

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

2004



Robert Middleton

Christmas Pudding is an anthology devoted essentially to aspects of the use of language, particularly in poetry but also in wit and humour. Poetry is a vehicle for sharing ideas and emotions and, as such, is a mark of our civilisation and collective intelligence: it also promotes an understanding of the nature and importance of language, man's highest natural attribute. I am concerned that few people read poetry today and that the contemporary dominance of the visual media poses a threat to our command (and even understanding) of language and to a decline in writing skills.

I was deeply influenced by the teaching and literary criticism of Yvor Winters at Stanford University in the early 1960s, by his rigorous insistence on the distinction between connotation and denotation in poetry and by his moral crusade against the decline of reason as a precept in art and literature (and life) since the end of the eighteenth century. The accompanying relaxation of content and meaning - and subsequent abandonment of form - that characterise verse for the last two hundred years is, at least in part, responsible for a breakdown in communication between writer and reader: today, 'anything goes' - much verse is obscure and, if it were not divided into lines, would be indistinguishable from prose. I share Winters' view that the late sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century was a golden age for poetry and that the poets of this age developed a "timeless" medium for poetic expression characterised by the clear communication of ideas and emotion, using words not only for their sound, rhythm and imagery but also to convey meaning. I recognise, however, that the poetry of this period may not be easily accessible to the general reader as a result of unfamiliar contemporary poetic conventions and shifts in the meaning of words. I also dissent from Winters' rather pessimistic view that not much of comparable quality has been produced since. While drawing on poetry of the "golden age", *Christmas Pudding* aims to identify those later poems that, in my opinion, meet Winters' strict criteria.

In addition to the desire to entertain and amuse, *Christmas Pudding* has thus a serious intent: I aim to include poems that use language in a rational and comprehensible way, that have a clear meaning with a minimum of decoration and cliché and that express feelings we can share. My choice is intended to show that poetry can be (I would even say, should be) a means of communication between normal rational people.

The inspiration for *Christmas Pudding* is *Christmas Crackers*, an anthology of wisdom, wit and linguistic surprise collected by the distinguished scholar John Julius Norwich. I have tried to emulate his mixture of humour and erudition, although a significant part of my raw material is drawn from the more mundane spheres of e-mail and the Internet. My title seems to me apposite: a Christmas pudding is full of varied, interesting and sometimes surprising ingredients, is well-rounded, requires a considerable amount of stirring in its preparation, is still good a long time after the first serving and is not heavy if enjoyed sparingly. Moreover, a pudding is the least pretentious of dishes and acknowledges Norwich's superior recipe.



Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage;
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone, that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty.

“To Althea, from Prison”
Sir Richard Lovelace (1618-1657)

“Stone walls do not a prison make, Nor iron bars a cage” - 1908
Edward Reginald Frampton, 1870-1923

“Every quotation contributes something to the stability or enlargement of the language.”
Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) – Preface to A Dictionary of the English Language, 1755

“Cui dono lepidum novum libellum,
Arido modo pumice exolitum?”
Catullus, “Carmina” i

© Robert Middleton 2004
e-mail robert@pamirs.org
Visit my website www.pamirs.org

CHRISTMAS PUDDING 2004

This year’s *Christmas Pudding* concentrates on familiar quotations: quotations that we use almost every day, often without being aware of their origin and context – and sometimes getting them wrong in the process. By giving the literary source reference and, in many cases, some of the context, I hope to encourage the reader to explore further the origin of some of these very familiar words, expressions and aphorisms

In seasonal vein, I begin with a poem by Robert Burns that we have all sung at one time or another at this time of year, but generally only the first verse. Moreover, non-Scots probably had no idea of the meaning of what we were singing – see the glossary in brackets.

Auld Lang Syne

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne! (literally “old long ago” or,
better, “times gone by”)

For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
We’ll tak a cup o’ kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

And surely ye’ll be your pint stowp! (buy your pint tankard)
And surely I’ll be mine!
And we’ll tak a cup o’ kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

For auld, &c.

We twa hae run about the braes, (hills)
And pou’d the gowans fine; (picked the daisies)
But we’ve wander’d mony a weary fit, (foot)
Sin’ auld lang syne.

For auld, &c.

We twa hae paidl’d in the burn, (paddled in the stream)
Frae morning sun till dine; (dinner)
But seas between us
braid hae roar’d (broad)
Sin’ auld lang syne.

For auld, &c.

And there’s a hand, my trusty fere! (friend)

And gie's a hand o' thine!
 And we'll tak a right gude willie-waught, (goodwill drink)
 For auld lang syne.

 For auld, &c.

So here's wishing all readers of this sixth edition of *Christmas Pudding* gude reading and a right gude willie-waught!

Language is not static – it is a living organism that grows and mutates in unpredictable and sometimes improbable ways. The growth of language is a democratic and unstoppable process that will not obey the dictates of an “Académie” or a *Loi Toubon*¹: in everyday speech phrases and words, new and old, are tried out, unconsciously sifted and compared for their usefulness in communicating messages. Some get left by the wayside, others shift their meaning or lose nuance and new ones are coined and added.

The globalisation of a mass “entertainment” culture characterised by visual images, music and messages of maximum simplicity has resulted in a “dumbing-down” of popular communication. Standards of education in the use of English have declined (especially in the USA), “parts of speech” and parsing² are no longer taught and fewer young people read as a pastime. All this has resulted in a decline in the study of words as purveyors of meaning and in the skills required to master the complex concepts of which they are the symbols.

Nevertheless, more words and expressions are added annually to language because they

¹ Sarcastically called by the French the “Allgood Law”.

² How many people today even know what parsing is? David B. Tower and Benjamin F. Tweed, authors of a popular mid-nineteenth-century schoolbook, wrote a useful rhyme on the subject.

Three little words you often see
 Are articles: “a”, “an”, and “the”.
 A noun's the name of anything,
 As: “school” or “garden”, “toy”, or “swing”.
 Adjectives tell the kind of noun,
 As: “great”, “small”, “pretty”, “white”, or “brown”.
 Verbs tell of something being done:
 “To read”, “write”, “count”, “sing”, “jump”, or “run”.
 How things are done the adverbs tell,
 As: “slowly”, “quickly”, “badly”, “well”.
 Conjunctions join the words together,
 As: men “and” women, wind “or” weather.
 The preposition stands before
 A noun as: “in” or “through” a door.
 The interjection shows surprise
 As: “Oh, how pretty!” “Ah! how wise!”
 The whole are called the parts of speech,
 Which reading, writing, speaking teach.

are found useful than are lost because, in a world of simple messages, they are not³. Language grows like Topsy – and here I am deliberately using an example of the way in which new phrases are coined. Until I looked it up, I was unaware that Topsy was a character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* – one of the best known books in North America.

“Have you ever heard anything about God, Topsy?” The child looked bewildered, but grinned as usual. “Do you know who made you?” “Nobody, as I knows on,” said the child, with a short laugh. The idea appeared to amuse her considerably; for her eyes twinkled, and she added, “I spect I grow'd. Don't think nobody never made me.”

Language has been with us for a long time. It deserves the respect owed to an old relative; its past – and the ways by which it has come to be what it is today – should be of interest to us. In understanding these processes better, we may learn to appreciate the wealth of human experience that lies behind its development and even come to its defence against the depredations of globalisation and a “popular” culture that abuses it and panders to the lowest common denominator of understanding.

As sources for this year's *Christmas Pudding* I have drawn on: *The Oxford Book of Quotations*; *Familiar Quotations* (compiled by John Bartlett, 1820-1905); and *The Dictionary Of Phrase And Fable* by E. Cobham Brewer (modern revision by Ivor H. Evans - Wordsworth Editions, 1993). Ivor Evans comments in his 1969 preface:

Of the forty or so publications of Dr. Ebenezer Cobham Brewer, his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, still in the hands of its original publishers, has outlived all the others. That this somewhat miscellaneous compilation has continued in active circulation for a century is sufficient testimony of its proven usefulness and it is seldom found at the second-hand booksellers. Although initially regarded as a rather doubtful commercial venture, it has long established itself as an authoritative companion for those with literary interests and catholic tastes. In the earlier editions, the author referred to his dictionary as an ‘almsbasket of words’ and the title page described it as a *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable giving the Derivation, Source, or Origin of Common Phrases, Allusions and Words that have a Tale to Tell*.

My limited survey suggests that the main literary sources of influence on the development of English were: the Bible⁴; Shakespeare; Latin authors; proverbs, folk tales and fables (Aesop and Chaucer); classical mythology; and 18th century writers, especially Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson. I have found it much more difficult to determine the equivalents – apart from the Bible – in other languages. Goethe has probably contributed

³ For example, I deeply regret the imminent demise of the very useful nuance between “enormity” and “enormousness”; yet I recognise that the latter is a clumsy mouthful and the former much more amenable and also that both meanings have shifted substantially from the original Latin *norma*, meaning “a carpenter's square”. I have trouble, however, with those politically correct Americans who would ban the use of the verb “denigrate” solely because it contains a syllable that sounds like a racial slur. (I somehow doubt that these people are actually aware that its etymological root is indeed the Latin for “black”.)

⁴ The aim of *Christmas Pudding 2004* is to give “chapter and verse” for various quotations; this expression is in itself indicative of the importance of the Bible as a reference.

as much to the German language as has Shakespeare to English and Voltaire and La Fontaine are responsible for many familiar phrases in French. While the source of quotations is easily researched with the powerful tool of the Internet, it requires great proximity to a language to say with certainty what is a “familiar expression”. I suspect even that much of what I find “familiar” in English will be less so for a younger generation, whose education has probably involved less reading than my age enjoyed. Over time, there is a change in what can be taken for granted as a part of what I would call “cultural awareness”; this can be seen, for example, in the decline in familiarity with classical mythology, which, in the period up to the 20th century, was an essential part of the intellectual baggage of anyone claiming to be educated.

My selection of phrases and aphorisms cannot be anywhere near exhaustive and is intended only to stimulate the reader to explore further. I would welcome suggestions for inclusion of “familiar quotations” in other languages.

* * * *

The Bible

“Bible” means simply a book (Greek, *biblos*, a book). Until the publication of an “Authorised Version”, the English Bible was in fact a profusion of many different versions that finally came together in “the Authorised Version” in 1611⁵.

Wyclif's Bible, 1380. John Wyclif (c.1328–1384) taught theology and philosophy at Oxford. He became a champion of the people against the abuses of the church and spread the doctrine that the Scriptures are the supreme authority and that the good offices of the church are not requisite to grace. He was condemned as a heretic in 1380 and again in 1382. The Wyclif Bible was the first translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible into English. It was mainly the work of his followers, notably Nicholas Hereford; the smoother revision of c.1395 was directed by John Purvey. He was a chief forerunner of the Reformation in Europe, through his influence on Jan Huss, the Bohemian reformer, and through Huss on Martin Luther and the Moravians.

Coverdale's Bible, 1535. Translated by Miles Coverdale, afterwards Bishop of Exeter. This was the first Bible sanctioned by royal authority.

Tyndale's Bible. William Tyndale, or Tindal, having embraced the Reformed religion, retired to Antwerp, where he printed an English translation of the Scriptures. All the copies were bought up, whereupon Tyndale printed a revised edition. The book excited the rancour of the Catholics, who strangled the “heretic” and burnt his body near Antwerp in 1536.

Cranmer's Bible, 1539. This is Coverdale's Bible corrected by Archbishop Cranmer. It was printed in 1540, and in 1549 every parish church was enjoined to have a copy under a penalty of 40s. a month.

The Great Bible (Matthew Parker's Bible), published in the reign of Henry VIII 1539-1541. under the care of Archbishop Parker and his staff.

Bishop's Bible, 1568. The revised edition of Archbishop Parker's version.

The Geneva Bible, 1579. The Bible translated by the English exiles Whittingham, Gilby, and Sampson at Geneva. The same as the “Breeches Bible” (see below)

The Douay Bible, 1581. A translation made by the professors of the Douay College for the use of English boys destined for the Catholic priesthood.

The Authorised Version, 1611, otherwise known as *The King James Bible*.

The Revised Version, May, 1885. The work was begun in June, 1870, by twenty-five scholars.

There were also a number of Bibles named from typographical errors, or from odd translations or archaic words:

The Breeches Bible, 1579. So called because *Genesis iii* 7 reads, “The eyes of them bothe were opened ... and they sowed figge-tree leaves together, and made themselves breeches.”

The Idle Bible, 1809. In which the “idole shepherd” (*Zechariah xi* 17) is printed “the idle shepherd.”

The Bug Bible, 1551. So called because *Psalms xxi* 5 is translated, “Thou shalt not be afraid of bugges [bogies] by nighte.”

The Place-maker's Bible. So called from a printer's error in *Matthew v* 9, “Blessed are the placemakers [peace-makers], for they shall be called the children of God.”

The Printers' Bible makes David complain pathetically that “the printers [princes] have persecuted me without a cause” (*Psalms cxix* 161).

The Treacle Bible, 1549 (*Beck's Bible*), in which the word “balm” is rendered “treacle.” *The Bishops' Bible* has *tryacle* in *Jeremiah iii* 28, *xlvi* 11 and in *Ezekiel xxvii* 17.

The Unrighteous Bible, 1652 (Cambridge Press). So called from the printer's error, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall inherit the Kingdom of God?” (*1 Corinthians vi*. 9).

The Vinegar Bible. So called because the heading to *Luke xx* is given as “The parable of the Vinegar” (instead of Vineyard). Printed at the Clarendon Press in 1717.

The Wicked Bible. So called because the word *not* is omitted in the seventh commandment, making it, “Thou shalt commit adultery.” Printed by Barker and Lucas, 1632.

The translation of the Bible from Latin into English was bitterly opposed by many senior clergy⁶; Protestantism's greatest success was to overcome this opposition, thus making it accessible to the general population (and thereby diminishing the power of the priesthood). At the beginning of the 17th century, given the large number of different versions in use, King James I was petitioned to authorise a new “standard” version. Fifty-four translators, from the Church and universities, were appointed and the work was completed in five years. The translators' dedication to King James is as eloquent and sonorous as the biblical text itself: small wonder that so many direct quotations from *The Authorised Version* became an unforgettable part of the language.

Great and manifold were the blessings, most dread Sovereign, which Almighty God, the Father of all mercies, bestowed upon us the people of England, when first he sent Your Majesty's Royal Person to rule and reign over us. For whereas it was the expectation of many who wished not well unto our Sion, that, upon the setting of that bright Occidental Star, Queen Elizabeth, of most happy memory, some thick and palpable clouds of darkness would so have overshadowed this land, that men should have been in doubt which way they were to walk, and that it should hardly be known who was to direct the unsettled State; the appearance of Your Majesty, as of

⁵ The Gutenberg Bible, the first book printed with movable type (undated but ca. 1450) was, of course in Latin. Thanks to Mr. Jacques Quentin, I had the privilege in 2004 of seeing it (and many other priceless works) at the *Fondation Bodmer* in Geneva: “vaut le voyage”, as they say in Michelin.

⁶ It is well to remember this before we complain too loudly about the obscurantism of some contemporary Muslim clerics.

the Sun in his strength, instantly dispelled those supposed and surmised mists, and gave unto all that were well affected exceeding cause of comfort; especially when we beheld the Government established in Your Highness and Your hopeful Seed, by an undoubted Title; and this also accompanied with peace and tranquillity at home and abroad.

.....

There are infinite arguments of this right Christian and religious affection in Your Majesty; but none is more forcible to declare it to others than the vehement and perpetuated desire of accomplishing and publishing of this work, which now, with all humility, we present unto Your Majesty. For when Your Highness had once out of deep judgment apprehended how convenient it was, that, out of the Original Sacred Tongues, together with comparing of the labours, both in our own and other foreign languages, of many worthy men who went before us, there should be one more exact translation of the Holy Scriptures into the English Tongue; Your Majesty did never desist to urge and to excite those to whom it was commended, that the Work might be hastened, and that the business might be expedited in so decent a manner, as a matter of such importance might justly require.

* * * *

The following familiar expressions originate in the Bible:

Let there be light – *Genesis i 3*
Fig leaf – *Genesis iii 7*
By the sweat of your brow – *Genesis iii 17, 19*
My brother's keeper – *Genesis iv 9*
Fat of the land – *Genesis xlv 18*
Old as Methuselah – Methuselah is the oldest man mentioned in the Bible, *Genesis v 27*
Land of milk and honey – *Exodus iii 6*
Shibboleth – *Judges xii 1-16*
How are the mighty fallen – *I Samuel i 29; II Samuel i 23*
A broken reed – *II Kings xviii 21; Isaiah xxxvi 6*
The price of wisdom is above rubies – *Job xxxviii 18; Proverbs viii 11*
The skin of my teeth – *Job xix 19-20*
Scattered to the four winds – *Jeremiah xl:36*
Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings ... *Psalms viii, 2; Matthew xxi, 16*
Pride goes before a fall – *Proverbs xvi 18*
Nothing new under the sun – *Ecclesiastes i 8*
The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong – *Ecclesiastes ix 11*
Fly in the ointment – *Ecclesiastes x 1*
Swords into ploughshares – *Isaiah ii 4*
Stumbling block – *Isaiah viii 14 (Tyndale's version)*
The leopard can't change its spots – *Jeremiah xiii 23*
Feet of clay – *Daniel ii 31-33*
Writing on the wall – *Daniel v 5-31*
They have sown the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind – *Hosea viii 7*
Baptism of fire – *Matthew iii 11⁷*
Separate the wheat from the chaff – *Matthew iii 12*
Man shall not live by bread alone – *Matthew iv 4*

⁷ Is it not extraordinary that nearly all familiar phrases from the New Testament are from Matthew?

Salt of the earth – *Matthew v 13*.

Jot or tittle – *Matthew v 18*. Iota is the smallest Greek letter and tittle is the dot over it.

The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing – *Matthew vi 3-4*

To cast pearls before swine – *Matthew vii 6*

Wolf in sheep's clothing – *Matthew vii 15*

He that is not with me is against me⁸ – *Matthew xii 30*

No man is prophet in his own country – *Matthew xiii 57*

Lip service – *Matthew xv 8; Isaiah xxix 13*

The blind leading the blind – *Matthew xv 14*

Get thee behind me Satan – *Matthew xvi 23*

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself – *Matthew xix 19*

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God – *Matthew xix 24; Mark x 25*. cf Koran: "The impious shall find the gates of heaven shut; nor shall he enter till a camel shall pass through the eye of a needle"; and Rabbinical writings: "Perhaps thou art one of the Pampedithians, who can make an elephant pass through the eye of a needle."

For many are called, but few are chosen – *Matthew xxii 14*

Practice what he preaches – *Matthew xxiii 2-3*

Whited sepulchre – *Matthew xxiii 27*

Separate the sheep from the goats – *Matthew xxv 32*

He who lives by the sword will die by the sword – *Matthew xxvi 52*

Measure for measure – *Mark iv 24*

Nurse a grudge – *Mark vi 18-19*

Physician, heal thyself – *Luke iv 23*

Eat drink and be merry⁹ – *Luke xii 19; Isaiah xxii 13; I Corinthians xv 32*

Cast the first stone – *John viii 7*

The truth shall make you free – *John viii 32*

Wages of sin – *Romans vi 23*

The Powers that be¹⁰ – *Romans xiii 1*

Not suffer fools gladly – *II Corinthians xi 19*

Thorn in the Flesh – *II Corinthians xii 7* – see also *Numbers xxxiii, 55*, the origin of the German expression "Dorn im Auge".

The love of money is the root of all evil – *II Timothy vi 10*

Alpha and Omega – *Revelation i 8*

Double-edged sword – *Revelation i 16*

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us – *Ecclesiasticus xlv 1*

Truth bears the victory – *I Esdras iii 10-12* – "The first wrote, Wine is the strongest. The second

⁸ George W. Bush's speechwriters know the Bible well and have sought to dress up his particular form of zealotry in Biblical language.

⁹ This apparently jolly text is, actually a *memento mori*, since it is followed by the reminder that "tomorrow we die". Personally, I prefer Paul's suggestion to Timothy (*Timothy v 23*): "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" – every time I open a bottle, I think of my "often infirmities" and take pleasure in obeying at least one biblical injunction.

¹⁰ Whenever I hear this catch phrase, I cannot avoid recalling the name E. Power Biggs (1906-1977), one of the greatest organists of the twentieth century. Charles Dickens, a superlative inventor of memorable and apposite names, could hardly have conceived a better one for an organist. Born in England, Biggs studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London and moved to the United States in 1930. He popularised organ music through his live weekly radio programme on CBS from 1942 to 1958 and introduced many Americans to the music of Bach and Händel.

wrote, 'The king is strongest. The third wrote, Women are strongest: but above all things Truth beareth away the victory'

Do as you would be done by – *Book of Common Prayer, Catechism*

The world, the flesh, and the devil – *Book of Common Prayer*: "From all the deceits of the world, the flesh and the devil, Good Lord, deliver us."

* * * *

Punctuation Matters

One of the surprise publishing successes of 2003 was the highly entertaining, yet deeply serious book by Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves – The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (Profile Books 2003)¹¹. The title is explained by the following anecdote:

A panda walks into a café and orders a sandwich. He eats it, draws a gun and shoots the waiter. "Why?" asks the dying waiter. The panda produces a wildlife manual and points to the section on the panda: 'Eats, shoots and leaves'.

Among the other gems to be found in the book:

Add punctuation to the following: 'A woman without her man is nothing' (and see for yourself how sexist you are).

Why do children avoid the Giant Kid's Playground? Because they're afraid of the Giant Kid.

'Prudential – were here to help you' – spot the un-deliberate mistake.

On the vexed subject of apostrophes, Ms Truss refers to the "inspired story" by William Hartston in *The Express* about the Apostropher Royal, a post inaugurated in the reign of Elizabeth I, who controlled the quality and distribution of apostrophes and distributed them in a wheelbarrow to all the greengrocers of England on the second Thursday of every month (Apostrophe Thursday). His present day successor is named as Sir D'Anville O'M'Darlin'. Among examples of apostrophe errors are:

Pupil's entrance (to a very selective school, presumably)

Adult Learner's Week (lucky him)

Member's May Ball (but with whom will the member dance?)

Nigger's out (sign reportedly seen in New York, under which someone had written "but he'll be back shortly")

She describes the conflict between James Thurber and Harold Ross (editor of the *New Yorker*) on Thurber's (lack of) punctuation. Thurber was once asked by a correspondent "Why did you have a comma in the sentence 'After dinner, the men went into the living-room'?" "This particular comma", Thurber explained "was Ross's way of giving the men time to push back their chairs and stand up".

Another chapter refers to the "semantic havoc" created by a missing or wrongly placed comma, as in:

'What is this thing called, love?'

'He shot himself as a child'

'Go get him, surgeons' (in relation to the wounded soldier in *Macbeth*)

'Leonora walked on her head, a little higher than usual'

'The driver managed to escape from the vehicle before it sank and swam to the river bank'

'Don't guess, use a timer or watch'

'The convict said the judge is mad'

There is an apocryphal story that Umberto Eco used no semi-colons in his novel *The Name of the Rose* because his typewriter didn't have one. (Fans of Jean-Paul Belmondo will recall the film *Le Magnifique*, in which Belmondo plays a novelist who daydreams the scenes from his novels as he writes them. In one scene one of the letters on his typewriter gets stuck and the characters in his daydream suddenly acquire a speech impediment.) Another apocryphal story concerns Victor Hugo, who – when he wanted to know how *Les Misérables* was selling – telegraphed his publisher "?" and received the reply "!".

The necessity of that much-maligned and threatened species, the hyphen, is demonstrated by the 'little used car', 'superfluous hair remover', 'pickled herring merchant', 'slow moving traffic' and 'two hundred odd members of the Conservative Party'.

* * * *

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

"Although he may or may not have invented them, the words 'obscene', 'accommodation', 'barefaced', 'leap-frog', and 'lack-lustre' are just a few of those which make their first appearance in his work. Again we can see how words like 'obscene' and 'accommodation', for instance, once identified and put in print, bred many lines. It is as if a new word, if it strikes a deep chord in our minds, is immediately rooted to feed itself, to grow, to seek out more and more areas and nuances of expression, to bring back news to the mother-ship, to release a part of the brain just waiting for that word. Other words that make their first appearance include 'courtship', 'dextrously', 'indistinguishable', 'premeditated' and 'reliance'.

Over four hundred years ago, Shakespeare had a vocabulary of at least twenty-one thousand different words: some have estimated that with the combination of words, this could have reached thirty thousand. Comparisons are entertaining: the King James Bible of 1611 used about ten thousand different words. The average educated man today, more than four hundred years on from Shakespeare with the advantage of the hundreds of thousands of new words that have come in since his time, has a working vocabulary of less than half that of Shakespeare. His personal vocabulary was as big as entire languages.

The language at that time was in flux: Shakespeare must have made it dizzy. He 'out-Heroded Herod'; 'uncle me no uncle,' he said, he would 'dog them at the heels' - just one of the astonishing, simple transferences of a common observation, a dog at someone's heels, into a phrase which could be menacing, funny, admirable, pestering: and it is clinchingly memorable.

¹¹ With thanks to David Nygaard.

Shakespeare shoved into bed together words that scarcely knew each other before, had never even been introduced. He coupled 'ill' with 'tuned' - 'ill-tuned' it was and is and ever more shall be. 'Baby' suddenly found itself hitched to eyes and 'baby-eyes' hit the page. 'Smooth', unaware of its new mate, was joined with 'faced' and the 'smooth-faced' appeared among us. 'Puppy' met 'dog'. In the sixteenth century people began to start their sentences with 'oh', 'why' and 'well' as 'pray', 'prithee' and 'marry' began to die off. Shakespeare was on to them. Almost every word could be used as almost any part of speech. There were no rules and Shakespeare's English ran riot."

From *The Adventure of English* by Melvyn Bragg

Probably the best known speech in all Shakespeare's works is Hamlet's soliloquy **To be, or not to be** (*Hamlet* III 2) ; yet few know more than the first line – it bears reading to the end.

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

As Melvyn Bragg notes in the book referred to above, Shakespeare enriched the language by imaginative use of new words or combinations of words, by original and striking descriptive phrases and by new formulation of classical tags. His achievement is in many cases not the formulation itself, but that his expressions were taken up in day-to-day speech, to the point that we no longer recognise Shakespeare as their author.

Gild the lily – To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, or add another hue
Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.
King John, IV 2

Familiarity breeds contempt – *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, I 1 (cf *Publius Sirius: Maxim* 640)
The world's mine oyster – *Merry Wives of Windsor*, II 2
This is the short and the long of it – *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, II 2
What the dickens? – *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, III 2
As good luck would have it – *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, III 5
Salad days – *Antony and Cleopatra*, I 5
It beggared all description – *Antony and Cleopatra*, II 2
Brevity is the soul of wit – *Hamlet*, II 2 ¹²
Play fast and loose – *Love's Labour's Lost*, III 1
Pound of flesh – *Merchant of Venice*
Budge an inch – *The Taming of the Shrew*, Induction 1
More in sorrow than in anger – *Hamlet*, I 2
In my mind's eye – *Hamlet*, I 2
To thine own self be true – *Hamlet*, I 3
The play's the thing – *Hamlet*, II 2
There's method in his madness – "Though this be madness yet there is method in it" - *Hamlet*, II 2
Primrose path – "Primrose path of dalliance" *Hamlet* I 3; "Primrose way to the everlasting bonfire". *Macbeth* II 1.
Hold the mirror up to nature – *Hamlet*, III 2
In my heart of hearts – *Hamlet*, III 2
I must be cruel only to be kind – *Hamlet*, III 4
Hoist with his own petard - *Hamlet* III 4
The rest is silence – *Hamlet*, V 2 (Hamlet's last words)
Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it – *Macbeth*, I 4
The milk of human kindness – *Macbeth*, I 5
In one fell swoop – *Macbeth*, IV 3
He wants the natural touch – *Macbeth*, IV 2
All our yesterdays – *Macbeth*, V 5 - Another speech that bears reading in full:

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

¹² cf Dorothy Parker: "Brevity is the soul of lingerie".

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life 's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.”

Vanished into thin air – *The Tempest IV 1* – “These our actors, As I foretold you, were all spirits,
and Are melted into air, into thin air”

Give the devil his due – *Henry IV Part 1, I 2*

The better part of valour is discretion – *Henry IV Part 1, V 4*

Halcyon days – *Henry VI Part 1, I 2*

Still waters run deep – A popular aphorism, but cf

“Smooth runs the water where the brook is deep:
And in his simple show he harbours treason.
The fox barks not when he would steal the lamb;
No, no, my sovereign, Gloucester is a man
Unsound yet, and full of deep deceit.”
Henry VI Part 2, III 1

Let's kill all the lawyers – *Henry VI Part 2, IV 2*

The unkindest cut – *Julius Caesar, III 2*

Cold comfort – *King John, V 7*

I am a man more sinn'd against than sinning – *King Lear, III ii*

Fie, foh, and fum, I smell the blood of a British man – *King Lear, III iv*

Every inch a king – *King Lear, IV vi*

The course of true love never did run smooth – *A Midsummer Night's Dream, I i*

To wear one's heart on one's sleeve – *Othello I i*

Thereby hangs a tail – *Othello, III i*

Who steals my purse steals trash – *Othello, III iii*

One that loved not wisely but too well – *Othello, V ii*

There is no virtue like necessity – *Richard II, I iii*

The worst is death, and death will have his day – *Richard II, III ii*

Perish the thought – from Colley Cibber's version of Shakespeare's *Richard III, V 5*

We are such stuff as dreams are made on – *The Tempest, IV i*

Cakes and ale – *Twelfth Night, II, iii*

A worm in the bud – *Twelfth Night, II, iv*

Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them –
Twelfth Night, II v

Midsummer madness – *Twelfth Night, III iv*

Brave new world – *The Tempest, V i*

What's gone and what's past help should be past grief – *The Winter's Tale, II ii*

Star-cross'd lovers – *Romeo and Juliet, Prologue*

Parting is such sweet sorrow – *Romeo and Juliet, II, ii*

What's in a name? – *Romeo and Juliet, II 2* – “That which we call a rose, By any other word would
smell as sweet.”

A plague on both your houses! – *Romeo and Juliet, III, i*

JULIET : Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day:
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear;
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate-tree:
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

ROMEO : It was the lark, the herald of the morn,
No nightingale: look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

Romeo and Juliet, III, v

Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure:
In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

Twelfth Night, II, iii

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again! it had a **dying fall**:
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour! Enough; no more:
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
O spirit of love! how quick and fresh art thou,
That, notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,
Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
But falls into abatement and low price,
Even in a minute: so full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high fantastical.

Twelfth Night, I, i

This royal throne of kings, **this scepter'd isle**,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,

Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth,
 Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
 For Christian service and true chivalry,
 As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry,
 Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son,
 This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
 Dear for her reputation through the world,
 Is now leased out, I die pronouncing it,
 Like to a tenement or pelting farm:
 England, bound in with the triumphant sea
 Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
 Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
 With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds:
 That England, that was wont to conquer others,
 Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.
 Ah, would the scandal vanish with my life,
 How happy then were my ensuing death!

Richard II, II i

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
 I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

**The evil that men do lives after them;
 The good is oft interred with their bones;**

So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
 Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
 If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
 And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.
 Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest--
 For Brutus is an honourable man;
 So are they all, all honourable men--
 Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
 He was my friend, faithful and just to me:
 But Brutus says he was ambitious;
 And Brutus is an honourable man.

Julius Caesar, III ii

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players:
 They have their exits and their entrances;
 And one man in his time plays many parts,
 His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
 Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
 And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
 And shining morning face, creeping like snail
 Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
 Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
 Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
 Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
 Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,

Seeking the bubble reputation
 Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
 In fair round belly with good capon lined,
 With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
 Full of wise saws and modern instances;
 And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
 Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
 With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
 His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
 For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
 Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
 And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
 That ends this strange eventful history,
 Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
 Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

As You Like It, II iii

**There is a tide in the affairs of men,
 Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;**
 Omitted, all the voyage of their life
 Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
 On such a full sea are we now afloat;
 And we must take the current when it serves,
 Or lose our ventures.

Julius Caesar, IV iii

O, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs
 All from her father's death. O Gertrude, Gertrude,
**When sorrows come, they come not single spies
 But in battalions.**

Hamlet, IV v

* * * *

Financial Times book title competition

In 1983, *The Financial Times* held a competition for titles for false book-backs, in the manner of Patrick Leigh Fermour, who reportedly devised some for the library of the Duchess of Devonshire at Chatsworth (examples given were “Sideways through Derbyshire” by Crabbe; “Consenting Adults” by Abel N. Willing). Entries included:

“Broken Windows” by Eva Stone
 “School Discipline” by Tanya Hide
 “Cannibal Island” by Henrietta Mann
 “How to Make Money” by Robin Bankes
 “Saddle Sore” by Rhoda Lott
 “Gardening for the Over-Sixties” by A. King-Bach
 “Travelling by Tube” by Jocelyn Daley
 “Escape from Holloway” by Freda Quickly

"The Moviegoer's Guide" by C. Watson
"Aeroplane Chic" by Baudelaire

The winners were:

"Destruction of the Family Unit" by Frank and Ernest Torques
"Poise and Posture for the Russian Woman" by Gorky
"The Church Militant" by Canon Ball
"The Lispering Lover" by Keith McQuick

* * * *

Writing Skills

It will be no surprise to readers of *Christmas Pudding* that I am an admirer of the works of Gore Vidal. His mammoth collection of essays from 1952-1992, *United States*, is illustrative of his eclectic interests and wide-ranging scholarship. Nearly half deal with literature and are peppered with "Vidalisms" such as

"To the end of a long life, he kept on making the only thing he thought worth making: sense, a quality almost entirely lacking in American literature where stupidity – if sufficiently sincere and authentic – is deeply revered, and easily achieved." (Essay on Edmund Wilson, *The New York Review of Books*, 25.9.1980)

"Obviously there is a great deal wrong with our educational system, as President Reagan recently, and rather gratuitously, noted. After all, an educated electorate would not have elected him President."¹³ (Essay on William Dean Howells, *The New York Review of Books*, 27.10.1983)

I am pleased to find a concordance of ideas between Vidal and my mentor, Yvor Winters, on the decline in the quality and understanding of English as well as on the fraud perpetuated by English faculties on English literature (and students thereof).

"For every Scott Fitzgerald concerned with the precise word and the selection of relevant incident, there are a hundred American writers, many well regarded, who appear to believe that one word is just as good as another, and that anything that pops into his head is worth putting down. It is an attitude unique to us and deriving, I would suspect, from a corrupted idea of democracy: if everything and everyone is of equal value, then any word is as good as any other to express a meaning, which in turn is no more valuable than any other meaning. Or to put it another way, if everyone is equally valuable, then anything the writer (who is valuable) writes must be of value, so why attempt selection?" ("John dos Passos at Midcentury", *Esquire*, May 1961)

"One interesting result of today's passion for the immediate and the casual has been the decline, in all the arts, of the idea of technical virtuosity as being in any way desirable. The culture (*kitsch* as well as camp) enjoys singers who sing no better than the average listener, actors who do not

¹³ A welcome antidote to the unseemly and unthinking praise lavished in 2004 on the dead Reagan by many who should have known better, but whose memories are short and selective. What was the "Contra" affair about? How many repressive regimes were supported by the Reagan administration? Whose Presidency began the dismantling of social services?

act yet are, in Andy Warhol's happy phrase, "super-stars," painters whose effects are too easily achieved, writers whose swift flow of words across the page is not submitted to the rigors of grammar or shaped by conscious thought. There is a general Zen-ish sense of why bother? If a natural fall of pebbles can "say" as much as any shaping of paint on canvas or cutting of stone, why go to the trouble of recording what is there for all to see? In any case, if the world should become, as predicted, a village united by an electronic buzzing, our ideas of what is art will seem as curious to those gregarious villagers as the works of what we used to call the Dark Ages appear to us." ("French Letters: Theories of the New Novel", in *Encounter*, December 1967¹⁴)

"The fact that America's English departments are manned by the second-rate is no great thing. The second-rate must live, too. But in most civilized countries the second-rate are at least challenged by the first-rate. And score is kept in literary journals. But as McDonald's drives out good food, so these hacks of Academe drive out good prose. At every level in our literary life they flourish. In fact, they have now taken to writing the sort of novels that other tenured hacks can review and teach. Entire issues of "literary journals" are written by them. Meanwhile, in the universities, they are increasing at a positively Malthusian rate; and an entire generation of schoolteachers and book chatters now believes that an inability to master English is a sign of intellectual grace, and that a writer like Pritchett is not to be taken seriously because he eschews literary velleities for literary criticism. Madame Verdurin has won the day. Even so, it is good to know that our last critic in English is still at work, writing well—that is, writing as if writing well mattered. It would be nice if Sir Victor lived forever." (Essay on V.S. Pritchett in *The New York Review of Books*, 28.6.1979)

"We do not, of course, write literary criticism at all now. Academe has won the battle in which Wilson fought so fiercely on the other side. Ambitious English teachers now invent systems that have nothing to do with literature or life but everything to do with games that must be played for them to rise in the academic bureaucracy. Their works are empty indeed. But then their works are not meant to be full. They are to be taught, not read." (Essay on Edmund Wilson, *The New York Review of Books*, 25.9.1980)

* * * *

Chaucer

To maken vertue of necessite. *Canterbury Tales. The Knightes Tale. Line 3044.*
So was hire joly whistle wel ywette. *Canterbury Tales. The Reves Tale. Line 4153.*
Mordre wol out, that see we day by day. *Canterbury Tales. The Nonnes Preestes Tale. Line 15058.*
And of his port as meke as is a mayde. *Canterbury Tales. Prologue. Line 69.*
But all thing which that shineth as the gold, Ne is no gold, as I have herd it told. *Canterbury Tales. The Chanones Yemannes Tale. Line 16430.*¹⁵
Full wise is he that can himselven knowe. *Canterbury Tales. The Monkes Tale. Line 1449.*
Right as an aspen lefe she gan to quake. *Troilus and Creseide. Book ii. Line 1201*
One eare it heard, at the other out it went. *Troilus and Creseide. Book iv. Line 435.*
The lyfe so short, the craft so long to lerne, *The Assembly of Fowles. Line 1.*¹⁶

¹⁴ In "American Plastic: The Matter of Fiction" (NYR, 15 July 1974), Gore muses on the irony that this article was "rejected by the American literary paper for which I had written it ... I was obliged to publish in England at the CIA's expense."

¹⁵ See also "All that glisters is not gold" – Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, II, vii

¹⁶ cf "Ars longa, vita brevis" – Seneca *De brevitate vitae* I,1

* * * *

One of the saddest events in recent publishing history was the demise of the old magazine **Punch** – unlike its North American equivalent, *The New Yorker*, it never managed to carve out a sufficiently large market niche for its particular brand of wit and, under its new owner, the magazine is but a shade of its former self. One of the cartoons published in *Punch* at the end of the 19th century coined a new expression in English: “The Curate’s Egg”.



Right Reverend Host: "I'm afraid you've got a bad egg, Mr. Jones!" - The Curate: "Oh no, my Lord, I assure you! Parts of it are excellent!" Artist: du Maurier Date: Nov 1895

Other expressions originating in or given notoriety by *Punch* include:

On the side of the Angels - *Punch*, Dec. 10, 1864, contains a cartoon of Disraeli, dressing for an Oxford *bal masqué*, as an angel, and underneath the cartoon are these words: “The question is, is man an ape or an angel? I am on the side of the angels” (words actually included by Disraeli in his *Oxford Speech* on 25 November 1864).

You pays your money and you gets your choice – vol. x 1846

Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow. – vol. xvii 1849

What is better than presence of mind in a railway accident? Absence of body. – vol. xvi 1849

* * * *

Spyplane

Who recalls the incident of the US spyplane captured by the Chinese in March 2001? In *The Financial Times* of 19.4.2001, Gerard Baker revealed a hitherto unknown Chinese translation of a draft agreement to resolve tensions with America over the crisis.

It took some time, but the US and China finally agreed on a complex verbal formula to defuse their dispute over the spyplane that landed on the island of Hainan three weeks ago.

What helped pave the way for the release of the 24 US crew members, according to news reports, was the fact that the vague and multiple meanings of English words can be translated into the more narrowly defined and nuanced Chinese in a number of differing ways. The US expression of sorrow over the loss of the Chinese pilot and the infringement of Chinese airspace was represented in Chinese as an “apology”.

In that spirit the two countries have been meeting this week to resolve the remaining sources of contention, reach agreement on the conditions of US aerial operations in the sea and air off China in future and establish a framework for bilateral relations between them for the next few years.

Here is what my sources say is the draft of an agreement. Where appropriate, the Chinese translation back into English is given in parentheses.

‘The governments of the United States and the People’s Republic of China, having examined the causes and potential consequences of the incident (unwarranted intrusion) that took place on Sunday, April 1, have agreed the following.

The events followed deliberate provocation by a hot-dogging Chinese aviator (heroic airmanship by a martyr of the people) that forced the crew of the US surveillance aircraft (imperialist airborne spies) to take evasive action.

We regret the fact that the F-8 pilot’s own repeated acts of aggression and suicidal behaviour ended with predictable results. (The US begs forgiveness of the People’s Republic for having committed an unpardonable act of aggression that caused the loss of the life of a hero of the revolution.)

Thanks to the heroic airmanship of American crew members (hot-dogging by reckless cowboy impersonators) the US aircraft landed on Hainan. We regret the fact that, after repeated attempts to gain clearance for landing on the island, which were ignored by Chinese authorities, the US aircraft was forced to enter Chinese national territory. (We prostrate ourselves before the Chinese people for repeating the sins of imperialists through the centuries and intruding unlawfully into Chinese territory.)

The US notes with pride that while imprisoned on the island of Hainan, the US servicemen showed great forbearance in the face of hostile interrogations by their Chinese captors and behaved with decorum and respect. (China notes with pride its humane and compassionate treatment of the alien forces, although it would have been free under international law to have them all executed as spies.)

The surveillance aircraft will be returned intact within one week of this agreement. (What is left of the spyplane will be placed in the Great Hall of the People and displayed as a permanent memorial to China’s triumph in the Battle of Hainan.) To avoid the possibility of any repetition of this incident (insult to Chinese sovereignty), we have further agreed:

That US aircraft on routine surveillance missions in international airspace will in future be accompanied by at least one US fighter jet equipped with air-to-air missiles, backed up by the capital ships of the US Pacific fleet. (That US aircraft conducting hostile spy missions in Chinese airspace will be shot down without warning by a Chinese fighter jet, whose pilot will thereby gloriously avenge the murder of Aviator Wang Wei.)

That, in order to enhance prospects for regional security, the Republic of China on Taiwan will receive whatever it wants, on favourable financing terms, from US defence equipment manufacturers; Beijing will withdraw its bid for the 2008 Olympics in favour of Houston, Texas; realistic tariffs will be placed on the importation of toys for Happy Meals; and Britney Spears' planned concert tours of China will be indefinitely postponed. (That the US will use its influence with the renegade province of Taiwan to bring about an early reunification of China; encourage re-education programmes on Chinese history among Americans, especially members of Congress; quickly conclude negotiations on China's entry into the World Trade Organisation; and facilitate cultural exchanges to promote better understanding between the peoples of our two countries.)

That the US will make efforts to establish a working rapport for public relations purposes between General Colin Powell, secretary of state, and his counterparts in the Chinese government. (That the US authorities will listen to the wise diplomatic words of General Pau Co-Lin [tr: *Peaceful Warrior*] as he alone speaks for the American people.)

That in future all the really important policy decisions regarding China will be taken by Vice-President Dick Cheney and defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld. (That the twins of capitalist tyranny, Chei-Nee Veep [tr: *Evil Power behind the Throne*] and Rum-Mee Don [tr: *Dragon with Five Heads*] will be removed from policy operations involving Asia.)

That US relations with China will in future be marked by a "New Realism" as defined by President Bush that will treat China as a strategic competitor and the threat to global peace that it truly is. (That the president known as Boo-Shi [tr: *illegitimate Leader with No Mandate*] will quickly assume the position so wisely adopted by his Great and Well Endowed Predecessor, Clin-Ton, [tr: *Leader with Useful Intelligence*] ensuring that his forehead remains in constant touch with the ground.)

Signed Pte J Smith, records clerk, consular section, U.S Embassy, Beijing
Jiang Zemin, president.'

* * * *

Modern Times

The following is not by Gore Vidal, but could have been¹⁷.

World History 101 - Mid-term exam

This test consists of one (1) multiple-choice question. Here's a list of the countries that a major power has bombed since the end of World War II, compiled by US historian William Blum:

China 1945-46
Korea 1950-53
China 1950-53
Guatemala 1954

¹⁷ See the long list of US military operations from 1948 to the present compiled by the Federation of American Scientists that Vidal appends to the chapter "September 11, 2001 – A Tuesday" in his *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*: Vidal's comment: "In these several hundred wars against Communism, terrorism, drugs, or sometimes nothing much, between Pearl Harbor and Tuesday September 11, 2001, we tended to strike the first blow. But we're the good guys, right? Right."

Indonesia 1958
Cuba 1959-60
Guatemala 1960
Congo 1964
Peru 1965
Laos 1964-73
Vietnam 1961-73
Cambodia 1969-70
Guatemala 1967-69
Grenada 1983
Libya 1986
El Salvador 1980s
Nicaragua 1980s
Panama 1989
Iraq 1991-2003
Sudan 1998
Afghanistan 1998-2001
Yugoslavia 1999

Question: In how many of these instances did a democratic government, respectful of human rights, occur as a direct result? Choose one of the following:

(a) 0 (b) zero (c) none (d) not a one (e) an integer between -1 and +1

In his *Epitaph on a Tyrant*, from 1940, W. H. Auden captures with uncanny foresight the outcome of two Gulf wars, and the supine reaction of the US Congress to the unprecedented extension of Presidential war powers by the brightly burning Bush¹⁸, that have resulted in special hardship for children in Iraq¹⁹:

Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after
And the poetry he invented was easy to understand;
He knew human folly like the back of his hand,
And was greatly interested in armies and fleets;
When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter,
And when he cried the little children died in the streets.

* * * *

The **Plain English Campaign** (<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/index.html>) is an independent pressure group fighting for public information to be written in plain English. It defines 'public information' as anything people have to read to get by in their

¹⁸ In 2003 I joined my first (and perhaps last) Peace March – one of the slogans prepared by the peaceful and well-disciplined Geneva school kids (shame on all older generations) read: "More Flowers - Less Bushes".

¹⁹ The Clinton administration continued the sanctions that led to the deaths of more than half a million Iraqi children; Madeleine Albright, when confronted with this figure, was not embarrassed to declare that "we think the price is worth it". See <http://www.fair.org/extra/0111/iraq.html>

daily lives; and ‘plain English’ as language that the intended audience can understand and act upon from a single reading.

In a press release dated 23 March 2004, the Campaign reported on a membership survey, in which “At the end of the day” was voted the most irritating phrase in the language. Second place was shared by “At this moment in time” and the constant use of “like” as if it were a form of punctuation. “With all due respect” came fourth. The following terms also received multiple nominations:

awesome
ballpark figure
basically
basis ("on a weekly basis" in place of "weekly" and so on)
bear with me
between a rock and a hard place
blue sky (thinking)
boggles the mind
bottom line
crack troops
I hear what you're saying..
in terms of...
it's not rocket science
literally
move the goal-posts
ongoing
prioritise
pushing the envelope
singing from the same hymn sheet
the fact of the matter is
thinking outside the box
to be honest/to be honest with you/to be perfectly honest
touch base
value-added (in general use)

The Campaign makes an annual “Foot in Mouth” award for what it describes as “a truly baffling comment”. The 2003 winner was United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld for comments in a press briefing:

“Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns - the ones we don't know we don't know.”

The winning statement reveals more about the opaque nature of US strategic aims in Iraq than was perhaps intended and confirms the impression we had of him from his witty remarks about the “old Europe” and gems such as

“My impression is that what has been charged thus far [in Abu Ghraib] is abuse, which I believe is technically different from torture. ... I don't know if it is correct to say what you just said that torture has taken place, or that there has been a conviction for torture. And therefore I'm not going to address the torture word.”²⁰

* * * *

Miles and Miles



This picture shows a milestone in Zschortau, near Leipzig. I was puzzled by the distance shown to Berlin: 20 miles – in reality about 170km on today's roads. Had the milestone been erected in another location and moved to Zschortau subsequently? In satisfying my curiosity, I discovered a mine of useless information that I hasten to share with the reader. In the British Commonwealth and USA, a mile is 1,760 yards, 5,280 feet or 63,360 inches (in England, a mile comprises 8 furlongs, each of which is divided into 40 rods, poles or perches). The old Irish and Scottish miles were longer: 2,240 and 1,980 yards respectively. A Roman mile is 1,000 paces, equivalent to about 1,680 yards. (In case you wonder, as I did, why a Roman pace is so long, I discovered that it was actually a *double* pace, left and right combined.) The Geographical Mile is 1/15th of a degree of longitude at the Equator (7,420m), a quarter of which, i.e. one minute (1,852 m), is an International Nautical mile. A Norwegian mile (11,296m) is the longest known, with the Swedish mile a close second at 10,688m.

None of this explained the milestone in Zschortau until I discovered that the German “Meile” was yet again something different. The original German *Meile* comprised 1,000 *Klafter*, corresponding to the Roman double pace and was thus indeed derived from the Latin *millē*. However, different regions of Germany subsequently adopted different standards for the *Klafter* varying from 1.7 to 3 metres. Similarly, the *Meile* had different lengths in different parts of Germany: for example: Saxony 7,500m, Prussia 5,532.5m, Baden 8,888.9m. Since Zschortau is in Saxony, I have my explanation (give or take a little).

* * * *

²⁰ If anyone has a lingering doubt about what actually went on in Abu Ghraib, see <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/iraq/abughraib/swornstatements042104.html?g>

Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744)

Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And, without sneering teach the rest to sneer.
Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is Man.²¹
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act or rest,
In doubt to deem himself a God or Beast,
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such
Whether he thinks too little or too much:
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;
Still by himself abused, or disabused;
Created half to rise and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled;
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!
Go, wondrous creature! mount where science guides:
Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides:
Instruct the planets in what orbs to run,
Correct old time and regulate the Sun;
Go, soar with Plato to th' empyreal sphere,
To the first good, first perfect, and first fair;
Or tread the mazy round his follow'rs trod
And quitting sense call imitating God --
As Eastern priests in giddy circles run,
And turn their heads to imitate the Sun.
Go, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule:
Then drop into thyself, and be a fool!
Superior beings, when of late they saw
A mortal man unfold all nature's law,
Admired such wisdom in an earthly shape,
And showed a NEWTON as we show an ape.
Could he, whose rules the rapid comet bind,
Describe or fix one movement of his mind?
Who saw its fires here rise and there descend,
Explain his own beginning or his end?

²¹ "Of all things the measure is man, of the things that are, how they are, and of things that are not, how they are not." Attributed to Protagoras (c. 490-c. 420 BC) by Plato (c. 427-327 BC) in *Theaetetus* 152a. It is not agreed among scholars whether the statement was really made by Protagoras or was put into his mouth by Plato.

Alas, what wonder: man's superior part
Unchecked may rise, and climb from art to art,
But when his own great work is but begun,
What reason weaves by passion is undone.
Essay on Man. Epistle I

Hope humbly then; with trembling pinions soar;
Wait the great teacher Death, and God adore.
What future bliss He gives not thee to know,
But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.
Hope springs eternal in the human breast:
Man never is, but always to be, blest.
The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.
Essay on Man. Epistle I

A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.
Fired at first sight with what the Muse imparts,
In fearless youth we tempt the heights of arts,
While from the bounded level of our mind
Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind:
But more advanc'd, behold with strange surprise
New distant scenes of endless science rise!
So pleas'd at first the tow'ring Alps we try,
Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky;
Th'eternal snows appear already past,
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last:
But those attain'd, we tremble to survey
The growing labours of the lengthen'd way;
Th'increasing prospect tires our wand'ring eyes,
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise! ...
An Essay on Man Part II

And while self-love each jealous writer rules,
Contending wits become the sport of fools:
But still the worst with most regret commend,
For each ill author is as bad a friend.
To what base ends, and by what abject ways,
Are mortals urg'd through sacred lust of praise!
Ah ne'er so dire a thirst of glory boast,
Nor in the critic let the man be lost!
Good nature and good sense must ever join;
To err is human; to forgive, divine.²²
Essay on Criticism, Part II

²² Attentive readers of *Christmas Pudding 2003* will recall Mae West's alternative: "To err is human, but it feels divine".

Such shameless bards we have; and yet 'tis true
 There are as mad abandon'd critics too.
 The bookful blockhead ignorantly read,
 With loads of learned lumber in his head,
 With his own tongue still edifies his ears,
 And always list'ning to himself appears.
 All books he reads, and all he reads assails,
 From Dryden's Fables down to Durfey's Tales.
 With him most authors steal their works, or buy;
 Garth did not write his own Dispensary.
 Name a new play, and he's the poet's friend;
 Nay, show'd his faults--but when would poets mend?
 No place so sacred from such fops is barr'd,
 Nor is Paul's church more safe than Paul's churchyard:
 Nay, fly to altars; there they'll talk you dead;
 For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.
 Distrustful sense with modest caution speaks,
 It still looks home, and short excursions makes;
 But rattling nonsense in full volleys breaks ...
Essay on Criticism. Part III

* * * *

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* appeared in 1755. Almost entirely his own work, it was the first dictionary produced according to modern standards of lexicography and contained some 40,000 entries. Johnson's approach was highly idiosyncratic, and often humorous, as shown by his definition of lexicographer: "a writer of dictionaries, a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words". In the Preface, Johnson claimed modest objectives

"It must be remembered, that while our language is yet living, and variable by the caprice of every one that speaks it, these words are hourly shifting their relations, and can no more be ascertained in a dictionary, than a grove, in the agitation of a storm, can be accurately delineated from its picture in the water."

"Every increase of knowledge, whether real or fancied, will produce new words, or combination of words. When the mind is unchained from necessity, it will range after convenience; when it is left at large in the fields of speculation, it will shift opinions; as any custom is disused, the words that expressed it must perish with it; as any opinion grows popular, it will innovate speech in the same proportion as it alters practice."

"... no dictionary of a living tongue ever can be perfect, since while it is hastening to publication, some words are budding, and some falling away;"

Despite this modesty, his dictionary, by the use of many illustrative quotations, helped to establish a standard for "modern English". In his *Life of Samuel Johnson*, James Boswell recorded many of Johnson's other pithy sayings:

"It is strange that there should be so little reading in the world, and so much writing. People in general do not willingly read, if they can have any thing else to amuse them."

"There may be other reasons for a man's not speaking in public than want of resolution: he may have nothing to say."

"Read your own compositions, and when you meet with a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out."

"This is one of the disadvantages of wine, it makes a man mistake words for thoughts."

* * * *

Classical

Caveat emptor – the full Latin legal maxim is *Caveat emptor, quia ignorare non debuit quod ius alienum emit* (Let a purchaser beware, for he ought not to be ignorant of the nature of the property that he is buying from another party).

Whom the gods love die young – *Hon boi theoi philousim apothneskei neos*: Menander.²³



Cave canem – from a mosaic in Pompeii in the entrance hall to the House of the Tragic Poet:

"There on the left as one entered...was a huge dog with a chain round its neck. It was painted on the wall and under it, in big capitals, was written: Beware of the Dog." Petronius, *Satyricon* (XXIX)

Silent leges inter arma – Cicero, *Pro T. Annio Milone*, 10

Achilles' heel – Thetis took her son Achilles by the heel and dipped him into the river Styx to make him invulnerable, but the heel in her hand remained dry.

Mens sana in corpore sano – Juvenal, *Satires* X, v, 356

Purple patch – *Inceptis gravibus plerumque et magna professis purpureus, late qui splendeat, unus et alter adsuitur pannus* Horace, *Ars Poetica* 14

Gave birth to a mouse ... – *Parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus* Horace, *Ars Poetica* 139 (cf also Boileau, "La montagne en travail enfante une souris.")

Even Homer nods – *Indignor quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus* Horace, *Ars Poetica* 359

Life's too short – *Vita summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam* Horace, *Ode* I, 4 (*Vita summa brevis* is also title of a poem by Ernest Dowson, 1867-1900)

Time flies – *Fugit irreparabile tempus* Virgil, *Georgics* 3,284

The die is cast – *Alea jacta est*: Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 32 (on crossing the **Rubicon**)

Cloud-cuckoo-land – the *Nephelococcygia* of *The Birds* by Aristophanes: an imaginary city built in the air by the birds. (Goethe translated it as "Wolkenkuckucksheim")

²³ Famously rendered by Oscar Wilde as "Those whom the gods love grow young."

Pecunia non olet – Money doesn't stink: Suetonius, *Vespasian* 23, 3 – Response by the emperor Vespasian to his son Titus, who had criticised his father for introducing a tax on public toilets.

A friend in need is a friend indeed – *Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur* Cicero, *De Amicitia* 64

Love conquers all – *Amor vincit omnia* Virgil, *Bucolica* 10, 69

Ab ovo ... in medias res – Horace, *Ars Poetica* 147-48

One hand washes the other – *Manus manem lavat* Petronius, *Satiricon* 45,13

In vino veritas – Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 14, 41

Know thyself – Socrates, quoted as *Nosce te ipsum* by Juvenal *Satires* xi 27 and Cicero, *Tusculanas*, 1, 52

Sic transit gloria mundi – Thomas a Kempis, *Imitatio Christi*

When in Rome – *Si fueris Romae, Romano vivito more; Si fueris alibi, vivito sicut ibi*. St. Ambrose, c. 340-397

Bread and circuses – *Duas tantum res anxius optat, Panem et circenses*. Juvenal, *Satires* 80

Fortune aids the brave – *Audaces Fortuna juvat* Virgil *Aeneid* 10, 284; and *Fortis fortuna adjuvat* Terence, *Phormio* 203

Cui bono – To whose profit? Cicero, *Pro Milone* XII xxxii

O tempora, O mores! – O what times, O what habits! Cicero, *In Catilinam* I i 1

Carpe diem – Horace, *Ode* I, 11, 8

Errare humanum est – Cicero, *Filippica* 12, 5

Beware of Greeks bearing gifts – *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*: Virgil *Aeneid* II 49

Philippic – So called from the orations of Demosthenes against Philip of Macedon

Festina lente – Make haste slowly: Suetonius, *Augustus* xxv.



Suetonius and Aulus Gellius record that the emperor Augustus, a wise and prudent commander, chose it as his motto, together with the image of a dolphin clasp and anchor device was used by the Venetian scholar-printer Aldus Manutius (ca. 1449-1515) and is “perhaps the most celebrated of all printers’ marks. It is singularly graceful in design, eminently characteristic of the distinguished scholar who first adopted it, and is affixed to a series of works which contributed more than those of any single printer or family of printers to the progress of learning and literature in Europe.” (Christie, *Bibliographica* I 1895, 247).

Never say die – *Nil Desperandum* Horace, *Carmen* I vii 27.

O tempora! O mores! – Cicero, *In Catilinam* i I

Si vis pacem, para bellum – *If you desire peace, prepare for war* – No precise source, but similar concepts appear in Plato, *Laws* VIII, 829 A, Cornelius Nepos, *Epaminondas* 5, 4; Livy VI, 18, 7; and Vegetius, *Book III*, *Foreword*.

Quot homines, tot sententiae – *There are as many opinions as there are men*. Terence, *Phormio* II iv 14

Latet anguis in herba – *Snake in the Grass*. Virgil. Eclogue iii. 93.

Ave atque vale – Catullus at his brother's tomb

Leave no stone unturned – After the defeat of Mardonius at Plataea (B.C. 477), a report was current that the Persian General had left great treasures in his tent. Polycrates the Theban sought long but did not find them. The Oracle of Delphi, being consulted, told him “to leave no stone unturned,” and the treasures were discovered.

In the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king – *In regione caecorum rex est luscus* Erasmus, *Adagia* (1500)

* * * *

Signs noted from across the globe²⁴

Our hotel is situated in the shadiest part of town.

We make tea from a bag, just like mother

If you wish for breakfast, lift the telephone and our waitress will arrive. This will be enough to bring your food up.

You cannot fail to remark from the window the odours of the pine trees in our swimming pool.

There is a French widow in every bedroom.

Extract of fowl: Which means an egg, of course It can be ordered peached or sunside up.

London hospital: Visitors. Two to bed and half-an-hour only.

Paris hotel: A sports jacket may be worn to dinner, but no trousers.

Istanbul dentist: American dentist, second floor - teeth extracted by latest methodists.

Rome newspaper advertisement: During the working process the quality of our products undergoes compromises never.

Shop window: Dresses for street walking - Another said ‘Come inside and have a fit’

In a cemetery: Persons are prohibited from picking flowers from any but their own graves.

On an Athi River highway: Take notice when this sign is under water, this road is impassable.

In a City restaurant: Open seven days a week and weekends.

One of the Mathare buildings: Mental health prevention centre.

A sign seen on an automatic restroom hand dryer: Do not activate with wet hands.

In a Pumwani maternity ward: No children allowed.

In a Nairobi restaurant: Customers who find our waitresses rude ought to see the manager.

On the grounds of a private school: No trespassing without permission.

Tokyo hotel's rules and regulations: Guests are requested not to smoke or do other disgusting behaviours in bed.

Hotel notice, Tokyo: Is forbidden to steal hotel towels please. If you are not a person to do such a thing is please not to read notis.

On the menu of a Swiss restaurant: Our wines leave you nothing to hope for.

In a Bangkok temple: It is forbidden to enter a woman even a foreigner if dressed as a man.

Hotel room notice, Chiang-Mai, Thailand: Please do not bring solicitors into your room

Hotel brochure, Italy: This hotel is renowned for its peace and solitude. In fact, crowds from all over the world flock here to enjoy its solitude.

Hotel lobby, Bucharest: The lift is being fixed for the next day. During that time we regret that you will be unbearable.

Hotel elevator, Paris: Please leave your values at the front desk.

Hotel Yugoslavia: The flattening of underwear with pleasure is the job of the chambermaid.

Hotel Japan: You are invited to take advantage of the chambermaid.

In a Tokyo Bar: Special cocktails for the ladies with nuts.

Supermarket, Hong Kong: For your convenience, we recommend courteous, efficient self-service.

Dry cleaner's, Bangkok: Drop your trousers here for the best results.

East African newspaper: A new swimming pool is rapidly taking shape since the contractors have thrown in the bulk of their workers.

Hotel, Vienna: In case of fire, do your utmost to alarm the hotel porter.

A sign posted in Germany's Black Forest: It is strictly forbidden on our black forest camping site that people of different sex, for instance, men and women, live together in one tent unless they are married with each other for this purpose.

²⁴ With thanks to John Clark

Hotel, Zurich: Because of the impropriety of entertaining guests of the opposite sex in the bedroom, it is suggested that the lobby be used for this purpose.

From a Russian book on Chess: A lot of water has been passed under the bridge since this variation has been played.

A laundry in Rome: Ladies, leave your clothes here and spend the afternoon having a good time.

Tourist agency, Czechoslovakia: Take one of our horse-driven city tours. We guarantee no miscarriages.

Advertisement for donkey rides, Thailand: Would you like to ride on your own ass?

Air line ticket office, Copenhagen: We take your bags and send them in all directions.

Moscow hotel room: If this is your first visit to the USSR, you are welcome to it.

Cocktail lounge, Norway: Ladies are requested not to have children in the bar.

At a Budapest zoo: Please do not feed the animals. If you have any suitable food, give it to the guard on duty.

Doctors' office, Rome: Specialist in women and other diseases.

Information booklet about using a hotel air conditioner, Japan: Cooles and heates if you want just condition of warm air in your room, please control yourself.

Hotel, Acapulco: The manager has personally passed all the water served here.

Car rental brochure, Tokyo: When passenger of foot heave in sight, tootle the horn. Trumpet him melodiously at first, but if he still obstacles your passage then tootle him with vigor.

Finally, I would like to thank Jamilia in Bishkek for her e-mail wishing me a happy New Year and "a lot of loves and happiness".

* * * *

Fine Writing

Absolute Friends, by John Le Carré, which I have just finished reading, gives an English translation of what he describes as the "loveliest and shortest poem in the German language" (by Goethe): judge for yourself.

<i>Ein Gleiches</i> Über allen Gipfeln Ist Ruh, In allen Wipfeln Spürest du Kaum einen Hauch; Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde. Warte nur, balde Ruhest du auch.	<i>Similarity</i> Over all the mountains Is peace, In all the tree-tops You feel Hardly a breath; The little birds are silent in the woods. Wait awhile, soon You too will be at rest.
---	--

I am indebted to Ludovica de Spoelberch for the following, which is very similar in atmosphere.

Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837) - *L'Infinito*

Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,
E questa siepe, che da tanta parte
De l'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.
Ma sedendo e mirando, interminato

Spazio di là da quella, e sovrumani
Silenzi, e profondissima quiete
Io nel pensier mi fingo, ove per poco
Il cor non si spaura. E come il vento
Odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello
Infinito silenzio a questa voce
Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,
E le morte stagioni, e la presente
E viva, e 'l suon di lei. Così tra questa
Infinità s'annega il pensier mio:
E 'l naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.

In *The New Yorker* of 23 August 2004, Adam Gopnik reviewed several recent books on the First World War. Gopnik writes well and has a good ear for poetry. What he has to say is a salutary lesson for US presidents, although it may be doubted that *The New Yorker* is read by the current incumbent of the Oval Office or that he would understand it if he could.

History does not offer lessons; its unique constellations of contingencies never repeat. But life does offer the same points, over and over again. A lesson is many-edged; a point has only one, but that one sharp. And the point we might still take from the First World War is the old one that wars are always, in Lincoln's perfectly chosen word, astounding. They produce results that we can hardly imagine when they start. It is not that wars are always wrong. It is that wars are always wars, good for destroying things that must be destroyed, as in 1864 or 1944, but useless for doing anything more, and no good at all for doing cultural work: saving the national honor, proving that we are not a second-rate power, avenging old humiliations, demonstrating resolve, or any of the rest of the empty vocabulary of self-improvement through mutual slaughter.

Kipling learned this, if the Kiplingites still haven't. Niall Ferguson²⁵ ends his recent neo-imperialist polemic "Colossus" with a mention of Kipling on the White Man's Burden (which he rejects), and then a quote from Kipling on the fragility of empire (which he admires), but he leaves uncited the best poem Kipling ever wrote about war and its consequences, the simple couplet produced after his son was killed:

If any question why we died
Tell them, because our fathers lied

No one has ever thought that the First World War didn't have meaning, in the sense of an effect on things that came after, and purpose, in the sense that it happened because people believed it to be necessary. The questions persist. Were this purpose and this meaning worth the expense of life, the deaths of all those nineteen-year-old boys? Was what had been achieved in Europe by 1919 worth knowing that your son gasped out his last breath in the mud, as Kipling and eight million other fathers did? Was the credibility of liberal civilization worth the suicide of liberal civilization? One of the things that twentieth-century philosophy learned, in the wake of the war, is that big words are empty uniforms without men to live out their meanings, and that high

²⁵ Author of *The Pity of War* (Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1998), which Gopnik describes as an "aggressively revisionist history ... which grieves over the war less as a disaster of imperialism than as a disaster for imperialism."

moral purposes have no value outside a context of consequences. As the new century begins, the First World War seems as present, and just as great a pity, as it ever did.

* * * *

Folk Tales and Fables

To add insult to injury – from Aesop's fable of the bald man and the fly.

Borrowed feathers – from Aesop's fable of the crow and the peacock (cf. German "sich mit fremden Federn schmücken").

Sour grapes – from Aesop's fable of the fox and grapes.

To pull the chestnuts out of the fire – cf to be made a "Catspaw"

— **Le Singe et le Chat** – *Jean de la Fontaine (1621-1695)*
Bertrand avec Raton, l'un Singe et l'autre Chat,
Commensaux d'un logis, avaient un commun Maître.
D'animaux malfaisants c'était un très bon plat ;
Ils n'y craignaient tous deux aucun, quel qu'il pût être.
Trouvait-on quelque chose au logis de gâté,
L'on ne s'en prenait point aux gens du voisinage.
Bertrand dérobait tout ; Raton de son côté
Était moins attentif aux souris qu'au fromage.
Un jour au coin du feu nos deux maîtres fripons
Regardaient rôtir des marrons.
Les escroquer était une très bonne affaire :
Nos galands y voyaient double profit à faire,
Leur bien premièrement, et puis le mal d'autrui.
Bertrand dit à Raton : Frère, il faut aujourd'hui
Que tu fasses un coup de maître.
Tire-moi ces marrons. Si Dieu m'avait fait naître
Propre à tirer marrons du feu,
Certes marrons verraient beau jeu.
Aussitôt fait que dit : Raton avec sa patte,
D'une manière délicate,
Ecarte un peu la cendre, et retire les doigts,
Puis les reporte à plusieurs fois ;
Tire un marron, puis deux, et puis trois en escroque.
Et cependant Bertrand les croque.
Une servante vient : adieu mes gens. Raton
N'était pas content, ce dit-on.
Aussi ne le sont pas la plupart de ces Princes
Qui, flattés d'un pareil emploi,
Vont s'échauder en des Provinces
Pour le profit de quelque Roi.

* * * *

Miscellaneous

God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform – William Cowper (1731-1800)

He who hesitates is lost – Joseph Addison (1672-1719). What Addison actually wrote (in his play *Cato*) was: "The woman that deliberates is lost".

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know **for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee** – John Donne (1572-1631) *Meditation XVII*

Perfide Albion – Napoleon, but previously Bossuet (1627-1704) "L'Angleterre, ah! La perfide Angleterre". Albion is an ancient and poetical name for England, probably from the white cliffs (*alba*) on the South coast, but possibly from the Celtic *alp*. Albion or Albany may have been the Celtic name of all of Great Britain.

Out of sight out of mind – title of one of Barnabe Googe's *Eglogs* in 1563; cf Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (1554-1628) 56th Sonnet: "Out of sight as soon as out of mind".

Absence makes the heart grow fonder – from the song "The Isle of Beauty" by T. Haynes Bayly (1797-1839)²⁶

Après moi le déluge – Metternich (1773-1859) - Madame de Pompadour (1721-1764) "Après nous le déluge"

Why should the devil have all the good tunes? – Charles Wesley, ca 1740, when he adapted the music of current popular songs to promote the use of his hymns.

Damned neuters in their middle way of steering,
Are **neither fish nor flesh nor good red herring**²⁷.
John Dryden (1631-1700), Epilogue to "The Duke of Guise"

I hold it true, whate'er befall;
I feel it, when I sorrow most;
**'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.**
Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), In Memoriam, 1850

They say that man is mighty,
He governs land and sea,
He wields a mighty sceptre
O'er lesser powers that be;
But a mightier power and stronger
Man from his throne has hurled,
And **the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.**"
William Ross Wallace (1819-1881)

Keep your powder dry – Oliver Cromwell, whose full instruction to his troops (on campaign in Ireland) was "Put your trust in God; but be sure to keep your powder dry".

²⁶ Oscar Wilde: "Absinthe makes the heart grow fonder".

²⁷ Suitable to no class of people. Fish = food for the monk; flesh = food for the burghers; red herring = food for the poor.

The pen is mightier than the sword – Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873) *The Last Days of Pompeii*, (also **the great unwashed**, and **the almighty dollar**).

It was a dark and stormy night ... – Bulwer-Lytton, *Paul Clifford*

Man proposes, God disposes – *Homo proponit, sed Deus disponit* Thomas à Kempis *Imitatio Christi*, I xix 2

Ivory tower – first used by Sainte-Beuve, “tour d’ivoire”.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions – Dr. Johnson, according to Boswell (*Life of Johnson*, entry for 16 April 1775) said “Hell is paved with good intentions”.

Jingoism – From the chorus of *McDermott’s War Song* by G. W. Hunt (1878):

We don't want to fight but by jingo if we do...

We've got the ships, we've got the men, and got the money too!

We've fought the Bear before... and while we're Britons true,

The Russians shall not have Constantinople...²⁸

The price of liberty is eternal vigilance – in a speech made in 1790, the Irish judge John Philpott Curran (1750-1817) said “The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance”. The phrase “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty” was first used by Wendell Phillips (1811-1884), the American reformer, in 1852.

Tell that to the marines – Pepys, when re-telling stories gathered from the Navy to Charles II, mentioned flying fish. The courtiers were sceptical, but an officer of the Maritime Regiment of Foot said that he had seen such. The king accepted this evidence and said, “From the very nature of their calling, no class of our subjects can have so wide a knowledge of seas and land as the officers and men of Our loyal Maritime Regiment. Henceforward ere ever we cast doubt upon a tale that lacks likelihood we will first ‘tell it to the marines’.”

Nothing comes from nothing – a dictum of Xenophanes, founder of the Eleatic school (sixth century), to prove the eternity of matter (*Ex nihilo nihil fit*). Persius *Satires* iii 84 has *De nihilo nihilum, in nihilum nil posse reverti* “From nothing nothing, and into nothing can nothing return”. See also Lear to Cordelia in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. “Nothing will come of nothing”.

Pandemonium – “all the demons”: present meaning first in Milton *Paradise Lost* X 424.

Place in the sun – Kaiser Wilhelm II – claiming Germany’s right to colonies.

Sweetness and light A phrase popularised by the nineteenth-century English author Matthew Arnold; it had been used earlier by Jonathan Swift. According to Arnold, sweetness and light are two things that a culture should strive for. “Sweetness” is moral righteousness, and “light” is intellectual power and truth. He states that someone “who works for sweetness and light united, works to make reason and the will of God prevail.” **There is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous** – Napoleon: “Du sublime au ridicule il n’y a qu’un pas.” Napoleon, an admirer of Tom Paine, may have derived this from a note in Paine’s *Age of Reason*, 1794: “The sublime and the ridiculous are often so nearly related that it is difficult to class them separately. One step above the sublime makes the ridiculous, and one step above the ridiculous makes the sublime again.”

The Empire on which the sun never sets – In the *Pastor Fido* (1590) Guarini speaks of Philip II of Spain as “that proud monarch to whom when it grows dark, the sun never sets”. Thomas Gage in his *New Survey of the West Indies* (1648) writes: “It may be said of them [the Dutch], as of the Spaniards, that the Sun never sets on their dominions.”²⁹

²⁸ A parody was later composed following the news that Indian troops were being sent to Malta to help the English: We don’t want to fight but, by Jingo, if we do,

We won’t go to the front ourselves, but we’ll send the mild Hindoo.

Quoted in G.W.E. Russell’s *Collections and Recollections*

²⁹ It is not well known that the Aga Khan presides over a variety of philanthropic and social institutions. During the 1980s, a major period of construction of hospitals, schools and other buildings for these institutions, one of his senior employees suggested to him that on his particular empire the concrete never sets.

Peace with Honour The rallying cry of the late Lord Beaconsfield, from his speech after the Berlin Conference (1878), when he stated that he had brought back Peace with Honour. “Lord Salisbury and myself have brought you back peace – but a peace I hope with honour, which may satisfy Sovereign and tend to the welfare of the country.”

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,

Only a signal shown and distant voice in the darkness;

So the ocean of life, we pass and speak one another,

Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and silence.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882): Tales of a Wayside Inn, Part III

Between the dark and the daylight,
When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations,
That is known as the Children's Hour.

I hear in the chamber above me

The patter of little feet,

The sound of a door that is opened,

And voices soft and sweet.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: The Children's Hour (1860)

Heav’n has no rage, like love to hatred turn’d,

Nor Hell a fury, like a woman scorn’d.

William Congreve (1672-1729): The Mourning Bride, III viii

* * * *

Some German

For lovers of Positano and the Amalfi coast:

Kennst du **das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn**,

Im dunkeln Laub die Goldorangen glühn,

Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,

Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht?

Kennst du es wohl? Dahin!

Dahin möcht' ich mit dir,

O mein Geliebter, ziehn.

Kennst du das Haus? Auf Sälen ruht sein Dach,

Es glänzt der Saal, es schimmert das Gemach,

Und Marmorbilder stehn und sehn mich an:

Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?

Kennst du es wohl? Dahin!

Dahin möcht' ich mit dir,

O mein Beschützer, ziehn.

Kennst du den Berg und seinen Wolkensteg?

Das Maultier such im Nebel seinen Weg,

In Höhlen wohnt der Drachen alte Brut;

Es stürzt der Fels und über ihn die Flut.
Kennst du ihn wohl? Dahin!
Dahin geht unser Weg!
O Vater, lass uns ziehn!
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

* * * *

Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet) 1694-1778

“Tout est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes possibles” – *Candide* (parody of Leibniz *Die beste aller möglichen Welten* 1710). “Si c'est ici le meilleur des mondes possibles, que sont donc les autres?”
“Il faut cultiver son jardin” – *Candide*
“Courtes lettres et longues amitiés, tel est ma devise”.
“Que chacun aille à Dieu par le chemin qui lui plaît!”
“Je ne connais de sérieux ici-bas que la culture de la vigne.”
“L'art de gouverner consiste à prendre le plus d'argent possible à une catégorie de citoyens afin de le donner à une autre.”
“Les hommes sont comme les animaux : les gros mangent les petits et les petits les piquent.”
“Ce qu'on peut expliquer de plusieurs manières ne mérite d'être expliqué d'aucune.”
“Lorsqu'une question soulève des opinions violemment contradictoires, on peut assurer qu'elle appartient au domaine de la croyance et non à celui de la connaissance.”
“Non, si vous voulez rendre la religion chrétienne, ne parlez jamais de martyrs; nous en avons fait cent fois plus que les païens.”
“Les bavards sont les plus discrets des hommes: ils parlent pour ne rien dire.”
“Le premier devin fut le premier fripon qui rencontra un imbécile.”
“La femme coquette est l'agrément des autres et le mal de qui la possède.”

Other French

“Je suis jeune il est vrai, mais aux âmes bien nées La valeur n'attend pas le nombre des années.”
Jean Corneille (1606-1684)
“L'exactitude est la politesse des rois”. *Attributed to Louis XVIII.*
“Le meilleur régime politique est la monarchie absolue tempérée par l'assassinat” *Stendhal.*
“Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait.” *Henri Estienne (1531-1598)*
“On peut naître vieux, comme on peut mourir jeune” *Jean Cocteau (1889-1963)*
“Revenons à nos moutons”. Let's get back to our subject. The phrase is taken from a 15th century play *La Farce de Maître Pathelin*, in which a draper charges a shepherd with stealing sheep. In telling his grievance he kept for ever running away from his subject. The judge had to pull him up every moment with, “*Mais, mon ami, revenons à nos moutons*”.
“C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre” – *General Pierre-François Bosquet (1810-1861)*:
Comment to Sir Austen Layard on the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava.

* * * *

Benjamin Franklin³⁰

Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.
Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.
A penny saved is a penny earned.
Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other.
Fish and visitors stink in three days.
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
Honesty is the best policy.
In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.
Never has there been a good war or a bad peace.
God helps them that help themselves.
Have you somewhat to do tomorrow, do it today.
He that lies down with dogs shall rise up with fleas.
Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.
Time is money.
We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.
When in doubt, don't.

* * * *

Huddled Masses

*The New Colossus - Emma Lazarus (1849-1887)*³¹
Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand

³⁰ With thanks to Fritz Stewart, who introduced me to *Poor Richard's Almanack* – and also to the Petite Syrah – see page 28.

³¹ Reproduced on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. An editorial in *The New York Times* of 25 September 2004 reveals how Emma Lazarus' ideals are being betrayed by the current US administration:

“In jails and prisons across the United States, thousands of people are detained who have never been accused of crimes. The guards treat them like criminals, and the criminals they bunk with often abuse them. They are held for months, sometimes even years, but unlike the criminals, they do not know when their sentences will end. They receive this treatment because they are foreigners who arrived in the United States saying that they were fleeing persecution at home.

The United States did not always lock up the huddled masses. Until 1997, when security concerns began to rise, asylum seekers could live like normal people while awaiting their hearings. Today, thousands wait in detention. Some go to immigration centers that greatly resemble prisons, but more than half are sent to actual jails and prisons.

The Homeland Security Department, which took over immigration matters from the Immigration and Naturalization Service 18 months ago, says it detains only those who pose a security threat or who intend to disappear. But there are countless cases of asylum seekers who are detained even when they clearly pose no risk, have friends or relatives in America who will post bond, and are unlikely to skip out on their asylum hearings. They include Tibetan nuns, religious minorities from Africa, an Afghan woman persecuted by the Taliban for running a girls' school, Ukrainian grass-roots activists and others. These people are often the most noble in their society. They come here chasing America's promised liberty, and they end up in chains.”

A mighty woman with a torch whose flame
 Is imprisoned lightning, and her name
 Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
 Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
 The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
 "Keep ancient lands your storied pomp!" cries she
 With silent lips. "Give me your tired your poor,
 Your **huddled masses** yearning to breathe free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

The Statue of Liberty was a gift to the United States from the people of France. Designed by sculptor Auguste Bartholdi and engineered by Gustave Eiffel, it was begun in 1875 and completed in 1884, and stood in Paris until it was dismantled in early 1885 for shipping to the US. On October 28, 1886 President Grover Cleveland accepted the Statue on behalf of the United States.

The following notes come from the website of the US National Park service. In the light of the recent scurrilous anti-French propaganda in the US right-wing media, it is a relief to find confirmation – in the words of the *New York Review of Books* – that “there is another America”.³²

America probably could not have won its freedom from the British during the American Revolution without the help of the French. France provided arms, ships, money, and men to the American colonies. Some Frenchmen - most notably the Marquis de Lafayette, a close friend of George Washington - even became high-ranking officers in the American army. It was an alliance of respect and friendship the French would not forget.

Almost 100 years later, in 1865, according to Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi, a successful 31-year-old sculptor, several French intellectuals opposed to the oppressive regime of Napoleon III were at a small dinner party discussing their admiration for America's success in establishing a democratic government and abolishing slavery at the end of the Civil War. The dinner was hosted by Edouard René Lefebvre de Laboulaye, a scholar, jurist, abolitionist and a leader of the "liberals," the political group dedicated to establishing a French republican government modeled on America's constitution.

During the evening, talk turned to the close historic ties and love of liberty the two nations shared. Laboulaye noted there was "a genuine flow of sympathy" between the two nations, and called France and America "the two sisters." As he continued speaking, reflecting on the centennial of American independence only 11 years in the future, Laboulaye commented, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if people in France gave the United States a great monument as a lasting memorial to independence and thereby showed that the French government was also

³² It may be doubted that the National Park Service will be allowed to maintain such a balanced view on its website. *The New York Review of Books* of 21.10.2004 reports that the Service has recently been obliged by the Administration to permit the sale in its bookstores of *Grand Canyon – A Different View*, an obscurantist text that claims that the Canyon was created not by the continual movement of the Colorado River since the Tertiary Period, but in the six days described in *Genesis*.

dedicated to the idea of human liberty?" Laboulaye's casual question struck a responsive chord in Bartholdi. Years later, recalling the dinner, Bartholdi wrote that Laboulaye's idea "interested me so deeply that it remained fixed in my memory."

So was sown the seed of inspiration that would become the Statue of Liberty.

An exact replica of the statue – quarter-size – can be found near the Pont de Grenelle in Paris. It was offered to France by the Americans to commemorate the centennial of the French Revolution, and was inaugurated on 15 November 1889. When it was installed it faced the Eiffel Tower so as not to turn its back on the Elysee Palace. But, Bartholdi, its creator, was disappointed that it did not face the New York statue, so in 1937, at the Paris World Fair, it was rotated to face towards America.

* * * *

Thomas Gray (1716-71)

To each his sufferings: all are men,
 Condemn'd alike to groan;
 The tender for another's pain,
 Th' unfeeling for his own.
 Yet, ah! why should they know their fate,
 Since sorrow never comes too late,
 And happiness too swiftly flies?
 Thought would destroy their paradise.
 No more; - where **ignorance is bliss**,³³
 'Tis folly to be wise.

Ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
 The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
 And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Elegy - written in a country church-yard

* * * *

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

In his essay on Rudyard Kipling (1942), George Orwell pointed out that

Kipling is the only English writer of our time who has added phrases to the language. The phrases and neologisms which we take over and use without remembering their origin do not always come from writers we admire. It is strange, for instance, to hear the Nazi broadcasters referring to the Russian soldiers as 'robots', thus unconsciously borrowing a word from a Czech

³³ Compare also

From ignorance our comfort flows,
 The only wretched are the wise.
Matthew Prior (1664 - 1721): To the Hon. Charles Montague

democrat whom they would have killed if they could have laid hands on him³⁴. ... In general ours is a civilization in which the very word 'poetry' evokes a hostile snigger or, at best, the sort of frozen disgust that most people feel when they hear the word 'God'. If you are good at playing the concertina you could probably go into the nearest public bar and get yourself an appreciative audience within five minutes. But what would be the attitude of that same audience if you suggested reading them Shakespeare's sonnets, for instance? Good bad poetry, however, can get across to the most unpromising audiences if the right atmosphere has been worked up beforehand. Some months back Churchill produced a great effect by quoting Clough's 'Endeavour' in one of his broadcast speeches. I listened to this speech among people who could certainly not be accused of caring for poetry, and I am convinced that the lapse into verse impressed them and did not embarrass them. But not even Churchill could have got away with it if he had quoted anything much better than this.

As examples, Orwell refers to "half a dozen phrases coined by Kipling which one sees quoted in leaderettes in the gutter press or overhears in saloon bars from people who have barely heard his name":

East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great judgement seat.

Take up **the White Man's burden**--³⁵
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait, in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.

When the Himalayan peasant meets the he-bear in his pride,
He shouts to scare the monster who will often turn aside.
But the she-bear thus accosted rends the peasant tooth and nail,
For **the female of the species is more deadly than the male.**

Ship me somewhere **east of Suez**, where the best is like the worst,
Where there ar'n't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a thirst.

"**What do they know of England who only England know?**" (*A Little of myself*, 1937, Ch. 4 - quoting his mother)

We never pay *any* one **Dane-geld**,
No matter how trifling the cost,
For the end of that game is oppression and shame,
And the nation that plays it is lost!

* * * *

³⁴ The word *robot* first appeared in 1921, in Karel Capek's play *Rossum's Universal Robots*, as the name of a mechanical servant.

³⁵ Orwell observes wryly that "it ought to be altered to 'black man's burden'".

Something to reflect on³⁶

Neujahrsgebet des Pfarrers von St.Lamberti, Hermann Kappen (1818 - 1901), Münster, 1883	New Year prayer by the Vicar of St. Lambert, Hermann Kappen (1818 - 1901), Münster, 1883
Herr, setze dem Überfluss Grenzen und lasse die Grenzen überflüssig werden.	Lord, set frontiers to our superfluity and make frontiers superfluous.
Lasse die Leute kein falsches Geld machen, aber auch das Geld keine falschen Leute!	Prevent men from fraudulent money-making and money from making men false.
Nimm den Ehefrauen das letzte Wort und erinnere die Ehemänner an ihr erstes.	Prevent wives from always having the last word but remind husbands of their first.
Schenke unseren Freunden mehr Wahrheit und der Wahrheit mehr Freunde.	Grant our friends the truth and truth more friends.
Bessere solche Beamten, Geschäfts- und Arbeitsleute, die wohl tätig, aber nicht wohlthätig sind.	Improve those government employees, businessmen and workers who seek to fare well but care little for welfare.
Gib den Regierenden ein besseres Deutsch und den Deutschen eine bessere Regierung.	Grant our government the gift of better German and the Germans a better government.
Herr, Sorge dafür, dass wir alle in den Himmel kommen, aber nicht sofort.	Lord, allow us all to go to Heaven, but not immediately.

* * * *

More Headline Humour

Include Your Children when Baking Cookies
Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says
Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers
Safety Experts Say School Bus Passengers Should Be Belted
Drunk Gets Nine Months in Violin Case
Survivor of Siamese Twins Joins Parents
Panda Mating Fails; Veterinarian Takes Over
Eye Drops Off Shelf

³⁶ With thanks to Thies and Geesa Korsmeier.

Enraged Cow Injures Farmer With Axe
 Plane Too Close to Ground, Crash Probe Told
 Stolen Painting Found by Tree
 Two Sisters Reunited After 18 Years in Checkout Counter
 Killer Sentenced to Die for Second Time in 10 Years
 Never Withhold Herpes Infection from Loved One
 If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last a While
 Cold Wave Linked to Temperatures
 Deer Kill 17,000
 Enfield Couple Slain; Police Suspect Homicide
 Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead
 Man Struck By Lightning Faces Battery Charge
 New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group
 Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft
 Kids Make Nutritious Snacks
 Chef Throws His Heart into Helping Feed Needy
 Arson Suspect Held in Massachusetts Fire
 Ban On Soliciting Dead in Trotwood
 Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half
 New Vaccine May Contain Rabies

* * * *

Albert Einstein

A question that sometimes drives me hazy: am I or are the others crazy?
 Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.
 Do not worry about your problems with mathematics, I assure you mine are far greater.
 Gravitation is not responsible for people falling in love.
 I want to know God's thoughts,..... the rest are details..
 If you are out to describe the truth, leave elegance to the tailor.
 If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?
 Intellectuals solve problems; geniuses prevent them.
 It gives me great pleasure indeed to see the stubbornness of an incorrigible nonconformist warmly acclaimed.
 Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the former.
 Put your hand on a hot stove for a minute, and it seems like an hour. Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, and it seems like a minute. THAT'S relativity.
 Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.
 Science is a wonderful thing if one does not have to earn one's living at it.
 Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it is the only means.
 The hardest thing in the world to understand is income tax.
 The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible.
 The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once.
 Things should be as simple as possible, but not simpler.
 When the solution is simple, God is answering.

* * * *

Marriott Edgar (1880-1951) *The Lion and Albert*³⁷

There's a famous seaside town called Blackpool,
 That's noted for fresh air and fun,
 And Mr and Mrs Ramsbottom
 Went there with young Albert, their son.

A grand little lad was young Albert
 All dressed in his best; quite a swell
 With a stick with an 'orse's 'ead 'andle
 The finest that Woolworth's could sell.

They didn't think much to the Ocean
 The waves, they were fiddlin' and small;
 There was no wrecks and nobody drowned
 Fact, nothing to laugh at, at all.

So, seeking for further amusement
 They paid and went to the zoo
 Where they'd lions and tigers and camels
 And old ale and sandwiches too.

There were one great big lion called Wallace
 His nose were all covered with scars
 He lay in a somnolent posture
 With the side of his face on the bars.

Now Albert had heard about lions
 How they was ferocious and wild
 To see Wallace lying so peaceful
 Well, it didn't seem right to the child.

So straight 'way the brave little feller
 Not showing a morsel of fear
 Took his stick with its 'orse's 'ead 'andle
 And shoved it in Wallace's ear.

You could see the lion didn't like it
 For giving a kind of a roll
 He pulled Albert inside the cage with 'im
 And swallowed the little lad 'ole

Then Pa, who had seen the occurrence
 And didn't know what to do next
 Said "Mother! Yon lion's 'et Albert"
 And Mother said "Well, I am vexed!"

³⁷ This poem is best read out loud with an accent as close to Blackpool as possible. A few years ago my wife and I were at table with a couple from the "Black country" in England. We were discussing Christmas traditions and my wife explained that in Germany goose was the standard fare. "Oo", said one of our companions, "ah doont noo goose, is it laak dook". My wife admitted in turn that she didn't know what dook was. This will give you an idea of the accent suitable for this poem.

Then Mr and Mrs Ramsbottom,
Quite rightly, when all's said and done
Complained to the Animal Keeper
That the lion had eaten their son.

The keeper was quite nice about it
He said "What a nasty mishap!
Are you sure it's your boy he's eaten?"
Pa said "Am I sure? There's his cap!"

The manager had to be sent for
He came and he said "What's to do?"
Pa said "Yon lion's 'et Albert
And 'im in his Sunday clothes, too."

Then Mother said, "Right's right, young feller
I think it's a shame and a sin
For a lion to go and eat Albert
And after we've paid to come in."

The manager wanted no trouble
He took out his purse right away
Saying "How much to settle the matter?"
And Pa said "What do you usually pay?"

But Mother had turned a bit awkward
When she thought where her Albert had gone.
She said "No! someone's got to be summonsed"
So that was decided upon.

Then off they went to the Police Station
In front of the Magistrate chap.
They told 'im what happened to Albert
And proved it by showing his cap.

The Magistrate gave his opinion
That no one was really to blame
And he said that he hoped the Ramsbottoms
Would have further sons to their name.

At that Mother got proper blazing
"And thank you, sir, kindly," said she
"What waste all our lives raising children
To feed ruddy lions? Not me!"

Denglisch

My German relatives know that I have taken issue with the ever-increasing usage in German of English words when there are already perfectly adequate German equivalents. As an example, I have in front of me a flyer (nominally in the German

language) for a sporting event in Timmendorfer Strand, that includes the following: "Summer Funsport Tour", "Action Zone", "Club-Night", "Opening-Party", "Megatrendsport", "Top-Event", "Mixed-Teams", "Funsportmaterial", "Kids", "Tattoos und Buttons", "After-Race-Party", "Online-Broking" etc.

In September 2003 the *Hamburger Abendblatt* reported on a survey in which twelve of the most familiar contemporary German advertisements that included English words were shown to a sample of 1100 persons. Conclusion: more than half did not understand the meaning, even when they claimed to. "Come in and find out" (Douglas pharmacy) was taken by many to mean "enter the shop and look for the exit"; "Where the money is" (Citibank) became "where Manni lives"; "Powered by emotion" (a word game on SAT1 television) became "Kraft durch Freude" or "electricity with emotion"; "Drive alive" (Mitsubishi) became "try to stay alive in the car".

While I salute the ingenuity of the inventor of the term "handy" to describe a mobile telephone, most "denglisch" words are unnecessary replacements of perfectly intelligible and widely recognised German equivalents, used either from laziness or to show off. The website of the *Verein Deutsche Sprache* gives a list of the most egregious anglicisms used in contemporary German. The entries for the letter "a" alone contain more than 300 English words and derivatives in current use in German, including the following monstrosities: abchecken, abgespaced, absaven, abturnen, andocken, anpowern, ansurfen, auditieren, auffeatern, aufsplitten, auschecken, ausgepowert, ausknocken, auslevelt (see <http://www.vds-ev.de/denglisch>). The website describes these as BSE: Bad Silly English.

I quote from the site:

"Computer, Service point, Monitor, Facility manager, Cargo, Newcomer sind länger als 'Rechner', 'Auskunft', 'Bildschirm', 'Liegenschaftsverwalter', 'Fracht' oder 'Neuling'.

Flyer, Slow motion, e-mail, Bodyguard, Funeralmaster sind genauso lang wie 'Faltblatt', 'Zeitlupe', 'e-Post', 'Leibwächter' oder 'Leichenbestatter'.

Tie-break, sale, recycling sind kürzer - an Silben - als 'Entscheidungsspiel', 'Schlussverkauf' oder 'Reststoffverwertung'.

Was aber durch englische Wörter u.U. an sprachlichem Aufwand eingespart wird, geht oft an Verständlichkeit verloren. Die Stärke der deutschen Sprache ist ihre Anschaulichkeit. 'Entscheidungsspiel', 'Schlussverkauf' oder 'Reststoffverwertung' sind Wörter zum Anfassen. Und jeder versteht sie - natürlich auch und vor allem -, weil es Wörter der eigenen Sprache sind.

Die Forderungen nach sprachlicher Kürze werden meist von denen erhoben, die tagaus, tagein die Menschen mit schwer erträglichem Geschwätz heimsuchen, d.h. überflüssige Sprache erzeugen: den Maulhelden von der Werbung und den Medien. Sollen wir uns von denen tatsächlich sagen lassen, unsere Rede habe mit Hilfe englischer Stummel- und Stammelwörter kurz und knapp zu sein?

Zur Kürze als angeblicher Qualität gibt es einen schönen Ausspruch des Malers Max Liebermann (1847-1932). Jemand hatte an einem berühmten Gemälde bemängelt, der Arm einer Figur sei zu lang. Darauf antwortete Liebermann: 'Der Arm kann gar nicht lang genug sein, wenn er schön ist.' Das gilt auch für die deutsche Sprache."

There is no reason for the language of Luther and Goethe to welcome these particular "huddled masses".

* * * *

It must be true – I read it on the Internet

CNN/Reuters: News reports have filtered out early this morning that US forces have swooped on an Iraqi Primary School and detained 6th Grade teacher Mohammed Al-Hazar. Sources indicate that, when arrested, Al-Hazar was in possession of a ruler, a protractor, a set square and a calculator. US President George Bush argued that this was finally clear and overwhelming evidence that Iraq indeed possessed weapons of maths instruction.

* * * *

Etymythology

An article by Justine Jordan in *The Guardian* of 12 December 2002 described a visit to Anne Hathaway's Cottage near Stratford-on-Avon, where she found "a guide with an almost insane passion for etymology [who] used each stick of furniture to swell our word power, illustrating stopgap with the wooden plug used to seal the bread oven, threshold by the layers of hay spread for insulation until they obstructed the doors, sleep tight by the meshes of ropes supporting the mattresses, boardroom and boardgame by the wooden board laid out to serve as a table top... I could go on (she did). She also provided a handy tip on the best way to clean a chimney: drop a chicken down it. Apparently, in darkest France, they do it to this day."

Shortly after reading this, I received an e-mail from someone who had also just been to Stratford and, obviously having met the guide of "insane passion", had come back with the text below. Which of these explanations are correct and which are false? (Answers in *Christmas Pudding 2005*).

Much research into the etymology of popular expressions and aphorisms is pure speculation; in *POSH and Other Language Myths* (Penguin Books, 2004) ³⁸, Michael Quinlon rails against tour guides (thinking specifically of the lady in Stratford?) who perpetuate what he calls "etymythology". He also provides a clue: "the better they sound, the more circumstantial and detailed the background, the neater the conclusion, the less likely they are to be true".

Bathing was in a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children, last

of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying: 'Don't throw the baby out with the bath water'.

Houses had thatched roofs of thick straw. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the dogs, cats and other small animals lived in the roof. When it rained, it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying: 'It's raining cats and dogs.'

Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May. However, by June they were starting to smell, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odour. Hence the custom today of carrying a bouquet when getting married.

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence the term 'dirt poor'. The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on, they kept adding more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood would be placed in the entrance, hence the word 'threshold'.

Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man 'could bring home the bacon'. They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit round and 'chew the fat'.

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or 'upper crust'. Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather round and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a 'wake'.

From time to time, graves were dug up to make room for more coffins. A number were found to have scratch marks on the inside and people realised they had been burying people alive. So they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (the 'Graveyard shift') to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be 'Saved by the bell' or was considered a 'dead ringer'.

Only the master of the house and his wife had a bed to sleep in. The rest slept on the floor. Unmarried girls used to sleep on a high board. Those who failed to get married remained 'on the shelf'.

The table was a board, polished on one side and on which the family silver was displayed when guests came. It was turned over for meals, hence the expression 'board and lodging' when guests stayed overnight.

There was nothing to stop things from falling off the ceilings. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could fall on the bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet over it was invented and four-poster beds came into existence.

* * * *

³⁸ With thanks to Keith Cooper.

Pass the Port

Which reminds me

An African potentate received a golden throne from a former colonial power. Not wishing to arouse jealousies in his capital, he decided to hide it in his village, in the roof of his hut, where he could look lovingly at it from his bed. The first night he was there, however, the roof collapsed and the throne fell on the potentate, killing him. The moral of this story is that

People who live in Grass Houses Shouldn't Stow Thrones.

* * * *

Sumer is icumen in (*Anonymous 13th century*)

Sumer is icumen in,
Lhude sing, cuccu!
Groweth sed and bloweth med
And springth the wude nu.
Sing, cuccu!

Awe bleteth after lomb,
Lhouth after calve cu
Bulloc sterteth, bucke ferteth.
Murie sing, cuccu!
Cuccu, cuccu,
Wel singes thu, cuccu.
Ne swik thu naver nu!

Sing cuccu nu, sing cuccu!
Sing cuccu nu, sing cuccu!

Translation:

Spring has come in
Loudly sing, cuckoo!
Grows the seed and blooms the meadow
And the woods spring now –
Sing, cuckoo!

The ewe bleats after the lamb
The calf lows after the cow
The bull leaps, the buck leaps, twisting.
Merrily sing, cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo,
Well sing you, cuckoo.
Nor cease you ever now!

Sing cuckoo now, sing cuckoo!
Sing cuckoo now, sing cuckoo!

Two German translations: Sommer kam ins Land gezogen –
Kuckuck, sing nur zu!
Es spriesst die Saat, frisch grünt der Hag,
Es blüht die weite Flur –
Sing nur, Kuckuk!
(*Werner von Koppelfels*)

summer is gezogen in
lûte sing, kukkû!
gras stêt uf bloumen anger mât,
das holz in vollem lawbe stêt –
sing, kukuk nû!
(*Wolfgang Schlüter*)

Version by Ezra Pound Winter is icumen in,
Lhude sing Goddamm,
Raineth drop and staineth slop,
And how the wind doth ramm!
Sing: Goddamm.

Skiddeth bus and sloppeth us,
An ague hath my ham.
Damm you; Sing: Goddamm.
Goddamm, Goddamm, 'tis why I am, Goddamm,

So 'gainst the winter's balm.
Sing goddamm, damm, sing goddamm,
Sing goddamm, sing goddamm, DAMM.

* * * *

Oddities

In *Christmas Pudding 2001* I included a list of “Remarkable Names of Real People”. I have one more to add: Karin Sham Poo, Deputy Director of UNICEF.

Can you translate the following? “*Caesar adsum iam forte – passus sum sede.*”

Hannibal ante portas. A widely used Latin tag, attributed to Cicero (*Philippica* 1,5,11 and *De Finibus* 4,9,22) – but Cicero actually wrote **ad portas**.

Moses' Horns - Moses is conventionally represented with horns owing to a misunderstanding of the Latin text in *Exodus xxxiv 30*, “*Cornuta esset facies sua.*” (All the children of Israel saw Moses, and the skin of his face shone). In *Habakkuk iii 4* we read of God, “His brightness was as the light, and He had horns [*rays of light*] coming out of His hand.” Michelangelo depicted Moses with horns, as a result of this misunderstanding.



Elementary, my dear Watson – this famous remark by Sherlock Holmes appears in none of the stories or novels written by A. Conan Doyle; it originated in the Hollywood films based on them.

You can fool some of the people all the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all the time. “Everyone knows” that Abraham Lincoln said this, but it is nowhere found in a written source.

I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it. “Everyone knows” also that Voltaire said this, but it is not in his written works.

We are witnessing today an interesting example of the way in which such misquotes arise. Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, concludes as follows:

George Orwell once wrote, that it's not a matter “if the war is not real, or if it is. Victory is not possible. **The war is not meant to be won, but it is meant to be continuous.**” ... “A hierarchical society is only possible on the basis of poverty and ignorance, this new version is the past and no different past can ever have existed. In principle the war effort is always planned to keep society on the brink of starvation. The war is waged by the ruling group against its own subjects and its object is not the victory over either Eurasia or east Asia but to keep the very structure of society intact.”

This clearly struck a chord among viewers and led to a lively exchange of “blogs” on the Internet, none of which, however, pointed out that this “quote” is actually a hodgepodge of selected words and phrases taken from the book that the hero of 1984 is surreptitiously reading (in Chapter 9: *The Theory and Practice Of Oligarchical Collectivism* by Emmanuel Goldstein) – totally Orwellian but not a quotation *stricto sensu*. Thanks to Moore's film however, the passage, and in particular the words I have given in bold, will probably continue to be quoted and attributed to Orwell.

The phenomenon is well illustrated in Graham Greene's novel *A Burnt-Out Case*, in which one of the characters, Parkinson, an obnoxious journalist, defends his working methods:

Do you really believe Caesar said “Et tu, Brute?” It's what he ought to have said and someone ... Suetonius, perhaps, spotted what was needed. The truth is always forgotten. Pitt on his deathbed asked for Bellamy's Pork Pies, but history altered that.

Charades:

Jane Austen (1775-1813)

When my first is a task to a young girl of spirit,
And my second confines her to finish the piece,
How hard is her fate! but how great is her merit
If by taking my whole she effects her release! (*Hemlock*)

My first doth affliction denote
Which my second is destin'd to feel.
And my whole is the best antidote

That affliction to soften and heal. (*Woman*)

Winthrop Mackworth Praed (1802-1839)

My first, tho' water, cures no thirst,
My next alone has soul,
And when he lives upon my first,
He then is called my whole. (*Seaman*)

Victor Hugo (1802-1885)

Mon premier au chat plaît.
Mon second haut et bas.
Et mon tout pâit. (*Mouton*)

Je prends mon premier
Au coin de mon dernier
En sortant de mon entier... (*Théâtre*)

Andrée Sodenkamp (1906-2004)

Pour mon premier,
il faut deux pieds.
Mon second se fera piéger.
Sur mon trois, il faut marcher.
Et mon tout est un petit toit qui se promène... (*Parasol*)

Do you know the one about the dyslexic agnostic insomniac who stayed up all night wondering if there really was a dog?³⁹



Otto Bromberger was an accomplished illustrator of children's books in the late 1890s. Today, he is perhaps best remembered for his book *Dreh' mich um, rund herum* (Turn me round, right round) containing drawings that show faces that change if the book is turned round. Such drawings were a regular feature of children's magazines when I was a child and were part of Christmas fun. Enjoy!⁴⁰



AMO, amas,
I love a lass
As a cedar tall and slender!
Sweet cowslips' grace
Is her Nominative Case,
And she's of the Feminine Gender.

Rorum, corum, sunt Divorum!
Harum, scarum Divo!

³⁹ With thanks to Paul Haas

⁴⁰ With thanks to Liz Oram

Tag rag, merry derry, periwig and hatband,
Hic hac, horum Genetivo!

Can I decline
A Nymph divine?
Her voice as a flute is *dulcis!*
Her *oculi* bright!
Her *manus* white!
And soft, when I *tacto*, her pulse is!

Rorum, corum, sunt Divorum!
Harum scarum Divo!
Tag rag, merry derry, periwig and hatband,
Hic hac, horum Genetivo!

O, how *bella*
Is my *Puella!*
I'll kiss *saeculorum!*
If I've luck, Sir!
She's my *Uxor!*
O, *dies benedictorum!*

Rorum, corum, sunt Divorum!
Harum scarum Divo!
Tag rag, merry derry, periwig and hatband,
Hic, hac, horum Genetivo!
John O'Keefe (1747-1833)

Adam
Had 'em
On the antiquity of microbes - Anonymous.⁴¹

If you thought the accent necessary for *The Lion and Albert* was difficult, try this exercise:

The Budding Bronx
Der spring is sprung
Der grass is riz
I wonder where dem boidies is?
Der little boids is on der wing,
Ain't dat absoid?
Der little wings is on der boid!

Thirty Purple Birds
Toity poiple boids
Sitt'n on der coib
A' choipin' and a' boipin
An' eat'n doity woims.

"The nature of God is a circle of which the centre is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere" Origin unknown – said to have been traced to a lost treatise of Empedocles. Quoted in the *Roman de la Rose* and by S. Bonaventura in *Itinerarius Mentis in Deum*

* * * *

Edward Said†

On 25 September 2003 a great scholar and humanist died. Edward Said, who balanced criticism of successive Israeli governments with scathing remarks about the failures of the Palestinian leadership, was a confrontational commentator on politics and social affairs as well as on culture, literature and the arts. There are few of his stature today able to describe with such authority the wrongs of the world.

... television dependency has played not only a great role in inducing an absence of critical thought but an even more crucial role in reducing the capacity of the mind for precise and exact uses of language, language being what we think with and in when we think about our world. ("Loss of Precision", 24 February 1997)

The point is that criticism heightens awareness and recalls leaders to their constituency. Above all, I believe, criticism of authority is a moral duty. Silence or indifference, or compliance, in such a situation is immoral. ("Where do we go from here?", 8 November 1995)

* * * *

Tips – enjoyed in 2004:

Wine: Gewürztraminer Doux 2003, Château de Crans (as good as a Sauternes!)
Petite Syrah 2002, David Bruce, Central Coast, California
Cairanne (Côtes du Rhône Villages) 1999, Cuvée Antique: Caves de Cairanne

CDs: I have been privileged this year to have met personally three exceptional sopranos: Gundula Janowitz⁴², one of the greatest voices of the last century; Cecilia Bartoli, certainly one of the greatest voices of the current century; and Elena Tsallagova. Janowitz's performance of the *Four Last Songs* of Richard Strauss is one of the most beautiful pieces of music I have heard (DG 447 422-2). Bartoli's strength and energy (in, for example, her breathtaking performances of Vivaldi arias on Polygram) belie her equally remarkable lyrical talents – listen to *Cecilia Bartoli – A Portrait* on London 448300. Watch out for future performances by Elena – she has made no CDs as yet!

⁴¹ Said to be the shortest poem in English. I claim the following love poem as the shortest: U!

⁴² I attended a master class given by Gundula Janowitz in Verbier. She began the class by announcing that any student saying "wow" or "OK" would be fined 1 Swiss Franc per occurrence. I wish she had also fined the insolence of the young woman who turned up for the master class with an expansive bare midriff (at least it allowed the audience to appreciate the muscles she used for singing).