiley an alcoholic beverage the color of birthday cake. Reiley turned as Greenberg turned on the neighboring stool; swallowed his yeasty drink as Greenberg swallowed his phlegm. Greenberg fingered his forehead and smiled through Reiley's alcohol. Very soon an identical mug appeared before Greenberg, whose own sitting-down ritual (intricate—though aesthetically no match for Reiley's) had been played out three feet to the left an hour ago.

Somewhere in Pennsylvania a teenage boy was putting these words in a little red book:

We can drink iced tea/and digest/our fats/you & me sweet kid/we can make it to the fucking/moon. Come my way sweet-kid/hit me hard with a jackhammer/of total commitment/right between the eyes that crave/your sweet roasted meat/debutante. If you weren't married/to a sumo wrestler/and didn't have to pour/milk into his cocoa Puffs/every A.M./we could escape to Central Islip and catalog the dimensions of each other's soul.

Reiley talked Mets with Greenberg 'til around eleven, then went home to see exactly where he'd bleed.
A recently fired letter carrier in Reading, Pa., opening her husband's safety goggles upside-down on her own lens face and facing a steep rise on top of a steep rise. She's wearing the wrong shoes. The view of the mountains over the mountains over the mountains over the mountains. Unbearably slumpy, unenviably smudgy. Men who wouldn't do it for you, a left. Watching pigeons for a left. Anything for a left.

Filling your mouth with college cheese and bananas and purposely mispronouncing the word "mutter" for a left. Hitting Larry for a left. The last ray of sunlight dazzling on Aunt Rosal's embroidered towel/seat cover for a left. Nuclear winter for a left. Anything for a left.

A daydream budget falling down in 1978 for a left. A political non-left. Someone we all know repeatedly whispers "LADDY!" for a left—and almost always gets it. A BLT on a poppy bagel and the mayo. Side or slice for a left. Unnecessary surgery for a nervous left. See for a left. A for a left. Bar for a left. Anything for a left. A man walks into a bar and looks around. Every seat is taken. Sitting in the bar are a Jewish man, a Polish man, an Italian man, a black man, an Hispanic man, a Japanese man, an Irishman and a Native American man. Behind the bar is a female Königsberg serving drinks. (All of this is for a left.)

The end of the month for a left. The beginning of love for a left. McGurkoff selling his own throat in a barber's chair for a left. Abdominal Expressions for a left. Richard for a left. Letting the outside, wearing on the outside for a left. For Johnson, New Jersey, white bread, investor banks, compromised salad, light machinery, pop streamers, Annie, AIDS, wind-up figures, Aedeloff Miller, Veronica Davis, the word "tuck", the sinking of the Titanic, the spirit of the poet diarists, Sammy Patrico, Maynard, Ingrid, Linda Kentona, and Paul Newman Naked Dressing for a left. Anything for a left. Everything for a left. OK? So leave me alone.

Mrs. Rosalie DiCathartof of 47 Bedsides Mews, S.I. buried the last of her offspring in the sixth tragic parka-related death among the crusading DiCathartof toofs. The eleven-year-old Angie was reportedly "brushed to the brink" by the social stigma connected with the severely frayed plastic cuffs on the bend-me-down parka, a parka which so pleased each successive DiCathartof seeking that each was driven to an unusual diligence in his own woody ways. This less than beloved garment was purchased at a "healthy savings" at an off-season K-Mart Savings Bonanza by budget-minded Rosalie—yet allegedly never fit any of the family members quite right, various reasons of the cut and material frustrating each of the style-conscious DiCathartofs in a different manner, inevitably resulting in shame and agony which, coupled with peer mockery, finally erupted into a private reversible-polyester half for Rosalie's entire crew.

"I guess my kids just don't like that parka," bawled Mrs. D. as she signed an agreement to place the discount amount of wholesale destruction in cold storage. "I know I should have done this after Stivie, but how could I bring myself to throw out perfectly good late-late winter wear?"
C'est la Vie

Mickey not talking to Dana. Dana not talking to Mickey. Basically one large misunderstanding over butter.

"The smallest things amaze Mickey." Dana groaned into the receiver. "Like someone else eating butter." "Is that why you're not talking?" asked Nora.

Mickey sat on a stool at Red's next to George. He spoke, "We had a fight." "About what?" said George as he emptied the last of his mug. "Butter," said Mickey. "My truck got a flat," said George.

THE MICKEY & DANA OF YESTERYEAR MONTAGE: Sipping multicolored beverages at an outdoor café in the village, scaring pigeons on the bridge deck of the Staten Island ferry, snowballs and hugs in Central Park, modeling funny hats at a Sunday flea market, long silent walk along the shore. (Add a gag about beach debris if desired.)

Mickey gave Dana flowers. Dana put them in a vase. Dana took a picture of Mickey's flowers. Mickey put it in a frame. Once after making love Dana made up a poem: Babies crying/Planes flying/Birds singing/People bowling. Mickey wrote it on his hat.

Mickey and Dana let the subject lie for a long time after that. He had work to do. She had work to do. When they spoke they kept it light. They went to a used machinery-parts auction in June. They went to The Barber of Seville in July. And they both knew better than to bring up that butter stuff again. One day Mickey did, though. "You've got this butter thing totally wrong," he said as they watched a video of Alan Funt. Dana resisted, just watching the screen. "You make me sound stupid. I'm not stupid. I work in a bank!" "I know you're not stupid," Dana quietly remarked.

Neither brought it up again. Eventually Mickey met a pet-groomer named Francine. Dana began taking long, sudden business trips to Greece. And both of their friends got into the film industry and ignored Mickey and Dana completely. Mickey and Dana broke up, went their separate ways, lived their own lives. They didn't stay in touch. Such were the ultimate ramifications of a mere butter discord.

the Masterpiece

This is it. This is the one that you and I have been after for so long. This is the one that will make the books hit the headlines, current my revolution forever among the cognoscenti. This is the one I've been trying for, in the far recesses of my mouth, like the echo of a Necco waffer I ingested in 1979. The one that bolts into its own terrifying and beautiful reality, like a true (Old World) chameleon after the first glimpse of a succulent baby ladybug right over there. (Not just another ant)

This is the one that will open the doors, close the chapter, sink the putt, ring the bell, save the whales! This is the one that will secure my party the preferred seats at Lutete where Monsieur Sutter will knowingly explain the true superiority of a certain pricey Cava Brut Nature and unrollle my doubts with a shrug: "But it is on the house, Mark, not to worry." Actually, he will call me Mark.

This is the one that will make a household name in the household of Ernie and Ida Grubiner of Elk Meund, Wisconsin.

Ernie: We've seen what that jerk Mark Newsom came up with this week? I usually can't stomach his junk but... I'll be damned—think he really came up with some kind of coxcomb masterpiece—It sounds...
Ida: Yes, and he has the cutest butt! I saw him on A Current Affair and...

This is the one that will send Guernica back into storage, bring Proust to his soiled knees, make Terrytoon Circus look like something for kids. This is the one that is something transcendent, ineffable, infallible, irrational, miraculous, sexy, goofy and grand. This is the something that will come along only once in a genera...

Ernie: I guess we're not as young as we used to be.
Ida: Um-hmm.
Ernie: So what.
Ida: You know, I just dozed off for a second and had this strange little dream. It's funny because I couldn't have been asleep more than a few seconds but the dream had the weight of something that seemed to go on and on for centuries. It was so weird. You and I were both together on a little beach somewhere. We were holding hands and walking slowly toward the water. The beach was covered with tens of thousands of shells, all kinds of colors as far as the eye could see. As we stepped into the sand, we kicked the shells, into the wet part of the sand, you turned to me and recited the most beautiful little piece of poetry. Isn't that strange? It began something like...
Ernie: Jesus, not that crap again.
I saw a man slip on a banana peel and fall down today. I guess it was the first time I've ever really seen this happen. That, and of itself, is noteworthy. I mean it’s a cliche, right? But I've never witnessed it before today and you probably haven’t either (not counting TV or movies). So here’s what it was like.

It happened during the hour of noon in the Wall St. district of Manhattan. A lot of the streets there are narrow and are normally pretty overcrowded at that time of day. The buildings are big ones. The air was clear and dry and warm. Why I was there isn't very important, but there I was, loitering on the corner of Exchange Place, studying the crowd. I noticed the banana peel first, almost immediately. In fact, it wasn’t a particularly fresh one. It was slimy, blackish-spotted and rested way off to one part of the sidewalk near the gutter. No one walked near it.

Then I saw him trotting along, weaving past a street vendor offering giant-size coloring books. The coloring books didn’t look too good to me, but he never even noticed them. He was wearing a gray suit and a maroon tie. A white button shirt. A bracelet hung on his left arm under which he carried a small brown leather portfolio with a buckle. He had curly brown hair, candy blue eyes, a reddish Beaver-Cleaver profile with big straight teeth, the kind I sometimes call "teeth o' success." He looked like he needed to shave twice a day and I bet he did. I would place him at a few years younger than me (I'm twenty-nine). He was moving a lot faster than those near him, which is why I singled him out to study in the first place. He didn't quite push anyone but he was someone trying to get somewhere faster than anyone around him and he didn't care who knew. He was darting around a slow-moving woman in a green print dress, when he stepped right into it. Actually, the peel caught the middle of his right heel on the downswing and he went forward and south, quickly, silently, classically. I looked at my pocket watch and noted the time—12:46. He was up before I re-pocketed my watch. The portfolio never left his arm. He resumed his gait in mid-trot. People noticed, but he was so quick and adroit about it that nobody reacted for more than a moment.

There's not much more to say except to mention that his facial expression never wavered, not one split second. The same determined, intent glare. Wherever he was going probably involved something very important. I suspect a half-minute later no one but he and I were conscious that he had ever been down. But I saw it happen and let me tell you—

This is it. This is the one I pray nobody ever notices, let alone actually reads. This is the one that I hate to do, but I have to do, because I've got a pressing deadline, a binding contract, an unforgiving editor and a family of sixteen to feed. clothes and almonds I Steve needs a new tongue prosthesis. This is the one that I'll never be able to live down, that will turn my legion of devoted fans into a snarling ugly mob, that will haunt me throughout my life like some tragic, twilight childhood memory of Joe Corling in drag. This is the one that will turn my closest friends against me forever, leaving me with a naked, empty, fragile feeling of confusion and remorse. This is the one that will irreversibly alienate Shirley and send her straight into the arms of some more consistent craftsman, one with the bright future and an impressive past who will effortlessly grace the literary scene with a cascade of minor-classics as he makes canines love her on the back steps of a crumbling penitentiary in the heart of old Rotterdam. Worse, this is the one that will destroy my good name forever in the households of Ernie and Ida Grumbler of Elk Mound, Wisconsin.

Emile: I'd say you'd find that job, Mark. Newgarden is trying to palm off this week? I swear, I can't imagine how that guy gets away with that lame bullshit week in and week out. He must have some girlfriend or relative running the place or something. Maybe they let him do that stuff after weaping up the press room or stuffing the water coolers. It's always pretty downright feeble but this one is an old and out cheater! Even the punctuation strikes.

Ida: I was thinking of maybe submitting something. If he can do it, why can't I? I know I always got an A-plus in creative writing and years later when I was doing that column for the union newsletter I stripped it so much I thought it was more. I'm sure it still works. I used some paper though. Ernie: You'd be a cinch! You got good ideas about things and you know all the jokes. You could even do some poetry when you run out of things to say. And I could draw the pictures. Remember the time I painted Common Sense on the drum for the Community Marching Band? Well I still got the book! I copied it off! No one'll remember all these years later.

Ida: We could make a fortune! We run out of ideas or just want to go bowling we could do "Found Objects" like Mark. We could just print playing cards or pages from Dante's Inferno. People will think it's art or something.

Emile: Ida Grumbler, you're a genius.


Emile: Let's back.

Ida: OK, but first let's watch the remake of Miracle on 34th Street with Mario Thomas. It's on in five minutes.

Emile: Newgarden should hate it so good. This is truly the one I'll always regret.
The New Humor Experts are a shadowy, heteronormative group of dimly ventilated halls to determine the course of the New Humor's fate—who will thrive, who will perish, who will struggle, who will shine. Who will, like the excellently handy stock of some classic, lewd brown sauce, cast a delightful, semi-pornographic image on the humor-hungry plate at a discriminating public. The New Humor Experts never laugh—they don't have to.

The New Humor Experts have themselves to multi-racial concerns so that men with large bellies and small souls can be helped to understand the profit potential inherent in the philosophy of descent. The New Humor Experts like macaroons, thin crust, black forest cakes. And any kind of truffle. Except one.

The New Humor Experts can determine the effectiveness of a Latherman knife; compete with a casserole, slide, compar and refrigeration system, but don't prefer to operate on a gut level alone. The New Humor Experts like glowering plum juice, apples wrapped in poached apple leaves, a truffle-perfumed bow. The New Humor Experts become cartoon editors of magazines that don't run cartoons and comedy, and don't acknowledge comedy. The New Humor Experts are not evil, the New Humor Experts are very well known. The New Humor Experts like real wrapped candy, not the kind that you get in a can for $1.29 at Walgreens. The New Humor Experts will surely represent me for speaking out, for drawing attention to their dubious calling. They will surely offer me, under their puffy thumbs, prevent me from ever earning a putrid gratitude of fake amusement in this town again.


**Theodore Canning Vealie**

Swiped a quarter out of his old man's vest pocket and centered it on the brown wrapping paper that had once helped protect Swiss cheese from the gritty Chicago microbes lurking between the grocery on the corner and his mother's kitchen. With a little special clay-stained fuzzy pencil he tickled it again and again until he had a hundred and sixty-seven quarter-sized circles on the crumpled paper. He then slowly filled them in with a pair of eyes, a nose, a mouth, and various other details. Two hours after he began he stood up and scrutinized his efforts. Clearly he was getting better every time; some of the faces had real character like Jiggs and Judy or Amos and Andy Roach. Well almost. Tomorrow he would practice bodies. Thursday arms and hands, Friday the outlines of buildings and street fencers. And someday he would be a professional cartoonist and earn millions of dollars.

Sixty-three years later Theodore looked up from the telephone book where he had been attempting to locate the number of a firm that dealt in washing-machine parts and repair. He noticed a small cartoon drawing of a repairman on the ad for J&M Repairs with a perfectly round, quarter-sized head and remembered the last time he had practiced those faces on the red and purple page in his parents' first apartment so many years ago.

Instead of becoming a professional cartoonist and earning millions of dollars, Theodore had become a manufacturer of wood-furniture polish, a family business he took over from Theodore Sr. He had earned millions of dollars and was now retired. He sat back in his armchair and wondered if the millions would have come quicker if he had stuck with cartooning. Probably not, he thought. But look at Walt Disney, and Al Capp. And the fellow that draws the cat. He wiped his chin. BUT—had they ever known the satisfaction of providing a really good wood-cleaning agent to the homes of America at a reasonable price? I mean a REALLY good one? He lifted the receiver and dialed, and when someone answered he mentioned that he had selected their firm especially because of the funny little cartoon in their Yellow Pages ad. "That's not us," said the voice on the phone. "That's J&M—we're Excel Corp. What model did you say you had?"

Theodore told them and by six o'clock his white socks were clean again.
Ralph put the smooth tip of pencil to Strathmore and began to delineate the crest of a nose—his drawings had defined it for the last forty-six years: immense, bulbous, obtuse, otherwise. And comic, Ralph did the best noses in the game. His fans knew it and loved him for it: his editors knew it and paid him for it, his colleagues knew it and respected him for it. Nobody else could draw a nose so absurdly out of proportion (once ten times the size of the face attached to it) yet so unquestionably correct. It was a gift. Weber, Lundquist and others had tried to match him in the old days but were immediately, universally chastised for amping the Apollonian look. They rarely tried again. Ralph was modest. "I'm not the first guy in this business to draw a big nose and I won't be the last," but everyone concerned agreed that Ralph's noses were something else again.

A new generation had begun to frequent Ralph's studio, box-like Village studio for something of an insight into the man who made such big noses for all these years. Stringy, droll-eyed collectors with mustaches and checkbooks, tired reporters and aspiring young artists looking for a fatherly nod all made the pilgrimage. When asked of his success, Ralph always told them the same thing: "Draw the noses big—do!" And each left with an original ripped from a pad of noses Ralph dashed off by the dozen in felt-tip.

Ralph put the smooth tip of pencil to Strathmore and began to delineate the crest of a nose—and didn't. He rested the stub in his morning's Styrofoam coffee cup and did not discernibly move for the next twelve and a half hours. As it had nearly every day for the last 36 years, white sunlight crept steadily across the plain plaster wall, the oak drawing board and finally Ralph. Instead of lowering the paper shade between three o'clock and four o'clock, Ralph sat and let the sweet light envelop him, warming his waxy skin. He felt sate with the sun in his eyes and matriarch of hule-hule girls. The telephone rang around ten o'clock that night. It was Nat. "How's the nose, Ralph?" Ralph chuckled, knowing that it would be a great big funny one.

"No more noses forever, Nat." Ralph whispered.

"Are you joking me?" Nat asked. "In fourteen years you never joked me—don't joke me now. I need that nose by yesterday!"

"I'm through," Ralph replied in a louder voice. "And I'm not joking you, either!"

Ralph put the smooth tip of pencil to Strathmore and began to delineate the crest of a nose. The lead skated across the surface, cooing, rising and sputtering with the precision of a drawing arm charting the electrocardiogram of a surprise heart attack. The nose emerged, perfect, followed by a bony little face, with a sweet, cockeyed, confused look. He stood at a bar. Fifteen minutes or so later Ralph unlatched the sheet and brandished it to an empty shelf where the ink would dry. Beneath the drawing was a funny caption written by another man. It would be a ruse. Ralph tucked another sheet of two-ply Strathmore to his side, which he had clipped from a stack wrapped in brown. There were many more sheets in that package.
"A big funny nose?" Len quizzed the man behind the boxes at Al's Funny Flot. "I need one to make somebody laugh," he explained, somewhat slyly. "We've got an assortment. I flew the man from behind a war cigarette, handing Len the long-shelved box. Len noticed a tattoo of Little Jinx on his arm. "All funny-different types." "And the price?" asked Len, riffling through the meager assortment. "They're marked," called the man as he hobble toward the back room to answer the whimsy of an invisible employee. Each of the pink and red rubber noses was bagged in a small clear plastic package through an illustrated header card. Displayed on the case was a cartoon of a man who resembled Jimmy Durante. "It would be hard to pick the funniest," thought Len. "Everyone has such a differents sense of humor."

Len waited outside the steel office building where Denise had been taping for months as a legal secretary. He hadn't met her there in quite a while, but he was making an all-out effort these days. Denise did up no struggle. She exited the main door just after five. Avoiding the crowded box, Len suggested a walk through the small park where he had often wheeled her as a child. As they approached the scruffy baseball diamond Denise's breathing became heavy and labored. This, felt Len, was happening too regularly and he suggested taking a walk, at least, and the smallest breeze would rear the topmost leaves, suggesting the hum of the show. "I'm OK" Denise insisted, but Len's slightest breeze roared the topmost leaves, suggesting the hum of the show. "I'm OK." Denise insisted, but Len's slightest breeze roared the topmost leaves, suggesting the hum of the show. "I'm OK.

She wanted to get it all out. The earth was still warm, and the shadows were creeping along. The two were presently enveloped in the shade of an ancient oak two dozen feet away. The was one for being cautious. "I'm really OK." She wandered how long it had been since they had been here together. "It's been a long time" said Lance with empathy. "Yeah..." sighed Denise, staring at the empty ball field. The white baselines had been smeared away into cloudy lines (literary devices). She began to cry, Len tumbled with the small brown paper bag he had produced from his coat pocket. "Don't look," instructed Len. "Wait." Denise sat back with her eyes closed. She had lost over forty-five pounds in the past two months and her eyes were nearly transparent. Len tore open the cellophane bag and fingered the flexible comedy nose. He brought it to his own, where it fitted on nicely. Denise had opened her eyes by now. She was smiling. "Well, you look like Jimmy Durante!" she exclaimed. "Yeah," chuckled Len stiffly. They looked blankly at each other for a moment. The sun was setting. Denise's smile faded slightly as she returned, deliberately widened, expressed. "EVERYONE WANTS TO GET INTO THE ACT!" Jimmy Durante roared. "CHAAA." Denise shook her head. Godly, Len removed the nose, bowed, and ceremoniously slipped it back into the bag. Swiftly hopping up, he held out his arm to Denise, who grabbed it, and righted herself. "You really don't look so bad," he told her. "Would you prefer a lip?" He gets me and we both laugh over that. Abby is still glum. Well, I'll take her out for ice cream Friday.

I just finished 1984 last night. A good book. Today I'm set to ink a set of dailies. Before starting I wash my drawing equipment in soapy warm water. It's amazing how much ink can cake up on these Hunt's points. When I rinse them the whole sink of water turns black. I note this for a gag idea. Then I realize that the sink has stopped up completely. FUCK!! So the joke's on me.

I woke up in the middle of the night, another bad dream. A giant beaver was chasing me, wanting to play. It was a big, friendly beaver, but frightening. There was something else with cuts on my leg. I rolled over to tell Abby but she was asleep. Then I saw it. There was a little bubble of spit at the corner of her mouth. As she inhaled and exhaled the bubble of spit gets minutely bigger and smaller. I can't help myself and laugh out loud and fall right out of bed. I explain the whole thing and Abby laughs too. But I still can't sleep.
I once had occasion to roam the land adjacent to Ted "Teddy" McCullough's holdings on the southern bank of Cranberry Lake, NJ with the exceptionally resonant humorist Pepe O. Ashcroft sometime in the late '60s. As we hiked mile after husky mile along that breathtaking spot of earth not a word was spoken between us. The weather that day was a sort of weather that seems to come along only too rarely in a Jersey August—a gentle warmth; the soothing temperature of a never forgotten childhood bath or a cup of coffee that you make for yourself with hot tap water. The sky was exceptionally bright and the light was of that eerily tranquil variety that the denizens of Cranberry Lake called "lake light" in the early days of the century. As the thin clouds shifted slowly above us a profound sense of tranquility enveloped us both. I had many questions to ask the brilliant Ashcroft about the semiotics of visual comedy, especially relating to the cartoon idiom. But as we trudged on, up hills, down valleys, circumventing culverts and forest streams, it became apparent that there was, indeed, no need to say anything. When we arrived back at our host's kitchen by late eventide we both had a bit of hot broth and good whiskey and I ventured a bit of conversation. "What makes people laugh?" I queried. The slimmest smile insinuated itself on the far side of Ashcroft's craggy lip. He removed his spectacles and, clearing his throat, answered me. "Funny things, I guess." I pressed him no further and we both retired.

The next morning I was somewhat embarrassed to find out from my host that I had spent the previous day not with Ashcroft, but with a retired zipper manufacturer named T. Kaplan Pechstein who had died in his sleep from a heart attack brought on by over-exertion. I guess you could say the joke was on me.
The men that make you laugh have no time for ordinary pleasures, never at ease, their minds are always onto the next big gag. The men that make you laugh sit in the park on Wednesdays, clutching their guts, with a letter and a photo (of a blonde-haired friend), counting to three-digit numbers and weeping over what might have been. The men that make you laugh are ready to move to a coast on thirteen days' notice. Any coast. The men that make you laugh wonder about your childhood traumas. The men that make you laugh know that there are only a finite number of jokes in the world and that these finite number of jokes are not really very funny at all. The men that make you laugh commit the sorriest of suicides only to show up at their own funerals dressed like grannies. The men that make you laugh gather together at all-night restaurants to show each other photographs of bruises and sores that they cut from books meant for doctors. The men that make you laugh are named Sammy and Jerry and Mel and smile at strangers and freeze with their families. The men that make you laugh gradually lose their own sense of humor until nothing makes them laugh except cardboard boxes of Middle Eastern dried fruit and abandoned banana bread. The men that make you laugh play golf. Hard. Think about that. The men that make you laugh nearly always become the men that made you laugh.

Youth falls on the mossy bridge by the green grassy brook, takes off his shoes and stockings and jumps up and down in the clean sparkling pool. Youth cuts his foot on a razor-sharp piece of glass, sparkling metal. Foot bleeds. Stupid Youth.

Youth enters convenience store and opens a cellophone package of sugar-coated pecans. Irrelephant owner gives chase deep into summer night with his bully stick. Youth trips upon garbage and boxes. Drops the sweet nuts all over the dark and narrow alley. Fleet owner catches him on back of leg with stick. Youth limps. Stupid Youth.

Youth sees a television commercial advertising vacation packages in Florida. Youth sneaks his elders' credit card and heads for airport packed for six days of Key West fun. Suspicious matron airline employee phones next of kin and youth is removed to his room by embarrassed elders. Youth is driven to school door every A.M. for rest of semester. Youth places his feet upon seat of car. Stupid Youth.

Youth asks girl to tie him in a vinyl sleeping bag in park. Youth buys condoms, brushes teeth, showers twice and goes off to grassy field to meet girl. Girl isn't there and never shows up. Youth falls asleep by himself listening to Walkman in park. Wakes up when park man shines lantern in Youth's eyes. Elders escort Youth to his room by lobe of ear. Youth never talks to girl again. Stupid Youth.

THE TIME WAS THAT COMEDY WAS LARGE. THE TIME WAS THAT MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN OF ALL AGES, HUES AND EXTRACTIONS FLOODED INTO A RICH, STERILE CORPUS OF COMEDY UNTIL BLOATED, SLEAZED AND JOLLY, THEY WOULD STRIKE THEIR DISTENDED BELLYS AND ROLL, HEAD OVER LOW, THROUGH THE STREETS OF THEIR HOMETOWNS, INTO THEIR YARDS, SHUT UP THEIR FRONT PORCHES AND RIGHT INTO THEIR BEDROOMS WHERE THEY WOULD THEN EXPLODE, STARTLING THE WALLPAPER AN EARTHLY RUST FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.

WHEN COMEDY WAS LARGE, THE WORLD WAS A SIMPLER, SMALLER WORLD WHERE YOUNG BOYS TIED ROLLS OF BLEEDING BANDAGE TO THEIR TORSOS AND MAMAS NEVER WENT OUT TO CALL WITHOUT HER MOUTH SHUT TIGHTLY TO KISSES CROWN. DOLLS IN OVALS WERE BOUND TO THEIR LEGS WITH DOZENS OF ELECTRICAL JUDY BUZZERS AND WRITTEN IN A DAYSTAFF IN THE PINK BAND SHELL AS AN ITINERANT CIRCUS TO HIS MIGHTY MOUTH FANCYING GARGANTUA. WHEN COMEDY WAS LARGE, WE IT SMALL HELPLESS MINORITY GROUPS ALIVE BY THE HUNDREDS IN THE VILLAGE SQUARE AND TIRED OUR SKIMMERS TO ELIGIBLE YOUNG LADIES AND TOOK TEA AND STOLE TARTS.

WHEN COMEDY WAS LARGE, WHITE-FACED MEN JUMPED BACKWARD UP BLUFFS, KNOB CRACKED THE SKULLS OF ROWDY IRISH WASHINGWOMEN AND TRAMPED THEIR SHOES AND WALKED BAREFOOT THROUGH THE MEADOWS SHAKING THE TAILS OF GUINEA PIGS LIKE PUMPS. WHEN COMEDY WAS LARGE, THE WORLD HAD A DIFFERENT WAY OF LAUGHING. OFTEN THE EYES OF LOVELY WIDOWS POPPED AND BLITZ IN LIFTER SHOWS WHEN MAX OR CHARLIE OR FATTY OR AL HIT HIS CIGARETTE ON THE CONTRAST OF A LONG WHITE-BEADED BABYTOY. WE WOULD LAUGH UNTIL SANDWICHES OF MYSTERIOUS BLACK MEMBRANE LEAFED FROM OUR MOUTHS. WE WOULD LAUGH UNTIL OUR EYES SPUN CLOCKWISE IN OUR SOCKET, OUR TEARS WOULD CRUNCH AND CRACKLE, OUR BOWLS WOULD BECOME AUTO-AMBULATORY AND OUR TONGUES WOULD UNEARLY TO THE LENGTH OF A CROUCHER FIELD.

IT WAS A WORLD OF INNOCENCE WHEN COMEDY WAS LARGE. HORSES STILL TROTTED THE COBBLESTONE STREETS, WEARING WEDDING DRESSES, A ROAD BOUGHT YOU SIXTEEN BICYCLES AND NEW-FANED GAS OVENS REGULARLY EXPLODED, SLAYING CHEFS BY THE THOUSANDS IN A SINGLE DAY IN AN AGE WHEN A GOOD CHEF WAS MORE VALUED THAN A HUNDRED SECOND BASEMEN. WE PLAYED MUCH WHEN COMEDY WAS LARGE AND THE ENTERTAINMENT MACHINES OF OUR SHORELINE COMMUNITIES WERE ADORNED WITH THE ERUPTING ELECTRICAL GUSTS OF HEAVEN AND HAYES. WE SHOT CLOTH PIFFER FROM THE MOUTHS OF THE UNIVERSE, ERE THE FLESH OF BABY DOLMATIANS WITH PINK SPUN INSULATION AND FLUNG OUR CHILDREN INTO SIZING PITS OF BURNING IRON SO AS IN THE NAME OF ENTERTAINMENT AND ENTERTAINED WE WERE. IT WAS A FAR DIFFERENT WORLD WHEN COMEDY WAS LARGE, AND WE WERE A FAR DIFFERENT PEOPLE. AND NOW THAT COMEDY IS SMALL AND SMELLS LIKE MONKEY URINE IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT WE WILL NEVER SEE IT'S LIKE AGAIN.

MASTERS WEAR OUT. CARS RUST. PEOPLE DIE. BUT WHAT LIVES ON ARE THE BRANDS.
—HECTOR LAING,
FORMER CHAIRMAN,
UNNEEDA BISCUITS

IT'S EMR®
No super powers
Need a new cartoon character? TRY *EM*!
Keep on makin’ LIKE *EM*!

No snappy wisecracks
Happiness is a warm *Em*?
If you like art—You’ll love *Em*!

No stupid jokes
If you like money YOU’LL LOVE *EM*!
IF YOU LIKE MONEY YOU’LL LOVE *EM*!

No Canine sidekicks
If you like sex... you’ll love *EM*!
IMPEACH BUSH WITH *EM*!
EVERYBODY LOVES *EM*!

NO “OLD-FASHIONED” STORY LINES
Keep on makin’ LIKE *EM*!
EVERYBODY LOVES *EM*!

No “HIGH ART” PRETENSIONS
SUPPORT THE TROOPS Support *EM®*

No Canine sidekicks
If you like money YOU’LL LOVE *EM*!
IMPEACH BUSH WITH *EM*!
EVERYBODY LOVES *EM*!

No content whatsoever
If you like art—You’ll love *Em*!
IMPEACH BUSH WITH *EM*!
EVERYBODY LOVES *EM*!

just *Em*.
SUPPORT THE TROOPS Support *EM®*

No political agenda
If you like sex... you’ll love *EM*!
EVERYBODY LOVES *EM*!

No content whatsoever
SUPPORT THE TROOPS Support *EM®*

just *Em*.
SUPPORT THE TROOPS Support *EM®*
Accept EM® as your own personal cartoon character

MAKE EM®, NOT BART!

Hate Mondays?
So does Em®!

Today is the first day of the rest of your life
- with Em?

Em® is healthy for children and other living things!

NOBODY'S PERFECT EXCEPT EM®!

Em® no room for improvement!

Em® NO HIDDEN AGENDA!

Cynical, calculated and an insult to your intelligence

EM® NEVER SAYS "FUCK"

EM® NEVER TAKES MONEY FROM THE HOMELESS

EM® NEVER Puts down the President

EM® NEVER MAKES BOWEL MOVEMENTS ON THE GOOD BOOK

EM® NEVER MOLESTS YOUNG SPANIARDS

EM® belongs in your heart

EM® NEVER INSULTS THE CLERGY

EM® NEVER PUSHES PIGS INTO THE EYES OF COWARDS
TWO IN DISTRESS... MAKE SORROW LESS.
— SAMUEL BECKETT

OTHER
JOKES

IMAGINE
THE
FUNNIEST
PICTURE IN
THE WORLD.

IMAGINE THE SADDEST TRUTH.
IMAGINE A DRAWING OF DENNIS THE MENACE

IMAGINE A SENTENCE OF SAMUEL BECKETT’S.
NOTHING FUNNY THIS WEEK.

TOILET PAPER

My aunt in Knoxville would bring us newspapers that we used for toilet paper. Before we used it, we'd look at the pictures.

— DOLLY PARTON
Industrial Toilet Paper Wrapper Design Of N.Y.C. 5

Quad Cinema 137 2nd St. NYC
Kent Twin Cinema BKLYN.
Empire.
Man. Chili Co. Bleeker St. NYC
Old Town Bar 182 2nd St. Park Ave. NYC
Whole Wheat N’ Wild Berries 102 St.
Two Swiss Guys Gave Me This

Industrial Toilet Paper Wrapper Design Of N.Y.C. 6

1000 Sheets Bathroom Tissue
1000 Sheets Bathroom Tissue

ACME REST. GREAT JONES + LAFAYETTE
Broadway Diner 8 Way + 55 St

Ritz Bar-B-Que Allentown PA
Piccolino’s Amsterdam + B1st

Kristine Found This In FLA
Newgarden Studios BKLYN
DO YOUR GUMS EVER BLEED?
How does it happen?
what's so funny?

Industrial Toilet Paper Wrapper Design Of N.Y.C. 11

MILLER
MILLER
MET. HOSPITAL CAFE, 1st AVE., NYC

Prime
SOCIAL QUALITY TOILET PAPER

ISD RESTAURANT 11TH ST. 2ND AVE., NYC.

Pottsville Motor Inn, Pottsville, Pa.

Living Well Groceries, BKLYN.

Sweeney

Somesta Hotel, Aruba

Somewhere in Greece

THANKS TO THE SMART TOILET PAPER WRAPPER SOCIETY: SARAH ONDENSE, LINA SAKNOWSKY, MIKE SENGUPTA, MRS. IRA LEVY, MRS. QUAD, PAUL PAZ, RICK.

Industrial Toilet Paper Wrapper Design Of N.Y.C. 12

Museum Cafe 16th + Columbus

Some Trendy Soho Bistro

Morgan Sta. R.O. 3012 St. 9th Ave.

Econo-Lodge, Reading PA.

Airport, Tupelo Miss.

Somewhere in the Great Northwest

TRAVELS TO THE NIGHTS NEUMANN TASK FORCE: LOGAN SAWICKI, CHRISTIAN LARSEN + ONS. RICHTER. YOUR COMPANIES ONE WHO PUL!
I love Mickey Mouse more than any woman I've ever known.
— Walt Disney
LOVE'S SAVAGE FURY

I rode the same train for 3 years

and I never saw you

again.

Or maybe I did forget what you looked like.
And one day it just came back

I'll get off quickly.

purposely dropping the Polaroid

leaving you

to wonder why I bothered.
GARBAGE IN:

Crying

Not for use when peeling onions

Towel

When loaded wring out and start over.
The Goings On and Goings Off of the Curious People of Nowyland.

And here you see in Nowyland
A wicked man compelled to saw
His nose away as punishment.
For having sneered against the law.

While pale with fear, another says:
"His nose gone, the bucket's stopper"
"When with an axe they chop it off,
And make a punchless man of him!"
GOOD STORY—BUT YOU'RE AT THE WRONG HOUSE

NO MORE FOR HIM HE'S DRIVING!

LOOK AT THE BIG ONE I'VE GOT!
MY WALLET!

CONJURED YOU'LL...

YIPPEE!

YOU WONT ESCAPE ME!

YOU WONT GET AWAY!

I'M RIGHT ON YOUR...

DAD! OY!
To Abbie
from the great cartoon
dog

Felix

Muss

From Otto

Messer
Well, there’s that iron!

Cover on the gas stove.
The cord’s plugged in!

Don’t trip over it!

Won’t I be in your way on here, Dave?

No, I don’t think so.

You’ve not through with the upper dishes yet.

Maybe I better go in an’ read the paper until I

So — long as you’re here you better stay and fix

that iron. Never could get you out here again.

Yeah, but there ain’t hardly room for me in...

How much room do you need? I’m going to be busy

by the sink. You get the whole half of the room.

My hands, if you need a vacuum lot to fix a little

iron in, I guess...move over, wanna get that step

up. Hang it here.

Here you...m’kay. Take it.

I think what’s really the matter with that iron...

And, ain’t it? Had the egg-mother in it; water

eheld up, so long...I think what’s really the

matter with that iron in Rush plays with it so much.

What’s he do with it? Seems like a funny plaything.

Oh — it’s bright and shiny. Children like shiny

tings to play with. An’ besides it’s electric.

Anything that runs by electricity just gets Rush.

The other day he was ropin’ around the wash-machine

on...move your elbow.

VIGI:

DADDY:

VIGI:

DADDY:

VIGI:

DADDY:

VIGI:

VIGI:

Yes, I’m sick of it.

Well, thunder, if I’m gonna fix it.

If you’re gonna turn on that iron, you’d

get over to the sink. That there

seared the daylight out of me. In

morning when I was pressin’ out

I plugged the thing in the wall

up the iron, and all of a sudden

...well, I tell you I pretty near

the wall, I dropped that iron like

That’s probably the matter with it around all the time...

Want you done there...gonna turn it out.

Sure.

Well, wait till I get over the wash.

O.K.
Physician: "You are suffering from over-highbrowism. Go easy on T. S. Eliot and Proust for a while, and no Kafka at all. Stop at the Giant Drug Store and get 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' and some Edie Stanley Gardner stories that you haven't read. Buy records of Von Suppe's Poet and Peasant Overture; Ravel's Bolero; Prokofieff's Love For Three Oranges and Yes, We Have No Bananas. Keep this up for two weeks and then come back to me. I have an excursion you can make into unexplored intellectual fields which will tax all your capacities. But I want you to be well rested in advance. And don't forget that you are allergic to emotional flavors 47A, 412 and 16XX."
A. Processes Involved in Humor Appreciation

This section describes the processes and steps of the information-processing analysis of humor (see Figure 1).

Stage 1

Processing begins with a read-in of the introduction of the joke or of the cartoon picture. Information is extracted from this initial input, and such components as setting and context are stored. This information is used to formulate a narrative schema which is used to predict forthcoming text. This prediction-making process is used in reading, listening, and other perceptual tasks. Kolers (1968) has emphasized the importance of developing a schema or script that the reader humor generates. On the basis of what he has just read, he formulates hypotheses about what his eye will next encounter.
The Best Jokes About Drunks
Edited by George Milburn
PLEASE CARE MORE FOR ME.
GARBAGE IN: THAT'S FUNNY!

A random mimcary of influences, prejudices, preoccupations, cherished objects, and leisure consistencies

1. Crying Toews
Have you ever wept into a cartoon? Emerging in the 20th century, such as the rotoscope, a technique that mutes the interpretative powers of the animator.

2. Novely Clown
First he huggs, then he's out, then he's up again. Great set is made before he leaves. It is one of the most popular personalities of the 20th century, perhaps the quintessential of the mid-20th century broken-hearted sentimentalist.

3. Funny Men
Traditional American humorists circa 1923.

4. Big Nose Object #1
Big noses are funny.

5. Big Nose Object #2
Big noses are funny.

6. Big Nose Object #3
Big noses are funny.

7. Big Nose Object #4
Big noses are funny.

8. Show Card Cartoon
Anonymous cartoonist circa 1890 created a series of cartoon-like illustrations that mocked the proprietors of modest saloons, as a side light of spot and color in their customers' daily life. Why doesn't the party celebrate on a U.S. postage stamp yet?

9. Barroom Gag Plaques
Cartoons and strip cartoon characters live on the walls of galleries; great gag cartoons live on barroom walls, or better yet, in the garbage, where I discovered this one.

10. Milt Gross (1905-1952)
Perhaps the most mainstay parodic practitioner of his day. Gross' impulsive slapstick stuff, observational joke-making, and cross-eyed physique remain marvelously fresh, fresh, and funny, parodic of his era. Cartoonist, illustrator, surrealist, cartoonist, screenwriter, animator, newspaper, and cartoonist all, Gross' impulsive striking drawings, are, to me, at the heart of the impulsive toonist.

11. Otto Messmer (1892-1983)
Otto Messmer was an animation pioneer and the long anonymous creator of Felix the Cat. Messmer's career as an animator was truly long, both in duration and in quality. Felix the Cat was among the first cartoon characters to have a niche audience, and his popularity was enormous.

12. Renard the Fox
When a disguised raccoon character shielded its prey from a hunter, William Hamilton, the Great Fox's story, made the circuit of cartoons, mildly amusing adventures about women wrestlers, bodily transform him into Koko the Dog, and various other other adventures, and in general review our understanding of entertainment, humor, and reality itself. And yes, I think he's alive and living in Argentina.

13. X-Ray
Cartoons can hurt you. My mother posted this into a grade school scrapbook back in the 1960s. After I discovered this image as a child I could never forget it, and now you can too.

14. Professor Einstein
Another big nose cartoon character that scared my sensibilities childhood. This Big Nose Man was the parental figure in the strip which made a hit in the 1920s. By the 1930s, the strip was marketed to passive-aggressive maniacs to a culture always on the lookout for a new cartoon character to hide behind. Suicide, self-stabulation, and psychoactive substances became the social norm. "Stale, today you won't feel well."

15. Two Funny Men
Bob Egan (b. 1920) and Ray Goulding (1922-1990), posthumous of the amusingly mundane, were a radio and television comedy team popular first in the 1930s. Their books of dialogues and deep dramatizations include the profoundly controversial, a comic strip drawn by a comic strip artist, as well as public service announcements advocating the end of money in financial transactions.

16. Funny Writer
The finest that ever a writer of comic dialogues hung on the branch of our Paul Riehm (1905-1964), who for decades created a daily fifteen-minute minimal masterpiece for the American grownup called Ve and Sade. The two chronicles a small town with the name "Veek" as they converse rhythmically and casually about nothing and everything. "Nothing much is funny."

17. Jean Shepherd (1923-1999)
The Great Nomad of the Airwaves, black humorist, and great chronicler of the Great American Village, Shepherd was a singular voice in the electronic feedback loop of America from the 1960s to the 1970s. Generations of his radio "eight people" (like me) were arrested with his unique feisty personal voice and his impassioned, sarcastic glorification of American popular culture.

Back in the mid-1970s, standup dawg crashed hard onto the hardcore Unix at 850 mph and the resulting accident gave rise to a new generation of humorists. Who introduced the concept of trash, slapstick, and off-color jokes to an audience.

19. Dognog and the "Snake"
Our own culture bacterizes its fun cap in these cheap disposable weapons of ridicule that depend on the ring of a kick register and reliable ability to trigger the ratlike sniffs. No one in immunity from the well-served humorists' nerve: we are all potential victims of comedy.

20. Artistic Business Card
My first business card was received from an Old Maid deck. Since then, I have had one every 10 years and I have been looking for it back. Chimping is not the answer to台上. It is a self-inflating network strategy.

21. T. L. Shaw (dates unknown)
Why didn't I want to be a "naive artist" when I grew up? In a series of obscure 1950s publications with titles like Prehistoric Racket, Critical Quarterly, and Don't Go Nuts Art This Way, conspiracy art theorist Theodore L. Shaw angrily attacked the "avant-gardists" of the art establishment and instead he soared. His in cultural epistemology, common sense, psychotherapy, and the fragile human attention span. His works are dense with charts, graphs, and even gag cartoons delimiting his forsworn destiny. So what if he wins name?

22. Advertising Cartoon Characters
Current culture as capitalist tool. Character-less characters created by industry in the millions, milked till dry, then retired, discarded. These successful icons of all context, have become real: Lori Parthenon, wondering the remote storage of our elitist culture, with such sales, is the terrorizing surreal perpetual smiles. I love them all, probably more than my text of him.

23. Wesley Morgan (1897-1962)
Wesley Morgan was arguably the most widely published artist of the twentieth century, his career spanning virtually anonymous. The title paper (1897-99) and his "comic" comics wrapped billions of penny-bubble-gum-stubs to scores of南宁 for decades. In a market which seemed to simultaneously skirt both ubiquity and marginality, Morgan's career also included the cultural underworld, for which he anonymously owned a series of costumes under the comic horror comic "Amoeba" (1928) and "Amoeba" (1928-2014), and "Amoeba" (1928-2014) and "Amoeba" (1928-2014). Some of his more salacious artwork also graced the pages of numerous "Amoeba" (1928-2014) and "Amoeba" (1928-2014). His most salacious artwork was pure, rapid, fire, childish: cartoon pep and comics, and in general review our understanding of entertainment, humor, and reality itself. And yes, I think he's alive and living in Argentina.

24. Phone-Book Art
Art Loeb's Travel Tip: The great secret art galleries of America can be found in the Yellow Pages of many city directories. Next vacation, spend more time in your hotel room and let the curators of the world's great museums work for you.

25. Honor Theory
Never funny?

26. The Seventeenth Annual Optimist International Convention, 1935
They're all dead now.

27. The Audience
"World's all man learns about the funny papers from James Scouring, Herblock!" The caption tells us that the cartoonists is teaching the 15-year-old boy, but I think Herblock knows something Herblock doesn't, and isn't telling.

28. A Secret Message
This picture was drawn by my great uncle Charles and kept as an example of the kind of talent that ruins in my family's veins.

29. Gang Cartoon Magazine
Magazine publishing Seminars such as Humanae Ini of New York is a non-profit organization was a leading market for the intriguing gag comic strip, "The World's Most Popular Comic Strip." These "Top of the Pile" pulps digests, which incorporated low-grade gags with smutty newpaper comic strip style, were charged out in continuous quantity and weekly by the dozens, then discarded. These successful icons of all context, have become real: Lori Parthenon, wondering the remote storage of our elitist culture, with such sales, is the terrorizing surreal perpetual smiles. I love them all, probably more than my text of him.
31. "How to Housebreak Your Dog"

I believe this was the first comic strip ever. It was originally drawn by Ernie Bushmiller and privately published in the 1961 Member's Annual of the Dutch Treat Club, a New York stick organization for artists and media workers. Praxed and widely reprinted as a joke-shop sign, picture postcard, wooden plaque souvenir of Marilyn Monroe's apartment, and Gas knows what else, this little comic strip made nearly all its stops on the pop-culture underground railroad. My grandmother gave it to my in a comic book at age seven, and I was in love with it for life.

32. Gag Cartoon Vending Machine

There was one in a world that was as hungry for gag cartoons as they were actually individually needed in penny arcade machines for the left-handed smoker on the go. Believe it or not.

33. John Books

Read, left, right, reverse, joke books in their very antithetical context have never been more than a passing resemblance in my eyes to pornography (and in fact some of the premier adult magazines of the present century pedalled cheap cartoons and joke books as cover operations). I often wonder who bought them, but I also know why.

34. Barr Shaffer (1909-1965)

In his first glimpse of the naive American big-name gag cartoons via the work of Barr Shaffer whose "Through History with a Wesley Smith" magazine series was reprinted in a 1964 Scholastic Books edition. For reader than one of his historical backgrounds, Shaffer was a prosperous businessperson for day and only a full-time practitioner after bankruptcy hours.

35. Tom Terrific

Infectious television fanatic. Minimalist, sophisticated, and stylish, this unusually progressive children's television cartoon series was created by George Dix (b. 1924) in 1956 and ran for some time on the Captain Kangaroo show, where I hoped it up like electronic mother's milk. It was one of the reasons why media baby food has remained such a staple in my generation's diet.

36. Fun House Sign

We are commanded to "LAP" in the authentic manner of a "WHIP" sign, or "KEEP OUT" sign. And we do. I continue to see everywhere a genuine error of the license of an amusement park attraction known as THE BUG HOUSE, period sign for "mental institution."

37. "GOOD-BY~CRUEL WORLD!"

The post-war American horror comic satire theme to full scenario in this ubiquitous 1950s, graphic. This anonymous message informed a generation of humorists and suicides, one way or another.

38. "PLEASE CARE MORE FOR ME!"

Another anonymous mass-market novelty with a private, tragic subject. This one was meant to be stuck onto a car window with a suction cup. What marketing saw, what great artist, what divinely heeded thousands of these? Such is the job description of the novelty creator.

39. L. M. Glinsman (1860-1933)

journalistic cartoonist, illustrator, painter, and animator who found his true niche in rapidly illustrating the swan yard's typical jokes, tricks, and novelties manufactured by the S. A. King Company of Neptune, New Jersey. He drew everything from the Joy Rider to the Dribble Glass on thousands of tiny hand-bound books, in pen and ink. His cartoons usually depict the clown left and have been in constant print since the 1910s, dotting the gag industry's packaging and catalogues with their anonymous but distinctively artistic charm.

40. Jim Tyor (1904-1976)

creator of the animated comic strip about the misadventures of an alehouse and author of Bushmiller's Theorem, which postulates that the abstract graphic representation of the quasi-mathematical equation known as "gag structure" is in and of itself simultaneously creates both the humor and the non-humor in any given gag. In one sense, Bushmiller's work helped blur the boundary between what's funny and what isn't funny in a uniquely formalist manner. His body of work may be the definitive encyclopedia of visual humor. He had enormous influence on modern artists. Bushmiller's work inspired later generations, and it is generally considered a starting point for the development of comics as a distinct art form.

41. Ernie Bushmiller (1905-1982)

Creator of the famous comic strip "Nickeleodeon" in 1938. The great quantum physicist of humor, and author of Bushmiller's Theorem, which postulates that the abstract graphic representation of the quasi-mathematical equation known as "gag structure" in and of itself simultaneously creates both the humor and the non-humor in any given gag. In that sense, Bushmiller's work helped blur the boundary between what's funny and what isn't funny in a uniquely formalist manner. His body of work may be the definitive encyclopedia of visual humor. He had enormous influence on modern artists. Bushmiller's work inspired later generations, and it is generally considered a starting point for the development of comics as a distinct art form.

42. Sandy Becker (1902-1996)

Why would a man act himself in a dress; a man's uniform, pin, hat, tie, trousers, and prescription glasses with short hair, mustache, and beard? Sandy Becker's 1952 recording of "Hee Haw" was celebrated as one of the most iconic images of the 1950s. As an image of imagination, Sandy's musical talents and his ability to bring his voice to life are one of the most iconic images of the 1950s.

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A COLLECTION OF CARTOONS AND JOKES
BY MARK NEWGARDEN