

the nature of poetry, but written in prose. How is poetic talent related to worldly success, and ought one to live if the talent burns out? Can the poet be 'a humanist, physician to all men', as Keats wrote himself in a famous line, and not just a kind of song-sparrow? — questions that become more intricate when we realise that they are being asked by the current poet laureate, a career-writer whose present job relies, notoriously enough, on commission rather than inspiration.

And if that isn't enough to mull over, John Barnard has pointed out, in an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* (25 Apr 2003),<sup>2</sup> that Dr Cake actually had a real-life doppelgänger, not mentioned by Motion: Charles Turner Thackrah (1795–1833), one of the lights of modern medical practice and teaching in Leeds. His short life offers an intriguing and direct commentary on the very questions raised by Motion's fabrication. Ignoring his own penchant for literature and philosophy, Thackrah devoted himself instead to writing about social conditions in England and the need for reform. The age demanded it. Keats believed in progress too. The myth of the genius dying before his time was created by his admirers; he himself died convinced his life had been a failure.

Iain Bamforth

#### References

1. Motion A. *Wainwright the poisoner*. London: Faber and Faber, 2000.
2. Barnard J. Incurable romantics — the true story of Dr Cake, John Keats and Charles Turner Thackrah. *Times Literary Supplement*, 2003; **25 Apr**: 14.

#### Spam, spam, spam, spam, spam ...

NINE days away: back to 326 e-mail messages that I didn't want, a signal to noise ratio of 1:20.

It didn't take long to get rid of them, but they're so annoying. Even with two filter systems, both of which learn as they go, stuff gets through. This time, the first filter caught 201. A handful of these were not spam, but were advertising from companies I've bought from. Another was an e-flyer for the *American Medical Directory & Physicians Guide*: I didn't correct the filter's logic on that one. The second filter caught another 75, but there were 50 in my in-box not identified as junk mail.

When the headers proclaimed 'Viagra at low price', it was a cinch to filter them. So next came 'Vlagra', 'Vi@gra' and 'V!agra'. Problem is that there are just too many ways of representing Viagra without properly spelling it out. Even spelling it out gets through (for a while): I've also been offered V\*i\*a\*g\*r\*a. And it doesn't take much imagination when an e-mail offers a 'Peeens Xtnsn'.

Although there have been fewer recently, the most surreal junk headers string together unconnected, sometimes quite erudite, words. I guess there really is a Lewis Spivey somewhere, whose address was purloined to send me 'bronchiole phlox employer'. Eddie Keller started well with 'gettysburg eutectic gyrocompass', but the fourth word was 'fabuklous', which rather spoiled the effect.

Receiving junk mail is annoying, and viruses can cause real damage (although rarely to we higher breeds who use Macs), but I do worry about stolen e-addresses. I don't know if there is a Lewis Spivey; I do know there is a Mike Fitzpatrick out there, who certainly did not send me the message that purportedly originated from him — and from his correct e-mail address. It consisted only of a zip attachment: are there really people out there who open these things?

Junk mail does, although, allow a celebration of something in the NHS that works: despite NHS e-mail addresses being fully public, junk mail doesn't get through. Or hasn't to me.

Meanwhile, I have been made an offer, and I think it unfair not to let others in on it. It seems there's some poor chap in Africa who is legally entitled to \$27 million, but needs to move it out of the country. All he needs is a bank account in the UK, and 15% of the recovered sum can be mine. I don't want to be greedy, so just e-mail me your details if you're interested. Then, u 2 kn b r l tch.