

QUOTIDIAN

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A BRIEF PRELUDE

It would have been fitting to deliver this as a Valentine's day gift to you all on Monday, but I was too busy counting the ways in which the holiday has turned into a boon for Hershey. This week: why we celebrate this crazy day, and whence it came.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"Gravitation is not responsible for people falling in love."
—Albert Einstein

"Love is the triumph of imagination over intelligence."
—H.L. Mencken

"Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs."
—Shakespeare

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY



FEBRUARY 16, 1959: Fidel Castro is sworn in as prime minister of Cuba after leading a guerrilla campaign that forced right-wing dictator Fulgencio Batista into exile. Castro, who became commander in chief of Cuba's armed forces after Batista was ousted on January 1, replaced the more moderate Miro Cardona as head of the country's new provisional government.

FEBRUARY 18, 1929: The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (A.M.P.A.S.), founded in 1927, announced the winners of the first Academy Awards. The awards were handed out at a banquet in May, which was broadcast on live radio. Although the first awards were for films made in 1927-1928, they weren't announced until February of 1929. *Wings* won the Best Picture award; Janice Gaynor won Best Actress and Emil Jannings won Best Actor. Frank Borzage and Lewis Milestone both took Best Director awards.

The winners received gold statuettes; however, the awards weren't nicknamed "Oscars" until 1931, when a secretary at the academy noted the statue's resemblance to her Uncle Oscar, and a journalist printed her remark. Source: www.historychannel.com.

3 WORDS

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

matrocliny (MA-truh-klin-ee) *n.*
1. inheritance of traits primarily from the mother (*patrocliny* is the male equivalent of this term)

(His matrocliny was apparent because he shared the same knowing smile and brown eyes.)

toothsome (TOOTH-sum) *adj.*
1. pleasing to the taste; delicious
2. sexually attractive
(1. That Chinese restaurant across the way has been serving up toothsome dishes for years. 2. Every eye was on the toothsome young blonde as she entered the room in a swirl of white linen and lace.)

pulchritude (PUL-kri-tood) *n.*
1. physical beauty
(He was a dashing figure of great pulchritude, sculpted as from a stone by the gods.)

Starting next week: the three words of the week will be thematic, or somehow related. This will make it easier for the reader to retain the words in his or her memory.



ETYMOLOGY 101

The word **radical** comes from the Latin word *radicalis*, meaning “of or having roots.” Anyone familiar with mathematics is aware that when one takes the square root of a number, one is also taking the “radical,” or “root” of that number (it is suggested the square root symbol $\sqrt{\quad}$, first used in the 16th century, is a modified *r*, which was shorthand for the Latin *radicalis*).

One who is a radical is one who seeks “change from the roots.” This use was first recorded in the early 19th century.

Consider also that the radish is quite literally a root.



*Thomas Paine, a well-known
18th-century radical*

PLAIN ENGLISH

The words *farther* and *further* are often confused, but each has a slightly different meaning. **Farther should be used when speaking about distances**—e.g. “We live farther from town than you do.” **You should use further when you mean “additional” or “additionally”**—e.g. “There are two further points I want to make.”

To help distinguish between the two, remember that you say *furthermore*, and not *farthermore*, when making additional points.

SONNET CXVI

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come:
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

—Shakespeare

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

Why do we have a best man at weddings?

The custom of having a best man at weddings is believed to be a survival of primitive marriage by capture, when a man seized a woman and carried her away by force. He would naturally, under such circumstances, choose a faithful friend or follower to go with him and ward off attacks of the girl's kinsmen while he stole away with her. Thus, if this notion is correct, the appearance of the bridegroom with his chief groomsmen or best man at the bride's home really represents a prehistoric marauding expedition. *Best man* is of Scottish origin and probably does not date back further than the 18th century.

Groom is derived from an old English root meaning **male child, man, servant, or attendant**. Groomsmen were originally the attendants who went along to assist the best man of the bridegroom. Bridesmaids symbolize the female attendants or “girl friends” who used to help defend the bride against her abductors.

Source: George Stimpson, *A Book About A Thousand Things*, pg. 181.

THE ORIGINS OF... VALENTINE'S DAY

St. Valentine's Day has its roots deep in time, but its origins are shrouded in a bit of mystery. There were no fewer than three St. Valentines, and very little fact and much legend surrounds each. The most entertaining version of history has it that Valentine was a priest in 3rd century Rome, when the emperor Claudius II was engaged in a series of wars. Claudius was unsuccessful at recruiting soldiers to fight his wars, and he found out that many men refused to serve because they were married and had families to attend to. In order to circumvent this problem, Claudius outlawed marriage and other engagements. Valentine, who thought this a grave injustice, decided to conduct weddings in secret. As a consequence, he was thrown in a jail cell and asked to repent. It is here that legend has Valentine save his jailer's daughter from illness (or blindness). The two were allegedly quite close, and Valentine is said to have written the first Valentine note to her, which was inscribed "from your Valentine."

There is little to no factual evidence for these events, aside from the fact that Valentine became a martyr when Claudius ordered his head struck off. The day of his execution was supposedly February 14, and in 496, Pope Gelasius I declared it a feast day in Valentine's honor. The feast was celebrated by the Roman Catholic church until 1969.

Valentine's day falls on February 14 for another reason, and this of course is due to the pagans. In ancient times, there was a festival by the name of Lupercalia, which was celebrated for many years by the Romans. The festival fell on February 15, and was in honor of the Roman god Faunus (the Greek god *Pan*, who watched over shepherds and their flocks). The Romans honored this god because it was believed he watched over the shepherds and their flocks, and prevented them from being ravaged by roaming wolves. The festival also celebrated the birth of Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, and was held near the cave of Lupercal. It is here that the two brothers were allegedly nursed for a time by a female wolf (note the Latin word for wolf is *lupus*).*

Priests would gather near the cave and sacrifice a goat (for fertility) and a dog (for purification); young boys would then slice the goat hide into strips, dip them into the sacrificial blood, and run about slapping both women and crops with them. The women were very receptive to this practice, since it was believed it would make them more fertile in the coming year.

Though there is little evidence to support this, it is also believed the Roman women would write their names on bits of paper and drop them into an urn, and the city's bachelors would draw them out. The two would become paired for the next year, and were often married. It is believed the church converted this pagan practice into the modern one of giving and receiving cards and other gifts. It is also very plausible that the church chose to honor Saint Valentine on a day near this festival, so as to subvert it and eventually eliminate it entirely.

Valentine's day has turned into a heavily commercialized event (at least in the western world), yet it retains its roots as a celebration of fertility and romance. As the English poet Drayton said: "Each little bird this tide/ Doth choose her beloved peer,/ Which constantly abide/ In wedlock all the year." So, if your significant other finds no excitement in chocolates or flowers, you might consider slapping her with a strip of bloody goat hide instead.

Sources: www.wikipedia.org,
www.historychannel.com.

*Note also that in the popular *Harry Potter* series, author J.K. Rowling cleverly named the werewolf teacher at Hogwarts Professor Lupin.

TRIVIAL TRIVIA

The word *trivia* is Latin, plural of *trivium*, which means "place where three roads meet" (tri "three" + via "road"). The word *trivial* is derived from the same Latin word, and today means "that which may be found anywhere; commonplace or vulgar."

These words get their meanings from the crossroads, which was a meeting place where people would discuss all manner of things, most of which were of little consequence.

LITERARY GENIUS

This week's literature is an excerpt from Edith Wharton's Pulitzer Prize winning novel about upper crust New York society at the turn of the 20th century. It is extraordinary for its piercing and highly personal portrayal of a society that was still shaking off its European vestiges, and was uniquely "Euro-American." In the short excerpt that follows, note how Ms. Wharton's diction lends marriage a contrived and loveless quality.



FROM *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*

Edith Wharton

Chapter XIX

THE DAY WAS FRESH, with a lively spring wind full of dust. All the old ladies in both families had got out their faded sables and yellowing ermines, and the smell of camphor from the front pews almost smothered the faint spring scent of the lilies banking the altar.

Newland Archer, at a signal from the sexton, had come out of the vestry and placed himself with his best man on the chancel step of Grace Church.

The signal meant that the brougham bearing the bride and her father was in sight; but there was sure to be a considerable interval of adjustment and consultation in the lobby, where the bridesmaids were already hovering like a cluster of Easter blossoms. During this unavoidable lapse of time the bridegroom, in proof of his eagerness, was expected to expose himself alone to the gaze of the assembled company; and Archer had gone through this formality as resignedly as through all the others which made of a nineteenth century New York wedding a rite that seemed to belong to the dawn of history. Everything was equally easy--or equally painful, as one chose to put it--in the path he was committed to tread, and he had obeyed the flurried injunctions of his best man as piously as other bridegrooms had obeyed his own, in the days when he had guided them through the same labyrinth.

So far he was reasonably sure of having fulfilled all his obligations. The bridesmaids' eight bouquets of white lilac and lilies-of-the-valley had been sent in due time, as well as the gold and sapphire sleeve-links of the eight ushers and the best man's cat's-eye scarf-pin; Archer had sat up half the night trying to vary the wording of his thanks for the last batch of presents from men friends and ex-lady-loves; the fees for the Bishop and the Rector were safely in the pocket of his best man; his own luggage was already at Mrs. Manson Mingott's, where the wedding-breakfast was to take place, and so were the travelling clothes into which he was to change; and a private compartment had been engaged in the train that was to carry the young couple to their unknown destination--concealment of the spot in which the bridal night was to be spent being one of the most sacred taboos of the prehistoric ritual.

"Got the ring all right?" whispered young van der Luyden Newland, who was inexperienced in the duties of a best man, and awed by the weight of his responsibility.

Archer made the gesture which he had seen so many bridegrooms make: with his ungloved right hand he felt in the pocket of his dark grey waistcoat, and assured himself that the little gold circlet (engraved inside: Newland to May, April—, 187—) was in its place; then, resuming his former attitude, his tall hat and pearl-grey gloves with black stitchings grasped in his left hand, he stood looking at the door of the church.

Overhead, Handel's March swelled pompously through the imitation stone vaulting, carrying on its waves the faded drift of the many weddings at which, with cheerful indifference, he had stood on the same chancel step watching other brides float up the nave toward other bridegrooms.

"How like a first night at the Opera!" he thought, recognising all the same faces in the same boxes (no, pews), and wondering if, when the Last Trump sounded, Mrs. Selfridge Merry would be there with the same towering ostrich feathers in her bonnet, and Mrs. Beaufort with the same diamond earrings and the same smile—and whether suitable proscenium seats were already prepared for them in another world.