

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

2018

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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.

After studying under Graham Storey and Frank Leavis in Cambridge, I was deeply influenced by the 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 that characterises 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 several 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 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. Until 2011, *Christmas Pudding* drew heavily on poetry of the 'golden age'; since then I include much modern and contemporary verse that, in my opinion, meets Winters' strict criteria. If I no longer insist on form, my criterion remains nevertheless quality of language and content - and, a new ingredient, wit.

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.

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THE NEW YORKER

JAN. 22, 2018



Washington Post 12 January 2018: "President Trump grew frustrated with lawmakers Thursday in the Oval Office when they discussed protecting immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador and African countries as part of a bipartisan immigration deal, according to several people briefed on the meeting.

"Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?" Trump said, according to these people, referring to countries mentioned by the lawmakers."

The Guardian 3 November 2018: "Michael Cohen, a former Trump confidant, told *Vanity Fair* that the president had once told him that "black people are too stupid to vote" for him and had challenged Cohen to name 'one country run by a black person that's not a shithole'".

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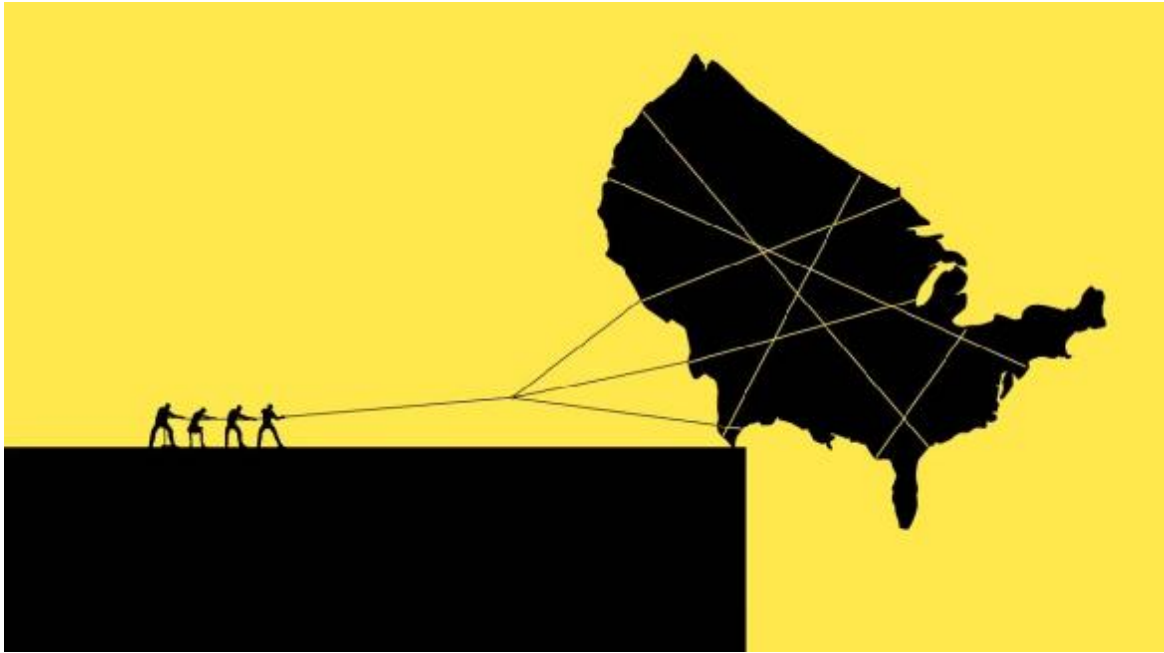
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<http://www.pamirs.org/Christmas-Pudding.htm>

CHRISTMAS PUDDING 2018

TRUMPERY

[*Trigger Warning*] If you are a fan of Donald Trump and/or have problems with satire, sarcasm and irony (and/or don't know what these words mean), STOP reading now and consign this Christmas Pudding to the nearest log fire.



New York Times, 5 September 2018

Enough is Enough. I had never intended CP to get involved in politics, let alone beyond my immediate political environment at communal level. But CP is about civilisation and its values. Donald Trump is not.

What are the literary images that come to mind when contemplating this mess of a man? First perhaps, Pooh: “When you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and you Think of Things, you find sometimes that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it.” But Pooh is polite and modest and nice and fully aware of his limited mental capacities. Donald Trump is not.

Then, possibly, the Scarecrow in The Wizard of Oz:

I could while away the hours
Conferrin' with the flowers
Consultin' with the rain

And my head, I'd be scratchin'
While my thoughts were busy hatchin'
If I only had a brain

I'd unravel every riddle
For any individual
In trouble or in pain

With the thoughts you'll be thinkin'
You could be another Lincoln¹
If you only had a brain

Again, however, the Scarecrow is a sympathetic character, and cares for "any individual In trouble or in pain". Trump does not. Moreover, as the story unfolds, the Scarecrow shows not only that he scratches his head while formulating his thoughts (i.e. thinks before twittering), but that he already has the brains he seeks and is later recognised as the wisest man in all of Oz. If today the USA resembles more Oz² than the nation that used proudly to lead the free world, Donald Trump is certainly not its wisest citizen.³

Finally perhaps, the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland: "Off with his/her/their/your head!" whether railing at fake news, CNN, the Clintons, NATO, WTO, UNESCO, Europe, Canada, China or any one else who contradicts or diminishes him, or you name it

If it wasn't so tragic (and dangerous) it would be laughable.

During the long night of the Soviet Union, the only protest that was unlikely to get you sent to the Gulag was humour. Perhaps, until the Republican party comes to its senses, that is all that is left to us. Hence the main theme of CP 2018. (N.B. All cartoons are from *The New Yorker*.)

¹ "President Donald Trump told supporters in Youngstown, Ohio, on Tuesday night that he could act more presidential than any other former U.S. president, except for 'the late, great Abraham Lincoln.'" (Huffington Post, 26 July 2017)

² Is the Treasury Secretary a Munchkin?

³ He is, however, under the illusion that he is: "Sorry losers and haters, but my I.Q. is one of the highest -and you all know it! Please don't feel so stupid or insecure, it's not your fault" (Twitter, 6:37 PM - 8 May 2013)



"But what if a tyrant comes to power and no one's able to stop him because the whole thing's kind of funny?" New Yorker 24.4.2017



"Would you say this tweet puts us at DEFCON 3 or DEFCON 4?" New Yorker 10.4.2018

T T T T

Seasonally Appropriate

Song For A Winter's Night - *Gordon Lightfoot*⁴

The lamp is burning low upon my table top
The snow is softly falling;
The air is still in the silence of my room,
I hear your voice softly calling -
If I could only have you near
To breathe a sigh or two,
I would be happy just to hold the hands I love
On this winter night with you

The smoke is rising in the shadows overhead,
My glass is almost empty;
I read again between the lines upon each page
The words of love you sent me -
If I could know within my heart, that you were lonely too,
I would be happy just to hold the hands I love
On this winter night with you

The fire is dying now, my lamp is growing dim,
The shades of night are lifting;
The morning light steals across my windowpane
Where webs of snow are drifting -
If I could only have you near, to breathe a sigh or two,
I would be happy just to hold the hands I love
And to be once again with you,
On this winter night with you

T T T T

More Trumpery

As many of you know, I love *The New York Review of Books*. I was amused to find the following two entries in a recent edition:

- LET'S BIVOUAC (AND FIGHT) through the Trump years together. I am: sexy, Ivy-educated 40-something of independent means and a putatively glamorous career, most often praised by others for her wit, dresses, liquor tolerance, rapier perception, courage, and parallel parking skills. I do not

⁴ I mentioned Gordon Lightfoot in CP 2017 as a lyricist at least on a par with Bob Dylan. Hear this song on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Is38naHuxjE>.

want a baby, wedding ring, or your pension - but companionship, passion are nice. You are: under 60 (seriously), unattached (seriously), of sound body (mind optional), sidesplittingly funny, brilliant at one or two things, and willing to die on the hill for a few more. Got kids, pets? No problem. (hopedripseternal)

[I hope she found her man.]

- FED UP WITH TRUMP? Buy my tranquil Irish stone cottage overlooking Dumanas Bay.

T T T T

Charles William Jefford

A Summer's Night at Quinn Farm, Hopewell, New Jersey

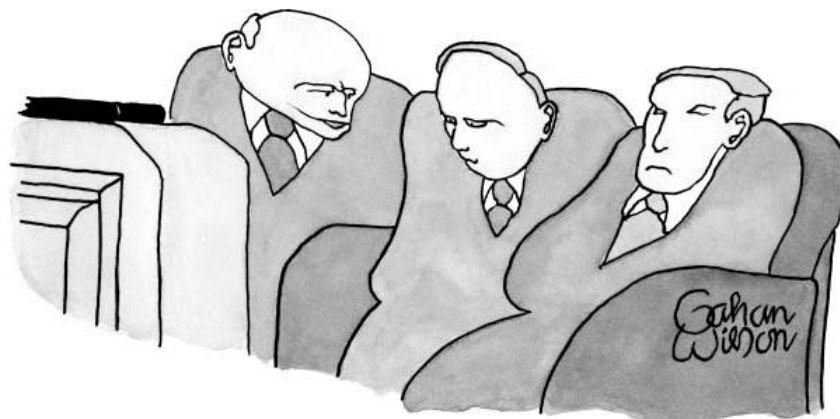
On the verandah in twos and threes,
we gather, drinks in hand,
chatting absently together.
While glancing through the trees
towards the sedgy pond,
we spy far-off a band
of brothers clad in black,
marching out of step.
Down the lane they come
through the darkling glen,
their faces blanco-white, set-firm, intent.
They move with jerky arms and knees,
with clothes unkempt.
They've come to claim their own again.
They've come to claim their hearth and home.
They want it back.
Deep in the valley, a lighted window glows.
Did they come from there we wonder?
Then suddenly they appear before our eyes,
stumbling headlong in a rush.
No word is uttered, no sound is heard,
as guests and hosts recoil as one.
The expected altercation,
the rain of blows, does not arise.
The vision fades, the far-off light has gone.
Confused, we turn, and go in to dine,
our table talk resumes.
It was just imagination, a troubling dream.

Ghosts they were, their name is Quinn.
 We hope they never come again.
 But that will never be.
 The family Quinn were foresters,
 fowlers, in a time gone-by.
 They roamed the hill, are roaming still.
 By the springhouse their footprints lie
 imbedded in the muddy bank.
 In these fields they hunted birds, cut wood.
 Unaware, we presume on sacred ground.
 We tramped here never, have left no trace of blood.
 We're alien people from the town.
 Men in suits with pens in hand.
 holding title to the land,
 we bought its antecedents too, those souls
 who rove at night and hide by day,
 that band of Brothers clad in black,
 whose name is Quinn.
Bogis-Bossey, March 1, 2009

T T T T

The Usual Supects

Of course, we should be looking first and foremost for the people who benefit from Trump. The majority is certainly not to be found among those who voted for him - where are the re-opened coal mines, where are all the promised industrial jobs, where are the salary increases for ordinary workers ...? At first I thought that the Republicans and their alt-right supporters, including but not limited to the Koch brothers, would ditch him as soon as he had fulfilled the major part of their agenda, namely tax deductions for the wealthy.



"I'm not saying this candidate wouldn't be expensive, but he's well within our budget"

Of course, this included protection for the fossil fuel industries.



"I'll also need you to clean up the environment after I'm done with it."



"Thank goodness we finally have an Administration that speaks for those of us who don't care what happens to the planet in a hundred years because we'll be dead."

It seems that was not enough. The nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court suggests that there are still a few "liberal" policies to be overturned.



"Part of me is going to miss liberal democracy."

Where will they stop? Or perhaps more realistically: Will they stop?

T T T T

Charles Aznavour

On the first of October this year, we lost one of the greatest lyricists and troubadours in recent memory. I included one of his songs in CP 2017, again as a comparison with Dylan. Here are two more.

Le Cabotin⁵

Je suis un cabotin dans toute sa splendeur
Je suis né pour jouer
Donnez-moi un tréteau minable et sans chaleur
Je vais me surpasser
Je suis un cabotin dans toute sa splendeur
Mais j'ai ça dans le sang
Donnez-moi quatre planches et quelques spectateurs
Et j'aurai du talent,
Du talent

Dans une pièce de trois murs
A ventre ouvert sur le public
Tout comme au bord d'un gouffre obscur
Avec mon trac, mes tics
Je viens donner la comédie
Vibrant d'un feu qui brûle en moi
Je parle, je pleure, et je ris
Et vis mon rôle chaque fois
Ne me condamnez pas sans comprendre mon cœur
Je suis d'une autre race
Je suis un cabotin dans toute sa splendeur
La scène est mon espace

Ma vie commence alors
Que je vois le décor
Que j'entends les trois coups
Et je suis malgré moi
pris de peur et de joie
Quand le rideau se lève
Là, mon cœur bat si fort

⁵ Hear this on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoWheph2uBI>.

Que je frôle la mort
Et que j'en oublie tout
Mais au moment exact
Je fais le premier pas
Pour entrer dans mon rêve

Je suis un cabotin dans toute sa splendeur
J'ai choisi mon destin
Donnez-moi dix répliques et quelques projecteurs
Vous verrez mes moyens
Je suis un cabotin dans toute sa splendeur
Et c'est toute ma vie
Donnez-moi un théâtre, un rôle à ma hauteur
Et j'aurai du génie
Du génie

Sous un maquillage savant
ou le visage à découvert
Emphatique ou discrètement
Je dis la prose ou bien le vers
Avec tendresse avec fureur
Selon la pièce et puis l'emploi
Je souffre, je vis ou je meurs
Et mens jusqu'à ce que j'y croie
Soit dit sans vanité je connais ma valeur
Et si pour vous peut-être
Je suis un cabotin dans toute sa splendeur
Je reste fier de l'être

And here is an extract from a tribute by Doreen St. Félix in *The New Yorker* of October 23, 2018.

Aznavour's career spanned nearly eighty years, at least a thousand songs, three hundred albums, dozens of tours, and many, many films. His music, animated by an earthy interest in what addles and excites the common man, had a revolutionizing impact on French pop, extending its lifetime well past its mid-century golden age, and its influence well beyond the borders of Aznavour's nation.

Logically, his death should not have been a shock. Age must do its ravishing, even to those who have acquired the sheen of the immortal. Yet Aznavour really did seem to possess some counterforce. Since 2006, he had been on an on-and-off global farewell tour. As his hearing went and his

vision deteriorated, the nonagenarian simply got hearing aids and a teleprompter. After breaking his arm in May, he healed up and had his last performance, in Osaka, in September. At the time of his death, Aznavour was planning a ninety-fifth-birthday tour, and expressed a desire to perform in a centennial concert, on May 22, 2024. The artist's nature was one of warm Gallic self-deprecation, but on the subject of living and working long he could be gravely serious. "But why would I ever stop?" he told the Daily Telegraph this spring. "In order to die at home in an armchair? Non merci."

.....

In the late forties, Aznavour was scraping up a living as a singer in Parisian night clubs and cabarets. Word of a diminutive tenor who could make hearts break reached the singer Édith Piaf. She pulled Aznavour under her wing, taking him to North America in 1948, where he opened for her in New York and Montreal, in addition to running her errands and tending to her not-at-all infrequent swoons. (Aznavour denies that the two were ever lovers; he has called their relationship "une amitié amoureuse," a romantic friendship, or, as he elaborated, "more than friendship and less than love.") The love that the mentor had for her pupil was a harsh one. Prone to costume and to aggrandizing mythologies of the self, Piaf, who was of Berber ancestry, believed that Aznavour, who stood at only five feet three inches, would not be successful so long as he looked the way he did: foreign, undergrown. Piaf commanded Aznavour to get a nose job, and he did. "I preferred you before," Aznavour remembers Piaf saying afterward.

But the mark of his origins could not be so easily chiselled away. Aznavour, whose name has become synonymous with his country's cultural character—who was called one of the enduring "faces of France" by Macron at his state funeral, earlier this month—was initially reviled. Critics called him ugly; his voice, unrefined; and his lyrics, vulgar. ("One wrote 'Why have they let a cripple onstage?'" Aznavour told the Daily Mail in 2015.) As a modern troubadour, mining the social perspective of the chansons réalistes, Aznavour was the inheritor of a French tradition that can be traced back to the entertainment of the medieval jongleur. But, in modern France, Aznavour quickly came to represent the threat of the uneducated, the immigrant, and the unpalatably ribald. Aznavour piqued the love song and made it dangerous; what he wrote were often tributes not to love but to lust. His song, "Après l'amour," from 1955, about the postcoital glow—the genitals, heavy; the sheets, twisted—was banned from the radio by the French government.

.....

A vaudeville show in Casablanca, in 1956, where the audience raved, has been identified as a turning point in Aznavour's public favor. His popularity anticipated the sexual revolution and the lure of hipsterism, and Aznavour fashioned himself an unlikely sex symbol. Critics remarked on his magnetism, his off-kilter seductiveness. Watching Aznavour perform his "five hundred and eighth composition" for a select crowd at the Americana Hotel, in New York, in April of 1963, The New Yorker's Lillian Ross observed that he was "small, and tightly put together, with enormous Armenian eyes and a dry little Existentialist face, but he has a strong voice." "I am popular because I am like everybody in France," Aznavour told Ross. France came to call him, endearingly, "Le petit Charles."

....

The world mourns him. The century was better for his genius and his compassion and his oblique, and at other times explicit, social politics. This was an artist who, in 1976, nearly a decade before the United Nations recognized the Armenian genocide, released, "Ils sont tombés," or "They Fell." The song is hymnal, talismanic. "Before Aznavour, despair was unpopular," the French director Jean Cocteau once said. It is difficult to imagine popular music without his stark, and specular, existential insight.

Ils sont tombés sans trop savoir pourquoi
Hommes, femmes et enfants qui ne voulaient que vivre
Avec des gestes lourds comme des hommes ivres
Mutilés, massacrés les yeux ouverts d'effroi
Ils sont tombés en invoquant leur Dieu
Au seuil de leur église ou le pas de leur porte
En troupes de désert titubant en cohorte
Terrassés par la soif, la faim, le fer, le feu

Nul n'éleva la voix dans un monde euphorique
Tandis que croupissait un peuple dans son sang
L' Europe découvrait le jazz et sa musique
Les plaintes de trompettes couvraient les cris d'enfants
Ils sont tombés pudiquement sans bruit
Par milliers, par millions, sans que le monde bouge
Devenant un instant minuscules fleurs rouges
Recouverts par un vent de sable et puis d'oubli

Ils sont tombés les yeux pleins de soleil
Comme un oiseau qu'en vol une balle fracasse
Pour mourir n'importe où et sans laisser de traces

Ignorés, oubliés dans leur dernier sommeil
Ils sont tombés en croyant ingénus
Que leurs enfants pourraient continuer leur enfance
Qu'un jour ils fouleraient des terres d'espérance
Dans des pays ouverts d'hommes aux mains tendues

Moi je suis de ce peuple qui dort sans sépulture
Qu'a choisi de mourir sans abdiquer sa foi
Qui n'a jamais baissé la tête sous l'injure
Qui survit malgré tout et qui ne se plaint pas
Ils sont tombés pour entrer dans la nuit
Éternelle des temps au bout de leur courage
La mort les a frappés sans demander leur âge
Puisqu'ils étaient fautifs d'être enfants d'Arménie

T T T T

Aging

Another year has passed, and we're all a little older.
Last summer felt hotter, and winter seems much colder.
There was a time not long ago, when life was quite a blast.
Now I fully understand about 'Living in the Past' .
We used to go to weddings, football games and lunches.
Now we go to funerals, and after-funeral brunches.
We used to have hangovers, from parties that were fun.
Now we suffer body aches, and awaken with the sun.
We used to go out dining, and couldn't get our fill.
Now we ask for doggie bags, come home and take a pill.
We used to often travel to places near and far.
Now we get sore asses from riding in the car.
We used to go to nightclubs, and drink a little booze.
Now we stay home at night, and watch the evening news.
That, my friend is how life is, and now my tale is told
So, enjoy each day and live it up before you're too damned old⁶

T T T T

Alternative Facts

Since the arrival of Trump, we live in a world of alternative facts.

⁶ Author unknown - with thanks to Philipp Ruperti



"Isn't this political ad wonderfully false and misleading"

And, of course, extreme polarisation that incites to violence.⁷



*"That was Brad with the Democratic weather. Now here's
Tammy with the Republican weather."*

As well as unbridled (parochial) nationalism.

⁷ "Sara Lipton, a professor of history at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, said 'there is absolutely no question' that Trump is aware his followers include white supremacists, racists and antisemites and that he is determined to keep them. The Republican party's willingness to put power before principle is "even more alarming", she added. 'This is where I see the breakdown of society: the passivity and tacit acceptance of those in positions of influence.'" (*The Guardian* 30.10.2018 - in the aftermath of the synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh)



"Remember how nice things were before they made America great?"

Heaven help us.

T T T T

8 pronunciation errors

Think hyperbole rhymes with Super Bowl? Don't worry, it could be the start of something beautiful - David Shariatmadari, *The Guardian*, 11 March 2014.

Someone I know tells a story about a very senior academic giving a speech. Students shouldn't worry too much, she says, if their plans "go oar-y" after graduation. Confused glances are exchanged across the hall. Slowly the penny drops: the professor has been pronouncing "awry" wrong all through her long, glittering career.

We've all been there. I still lapse into mis-CHEE-vous if I'm not concentrating. ... Researchers also found that 340 of the 1000 surveyed said ex-cetera instead of etcetera, while 260 ordered ex-pressos instead of espressos. Prescription came out as perscription or proscription 20% of the time.

The point is malapropisms and mispronunciations are fairly common. The 20-volume Oxford English Dictionary lists 171,476 words as being in common use. But the average person's vocabulary is tens of thousands smaller, and the number of words they use every day smaller still. There are bound to be things we've read or are vaguely familiar with, but not able to pronounce as we are supposed to.

The term "supposed" opens up a whole different debate, of course. Error is the engine of language change, and today's mistake could be tomorrow's vigorously defended norm. There are lots of wonderful examples of alternative pronunciations or missteps that have become standard usage. Here are some of my favourites, complete with fancy technical names.

Words that used to begin with "n": Adder, apron and umpire all used to start with an "n". Constructions like "A nadder" or "Mine napron" were so common the first letter was assumed to be part of the preceding word. Linguists call this kind of thing reanalysis or rebracketing.

When sounds swap around: Wasp used to be waps; bird used to be brid and horse used to be hros. Remember this when the next time you hear someone complaining about aks for ask or nucular for nuclear, or even perscription. It's called metathesis, and it's a very common, perfectly natural process.

When sounds disappear: English spelling can be a pain, but it's also a repository of information about the history of pronunciation. Are we being lazy when we say the name of the third day of the working week? Our ancestors might have thought so. Given that it was once "Wodin's day" (named after the Norse god), the "d" isn't just for decoration, and was pronounced up until relatively recently. Who now says the "t" in Christmas? It must have been there at one point, as the messiah wasn't actually called Chris. These are examples of syncope.

When sounds intrude: Our anatomy can make some changes more likely than others. The simple mechanics of moving from a nasal sound ("m" or "n") to a non-nasal one can make a consonant pop up in-between. Thunder used to be "thuner", and empty "emty". You can see the same process happening now with words like hamster, which often gets pronounced with an intruding "p". This is a type of epenthesis.

When "l" goes dark: A dark "l", in linguistic jargon, is one pronounced with the back of the tongue raised. In English, it is found

after vowels, as in the words full or pole. This tongue raising can go so far that the "l" ends up sounding like a "w". People frown on this in non-standard dialects such as cockney ("the ol' bill"). But the "l" in folk, talk and walk used to be pronounced. Now almost everyone uses a "w" instead- we effectively say fowk, tawk and wawk. This process is called velarisation.

Ch-ch-ch-changes: Your grandmother might not like the way you pronounce tune. She might place a delicate "y" sound before the vowel, saying tyune where you would say chune. The same goes for other words like tutor or duke. But this process, called affrication, is happening, like it or not. Within a single generation it has pretty much become standard English.

What the folk?: Borrowing from other languages can give rise to an entirely understandable and utterly charming kind of mistake. With little or no knowledge of the foreign tongue, we go for an approximation that makes some kind of sense in terms of both sound and meaning. This is folk etymology. Examples include crayfish, from the French écrevisse (not a fish but a kind of lobster); sparrow grass as a variant for asparagus in some English dialects; muskrat (conveniently musky, and a rodent, but named because of the Algonquin word muscascus meaning red); and female, which isn't a derivative of male at all, but comes from old French femelle meaning woman.

Spelling it like it is: As we've mentioned, English spelling can be a pain. That is mainly because our language underwent some seismic sound changes after the written forms of many words had been more or less settled. But just to confuse matters, spelling can reassert itself, with speakers taking their cue from the arrangement of letters on the page rather than what they hear. This is called spelling pronunciation. In Norwegian, "sk" is pronounced "sh". So early English-speaking adopters of skiing actually went shiing. Once the rest of us started reading about it in magazines we just said it how it looked. Influenced by spelling, some Americans are apparently staring to pronounce the "l" in words like balm and psalm (something which actually reflects a much earlier pronunciation).

T T T T

Acrostic "Impeach"

Resignation letter from Professor Daniel M. Kammen, Science Envoy, U. S. State Department (former) - 23 August 2017

Mr. President,

I am resigning from my position as Science Envoy for the Department of State of the United States. Since 1996 I have served the Departments of Energy, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the State Department in a number of roles. Working closely with the talented teams at State Department headquarters and at U.S. embassies abroad, we have built significant partnerships in North and East Africa, and in the Middle East, around shared visions of national security, job creation in the U.S. and sustainable energy.

My decision to resign is in response to your attacks on core values of the United States. Your failure to condemn white supremacists and neo-Nazis has domestic and international ramifications. On this issue, I stand with the unequivocal and authoritative statements of Charlottesville Mayor Mike Signer, Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe, Ohio Governor John Kasich. Senator John McCain, Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Presidents George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush, Dr. Cornel West, Linda Sarsour, the Palestinian-American activist and one of the organizers of the Women's March, and many others.

Particularly troubling to me is how your response to Charlottesville is consistent with a broader pattern of behavior that enables sexism and racism, and disregards the welfare of all Americans, the global community and the planet.

Examples of this destructive pattern have consequences on my duties as Science Envoy. Your decision to abdicate the leadership opportunities and the job creation benefits of the Paris Climate Accord, and to undermine energy and environmental research are not acceptable to me.

Acts and words matter. To continue in my role under your administration would be inconsistent with the principles of the United States Oath of Allegiance to which I adhere.

Character is vital in leadership. I find particularly wise the admonition of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who cautioned that, "A people (or person) that values its privileges above principles soon loses both."

Herein, with regret, I resign. I deeply respect and value the work of the many fine people I have encountered in our federal agencies and will miss the opportunity to work with and support them. Your actions to date have, sadly, harmed the quality of life in the United States, our standing abroad, and the sustainability of the planet.

T T T T

The Human Brain

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53RV35 70 PR0V3
H0W @UR M1NDS C4N
D0 4M4Z1NG 7H1NG5!
1MPR3551V3 7H1NG5!
1 N 7H3 B3G1NN1NG
17 WAS H4RD BU7
NOW,0N 7H15 LIN3
Y0UR M1ND 1 S
R34D1NG 17
4U70M471C4LLY
W17H0U7 3V3N
7H1NK1NG 4B0U7 17,
B3 PR0UD! @NLY
C3R741N P30PL3 C4N
R3AD 7H15.

Are you one of them?

T T T T

Aging - A thousand words for death

"To peg out, cash in one's chips or succumb? The lexicon of dying is remarkably inventive" (*David Crystal, The Guardian, 13 September 2014*)

How would you like to die, linguistically? When the lexicographers were compiling their citations for the *Oxford English Dictionary*, they came across this remarkable one, in a US graveyard:

Caroline, wife of EJ Langston, born on March 23 1833.
Passed out Dec 18 1867

It's the earliest recorded use of *pass out* meaning to die. The usage continued into the 20th century, but I doubt that it would be used now. Today we associate passing out with excessive tiredness, drugs, or drink. I don't want to be passed out on my gravestone.

Nor do I want any of the glorious deathly lexicon that accompanied the customer who brought *Monty Python's* legendary dead parrot back to the shop:



Customer: "'E's bleedin' demised!"

Owner: "No no! 'E's pining!"

Customer: "'E's not pinin'! 'E's passed on! This parrot is no more! 'E 'as ceased to be! 'E's expired and gone to meet 'is maker! 'E's a stiff! Bereft of life, 'e rests in peace! If you 'adn't nailed 'im to the perch 'e'd be pushin' up the daisies! 'Is metabolic processes are now 'istory! 'E's off the twig! 'E's kicked the bucket! 'E's shuffled off 'is mortal coil, run down the curtain, and joined the bleedin' choir invisible!"

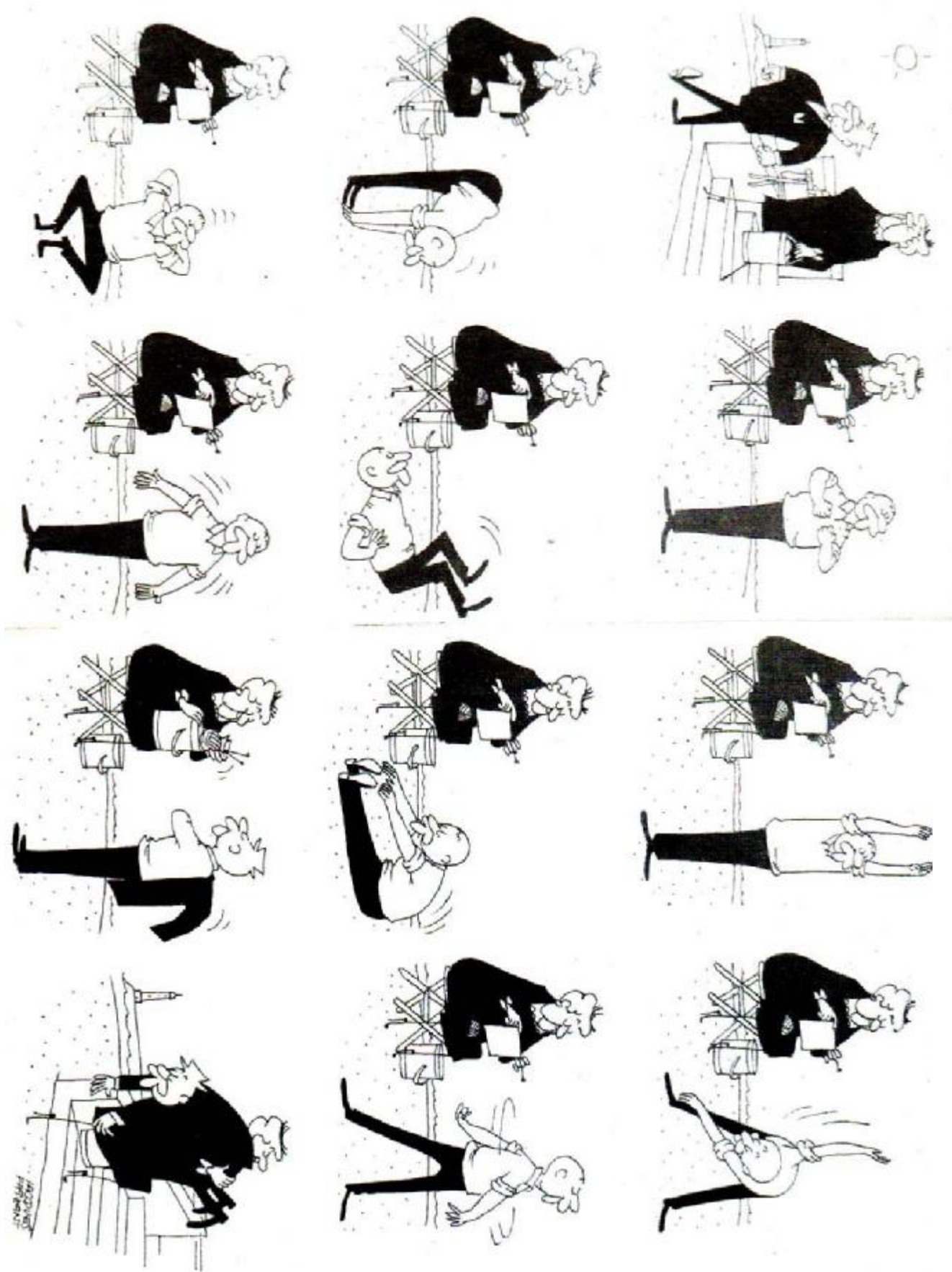
This profusion of defunctive synonymy is not a modern phenomenon. An Anglo-Saxon equivalent to the *Monty Python* scriptwriters would have had more than 40 expressions in Old English to choose from. His customer could have described his parrot as gone (*gegan*), departed (*leoran*), fallen (*gefeallan*), died away (*acwelan*), parted from life (*linnan ealdre*), gone on a journey (*geferan*), totally died off (*becwelan*), with its spirit sent forth (*gast onsendan*), completely scattered (*tostencan*), or glided away (*glidan*). It's plain that the Anglo-Saxons were as concerned about finding different ways to talk about death as we are today.

A remarkable creativity surrounds the vocabulary of death. The words and expressions range from the solemn and dignified to the jocular and mischievous, and they reflect the changing ways we have thought about life and death over the centuries. The early verbs are rather mundane and encompass literal notions of "leaving", such as wend, go out of this world, fare, leave and part. Only later do we get a sense of where one is going to, with an initial focus on ancestors evolving into the notion of a divine presence: be gathered to one's fathers, go over to the majority, go home, pass to one's reward, launch into eternity, go to glory, meet one's Maker, get one's call.

People seem always to be searching for ways of renewing their stock of apt metaphors. The Bible is one source, as seen in Wycliffe's "disperish", Tyndale's "depart", Coverdale's "die the death", and the King James Bible's "give up the ghost" and "the silver cord is loosed". Classical texts are another: Greek mythology is the source of "take the ferry"; Latin the source of "pay one's debt to nature" and "go over to the majority". Shipping provides "slip one's cable"; the livestock industry "kick the bucket"; pastimes "peg out" and "cash in one's chips"; mining "go up the flume"; finance "hand in one's accounts". Wartime produces a wide range of slang expressions (pack up, cop it, conk, stop one, buy it) as well as more solemn idioms (shed one's blood, fall a victim).

We also see a great deal of stylistic variation. Class division is in operation: at one extreme, upper-class slang (walk and pip); at the other, the language of the underworld (croak, kiss off, perch). There are signs of journalese (succumb), because finding an appropriate way to report a death is a perpetual challenge. Formality and solemnity contrast with colloquialism and slang: "yield the ghost", "expire" and "pass away" versus go "off the hooks", "kick the bucket" and "zonk". Some constructions evidently have permanent appeal because of their succinct and enigmatic character, such as the popularity of snuff it, peg it, buy it, cop it, off it, crease it, have had it. It's possible to see changes in fashion, such as the vogue for colloquial usages of "off" in the middle of the 18th century (move off, pop off, pack off, hop off).

But some things don't change. Pass away has been with us since the 14th century. And, in a usage that dates back to the 12th, we still do say that people, simply, died. That'll do me."



(Jacques Faizant, 1918-2006).

TTTT

Archie Randolph Ammons, 1926 - 2001⁸

In Memoriam Mae Noblitt

This is just a place:
we go around, distanced,
yearly in a star's
atmosphere, turning
daily into and out of
direct light and
slanting through the
quadrant seasons: deep
space begins at our
heels, nearly rousing
us loose: we look up
or out so high, sight's
silk almost draws us away:
this is just a place:
currents worry themselves
coiled and free in airs
and oceans: water picks
up mineral shadow and
plasm into billions of
designs, frames: trees,
grains, bacteria: but
is love a reality we
made here ourselves--
and grief--did we design
that--or do these,
like currents, whine
in and out among us merely
as we arrive and go:
this is just a place:
the reality we agree with,

⁸ Archie Randolph Ammons was an American poet who won the annual National Book Award for Poetry in 1973 and 1993.

that agrees with us,
outbounding this, arrives
to touch, joining with
us from far away:
our home which defines
us is elsewhere but not
so far away we have
forgotten it:
this is just a place.

In View of the Fact

The people of my time are passing away: my
wife is baking for a funeral, a 60-year-old who
died suddenly, when the phone rings, and it's
Ruth we care so much about in intensive care:
it was once weddings that came so thick and
fast, and then, first babies, such a hullabaloo:
now, it's this that and the other and somebody
else gone or on the brink: well, we never
thought we would live forever (although we did)
and now it looks like we won't: some of us
are losing a leg to diabetes, some don't know
what they went downstairs for, some know that
a hired watchful person is around, some like
to touch the cane tip into something steady,
so nice: we have already lost so many,
brushed the loss of ourselves ourselves: our
address books for so long a slow scramble now
are palimpsests, scribbles and scratches: our
index cards for Christmases, birthdays,
Halloweens drop clean away into sympathies:
at the same time we are getting used to so
many leaving, we are hanging on with a grip
to the ones left: we are not giving up on the
congestive heart failure or brain tumors, on

the nice old men left in empty houses or on
the widows who decide to travel a lot: we
think the sun may shine someday when we'll
drink wine together and think of what used to
be: until we die we will remember every
single thing, recall every word, love every
loss: then we will, as we must, leave it to
others to love, love that can grow brighter
and deeper till the very end, gaining strength
and getting more precious all the way. . . .

Admission

The wind high along the headland,
mosquitoes keep low: it's
good to be out:
schools of occurring whitecaps
come into the bay,
leap, and dive:
gulls stroll
long strides down the shore wind:
every tree shudders utterance:
motions—sun, water, wind, light—
intersect, merge: here possibly
from the crest of the right moment
one might break away from the final room.

T T T T

Guide to Britain for Princess Meghan

(Terence Blacker, *The Guardian* 28 Nov 2017)

Dear Meghan,

May I first of all, with the rest of the nation, offer my heartfelt congratulations to you on your engagement to our very own Prince Harry. When the announcement was issued on Monday by Clarence House, spontaneous applause broke out in the newsrooms of our national newspapers. I'm not ashamed to admit that there were tears in the Royal Affairs Department of this one.

Beyond the joy and the laughter, though, there are serious matters to consider. The family that you are about to join cannot be described as entirely normal. Your future father-in-law, for instance, exudes the tense and gloomy dissatisfaction of a man ill at ease with himself and the world. Outside the palace walls, the media gazes in. Already the popular press is gushing about you in a way that old hands will see as oddly menacing – it is waiting for your first wrong move. Elsewhere the dreary old establishment, steeped in snobbery about race, nationality and class, have already found you wanting in all three areas.

Within hours of your engagement being announced, a *Spectator* columnist set the tone, writing: “Obviously, 70 years ago, Meghan Markle would have been the kind of woman the prince would have had for a mistress, not a wife.”

You get the picture. It will be a bumpy ride. The British are in a confused state right now, longing to belong to the outside world yet in love with borders; hankering for celebrity and glamour while also disapproving of them. To be honest, we are in a bad place psychologically and, in this sense at least, we have the perfect representatives in the family you are about to join.

I would like to cut through the emotion and the carping to offer some practical advice about royal life. Frankly, if you avert your eyes from the gurning contortions of the press and follow these simple guidelines, you won’t go far wrong. On a positive note, you have done very well bringing Guy and Bogart here. This is a nation that likes to believe it is good with animals, and four-legged creatures, canine and equine, are an essential part of the royal image. To avoid confusion, you should probably avoid referring to your dogs as “my boys”, the phrase Princess Diana used to describe your future husband and his brother. Let it be known that Guy and Bogart are rescue dogs, recommended by the American television star Ellen DeGeneres. That mixture of the grim and the glitzy – “from refugee camps to red carpets”, as you once beautifully put it – always plays very well in Britain.

You will also be required to kill animals, or at least be around when they are killed. In the royal family, shooting and hunting animals are a valid expression of your love for them. Paradoxically, fans of the Windsors not only forgive the killing but see it as something rather special and distinguished about the family. To be squeamish about these things can cause difficulties.

On the subject of families, it would probably be sensible not to talk too much about your own. When it comes to the monarchy, admirers of the royal family are quite traditional: they tend to be suspicious of any new member not belonging to a family of aristocrats who own half of Northamptonshire. And whatever you do, avoid repeating your description of your mother Doria as “free-spirited”. The British, who can be surprisingly sensitive to linguistic nuance, will take this to be code for mad, promiscuous or both.

Your new status will involve a change of name, and you will mercifully be able to bid farewell to Markle, which for many Britons sounds uncomfortably close to *Merkel*. Just as the last royal bride became Princess Kate, a usefully classless name, you should quietly encourage the use of Princess Meg, which has a jaunty lack of pretension without being downright common.

Be careful not to say or do anything that might invite the deployment of the expression “Princess Pushy”, a favourite of the press that has not been used for a while. All that may sound rather bland, and so it is. Dullness should be your friend. If you must sparkle, for heaven’s sake do it behind closed doors. The last thing the Windsor family needs is another strong, opinionated, charismatic young woman. That always ends in tears.

One final, slightly personal point. Your teeth: they are just a little too white. As a nation that is not dentally blessed, we are sensitive about such things and see excessive oral dazzle (Justin Bieber, Penélope Cruz, Donald Trump) as a sign of vulgarity. Good luck, Princess Meg. We’ll be watching you.

T T T T

Gurning

In case you don't know what "gurning" is (I didn't), here is the explanation from Wikipedia:

A gurn or chuck, in British English, is a distorted facial expression, and a verb to describe the action. The American English equivalent is "making a face". A typical gurn might involve projecting the lower jaw as far forward and up as possible, and covering the upper lip with the lower lip, though there are other possibilities.

The English Dialect Dictionary, compiled by Joseph Wright, defines the word gurn as "to snarl as a dog; to look savage; to distort the countenance," while the Oxford English Dictionary suggests the

derivation may originally be Scottish, related to "grin." In Northern Ireland, the verb "to gurn" means "to cry," and crying is often referred to as "gurnin'." Originally the Scottish dialectal usage refers to a person who is complaining.

Gurning contests are a rural English tradition. By far the most notable is that held annually at the Egremont Crab Fair, which dates back to 1267 when King Henry III granted the fair a Royal Charter.

....

The competitions are held regularly in some villages, with contestants traditionally framing their faces through a horse collar — known as "gurnin' through a braffin." The World Gurning Championship takes place annually at the same crab fair in Egremont, Cumbria. Those with the greatest gurn capabilities are often those with no teeth, as this provides greater room to move the jaw further up. In some cases, the elderly or otherwise toothless can be capable of gurns covering the entire nose.

T T T T

Reversible Heads

On the subject of gurning, a few artists have painted "reversible heads". Probably the earliest was Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527?-1593).





The Swiss engraver Matthäus Merian (1593-1650) also painted in the same genre - this is his *Vanitas*



Probably the most prolific (and humorous) was Rex Whistler (1905-1944). Some were published posthumously with text by his brother Laurence (1912-2000) under the titles OHO! and AHA!

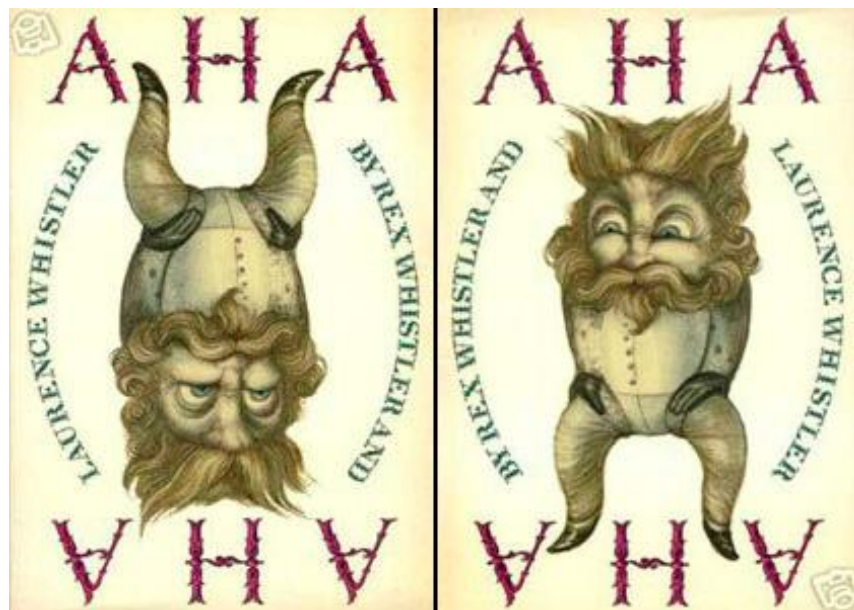


Henry VIII



Anne of Cleves





T T T T

Alzheimer?

How fast can you guess these words?

1. F _ _ K
2. PU _ S _
3. S _ X
4. P _ N _ S
5. BOO _ S
6. _ _ NDOM

Answers:

1. FORK
2. PURSE
3. SIX
4. PANTS
5. BOOKS
6. RANDOM

Did you get all six wrong? Well, the good news is that you don't have Alzheimer, but you may have another problem.⁹

T T T T

Americans Startled by Spectacle of President Who Can Speak English (*Andy Borowitz, The New Yorker 25 April 2018*)

WASHINGTON —Americans who were watching television on Wednesday morning witnessed the startling spectacle of an English-speaking President, viewers have confirmed.



All of the major cable news networks interrupted their regularly scheduled programs to cover the phenomenon, as a man who was identified as “President” spoke in complete, grammatically correct

⁹ With thanks to Gian Paolo Ravelli

English sentences with no visible sign of strain or discomfort.

Just minutes into the telecast, thousands of viewers called the networks to inquire if they were witnessing a hoax.

"I couldn't believe what I was seeing," Carol Foyler, a viewer in Akron, Ohio, said. "It had to be special effects or something."

While the spectacle might have appeared jarring to many, cable news insiders reported that the networks had in fact aired several hundred speeches by an English-speaking President between the years 2009 and 2017.¹⁰

T T T T

Bizarre

A federal vote in Switzerland on 25 November 2018 dealt with a proposal to modify the Swiss Constitution with an article promoting horns on cows.¹¹ Happy the land in which voters are called to decide this issue rather than, say, membership in the European Union! However, similar issues have occupied the Council of the EU in the past, witness the following from the *Journal Officiel des Communautés Européennes*:

"Décision du Conseil du 30 juin 1965, autorisant le royaume de Belgique à suspendre totalement à l'égard de pays tiers ses droits applicables aux animaux de l'espèce bovine, des espèces domestiques, autres, de la position ex 01.02 A II, à l'exclusion des animaux d'un poids inférieur à 220 kilogrammes et qui n'ont pas leur dents de remplacement."

I can imagine Belgian customs officers weighing bovine species at the frontier and checking each one to make sure it didn't have false teeth.

T T T T

¹⁰ A Resolution was proposed in the House of Representatives in 1820 suggesting that Americans educate the English in their own language.

"Whereas the House of Representatives in common with the people of America is justly proud of its admirable native tongue and regards this most expressive and energetic language as one of the best of its birthrights.... Resolved, therefore, that the nobility and gentry of England be courteously invited to send their elder sons and such others as may be destined to appear as politic speakers in Church and State to America for their education [and after due instruction he suggested that they be given] certificates of their proficiency in the English tongue."

¹¹ Initiative populaire "Pour la dignité des animaux de rente agricoles (initiative pour les vaches à corner)."

Pass the Port

A gynaecologist had become fed up with malpractice insurance and bureaucratic paperwork, and was burned out. Hoping to try another career where skilful hands would be beneficial, she decided to become a mechanic. She went to the local technical college, signed up for evening classes, attended diligently, and learned all she could. When the time of the practical exam approached, the gynaecologist prepared carefully for weeks, and completed the exam with tremendous skill. When the results came back, she was surprised to find that she had obtained a score of 150%.

Fearing an error, she called the Instructor, saying, "I don't want to appear ungrateful for such an outstanding result, but I wonder if there is an error in the grade?" The instructor said, "During the exam, you took the engine apart perfectly, which was worth 50% of the total mark. You put the engine back together again perfectly, which is also worth 50% of the mark." After a pause, the instructor added, "I gave you an extra 50% because you did it all through the muffler, which I've never seen done in my entire career."

T T T T

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)

I had always associated Schopenhauer with bleak pessimism. His aphorisms, however, are full of wit.

Für eine gelungene Rede gebrauchte gewöhnliche Worte und sage ungewöhnliche Dinge.

Höflichkeit ist wie ein Luftkissen: es mag zwar nichts drin sein, aber es mildert die Stöße des Lebens.

Ich glaube, wenn der Tod unsere Augen schließt, werden wir in einem Lichte stehen, in welchem unser Sonnenlicht nur der Schatten ist.

Der einzige Mann, der wirklich nicht ohne Frauen leben kann, ist der Frauenarzt.

Natürlicher Verstand kann fast jeden Grad von Bildung ersetzen, aber keine Bildung den natürlichen Verstand.

Nichts ist schwerer, als bedeutende Gedanken so auszudrücken, dass jeder sie verstehen muß.

Toleranz heisst: die Fehler der anderen entschuldigen. Takt heißt: sie nicht bemerken.

Viele verlieren den Verstand deshalb nicht, weil sie keinen haben.

Wenn die Welt erst ehrlich genug sein wird, um Kinder vor dem 15. Jahr keinen Religionsunterricht zu erteilen, dann wird von ihr was zu hoffen sein.

Zum Denken sind wenige Menschen geneigt, obwohl alle zum Rechthaben.

Bei gleicher Umgebung lebt doch jeder in einer anderen Welt.

T T T T

Robots

ZURICH (Reuters) 27 October 2018: "Robots will make robots at a new ABB factory in China, which the Swiss engineering group said on Saturday it plans to build for \$150 million in Shanghai as it defends its place as the country's largest maker of industrial robots."



Humanoid robot Yu Mi conducts the Lucca Philharmonic Orchestra

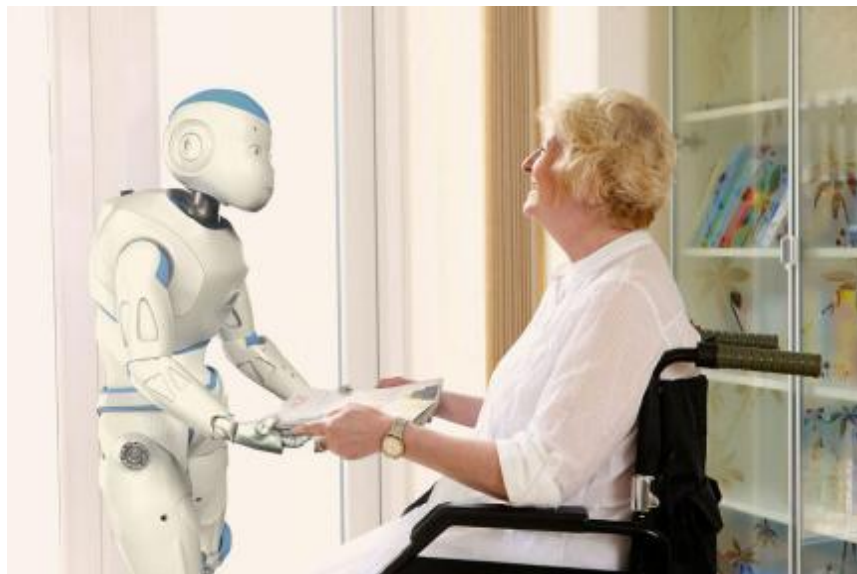
If perhaps some of us think that some conductors are superfluous or already robotic, it will probably be a long time before they are replaced by robots.¹² In other walks of life, however, they are becoming omnipresent - and not just in factories.

They will probably look less like this

¹² I assess the degree of superfluity by observing the extent to which the musicians are attentively watching the conductor. I recall a concert at the Gstaad Menuhin Festival several years ago at which the conductor arrived by helicopter in the afternoon, held one rehearsal, and spent the entire concert jumping up and down. The orchestra didn't watch him. At the same festival I had the privilege of talking with Yehudi Menuhin.



than this



or this:



"Japan's robot hotel: a dinosaur at reception, a machine for room service" The Guardian 16 July 2015

The English-speaking receptionist is a vicious-looking dinosaur, and the one speaking Japanese is a female humanoid with blinking lashes.

"If you want to check in, push one," the dinosaur says. The visitor still has to punch a button on the desk and type in information on a touch panel screen.



From the front desk to the porter that is an automated trolley taking luggage to the room, this hotel in south-western Japan, aptly called Weird Hotel, is “manned” almost totally by robots to save labour costs.

T T T T

Bad Child's Book of Beasts, by Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953)

**Child! do not throw this book about;
Refrain from the unholy pleasure
Of cutting all the pictures out!**

Preserve it as your chieftest treasure.
Child, have you never heard it said
That you are heir to all the ages?
Why, then, your hands were never made
To tear these beautiful thick pages!
Your little hands were made to take
The better things and leave the worse ones.
They also may be used to shake
The Massive Paws of Elder Persons.
And when your prayers complete the day,
Darling, your little tiny hands
Were also made, I think, to pray
For men that lose their fairylands.

I CALL you bad, my little child,
Upon the title page,
Because a manner rude and wild
Is common at your age.
The Moral of this priceless work
(If rightly understood)
Will make you--from a little Turk--
Unnaturally good.

Do not as evil children do,
Who on the slightest grounds
Will imitate the Kangaroo,
With wild unmeaning bounds:

Do not as children badly bred,
Who eat like little Hogs,
And when they have to go to bed
Will whine like Puppy Dogs:

Who take their manners from the Ape,
Their habits from the Bear,
Indulge the loud unseemly jape,
And never brush their hair.

But so control your actions that
Your friends may all repeat.

'This child is dainty as the Cat,
And as the Owl discreet.'

The Yak

As a friend to the children
commend me the Yak.
You will find it exactly the thing:
It will carry and fetch,
you can ride on its back,
Or lead it about with a string.

The Tartar who dwells on the plains of Thibet
(A desolate region of snow)
Has for centuries made it a nursery pet,
And surely the Tartar should know!
Then tell your papa where the Yak can be got,
And if he is awfully rich
He will buy you the creature--
or else
he will not.
(I cannot be positive which.)

The Lion

The Lion, the Lion, he dwells in the waste,
He has a big head and a very small waist;
But his shoulders are stark, and his jaws they are grim,
And a good little child will not play with him.

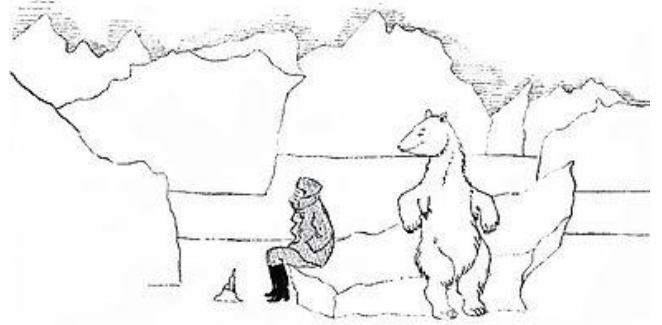


The Tiger

The Tiger on the other hand, is kittenish and mild,
He makes a pretty playfellow for any little child;
And mothers of large families (who claim to common sense)
Will find a Tiger well repay the trouble and expense.

The Polar Bear

The Polar Bear is unaware
Of cold that cuts me through:
For why? He has a coat of hair.
I wish I had one too!



The Whale

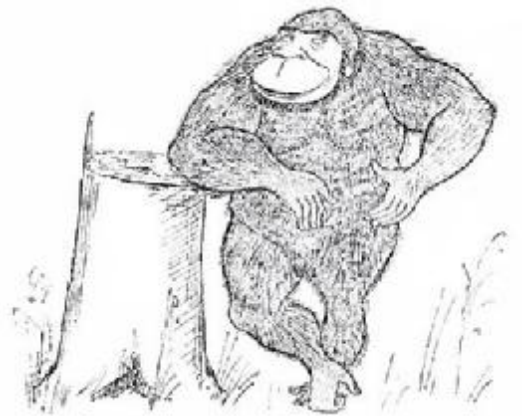
The Whale that wanders round the Pole
Is not a table fish.
You cannot bake or boil him whole
Nor serve him in a dish;
But you may cut his blubber up
And melt it down for oil.
And so replace the colza bean
(A product of the soil).

These facts should all be noted down
And ruminated on,
By every boy in Oxford town
Who wants to be a Don.

The Big Baboon

The Big Baboon is found upon
The plains of Cariboo:
He goes about with nothing on
(A shocking thing to do).

But if he dressed respectably
And let his whiskers grow,
How like this Big Baboon would be
To Mister So-and-so!



The Dodo

The Dodo used to walk around
And take the sun and air.
The sun yet warms his native ground-
The Dodo is not there!

The voice which used to squawk and squeak
Is now for ever dumb--
Yet may you see his bones and beak
All in the Mu-se-um.

The Learned Fish

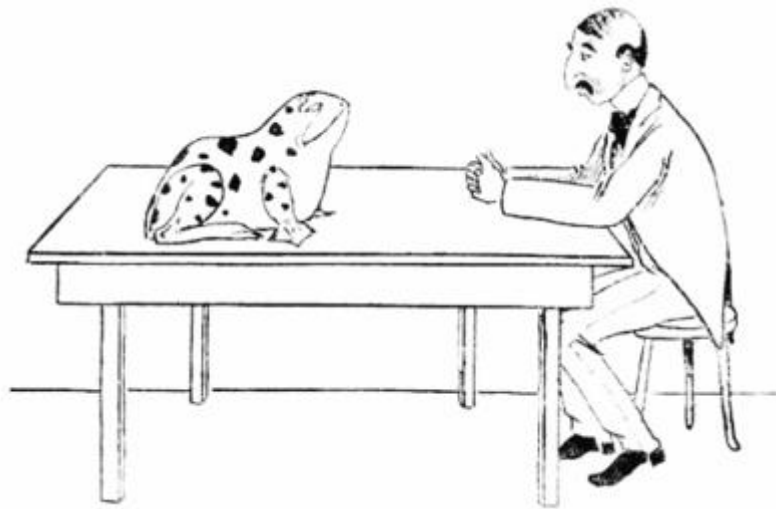
This learned Fish has not sufficient brains
To go into the water when it rains.



The Frog

Be kind and tender to the Frog,
And do not call him names,
As 'Slimy skin,' or 'Polly-wog,'
Or likewise 'Ugly James,'
Or 'Gap-a-grin,' or 'Toad-gone-wrong,'
Or 'Bill Bandy-knees':
The Frog is justly sensitive
To epithets like these.

No animal will more repay
A treatment kind and fair;
At least so lonely people say
Who keep a frog (and, by the way,
They are extremely rare).



T T T T

More Aging - More Port

On graduating from high school, the organising committee was discussing where to hold the class reunion. The Chairman said "let's go to the Crown, the waitresses are so pretty." The choice was decided unanimously.

Twenty years on, the same class held the same discussion. The choice was again the Crown, because, as the Chairman said, "the food is so good."

Another twenty years on, the Committee met to decide where to go.

The choice was again the Crown because "the toilets are on the ground floor."

After another twenty years, the same discussion. "Let's go to the Crown," the Chairman said, "we haven't been there before."

T T T T

Maya Ribault¹³

Bees

Open up your hives, o bees, cyphers on the fringes of
childhood, honeyed inheritance of self among others.
My grandfather and godfather carved their pockets of solitude
by donning white suits. Meticulous, industrious natures, each
quietly worshipped a queen,
each quietly stoked my inheritance. How could I
have known the vastness
being stored up for me, how it would remain
long after the bees had flown.
The moment I was handed the comb
dripping, the stickiness, the wax
in my teeth, the overwhelming sweetness.
It's over now. The bees, long gone, belong
to barefoot gardens, deserted.
Summer no longer sleeps
one foot swollen in her ice bucket. Jars of
honey no longer arrive
from Lyon, broken in the mail.

Society of Fireflies

When it was warm enough, you came with your nighttime
show, costing us nothing. We caught you in Mason
jars, hoping to create a new kind of bedside
lamp. Leave days rationed out by the computer,
hoarded for a vain flicker of freedom. Weekends,
I zone out on "Homeland." Sordid. I do enough
careful work to satisfy my bosses. I save
for retirement—to my bohemian eyes,
a fortune—though they say you need more

¹³ Maya Ribault is a recent M.F.A. graduate of Bennington College.

than a million. Immerse yourself in the exponential power of dividends. And what about decorating your rental apartment? At least put up some curtains after fourteen years. I don't mind the metro, eavesdropping on other people's lives. I don't die down there every day a little. And you rise up once more unsolicited from the fields, with your equal measure of appearing and disappearing.

T T T T

More Robots

Do you have **Alexa** at home. If not, good; if so, watch out - it can be as creepy as the Japanese hotel described above.

"Instantly connect to **Alexa** to play music, control your smart home, and get information, news, weather, and more using just your voice." "For example: say 'Alexa, announce that dinner's ready' to your supported Echo or Alexa-enabled device and 'Dinner's ready' will play in your voice on your other supported devices. You can also reach your whole family while you're out by making an announcement from the Alexa app that will play on your supported household devices. Just ask: 'Alexa, announce that dinner's ready.' / 'Alexa, broadcast that we're leaving in five.' / 'Alexa, announce that I'm heading home from the office.'" (*Publicity by Amazon*)



Amazon working to fix Alexa after users report random burst of 'creepy' laughter - Julia Carrie Wong The Guardian 7 March 2018

The robot wars are coming, and Alexa will have the last laugh.

Amazon acknowledged on Wednesday that some of its Alexa-enabled devices have developed a new skill: creeping out their owners with unexpected and unwarranted bursts of robotic laughter. "We're aware of this and working to fix it," the company told the *Verge*.

People began reporting the problem with their "smart" speakers on

social media in recent weeks. “So my mom & I are just sitting in the living room, neither of us said a word & our Alexa lit up and laughed for no reason,” tweeted one woman, Taylor Wade, on 5 March. “She didn’t even say anything, just laughed.”

Another Twitter user reported that Alexa began laughing in the middle of an office conversation: “I asked why she laughed and she said, ‘Sorry, I am not sure.’” Amazon did not immediately respond to queries from the Guardian about the nature or cause of the apparent bug, but terrifying your customer base is likely a bad move for a company trying to convince people to install a listening device in their bedrooms.

Wade at least had a simple enough solution to the problem, however: “We unplugged her.” After the publication of this article, Amazon announced a fix and apparent explanation for the ghostly laughter. The company suggested in an email that the laughs had occurred “in rare circumstances” because the speaker was picking up a “false positive” for the command “Alexa, laugh”.

Amazon will change the command for laughter to “Alexa, can you laugh?” and disable the shorter command. It will also program Alexa to preface its simulacrum of human emotion with the phrase: “Sure, I can laugh.”



TTTTT

Have some more Port

A woman walks into a pharmacy and asks the pharmacist for some arsenic.

"Madame, what do you want with arsenic?"

"I want to kill my husband."

"I can't sell you arsenic to kill a person!"

The lady lays down a photo of a man and a woman in a compromising position. The man is her husband and the woman is the pharmacist's wife. He takes the photo and nods. "I didn't realize you had a prescription!" ¹⁴

T T T T

Anthony Evan Hecht (1923-2004) ¹⁵

Of Loneliness and Freedom

As at the beginning and end, a single soul,
With all the sweet and sour of loneliness.
I, as a connoisseur of loneliness,
Savor it richly, and set it down
In an endless umber landscape, a stubble field
Under a lilac, electric, storm-flushed sky,
Where, in companionship with worthless stones,
Mica-flecked, or at best some rusty quartz,
I stood in childhood, waiting for things to mend.
A useful discipline, perhaps. One that might lead
To solitary, self-denying work
That issues in something harmless, like a poem,
Governed by laws that stand for other laws,
Both of which aim, through kindred disciplines,
At the soul's knowledge and habiliment.
In any case, in a self-granted freedom,

¹⁴ With thanks to the late Peter Parkany

¹⁵ "Anthony Hecht, more than any other American poet of the past half-century, wrote as a champion of traditional forms and elevated syntax. Formal verse, in his eyes, embodied the dignity and grandeur of law itself. He titled one of his books of criticism *The Hidden Law* (1993), another *On the Laws of the Poetic Art* (1995). The laws that governed poems were for him the symbols of universal moral law, and equally demanding." (*Edward Mendelson, NYRB 20 June 2013*) - A man after my own heart.

The mind, lone regent of itself, prolongs
The dark and silence; mirrors itself, delights
In consciousness of consciousness, alone,
Sufficient, nimble, touched with a small grace.

The End Of The Weekend

A dying firelight slides along the quirt
Of the cast iron cowboy where he leans
Against my father's books. The lariat
Whirls into darkness. My girl in skin tight jeans
Fingers a page of Captain Marriat
Inviting insolent shadows to her shirt.

We rise together to the second floor.
Outside, across the lake, an endless wind
Whips against the headstones of the dead and wails
In the trees for all who have and have not sinned.
She rubs against me and I feel her nails.
Although we are alone, I lock the door.

The eventual shapes of all our formless prayers:
This dark, this cabin of loose imaginings,
Wind, lip, lake, everything awaits
The slow unloosening of her underthings
And then the noise. Something is dropped. It grates
against the attic beams. I climb the stairs
Armed with a belt.

A long magnesium shaft
Of moonlight from the dormer cuts a path
Among the shattered skeletons of mice.
A great black presence beats its wings in wrath.
Above the boneyard burn its golden eyes.
Some small grey fur is pulsing in its grip.

Witness

Against the enormous rocks of a rough coast
The ocean rams itself in pitched assault
And spastic rage to which there is no halt;
Foam-white brigades collapse; but the huge host
Has infinite reserves; at each attack
The impassive cliffs look down in gray disdain

At scenes of sacrifice, unrelieved pain,
Figured in froth, aquamarine and black.

Something in the blood-chemistry of life,
Unspeakable, impressive, undeterred,
Expresses itself without needing a word
In this sea-crazed Empedoclean Strife.

It is a scene of unmatched melancholy,
Weather of misery, cloud cover of distress,
To which there are not witnesses, unless
One counts the briny, tough and thorned sea holly.

T T T T

Chinese carmaker dumps model name Trumpchi

Chinese automaker GAC is changing the name of models it plans to introduce in the US market next year, because Trumpchi sounds too much like it is linked to President Donald Trump.

“The name will change for the US market to avoid the wrong connotation or misunderstanding,” a GAC spokesman told AFP on Tuesday at the Detroit auto show.

The Trumpchi models have been available in China for years, and the word actually means “legend” in Chinese, the spokesman said.

US media has previously reported that company executives had been deliberating over a name change. The cultural dissonance with its chosen brand name is something with which another automaker can relate.

Tata Motors’ zippy car abbreviation Zica was an unfortunate choice in 2016 for its new hatchback sedan, considering it debuted as the World Health Organization declared the Zika virus a global health emergency. The Indian company renamed it Tiago after making marketing lemonade out of a public relations lemon by holding an online renaming contest. (*Agence France-Presse, 17 January 2018*)

T T T T

Sporting Metaphors

We use a surprisingly large number of sporting metaphors in every day English speech, sometimes without knowing their precise meaning.

A Blow-by-Blow account
Saved by the bell

Down for the count
The gloves are off
Lead with the chin
Have someone in your corner
Take it on the chin
Throw in the towel
Below the belt
Throw one's hat into the ring
On the ropes
Pull one's punches
Roll with the punches
Par for the course
Level playing field
The ball's in your court
Down to the wire
First past the post
Gambit
Go to the mat
Keep your eye on the ball
On the ball
Score an own goal
Pass the baton
Dark horse
Against the rub of the green
Get the ball rolling
Come out swinging
Move the goal posts

Many are from predominantly American sports: ¹⁶

A ball-park figure
Covering all bases
Playing hardball
A rain-check¹⁷
Touch base
Dead ringer
Slam Dunk

¹⁶ For a full account see: Josh Chetwynd, *The Field Guide to Sports Metaphors: A Compendium of Competitive Words and Idioms*.

¹⁷ A ticket stub good for a later match when the scheduled one is rained out - definitely not to look outside and see if it is raining.

Drop the ball/Fumble
A Hail Mary¹⁸

Some are only understood in Britain:

A sticky wicket
Bowl a googly (US equivalent: curveball)
Stumped
A good innings
It's not cricket
Hit for six
In to bat
Keeping your end up
A hospital pass

T T T T

The Mom song (Wilhelm Tell Overture)

Try singing these words to the tune of Rossini's *Wilhelm Tell* overture.¹⁹

Get up now, get up now, get up out of bed.
Wash your face, brush your teeth, comb your sleepy head.
Here's your shoes and your clothes, hear the words I said.
Get up now, get up and make your bed.

Are you hot are you cold, are you wearing that?
Where's your books and your lunch, where's your homework at?
Grab your coat and your gloves and your scarf and hat.
Don't forget, you've got to feed the cat.

Play outside, don't play rough, will you just play fair.
Be polite, make a friend, don't forget to share.
Work it out, wait your turn, never take a dare.

¹⁸ This was new to me - Wikipedia gives the following explanation: "A Hail Mary pass, also known as a shot play, is a very long forward pass in American football, made in desperation, with only a small chance of success and time running out on the clock. The term became widespread after a December 28, 1975 NFL playoff game between the Dallas Cowboys and the Minnesota Vikings, when Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach (a Roman Catholic and fan of *The Godfather Part II* (1974), whose character Fredo had popularized the phrase) said about his game-winning touchdown pass to wide receiver Drew Pearson, 'I closed my eyes and said a Hail Mary.'"

¹⁹ You can hear Anita Renfroe, the author, in a breathless version on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxT5NwQUtVM>.

Get along! Don't make me come down there.

Clean your room, fold your clothes, put your stuff away.

Make your bed, do it now, do we have all day?

Were you born in a barn, would you like some hay?

Can you even hear a word I say.

T T T T

Yevgeni Yevtushenko (1933-2017)

Я - Ангел

Не пью.

люблю свою жену.

Свою -- я это акцентирую.

Я так по -- ангельски живу --

чуть Щипачева не цитирую.

От этой жизни я зачах.

На женщин всех глаза закрыл я.

Неловкость чувствую в плечах.

Ого!

Растут, наверно, крылья.

Я растерялся.

Я в тоске.

Растут -- зануды!

Дело скверно!

Теперь придется в пиджаке

проделать прорези, наверно.

Я ангел.

Жизни не корю

за все жестокие обидности.

Я -- ангел.

Только вот курю.

Я -- из курящей разновидности.

Быть ангелом -- страннейший труд.

Лишь дух один.

Ни грамма тела.

И мимо женщины идут,

я ангел.

Что со мною делать?!

Пока что я для них не в счет,

пока что я в небесном ранге,

но самый страшный в жизни черт,

учтите, -- это бывший ангел!

I'm An Angel

I don't drink.

I love my wife.

My own wife, let me emphasize.

I live so much - like an angel,

I almost quote Shchipachev.

I am withering in this life.

I've shut my eyes to all women.

My shoulders feel peculiar.

Aha!

Wings, probably, are sprouting!

I'm confused.

Anxious.

And they're growing - what a pain!

Things are serious!

Now I'll have to cut

holes in my jacket.

I'm an angel.

I bear life no grudge

for all its cruel hurts.

I - am an angel.

But I still smoke.

I'm the smoking type.

To be an angel - what strange work.

Only one soul.

Not a gram of flesh.

And the women go by.

I'm an angel.

What use am I to them!

So far, I don't matter to them,

not while I hold celestial rank,

but the worst thing in life is hell,

please note that I'm a fallen angel!

<p>Моя любимая придет, меня руками обоймет, все изменения приметит, все опасения поймет.</p> <p>Из черных струй, из мглы крошечной, забыв захлопнуть дверь такси, вбежит по ветхому крылечку в жару от счастья и тоски.</p> <p>Вбежит промокшая, без стука, руками голову возьмет, и шубка синяя со стула счастливого на пол соскользнет...</p>	<p>My love will come, will embrace me, see how I have changed and understand all my fears.</p> <p>In from the streaming dark, from the black night, without stopping to slam the taxi door, she'll run upstairs through the shabby porch burning with happiness and memories.</p> <p>Soaking wet, without knocking, she will take my head in her hands, and her blue coat will slide gently from the chair to the floor.</p>
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T T T T

Broad Majority of Americans Support Moving Trump to Jerusalem - Andy Borowitz, *The New Yorker* December 6, 2017

WASHINGTON—In a new poll conducted on Wednesday, a sweeping majority of Americans said they support moving Donald J. Trump to Jerusalem.

The sixty-three per cent of survey respondents who approved relocating Trump to Jerusalem placed few conditions on such a move, other than that it take place “as soon as possible” and that it be “permanent.”

In other poll results, an overwhelming majority of respondents said that they would support relocating Trump to any number of other foreign destinations, including Russia, the Philippines, and “that station where scientists live at the South Pole.”

Though Americans were strongly enthusiastic about moving Trump to Jerusalem, in a rare consensus both Arabs and Israelis vehemently opposed the move.

T T T T

Jupiter

In 1921 Gustav Holst adapted the music from a section of *Jupiter* from his suite "The Planets" to create a setting for a poem by diplomat Cecil Spring-Rice written in 1908 whilst he was posted to the British Embassy in Stockholm. Since 1991, when the melody was used as an anthem for the Rugby World Cup tournament in England, it is used by the International Rugby Board for World Cup events (to which we can

look forward in 2019).

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.
I heard my country calling, away across the sea,
Across the waste of waters she calls and calls to me.
Her sword is girded at her side, her helmet on her head,
And round her feet are lying the dying and the dead.
I hear the noise of battle, the thunder of her guns,
I haste to thee my mother, a son among thy sons.
And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.

While I am at it, let's have the chorus and first verse from *Land of Hope and Glory*.

Land of Hope and Glory
Mother of the Free
How shall we extol thee
Who are born of thee?
Wider still, and wider
Shall thy bounds be set;
God, who made thee mighty
Make thee mightier yet!

Dear Land of Hope, thy hope is crowned
God make thee mightier yet!
On Sov'ran brows, beloved, renowned
Once more thy crown is set
Thine equal laws, by Freedom gained
Have ruled thee well and long;
By Freedom gained, by Truth maintained
Thine Empire shall be strong

and why not the first three verses of Rule Britannia?²⁰

When Britain first, at Heaven's command
Arose from out the azure main;
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sang this strain:
"Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
"Britons never will be slaves."

The nations, not so blest as thee,
Must, in their turns, to tyrants fall;
While thou shalt flourish great and free,
The dread and envy of them all.
"Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
"Britons never will be slaves."

Still more majestic shalt thou rise,
More dreadful, from each foreign stroke;
As the loud blast that tears the skies,
Serves but to root thy native oak.
"Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
"Britons never will be slaves."

Pretty awful poetry, but rousing stuff, part of the myths that animate the Brexiteers: if you haven't read it and heard it (for example, at the *Last Night of the Proms*)²¹ you can't begin to understand Brexit.

Let's turn at last to William Blake's *Jerusalem*²² for some real poetry.

And did those feet in ancient time,
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;

²⁰ By James Thomson (1700-1748) and set to music by Thomas Arne (1710-1778).

²¹ Watch on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2-43p3GVTQ> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rB5Nbp_gmgQ.

²² Set to music by Sir Hubert Parry (1848-1918).

Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant Land.²³

T T T T

Try some Pflümli

In lieu of port, here are a couple of jokes about the inhabitants of the canton of Bern, who have the reputation of being exceptionally slow in all respects.

One Bernese meets another in the street. The first is limping.
What happened, Hans-Ueli?
Oh, Heinz, I tripped over a snail.
You didn't see it?
No, it came from behind.

Another Bernese decides to take parachute lessons. The instructor explains carefully that he must count to three before pulling the ripcord.

The plane takes off, the Bernese jumps out but his parachute doesn't open. By a stroke of good fortune, he lands in a pile of hay and is only slightly injured. On the way to the hospital he says: "Three."

T T T T

Odds and Ends

"If you cannot read all your books, at any rate handle, or as it were, fondle them--peer into them, let them fall open where they will, read from the first sentence that arrests the eye, set them back on the shelves with your own hands, arrange them on your own plan so that you at least know where they are. Let them be your friends; let them at any rate be your acquaintances." *Winston Churchill*

²³ The biblical references belie the fact that Blake, although a committed Christian, was hostile to almost all forms of organised religion. He was influenced by the ideals and ambitions of the French and American Revolutions. *Jersualen* expresses Blake's fear of the effects of industrialisation on workers and nature. He has been described as "a glorious luminary."

Timeo hominem unius libri. (Beware of the man with just one book.)
Attrib. Thomas Aquinas

The man who doesn't read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them. *Mark Twain*

"Stalinism might be one way of attaining industrialisation, just as cannibalism is one way of attaining a high-protein diet." *Robert Conquest*

"All this time we've been worrying that the danger is Artificial Intelligence - turns out, it's natural stupidity...." *Stephen Colbert 10 November 2017*

"...Hunter Thompson said he did not have to worry about running out of LSD in a hotel. He could trip on the Gideon Bible's Revelation" Gary Wills, *NYRB 8.2.2018*

"I have somewhere heard or read the frank confession of a Benedictine abbot: 'My vow of poverty has given me an hundred thousand crowns a year; my vow of obedience has raised me to the rank of a sovereign prince.' I forget the consequences of his vow of chastity." Edward Gibbon, *Rise and Fall*, Chapter xxxviii, Note 57.

[**Trigger Warning**] "... [the television station] KTVU claimed it had 'just learned the names of the 4 pilots on board' Asiana flight 214 which crashed last Saturday [13.7.2013]. But the station was given bad information that made it all the way into the newscast. If you read the names it becomes immediately clear this is a joke, which went unnoticed by the newsroom, producers and the anchor."

