

The Poets and the Housewife

A FABLE

Martin Armstrong

Martin Armstrong (1882~1974) was born in Newcastle upon Tyne, England. He wrote both novels and histories, but is, perhaps, best known for his short stories.

The Poets and the Housewife makes use of an old way of telling stories to make very much a modern point. Appearances do deceive! So does the language. It looks like old English (it is a fable) but there are surprises.

Once upon a time, on a summer's day, two poets, having shut up shop, went out into the country to collect copy^[1], for their stock of this commodity was exhausted.

And they were careful to dress themselves carelessly^[2]: one put on a black collar and black-and-white checked trousers, and the other a cravat^[3] of raging scarlet, 'for' they thought (though they did not say so) 'we must dress the part'^[4]. And their hats were wide and reckless and the hair beneath their hats was like the thatch upon a broad-eaved barn.

And as they journeyed, poking about with their walking sticks after the precious substance of their quest^[5], there gathered over their heads the devil of a storm.

And at the proper moment the storm burst and the rain came down and the poets left off seeking for copy and huddled under a hawthorn tree. And they appeared as two proud exotic birds, lighted down from the Lord knows where^[6].

And there was a lodge near the hawthorn tree, and the lodge-keeper's wife looked out and, seeing the two, she exclaimed: 'Lord, look what the wet brings out!^[7]' and the rain increased fearfully.

And after a while she looked out again and the poets were changed, for their bloom was impaired, the rain had clotted their hair, and the scarlet cravat of the one had become crimson from saturation. And rain dripped from all their extremities.^[8]

And the lodge-keeper's wife was grieved for them and called out: 'Young men, will you not come in? Why play the heron who stands lugubrious^[9] with his feet in cold water when it is open to you to become as sparrows twittering with gladness beneath the eaves?'

But they bowed politely and replied: 'Thanks awfully, ma'am, but we are poets and we like it.'

And the lodge-keeper's wife was riled and sneered at them, remarking: 'They have certainly had a drop too much^[10].' But they, smiling deprecatingly upon her, responded: 'Madam you are pleased to be dry^[11].' 'And you,' quoth^[12] she, 'are pleased to be wet.' And she slammed to window^[13], casting up her eyes and inquiring rhetorically^[14], 'Did you ever?' and 'What next?'^[15] And the rain came down like hell, leaping a foot high and sousing all things.

And after another while, the lodge-keeper's wife looked out again, and the two had gathered closer about the trunk of the hawthorn tree, and they were as two old crows, for their shoulders

were up and their beaks^[16] were down and they were unbelievably disheveled.^[17]

And she shout to them again, for she was a charitable woman, saying: 'O miserable gentlemen, in the name of civilization and commonsense, come inside.'

But they dared not turn their faces to her, lest the water should run down their necks: so, revolving themselves all of a piece, they replied: 'Renewed thanks, ma'am, but we are very well, for we are acquiring copy.' And they cowered under the deluge^[18] with great earnestness of purpose.

But the lodge-keeper's wife did not understand the word copy, so that she was amazed beyond measure and the power of comment was taken from her.

And the storm, having stormed itself out, abated: and the place was bathed in delicious smells of breathing leaves, and the warm sweetness of hawthorn perfumed the air.

And the lodge-keeper's wife looked out from the window a fourth and last time, and the poets were in the act of departure. And the tragedy of their appearance was beyond all comparing. For the scarlet of the cravat of one had run down into the bosom of his shirt, so that he was, as it were, a robin-redbreast. And both were soaked to the uttermost.

And when those poets were returned home, the one found that he had lost a shirt and the other found that he had gained a cold. Therefore the one went out and bought a new shirt at seven and six and dear at that, and the other got himself a shilling bottle of Ammoniated Quinine^[19] which was tolerably cheap considering.

And the one wrote an ode called *Midsummer Storm* for which he obtained five guineas^[20], so that (deducting four pence for

stamps and seven and six for the shirt) his net profit was four pounds seventeen and twopence.

But the other could only manage a one-quine sonnet called *Rain Among Leaves*, so that (deducting fourpence for stamps and a shilling for the quine) his net profit was nineteen and eightpence.

Thus the two acquired great store of copy (more, indeed, than they bargained for^[21]) and the sum of five pounds sixteen shillings and ten pence thrown in.^[22]

But the wife of the lodge-keeper knew nothing of all this, so that she still believes, like many another ill-informed person, that poets are nothing more than unpractical dreamers.

寓言一则：诗人与村妇 [英] 马丁·阿姆斯特朗

马丁·阿姆斯特朗 (1882~1971) 生于英格兰的泰恩河畔纽卡斯尔。他既写长篇小说，又写历史传奇，不过，他最为人称道的也许还是他的短篇小说。

《诗人与村妇》借古老的叙述方式把一个现代的观点表现得淋漓尽致。事物的外表的确能使人迷惑！文中的语言亦是如此。看似古英语（因为是寓言故事）实则不乏拍案惊奇之处。

话说某年仲夏里的一天，两个诗人关好店门，就奔乡下搜罗诗材去了，因为他们商店里的这种存货已告售罄。

于是他们就精心地打扮起来，尽量显出不修边幅的样子。一个诗人脖子上系了一条黑领子，下面穿的是格子裤；另一个诗人则围了一条大红领巾。“因为”他们心里想（虽然嘴上没有这么说），“我们必须穿戴得像个诗人的样子才好。”他们的帽子又宽又大，帽子下的头发就像一堆覆盖在阔檐谷仓上的乱蓬蓬的茅草。

正当他们拄着手杖走在路上，四处寻找他们要找的那种宝贝东西的时候，一场可恶的暴风雨就要在他们的头顶上聚集起来。

暴风雨在恰当的時刻降临了。雨点落了下来，两个诗人只好放下手头的活，蜷缩在一棵山楂树下避雨。他们看起来颇似两只骄傲怪异的大鸟，天知道从哪里飞来落在了此地。

山楂树旁有一座农舍，农舍主妇向外望去，看见两位诗人，不由得喊叫起来：“老天爷 瞧这雨下的！”话音刚落 雨便一阵紧接一阵倾洒下来。

过了一会儿，村妇又朝窗外看了一眼，两个诗人就跟换了个人似的，因为雨水已经把他们的头发浇成一团，其中一个诗人披戴的大红领巾，由于雨水浸淫的缘故，颜色亦由大红变成猩红，他们先前那股子鲜活劲儿此时早已消失得无影无踪。雨水顺着他们的胳膊和腿吧嗒吧嗒地滴落在地面上。

村妇见此情景 颇生怜悯之心 于是朝他们喊道：“年轻人 进屋来吧！做个屋檐下快乐歌唱的麻雀多好，为何非要做那个双脚泡在凉水里的可怜兮兮的鹭鸶呢？”

但是两个诗人只是礼貌地弯了弯身子 回答说：“夫人 万分感谢您。您有所不知 我们两个是诗人 我们正巴不得这样哪。”

村妇听了这话非常生气，于是就讥笑他们说：“他们肯定是喝过头了。”不过他们不以为然地笑了笑 回答说：“夫人 您酒水不沾 那是您乐意。”那你们，”村妇回敬道，“酒水不拒 也是你们乐意喽？”紧跟着她猛地把窗子往回一拉 抬眼朝空中望去 嘴里喃喃自语：“这像什么话？”往后还怎么了得？”

大雨疯狂地下着，水花溅起一英尺高，把所有东西都打湿了。

又过了一会儿，村妇又朝窗外看了一眼，这时候两个诗人往山楂树干上靠得更近了，看起来就像是两只老乌鸦，因为他们的肩膀高耸着，喙状鼻子低垂着，衣帽凌乱不堪，已经到了难以置信的地步。

村妇是个慈悲心肠，不忍心看见他们这样，于是就又对他们喊

起来：“哎呀，可怜先生们，我借文明与常识的名义，请两位进屋。”

但是两个诗人不敢把脸转过去，害怕雨水顺着他们的脖子往下流。因此他们就以身为轴心整个儿人转了过去。回答说：“夫人，再一次感谢您。不过我们这样就挺好，因为我们这会儿正在搜集诗材。”然后，他们便为了他们要找的那东西毕恭毕敬地瑟缩在风雨中。然而村妇不明白“诗材”是什么玩意，一时竟惊愕得说不出话来。

暴风雨肆虐了一阵，慢慢地缓和下来。雨后繁叶伸展呼吸，大地沐浴在一片清新气息之中，山楂树发出的怡人芳香弥漫了整个空气。

村妇第四次同时也是最后一次朝窗外望，这时候两个诗人正打算离去。其中戴着大红领巾的那位，衬衫前襟全染红了，看起来就像是一只红胸知更鸟；两个诗人都淋得浑身湿透。再没有比他们那模样更悲惨的了。

回到家中，一个诗人发现自己损失了一件衬衫，另一个诗人则发现自己得了一回感冒。因此，损失衬衫者上街买了一件衬衫，花去 7 先令 6 便士，价钱不菲。得感冒者花了 1 先令给自己买了一瓶奎宁，相比之下还算便宜。

前者作了一首颂歌，题目叫做《仲夏暴风雨》，得到 5 畿尼的稿费。除去邮资 4 便士及衬衫 7 先令 6 便士，纯收入为 4 英镑 17 先令 2 便士。

后者勉强作了一首只值 1 畿尼的十四行诗，题目叫做《叶中雨》。除去邮资 4 便士及奎宁 1 先令，纯收入为 19 先令 8 便士。

两个诗人由此获得了大量的诗材（实际上比他们预料的还要多）。另外还有一笔总数为 5 英镑 16 先令的额外收入进了他们的钱囊。

当然村妇对此概无所知。就像众多孤陋寡闻的人们一样，她还一直以为诗人不过是些爱做白日梦的傻瓜呢。

Notes:

- [1] copy : 用于创作的题材或素材
- [2] And they were careful to dress themselves carelessly: careful 与 carelessly 意思相反, 放在同一句中, 修辞学上称为 oxymoron (矛盾修饰法)
- [3] cravat : 从前人们披戴的领巾
- [4] We must dress the part: the part = the kind 此处指诗人。整句意为: 我们必须穿戴得像个诗人的样子。
- [5] quest : 寻求, 探求
- [6] lighted down from the Lord knows where : 其中 the Lord knows 为插入语
- [7] Lord, look what the wet brings out! The wet = the rain
- [8] And rain dripped from all their extremities: extremities 指人体四肢
- [9] lugubrious 哀伤的, 忧郁的
- [10] They have certainly had a drop too much: drop 有两种含义: 水滴和酒滴
- [11] Madam you are pleased to be dry: dry 与下文的 wet 相对, 均为双关语。dry 干的, 不喝酒的; wet 湿的, 喝酒的
- [12] quoth: (古) 说过去式, 主要用于第一人称和第三人称中, 主语须后置
- [13] slammed to the window : 用力把窗户往回拉
- [14] inquiring rhetorically 作修辞问句, 即无须回答的问句
- [15] Did you ever 惯用语, 意即: 不成体统, What next? 惯用语, 意即: 无法预料将来会做出什么荒唐事来。
- [16] beaks: beak 具有双关含义, 一是指鸟的尖嘴, 即喙, 因为前文中说两个诗人看起来就像两只老乌鸦; 二是指人的喙状鼻子, 即我们通常说的鹰勾鼻子。

[17] disheveled 毛发零乱 衣冠不整

[18] deluge 大雨 暴雨

[19] Ammoniated Quinine 加氨奎宁 曾用于治疗伤风感冒

[20] guinea: 畿尼, 英国旧制货币单位, 合一英磅一先令。从前一先令等于 12 便士 现在是 5 便士。

[21] more, indeed, than they bargained for; bargain for 意思同 expect(预想 料想)

[22] throw in 外加 额外得到

(张敏 译注)

The Return of the Moon Man

Eric Lawson Malpass

Eric Lawson Malpass (1910 ~ 1996), Welsh, has many books to his credit: *A House of Women*, *Sweet Will*, *The Wind Brings up the Rain*, etc. This story was first published in *Esquire* — an American magazine famous for the short stories it publishes. It is set in rural Wales. It may be in the future but the Welsh folk in his story certainly haven't changed much. Mind you, the Electric is probably already at Pen-y-Craig. And there have been Grandfather/Grandmother jokes for a few thousand years.

A.D. 2500

That was the year they brought the Electric to Pen-y-Craig Farm.

Wonderful it was, when Grandfather Griffiths pressed down the switch, and the great farm kitchen was flooded with light. There was Dai my father, and mother, blinking and grinning in the light, and Electric Plumber Williams, smug as you please, looking as though he had invented the Electric himself and sent it through the pipes. Only Gran was sad. Tears streaming down her face, she picked up the old paraffin lamp and carried it sadly into the scullery.

That was funny about Gran. She was progressive, and left to

herself she would have filled the house with refrigerators and atomic cookers and washers. But Grandfather called these things devil's inventions, and would have none of them. And yet, when Grandfather at last agreed to the Electric, Gran was in tears. Reaction, Auntie Space-Ship-Repairs Jones^[1] said it was.

'Well,' roared Grandfather. 'There's your Electric. But don't think that because you've talked me into this you'll talk me into any more of these devils' inventions. Let no one mention the words space-ship in my presence ever again.'

That was intended for Gran. In her black clothes she was a rather pathetic-looking little woman, and no match for her fiery husband. But one thing she had always insisted that she wanted: a space-ship; and it had been a source of argument between them for years.

I tell you all this that you may know that we of Pen-y-Craig are not the backward savages that some people would have you believe. We are in touch with modern thought, even though we are apt to cling to the old ways. But what I really remember of those far-off, golden days of 2500 is of how the first Expedition to the Moon set off, and of how it landed in Ten Acre Field^[2], and of the strange events that followed.

Men had been trying to set off for the Moon for years, perhaps for centuries. But you know how it was. Something always happened to stop them. The weather was bad, or someone's auntie died, or there was an eclipse^[3]. In the autumn of 2500, however, they were ready at last.

It was cold that evening, and we were sitting by the fire, enjoying the Electric. Grandfather was listening in; suddenly he jumped to his feet and shouted, 'Blasphemy^[4].'

No one took much notice, for if the old man didn't jump up and shout 'blasphemy' at least once of an evening Gran thought he was sickening and gave him a purge.

So Gran said dutifully, 'What is it, Mortimer?'

'Flying to the moon, they are,' he cried. 'The space-ship has just left London. And they're dancing in the streets, and exploding fireworks in celebration. Sodom^[5] and ...'

But at that moment there was a noise as of a great wind passing over, and then a terrible crash as though someone had picked up all our milk churns and dropped them on the Dutch barn. We ran outside, and there, in the Ten Acre Field, a thing was glinting in the frosty moonlight. Huge it was, like a great shining rocket.

Grandfather looked at it. 'Lost their way, maybe,' he said with malicious satisfaction. Then he felt in his waistcoat pocket and took out a card and put it in my hand.

'Run you, Bronwen,' he said, 'and give them the business card of Uncle Space-Ship-Repairs Jones.'

But I was frightened, being but a little girl then, and clung to my mother's skirts. So Dai, my father, started up the tractor without a word, and rode off to fetch Uncle Space-Ship-Repairs Jones.

Down to the farm came the Moon Men, as the newspapers called them, their helmets bright in the moonlight, and soon Dai my father arrived. My uncle was sitting on the tractor with him, clutching a great spanner and grinning as pleased as Punch^[6], and soon his banging and hammering came across the still air from Ten Acre.

One of the Moon Men took off his great helmet.

'Bit my tongue when we landed sudden,' he said.

'Nothing to what you will bite when you land on the

Moon^[7],’ said my Grandfather.

‘That is what I am thinking,’ the man replied. ‘And that is why I say they can have their old Moon. Back to Golders Green by the first train it is for me.’ The leader took off his helmet at that moment. ‘Go to the moon one short?’^[8] he cried. ‘That would never do.’

‘I will go in his place,’ said Dai my father quietly.

‘You go? Never,’ roared my Grandfather. ‘No son of mine shall go gallivanting^[9] round among the planets.’

My father flushed angrily. But no one argued with Grandfather, and at that moment we heard Uncle Space-Ship-Repairs Jones hollowing that the Moon-Ship was now as right as ninepence^[10].

The Moon Men, all except the one who had bitten his tongue, set off for Ten Acre.

‘I will come and see you off,’ said Grandfather, and we watched him walk up the hill with the men.

With a great roar, the Moon-Ship rose into the sky, and climbed among the stars. Soon we could see it no more.

‘Supper now,’ said Gran.

We got the meal ready, and then someone said, ‘Where is Grandfather?’

All the grown-ups looked uneasy, and suddenly I was frightened and began to cry.

‘Gone to talk to the old bull^[11], maybe,’ said Gran.

Silently my father picked up the lantern and went out into the fields. It was a long time before he came back.

‘Gone,’ he said. ‘Clean as a whistle.’

No one said anything.

Grandfather did not come back all night.

Nor the next day.

Then, at dusk, Read-All-About-It Evans^[12], instead of dropping our evening papers from his helicopter as he flew past, landed. He marched into the house and thrust the paper under my father's nose, and said, 'See you.'

'Octogenarian^[13] on Moon,' said big headlines. Then, below: 'Radio flash from Moon party says Mortimer Griffiths, elderly Welsh farmer, took place of member of crew injured in earth landing.'

'Well, there is sly for you,' said my father. 'Going out for five minutes and finishing up on the Moon.'

Gran said nothing. But she went to the pegs and got her coat and went out of the door.

'Go with her, Bronwen,' my father ordered me, but kindly.

When I got outside it was almost dark, but a big, full Moon was just swinging clear of the hill, and I could see Gran going along the path that leads up Break Back and past Ten Acre and brings you to the Little Mountain. Though I was only a child I knew where Gran was going, and why. At the top of Little Mountain she would be nearer to the Moon than anywhere. I also felt, child though I was that she would want to be alone, so I followed quietly, at a short distance.

Sure enough, Gran kept on up the mountain, and at last we were on the top place where there is nothing but broken rocks, and holes of black water, and lonely old ghosts. And the Moon was well up^[14] now, and so near that you felt that if you stood on tiptoe you could touch it like an apple on the tree.

Gran looked up at the Moon. And the Moon looked at Gran.

Now^[15] Grandfather was a big man, and I knew she was hop-

ing to see him, perhaps putting up a little tent, or lighting a Primus^[16]. But there was no sign of anyone on the Moon's face. And at last, after a long time, Gran shivered and sighed. Then she muttered, 'Round at the back, maybe,' and she turned and came slowly down the mountain. And though she must have seen me she said no word.

The next night the same thing happened. At moonrise Gran set off for the mountain, and I followed. But this time the Moon was not quite round, and Gran looked at it for a long time. Then she said, 'Shrinking it is,' and came home again.

This happened every night. The Moon grew thinner and thinner, and Gran went out later and later. Young though I was, they let me stay up till all hours to follow Gran up the mountain. But at last the Moon rose so late that Dai my father said, 'Bed for you tonight, my girl.'

But I awoke in the small hours, and looked out, and there was the Moon, a thin, sliver sickle, and there was the yellow light of a lantern climbing the dark side of the sleeping mountain.

I put on my coat and ran out into the cold.

When I reached the top of the mountain Gran was there. To my surprise she spoke to me. Pointing to the thin crescent she said, 'Hanging on by his finger-nails now he will be.' And she took my hand and led me home.

The next evening she said to my father, 'What time does the Moon rise tonight, Dai?'

My father looked at the paper.

'There is no moon tonight, Gran,' he said.

'No Moon,' repeated Gran in a voice of death. 'No Moon.' She rose, and hung a black cloth over the big picture of Grandfather

at the Eisteddfod^[17].

‘Falling through the sky he will be now,’ she said slowly, as though speaking to herself. ‘Like a shooting star he will fall, and like a shooting star he will cease to be.’ She went back to her chair and sat down, her hands folded in her lap.

‘But the fact that you can’t see the Moon doesn’t mean it isn’t there.’ My father explained. ‘It’s just that the sun is shining on the other side of it.’

Gran gave him a look. ‘Black midnight,’ she cried. ‘Black midnight, and you talk to me of sunshine. Open the door.’ She pointed an ancient finger at it. ‘And, if the sun is shining, run up Snowdown^[18] barefoot I will, like the mad woman of Aberdaron.’

Dai my father gave up. There was a silence. Then Gran began talking again, almost to herself.

‘He was a hard man,’ she said. ‘I didn’t much care for him. Never would he buy me anything. A space-ship, only a little one, I asked him for, many times.’

“No mention of space-ships in the Lives of the Great Saints^[19],” he says, smiling nasty, putting the tips of his fingers together, smug as you please.

“No mention of indoor sanitation either,” I say, real angry now. “But that do not stop Rev Williams having a little room up at the Manse^[20].”

‘But it was no good. There was no arguing with Mortimer Griffith.’ She rose, and went to bed. And the next day she left for Aberystwyth and married Llewellyn Time Machine^[21].

They went to 1954 for their honeymoon. And two days after they had gone Grandfather came back from the Moon.

‘Finished the harvest?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ said my father.

‘Have you mended the fence in Ten Acre?’

‘Never mind the fence in Ten Acre,’ said my father. ‘Gran has married Liewellyn Time Machine.’

That was a terrible moment. For a long time my Grandfather stood stroking his beard. Then suddenly he shot out his long arm and grasped a chopper.

‘Where are they?’ he roared. ‘Where are they?’

My father, pale, said nothing.

Grandfather seized him by the throat and shook him.

‘Where are they?’ he repeated.

‘In—in 1954,’ gasped my father.

Grandfather let him go. ‘Get the tractor out,’ he ordered.

‘Where are you going?’

‘1954,’ said Grandfather.

He was gone for nearly a week.

Then he came back, alone. He was in a good mood, quite talkative for him.

‘Hired a Time Machine in Llandudno,’ he said, beaming. ‘Chased them right back to the Middle Ages^[22]. Liewellyn caught the Black Death^[23]. And I smashed his Time Machine to pieces with my little chopper.’

‘And Gran?’ asked my father.

‘Stranded in the Middle Ages, with no money, and no means of getting back,’ said Grandfather with immense satisfaction. ‘She was taking the veil^[24] when I last saw her. Damp, the nunnery looked. Damp and cold.’

‘Teach her to go hankering after^[25] space-ships,’ said my Grandfather.

老翁奔月

[英] 埃立克·劳生·马尔帕斯

埃立克·劳生·马尔帕斯(1910~1996) 威尔士人,一生著作甚丰,著有《一屋子女人》、《甜蜜的心愿》、《风吹雨飘》等。此文故事最初发表在《先生》杂志上,一份因短篇小说而闻名的美国杂志。故事以威尔士的乡村背景,可能发生在未来,但故事中的威尔士人肯定没有多大的改变。请注意,平——伊——克雷格现在大概已经通电了,关于爷爷和奶奶的笑话也已经流传了数千年。

公元 2500 年

正是这一年,平——伊——克雷格农场有了电。

当格里菲斯爷爷按下开关,农场的大厨房一下子充满光明,变得亮堂堂的,这真是一件奇妙的事情。我父亲戴和我母亲在灯光中眨着眼睛并且咧嘴笑着。电工加管道工威廉姆斯得意得不得了,好像是他自己发明了电,并用管道送到这里来。只有格兰闷闷不乐,眼泪从她脸上滑落下来。她收起旧煤油灯,很难过地把它拿去了贮藏室。

格兰这样真是很有趣。她不是一个守旧的人,要是她一个人说了算,她会在房子里摆满电冰箱、电子锅和电子洗衣机。但是爷爷把这些东西称为魔鬼的发明,他一样也不要。当爷爷最终同意通电的时候,格兰反而哭了。会修宇宙飞船的琼斯家的婶婶说这是她情绪的反应。

“哼!爷爷咆哮着:‘这就是你们要的电。但是别以为你们说服我接受了电,就可以说服我接受更多的这样的鬼发明。从今以后,谁也别在我面前再提宇宙飞船这几个字。’”

这话是说给格兰听的。黑色衣服包裹下的她,是个看起来很可怜的小女人,根本无法与她那脾气暴躁的丈夫相抗衡。但是,她