

the 2/5 second interval to the 1/5 second interval and, likewise, from the 3/5 second to the 4/5 second interval. There is a considerable net change of actual times from the 1/5 and 4/5 second intervals to the even seconds.

That this marked preference for the even second is peculiar only to "clockers" of horse races and to no one else is improbable.

In view of these extraneous variables, it does not seem possible to establish a definitive time-distance relationship for horse running races.

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Scientific Poetry

For some years now, in discussing the fact that the impact of science on mankind may well lead to misunderstanding and trouble unless scientists can make their discoveries emotionally apparent to people, I have suggested that we need scientific poetry. Now the contribution made by acknowledged poets is very small (a little from Shelley and Milton, but not a vital body of poetry), and it seems to be increasing only trivially. On the other hand, I feel sure that many

scientists are writing verse (I can name three). I would like to suggest that anyone who has any such lines, and who would care to do so, send them to me as a kind of clearinghouse. If enough material arrives, arrangements can be made to mimeograph and circulate it among those who are interested.

I suggest one or two ground rules. The first is that the author give his name, even if the poem is signed with a pseudonym. The second is that poems of epic dimensions be considered a little out of place until means for handling them have developed. The third is, of course, that all classes of poetry, serious and light (even including laboratory limericks), are welcome. My address is Box 2166, Yale Station, New Haven, Conn.

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Satirical Biology

Lovers of spoof biology (and who is not?) rejoiced greatly in a recent article on "Biological clock in the unicorn" [*Science* 125, 874 (3 May 1957)]. The appearance of a satirical spoof of this

kind inevitably raises general questions of widespread interest. Is any form of satire a legitimate style in which to write serious scientific criticism in a reputable journal? If so, does any particular instance meet a sufficiently high standard of plausible falsehood combined with some sharp truth? Are there any rules for this sort of thing?

There can be little real question of propriety because satirical spoofs have an ancient and honorable history. The Royal Society of London published its first spoof, designed to administer a wholesome jolt to the credulous, in the 1840's. David Starr Jordan, ichthyologist and university president, taught the gullible the value of suspended judgment in 1896 with his published account of a "sympsygraph," which enabled the operator to penetrate photographically into the minds of seven men simultaneously. In more recent years, Egerton Y. Davis, M.D., of Caughnawaga, P.Q., better known as William Osler of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, delighted to puncture some pomposities of medical literature with those incredibly solemn and vacuous studies on the perineal muscles.

It is a matter of opinion whether the present investigation into the physiology of the unicorn matches L. W. Sharp's immortal monograph on *Eoornis Pterovelox*, published by the Buighleigh Press (of Ithaca?) in 1928, or G. Albrecht's camera-documented account of the Schuss yucca, which was printed in *The Scientific Monthly* for October 1952. There is no doubt, however, that the "Clock in the unicorn" carries the kind of refreshing laughter which dissolves the lush overgrowths and precancerous verbirosities of the scientific mind.

Spoofs of all kinds involve certain risks, including the risk of being misunderstood. They extend over a broad spectrum, from inconsequential foolery, through high satire, to downright hoaxes intended to deceive for financial gain. The day seems happily past when a scientific idea can be laughed out of court without testing, in the way that Voltaire ridiculed virtually into oblivion the particulate theory of heredity when it was proposed by de Maupertuis, more than a century before Mendel. We can be sure that the question of the nature of any rhythms which may or may not reside in *Drosophila* eggs, fiddler crabs, or slices of New Jersey potatoes will be answered the more rigorously because of the laughter from that incorrigible pedestrian, common sense.

No one, and least of all scientific truth, stands to suffer harm from the well-tempered spoof. Innocence of harm to truth should be the Paris meter by which the legitimacy of a spoof is judged. Other rules? Brevity and rarity—extreme rarity. To specify more would

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