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Pandemic Cartoons for the #Draw Challenge: Sisyphus as Key Worker and The Toad and the Scorpion

Louisa Elizabeth Buck, University of Brighton, UK, l.e.buck@brighton.ac.uk

The political cartoon, by its nature, provides comment as events unfold and part of its power can be understood by “the satisfaction the successful cartoon gives us simply by its neat summing up, “a momentary focus” (Gombrich 1994: 131). This submission contains two cartoon series produced in response to a call on Twitter as part of the #Draw Twitter challenge by political cartoonist Martin Rowson. They were both constructed at the time of the 2020 lockdowns, imposed in the UK as a result of the developing events around the global spread of the then little-understood COVID-19 virus. This graphic submission includes my own work that was created in response to the #DrawTheCoronaVirus in collaboration with The Cartoon Museum, London, UK.

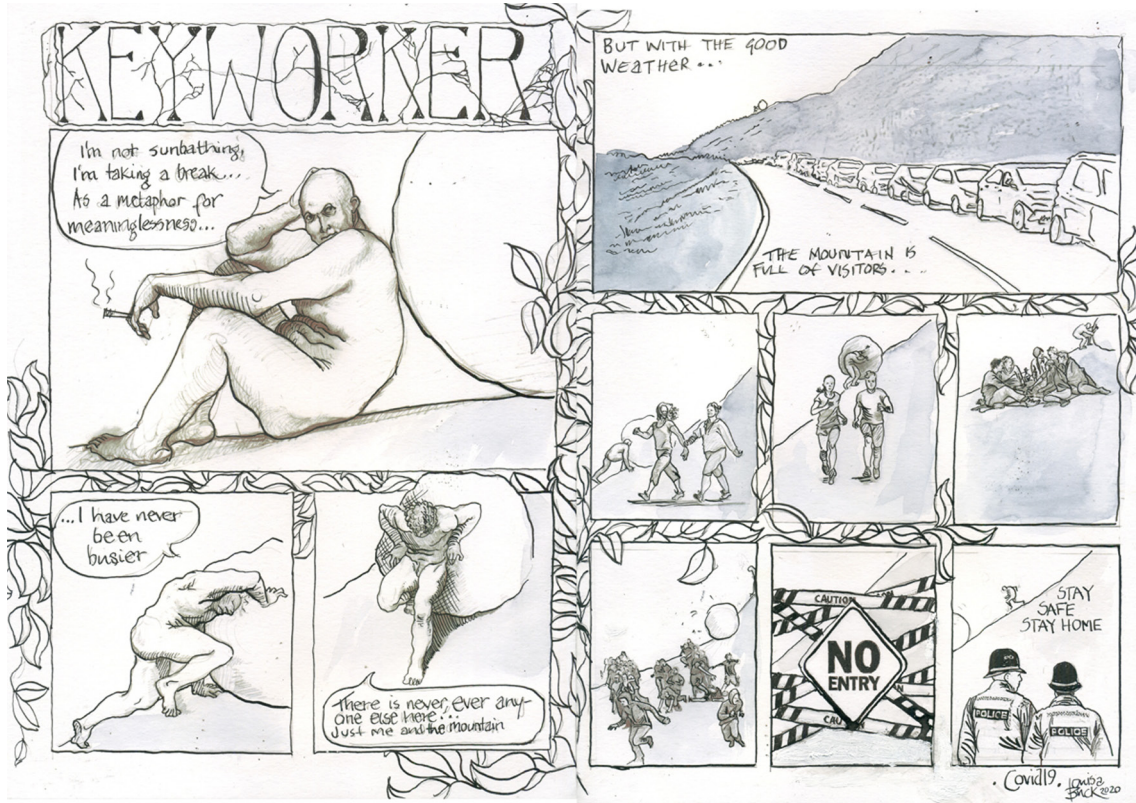


Described by *Punch* magazine as an ‘index of time’ (1988: 1), political cartoons can serve as important historic documents: ‘cartoons can be useful illustrations that catch the eye of the reader, but they are far more valuable as evidence of an important set of dynamic social and political relationships’ (Hiley, N. 2009: 41). Baudelaire saw the cartoon as an art form that could find ‘the fantastic in the real, and conversely depict ‘the reality of the fantastic in contemporary life’ (Hannoosh, M. 1992: 253). In short, cartoons and caricature became an art that represented real life for real people, took the banal and made it interesting, the ugly and made it beautiful and turned the transitory and ephemeral into eternal truths.

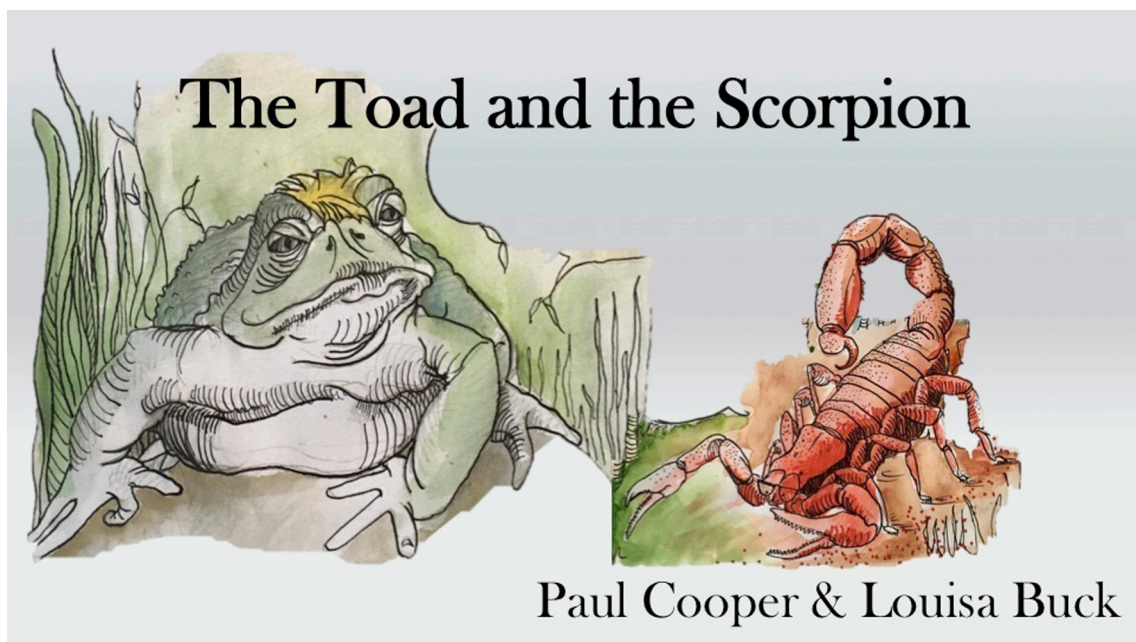
In late 2019, the political cartoonist Martin Rowson began a #Draw challenge on Twitter (Rowson 2019). Many cartoonists picked up the gauntlet and a large body of rapid response artworks have been created. This graphic submission includes my own work that was created in response to #DrawTheCoronaVirus in collaboration with The Cartoon Museum in London, United Kingdom. *Sisyphus as Keyworker* can be seen in an ebook (Rowson, M. 2020: 64) produced by the cartoon museum as a fundraiser and to highlight the plight of the museum during the lockdowns imposed in the UK in 2020.

The second artwork, whilst debuting on Twitter, is as yet unpublished. It is a modernised Aesop fable strip in response to the #DrawBorisJohnson challenge; *The Toad and the Scorpion*, in collaboration with Paul William Cooper who wrote the words for it. It follows the news events unfolding in the UK during the first lockdown beginning in March 23rd 2020. The artwork mimics the political cartoonist trope of imitation, parody and pastiche of existing creations. *The Toad and the Scorpion* resembles the format of a children’s illustrated book. The simplicity of the text plays to the subversive and ironic nature of the Aesopic tradition which was initially intended for an adult audience. They were originally purposed to provide political criticism in an era of repression.

#DrawTheCoronaVirus: Sisyphus as keyworker



#DrawBorisJohnson: The Toad & The Scorpion



Paul Cooper & Louisa Buck



Once upon a time there was a toad called Boris. Boris wanted to be king of the swamp. It was a dream he had ever since he was a wee tadpole.

“When I grow up I’ll be like the Great Winston”, he would tell his buddies.



One day, whilst hanging out on the edge of the bog, he was approached by a scorpion. The scorpion went by the name of Dom.

“I can help you live your dreams”, said Dom. “With my ideas you’ll soon be king of the swamp”.



Boris huffed, “But you’re a scorpion. You’ll sting me and I’ll die. It’s what scorpions do”.

“Why would I do that?” replied Dom. “With you as king I could reshape the swamp in my own image”.

“Hmpff”, puffed Boris. “OK then”.



They set about harvesting data. They gathered personal information about every creature. What they collected they used to persuade the animals to make Boris king.

Boris was very pleased. He took a long, long rest.



Together, Boris and Dom made big changes. They didn't want to be reliant on the rest of the forest; they wanted the land to be their own.

They lied and cheated and their friends benefited.

But the Toadies didn't care about the swamp. They were happy.



Suddenly, a terrible bug infected the wood. Every family was affected and sadly many lost their lives.

In fact, more animals died in the swamp than any other part of the forest.





Boris and Dom didn't want to do anything. But eventually they had no choice and imposed strict rules.

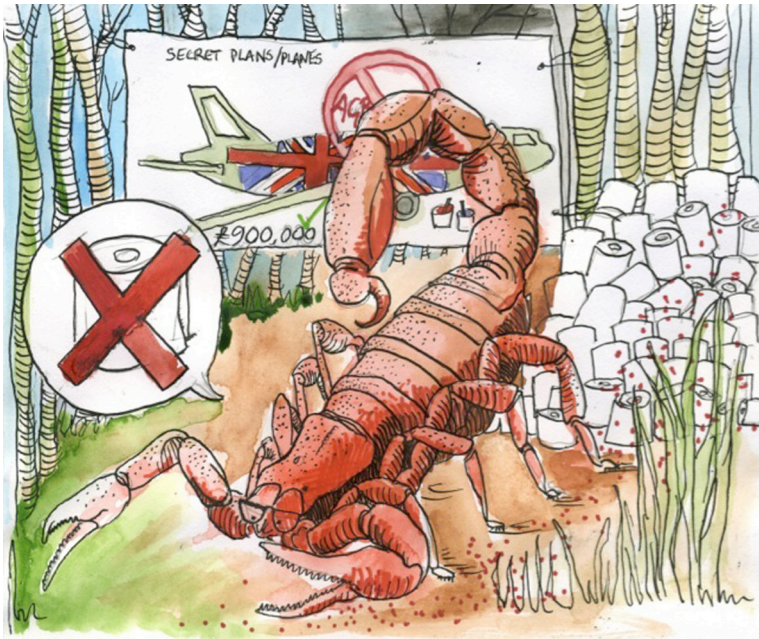
Of course, because Boris and Dom were special, the rules didn't apply to them.

The swamp community were angry. Boris and Dom didn't care.



Time passed. Days turned into weeks; weeks into months; months into years. Life was not the same.

Under the surface simmered loathing and discontent. "Why is there one rule for them and another for us", they murmured?



Dom couldn't let this fester. He ramped up a campaign of misinformation. He reverted to his old tricks, targeting falsehoods and condemning those who spoke ill of him.

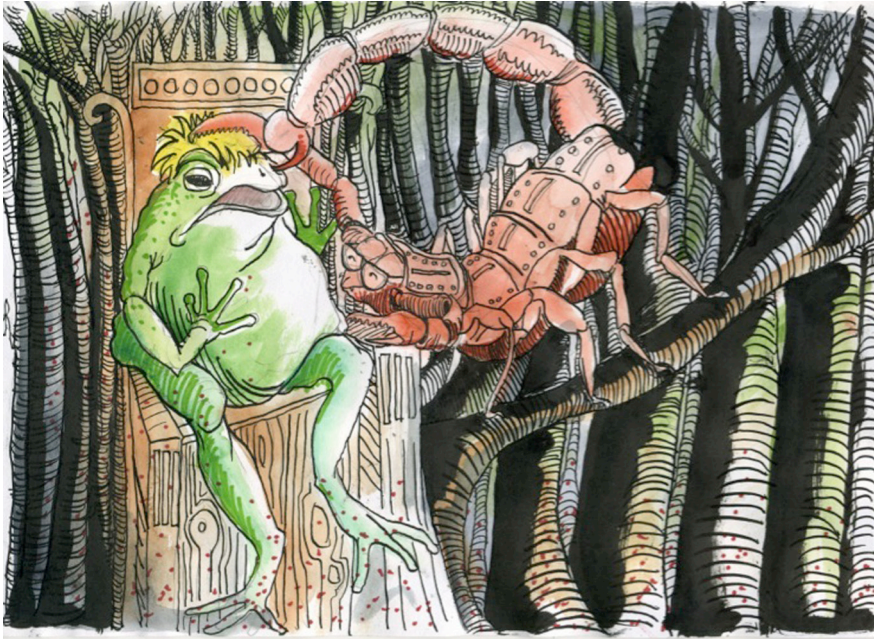
From his ivory tower, he told the creatures, "We are all in this together".



Stung by past experience, the swamp didn't buy the deceit. This time they saw through the broken promises; saw through the contempt.

"The Toadies are just in it for themselves", they said. They'd finally had enough.

They marched towards the castle Boris and Dom had made their home. As the creatures bayed and chanted, Dom realised the game was up.



He faced Boris.

Then, with a smirk, he lifted his tail and stung him.



Shocked, Boris looked up.

“Why did you do that”, he asked?
 “With your poison in my body, I will now truly die. The crowds outside will turn on you, and you will die too”.



Dom stared at him coldly.

“You always knew I was a scorpion”, he said.

THE END

Conclusion

The #Draw challenge focused the attention of its participants to create rapid response images to news events as they unfolded at a time when globally the future was unclear. They are an important record of lived experiences of the early days of the coronavirus impacting upon contemporary life. Functioning both as an example of the close relationship between modern life and cartoon art as referred to by Baudelaire, and as described by *Punch*, they are a fitting testimony of a moment in time.

Author's Note

Louisa Buck wrote the abstract, introduction and conclusions for this article, and created the artwork and words for *Sisyphus as Keyworker* and the artwork for *The Toad and the Scorpion*. Paul William Cooper wrote the words for the Toad and the Scorpion. *Sisyphus as Keyworker* has been reproduced here with permission of the Cartoon Museum, London. All the artwork included in this article is copyright © 2020 Dr Louisa Buck. All rights reserved.

Editors' Note

This work is part of the Comics in and of the Moment Special Collection, edited by Jeanette D'Arcy and Kay Sohini with the assistance of Ernesto Priego and Peter Wilkins.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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