

# QUOTIDIAN

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## PRELUDE

It's been a little over two years since the first issue of *Quotidian* hit the virtual shelves, and since then I have been overwhelmed by the support of my readers. What began as a small-time hobby has come to consume more and more of my time as I strive to give you, my readers, an ever greater dose of senseless knowledge. Over the past 24 months, I have become increasingly interested in senseful knowledge, of the type that is more than mere trivia and enlightens us on more compelling subjects. It is this type of knowledge that I will impart to you in the next volume of *Quotidian*, and I hope, as always, that you will enjoy it.

## QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"Study the past, if you would divine the future."  
—Confucius, from *Analects*

"Nothing is cheap which is superfluous,  
for what one does not need, is dear at a penny."  
—Plutarch, from *Lives*

"Better to be ignorant of a matter than to half know it."  
—Publilius Syrus, from *Moral Sayings*

"To do two things at once is to do neither."  
—Publilius Syrus, from *Moral Sayings*

"To show resentment at a reproach  
is to acknowledge that one may have deserved it."  
—Tacitus, from *Annals*

## THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

**JANUARY 23, 1957:** The Wham-O toy company produces the first Frisbee discs. The popular plastic flying discs can trace the origin of their name (if not design) back to the 1870s, when William Russell Frisbie moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut to manage a new bakery. Within a few years, Mr. Frisbie bought the bakery and established the Frisbie Pie Company, which was soon selling pies all over New England. Frisbie pies were popular among Yale University students in the 1920s, and soon empty pie tins began accumulating around campus. College students, experts in the art of filling empty time with empty activities, discovered that the tins—when inverted and thrown—made for an entertaining game of catch. —Continued on page 2, column 1—

## 3 WORDS

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

This issue's theme: words that sound funny.

**widdershins** (WI-dur-shinz)  
*adverb*

1. in a direction opposite to the usual; the wrong way; counterclockwise
2. in a direction contrary to the apparent course of the sun (considered as unlucky or causing disaster)

*Ex.* The coracle whirled round, clockwise, then **widdershins**. (Anth. Bailey)

**boondoggle** (BOON-daw-gul)  
*noun, verb*

1. a braided cord worn by Boy Scouts as a hatband or ornament
2. a wasteful or impractical project often involving graft
3. *verb* : to do useless, wasteful, or trivial work
4. *verb* : to deceive or attempt to deceive

*Ex.* Enron's CEO was jailed for **boondoggling** investors.

**tenterhook** (TEN-tur-hook) *n.*

1. a sharp, hooked nail for fastening cloth to a tenter
2. something that causes suffering or painful suspense

*Ex.* Fans of thrillers enjoy being kept on **tenterhooks** until the final minutes.

—Continued from Front Page— The popularity of the game (christened “Frisbie-ing” by its participants) spread, and it has long been believed that the origins of the disc came from Frisbie’s pie tins.

In a book released last year, however, Frisbee inventor Fred Morrison reveals that inspiration for the first modern flying disc did not come from Frisbie pie tins thrown by Yale students in the 1920s, but from a popcorn can lid he tossed around at a Thanksgiving gathering in Los Angeles in 1937. After serving in World War II (and being detained in the infamous luxury of Stalag 13), Morrison returned and started Partners in Plastic (Pipco) with fellow WWII vet Warren Franscioni. Together, they worked out a design for a lightweight, inexpensive disc and named it the Flyin’ Saucer to cash in on UFO mania (in July of 1947, the US military purportedly recovered the wreckage of an alien craft near Roswell).

Morrison and Franscioni faced some financial difficulties after being sued by Al Capp, who had agreed to feature the disc in his comic strip *Li’l Abner*. The \$5,000 settlement broke up Pipco, and the two founders drifted apart. Morrison was undeterred, however, and drew up plans for a new disc, the Pluto Platter. While demonstrating the Platter in an LA parking lot in 1955, Morrison was approached by Rich Knerr and Spud Melin, founders of the Wham-O toy company. A contract was signed, and Knerr and Melin began selling the Pluto Platter with an expertise Morrison and Franscioni had never possessed.

Knerr supposedly came up with the name *Frisbee* while handing out Pluto Platters at east coast college campuses in the 1950s. He witnessed students engaged in the decades-old pie-throwing activities of their ancestral peers, and heard them yelling “Frisbie!” each time they threw a pie plate. Why? Because the heavy metal tin was potentially dangerous, students yelled “Frisbie!” before each toss to warn people of the tin’s trajectory, much like golfers yell “fore!” before a stroke. Knerr trademarked the name Frisbee, possibly misspelling it to avoid trademark issues with the Frisbie Pie Company. He need not have worried, however; Frisbie Pie Co. went under in 1958, a year after Wham-O started selling Frisbees.

#### **More Frisbee Trivia**

- \* In 1977, twenty years and 100 million Frisbees later, Wham-O estimated that half of its sales came from the sale of flying discs.
- \* Over 200 million Frisbees have been purchased since 1957, and some estimate that more Frisbees are sold each year than the combined total of all footballs, baseballs, and basketballs.
- \* Ultimate Frisbee was invented by high school students in Maplewood, New Jersey in 1967.
- \* Frisbee Golf was invented by Wham-O inventor Ed Headrick in the 1970s. Headrick was also responsible for giving us the truly modern Frisbee when, in December of 1967, he patented a series of rings around the Frisbee’s edge. These were designed to stabilize the disc during flight, and are appropriately named the “Rings of Headrick.”

Sources: Flying Disc Connection, The History Channel: This Day in History, Wikipedia, About.com; Evans, Mike. *From Altoids to Zima* (2004); Morrison, Fred. *Flat Flip Flies Straight* (2006).

WELL I’LL BE!

### **THE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS YOU NEVER ASKED**

*Why do we put things in  
“layman’s terms”?*

When we have a specialized knowledge of a particular topic and wish to discuss it with someone unfamiliar with it (such as a physicist discussing the concept of black holes with a freshman astronomy student), we put it in “layman’s terms.” What is a *layman*, and why do we put it in *his* terms?

Way back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, those who weren’t ordained as a cleric or a member of the clergy were collectively known as the *laity*. This word is descended from *lay*, a much older word ultimately derived from the Greek *laos*, or “people.”

In the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, *lay* applied to people not of the clergy, and by 1432 *layman* was being used to describe any non-cleric. Within 60 years, *layman* described anyone who was an outsider or non-expert in a field (especially in law and medicine), and from there acquired its modern sense.

It is thus by analogy that *layman* expanded from its original meaning (i.e., not a specialist of the church) to its modern meaning (i.e., not a specialist of a particular profession).

Source: Online Etymology Dictionary.

## PLAIN ENGLISH

### Today's lesson: Who or Whom?

*Whom* is often treated like a pretentious relic of our language, and thus is seldom used correctly. Most people assume it's the same as *who*.

Here's why they're different:

▫ *Who* is either the **subject** or **predicate pronoun** of its own clause (clause = subject + verb).

Ex. Who is at the door? (*who* is the subject of the verb *is*)

▫ *Whom* is always an **object**.

Ex. With whom are you speaking? (*you* is the subject of the verb *are speaking*, and *whom* is the object)

If you think these rules are bosh, use this handy trick:

1. isolate the who/whom clause
2. substitute "he" or "him" for the "who" or "whom" and see which sounds better. **If it's him, use whom. If it's he, use who.**

Ex. For whom the bell tolls.

The bell tolls for ~~he~~.

The bell tolls for *him*.

*Him* sounds best, so use *whom*.

Ex. We'll give the job to the person who earns it.

~~He~~ earns it.

~~Him~~ earns it.

*He* sounds best, so use *who*.

Source: Get It Write Online.

## ETYMOLOGY 101

### The origin of: gargantuan

Gargantua was originally a benevolent giant of medieval French folklore, famous for his voracious appetite—his name is derived from the Spanish *garganta*, "throat." He was familiar to Shakespeare, who referenced him in his play *As You Like It* (c. 1600):

*Celia:* You must borrow me Gargantua's mouth first: 'tis a word too great for any mouth of this age's size (*III.ii.80*).

French satirist François Rabelais popularized Gargantua in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century when he released *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, a series of five novels that attacked clerical education and monastic orders. His works endorsed secular learning and the free will of the human spirit, but were also crude. The magnificent scale of everything in Rabelais' works (Gargantua rode a giant mare, whose tail switched so violently that it felled the entire forest of Orléans) gave rise to the adjective *gargantuan*, in use since Shakespeare's time.

Jonathan Swift (of *Gulliver's Travels* fame) gave us two more words to describe things on a hyperbolic scale. The first, **brobdingnagian**, comes from the mythical land of Brobdingnag, where a bewildered Gulliver encounters beings twelve times the size of normal people. The second word, **lilliputian**, comes from Gulliver's adventures on the isle of Lilliput. The Lilliputians are a mere six inches tall, petty, self-interested, arrogant, and constantly at war over trivial matters. In the story, they are warring with the neighboring island of Blefuscu over the proper way to eat a boiled egg. This was a parody of the trivial conflicts between Britain and France, specifically regarding the theories of consubstantiation and transubstantiation. While the former holds that the body and blood of Christ are present "alongside" the bread and wine, the latter holds that the substance of the bread and wine are transformed. The narrow-mindedness of the Lilliputians gives lilliputian a second sense: *petty*.



*Gulliver being tied down by the Lilliputians shortly after his shipwrecked arrival*

Sources: *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories*, Wikipedia.

## LITERARY GENIUS

Today is the 162<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the first publication of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven*. It first appeared in the *New York Evening Mirror*, though the accepted first version (since it was set in type from the manuscript, rather than from printed proofs) appeared in the February issue of the *American Review* and is reproduced below. The poem was printed under the pseudonym *Quarles*, perhaps a nod to Francis Quarles, whose book *Emblems* (1635) was an influential collection of grotesque illustrations and paraphrased passages from Scripture.

Like many poems, *The Raven* has no universally accepted interpretation, though it is widely understood that the poem addresses the finality of death and the absence of consciousness after it (hence the "nevermore" at the end of most of the stanzas). There is a great deal of symbolism: the raven is clearly a messenger from Pluto, Roman god of the underworld ("Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"). He sits upon a bust of Pallas (or Athena), goddess of wisdom, and responds to the speaker's inquiries with "nevermore," a practical, real, *wise* answer. The speaker is ultimately distraught when he asks the raven if his departed Lenore might be found "within the distant Aidenn [Eden]," and the raven responds yet again "nevermore." The poem, when viewed properly, is sobering in its view that there may be nothing but darkness after death.

### THE RAVEN

by Edgar Allen Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.  
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—  
Only this, and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.  
Eagerly I wished the morrow; —vainly I had tried to borrow  
From my books surcease of sorrow -- sorrow for the lost Lenore—  
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain  
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;  
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating  
"Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—  
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—  
This it is, and nothing more."

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,  
"Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;  
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,  
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,  
That I scarce was sure I heard you "—here I opened wide the door;—  
Darkness there and nothing more.



Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,  
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;  
But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token,  
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore!"  
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "Lenore!"—  
Merely this, and nothing more.

Then into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,  
Soon I heard again a tapping somewhat louder than before.  
"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice;  
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—  
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—  
'Tis the wind and nothing more!"

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,  
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore;  
Not the least obeisance made he; not an instant stopped or stayed he;  
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,  
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,  
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,  
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the Nightly shore—  
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"  
Quoth the raven "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,  
Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;  
For we cannot help agreeing that no sublunary being  
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—  
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,  
With such name as "Nevermore."

But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only  
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.  
Nothing further then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—  
Till I scarcely more than muttered "Other friends have flown before—  
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my hopes have flown before."  
Quoth the raven "Nevermore."

Wondering at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,  
"Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only stock and store  
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster  
Followed fast and followed faster so when Hope he would adjure—  
Stern Despair returned, instead of the sweet Hope he dared adjure—  
That sad answer, "Never—nevermore."



*The Raven*, by Gustave Doré

But the raven still beguiling all my sad soul into smiling,  
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;  
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking  
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—  
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt and ominous bird of yore  
Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing  
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;  
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining  
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,  
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,  
*She* shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer  
Swung by Angels whose faint foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.  
"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee  
Respite—respite and nepenthe, from thy memories of Lenore;  
Let me quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"  
Quoth the raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—  
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—  
Is there -- is there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!"  
Quoth the raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil—prophet still, if bird or devil!  
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."  
Quoth the raven "Nevermore."

"Be that word our sign in parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting—  
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!  
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!  
Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!  
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"  
Quoth the raven "Nevermore."

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon that is dreaming,  
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted—nevermore!



Illustration for the French edition  
by Édouard Manet