

PARAGRAPHS (GOOD)

I. *From a 2019 Washington Monthly article*

The University of Vermont was founded in 1791 and sits on a lovely redbrick campus a short walk uphill from Lake Champlain. The surrounding city of Burlington, where Bernie Sanders began his career in government as mayor in 1981, has a low-key vibe, with streets full of restaurants and boutique clothing stores. Lately, this region has become a hub of small craft brewing companies. The fall foliage is beautiful, and skiing opportunities in the nearby Green Mountains abound.

II. *From the New Yorker. Antonio Salieri was a composer and a contemporary of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*

Salieri is one of history's all-time losers—a bystander run over by a Mack truck of malicious gossip. Shortly before he died, in 1825, a story that he had poisoned Mozart went around Vienna. In 1830, Alexander Pushkin used that rumor as the basis for his play *Mozart and Salieri*, casting the former as a doltish genius and the latter as a jealous schemer. Later in the nineteenth century, Rimsky-Korsakov turned Pushkin's play into a witty short opera. In 1979, the British playwright Peter Shaffer wrote *Amadeus*, a sophisticated variation on Pushkin's concept, which became a mainstay of the modern stage. Five years after that, Milos Forman made a flamboyant film out of Shaffer's material, with F. Murray Abraham playing Salieri as a suave, pursed-lipped malefactor.

III. *From an American novel published in 1926*

This, then, turned out to be Magnolia's first glimpse of Gaylord Ravenal—an idle elegant figure in garments whose modish cut and fine material served, at a distance, to conceal their shabbiness. Leaning moodily against a tall packing case dumped on the wharf by some freighter, he gazed about him and tapped indolently the tip of his shining

(and cracked) boot with an exquisite little ivory-topped malacca cane. There was about him an air of distinction, an atmosphere of richness. On closer proximity you saw that the broadcloth was shiny, the fine linen of the shirt front and cuffs the least bit frayed, the slim boots undeniably split, the hat (a delicate gray and set a little to one side) soiled as a pale gray hat must never be. From the *Cotton Blossom* deck you saw him as the son, perhaps, of some rich Louisiana planter, idling a moment at the water's edge. Waiting, doubtless, for one of the big river packets—the floating palaces of the Mississippi—to bear him luxuriously away up the river to his plantation landing.

IV. *From a 2012 book by the instructor of this course. The topic is the Walt Disney Studio in Burbank, California*

Built at a cost of some three million dollars, the Burbank studio resembled a cheerful college campus. The centerpiece, on the corner of Mickey Avenue and Dopey Drive, was the Animation Building. Perhaps most remarkable was the fact that each building was air-conditioned—still a new invention in the 1930s. Air-conditioning helped keep dirt off the animation cels and controlled the humidity so that Jiminy Cricket's paint wouldn't smear. (Human workers were the lucky beneficiaries.) Overall, the new studio was like a miniature city, with a sewer system, a telephone network, an electrical grid, and a uniformed police force. The only thing Disney neglected to build was housing: after a day of whistling while they worked, the studio artists could have sung "Heigh-Ho" as they tramped from their air-conditioned offices to their air-conditioned homes.

V. *From a recent book review. John Law, a banker, may be considered one of the founders of modern finance*

In theory, all the money in circulation during the era of Victorian banking was backed up by deposits in gold. One pound in paper money was backed up by 123.25 grains of actual gold. In practice, that wasn't true. There were multiple occasions—usually linked to the cost of that old classic, war with France—when the government suspended the convertibility of paper money to gold. In addition, banks could print

their own money. They often didn't have enough gold to sustain the value of their notes, in the event of customers coming to the bank and demanding conversion. That phenomenon, the dreaded "bank run," was a direct outcome of the fractional-reserve banking prefigured by John Law. A system in which banks don't hold cash reserves equivalent to their outstanding loans works fine, unless enough people turn up at the bank and simultaneously want their paper money turned into its metal equivalent. Unfortunately, that kept happening, and banks kept going broke. The issues at stake were the same as those that had shaped the career of John Law, and which are on people's minds again today: What is money? Where does it derive its value? Who finally guarantees the value of debts and credits?

VI. *From a satirical 1846 magazine piece on The Snobs of England*

I should like to fill several volumes with accounts of various University Snobs, so fond are my reminiscences of them, and so numerous are they. I should like to speak, above all, of the wives and daughters of some of the Professor-Snobs: their amusements, habits, jealousies; their innocent artifices to entrap young men; their picnics, concerts, and evening-parties. I wonder what has become of Emily Blades, daughter of Blades, the Professor of the Mandingo language? I remember her shoulders to this day, as she sat in the midst of a crowd of about seventy young gentlemen, from Corpus and Catherine Hall, entertaining them with ogles and French songs on the guitar. Are you married, fair Emily of the shoulders? What beautiful ringlets those were that used to dribble over them! what a waist! what a killing sea-green shot-silk gown! what a cameo, the size of a muffin! There were thirty-six young men of the University in love at one time with Emily Blades; and no words are sufficient to describe the pity, the sorrow, the deep, deep commiseration—the rage, fury, and uncharitableness, in other words—with which the Miss Trumps (daughter of Trumps, the Professor of Phlebotomy) regarded her, because she *didn't* squint, and because she *wasn't* marked with the smallpox.

VII. *From a 2022 book review by James Parker*

If you were a gentleman in Elizabethan London, a gentleman of more or less regular means and habits, your typical day went something like this: You rose at 4 a.m., you wrote 14 letters and a 30-page treatise on the nonexistence of purgatory, you fought a duel, you composed a sonnet, you went to watch a Jesuit get publicly disemboweled, you invented a scientific instrument, you composed another sonnet, you attended the premiere of *As You Like It*, you romanced someone else's wife, and then you caught the bubonic plague and died.

VIII. *From the memoirs of the American silent-film star Louise Brooks. Here she remembers fellow actor W. C. Fields, a British comic who died in 1946*

(1) He was an isolated person. (2) As a young man he stretched out his hand to Beauty and Love and they thrust it away. (3) Gradually he reduced reality to exclude all but his work, filling the gaps with alcohol whose dim eyes transformed the world into a distant view of harmless shadows. (4) He was also a solitary person. (5) Years of travelling alone around the world with his juggling act taught him the value of solitude and the release it gave his mind. (6) Most of his life will remain unknown. (7) But the history of no life is a jest.

IX. *From an article by Samuel Johnson. Published in 1753*

Affliction is inseparable from our present state: it adheres to all the inhabitants of this world, in different proportions indeed, but with an allotment which seems very little regulated by our own conduct. It has been the boast of some swelling moralists, that every man's fortune was in his own power, that prudence supplied the place of all other divinities, and that happiness is the unfailing consequence of virtue. But, surely, the quiver of Omnipotence is stored with arrows, against which the shield of human virtue, however adamantine it has been boasted, is held up in vain: we do not always suffer by our crimes; we are not always protected by our innocence.

RODGERS AND HART

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*Morning*

When Rodgers opens his door to go to work, the weather is clear and the air is fragrant with honeysuckle. The bees swoop in melodic arcs, the birds call in mellifluous harmony, and the trolley cars trundle in metered time.

When Hart steps outside, it is raining. Cockroaches wave their greedy legs, the crows call, the taxicabs bleat impatiently. The wind blows his hat across the street, where it lands on the head of a stockbroker.

*Faces*

Rodgers is often photographed. His eyes look like painted irises.

Hart is rarely photographed. Every part of his face is a half inch too large.

#### *The Theater*

Rodgers loves the theater. He likes the bustle, the chatter, the occasional hammer-fall of a carelessly struck piano—the 365 components resonating in a well-assembled hum.

Hart does not like the word *theater*. It is very difficult to rhyme.

#### *Styles of Dress*

Hart's manner of dress is quite variable. Sometimes he will show up for rehearsal in a crisp, tailored pinstripe suit. Other times he will show up in his soiled shirtsleeves with a black eye. Once, during the rehearsals for *Pal Joey*, he showed up in a Hungarian soldier's outfit, terribly wan, and whispered in Rodgers's ear: "I haf come to suck your blaad."

Rodgers owns twenty versions of the same gray suit.

#### *Manners of Speech*

Rodgers is a fluid speaker. His words have a musical quality, in that they are light as air, spoken and then forgotten.

Hart talks slowly.

#### *The Piano*

Playing the piano is Rodgers's favorite pastime. While playing the piano, Rodgers often loses track of time. He forgets to eat, drink, and sleep.

While Rodgers plays the piano, Hart tries in vain to at-

tract his attention. He dances clumsily. He makes horrific faces. He weeps in silence.

When Rodgers is not around, Hart bangs his fat and clumsy fingers against the keys.

Once, Rodgers tried to buy Hart a piano. It was not a success.

#### *Punctuality*

Hart is never punctual and always apologetic.

Rodgers is never apologetic and always punctual.

#### *Expressions*

Rodgers's favorite expression is "all right."

Hart's favorite expression is "all right."

#### *Living Situations*

Hart's apartment is fantastically dirty. Clothes, papers, and cigarette ash accrue in layers, so that one could almost make a geological survey of his personal habits.

Rodgers's apartment is immaculate. He is almost never there.

#### *Methods*

Rodgers tells his students: "One note leads to another." He loves to describe his methods.

Hart tells his drinking companions: "One word hides another." He claims to have no methods.

#### *Editing*

Hart's lyrics take a long time, like children, and are sometimes rejected.

Rodgers's melodies appear instantaneously, like sunbeams, and are always appreciated.

#### *Parents*

Hart's parents are poor Jewish immigrants who speak Yiddish. He has a hard time speaking to them.

Rodgers's parents are wealthy, assimilated Jews who speak proper English. He has a hard time speaking to them.

#### *How They Met*

Hart met Rodgers at a music hall mixer at Columbia University. He asked Rodgers if he knew the tune to "High Society." Rodgers did not respond. He couldn't hear what Hart was saying. The ballroom was loud, and Hart talked with his hand over his mouth. Rodgers did not remember him.

Rodgers met Hart when he came across the other man sitting alone in a recital room, clumsily stringing together a facsimile of "High Society," flating and sharpening crucial notes.

"Let me show you how to do it," Rodgers said, alighting gracefully on the piano bench.

#### *Men*

Rodgers barely notices them, except as voices.

Hart always notices them.

#### *Rodgers on Hart*

Publicly, Rodgers calls Hart a genius, a wordsmith, a first-rate poet, a sophisticate, an aesthete, a top-notch ironist, a man with flair, the Bard of Manhattan.

Privately, Rodgers calls Hart a drunk, a spendthrift, a lout, a lazybones, a pervert, a washout, a gigantic waste of talent.

#### *Hart on Rodgers*

Publicly, Hart calls Rodgers an arrogant louse, a prig, a snob, Mr. Uptight, Park Avenue Princess, the Icebox, Madam Milquetoast, Stoneface, the Rajah of 102nd Street, and Toodles the Composing Chimpanzee.

Privately, Hart talks endlessly of Rodgers's graceful fingers.

#### *Drinking*

Rodgers is too busy laughing and shaking the hands of new acquaintances to drink.

Hart is never too busy.

#### *Love*

As a composer, Rodgers defines love in three varieties: young love, an upward leap from the tonic to the fifth, something like a round horn calling from a hilltop; unrequited love, a major chord melting into an unexpected minor tone like ringing glass; and contented love, the clean interval between the third and the fifth, sometimes rising to the major sixth and twinkling like a round, white star.

As a lyricist, Hart thinks of love as a dumb bear he must force to dance.

#### *Childhood*

When Hart was a child, he wrote a poem, and his mother couldn't read it.

When Rodgers was a child, he wrote a song, and his mother signed him up for piano lessons.

#### *The Police*

Hart spends a great deal of time in the police station, but nobody remembers his face.

Rodgers only comes down to the police station to pick up Hart, but the patrolmen brag about meeting him for days afterward.

#### *Troubles*

Hart has many troubles, including, but not limited to: money trouble, love trouble, heart trouble, stomach trouble, pitch trouble, ear trouble, family trouble, nose trouble, lung trouble, wart trouble, hair trouble, house trouble, and trouble with the police.

When Rodgers has trouble, he immediately begins to whistle "Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams," and the trouble disappears.

#### *The Break*

The last words Hart says to Rodgers are: "You've taken advantage of me."

The last words Rodgers says to Hart are: "You're so glad to be unhappy."

#### *Where They Are*

Everyone always knows where Rodgers is.

Nobody ever knows where Hart is.

#### *Farewell*

On the eve of his death, Hart writes a long good-bye letter to Rodgers. He never sends the letter. It is later found on the floor of his apartment, shuffled and sorted among lost lyrics, cries of pain and woe, horse-track betting forms, past-due utility bills, profiles of silent movie stars, and lists of dubious snake-oil stomach remedies.

By the time Rodgers receives the letter, he is already hard at work on another musical. Upon reading Hart's words, he immediately composes a song in which he transfigures the first line of each paragraph into a series of melodic fragments. After he is done writing the fragments, he throws the letter away.

The tune—somewhat revised—later appears as a love song in the musical *Me and Juliet*, which is not a success.

#### *Ghosts*

Near the end of his life, Rodgers admits to his few close friends that he has been haunted for a number of years by the ghost of Hart, who appears while Rodgers is composing, leaning on the side of the piano and staring at his fingers. Hart looks terrible in death; his mouth hangs open in an expression of yawning sadness. The only way to get him to leave is to stop playing the piano.

After his death, Rodgers never haunts anyone.