

## *Classic Prose Exhibits*

### **The Battle of Agincourt**

John Keegan

*The Face of Battle*. New York: Penguin, 1976, page 78.

Agincourt is one of the most instantly and vividly visualized of all epic passages in English history, and one of the most satisfactory to contemplate. It is a victory of the weak over the strong, of the common soldier over the mounted knight, of resolution over bombast, of the desperate, cornered, and far from home, over the proprietorial and cocksure. ... It is an episode to quicken the interest of any schoolboy ever bored by a history lesson, a set-piece demonstration of English moral superiority and a cherished ingredient of a fading national myth. It is also a story of slaughter-yard behaviour and of outright atrocity.

### **Dr. Thomas Rude**

Louise Brooks

*Lulu in Hollywood*. New York: Knopf, 1982, pages 4–5.

My mother was born in Burden, Kansas, in 1884, to Mary and Thomas Rude, who was a country doctor. Because he was the only doctor for miles around, the villagers, though they were a puritanical lot, found it necessary to condone much in him that they would never have forgiven in others—drinking, smoking, swearing, and refusing to go to church. He delivered babies, set bones, and eased the pain of the dying with morphine. When the weather was good, he drove to see his patients in a horse-and-buggy. When the weather was bad, he rode horseback. And when the weather was very bad and the horse could not find its way in the snowdrifts, he went on foot. A few of the patients paid him with money, some with pigs or sacks of corn, many with nothing at all.

### Tanzanian Peaberry Coffee Beans

Alexandra Griffin

classicprose.com/csguide.html ©2000

Tanzanian Peaberry coffee beans, when properly roasted, have a color between caramel and deep tan. Each bean is a nearly perfectly spherical ball the size of a pea, with a natural seam running across one side as if it were a normal coffee bean made of clay and rolled into a ball. Actually, this shape is produced by one special species of coffee tree which grows berries that bear only one bean apiece, while average coffee berries must support two beans each, which gives them the classic hemispherical shape. Since each berry supports only one Peaberry bean, the beans have an intense and inimitable flavor. This raw flavor makes for less roasting, and therefore a relatively light brown color.

### Medieval Man

C.S. Lewis

*The Discarded Image*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964, page 10.

At his most characteristic, medieval man was not a dreamer nor a wonderer. He was an organizer, a codifier, a builder of systems. He wanted “a place for everything and everything in its place.” Distinction, definition, tabulation were his delight. Though full of turbulent activities, he was equally full of the impulse to formalize them. War was (in intention) formalized by the art of heraldry and the rules of chivalry; sexual passion (in intention), by an elaborate code of love. Highly original and soaring philosophical speculation squeezes itself into a rigid dialectical pattern copied from Aristotle. Studies like Law and Moral Theology, which demand the ordering of very diverse particulars, especially flourish. Every way in which a poet can write (including some in which he had much better not) is classified in the Arts of Rhetoric. There was nothing which medieval people liked better, or did better, than sorting out and tidying up. Of all our modern inventions I suspect that they would most have admired the card index.

### The Elephant's Trunk

Steven Pinker

*The Language Instinct*. New York: Morrow, 1994, page 332.

The elephant's trunk is six feet long and one foot thick and contains sixty thousand muscles. Elephants can use their trunks to uproot trees, stack timber, or carefully place huge logs in position when recruited to build bridges. An elephant can curl its trunk around a pencil and draw characters on letter-size paper. With the two muscular extensions at the tip, it can remove a thorn, pick up a pin or a dime, uncork a bottle, slide the bolt off a cage door and hide it on a ledge, or grip a cup so firmly, without breaking it, that only another elephant can pull it away. The tip is sensitive enough for a blindfolded elephant to ascertain the shape and texture of objects. In the wild, elephants use their trunks to pull up clumps of grass and tap them against their knees to knock off dirt, to shake coconuts out of palm trees, and to powder their bodies with dust. They use their trunks to probe the ground as they walk, avoiding pit traps, and to dig wells and siphon water from them. Elephants can walk underwater on the beds of deep rivers or swim like submarines for miles, using their trunks as snorkels. They communicate through their trunks by trumpeting, humming, roaring, piping, purring, rumbling, and making a crumpling-metal sound by rapping the trunk against the ground. The trunk is lined with chemoreceptors that allow the elephant to smell a python hidden in the grass or food a mile away.