

QUOTIDIAN

AUGUST 27, 2006 VOL. 1 NO. 20



QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"Life is too important to be taken seriously."
—Oscar Wilde

"Never take anybody's advice."
—George Bernard Shaw

"Vision is the art of seeing things invisible."
—Jonathan Swift

"The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark."
—W.B. Yeats, from "The Choice"

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

SEPTEMBER 1, 1985: A joint Franco-American expedition led by Jean-Louis Michel and Dr. Robert Ballard locates the wreck of the *RMS Titanic* after a 56-day search. The *Titanic*, which sank famously 73 years earlier after striking an iceberg, was discovered 350 miles southeast of Nova Scotia, 13 nautical miles from where it was originally thought to lie, at a depth of 3,800 meters (12,500 feet).



Credit for the discovery was given to Dr. Ballard, who for at least a dozen years had made the discovery of *Titanic* a personal obsession. His first attempt to locate the wreck was in 1977, when he used a drilling ship belonging to the Alcoa Aluminum Company, the *Alcoa Seaprobe*. Unfortunately, Ballard's maiden attempt was a failure; the cumbersome steel pipes, which were lowered through the bottom of the vessel, snapped off and crashed to the sea floor, taking Ballard's equipment with them. It was not until 1985, when technology had advanced sufficiently, that Ballard got another chance. With the aid of a video camera sled named *Argo*, which was towed a few feet above the ocean floor, Ballard and his team located a debris field and eventually came upon one of the ship's boilers. His discovery made instant headlines in newspapers around the world. He returned the following summer to take additional footage, and snapped over 60,000 photographs of the wreckage. Source: www.titanic-titanic.com/discovery_of_titanic.shtml.

3 WORDS

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

This issue's theme: little-known words that ought to be used more often.

fuliginous (fyoo-LI-juh-nus)
adjective

1. sooty, obscure, murky
2. having a dark or dusky color

Ex. At the height of the Industrial Revolution, London was perhaps the most **fuliginous** city on earth.

Ex. 2. The mountains were obscured in a **fuliginous** mantle of storm.

Etym. From the Latin *fuligo*, "soot."

oneiric (o-NIGH-rik) *adjective*

1. of or relating to dreams; DREAMY

Ex. Salvador Dali was a master of **oneiric** landscapes.

Ex. 2. The warm rays of the sun and the subtle buzzing of insects cast an **oneiric** haze over the whole afternoon.

obnubilate (aub-NOO-bi-late)
verb

1. to becloud or obscure

Ex. The judge's ruling included excessive amounts of dicta, which did nothing but **obnubilate** his main points.

ETYMOLOGY 101

The origin of: donnybrook

"The word *donnybrook* has been applied to just about every kind of tumultuous struggle, from baseball games to political contests. For political contests in which the politicians are Irish, the label might be especially apt. Donnybrook, now a part of Dublin, was once a suburb about a mile and a half from the city's center. In 1204 King John granted to the citizens of Dublin a charter to hold at Donnybrook an annual trading fair as a way of raising funds for the building and upkeep of the city's walls. For the next 651 years it was held in August on a flat green beside the River Dodder. In addition to horse trading, the fair featured the selling of trinkets and food. Entertainment took the form of dancing to pipes and fiddles and dramatic performances by strolling bands of players.

"Donnybrook Fair became legendary for the vast quantities of liquor consumed. The fair also became locally infamous for the number of hasty marriages performed the week after the fair. But perhaps its best-known claim to fame was the frequent eruption of brawling. The fighting, which often involved the wielding of shillelaghs[*], was said by witnesses to be all in good fun. One nineteenth-century German visitor observed that for all the tumult, the general scene was one of genuine merriment and glee. Eventually Donnybrook Fair's reputation was its undoing. From the 1790s there were campaigns against the drunken brawl that the fair had become. The fair met its demise in 1855. By that time, however, the name *Donnybrook* had acquired a generic sense that would accord it an enduring place in the language."

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

* A shillelagh (pronounced shuh-LAY-lee) is a Gaelic war club made of Irish oak or blackthorn saplings. These are the only two woods used to make the club because, as it is said, they are the only ones hard enough to crack an Irish skull. The shillelagh is typically between 20 and 24 inches in length, and was (and still is) carried as a defense against muggers and thieves.



A traditional Irish shillelagh

NEAT-O

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HOSTESS TWINKIE

It's not every day that one reads about Twinkies, so consider yourself lucky. The popular golden sponge cakes were first developed in 1930, during the Depression, when inexpensive snacks were harder to come by. James A. Dewar, manager of the Schiller Park, Illinois, Hostess Bakery, came up with the Twinkie idea when he noticed that the machines used to make Hostess' Little Shortbread Fingers sat idle

outside of the summer months. The Shortbread Fingers, which contained strawberries, were only made during strawberry season—which, depending on the region, varied from a few weeks to a few months during the summer.

Dewar decided to utilize the pans during their down period. He filled them with a golden sponge cake, baked them, and then added a banana cream filling (yes, Twinkies were originally made with banana cream!). After the first few batches came out, Dewar decided to show his creation to his bosses. En route, Dewar passed a billboard for the Twinkle Toe Shoe Company, and it inspired him to come up with the name "Twinkies."

The snack was an instant success. Twinkies ballooned in popularity during the 1950s, when Hostess sponsored the "Howdy Doody" show, and were a popular staple in 1960s bomb shelters (it was said that Twinkies stayed "fresh forever"). Today, Twinkies are Hostess' best-selling snack—over 500 million are sold every year.

But wait! Today's Twinkies are filled with vanilla cream, not banana cream. What gives? The switch to vanilla came during World War II, when German U-boats allegedly sank a bunch of banana boats in the Caribbean in 1942, causing a temporary banana shortage. The vanilla cream was so popular that Hostess never switched back.

Sources: Evan Morris, *From Altoids to Zima*, American Heritage.com, The Kitchen Project.

WELL I'LL BE!
THE ANSWER TO A QUESTION YOU NEVER ASKED

Why is Ireland called the Emerald Isle?

Speaking of things Irish, why is the home of that proud culture known by the popular epithet *the Emerald Isle*? Anyone who has ever visited the island knows it truly is as green as the gemstone, thanks to the frequent rains for which the island is also noted (Ireland receives between 30 and 50 inches of rain in an average year, with some areas receiving in excess of 80 inches). The name was popularized by Dr. William Drennan, an Irish physician and poet, in a poem he wrote around 1800 entitled "Erin." Two stanzas from the poem read:

When Erin first rose from the dark-swelling flood,
God blessed the green island, he saw it was good.
The *Emerald of Europe*, it sparkled and shone
In the ring of this world, the most precious stone...

Arm of Erin! prove strong, but be gentle as brave,
And, uplifted to strike, still be ready to save,
Nor one feeling of vengeance presume to defile
The cause, or the men of the *Emerald Isle*.

According to George Stimpson, this is sometimes said to be the "original use" of *the Emerald Isle*; however, in an 1815 introduction to the poem, Dr. Drennan said the phrase was first used in "'Erin, to Her Own Tune,' a party song written without the rancour of party in the year 1795." That song was published anonymously.

Dr. Drennan was hopeful that *Emerald Isle* would someday become associated with the name of his country "as descriptive of its prime natural beauty, and its inestimable value."

Source: George Stimpson, *A Book About A Thousand Things*.



A typical Irish landscape, which vividly shows why the island got its name

PLAIN ENGLISH

Today's Lesson: **fast** vs. **quickly**: the proper use of adverbs and adjectives.

One of the most common mistakes I hear in English is the use of the adjective *fast* for the adverb *quickly*:

Incorrect: You finished your homework so fast!

In this case, *fast* is acting as an **adjective**, but it has no noun to describe (was the *homework* fast?).

Correct: You were so fast!

Here, the use of an adjective is correct, since it describes the pronoun *you*.

"Finished" is an action, so it is appropriate to use an **adverb** to describe HOW the action was done:

Correct: You finished your homework so quickly!

Another example of this common blunder is the use of the adverb *badly* for the adjective *bad*.

Incorrect: I feel badly for you.

In this sense, the verb "feel" is not an action verb; it describes a state of being, so it should be modified by an adjective:

Correct: I feel bad for you.

The bottom line: use an **adjective** to describe a NOUN, and an **adverb** (ends in *-ly*) to describe an ACTION.



LITERARY GENIUS

Generally considered the best stage comedy of all time, *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a classic “comedy of manners,” a type of play that satirizes the mannerisms of a particular class. Typically, the dialogue in such a play is more important than the plot itself. *Earnest* is also considered Oscar Wilde’s best play. It opened in St. James’ Theatre in London on February 14, 1895 to a packed house, only a month after Wilde’s successful *An Ideal Husband* was first released. The play is masterful in its use of epigrams (short, witty sayings) and its satire of vaunted Victorian-era social customs, especially marriage.

The play’s protagonist, Jack Worthing, is Wilde’s main satirical conduit. More than any other character, Jack ostensibly represents the conventional Victorian values of duty, honor, and respectability. In reality, Jack hypocritically flaunts these values through his alter-ego Ernest, a fictitious younger brother who engages in exactly the type of conduct Jack pretends to disdain. As the play progresses, Jack

realizes he must embrace his alter-ego’s lifestyle (and his name), since the woman he wants to marry is fixated upon it. The name of the play is thus a play on words: the name Ernest implies its bearer *is* earnest, when in fact this is not always the case (thus reflecting Wilde’s views on the muddled values of Victorian society).

Wilde described his play as “exquisitely trivial, a delicate bubble of fancy, and it has as its philosophy that we should treat all the trivial things of life seriously, and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality.”

FROM *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST*

by Oscar Wilde

FIRST ACT

Morning-room in Algernon’s flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room.

[Lane is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, Algernon enters.]

Algernon. Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

Lane. I didn’t think it polite to listen, sir.

Algernon. I’m sorry for that, for your sake. I don’t play accurately—any one can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life.

Lane. Yes, sir.

Algernon. And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

Lane. Yes, sir. [Hands them on a salver.]

Algernon. [Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.] Oh! . . . by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

Lane. Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.

Algernon. Why is it that at a bachelor’s establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

Lane. I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.

Algernon. Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that?

Lane. I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

Algernon. [Languidly.] I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

Lane. No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

Algernon. Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

Lane. Thank you, sir. [**Lane** goes out.]

Algernon. Lanes views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility.

[Enter **Lane**.]

Lane. Mr. Ernest Worthing.

[Enter **Jack**.]

[**Lane** goes out.]

Algernon. How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?

Jack. Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

Algernon. [Stiffly.] I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

Jack. [Sitting down on the sofa.] In the country.

Algernon. What on earth do you do there?

Jack. [Pulling off his gloves.] When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

Algernon. And who are the people you amuse?

Jack. [Airily.] Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

Algernon. Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

Jack. Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

Algernon. How immensely you must amuse them! [Goes over and takes sandwich.] By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

Jack. Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea?

Algernon. Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

Jack. How perfectly delightful!

Algernon. Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

Jack. May I ask why?

Algernon. My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

Jack. I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

Algernon. I thought you had come up for pleasure? . . . I call that business.

Jack. How utterly unromantic you are!

Algernon. I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

Jack. I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted.

Algernon. Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven—[**Jack** puts out his hand to take a sandwich. **Algernon** at once interferes.] Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [Takes one and eats it.]

Jack. Well, you have been eating them all the time.

Algernon. That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [Takes plate from below.] Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter.

Jack. [Advancing to table and helping himself.] And very good bread and butter it is too.

Algernon. Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

Jack. Why on earth do you say that?

Algernon. Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

Jack. Oh, that is nonsense!

Algernon. It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over the place. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

Jack. Your consent!

Algernon. My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [Rings bell.]

Jack. Cecily! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily! I don't know any one of the name of Cecily.

[Enter **Lane**.]

Algernon. Bring me that cigarette case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

Lane. Yes, sir. [**Lane** goes out.]

Jack. Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was very nearly offering a large reward.

Algernon. Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up.

Jack. There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found.

[Enter **Lane** with the cigarette case on a salver. **Algernon** takes it at once. **Lane** goes out.]

Algernon. I think that is rather mean of you, Ernest, I must say. [Opens case and examines it.] However, it makes no matter, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all.

Jack. Of course it's mine. [Moving to him.] You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

Algernon. Oh! it is absurd to have a hard and fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.

Jack. I am quite aware of the fact, and I don't propose to discuss modern culture. It isn't the sort of thing one should talk of in private. I simply want my cigarette case back.

Algernon. Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from some one of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know any one of that name.

Jack. Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

Algernon. Your aunt!

Jack. Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

Algernon. [Retreating to back of sofa.] But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? [Reading.] 'From little Cecily with her fondest love.'

Jack. [Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it.] My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! That is absurd! For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. [Follows **Algernon** round the room.]

Algernon. Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.

Jack. It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

Algernon. You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. [Taking it from case.] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany.' I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to any one else. [Puts the card in his pocket.]

Jack. Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

Algernon. Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

Jack. My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression,

Algernon. Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

Jack. Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

Algernon. I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

Jack. Well, produce my cigarette case first.

Algernon. Here it is. [Hands cigarette case.] Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable. [Sits on sofa.]

Jack. My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. In fact it's perfectly ordinary. Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his will guardian to his granddaughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

Algernon. Where is that place in the country, by the way?

Jack. That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited . . . I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire.

Algernon. I suspected that, my dear fellow! I have Bunburied all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now, go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

Jack. My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

Algernon. The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

Full text available at *Project Gutenberg*.