

The Last Word

particularly querulous old member. He steamed up to the club secretary one day and said:

Do you know what that new member just did?
No, Sir. What did he do?
He just said 'Good Morning' to me!
Oh. What did you do, Sir?
Well, I didn't want to be rude, so I just turned on my heel and walked off.

The other salient (if imaginary) feature of clubs is that the members are old duffers who sit about all day smoking cigars and drinking port. (It should be truer than it is, because port is a drink vastly underestimated, and at its Portuguese vintage best it is sublime.) *Duffer* has various meanings. Originally, it was a person who sold trashy goods as valuable, on false pretences (1756). Markets in Third World countries are full of duffers in this sense. In addition it is a person who 'fakes up' sham articles. In Australia it is a person who 'duffs' cattle: that is, steals them, especially by altering the branding.

This original connotation of dishonesty has been displaced. The other meaning of duffer, presumably the one more fitted to lounging club habitués, is: 'A person who proves to be without practical ability or capacity; one who is incapable, inefficient, or useless in his business or occupation; the reverse of an adept or competent person. Also more generally, a stupid or foolish person' (1842). In Australia this sense is extended to include a claim or mine which proves unproductive (1861). These senses are scarcely more flattering than the original.

These days, *duffer* is generally used with a softened meaning. It is used, not unkindly, for a person who is neither harmful nor useful; it has no connotation of dishonesty and neither does it suggest utter stupidity: it is more fitted to Wilkins Micawber than to Homer Simpson. This is possibly due to the influence of *buffer* which in Scottish and dialectical use refers to 'a foolish fellow'.

However that may be, it would be incongruous to see a duffer use an iPod. Incidentally, Homer Simpson does use an iPod, but he is a youthful 60 years old, by my reckoning. 'The Simpsons' was first aired on the *Tracey Ullman Show* in 1987. Homer was then a parent with three children. Inferentially, he must have been about

35 years old when the series began. Now, 25 years later, he must be about 60, although he has not aged at all. And Maggie is still on an infant's bottle at age 26 or so.

I notice how it goes against the grain to say *The Simpsons* was first aired... And yet we regularly see, without noticing, that Windows is shutting down. This prompted Clive James to write, a few years ago:

Windows is shutting down, and grammar are
On their last leg. So what am we to do?
A letter of complaint go just so far,
Proving the only one in step are you.
Better, perhaps, to simply let it goes.
A sentence have to be screwed pretty bad
Before they gets to where you doesnt knows
The meaning what it must of meant to had.

POETRY

By Trevor Bailey

Careering

Fire in my belly called me to the bar
What great wonders the law did portend!
Now flames have died to a glow and some char,
But my belly has prospered no end.

With Respect

(A Love Sonnet)

When women wail and counsel quail
The judge congratulates himself;
Encouraged now, he'll cancel bail,
And take a book down from the shelf
To throw at some poor bastard's head
- Then fault his subs to dry his lips -
To reinforce the role of dread
(Since parliament had outlawed whips).
But do we see a dinosaur
Inside that motley horsehair rug?
Will ways of bull and matador
Embrace some kindness and a hug?
*Pigs, at least, agree to be fair -
As we watch them flying in air.*