

QUOTIDIAN

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PRELUDE

It seems my prior dedication to this newsletter has waned in recent weeks, and for that I am apologetic, not only to my readers, but to myself. Much has happened recently to set my life on a different course, hopefully one for the better. And so I have suffered—and you as well—from healthy doses of trivial knowledge. To make amends, I am making this the most interesting *Quotidian* yet. Within are answers to questions about which we have all doubtless wondered from time to time. I hope you will find answers to yours.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“The wisest men follow their own direction.”
—Euripides

“Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”
—Mark Twain

“It is a good rule in life never to apologize. The right sort of people do not want apologies, and the wrong sort take a mean advantage of them.”
—P.G. Wodehouse

“Do not be too moral. You may cheat yourself out of much life. Aim above morality. Be not simply good; be good for something.”
—Henry David Thoreau

“Never apologize for showing feeling. When you do so, you apologize for truth.”
—Benjamin Disraeli

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

SEPT. 21, 1970: Monday Night Football (MNF) airs for the first time on ABC. The first showdown was between the New York Jets and the Cleveland Browns in Cleveland, Ohio. The Jets went down in flames, 31-21. Up to that point, football games had only been broadcast regionally to the visiting team’s viewers (thanks to a federal law prohibiting home games from being broadcast unless all the tickets to that game had already been sold).

The existence of MNF is largely due to NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle, who decided to capitalize on the growing popularity of football in the United States. He approached the big three networks (NBC, CBS, and ABC) with the idea of moving one NFL game from Sunday (when most games were and still are played) to the prime (*continued on page 2*)

4 WORDS

Memorize these by week’s end and you shall quickly develop an enviable lexicon.

This week’s theme: words that make you sound smart.

rebarbative (re-BAR-ba-tiv) *adj.*

1. extremely unattractive; repellant; irritating

Ex. Her rebarbative demeanor made it difficult for me to maintain my composure.

confabulate (con-FAB-u-late) *v.*

1. to talk informally; CHAT

2. to fill in gaps in memory by fabrication

Ex. Dad is in the parlor confabulating with a prospective customer.

vertiginous (ver-TIJ-i-nus) *adj.*

1. tending to produce vertigo or dizziness

2. inclined to frequent and often pointless change; inconstant

3. revolving; whirling; rotary

Ex. The ship hurtled along at a vertiginous speed as it climbed to the very parapets of Heaven.

somnolent (SOM-no-lent) *adj.*

1. drowsy; sleepy

2. inducing or tending to induce sleep

Ex. The quiet murmur of the somnolent stream made vigilance a chore.

ETYMOLOGY 101

The origin of: eavesdropper

I've decided to stop doing a word history of one of the "3 words" listed on the first page, since it limits my ability to talk about far more interesting and commonly used terms. So, ever wanted to know why we call people who listen surreptitiously to the conversations of others *eavesdroppers*?

The verb *eavesdrop* as we use it today first appeared in the 15th century, and was a descendant of the Middle English noun *evesdrop* and *evesdrip*. In the 9th century, these words referred to the water that falls in drops or drips from the eaves of a house. The term later applied to the area on the ground under the eaves where this water fell. Thus, one who stands within this area (known as the *eavesdrop*) is known as an eavesdropper. Since the eaves of a house typically don't extend far from the house, when one stands under them it is easy to hear what is going on inside.

The origin of: hamburger

Why do we call ground beef patties hamburgers? The name has nothing to do with the meat used, but with the *origin* of the meat. Hamburgers were first cooked up in the German city of Hamburg, where the ground beef was known as "Hamburg Steak." German immigrants brought the name and the steak to America in the 1850s, where it was subsequently transformed to *hamburger steak*. By 1908, the meat was known simply as *hamburger*.

The Germans also introduced two other popular types of meat to our diet and our language: *frankfurter* comes from the city of Frankfurt, and is commonly shortened to *frank*. Similarly, *wienerwurst*, or *wiener*, comes from Wien, the German name for the city of Vienna.

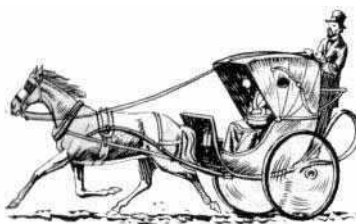
Wurst is German for "sausage." *Schnitzel* in German is literally "shred" or "shaving." *Brat* is German for "meat without waste" (no, bratwurst does not come from Brat, but from Thuringia, a state in Germany).

The origin of: taxi

Why do we call those ubiquitous yellow cars thus? The word comes from the mechanical devices that are installed in taxis to calculate the distance traveled and the fare due the driver. The device was called a *taxameter* by the Germans (from the Latin *tax* for a tax or charge, and the Greek *meter* for "a measuring device"), and a *taximetre* by the French. Cabs that used this mechanical device were called *taximeter cabs*. This was eventually shortened to the present *taxi*.

Cab is a shortened form of "cabriolet," a two-wheeled, horse-drawn carriage popular in France and Italy in the 19th century. Today the word refers to any car body style that has a retracting rooftop.

Source: *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories*.



(continued from page 1) time spot on Monday night. NBC allegedly turned down the offer due to the popularity of Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*. ABC producer Roone Arledge saw the potential for turning MNF into an entertainment spectacle. Through a combination of marketing and business savvy, MNF turned into one of the most successful television shows in history: it is the second longest running prime time show in American television history, second only to *60 Minutes* (which had its start in 1968). MNF switches to ESPN next season, ending its 36 year run with ABC.

Source: www.wikipedia.org.

PLAIN ENGLISH

Today's Lesson: onto vs. on to

Onto is a preposition—a word that shows the relation between another word and a noun or pronoun (like *with*, *across*, and *inside*)—and thus should only be used to describe the position of one thing relative to another.

Ex. He jumped onto the roof of the moving car.

On to is a combination of an adverb (on) and a preposition (to) and is used to describe movement.

Ex. After sacking the village and surrounding country, the army moved on to the next town.

← *The wildly popular variant of the cabriolet: David Chapman's "Hansom cab"*

NEAT-O WHY A HONEYMOON IS SO NAMED

Today, the honeymoon is a time of great joy for newlyweds, and also a time of great envy for those who wish they too were vacationing to exotic and distant lands. Back in the day, however, the term was much more sardonic (for those of you who haven't been reading my newsletter, that means *sarcastic*).

There are two explanations for the word. The first posits that the father of the bride gave as his dowry a month's supply of mead (an alcoholic drink made from honey, water, and yeast) for its pro-fertility and provirility properties. To increase the likelihood of childbirth, it was expected that the first month of marriage should include a daily draught of the honeyed stuff. Since a cycle of the moon is about a month long, this period of mead-drinking became known as the honeymoon.

The second, and more cynical explanation is that the first month of marriage is all sweet tenderness (like honey), and love—like the moon—is no sooner full than it begins to wane. Thus, a honeymoon used to refer to the love struck (but ephemeral) period of time directly following a marriage, when the lovers were not yet at each other's throats.

Source: www.wikipedia.org.

WELL I'LL BE! THE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS YOU NEVER ASKED

What's the difference between virgin and extra virgin olive oil?

Olive oil that is obtained solely from the olive on the tree, using only mechanical or other physical means (that is, no chemicals are used to treat the oil, and the oil hasn't been mixed with oils from other sources) is classified as *virgin*. It cannot have an acidity (as measured by the International Olive Oil Council, or IOOC) of more than 2%. *Extra virgin* olive oil differs only in that it cannot have an acidity of more than 0.8%.

Another classification—now obsolete—is *first press*. A century and more ago, olive oil was pressed by means of a hydraulic screw or press. The paste that was left after the first press tended to degrade the quality and taste of the remaining oil, so the first press was thought to be the best. Modern methods use centrifuges to extract the oil, so there is no longer any need for multiple presses.

Pure olive oil is oil that has been refined and mixed in with virgin oils. Over 50% of oils produced in the Mediterranean are of such poor quality that this refinement is necessary to produce an edible product.

Source: www.oliveoilsource.com.

Why do we call a touchdown a touchdown?

The term "touchdown" as used in American football comes from its predecessor (or "inspiration," depending on who you're talking to), rugby. In rugby, most points used to be scored by kicking goals; however, if a team managed to go beyond the goal line and touch the ball down to the ground, he was given a *try*. A try is so named because it allowed the team who touched the ball down to "try" to kick at the goal without interference from the other team. A success converted the try into a goal. Today, a rugby try is worth four points, and has eclipsed the goal as the primary method of scoring.

American football did away with the requirement of touching the ball down behind the goal line, but this ritual is still sometimes practiced by triumphant wide receivers.

Source: www.wikipedia.org



Now THAT is a touchdown



LITERARY GENIUS

There hasn't been much of a theme this week, so I thought I'd pick an excerpt from a book I've always enjoyed. Anyone familiar with *The Neverending Story* will understand why the font here is green. Its author was one of the most famous German writers of the 20th century, mostly due to the popularity of his children's books (notably the one excerpted here). His works have been translated into more than 40 languages and have sold 20 million copies. Apparently this success did little to change Mr. Ende; he remained shy and humble until his death in 1995.

FROM *DIE UNENDLICHE GESCHICHTE (THE NEVERENDING STORY)*

by Michael Ende

Chapter XII – The Old Man of Wandering Mountain

LONG-THUNDERING AVALANCHES descended from the heights, snowstorms raged between towering ice-coated summits, dipped into hollows and ravines, and swept howling onward over the great white expanse of the glaciers. Such weather was not at all unusual for this part of the country, for the Mountain of Destiny—that was its name—was the highest in all Fantastica, and its peaks literally jutted into the heights of heaven.

Not even the most intrepid mountain climbers ventured into these fields of everlasting ice. It had been so very, very long since anyone had succeeded in climbing this mountain that the feat had been forgotten. For one of Fantastica's many strange laws decreed that no one could climb the Mountain of Destiny until the last successful climber had been utterly forgotten. Thus anyone who managed to climb it would always be the first.

No living creature could survive in that icy waste—except for a handful of gigantic ice-glumps—who could barely be called living creatures, for they moved so slowly that they needed years for a single step and whole centuries for a short walk. Which meant, of course, that they could only associate with their own kind and knew nothing at all about the rest of Fantastica. They thought of themselves as the only living creatures in the universe.

Consequently, they were puzzled to the point of consternation when they saw a tiny speck twining its way upward over perilous crags and razor-sharp ridges, then vanishing into deep chasms and crevasses, only to reappear higher up.

That speck was the Childlike Empress's glass litter, still carried by four of her invisible Powers. It was barely visible, for the glass it was made of looked very much like ice, and the Childlike Empress's white gown and white hair could hardly be distinguished from the snow roundabout.

She had traveled many days and nights. The four Powers had carried her through blinding rain and scorching sun, through darkness and moonlight, onward and onward, just as she had ordered, "no matter where." She was prepared for a long journey and all manner of hardship, since she knew that the Old Man of Wandering Mountain could be everywhere or nowhere.

Still, the four invisible Powers were not guided entirely by chance on their choice of an itinerary. As often as not, the Nothing, which had already swallowed up whole regions, left only a single path open. Sometimes the possibilities narrowed down to a bridge, a tunnel, or a gateway, and sometimes they were forced to carry the litter with the deathly ill Empress over the waves of the sea. These carriers saw no difference between liquid and solid.

Tireless and persevering, they had finally reached the frozen heights of the Mountain of Destiny. And they would go on climbing until the Childlike Empress gave them another order. But she lay still on her cushions. Her eyes were closed and she said nothing. The last words she had spoken were the "no matter where" she had said on leaving the Ivory Tower.

The litter was moving through a deep ravine, so narrow that there was barely room for it to pass. The snow was several feet deep, but the invisible carriers did not sink in or even leave footprints. It was very dark at the bottom of this ravine, which admitted only a narrow strip of daylight. The path was on a steady incline and

the higher the litter climbed, the nearer the daylight seemed. And then suddenly the walls leveled off, opening up a view of a vast white expanse. This was the summit, for the Mountain of Destiny culminated not, like most other mountains, in a single peak, but in this high plateau, which was as large as a whole country.

But then, surprisingly enough, a smaller, odd-looking mountain arose in the midst of the plateau. It was rather tall and narrow, something like the Ivory Tower, but glittering blue. It consisted of innumerable strangely shaped stone teeth, which jutted into the sky like great inverted icicles. And about halfway up the mountain three such teeth supported an egg the size of a house.

Behind the egg large blue columns resembling the pipes of an enormous organ rose in a semicircle. The great egg had a circular opening, which might have been a door or a window. And in that opening a face appeared. The face was looking straight at the litter.

The Childlike Empress opened her eyes.

Translated by Ralph Manheim.

MORE LITERARY GENIUS

When I can't fit the "Literary Genius" segment onto one page, we all benefit—I get to share more of my favorite literature, and you become more cultured. Following is an excerpt from G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*, a classic piece of literature for Christian apologists (those Christians who wish to defend their faith). In it, Chesterton embarks on an intellectual quest that paints Christianity as an answer to the needs of humanity, rather than an esoteric doctrine to be followed in blind faith.

Another of Chesterton's works, *The Everlasting Man*, is credited with converting C.S. Lewis from atheism to Christianity.

FROM *ORTHODOXY*

by G.K. Chesterton

Chapter VI – The Paradoxes of Christianity

LET US FOLLOW for a moment the clue of the martyr and the suicide; and take the case of courage. No quality has ever so much addled the brains and tangled the definitions of merely rational sages. Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. "He that will lose his life, the same shall save it," is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes. It is a piece of everyday advice for sailors or mountaineers. It might be printed in an Alpine guide or a drill book. This paradox is the whole principle of courage; even of quite earthly or quite brutal courage. A man cut off by the sea may save his life if he will risk it on the precipice.

He can only get away from death by continually stepping within an inch of it. A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine. No philosopher, I fancy, has ever expressed this romantic riddle with adequate lucidity, and I certainly have not done so. But Christianity has done more: it has marked the limits of it in the awful graves of the suicide and the hero, showing the distance between him who dies for the sake of living and him who dies for the sake of dying. And it has held up ever since above the European lances the banner of the mystery of chivalry: the Christian courage, which is a disdain of death; not the Chinese courage, which is a disdain of life.

The full text of *Orthodoxy* is available online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/>.

