

December blog

Geoffrey Cannon



Glug! Burp! Here is a popular picture of Christmas good cheer. This advertisement goes back a bit, as you can see from the relatively tiny bottle, for Cola-Cola now no longer spends many tens of millions of dollars associating its products with grossly obese old men with complexions that match the company's brand colour. But there was a time when... well, see below.

As last month, this column is a bumper number. Fun and frolic first, for I start with the stories of McRib's, and then of Santa the Coke™ salesman. I continue with reflections on conventions of specialist journal publishing, some of which seem to me to be rum, dud or bunk, and end with Bernard Shaw on the credit crunch.

Ultra-processed products. Mechanically recovered 'meat'. Product names
Rib tickler

In Denver last month for the 138th annual meeting of the American Public Health Association (see the home news pages on this month's website), I was lucky enough to be staying at the Hyatt Regency. As is my wont, every 05.00 or so I was in the hotel's superb fitness centre, doing a smart 20 minutes level 12 hill climb on an exercise bicycle, ending with a blast of level 20, and then a circuit of the Life Fitness™ machines that titivate your dorsals and lumbar and pectorals and gluteals. After 06.00 when I was there the place was a zoo – US public health professionals put their bodies where their mouths are. Well, some of them do.

Glancing up at one of the television screens, I caught a snatch of an advertisement for a McDonald's product, whose 'grab' lines was something like MCRIBS ARE BACK. INDULGE YOUR OBSESSION. McDonald's publicity these days tends to emphasise fishburgers and salads. What was this all about?

McRib's are a McDonald's cult product. Launched in 1981, they did well in US Midwestern states and have remained big in Germany. They are promoted in a jocular style, because for those that love them they are not healthy but yummy, and they are not ribs either. To make jokes about your own product is a way of avoiding heavy breathing from regulators and then being found guilty by judges. McRib's are usually off the market, but after a five-year withdrawal they are back worldwide, from the beginning of last month, November, to the middle of this month, December. Here

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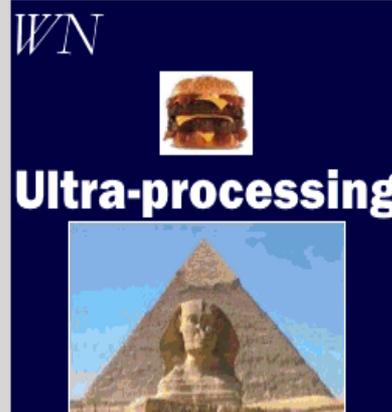
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**THIS MONTH IN
WORLD NUTRITION**



they are in the picture below, right, as right now featured in San Francisco. As you see, the ‘grab’ word being used here is similar to that used to brand or to promote perfume.



The nutritional composition of McRibs, and their declared ingredients – available on the McDonald's website – are not a great deal different from burgers. As can be seen from the boxed text below, one 7.4 ounce/ 209 gram McRib by itself delivers around 500 calories, of which about 45 per cent is fat; it contains a substantial dollop of salt; and the smoke-flavour sauce is sugary. The recipe of the bun is complicated, but that's normal too. Together with a portion of French fries (chips) and a ‘regular’ cola drink, total calories for a McRib sit-down meal, in a McDonald's outlet or in front of television, would be close to half the daily energy turnover of a basically sedentary adult. That's standard stuff also.

McRib energy, nutrients, ingredients

Energy and nutrients

One McRib of 7.4 ounces or 209 grams: 490 calories, 220 calories from fat, 25g fat, 8 g saturated fat, 75 mg cholesterol, 1040 mg sodium, 44 g carbohydrates, 2g fibre, 24 g protein, 11 g sugars.

Ingredients

McRib Patty: Boneless pork (Pork, water, salt, dextrose, citric acid, BHA, BHT, propyl gallate).

McRib Bun: Flour (wheat flour bleached and enriched with thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, iron, folic acid, malted barley flour), water, high fructose corn syrup, yeast, vegetable oil (partially hydrogenated soybean oil, cottonseed oil). Contains 2 per cent or less of dextrose, fumaric acid, calcium sulphate, salt, acetic acid, soy flour, monocalcium phosphate, ammonium sulphate, corn starch, fungal protease, natural culture, ammonium chloride, ascorbic acid, azodicarbamide, mono- and diglycerides, propionic acid, phosphoric acid, corn flour, calcium peroxide, calcium propionate, dicetyl tartaric acid esters of mono- and diglycerides, ethoxylated mono- and diglycerides.

McRib Sauce: Water, high fructose corn syrup, tomato paste, distilled vinegar, molasses, natural smoke flavour, modified food starch, salt, sugar, soybean oil, spices, onion powder, mustard flour, garlic powder, xanthan gum, caramel color, sodium benzoate (preservative), natural flavour (vegetable source), corn oil.

Pickle Slices: Cucumbers, water, vinegar, salt, calcium chloride, alum, natural flavorings (vegetable source), polysorbate 80, turmeric (colour).

Slivered Onions

Here below, courtesy of the detectives at Food Facts (www.foodfacts.info) is what a McRib looks like, as handed to you. Indeed, it does look rather like a conveniently packaged barbecued pork rib – without the rib, of course, together with barbecue sauce, all ready to be given the big bite, sauce dripping down your chin. Yum. That's not the story. What's special about McRibs is what's behind the rather coy terms ‘patty’ (which sounds like a homely girl) and ‘boneless pork’.

Carlos Monteiro

The riddle of the Great Food Pyramid

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WVW

Ultra-processing

Carlos Monteiro

Why bread is ultra-processed: Should you eat it?

[Click here](#)

WVW

SCN CRISIS

OUR SOLUTION

[Click here](#)

THIS MONTH'S COLUMNS

Fabio Gomes



For then, the Food Facts sleuths ran water over the 'rib' and took a picture. Here below is what they found. It's what the top of the homely 'patty' looks like after being cooked, without its robe of sauce, and thus with its visual and 'organoleptic' yumminess removed. The ribbing effect is made by putting pressure on the 'boneless pork'. This creates an effect rather like Lincrusta™, the knobbly or embossed wallpaper handy for covering up cracks and bumps in underlying plasterwork. Clever stuff.



What the earnest seekers after ultra-processed products truth then did, was to run a knife through the middle of the 'patty' and to take another photograph, and here below is the visual inside information on a McRib 'patty'. It is not what you would expect, if you sliced a chunk of cooked meat. So what is this 'boneless pork'? You may well know already. It is 'mechanically recovered meat', known in the trade as MRM.



As you probably know, MRM is to meat, what woodchip is to wood, a difference being that people don't eat woodchip. It is manufactured from remnants and scraps of animals, and other scrapings, and bits and pieces that cooks use for making stock that nobody would normally think of as meat, put into and whirled round in powerful centrifuges, and then extruded and moulded under pressure into the desired shapes and sizes. A lot of trouble is taken to make sure that the slurries resulting from mechanical recovery are microbiologically safe, which is not easy, for these 'soups' are caviar for bugs. Michael Pollan reminds me that this was once an issue, during the 'Mad Cow Disease' panic, but that nobody seems to be worried these days.

So what, you may think. If MRM is safe, and analyses out as having much the same nutritional content as meat, what's the problem? Well, there are a whole lot of answers to that, some of which have been given by [Carlos Monteiro](#) in his November **World Nutrition** *commentary on ultra-processing*.

One additional answer is to do with names. Now you know how the McRib 'patty' is made, would you call it 'boneless pork'? Really, would you? Substances passed off as meat or meat products that are at least in part reconstituted and moulded from a slurry of skin, bone scrapings, and other bits and pieces, even with some offcuts added, are surely not 'meat'. It would be better to identify 'McRib' as 'McNotRib' or 'imitation boneless pork ribs'. Or, better yet: 'Mechanically recovered pork scrapings and remnants'. Best of all would be no name, as a result of mechanical recovery being banned as a process whose products are unfit for human consumption.

From Latin America:
Enjoy! My message for 2011
Here is the bad - and good - news
[Click here](#)

Geoffrey Cannon

Our roving columnist
Leo Tolstoy on multicausality
Are computers taking us over?
[Click here](#)

Claudio Schuftan

From Asia
What Eduardo Galeano tells us
Nutritionists of the world, unite!
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Reggie Annan

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I continue to speak for Africa
Building competence and capacity
[Click here](#)

**NEXT MONTH IN W/N
OUT ON 1 FEBRUARY**

W/N



Ultra-processing



"I was on the low-carbohydrate diet for a week and lost three inches off my smile."

Transnational advertising **Ho ho! (Burp, burp)**

Living in the tropical South, aspects of Christmas are a travesty. Father Christmas, Santa Claus, or Papai Noel as he is known in Brazil, is an example. All of December, a high summer month here, supermarkets feature sweltering Santas, sweating pints into their bright red outfits. Some enterprising stores substitute sexy girls in bright red plastic bikinis with fur trimmings, ogled by the dads being dragged round the shops, but it's the casual hirelings dressed up as Santa that the kids queue up for. Ho ho ho, and in exchange for some money, a trinket.

'But you know that Santa Claus was invented by Coca-Cola?' asked a friend, rhetorically. This was a new one on me, which surely could not be true. In the past I did a bit of work on Yule iconography. Father Christmas as a genial seasonal spirit, loosely derived from the legendary 4th century CE St Nicholas, Bishop of Myra in Anatolia, dates back to European mediaeval times. He is part of the Christmas set that now includes carols, holly, mistletoe, the Tree, baubles, candles, crackers, turkey, plum pudding, booze, more booze, yet more booze, greetings cards, presents, illuminations, and so on. Plus, these days, households stock up with 6-packs of 2-litre bottles of cola drinks, which as from the end of November and closer to the festive season are stacked half-way up to the roof of supermarkets. Altogether, a mish-mash of celebration of the Winter Solstice, a festival of benevolence, and family feasting, with the Saviour superimposed for Christian believers. The set was more or less complete in the UK and the US by the mid-19th century. The image of Father Christmas as a sort of benevolent lord of misrule, looking vaguely like a genial version of Jehovah, not smiting (below left) but smiling, was first popularised by US illustrator Thomas Nast late that century (below right)



'Some people think that Father Christmas was invented by Cola-Cola!' I said to my wife Raquel. 'It's true!' she said, rather caustic, suggesting that if I didn't know that, then what I know about the food and drink industry? Ouch. So I turned to the unauthorised history of the company (1) and blow me, in a sense, it's true. As Coca-Cola itself says, if you access 'Coca-Cola Father Christmas': 'The modern image of Santa Claus is 'largely based on our advertising'.

The Christmas chug

The story goes like this. In the 1920s the Coca-Cola company wanted to get across the idea that 'thirst knows no season' – that their chilled 'soda' drink was not just for cooling off on hot summer days. So they put graphic artist Haddon Sundblom on to the job. The stroke of commercial genius was to fix the image of Santa. What we see all over the world now, is the Coke™ version: a obese old man, developed from the Thomas Nast image, brimming with good health and cheer, styled with a great buckled belt and boots, with outer clothes like a romper-suit coloured Coca-Cola bright red, and complexion almost to match, clutching and chugging Coke™.

For the Christmas market as from the early 1930s. Coca-Cola saturated the billboard, magazine and retail point-of sale outlets with its own Santa. Here below is a 1938 Sundblom classic, complete with a tot in pyjamas clamouring for a chug

Carlos Monteiro

'Carbs': The answer

WV



Michael Latham
Urban Jonsson
Elisabeth Sterken
George Kent

**GET YOUR TEETH INTO
RUTF STUFF**

(At last!)



This association of Santa and Coke™ with small children in such an affectionate pose, while presumably the parents are upstairs asleep, continued for decades. Innocent times! These days he'd be in danger of five years in the slammer. Here below is Santa with the midnight munchies, raiding the family ice-box, discovered by another small child in pyjamas, in a 1959 Saturday Evening Post Christmas illustration.



Haddon Sundblom continued to depict Santa and Coke™ with young children in pyjamas in winsome situations until the 1960s. Here below is a 1964 classic, complete with Santa's flaming nose and cheeks. It is said that the model for these illustrations, which involved several sessions, filled his bottle with something rather more fortifying than Coke™. The Coca-Cola website says that Sundblom's classic ads have been displayed all over the world, including in the Louvre in Paris.



The Coca-Cola company is now pledged not to market Coke™ to children under the age of 12. For this and perhaps other reasons – for any Santa who came down a chimney would surely be a grimy old man – advertisements like these no longer appear, and the Coke™ Santa later became featured alone, as shown in the 1990 ad that introduces this column. These days, the company is leery about any association of its flagship product with obesity. But for half a century Father Christmas has become shaped as a salesman for Coke™, and certainly for older customers, including parents and grandparents, the memory lingers on, as does Santa’s bright red outfit.

Reference

1. Prendergrast M. *For God, Country and Coca-Cola. The Definitive History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company That Makes It*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

Journal writing, referencing, review

What is a journal?

‘Your journal **World Nutrition** isn’t a *real* journal’ say some critics. ‘It’s just a bunch of opinions. Its commentaries are not structured properly and they are not externally peer-reviewed. And they include *pictures*, and *anecdotes*.’ (The words spoken in italics, in the tone used to refer to say, top-shelf lad mags). ‘At best they are grey literature’. (The last words spoken as in ‘great grey-green greasy Limpopo river’). ‘Besides, why bother to submit papers to a journal without an Impact Factor?’ (The last words are usually spoken as if capitalised).

Well, *WN* is not having any problems getting commentaries, and responses. Plus it’s getting plenty of impact. Three weeks after publication of Carlos Monteiro’s 12,000 word commentary on *ultra-food processing* last month, page sessions on the commentary (not hits) from over 65 countries totalled over 14,000, and downloads amounted to around 7 gigabytes, despite the commentary also being available as a free pdf. Plus we know it is, even as you read this, being studied by policy-makers in government, especially in the US of A.

This month I won’t get into the issue of what’s a fact and what’s opinion, or the difference between deductive and inductive approaches, or the virtues and limitations of cohort studies and their like. That’s another column, as is whether ‘grey’ (as in ‘literature’) needs to be blackened or bleached. What ‘impact’ really means is another item, which I am discussing with the editor of *Nutrition Reviews*, Irv Rosenberg. Here I discuss journal contribution structure, tone of written voice, systems of citation, and types of review. More generally, I wonder what actually is the meaning and purpose of the current usual type of specialist journal.

The Camp Bed Protocol

Who invented the Camp Bed Protocol (rigid, narrow, cold, unstable) for papers published in specialist journals? That is to say, the instructions to authors to submit an abstract, key words, introduction, methods, results, discussion, conclusion, disclaimers, acknowledgements, and so forth? Which expects papers to be written in a flat passive voice as if the authors do not exist? (1,2) And jokes? Don't even think of thinking about letting the reader smile. Which often requires the use of boring or horrid typefaces, notably Times New Roman or Arial? Which devises headings and sub-headings in ways that eliminate nuance? Which enjoins reading, learning and inwardly digesting the style-book catechism? These rules also involve the sending of submitted papers to the inquisition of external blind peer review, without which, there is casting into outer darkness – no PubMed entry, and for the journal, no granting of an Impact Factor.

The rationale for all this is to ensure that papers reporting research findings have a consistent structure, so that they can readily be compared. That makes sense. An alternative explanation is that it enables researchers engaged in what Tom Kuhn calls 'normal' run of the mill science, to keep the research wheels turning, to make all papers monotone, and also to maximise the profitability of journals by minimising the cost of editing (3,4). Perhaps you know how all this came about (5), in which case please let us all know – the response facility is below.

References, footnotes and all that

As you know, specialist journal authors are also obliged to assemble their references in the author-date (Harvard) or else number (Vancouver) style. Harvard looks impressive but is intrusive, because it involves inserting the names of authors cited within the text. Its advantage is that it lists references at the end of the paper in alphabetical order of given name. Vancouver, used for *WJN* and sort-of used here, merely inserts a number in the text, which can be emphatic, as (6) or discreet, as 6, and is more reader-friendly. Its disadvantage is that the end-list of references merely corresponds with the order in which they appear in the text.

But now why use references? One reason is to be prudent, when otherwise the volume of other peoples' stuff used in the text might approach plagiarism. Another is to stagger the reader with your erudition. A colleague (who I will not name) evidently was satisfied with his reviews only after the number of his references topped 300 (the boys' playground 'my references are longer than your references' syndrome) which suggested some last-minute shovelling in of minor or derivative papers from a Reference Managed electronic *portmanteau*. Another is to swank, by listing obscure sources, say in Catalan or Sanscrit, or big-deal sources, say from the preliminary proofs of a UN task force. Another is to flaunt, by listing lots of papers of which you are an author, especially those published in high-impact journals (7). Another is to crawl, to the head of your department on whom you depend for a favourable annual review and prospects of promotion, or to the editor of the journal, or to folks you reckon might be chosen as your peer-reviewers.

Another, the most valid, is to be helpful, by steering readers to further related thought and work. But why only references, and only of the types now normally used? If you look up old papers, by which I mean papers published not merely pre-PubMed, but in the olden days of typewriters, carbon copies and registered post, you'll see that they include footnotes as well as references, as does this column. Serious books still include footnotes, either literally at the foot of pages, or cited in the text and carried at the back of the book. How come these have disappeared from journals? Footnotes are an excellent device. They enable the author to elaborate a point, or to quote from somebody else, or to change style, or to go off on a tangent, without slowing the flow of the main text. They add dimension and colour. Ah! Perhaps this is why they are now expunged from journals.

The editors of leading journals now are, I sense, lively to this point. The highest-impact journals such as *The Lancet* and *The New England Journal of Medicine* now make much more use of bullet points, boxed text, take-home messages, and the like. But these are not the equivalent of footnotes of the more diverting type (8).

The r-e-volution

It seems to me though, that conventional references as still contained in journals are mostly obsolescent. The reason I say this, is search engines, the internet, hotlinks and websites. In their books and articles, Noam Chomsky and George Monbiot say in

effect 'if you want to know more, or check where I am getting this from, please access my website', which I think is courteous and sensible. This practice could be adapted by authors of academic papers in the form of a consolidated list of references to everything they have ever published, compiled on their own websites.

Conventional references assume that a significant number of readers go to libraries, read print copies of journals, note references to papers published in other journals, go back to the shelves (or make a request of the librarian and hang around), open the referenced journals, read and note the papers referenced, and so on. Do they? No. That's a picture that faded in the late 20th century. It isn't how many people work now, not even in the most lavishly resourced universities. Practically everything that we want to know is immediately accessible on-line. This argues for a revival of footnotes, as used in this column here, which can include precise references as and when really needed.

The external peer review doctrine

Now for reviewing [*Michael Latham's commentary*](#) on vitamin A supplementation in the inaugural May issue of our journal **World Nutrition** (9) was, and six months later still remains, a big hit. In the e-jargon, it went viral, and – we know from our clever web stats machine – has also, like Carlos Monteiro's commentary, been accessed, downloaded or printed out by well over 2,000 readers. Michael Latham's theme, as you no doubt know, is that the current programme of mass distribution and administration of capsules containing massive doses of vitamin A to children under the age of 5 in lower-income countries, is unjustified.

This 'VAC' programme is championed by senior executives in UNICEF, the World Bank, the World Food Programme, and perhaps to a lesser extent WHO. So what is the response of the relevant UN agencies? Dr Latham's commentary was discussed soon after publication at a meeting of the steering committee of the UN System Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN). No need to explain what is the SCN – see the home page of the website last month and this month. The notes of the meeting, which achieved a discreet circulation, indicate that some members of the committee felt that there was no need to take what Dr Latham says seriously, let alone comment on his arguments, conclusions, and recommendations that programmes designed to control and prevent undernutrition be food-based, because **World Nutrition** is not a peer-reviewed journal.

Piffle! Michael Latham is a world authority on undernutrition, and his views need to be taken seriously, whether they are published in *The Lancet*, *SCN News*, *The New York Times*, or as a transcript of a prime-time television interview. To their great credit, this was the view of leading champions of the vitamin A capsule programme from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, [*whose response*](#) to Michael Latham was published in WN in October.

The case for external review

There is a good case for external peer review of papers that report original research (10). This is normal practice in scientific and academic journals. Conventional science continues to become more and more specialised, alas. Editors of the corresponding journals can only have a rough understanding of much of what most of their contributors are writing. So it is therefore usually necessary to farm out submitted papers to expert readers, for their comments and opinion.

The convention is that the authors should not know the identity of the reviewers. A further convention is that the reviewers should not be told the identity of the authors. In practice, as I know from my own experience as a reviewer, it's often easy to tell – one quick check is to note whose name appears most often in the references. There are valid arguments for and against this policy. My own preference is for open review.

The external peer review system itself, whether or not 'blinded', is a bit like the process by which doctoral candidates are obliged to defend their theses to external examiners. It should work well when papers depend on information, particularly when presented in the form of statistically worked-up data. It is fairly often abused by editors, deliberately or inadvertently. Thus, for funk or for fun, editors may send papers to reviewers who are hostile to the thesis of the author, perhaps because of disagreeing with his or her general approach, or perhaps because she or he is competing with the reviewer for a big grant, or has just run off with the reviewer's loved one.

Editorial responsibility

But I am circling round the main point, which is that Michael Latham's paper is, like others in WN, a commentary. The convention, which is followed in learned journals whose papers reporting the findings of original research are subject to external peer-review, is that commentaries are reviewed internally, by the editors themselves, and when necessary checked by an external reviewer usually when technical points are made. This is the policy of WN.

Enterprising journals these days also make good use of electronic instant response facilities. These encourage debate. A new and improved facility is now attached to relevant contributors to this site, including WN. Members of the WN editorial team therefore look forward to a refutation of Dr Latham's commentary, from the UN executives currently responsible for the policies and programmes that he deplors. Come on, let's be having you!

Footnotes and references

1. Flat tone. A monotonous writing style, equivalent to the 'I speak your weight' robotic voice that many conference presenters use, is supposed to eliminate subjectivity. Not to mention the quality that is so often given the full Bible, cross and garlic treatment – emotion. However, as Susan Sontag rightly says: 'There is no neutral, absolutely transparent style... the celebrated "white style" of Camus' novel [*The Stranger*] – impersonal, expository, lucid, flat – is itself the vehicle of Meursault's image of the world (as made up of absurd, fortuitous moments)'. She is writing about literature, but she is also pointing to the curiously significant convention whereby the subjects of current scientific discourse are drained of meaning. Sontag S. On style. [Chapter 2]. In: *Against Interpretation*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967.
2. Passive voice. Rupert Sheldrake has written a cogent piece. He says: 'The active voice "I did" [is] far more appropriate in scientific writing than the passive – "it was done". Experiments do not mysteriously unfold in front of impersonal observers. People do science, and to portray it as a human activity is not to diminish it but to show it as it is'. He cites Bruce Alberts, then president of the US National Academy of Sciences, as agreeing with him. Sheldrake R. Personally speaking. *New Scientist*, 21 July 2001.
3. Ooh, very caustic! No no, not you! There are of course many scintillating papers published in medical, scientific and other types of learned journal. Including your contributions. Phew. My point here is that good stuff is generally despite, not because of, the Camp Bed Protocol.
4. So far this item is assuming that learned journals are meant to be read. There is an alternative view, which is that learned journals are repositories that are meant not to be read. The fact that most journal papers are gratuitously boring, is evidence for what at first may seem to be a rococo hypothesis. But think on... We all know that science occupies the space in most people's minds once filled by the more grandiose and hierarchical types of religion, complete with cardinals and bishops, in which CERN accelerators have replaced cathedrals. Given this, the practitioners of ordinary science, who follow whatever is the current dogma, are the equivalent of priests and monks, chanting and copying texts in Latin, set out in locked bibles and immured manuscripts. Training is in The Mysteries. Anybody ordained in the priesthood (now as PhD), but who speaks plainly in ordinary language, especially when denying any dogma, who in the days of the Church Militant was liable to be burned, or at least given the *bastinado and strappado*, is these days kept out of journals and committees, and denied tenure, grants, and pension. It follows from this idea that any time you pick up and open a learned journal you are doing something you are not meant to do, and are saved from sin by the contents being so dull that you nod off. Is this a joke?
5. Yes, I know about the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, and its requirements for editors and contributors, updated regularly. (www.icmje.org/urm_full.pdf). My question is, who started this process?
6. With acknowledgement to René Magritte (below), this is not a reference. Yes, faithful reader, this joke also appeared in my September column.



7. Thanks to John Garrow, for making me think about this. His take on references is quizzical but not cynical. I confess to most of the unworthy motives listed here, when I was writing 'Out of the Box' for *Public Health Nutrition* between 2003 and 2009. As sub-editor Gill Watling will remember, I also had some fun. Thus, I instituted a correspondence on referencing the (Christian) Bible. Should this start 'Bible, the'? Or 'Jhwh *et al*'? Or 'Price, Palmer, Aldis Wright, Kirkpatrick *et al* (tr)' or, in the case of my favourite New Testament version, 'Tyndale W (tr)'? Or what? I had a feeling that I was not meant to be referencing the Bible. But it is the first source of dietary recommendations, enforced in their day by the Big Daddy in the Sky, not by footling information and education campaigns, but by cursing, banishing, and eventually by smiting.
8. That is, of the type that may begin 'This reminds me of the time when...' or 'In his South American journals, Humboldt...' or 'Huxley in his later years became increasingly preoccupied with the issue of overpopulation. In a letter to Orwell after publication of 1984, he wrote...' or, more obviously within our field; 'Waterlow justifies use of the NCHS data on the grounds that these were, at the time, the most statistically robust. But...' That sort of thing, which needs an expansive approach.
9. Latham M. The great vitamin A fiasco. [Commentary] *World Nutrition* May 2010, 1, 1: 12-45.
10. In May this year Bruce Charlton, editor of *Medical Hypotheses* for seven years, was sacked by the journal's publisher Elsevier for refusing to send submitted papers for review. He argued that a journal whose purpose is to publish unconventional and controversial papers would lose its *raison d'être* if subjected to the conventions of peer review, particularly if this implied an obligation to send submissions to reviewers known to disagree with the hypothesis advanced by the author. But he also acknowledged that his policy was to publish any submission that seemed OK to him personally, including on topics beyond his own fields of competence, without reference to anybody else. This position is I think not possible to defend. Submissions do need to be reviewed by competent readers, who may be internal or external.

George Bernard Shaw
The wisdom of laughter

An intelligently worked Capitalist system... would give us all that most of us are intelligent enough to want. What makes it produce such unspeakably vile results is that it is an automatic system which is as little understood by those who profit from it in money as by those who are starved and degraded by it: our millionaires and statesmen are manifestly no more 'captains of industry' or scientific politicians than our bookmakers are mathematicians.

George Bernard Shaw
Preface to 'Misalliance', 1910

If writing on and engagement with British (and Irish) public affairs is compared with training for and competing in a decathlon, George Bernard Shaw is the equivalent of Daley Thompson, and for the same reason: dazzling natural ability and also an astounding work rate, combining to achieve incomparable results. Nobody comes close to GBS. Here he is above, writing exactly a century ago on the follies of decision-takers and policy-makers faced with and in awe of 'the market', which he identifies as 'the machine' (1)

The first time I picked up and browsed Bernard Shaw's collected prefaces was a time when I was studying for a university scholarship in my school's excellent

general library. He did me more good than the books I had been set to read. ‘My way of joking is to tell the truth’ he wrote, and I remembered that. Also, if you make a joke about a serious topic, and people laugh, they have become sympathetic. As Ernest Hemingway says: ‘They say the seeds of what we do are in all of us, but it always seemed to me that in those who make jokes in life the seeds are covered with better soil and with a higher grade of manure’ (2). On Bernard Shaw’s 90th birthday JB Priestley, who by that time had also become a sage, celebrated his ‘Superb debating style, at once provocative and persuasive, glittering with wit, often impudent, yet seriously challenging’, and also emphasised his ‘magnificent good sense’ (3). A titan of our times – for Bernard Shaw, having invented many modern ways of thinking, stays with us. .

There is a second-hand bookshop in central London in a street in which writers live, and more to the point, die – so it is always worth a visit. No sorry, I won’t tell you its name. On a visit five years ago I saw in its shelves... no it couldn’t be, but yes, it was: a first edition in perfect condition save foxed endpapers, of the original 1934 beautiful collected 802 page double-column prefaces issued by Bernard Shaw’s publisher Constable. Priced at £10. Trembling, I said to the manager: ‘you should be charging me very much more than this’. She replied ‘You saying so makes me delighted to sell it to you at our marked price’. As you might imagine, this made me feel pretty terrific. The book is always by my bedside. Google, and you will find the *Misalliance* preface quoted from here, as a free e-book.

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1. Shaw GB. Preface to *Misalliance*. In: *Prefaces by Bernard Shaw*. London: Constable, 1934.
2. Hemingway E. With Pascin at the Dôme. In: *A Moveable Feast*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1964.
3. Priestley JB. We owe him at least a hundred millions. *Daily Herald*, 26 July 1946.

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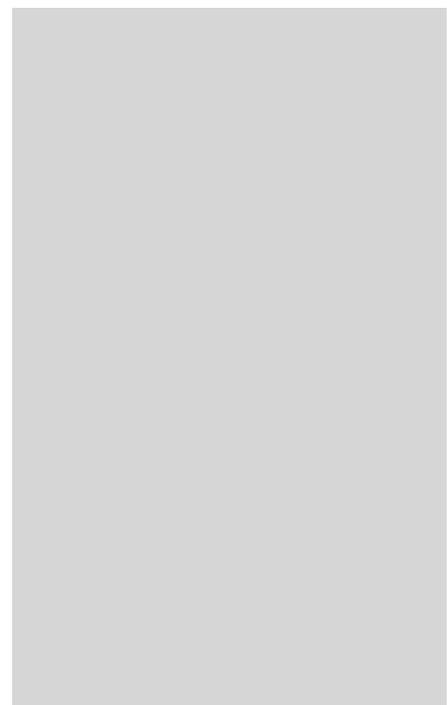
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