

# MISCELLANEOUS SHORT SHORTS

*by* DeWitt Henry

## WHAT IS A JERK?

A jerk is a chiseler in the traffic jam, say on the Long Island expressway. Three lanes immobile, motors revving, heat shimmering, the cars barely rolling, and the line stretching out of vision up ahead, over hill, around and up again. While on the other side, of course, the traffic snaps and whizzes past at seventy normal miles per hour.

The jerk is that guy, or that lady, that Archie Bunker, that teen babe in the red Subaru convertible, cell phone to her ear, who pulls out suddenly from behind you and accelerates up the breakdown lane, setting an example for other jerks, one, two, five, ten. And somewhere up ahead, then, they have to chisel back into line. They are never punished (you fume) with just deserts. No cop tickets. No irate citizens stone-walling them, refusing to let them back in line. Forcing them to wait stalled, while grim and righteous, those who have waited as they should, those who played by the rules, inch by inch, on and on, those just within the injustice visited upon them all, together, creep by toward their gradual restorations of freedom, progress, destinations -- eventually. No. The jerks through uncaring and audacity get away with being jerks. They even feel superior (you can tell from their jerk smirks). They barge back in line just where they need to. They intimidate citizen Jones there, who feels annoyed but what's the use? who tries to stone-wall, tries to keep close to the bumper ahead, keep pressing close, exclusive, just as the jerk honks, jerk grapples for eye contact, jerk edges pristine

paint-job and bumper (or maybe edges a junker with a nothing-to-lose bumper) against the citizen's bumper, daring to dare -- go on, run into ME, I'm barging in another inch or two, brake now and give me room or we scrape. There, see. You blinked. You are intimidated. Whistling, perhaps flipping you the bird, the jerk rolls into line while you brake to let her or him. Jerk!!!! Jerk!!! Chiseler!!!

Maybe you, citizen, should be a jerk. Jerks get where they are going. You, citizen, what about you? Handy, dandy, where's the jerk? Conformists. Sheep. All of you, all of us, boiling out our radiators. Spending our day, our days, our lives in cooperative stasis.

Maybe. Why not? Hell. You check the car behind. You check the quickening pace of other chiselers now, pulling out, rolling by, rejecting the collective folly of the law abiding. Abiding! you sneer. Abiding! Lunacy, you sneer. Now! Your turn, your break, your instant to intimidate! You do, you force your way into the breakdown lane, accelerate at last. You are passing the cars and families and drivers you have been watching ahead of you for trancelike, numbing, seething hours now, when the one ahead now in the breakdown lane, that Jeep Cherokee, hits brakes, slows. The surge slows. You come to a stop in the breakdown lane. Jammed with the jerks, the renegades, the take-it-into-their-own-handers. Your illegal lane of opportunism stops dead. Filled up. Over subscribed. Crowded and jammed. And wouldn't you know it, just then, just then, the abiding lane of citizens you left, well, it is moving, however slowly, creeping, rolling.

That family man there, that baldy with his two and one half kids, his singing wife, that guy with the windows down and no a/c -- he's been in your mirror all day, following behind you. Now he is passing, laughing out loud, laughing meanly. At YOU, you. You jerk.

## TRAIN STATION

In the midst of thriving and indifferent life, a circus of departures and arrivals--of loudspeaker echoes announcing that his train was boarding on track 603, of people milling and bustling towards the platform doors (where suddenly cold air spilled as a porter pushed a luggage cart), of smells of pizza and cappuccino from the nearby concessions, of strains of the live Irish band across the marble floor, which rose with rhythm and bite above the echoing murmur, of policemen vigilantly watching, of the elderly woman I had seen earlier now dragging her oversized suitcase like the burden of her cares, of the harried housewife and her rude and misbehaving girl and boy who had been teasing the blind man's dog just across from us, of the businessman talking into his cell phone about his wife's obesity, of sweepers, of sleepers, of showoffs, of con-artists and of frantic searchers and askers, of rich, of poor, of found and of lost--in this midst, in this swirl and confusion, there we embraced, there I clung to him hard, there I reached my arms around his neck and felt his arms crush, our closeness through the bulky coats, our lips oblivious, forever kiss. "Go," I told him. "Go. Just go." I am Anna. He is Vronksy. I am Guappa. He is Roberto. "Go." Motion is the dream, our separation, his steps of purpose like sleepwalking, intent on a mission out past the hulking diesel engine and the platform trembling with its power.

## THE REAL THING

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"Poets are...always sticking their emotions in things that have no emotions.'?"

--J.D. Salinger, "Teddy"

1.??

Instance: this classic Coke bottle. Empty. A twelve-ounce glass container, tinted green, with fluted contours like a hobble skirt, and tapering to a neck and mouth. Not a milk bottle. Not a beer bottle. Not a container for orange juice, tomato juice, or Gatorade. Not a even a bottle for other carbonated soft drinks. One of millions in space and in time, created in one of hundreds of glass bottle factories around the world, it has been standardized by molds, themselves standardized. This bottle, this very bottle, empty as it stands on the table before me, here in my kitchen, in Watertown, Massachusetts, in 2017, could be interchanged in space and time, past or future. It has that permanence, unchanged from some other bottle, say, in my youth, on some other table in 1948, in Philadelphia, empty now where I have placed it. Or this bottle might be indistinguishable from a bottle my son's unborn son might place down on some kitchen table years after my death, years after even my memory as ceased to be a conscious presence to my son. But interchangeable is not identical. This bottle is this bottle, here, now.??

2.??

The green upsets me. The tint of thick glass. The distortions of light, magnifying and containing the kitchen shapes around it. The pattern itself, familiar yet distant, closed and invariable. The fluted sides, the grooves, formed by what force? Ordained. The machined scrawl, cursive, of the logo. "Coca Cola," precise regardless of scale, here, on billboards, in the sky. The C and C like tidal waves. The bottle neck, constricting. Lips cold. The green of endings, illness, menace -- unnatural casts of brightness under churning skies. ??

3.??

Alas, poor Coke! Quite empty? Where be your syrups now? Your sugars? Where your caffeine? Melancholy Coke, the lips have vanished that have known you. Twelve full ounces, long since drained, the gulper too, and spirit's quench. ??

4. ??

Curved below, curved above. Nestles to the grasping hand. Grace to these curves, long and lickable up the surface of smooth glass. Between the crevices. Smooth letters of the raised logo, raised like scars. The tapering neck. The round bulges, ridges, then convex bracelet, then ridge and curved opening. Shaped for lips. Shaped for sucking. Shaped for probing with the tongue. And plentitude. The once and future Coke, the omnipresent Coke. The readily available. The promise of relief. Of solace. My hand craves the feel. The sliding down into that finger closing grip. So mine. Spinning now like Fortune's wheel, it slows and stops and points at you, at me!

5.??

Breakable. Smash-able. The smug form, thick glass. Designer detritus. As fixed and self satisfied as the glacier of enterprise, a glacier all of glass, of millions of bottles, like atoms, mounted and fused and flowing to the next global catastrophe. Formula coke. Sweet. Fizzy. Slight caffeine tag. Cocoa beans. Same caffeine in chocolate and coffee. Addiction. Third world addicts. Rotted teeth. Poor white trash. Bottles, bottles. Vending machine. Bottles. Bottles ranked and ready like cannon shelves. Next round into the chamber. Bottles like glass babies, pulled from wombs. Caps off! Flicked off. Cutting edges. Bottles fizzing, bottles exploding. The spew of fizz. Shaken secretly like bombs. Carbonation gas. Builds and builds, first pry and spews, fumes, spills, sticky everywhere. Bottles thrown. Smash on the wall. Smash on street. Neck like a handle, wielded. Swinging. Smash again smash. Smithereens. The

bottle tossed, cartwheeling over end, arcs high. Bottles against bottles. The glacier mass. The bottles on a fence, like crows set up, so pert, so hour glass, the handgun wavers, v sight, barrel sight, the bottle sits and wavers, one with sights, my breathing, tightening, can't control, the desperation, now, exploding, leap and instant crash, of glass, of dust. Of vanishing. The? power. Pleasure. Need for that. Pleasure too in shards. The base intact. A fragment, like a piece of puzzle, "Coke."

6.??

Curves of joy. Old friend. Familiar as this face. This hand. Quencher of thirst. Bringer of relief. The roundness. Communion. Share with me. One Coke for all mankind! Homey! All races, all cultures, all climes, all times, the human chain snakes infinite, singing, Cokes held high. No identity like yours. The flow of you. The grace. The fullness leading to supply. Beneficence. Bottle of plenty. Forever ready, constant, your crisp and bubbly taste (vanilla, cinnamon, lavender, nutmeg, coriander, citrus with sugar and phosphoric acid), the guarantees of water, milk.

## BEST AMERICAN SILENCES

As a prank, I once considered editing "The Best American Silences"—I would invite nominations, and in addition to the "reprints," I would list Distinctive Silences of the Year. There would be epigraphs, such as "---," Ezra Pound. There would be famous contributors, but after their titles and attributions, the pages would be blank. "On Love," perhaps, by Howard Stern. "On Justice," by O.J. Simpson. "Life After Death," by Elvis Presley. "Witness," by Neil Armstrong. The final selection, of course, would be my own: "My heart."

## BEAU AND ARROW

I forgot that my jogging path was scheduled for a Gay Pride Run, which hadn't yet begun. So the guy holding up a sign with a big arrow where my path divided from the sidewalk seemed absurd. "All you need now is a big bow," I shouted, jogging past. "Oh boy, do I ever!" he called. Fifty yards later, I got the pun.

## OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD

A young woman works nights at a suicide hotline, where a caller threatens suicide if she doesn't have phone-sex. As she fakes her orgasm, she hears a gunshot.

A real perv, detectives conclude. Apparently the deceased was into auto-snuff sex.

As for the girl, no future orgasm seems more than a memory.

