

*Madame Blavatsky makes it
in MacNeice's Bagpipe Music.*



FEW YEARS BACK I WAS LISTENING TO BBC RADIO FOUR when, out of the blue, Blavatsky came up in a 30's style light-hearted tune. An assiduous search to trace that song was frustrated until the other day when I found out that the lyrics of that tune were from a poem entitled "Bagpipe Music" by Irish poet Louis MacNeice (1907–1963). For your information and amusement, here is the entire poem — a sharp portrayal of the aspirations of the common man. The only reference to Blavatsky is on the first distich after the two opening quatrains. I've also appended a brief sketch of the life of the poet, and his literary contributions.

Bagpipe Music¹

It's no go the merry-go-round, it's no go the rickshaw,
All we want is a limousine and a ticket for the peepshow.
Their knickers are made of crêpe-de-chine, their shoes are made of python,
Their halls are lined with tiger rugs and their walls with heads of bison.

John MacDonald found a corpse, put it under the sofa,
Waited till it came to life and hit it with a poker,
Sold its eyes for souvenirs, sold its blood for whiskey,
Kept its bones for dumb-bells to use when he was fifty.

It's no go the Yogi-Man, it's no go Blavatsky,
All we want is a bank balance and a bit of skirt in a taxi.

Annie MacDougall went to milk, caught her foot in the heather,
Woke to hear a dance record playing of Old Vienna.
It's no go your maidenheads, it's no go your culture,
All we want is a Dunlop tyre and the devil mend the puncture.

The Laird o' Phelps spent Hogmanay declaring he was sober,
Counted his feet to prove the fact and found he had one foot over.
Mrs Carmichael had her fifth, looked at the job with repulsion,
Said to the midwife 'Take it away; I'm through with over-production.'

It's no go the gossip column, it's no go the Ceilidh,
All we want is a mother's help and a sugar-stick for the baby.

Willie Murray cut his thumb, couldn't count the damage,
Took the hide of an Ayrshire cow and used it for a bandage.
His brother caught three hundred cran when the seas were lavish,
Threw the bleeders back in the sea and went upon the parish.

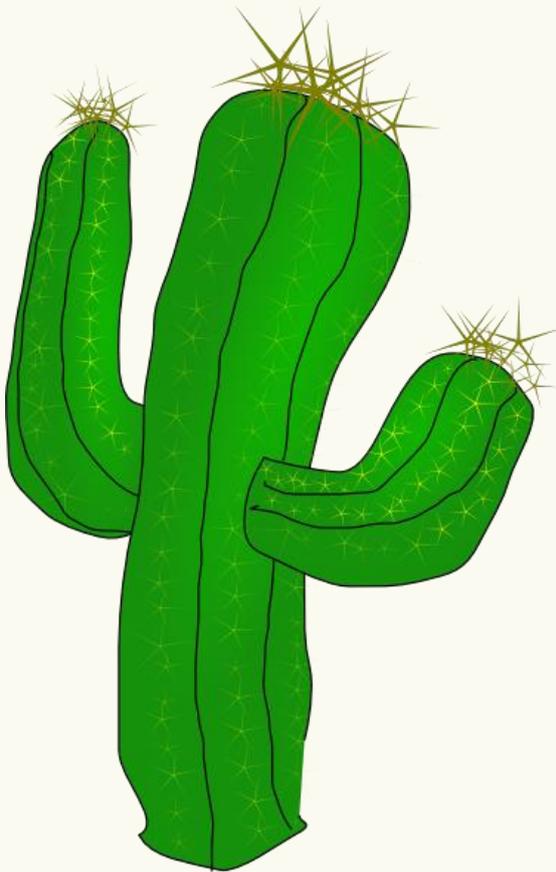
¹ [Frontispiece by Scorpy-Roy]

It's no go the Herring Board, it's no go the Bible,
All we want is a packet of fags when our hands are idle.

It's no go the picture palace, it's no go the stadium,
It's no go the country cot with a pot of pink geraniums.
It's no go the Government grants, it's no go the elections,
Sit on your arse for fifty years and hang your hat on a pension.

It's no go my honey love, it's no go my poppet;
Work your hands from day to day, the winds will blow the profit.
The glass is falling hour by hour, the glass will fall for ever,
But if you break the bloody glass you won't hold up the weather.

Here is a short biographical note about Louis MacNeice (*Chambers*, 1990):



Irish poet, born in Belfast, the son of a Church of Ireland clergyman who became a bishop. Educated at Marlborough and Merton College, Oxford, he became a lecturer in classics at Birmingham (1930–36) and in Greek at Bedford College, University of London (1936–40). He was closely associated with the British left-wing poets of the 1930's, especially Auden, with whom he wrote *Letters from Iceland* (1937). His poetry often has a biting colloquial humour and, with his writings for radio, ranges over a vast area of contemporary experience, ideas and images. His volumes of poetry include *Blind Fireworks* (1929), *Collected Poems* (1949), *Autumn Sequel* (1954), *Eighty-Five Poems and Solstices* (both 1961). He was the author of several memorable verse plays for radio, notably *The Dark Tower* (published with other radio scripts in 1947), as well as translations of Æschylus and of Goethe's *Faust*. He also produced several volumes of literary criticism.

You may wish to listen to Louis MacNeice himself, introducing and reciting his poem [here](#), and as put to bagpipe music by David W. Solomon [here](#).

COMPILER
10th June 2001



Suggested reading for students.



Tributes to Madame Blavatsky.

- “Blavatsky interviewed by Charles Johnston”
- “Blavatsky on Blavatsky”
- “Blavatsky remembered by Henry Travers Edge”
- “Blavatsky's Obituary by NY Daily Tribune”
- “Blavatsky's Obituary by WQ Judge”
- “Blavatsky will instruct me in the seven sacred trances”
- “Cleather on Blavatsky (1922)”
- “Cleather on the Great Betrayal (1922)”
- “De Zirkoff on Blavatsky's background and early life”
- “De Zirkoff pays homage to Blavatsky”
- “The Esoteric She by WQ Judge”
- “The great noetic radiance of our epoch”
- “The New York Times on Blavatsky”
- “The Seal of HP Blavatsky”
- “Wachtmeister et al. reminisce on Blavatsky (1893)”

