

He came for tea in our East Hull Vicarage every Monday eating poor old us out of house and home, so hungry you could imagine him demolishing a whole cow. His friend was from a fussy bygone age demanding our Monday sardine sandwiches be served on a silver tray. Not a lot of silver trays in East Hull in the 1960s. His poshness was in marked contrast to our Thursday guests, an anarchic class of kids, one menace dressed in red and black. Desperate Dan, Lord Snooty, the Bash Street Kids, Denis the Menace: all my imaginary friends, stars of the Dandy and Beano, my favourite comics whose red and black print paved the way for Technicolor. My parents' posh friends with degrees from Oxford despised comics, thinking they'd lead me into bad ways. I could see their point, but there again, fat lot of good an Oxford education had done them, ending up working in darkest Hull. Comic communication was through vivid cartoons with speech bubbles attached to the speaker with a beak, and thought bubbles with mini bubbles leading a tell-tale trail to whoever's brain had created them. It was all very neat and made for a fast-moving narrative and I still tend to look at the world through Beano eyes: the body language, the speech bubbles, the thought bubbles...

I suppose life is defined by our speech and thought bubbles and where we draw the border between the two. A few geniuses are festooned with thought bubbles galore, a cerebral flatulence with any speech bubbles few and succinct: Einstein with his $E=mc^2$, Boltzmann with his $S=K\log W$, Maurice Drake with his Beanz Meanz Heinz.

According to graffiti daubed on a Cambridge lecture hall wall Geneticist Gregor Mendel's speech bubble is very terse: *XX – female; YX – male; YYY – Delilah*. Cambridge always produced a better class of graffiti:

To do is to be – Descartes

No! To be is to do – Satre.

No! Do-be-do-be-do – Sinatra.

Thought bubbles break out in songs.

Most people, I'm sorry to say, overdose on speech bubbles, pearls of wisdom picked up from their parents, teachers, lovers, politicians, radio, TV, the Daily Mail. Not many thought bubbles behind them: cerebral retentives, aka the Church of England's House of Bishops.

Jim Carey's *Liar, Liar* and David Lodge's *Thinks* explore what it would be like if our thought bubbles ran amok, as they do with dementia and Tourettes.

I was once in Llandaff Cathedral awarding end-of-year prizes to pupils from the Bishop of Llandaff's High School. A very churchy occasion. One lad, a brilliant mathematician had Tourettes, but he'd got the top mark so he just had to have a prize. His teachers squirmed as he expletived his way down the cathedral nave towards me. I'm a closet mathematician and as I shook his hand I asked him about convergence series, infinite series of numbers which have a finite sum. The swearing stopped as we chatted happily, saved by Maths.

It's interesting how we herd our thought and speech bubbles. D H Lawrence is running amok in your head, yet you stutter, 'Don't you think Beethoven's Choral Symphony is divine?' She, who has Emily Bronte running amok in her head, replies, 'Absolutely, let's play the CD over a bite of supper.' Speaking, or thinking, of D H Lawrence, I guess he wanted us to reboot all our bubbles and chill out. Young children, the very elderly – and Queens - are such fun telling it straight rather than over-censoring the bubbles. Yet life would be impossible if thought bubbles had no filter. We'd live in our world of our own.

Influencers like the Stationers' Company explore appropriate filters, enabling life in all its fullness and fun, walking the narrow line between censorship and anarchy, recalling us to think on whatsoever is good, whatsoever is honourable, all that is excellent etc.

That outstanding work of fiction, *The Book of Common Prayer* describes the C of E as a mean between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing and of too much easiness in admitting any variation from it. Every Communion begins with this lovely collect for purity, asking God to help sort our thought and speech bubbles:

*ALMIGHTY God, unto whom all hearts are open,
all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid;
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love thee,
and worthily magnify thy holy Name, through Christ our Lord.*

Mind you, I think Jesus was God with Tourettes.

There are two ancient variants to our Gospel reading describing two conflicting emotion bubbles, one where Jesus is angry at the leper, the other where he is gutted by his plight.

Why the angry bubble? Angry at the separation, angry at nature red in tooth and claw? 'Things just shouldn't be like this, let's change them...' The New English Bible weirdly conflates the two, having a very Anglican Jesus look on the leper *with warm indignation!* You can sort of get the being-gutted bubble. Whenever you see someone desperately ill or disabled, aren't you gutted by them, don't you long to heal them? Whenever you watch the news and see the latest famine, the latest war, don't you want in your heart to feed them, to bring peace? Whenever you see a marriage going pear-shaped don't you long for cases of the finest wine to make everyone happy?

I once lost it one tea-time when our girls were playing up.
'Be happy, Daddy,' urged our two year old Hannah.
Don't you long to break the impasse
when a feud has gone on for ever by whispering,
'Forgive me. I forgive you?'

We have had a wonderful Jubilee weekend with so many iconic images, not least Paddington and the Queen and their stash of marmalade sandwiches!
But the image which would have trumped them all would have been if at the Thanksgiving Service in St Pauls Prince William had said 'Stuff the protocol!' had leapt over all the pews and dignitaries, and simply embraced his brother relegated to the second row.

So many people who have lost a brother or sister would move heaven and earth to embrace them again: 'Rejoice with me, I have found the brother I have lost.'

Don't you long for just one occasion when you won't go along with the crowd or latest compromise and instead make a stand unto death, and maybe, just maybe, rise like Him from the grave?

Jesus healed, partied, broke Sabbath lockdown rules, produced wine, forgave, was crucified, rose again. God-with-Tourettes, God's thought-bubbles made flesh. *Verbum Domini manet in aeternum.*

Of course, God's eternity will be defined by every good thought bubble running amok, the celestial choir endlessly trilling Beethoven's Ninth, which itself aims to redirect our thought and speech bubbles:

*O Freunde, nicht diese Töne
Sondern laßt uns angenehmere anstimmen und freudenvollere -
O friends, not these tones!
Rather let us tune our voices more pleasantly and joyously.*

Paving the way for setting Schiller's Ode to Joy to music, with additional lyrics by D H Lawrence and Emily Bronte sung by Desperate Dan and Lord Snooty best left to your imagination. As a teenager I learnt *Ode to Joy* off by heart, hoping to impress the examiner in my German O level Oral.

Freude schöner Götterfunken, Tochter aus Elysium... But he interrogated me about the distinctly joyless Ruhr, Germany's equivalent of Middlesbrough but without the glamour. So my debut was sadly postponed fifty years until today, foreshadowing that day when all our thought and speech bubbles meet merrily in heaven.

*What is soiled, make thou pure;
What is wounded, work its cure;
What is parched, fructify;
What is rigid, gently bend;
What is frozen, warmly tend;
Strengthen what goes erringly.*

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The Stationers' Company Richard Johnson Service: Vita humana bulla Est.