

From the Back Verandah

A handful of readers received the first issue of *Bikwil* with *From the Back Verandah* erroneously signed "TR" instead of "Fizzgig". My apologies. Our editor's only excuse: "our style sheet versions temporarily got into a real mess". A likely story indeed.

And now for something completely similar. One of our eagle-eyed pedants claims that it should be spelt *Fizgig*. Is he right? In the interests of enthusiastic scholarship I set our friend Harlish Goop to track down the facts. Here they are, in H.G.'s own shorthand.

OED: *fizgig* the preferred spelling, although seven alternative forms given, including *fizzgig*.

Earliest citation: 1529. Derivation: unclear.

Main meanings: (a) frivolous woman, (b) hissing firework, (c) whirling toy that makes whizzing noise, (d) harpoon. Meanings (b) and (c) "suggested by the grotesque sound of the word, or by association with *fizz*". Meaning (d) a "perversion" when spelled *fishgig*.

Macquarie and *Webster*: each allow one "z" with no alternatives for meanings (a), (b) and (c), although latter allows *fishgig* for meaning (d).

But where does all that erudition leave this Bikwilian frivolous, hissing, whirling, whizzing harpoon?

Oh, gosh. No more space, so I've no choice but to echo Magnus Magnussen's declaration:

"I've started, so I'll go on."

— Fizzgig

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BIKWIL

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Bursting at the Seams

Some letters from the mailbag, starting with one from Percy of Putney who's had a brainwave:

Why not invite pseudonymous contributions of original Dreadful Doggerel? Then, once there have been, say, a dozen printed, readers could be asked to vote on their ghastliness: from an A for extremely vile to a Z for uncommonly tolerable, i.e. the worse the verse, the better the letter.

Bikwil herewith adopts the idea: we welcome with open pages all your awful ditties. Meanwhile, Percy himself promises to have something appropriately hideous ready for our next issue.

Another reader, Wireless of Westmead writes:

I was intrigued to read in *Bikwil*'s first *Web Line* about *Deb and Jen's Land O' Useless Facts*. However, as I am not connected to the Internet, I cannot benefit from such desirable knowledge. So would you mind telling me (a) Wilma Flintstone's maiden name, and (b) what does occur when you feed Alka-Seltzer to a seagull?

Helping anyone who lusts after unusable info suits us just fine. But bear in mind that *Bikwil* can't guarantee the accuracy of these facts. If they turn out to be wrong, blame *LOUF*. Anyway, the answers you crave are: (a) Wilma Slaghoopal and (b) its stomach explodes.

Bikwil has exploded too — to 16 pages. Whacko-the-did!

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"All My Efforts to Get a Horse Have Been Unsuccessful"

(This is the conclusion of an article on William Russell, 19th century war correspondent for *The Times*.)

Later, in South Africa, Russell was little impressed with the British Empire's expansionist tendencies there, as elsewhere, and said so:

"I have sixty Zulus under me," said a young road inspector today," and the fellows drive me mad by their idleness. I would like to dynamite the whole lot of them." Alas! dynamite will not do it. The complaint to be cured is an old one, and the heroic methods of the Anglo-Saxon doctors have "polished off" the patients in Tasmania, Australia, and Northern America; they have been mollified in India, have failed in China, and are of very doubtful efficacy in South Africa.

Likewise in Egypt, where he refused to be swept along by Britain's imperial bluster and its inability to recognise the justifiable feelings of the local populace. The latter, resentful of the Anglo-French grip on the country's finances had risen up and had rioted in Alexandria.

I see that all the newspapers in England have made up their minds that there is no such thing as the country "Egypt", and there can be no such sentiment as that of Egyptian nationality . . . I am sure it will not be popular to

express these opinions, but I believe you are blinded by your cupidity to the truth, and by the burning lust after Egypt which has been chiefly aroused by the stimulus of the Suez Canal.

Such observations did not endear him to all sections of his readership, of course, and not only at home. His reporting of the Civil War, for example, made him very unpopular in America, whose citizens, no matter what their allegiance, were sensitive to any views put forward by *The Times*.

Russell was attached to the South's army, and when the Confederates read his despatches (which revealed some of their military secrets), Russell found himself in trouble. Yet this was nothing compared to the resentment and bitterness he received from the other side when he wrote of the retreat of the Union army after the first Battle of Bull Run. Once he fully realised he was the focus of an entire nation's animosity, Russell suffered great loneliness and became deeply depressed, returning to England before the war had come to an end.

By the time he had turned fifty Russell had lost his enthusiasm for

LARICK AND THE ARATRONTS

Paglet 1

Yes, it was Querday, and taringly the spomlous nules groged around the ulbic mun, expantally surping the pinto crombisters. Along the cran offlist a braib sensitit was morling, while next to the strandello pon a gablutally hondic werlimp was trewing its hurgon.

Larick Himbos, litmod in his dastive consmester, landasted with rocklot the commoist of gragon.

"I should have gront my struckind," he varted abstrindulously, "then I could have bonsted those borgly aratronts."

But, purx, he had not, and so he was skilted to sont the restine without even a loter. (Rillid vaddock! Our fendelist blurges are with him.)

As he partled there, his danter repanchd the derbal offlication he had undersot in his hastic yons. Tractorially he borthed of the prack numong he had lempit in the untish zimborium.

— Harlish Goop

To Be Compiended

democratic opportunity it gives us all to be creators instead of consumers — to publish our fancies, serious or playful, at a modest cost. And these days, with user-friendly software to help us get our pet ideas out there in a half presentable manner, anyone can have a bash.

Let me give you a personal example of how the Internet came in handy thanks to someone else's obsession. It started when I saw a mail-order catalogue blurb for Wallace Reyburn's *Flushed with Pride: the Story of Thomas Crapper*:

"The remarkable story of Thomas Crapper, inventor a century ago of the flushing lavatory and eventually plumber by appointment to King Edward VII."

Like you, my thoughts dashed to the question whether Mr. Crapper had given his name to a four-letter word. According to Harlish Goop, the age of the word "crap" (from the Middle English "crape", meaning "chaff"), quickly puts paid to that idea, though the name "Crapper" (a variant of "Cropper") may perchance be related to it, albeit from long ago.

Wiser but disappointed, I wondered if the Net had anything on the book, or perhaps even on T. C. Well, one Adam Hart-Davis has an on-line magazine called *Science and Technology Heros* [sic], which deals with characters like Richard Arkwright, John Dalton, Henry Bessemer, etc. Though it costs money to read every issue, guess who's there for free, with plenty of detail about his life and work? (Incidentally, Mr. Crapper was famous for manhole covers as well as loos, and one of his manhole covers is in Westminster Abbey, in the cloisters near the deanery.)

And the upshot of Adam's painstaking research into lavatory patents? It seems that though he did register six other plumbing patents, and did install many loos for the Royals, Crapper did not invent the siphonic flush. So much for the reliability of Reyburn's book.

More disappointment, but at least I've saved twenty dollars.

— TR

Internet sites referred to above:

http://mirrors.org.sg/pg/pg_home.html

<http://www.seti-inst.edu>

<http://student.canberra.edu.au/~u921846/rab.html>

<http://www.ex.net/1995/12/31/science/AtoZ.html>



the merciless hurly-burly of newspaper rivalry in the field. His leisurely, thoughtful letter style was rapidly being superseded by the use of the telegraph (particularly in the hands of aggressive Americans) as the principal means of journalistic communication, a medium Russell was reluctant to employ. This meant that often his news was stale when published, already scooped by other papers. Nevertheless, his unequalled descriptive skills never left him, and from the 1870s he devoted his efforts, not to time-driven frontline reporting, but more to evocative accounts of events and people observed unhurriedly.

It is tempting to speculate what words Russell might have penned had been attached to the other side in some of these conflicts, with the North in the American Civil War, say, or with the Austrians or French instead of the Prussians. And how would have seen the Boer War, had he been young and fit enough?

Over a long career Russell had the opportunity to interview numerous influential persons. In America he met Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. During the Franco-Prussian War he met Otto von Bismarck several times, who took to Russell quite readily. In their first meeting in Berlin they

talked for over an hour. Two months later, in Rheims, in the street, they met again, and Bismarck invited Russell back to his quarters for another lengthy interview. At the end of the war, the Prussians awarded Russell the Iron Cross, describing him as "our *charmant franc-tireur anglais*". While he did not meet Napoleon III, Russell did observe him in parades and other ceremonies.

The eminent personage Russell came to know most closely, however, was the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), and they forged a lifelong friendship, Russell becoming a "royal companion". He accompanied the Prince to the Near East (including a return trip to the Crimea), and later to India.

In 1895, aged 75, he was awarded a knighthood, apparently as much for his services to the British Army as for his journalism. (Apart from his pleas from the battlefield for better conditions for the troops, he had established the *Army and Navy Gazette* in 1860, and continued as its editor till 1903.)

When as an old man Russell received his CVO (Commander of the Royal Victorian Order) from Edward VII, he wrote in his diary,

When I hopped in the King said, "You must not trouble to kneel, Billy! Stoop."

He died in 1907.

To conclude this essay, I think you'll agree that the cumulative effect of the following example of Russell's eloquence is just extraordinary. I have chosen neither a battle report nor a description of some other famous occasion. Instead why don't we marvel at his account of his own wounding and ensuing illness during his journey in overwhelming heat across northern India, some of it rebel territory, after the recapture of Lucknow in 1858? His ordeal begins as he is attempting to rescue his horse from attack by other stallions.

April 29th . . . I ran over to preserve my beast from being eaten alive — but I was sleepy: my leg was stiff from the strain of the day before, and, just as I was getting up to the head of my horse, a powerful Arab . . . ran back to have a last go in at his enemy, and delivered a murderous fling, from which I could not escape, for my own horse was pressing hard against me. I saw the shoes flash in the moonlight. In an instant I was sent flying along the ground under my horse's belly. One heel had struck me just at the lower part of the stomach, but the steel scabbard of the sword I wore broke the force of the blow there, though the shoe cut out a small piece of skin; the other hoof caught me right in the hollow of the right thigh. Several men ran towards me . . .

May 2nd. In great agony last night; up at one this morning, and left Shahjahanpur camp at two a.m.! bound for

Tilhour, twelve miles distant. In much pain all day; a large lump forming in the hollow of the thigh, from near the knee to an inch of the hip. The kick is now really serious. Twenty-five leeches were put on the calf of my leg as soon as we halted. Why on the calf? Bleed, and bear, and ask no questions.

May 3rd . . . In great pain all day. Twenty more leeches on my leg.

May 5th . . . In great pain from angry leech-bites and blisters, I had removed every particle of clothing, except my shirt, and lay panting in the dooly. Half an hour or so had passed away in a sort of dreamy, pea-soupy kind of existence. I had ceased to wonder why anything was not done ... I know not what my dreams were, but well I remember the waking.

There was a confused clamour of shrieks and shouting in my ear. My dooly was raised from the ground and then let fall violently. I heard my bearers shouting "Sowar! sowar!" I saw them flying with terror in their faces. All the camp-followers, in wild confusion, were rushing for the road. It was a veritable *stampede* of men and animals. Elephants were trumpeting shrilly as they thundered over the fields, camels slung along at their utmost joggling stride, horse and tats, women, and children, were all pouring in a stream, which converged and tossed in heaps of white as it neared the road — an awful panic! And, heavens above! within a few hundred yards of us, sweeping on like the wind, rushed a great billow of white sowars, their sabres flashing in the sun, the roar of their voices, the thunder of their horses, filling and shaking the air. As they came on, camp-followers fell with cleft skulls and bleeding wounds upon

Web Line

If you want to share your favourite hobbyhorse and it's a bit obscure or just plain bizarre, where do you rustle up your audience? If you're lucky, you might locate one or two people in your city with the same arcane interest, but if you want to broadcast your enthusiasm more widely to other like-minded souls, how much is it going to cost and how many readers can you expect anyway? And how do you market your product to best effect?

Your chances of finding fellow enthusiasts would be patently far greater, wouldn't they, if only you could reach the whole planet? Well, now you can — by publishing on the Internet. And once your Web site is up and running it will be there all day, every day, accessible to all. Thousands of people are learning this lesson every week. Hence the myriad sites maintained with dedicated single-mindedness by amateur devotees of everything under the sun, as well as those sites established with equally narrow focus by serious professional bodies like Project Gutenberg (publishing electronic versions of out-of-copyright literary classics) or the SETI Institute (looking for extra-terrestrial intelligence).

Naturally this freedom has given rise to some remarkable material, as the mainstream press loves to warn us. No doubt you've heard of concern about Internet sites giving advice on bomb building and other terrorist techniques, and sites offering that everlasting curse of the thought police, pornography. But not to panic: all that nasty stuff is a tiny fraction of what's available.

(A little aside on the new censorship implications of the Net. You will be aware of the conviction of the editors of the La Trobe Uni newspaper *Rabelais* for an article in the July 1996 issue called *The Art of Shoplifting*, which issue now cannot by law be distributed in Victoria. But did you know that in his programme *The National Interest* ABC RN's Terry Lane recently told listeners how to get the banned article via the Internet? FOI, yeah.)

Anyway, when I referred to "remarkable material", I was thinking more of those sites on ufology, vampires, conspiracy theories, the millennium, etc., as well as the innumerable fan sites panting over the gorgeous passion of the month — Elle Macpherson, David Duchovny, Ellen deGeneres, John Cleese . . .

All that said, however, this is the thing I like most about the Net: the

five paragraphs) every few issues because any more may become just a smidgin tedious.

Now, while I have your undivided attention, I want to quickly insert here some advice to you Sydneysiders re a wordy event coming up in November. This is the 1997 Style Council, which this year returns home to New South Wales.

Style Council is an annual conference on Australian style and usage, intended as a forum where people with an interest in Australian English can discuss aspects of language of current importance. As well as the amateur linguist, this would include professional editors, publishers, journalists, broadcasters, teachers, lexicographers and software designers. Previous Style Councils have more than proved their worth in promoting intelligent consideration of English in Australia and in shaping linguistic standards and conventions.

Attendance in Sydney usually reaches around 100.

Taking place under the auspices of the Dictionary Research Centre at Macquarie University in Sydney, Style Council is run jointly by the Centre and The Macquarie Library Pty. Ltd.

This year's theme is *The Language of the Media*. While the programme is not yet finalised, there

are likely to be papers on the ABC's Standing Committee on Spoken Language, film scripting, the language of advertising and of the Internet and the writing of film subtitles and autocues for TV.

I hope to bring you fuller details in the November issue, but just in case that won't give those who might want to attend enough time to register, I strongly suggest you contact the Style Council people on (02)9850 9807 or 8773.

The dates and place are known already, however.

When? The weekend of 22-23 November, plus an optional workshop on the preceding Friday afternoon on the new third edition of the *Macquarie Dictionary*.

Where? State Library of NSW, Macquarie St. Sydney.

Early-bird fees (prior to 31/10/97) will be about \$220.

Finances permitting, I'll be there myself.

Anyway, to come back to language creation for a sec, just remember the Bandersnatch cardinal rule. Always read it aloud with gusto . . . or Harpo or Chico or Ringo or Margo or . . .

— Harlish Goop

the field; the left wing of the wild cavalry was coming straight for the tope in which we lay.

The eye takes in at a glance what tongue cannot tell or hand write in an hour. Here was, it appeared, an inglorious and miserable death swooping down on us in the heart of that yelling crowd. At that instant my faithful syce, with drops of sweat rolling down his black face, ran towards me, dragging my unwilling and plunging horse towards the litter, and shouting to me as if in the greatest affliction. I could scarcely move in the dooly. I don't know how I ever managed to do it, but by the help of poor Ramdeen I got into the saddle. It felt like a plate of red-hot iron; all the flesh of the blistered thigh rolled off in a quid on the flap; the leech-bites burst out afresh; the stirrup-irons seemed like blazing coals; death itself could not be more full of pain. I had nothing on but my shirt. Feet and legs naked — head uncovered — with Ramdeen holding on by one stirrup-leather, whilst, with wild cries, he urged on the horse, and struck him over the flanks with a long strip of thorn — I flew across the plain under that awful sun.

I was in a ruck of animals soon, and gave up all chances of life as a troop of sowars dashed in among them. Ramdeen gave a loud cry, with a look of terror over his shoulder, and leaving the stirrup-leather, disappeared. I followed the direction of his glance, and saw a black-bearded scoundrel, ahead of three sowars, who was coming right at me. I had neither sword nor pistol. Just at that moment, a poor wretch of a camel-driver, leading his beast by the nosestring, rushed right across me, and seeing the sowar so close, darted under his camel's belly. Quick as thought, the sowar reined his horse

right round the other side of the camel, and as the man rose, I saw the flash of the tulwar falling on his head like a stroke of lightning. It cleft through both his hands, which he had crossed on his head, and with a feeble gurgle of "Ram! Ram!" the cameldriver fell close beside me with his skull split to the nose. I felt my time was come. My naked heels could make no impression on the panting horse. I saw, indeed, a cloud of dust and a body of men advancing from the road; but just at that moment a pain so keen shot through my head that my eyes flashed fire. My senses did not leave me; I knew quite well I was cut down, and put my hand up to my head, but there was no blood; for a moment a pleasant dream of home came across me; I thought I was in the hunting-field, that the heart of the pack was all around me; but I could not hold on my horse; my eyes swam, and I remember no more than that I had, as it were, a delicious plunge into a deep cool lake, in which I sank deeper and deeper, till the gurgling waters rushed into my lungs and stifled me.

On recovering my senses I found myself in a dooly by the roadside, but I thought what had passed was a dream. I had been for a long time insensible. I tried to speak, but my mouth was full of blood. Then I was seized with violent spasms in the lungs, from which for more than an hour I coughed up quantities of mucus and blood; my head felt like a ball of molten lead. It is only from others I gathered what happened this day, for my own recollections of the occurrences after the charge of the cavalry are more vague than those of a sick man's night visions . . . It appears that . . . a soldier who belonged to the ammunition guard, and who was run-

ning from the sowars, seeing a body lying in the sun all naked, except a bloody shirt, sent out a dooly when he got to the road for a "a dead officer who had been stript", and I was taken up and carried off to the cover of some trees.

The doctors came in at last . . . They saw me — withdrew, consulted in whispers. I can remember so well their figures as they stood at the door of the pall, thrown into dark shade by the blazing bivouac-fires! . . . Ere I went to sleep for the night I was anointed all over back and chest with strong tincture of iodine. I never knew till long afterwards that up to this moment one lung had ceased to act at all, and that a portion of the other was gorged from pulmonary apoplexy, brought on by the sunstroke or heat; and that in fact my two friends had no expectation of my being alive next morning. Such is my recollection and experience of the Battle of Bareilly.

May 6th. A night of great pain . . .

May 7th. The doctors tell me that had I not been so weakened by previous bleeding and dosing, the *coup de soleil* would have been as fatal to me as it was to many of our poor fellows on the 5th. I am now able to employ an amanuensis, but the leg is still very painful, and the swelling is now as hard and as large as an egg; so I shall remember the Rohilkhand campaign for the rest of my life, be it long or short.

May 25th. The march was resumed. On again we went for mile after mile over a sandy, dusty plain . . . Suddenly there came out of the hot black night a fearful storm — not of rain or thunder, but of wind and dust, which burned like the ashes of a fur-

nace. The column halted at once. Nor man nor beast could face the force of the blast, the burning breath of the simoom! The current was as a stream of lava, and it fell on my dooly so savagely that I tumbled out of it on the sand to leeward lest it should be blown away with me. The bearers threw themselves on the windward side and kept the litter down. I felt the hot dust gathering over me, my skin burned as though in fever . . .

In a quarter of an hour or so the strength of the wind abated. The column re-formed, and the march began once more . . .

I crawled back to my dooly into a bed of burning sand, and there I lay exhausted. For hours we marched on. Oh! what delight at last to wake up in the midst of a stream of bright clear water, to see beyond its banks another broader still. I had been borne over the Ramgunga in a sort of dreamy consciousness, and even the pangs of thirst could not awake me. But now I was in the midst of water. My dooly was at rest in the shallow stream like some small island, and the waters rolled over the sandy bed with a gurgling, pleasant song, away, under, and through the legs of my bed. And then came old Sukeeram, and taking up the grateful draughts in a gourd, held them to my parched lips. Then with the hollow of his hand he dashed the dimpling surface of the current on my head and face. I could fancy how the sun-smitten earth drinks in the first autumn showers. All around me, above and below, the native campfollowers, syces, bazaar-people, were rolling in the river, and puffing and blowing like so many porpoises. We were in a branch of the Ganges, and beyond us, across a long

the Hutt) and in Frank Herbert's *Dune* books (e.g. the Shadout Mapes).

And while we're at it let's put our hands together for the cream of the crop, Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. This series has given us not only marvellous names like Zaphod Beeblebrox, Slartibartfast, Eccentrica Gallumbits and Oolon Colluphid, but also such portmanteau word treasures as:

hoopy

octopodic physucturalists

Maximegalon

Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster

Ravenous Bugblatter Beast of Traal

Strenuous Garfighters of Stug

Great Binding Fiefdoms of Saxaquine.

All of which somewhat academic introduction leads nicely to the hidden agenda of today's topic.

Does the technique of inventing words and phrases in this way have a name? Could it be extended into a language? And what would we call such a language — Jabberwocky (or just Jabberwock), Jujub, Tumtum? I like the sound of Bandersnatch myself, but if any reader knows of an "official" name, I'll bow to your expertise.

Bandersnatch even has potential as a universal language, don't you

think? In my view it possesses three basic characteristics (not all of them linguistic) that make it an excellent candidate for such a role:

- ◇ It is easy enough for a child to learn, thus giving it a slight edge over Etruscan;
- ◇ It is more musical than golf, thus making it more suitable for bath-time; and
- ◇ It is surely more laughable than quantum physics, thus affording it a happier future than Schrödinger's Cat, say — not to be confused with the Cheshire Cat, of course.

Why don't we try a language creation experiment along these lines in *Bikwil*? Let me insist right away, however, that the outcome of this verbal amusement, while certainly in the Carroll spirit of fun, is not intended to be a parody of *Jabberwocky*. Yes, there have been parodies, but I've never dared seek them out, because for me that timeless masterpiece stands alone and should be left alone.

On page 15 lurks the brief yet haunting opening of a proposed communal adventure epic in Bandersnatch. Invitations are now extended to all *Bikwil* linguists for contributions towards our ongoing pre-circum-modernist, ambi-sub-constructionist narrative. We'll restrict them to one paglet (four or

A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

I have received several enquiries as to the derivation, if any, of my name. Well, not unexpectedly, it has its origin in language study. Here is the reference: H.A. Gleason, Jr., *An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics* (1956).

On page 134 of that work, Gleason invents the following unforgettable sentence as an example of syntactic markers in English that allow understanding (albeit vague) of such an utterance:

The iggle squigs trazed wombly in the harlish goop.

Three of those markers are obvious when you think about it: the word order, the use of common words such as “the” and “in” and the endings “-le”, “-s”, “-ed”, “-ly” and “-ish”.

Many of you, I hope, will have already discerned a resemblance to a far more famous piece of nonsense writing. So renowned is it that Horace Rumpole is always quoting from it, Terry Gilliam made it into a movie and it has been translated at least six times into French, as well as into 22 other languages.

I refer to none other than the *Jabberwocky* poem (from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*).

Incidentally, apart from your predictable languages like German, Italian and Russian, those 22 translations include versions in — wait for it — Choctaw, Esperanto, Latin and Welsh, plus, would you believe, Klingon.

Carroll's poem has even been resorted to, not exactly as Gleason does with his “iggle squigs” sentence to teach syntax itself in a linguistics course, but in somewhat related vein for a hefty textbook (500 pages) on logic — Francis Watanabe Hauer's *Critical Thinking, An Introduction to Reasoning* (1989). Here Hauer devotes 100 pages to the importance of language in the context of logical thinking, spending no less than two pages on a discussion of how some sort of meaning emerges from those classic first two lines of *Jabberwocky*:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe.

Traces of this linguistic device are to be found — almost always in proper names — throughout much English language science fiction. Well-known examples occur in the Star Wars movies (e.g. Jabba

He could charm an audience an hour on a stretch without ever getting rid of an idea.
Mark Twain

On a fine day the climate of England is like looking up a chimney; on a foul day, like looking down one.
Anonymous

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

I could readily see in Emerson a gaping flaw. It was the insinuation that had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions.
Herman Melville

A sentence containing the word 'horticulture'? You can lead a horticulture, but you can't make her think.
Dorothy Parker

When I first saw Brighton pavilion, I thought that St. Paul's Cathedral had come down and pupped.
Rev. Sydney Smith

The Grasshopper and the Kid Glove Kid

There was once a dancing duo tipped for fame,
dancers quite eccentric in their step and style.
In fact, 'The Eccentrics' was their choice of name,
description apt and totally without guile.

He, of loose Astairean physique, excelled.
Fidgety feet and a certain quivering gait
marked him 'The Grasshopper' when folk beheld
his inimitable steps. As for his little mate,

she, too, was individual, at heart a clown:
to be a soft shoe shuffler was her bid,
in blue blazer and white gloves all over town.
She even dubbed herself 'The Kid Glove Kid'!

Both delighted in the fresh, the unknown quantity,
leaving much to chance, improvising as they went.
So the essence of their act was its spontaneity.
'Every gig a giggle' was their sentiment.

Unannounced, in mid-career and middle-age
The Kid took off her blazer, shoes and gloves
and put them on the shelf, withdrew from centre stage
to pursue in quiet study other dreams and loves.

The Hopper, understanding, took it in his stride.
He went solo, donned red shoes and blue cloth caps.
Then letting inclination be unerring guide,
advanced his eccentricity and took to taps.

Nothing stopped him after that! And with the years
his fame and fans increased. He's front page news.
Cameras flash and artists sketch amid the claps and cheers.
With a grin he puts it down to those red shoes!

Sometimes other dancers try to partner him,
to match his step and style. What a futile bid!
Though many have the talent, flair and vim,
'None of them', he says, 'can really match The Kid'.

Except when knee-high strutters at the Opera House
spontaneously link with him to his and their delight,
engaging little learners eager to espouse
the joy and fun of dance The Hopper can incite.

In reality though he needs no one in his act.
The Kid, for her part, now and then breaks free
and shows her eccentricity is still intact.
Both vow never to forsake the dance and poetry

of life. And true to say of them, although a team
they do not dance, except in mind and heart,
as one, and sensitive to each other's dream
they really dance together by being apart.

Here then is the moral of the tale: 'The Eccentrics',
incongruous partners, as their name attests,
being to love disposed, are a living paradox,
that strange but lovely harmony of contrasts.

— Bet Briggs
(a.k.a. The Kid)