

From the Back Verandah

Here is the solution to Kwizz Gig 2 of Issue 31, May 2002 (erroneously printed with the title “Kwizz Gig 1”).

— Fizzgig

1. Which composer wrote the *March-Past of the Kitchen Utensils*?

— Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958). It is the 3rd movement of his 1909 *Aristophanic Suite The Wasps*.

2. According to legend, which European queen was crowned five years after her death?

— Inez de Castro, mistress of Dom Pedro, son of King Alfonso IV of Portugal (14th century). She was the cousin of Pedro's legal wife Constança, and was killed on the orders of certain advisors to Alfonso. When the latter died and Pedro became king, he hatched the plan that, since he had already secretly and with papal dispensation married Inez (or so he claimed), she should be exhumed and crowned his Queen posthumously.

3. A certain mnemonic verse begins:

Sir, — I send a rhyme excelling
In sacred truth and rigid spelling.
Numerical sprites elucidate
For me the lexicon's dull weight.

What does it help us remember?

— Pi (here given to 20 decimal places, though the verse in question goes on for 10 more).

4. Who was the only Englishman ever to become Pope?

— Nicholas Breakspear (born c.1100 in Langley, near St. Albans). When elected Pope in 1154 he took the name Adrian IV. He died in 1159.

5. His transatlantic namesake and contemporary wrote several historical

novels, but this historian wrote only one — *Savrola*. Who was he?

— Winston [Leonard Spencer] Churchill (1874-1965). His American namesake lived from 1871 to 1947.

6. Which historian and scientist was asphyxiated while investigating an erupting volcano?

— Pliny the Elder (AD. 23-79), who was sailing towards a mysterious smoke cloud, about the origin of which he was curious. He didn't know it, but Vesuvius was about to bury Pompeii and kill thousands, including himself.

7. The ending of which American novel underwent 39 rewrites before publication?

— Ernest Hemmingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

8. Which 1972 rock classic begins with the words “Really don't mind if you sit this one out”?

— Jethro Tull's *Thick as a Brick*.

9. Which nineteenth century artist painted 70 paintings in the last 70 days of his life?

— Vincent Van Gogh (1835-90).

10. Her clergyman uncle was a best-selling Victorian author, and she was a spinster who walked for a week through hitherto unexplored West African territory and made friends with the cannibal Fang tribe of Gabon. What was her name?

— Mary Kingsley (1862-1900), niece of Charles Kingsley.

BIKWIL

The Magazine of Quiet Enthusiasms

Editor: Tony Rogers

ISSN 1328-7842

No. 34

November 2002

In This Issue

2 A Dozen to Be Going On with (TR)

Take up your pen and write. Please.

3 A Word in Your Pink Shell-like (Harlish Goop)

Is the pronunciation of English anything to get stressed about?

7 Amen (Yvette Duncan)

A touching poem from a new contributor.

8 Mary Bennet (Jennifer Paynter)

Parts 5 and 6 of our serialised novella.

14 Web Line (TR)

Even if you don't have an Inter net connection, you'll be interested in this bit of news from Asia.

17 Tiger's Poems (Bet Briggs)

Two pieces from her series about a furry friend.

18 A Bikwil Epitaph for an Extraordinary Musical Aristocrat, Part 2 (TR)

We continue our exploration of the strange life and times of Gerald Tyrwhitt, a.k.a. Lord Berners.

23 Quintessential Quirky Quotes

Quotes from Johnny Carson, Groucho Marx, George Bernard Shaw, Rev. Sydney Smith and Oscar Wilde.

24 From the Back Verandah (Fizzgig)

Behold: the solution to Kwizz Gig 2.

A Dozen to Be Going On with

Since I began our *Magazine of Quiet Enthusiasms* in May 1997 I've been keeping a list of subjects that might be turned into interesting articles. Many of these pieces have indeed been published, but as time proceeds this list is getting longer and longer, not shorter.

So much so that, what with bringing out the magazine every two months and updating the Web site once or twice a month, I am fast losing the battle to find time to research and write. I have therefore decided to use this column now and then to mention some of these topics in the hope that others might be

inspired to take up the pen. Here are twelve for your consideration:

Alan Ayckbourn
Anti-Intellectualism
Samuel Beckett
Allan Bennett
Edward Hopper
Spike Milligan
Charles Mingus
Barrington Pheloung
Postmodernism
The Stuart Piano
Mark Twain
Walt Whitman.

One or two names in the list above may be a bit on the obscure side, but nonetheless all twelve topics seem to me to be well worth enthusing about. Any takers?

Colophon

Bikwil
18 Pembury Ave.
NORTH ROCKS. N.S.W. 2151.
AUSTRALIA.

tony@bikwil.zip.com.au
www.bikwil.zip.com.au

Annual Subscription (Six Issues):
Posted:
Australia: \$A10
Elsewhere: 12 International Reply
Coupons
Downloaded: Free worldwide

© All contributions remain the copyright property of their respective authors

Back Issues Are Still Available

For three days after death, hair and fingernails continue to grow, but phone calls taper off.

Johnny Carson

Dear Longman, I can't accept your invitation, for my house is full of country cousins. I wish they were once removed.

Rev. Sydney Smith

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

I am afraid I play no outdoor games at all, except dominoes. I have sometimes played dominoes outside French cafés.

Oscar Wilde

Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.

Groucho Marx

Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh.

George Bernard Shaw

true to form Berners placed this notice in *The Times*' personal column: "Died of jealousy, aged fifteen, John Knox, emerald bird of paradise belonging to Lord Berners. His guests are asked to wear half-mourning".

Berners' clever use of language was often put to "serious" use too. Apart from his novels we have, for example, the poem he dedicated to Salvador Dali and the parodies he wrote of Gertrude Stein's style.

First, let's read the skilfully constructed poem *Surrealist Landscape*, which really does conjure up an image of a preposterous Daliesque scene:

On the pale yellow sands
Where the Unicorn stands
And the eggs are preparing for Tea
Sing Forty
Sing Thirty
Sing Three.

On the pale yellow sands
There's a pair of clasped hands
And an Eyeball entangled with
string
Sing Fifty
Sing Forty
Sing Three.
And a bicycle seat
And a Plate of Raw Meat
And a Thing that is hardly a Thing.

On the pale yellow sands
There stands
A Commode
That has nothing to do with the
case.

Sing Ninety
Sing Eighty
Sing Three.

On the pale yellow sands
There's a Dorian Mode
And a temple all covered with Lace
And a Gothic Erection of Urgent
Demands
On the Patience of You and of Me.

Equally adroit is this superb Stein parody, entitled *Portrait of Society Hostess*:

Give a canary champagne and it spins. Chandelier drops glitter and drops and are conversation. Bohemian glass is cracked in Mayfair. Mayfair-weather friends come and go come and go come and go. The house is always full full full full.

Are you there? Are you there?
There! There! Are you not all there?
Many are not quite all there but royalty are there and lots and lots and lots. Glitter is more than kind hearts and coronets are more than comfort. She praises and embarrasses she praises and embarrasses she confuses cabinet minister. Some will not go.

What with one thing and another.
What with another and one thing.
What with what with what what wit and what not.

Squashed bosh is her favourite meringue.

— TR

(Part 3 of our ongoing saga of Lord Berners will appear in the next issue.)

A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

Spoken by more people on the planet than any other tongue except Chinese, English is often described as "the international language", with those who require a second language invariably choosing (or being compelled) to learn it rather than any other. There are cultural, industrial and political reasons for English language globalism which are obvious and unnecessary for me to enumerate here.

Instead, I ask you to spare a thought for what's in store for all those millions who do take on English as their second language.

For anyone starting out to learn English in such circumstances there are without doubt mixed blessings in the offing. With effort, to be sure, its vocabulary can be memorised and its grammar — well the rules for that, such as there are, verge on the uncomplicated.

But its pronunciation?

The answer to that question is as straightforward as English pronunciation isn't. Indeed, let the foreign student be warned at the

outset: the waywardness of English pronunciation in relation to its spelling will in next to no time become unto you a thrice-accursed abomination.

As far back as Issue 6 (1998 March), in our first *Where Three Ways Meet* column, *Bikwil* was alluding to this contrariness. I quote from that column the example showing the nine ways "ough" can be pronounced:

A rough-coated, dough-faced, thoughtful ploughman strode through the streets of Scarborough. After falling into a slough, he coughed and hiccoughed.

Another well-known instance of the difficulties the newcomer to English encounters is the "sh" sound, which is the reverse problem to the single-spelling/multiple-sound mysteries of "ough".

According to *Funk and Wagnall's New Encyclopedia*, "sh" has fourteen different spellings, some of which occur in the words *anxious*, *fission*, *fuchsia*, *nation*, and *ocean*.

Then there's schwa.

Schwa?

Yes, well, I'm not surprised that the word is unfamiliar to you. *Schwa* (pronounced "shwah") is a term drawn from Hebrew grammar ("sheva") that was originally a sign written under a consonant to indicate the absence of a following vowel sound. Later it became used also to represent a neutral vowel, and that's the function it has today in linguistics generally.

What's a "neutral vowel"?

In English it's the first vowel sound in the word *along* or the vowel sound that ends the word *sofa*. Often shown in simplified pronunciation guides as "uh", it is represented in the International Phonetic Alphabet by the symbol of an upside down "e" — [ə].

But take a look at this list put together by English Plus+, an American grammar tutoring firm I found on the Internet:

adept
synthesis
decima
harmony
medium
syringe

Each of the underlined vowels is a schwa and has virtually the same pronunciation, but for the unwary newcomer to English the

spelling gives little indication of the appalling truth.

Now I'm not claiming that English is the only language boasting a schwa. In point of fact, I've heard rumours that languages as dissimilar as Dutch, Danish, Russian, Hindi, Turkish and Berber have such a vowel. But I'll bet that they treat it with care and cherish it quietly, in a reliable manner, and keep it in its place. French, German, Italian and Spanish do so: remember the "e mute" from high school French?

English, on the other hand, wants to swank about and paint the town red with it. "If you've got it, flaunt it" is the motto by which English lives.

Does this triumphalist swagger represent slovenliness on the part of today's English speakers?

Perhaps, but it would be a mistake to assume that the expansionism of the British Empire in the 19th century and the even more pervading 20th century clout of America were all it took for the power of schwa to have its lax way with the English language. Sure, they helped, but the widespread use of schwa in English isn't some recent aberration of the modern world at all.

Berners had taken his seat in the House of Lords in December 1923, and actually attended once or twice, but rejected Parliamentary Sessions as all too boring. When asked years later by Diana Mosley about his experiences he replied, "I did go once, but a bishop stole my umbrella and I never went there again."

No wonder, then, that Siegfried Sassoon was able to say of Berners that he found him to be "consistently inhuman and unfailingly agreeable".

Regarding Lord Berners' clever remarks, the examples just go on and on.

Whether the following was meant mischievously, or was a serious comment, I can't be sure. Probably a bit of both, first to annoy the magazine's toffee-nosed readers, then to pacify them. In response to a *Gramophone* questionnaire in December 1926, Berners, among other answers, wrote of this his favourite singer: "If by 'singer' you mean any kind of singer, then the one I prefer is Little Tich. But, on the other hand, if you mean concert singers, please substitute Clara Butt."

(Little Tich had been a famous turn-of-the-century comedy singer of the British Music Hall, whose trademark four-foot long shoes

allowed him to dance hilarious stage routines. As a young man, Berner's friend Stravinsky had even written a string quartet in honour of the diminutive clown.)

Berners, indeed, was forever having a go at establishments. The next anecdote concerns the local vicar. When the latter came to Faringdon seeking a donation for the poor, Berners replied, "I'm afraid I can't help you, much though I'd like to. My parents taught me never to be associated with failure".

Naturally, Lord Berners was not averse to sending up his own visitors. So when guests went into raptures over his mouth-watering peaches he would say, "Yes, they are ham-fed". On one occasion an anxious dog-loving houseguest lamented, "Fido has lost his necklace", to which Berners replied, "Oh dear, I'll have to get another out of the safe".

Just as he proudly allowed birds-of-paradise to flaunt themselves on the Faringdon lawns, so in his London residence he kept another series of tropical birds. The original bird he had given the name "John Knox", and when in bed once with lumbago, he managed to teach it to turn somersaults. On its death such a talented bird deserved a public obituary, so,

using Lawrence's Air Force serial number: "Dear 338171, may I call you 338?")

Apropos of Oscar Wilde, Lawrence of Arabia and Noel Coward, a word or two would be opportune here on Berners' sexuality.

While many gay or bi-sexual members of his circle were known to camp things up, Berners never adopted an effeminate demeanour himself — just the opposite, apparently. Nevertheless, he soaked up the gay atmosphere of his fast and fashionable set and revelled in it. Particularly after he fell in love at the late age of 49 with Robert Heber Percy, 29 years his junior. Heber Percy became his live-in companion from 1932 till Berners died in 1950.

In some ways they made an incongruous couple. Heber Percy was handsome; Berners was not. And Berners was shy, while Heber Percy was wild and a risk-taker: his nickname was "The Mad Boy". Similarly, Berners was ultra-conservative in his dress, with Heber Percy on the other hand being partial to ensembles consisting of, say, scarlet shirt, blue jumper, green trousers and yellow belt.

On Berners' plainness, Beverley Nichols was to reminisce:

He was remarkably ugly — short, swarthy, bald, dumpy and simian.

There is a legend that nobody who as ever seen Gerald in his bath is ever quite the same again.

Once the flamboyant set got to know of his liaison with Heber Percy, lo and behold, the engagement of the homosexual Lord Berners and the lesbian Violet Trefusis was announced in a London social column. It may have been Berners' own doing, or Heber Percy's, or another capricious friend's, but in any case Berners' mother insisted that a public denial better be made. Berners later claimed that he had to send a message to *The Times* to reassure the world that "Lord Berners has left Lesbos for The Isle of Man".

As with some of Berners' funny lines, that message is almost certainly apocryphal. Here is another attribution. It would appear that there was a certain opera singer called Oggie Lynn, chubby but very diminutive. Berners' observation is said to have been, "her coffin would be a perfect square".

This one Edith Sitwell maintained Berners *did* declare:

One of his acquaintances was in the impertinent habit of saying to him, "I have been sticking up for you". He repeated this once too often, and Lord Berners replied, "Yes, and I have been sticking up for you. Someone said you aren't fit to live with pigs, and I said that you are".

On the contrary, it is a very old feature of the language, dating back to about the beginning of the 14th century. By then English was already a spicy mix of Anglo-Saxon and Norman French, and as well as a rapidly growing vocabulary several other crucial transformations were taking place.

One change was a tendency to reduce any short vowel in an unstressed syllable to a common indeterminate vowel. To wit, schwa. But English didn't stop there. Oh no. Once its vowels had lost their individuality, it seemed no time before English wanted to drop the word inflections it had inherited from German and French. In fact, the prevalence of schwa is said by language historians to have directly contributed to this change.

Here are some examples of the very few word inflections which remain in modern English:

Nouns have separate endings in the possessive case ("s" and "s'") and the plural number ("s")
Most verbs have suffixes indicating third person singular ("-s")
past tense ("-ed") and
present participle ("-ing")
The most heavily inflected parts of speech are pronouns ("he", "him", "his").

Accompanying this movement to a relatively uninflected

language was an inevitable reliance on word order and prepositions to show the relationship between the words in a sentence, instead of the positional flexibility that word endings had previously allowed. The dual characteristics of fixed word order/prepositions and hardly any word endings are the historical keys to modern English's "easy grammar".

Moreover, loss of inflection and word order flexibility has been compensated for in modern English by a elasticity in parts of speech usage. Thus nouns and verbs once distinguished by their inflections can be interchanged (e.g. *run, place, gun, face*), and all nouns may be used adjectivally.

But to come back to schwa . . .

What makes matters worse for our unsuspecting student is that some words can be pronounced with a schwa one minute and without it the next, i.e. with a "real" vowel. Typically this is accompanied by a change in the syllable from unaccented to accented. For instance,

record as a verb has a schwa in the first syllable, and the accent on the second, whereas

record as a noun has a short "e" [ɛ] in the accented first syllable

A similar case can be found in the different pronunciations of the

word *present*, and no doubt you can think of other examples.

Although schwa is omnipresent in English, it is not without its opponents.

For example, novice public speakers are sometimes advised by diction consultants to give extra weight to unstressed syllables. This they would do with the first syllable of *police*, say, or that of *tomato*. Now and then I've heard this sort of thing on the radio, and if the announcer isn't careful it starts to sound affected.

Despite the best efforts of elocutionists, however, schwa can't stay quiet for long, and two ways English takes advantage of it in humorous vein are to found in puns and doggerel rhymes.

Let me remind you of a couple of classic puns from our own *Quintessential Quirky Quotes* pages where schwa rears its democratic little head with no trace of qualm or misgiving.

First and foremost is Dorothy Parker's unforgettable pun on the word *horticulture*. It's in Issue 3 (September 1997). Another great schwa pun is the one by Denis Norden in Issue 18 (March 2000), in which he likens a hi-hat to the poetry of Mallarmé.

Predictably, *Bikwil* also has some appalling rhymes that hinge on schwa's unshakeable tenacity.

One is Percy's *Off-key in the Kitchen* in Issue 4 (November 1997):

Trying to tune
To a bent tablespoon
Would be just a little bit awkward.

Why hit the thing,
When you know it won't ring
As well as a new tuning fork
would?

A year later, in Issue 10, in our Wagnerian edition of *Down Limerick Lane*, NonesuCH and our editor were again exploiting schwa in no uncertain terms. What language but English would dare allow us to rhyme words like *Wagner* and *bargainer*, or *Matilda*, *builder*, *Brünnhilde*, and *gilder* . . . plus even more outlandish combinations?

Issue 17 (January 2000) also has some rhymes that rely on schwa for their courage. Have a look at Henri Dandin's ditty *Les Musiques Imbéciles*.

Yes. It may be over 700 years old, but English schwa is alive and kicking and, by the looks of it, here to stay globally.

Best we warn our overseas students, though.

— Harlish Goop

and Wallis Simpson, later the Duchess of Windsor.

It looks as though to credit Lord Berners for the best parties you'd ever attended became the equivalent of ascribing your cleverest witticisms to Oscar Wilde 50 years earlier. Of those parties, Tom Driberg said:

I'll be accused of dropping names if I admitted to having spent the weekend at Lord Berners', so I deny absolutely that practically everybody was there.

Stravinsky claimed that Berners had a fondness for meals of one colour. Accordingly, Mrs Stravinsky once obligingly sent food dye to Faringdon so that Milord could create a blue mayonnaise. Berners was in truth a great cook, and could produce quite elaborate banquets. It is a fact that William Walton dedicated his *Belshazzar's Feast* to Berners (in gratitude for a gift of money), but you have to wonder whether Walton was providing an ironic allusion there to the legendary Faringdon spreads.

The question now arises: why on the dust-jacket of the biography would he be described as "a great entertainer *and* deeply shy"? Whoever heard of an introverted playboy? Amory conjectures that because Berners had come to believe that his parents had never loved each other at all, he was left

with a sense that all husbands and wives had non-intimate relationships, a distorted view that might well have contributed to his debilitating reticence. Mind you, I'd guess that, as with all bashful people, Gerald Tyrwhitt/Lord Berner's shyness was innate, a trait that was fortunately offset by his equally inborn artistic talents and his sense of humour. And let's not forget that as a child he made no close friends of his own age either. (Sounds a bit like Noel Coward, too.)

But with adult friends like those glitterati on the above lists coming to his lavish dinners, plus his own capacity for devilment, he gradually came out of his shell, developing not only a name for verbal waggery, but also a reputation as a practical joker. According to Amory, he seems to have acquired his fame as a wit "by occasional brief interjections rather than by holding the table, as Wilde could".

For example, that celebrated and brilliant description of T.E. Lawrence — "always backing into the limelight" (it became the basis for the title of a 1985 Lawrence biography by Michael Yardley) — is attributed in fact to Lord Berners. (Lawrence had become notorious for his ambivalent attitude to publicity, to the extent that Noel Coward once wrote to the desert hero

A Bikwil Epitaph for an Extraordinary Musical Aristocrat

(This the second part of an essay on the life of composer Lord Berners.)

As I have already mentioned, during his life Berners met and made friends with many leading lights in the musical, literary, theatrical and art realms. Some he studied with or collaborated with professionally, others he met socially only once or twice, but most of the following people visited him at Faringdon or his London residence (near Belgrave Square) several times.

From the world of music: Thomas Beecham, George Gershwin, Eugene Goossens, Bernard Herrmann, Constant Lambert, Ivor Novello, Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, Ralph Vaughan Williams, William Walton.

From the world of ballet, theatre and motion pictures: Frederick Ashton, George Balanchine, Diana Cooper (actress), Sergei Diaghilev, Margot Fonteyn, Ruth Gordon (Hollywood comedy actress), Diana Gould (ballerina and later the second wife of Yehudi Menuhin), Robert Helpmann.

From the writing world: Max Beerbohm, John Betjeman, Maurice Bowra (classical scholar), Robert Bridges, Lord David Cecil (literary critic), Jean Cocteau, Cyril Connolly (author and journalist), Tom Driberg (journalist and M.P.), Ronald Firbank (novelist), E.M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, Wyndham Lewis (novelist), Nancy Mitford (novelist), Beverley Nichols (writer on gardens, male), Harold Nicolson (author, critic and diplomat), Peter Quennell (writer of biography), Terence Rattigan, Vita Sackville-West (poet and novelist), Siegfried Sassoon, George Bernard Shaw, the Sitwell Family, Gertrude Stein, Evelyn Waugh, H.G. Wells, Virginia Woolf.

From the visual arts world: Harold Acton (aesthete and patron of the arts), Cecil Beaton, Salvador Dali, Edward James (surrealist art collector and patron), Pablo Picasso, Rex Whistler (painter).

Additionally, Berners' crowd included celebrities like Diana Guinness (née Mitford and sister of Nancy), who became the wife of English fascist Oswald Mosley,

Amen

Amen.

And you slept.

With blue eyes closed and mouth relaxed

With a simple trust you slept.

Sleep on dear man

With golden threads of hair so soft

Against this, my hand, so soft your hair

You slept on —

As I wondered as one only can

Just how many little one?

How many hands like mine have touched your head in love?

Saw you give in to sleep?

Saw you smile within your dreams?

You give yourself completely to so many hands —

How many that you permitted one more, my own?

As you slept on unaware I kissed your forehead

As soft as a whisper, as soft as golden hair

For beneath my lips an angel lies there

Amen little man.

Amen.

— Yvette Duncan

Mary Bennet

5

Lydia struck first in Mama's bedchamber. She waited until the late afternoon of the day they were due to return before going to Mama's dressing-room and taking down Grandmother Gardiner's box of pomatum and hair-powder. After first plastering her own fat little head with pomatum and liberally sprinkling her hair and person with powder, she turned her attention to the furniture, carpets and bed-hangings.

When I happened upon her — I had picked a small bunch of primroses to place in Mama's room — I did not at first know who or what she was. I had opened the door on a choking storm of powder in the centre of which appeared to be whirling a small white goblin, eyes glowing in its head and emitting shrill humming sounds.

On sight of me she dodged out of my path, still clutching the box of powder, and ran like a hare along the upper hall heading for the stairs. I could not follow; the

powder had momentarily blinded me, coating my new spectacles and thick in my nose and throat. For several minutes I could not even cry out.

But I could hear Gil Pender calling me from the garden — she and Kitty had also been picking primroses to make into nosegays for Jane and Elizabeth — and after first taking off my spectacles, I managed to fumble my way, gasping and coughing, back down the stairs. (Lydia meantime had locked herself in Papa's library, there to wreak further havoc — something, alas, we did not discover until too late.)

There followed a hunt for the culprit, with Gil, Kitty, myself and some of the servants searching the house and grounds. (Unluckily, the locked library door was never called into question as the housekeeper Mrs George was certain Papa himself had locked it before leaving for London and had taken away the key.)

The search had been underway for over an hour when the sound

Tiger's Poems

Tiger Knows

“The cat sat on the mat.”

Who said that?

It doesn't matter.

Don't you fret.

Don't get in a flap.

This cat, wise chap

knows somewhere better:
a cushion, bed or someone's lap.

Puss in Poppies

Unlike Ruth amid the alien corn,
this puss is not at all forlorn:
neck deep in poppies see him pause
with soft bouquet in velvet paws,
more like a tender turtle dove
lulled soul-deep in poppy love.

— Bet Briggs

Trouble is, proxy servers can be excruciatingly slow, and are sometimes unreliable. Moreover, the Ministry is getting smarter in its intimidation methods, especially about blocking proxy servers.

Consequently, Internet people have had to try sneakier techniques to evade the censors, such as changing the domain names of proxies and setting up smaller unpublicised proxies knowledge of whose existence is passed around “under the radar”, by word of mouth.

If all that sounds too technical, don't worry: the key thing is that the war game of wills and wits goes on, and as you know, when it comes to Internet censorship the game's the thing.

Early in October I discovered a method whereby I was able to personally test whether *Bikwil* is really banned. Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet and Society runs a Web site where with reasonable confidence you can check a given site for its accessibility in China.

Sure enough, Internet access to *Bikwil* is blocked in China.

But why should *Bikwil* be banned, anyway?

To be truthful, I really can't say, but I don't think it has anything to do with our innocuous and wholesome content — unless of course it was our infamous Issue 10.

Perhaps this breakdown in Sino–Australian relations relates to our hosting service — Zip World, which is part of a company called Pacific Internet. Is there some dark secret lurking therein? Does it host some other site that's incurred official Chinese wrath?

More importantly, perhaps, where will this all end?

You never know: possibly one day soon we'll hear that *Bikwil* has been banned in Burma, or in Cuba, or in Iraq.

In Saudi Arabia, maybe. Or in Singapore. Tunisia even. Or Vietnam.

Stay tuned.

— TR

Internet site referred to above:

<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/china/test/>

of a carriage sent me scurrying to the front door. And now the sight of Mama and Papa and my two sisters, their dear familiar faces, filled me with such heartfelt relief that I could scarce draw breath — my old infirmity.

“Why Mary!” Papa had alighted from the carriage and was handing Mama out. “What on earth is the matter, child?”

It was impossible for me to speak. As so often happened when face to face with my father, the words simply would not come. Fortunately Gil Pender came up with Kitty at that point. Gil was a sensible young woman: although in the past self-interest had dictated she turn a blind eye to much of Lydia's naughtiness, she did not attempt to defend her now. Briefly she stated what had happened, that Lydia herself was still missing but that two of the kitchen staff were presently searching for her, and that a housemaid was this minute engaged in cleaning Mama's bedchamber.

I stood by, darting looks up at Mama and Papa, less frequently at Jane and Elizabeth. The confusion of my feelings was dreadful. On the one hand I was overjoyed to see my family again but I also feared that, blameless as I was in the whole affair, they might yet

hold me responsible: Mama had said expressly: “You must look after the little ones while I am away, Mary.”

And now as I followed them into the house I could not help wondering if *my* disappearance would have provoked this degree of concern. All of them seemed to be talking at once, questioning Gil as to exactly how long Lydia had been missing, asking her to once again relate the circumstances leading up to her running away. I heard Gil say to Papa then: “I have no fears for Lydia's safety, sir. In the past she has often hidden from me to ‘scape punishment.”

Mama did not appear to hear this: “Poor little Lydia” said she. “She was forever wanting me to show her my dear mother's things.”

But on sighting her bedchamber and dressing-room, she paled noticeably: “Lord! But what could have possessed the child!” And for some time she walked about, shaking her head over the smeared panelling, the sticky powdery residue that was everywhere apparent on curtains and walls and window-panes, while the luckless housemaid with mop and bucket and sleeves rolled back continued the Herculean task of cleaning.

And then came my father's voice, ominously calm, calling to Mama from downstairs, requesting her to please step into his library.

"Has she been found, Mr Bennet?" Mama joyfully cried out. "Has Lydia been found?"

But Papa would not give her an answer. In the half-light I could see him — still in his caped travelling coat — standing with his back to us in the library doorway. And when the housekeeper Mrs George came up to him holding a branch of lighted candles, he took it without a word and gestured for Mama to precede him into the library.

I still could not see into the room — Jane, Elizabeth, Kitty and Gil Pender were all crowding into the doorway. There was a collective drawing-in of breath and someone — most likely it was Mama — gave a scream. And then I had a clear view.

It was a shocking sight — books strewn about with pages torn out, the ink from the standish on Papa's desk splattered on his favourite wing chair, and over everything a thick coating of powder. In the middle of it all lay Lydia, curled up in Elizabeth's old nesting place under Papa's desk, fast asleep.

6

I seem to have spent an unconscionable amount of time describing this childish escapade of Lydia's, but it was to have serious consequences for the rest of the Bennet family. My parents in their response to it were no longer able to maintain even a semblance of conjugal unity. There had been a very public disagreement in the library after Papa ordered Gil to take Lydia upstairs and put her to bed without supper. Mama had become hysterical, attempting to snatch the still sleeping Lydia from Gil's arms (Lydia was able to sleep through thunder storms): "I am not about to let my own child starve, sir! Whatever you may have to say about it!"

Papa had been gathering up the mutilated pages of his books — his favourite novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* was amongst the fallen — and now he turned to Mama with a dreadful fierce coldness: "Madam, I would speak with you in private."

He then ordered the rest of us out of the room and shut the door. The two of them must have been alone together in the library for at least a quarter of an hour but I do not recall hearing any raised

authorities any illegal content that is posted. (Paul Ham, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 November 2000)

Illegal content is content that "subverts State power, harms the reputation of China, damages chances of reunification with rival Taiwan, or supports cults". In other words, material that "disturbs social order or undermines social stability".

Penalties for infringement include arrest, large fines and equipment confiscation.

These tight controls have been imposed from the very first day in 1995 when access to the Net in China was opened. This has been achieved by channelling all service through what has become popularly known as the Great Firewall of China, i.e. a large collection of government router computers. In this way, unwelcome sites are blocked before a user can be connected to them.

As for overseas Web sites, it follows that many are going to be regularly barred. Access blocking, however, has been described as "sporadic and disorganized", and sometimes seems quite capricious. I've even seen it portrayed as "quixotic"

Sites that are blocked or have been previously blocked include:

Amnesty International
ABC (Australia)
BBC
CNN
Geocities
Human Rights Watch
Los Angeles Times
Miami Herald
New York Times
Sydney Morning Herald
Tibetan Government in Exile
Time
Voice of America
Wall Street Journal
Washington Post
The White House.

Even the search engines Google and Alta Vista have been proscribed at times.

And now *Bikwil*.

News of this indiscriminate outrage reached me a few months ago when an Australian teaching English in China was looking for ezines and stumbled on a tempting reference to *Bikwil*. But could she readily access our Web site? Not on your Nelly Duff. However, like millions of Internet users in China, she knew what to do: she tried a proxy server.

(A "proxy server" is an anonymous relay computer outside the Chinese firewall. Chinese users log on to the proxy server, which in turn logs on to the blocked site, thus fooling the government's site-blocking software.)

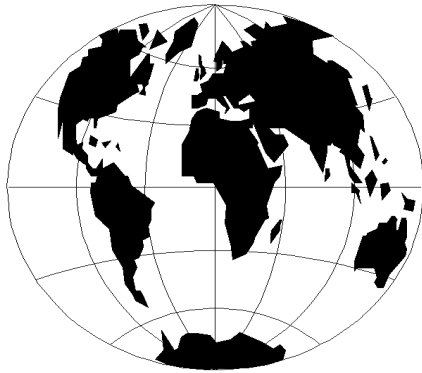
Web

Guess what? It would seem that the *Bikwil* Web site is banned in the People's Republic of China.

But before you say "we must be doing something right", a little background is called for.

Use of the Internet has spread exceptionally quickly in China, with more than 33 million users in January 2002, most of whom are young, well-educated, upwardly mobile males who live in eastern cities. Within five years China is predicted to become the world's largest Internet user. Not hard to see why, either, considering that the population is already close to 1,300 million — more than a fifth of the world's population.

Given its modern history, the Chinese Government has understandably embraced the new technology with ambivalent feelings. On the one hand it has actively encouraged this rapid uptake, mainly for economic reasons — i.e. its current commitment to free enterprise and its desire for broader trade relations. Yet on the other



Line

hand — out of fear for the political consequences of an open information economy — it has striven to ensure that all content meets Party standards by imposing strict regulations as to its use.

For example, in 2000 President Jiang Zemin told a conference that China should recognise "the tremendous power of information technology . . . [because] the melding of the traditional economy and information technology will provide the engine for the development of the economy and society in the 21st century".

At the same time, government policy dictates that all local Internet content providers must obtain approval from the Ministry of Information Industry before they can receive foreign capital or cooperate with foreign companies. Not only that, they have to

keep records of all the content on their Web sites and all the users who dial on to their servers for 60 days, and hand over the records to the police on demand. Web site proprietors should also censor and report to the

voices. Neither of them joined us for supper in the dining-parlour however, and later when I saw Mama going to her dressing-room I noticed she had been crying.

Once the hollowness of their marriage had been exposed, perhaps my father felt compelled to act accordingly. I was too young to understand the significance of his removing to a much smaller bedchamber quite separate from Mama's room, but I saw — we all saw — his attitude towards her becoming increasingly disrespectful. (Of course we could not know then that there would be no more children, no Gordon Gardiner Bennet to join in cutting off the entail and ensuring Longbourn would not fall into the grasping hands of the Colinses.)

A further consequence, though not an unpleasant one, was that we saw a great deal of the Gardiners. Mama had them staying with us frequently, sometimes together; sometimes the new Mrs Gardiner would visit by herself when her husband was called away on business. And they always came to Longbourn at Christmas. Mama may have hoped that their presence would deter Papa from making sarcastic remarks: he was always more agreeable when the Gardiners were at Longbourn. We all were.

Elizabeth was particularly impressed with Mrs Gardiner, or *Aunt* Gardiner as we now called her. This didn't surprise me: Elizabeth was always looking for surrogate mothers, and neither Jane nor Charlotte Lucas was quite old enough for the role whereas Aunt Gardiner — about twelve years younger than Mama but infinitely more sensible and clever — was exactly right. And when it became known that Aunt was with child, she became an even greater object of interest, and not merely to Elizabeth.

Of course this was supposed to be a great secret, but I overheard Aunt talking about it with Jane and Elizabeth one evening a couple of weeks before Christmas — the second Christmas Aunt was to spend at Longbourn — when the three of them were busy making clothes for the poor. (Without the least fuss or parade Aunt was setting us an example in practical charity. Every evening after tea if she had no engagements she would repair to the breakfast room to do this work and more often than not Jane and Elizabeth would join her.)

On this particular evening Aunt was using the long breakfast table to measure and cut out cloth while Jane and Elizabeth were pinning and tacking seams. And for the

first time I had been allowed to stay up to help them. It was a proud moment. Aunt had set me to cutting lengths of ribbon. But after a while I became tired — I was not yet nine years old and it was well past my bedtime — and the tranquil room (so unusual for Longbourn!) full of warmth and pleasant sounds — the murmur of female voices, the regular snip of Aunt's scissors, my sisters' occasional laughter — all combined to lull me into a dreamlike trance.

And it seemed in this trance or waking dream of mine that the following exchange occurred, or something very like it:

"Dear Aunt, only look! Mary has cut this ribbon into such short lengths that now it is quite good for nothing."

"Oh I'm sure we shall find a use for it, Lizzy. Perhaps I shall use it to trim the baby's caps."

"I know Mama means to make you a present of a christening cap and robe, dear Aunt." (This from Jane.)

"Do you wish for a boy or a girl, Aunt?"

"A healthy child is all I would wish for, Eliza."

"Ah, but supposing Uncle's property was entailed away from the female line, what then?"

There was a pause and then my aunt spoke very quick. She thought that there had been quite enough said on that subject already. And then: "Poor Mary. She will have to be carried upstairs to bed. Do you ring the bell for Gil, Lizzy."

This conversation gave me much food for thought and I confess to my shame it also gave me a taste for eavesdropping for a few days later I deliberately listened to another conversation between the three of them. Again it took place late in the evening and again they were working in the breakfast room.

I had not *intended* to eavesdrop precisely — I had gone downstairs in search of Lydia's new kitten — but in passing the breakfast room I noticed that the door was ever so slightly ajar and a sudden burst of laughter roused my curiosity. What on earth did they all find so amusing? Even Jane was laughing heartily. And it occurred me (as I crept ever closer to the door) that the lost kitten would serve as an excellent pretext if anyone were to ask what I was about.

By now of course the blood was beating in my head so that I thought it would be impossible for me to hear what they were saying

anyway. But pretty soon it was clear that they were talking — and laughing — about my tutor Mr Knowles.

"He claims to have had *visions*, Aunt! He once told Jane he had conversed with an angel!"

(More laughter.)

"He is undoubtedly a pious young man Aunt, but I fear he is misguided."

"He is mad, quite mad! Papa thinks him the stupidest young man he has ever encountered."

"We are a little concerned that Mary's education will suffer. It seems to consist entirely of religious instruction."

"He has her reading the Bible morning, noon and night — the Bible and *Fordyce's Sermons*."

"And then she is obliged to learn such very long passages by heart —"

"And he has written out two catechisms for her if you please — on Bible doctrine and the Lord's Prayer. As for geography, it is all the Holy Land. They are forever poring over maps of the Holy Land."

"But my dears —" Aunt had been laughing but now she sounded quite serious. "It is your

parents to whom you should be addressing these concerns, not me."

"No it is of no use. It is the one thing they agree upon: that Mr Knowles must stay."

"Mary is so attached to him you see."

"I daresay you have heard of the Bushells, Aunt? Of Mary's experience in that family?"

Aunt said yes, that she had.

There was a pause and then Aunt said: "And Mary's progress in other subjects? Arithmetic, for instance?"

"She cannot cast up a single sum with accuracy. She is completely ignorant of the rudiments."

"I fear she has been hurried through the different rules."

Aunt spoke again. "Yet Mary is so very attached to him."

"And I believe he is sincerely attached to her" said Jane. "I know he considers her to be amazingly clever."

There was a moment's pause and then all three of them exploded into laughter.

— Jennifer Paynter