

From the Back Verandah

The editor has passed to me a communication from occasional *Bikwil* correspondent jeneric.

Commenting on my column in Issue 17 (January, 2000) about Ethelred the So-called Unready, jeneric writes:

"Ethelred" means "good counsel" (perhaps it should be spelt Ethelraed??) so the "Un-raed" or "lacking counsel" tag was a snide little bit of wordplay by the authors of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (who seem to have been pretty hostile to poor old E the U).

(jeneric quotes the source of this information as Frank McLynn's *1066 — the Year of the 3 Battles*.)

Thanks, jeneric, and while we're adding to our knowledge of old England, allow me to continue my discussion on that other Ethel, the virginal abbess Etheldreda (or "Etheldrida").

After her death in 679 she became known as St. Audrey (a corruption of "Etheldrida") and the patron saint of the isle of

Ely, which is where she had founded her monastery. An annual fair was later instituted at her shrine there, and among the goods sold were cheap jewellery and showy lace. The latter, apparently, was already known as "St. Audrey's lace" because in her vain youth Etheldrida was well-known to have worn such adornments.

Hence the word *tawdry*, first as an abbreviation for the lace itself ("Let us buy some tawdries"), then eventually in the pejorative adjectival sense we know today.

Harlish Goop reminds us, however, that, although the sale of laces at the annual fair

. . . did not give the article its name, it doubtless made it more widely known, and [subsequently] led to the production of cheap and showy forms for the "country wenches" . . ., which at length gave to *tawdry* its later connotation. (*OED*)

— Fizzgig

BIKWIL

The Newsletter of Quiet Enthusiasms

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“Let Therefore the Next Friendly Contributor . . . Write Secretly in His Own Chamber”

The quotation is from Samuel Johnson, and is brazenly used here for obvious purposes.

A year ago, when *Bikwil* surveyed readers on whether to charge a subscription fee, many replies came in with suggestions regarding content. It is some of those ideas I want to reiterate today, with a view to stimulating oodles of not-so-secretive new enthusiastic and friendly contributions:

Pieces about art

A quiz

A crossword

Articles on popular (as well as high) culture

Something along the lines of *Notes and Queries* (i.e. someone writes in with a question on an obscure topic and other readers, hopefully, answer it)

More on classical and jazz music.

Any takers, then? Of course there are, and the queue starts here.

Colophon

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Back Issues Are Still Available

In China, the piano piece 'Chopsticks' is known as 'Knife and Fork'.

Denis Norden

It is scandalous to see these Society women going about with a poodle on the end of a string where a baby would be more fitting.

A New Zealand Newspaper

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

It's hard for me to get used to these changing times. I can remember when the air was clean and sex was dirty.

George Burns

The cook was a good cook, as cooks go; and as good cooks go, she went.

Saki

I didn't attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying that I approved of it.

Mark Twain

Web

In Issue 18 (March 1999) I looked at Web sites devoted to physicist Stephen Hawking.

Not surprisingly, his world famous *Brief History of Time* has in recent times attracted at least one humorous derivative, namely a book by astronomer and educator Eric Shulman entitled *A Briefer History of Time: From the Big Bang to the Big Mac* (1999, ISBN: 07167 3389 7),

... a highly irreverent and scientifically entertaining overview of some of the most important cosmic milestones since the beginning of time.

The critical thing is that Shulman's book will answer questions you might have never even conceived of asking — like why the universe is expanding and why this doesn't make it any easier to find a parking place. Even if you were asking those very questions only yesterday, I know you can't wait to get further info about the book from the Web. And while you're in the mood, take in some



Line

other intelligent nonsense from Eric Shulman — *The Universal History Translation Project*.

In 1997 Shulman had published in *The Annals of Improbable Research* what he called *The History of the Universe in 200 Words or Less*. This gave rise to The Universal History Translation Project, which has involved the translation of those 200 Words (or Less) into more than 30 languages. *A Briefer History of Time* is itself based on the 200-word history. This second Web site presents us with all available translations to date, including some “in two words or less”,

- (a) the scientific:
Bang. Expansion.
- (b) the religious:
God. Man.
- (c) the agnostic:
Nothing. Something.

— TR

Internet sites referred to above:

<http://www.radix.net/~fornax/bhtes/bhtes.html>
<http://www.cv.nrao.edu/~eschulma/histcom.html>

In Memory of Oscar

He was old but still frisky when we first met. I ignored his dints and bruises and he ignored mine. It was love at first sight. I was living at Byron Bay then and after breaking my polio leg was forced to rely on crutches to get around, so I lost no time in mounting Oscar, whose only protests were a few tinny grumbles, but when I carefully headed him out through the gate towards the park he responded with alacrity. It was a weekday, school was in and there were no football or cricket teams to threaten us. The path that led through the park to the town road was deserted. With no traffic and a crisp breeze to cool the sun's heat, I coaxed Oscar to increase his speed.

The birds picking in the dirt and dust flew off bewildered; a couple of cats squealed and turned tail, while dogs heading towards us suddenly stopped and stood rigid with ears stiff and upright. I was soon to realise that it was Oscar's soft whine that unsettled the animals. They could hear it long before we

approached them. The road up to Byron Bay's shops seemed too rough so I kept Oscar on the footpath, rough as that was with broken kerbing and ramps on our side of the road and long grass on the other side. Difficult as our progress was, though tough on Oscar, it was better for me than struggling on crutches over such terrain. Soon, ignoring the bumps, we quickened our pace. As we passed the well-mowed bowling green, the bowlers paused and waved to us. “Take it easy, love!” one called to me. “Don't let the coppers catch you speeding.” “I won't!” I shouted back, as an excited Oscar bumped over the broken kerbs.

Dear old Oscar! For months he took me everywhere, to coffee shops, restaurants, and down to the Byron Hotel overlooking the ocean. He was a bit clumsy at first, entering a coffee shop and knocking over chairs and tables, then having difficulty in turning around and getting out of the shop, but most shopkeepers were very tolerant, sometimes

laughing as they lifted Oscar with me on top of him and turned us around clear of their furniture and facing the door.

We were both contrite as we slowly made our way out of the shop. Oscar was a big bloke. I doubt that he had ever been nimble, even when young. Now at whatever ancient age he was, his furrows and creases were becoming more conspicuous.

He had always been very fond of children and they of him. They would follow him around, pat him, try to mount him, talk to him and ask me questions about him. My own grandsons, then quite young, knowing they were not allowed to get on him, would run by Oscar's side, challenging me. "Go on, Nanna Joan. Go faster. Go on!" I don't think Oscar enjoyed those challenges, and they scared me too.

Maybe his eyesight was deteriorating for he was most clumsy in the Supermarket, knocking packages off shelves and tipping over stands in the aisles. But when we headed for home he needed little help from me to find his way there. On the porch I would connect him to his sustenance and when he was finished,

I would cover him and say good-night.

Then one day our happy journeys were interrupted. I had to go to hospital with my broken polio leg. Eventually I was flown to Sydney for an operation and had to leave Oscar with my son. I don't think he liked that, nor did I. We had become very close to one another. A few months later, the operation over, the hospital surgeon said I could leave but was not to walk any long distances yet. He recommended that I use a wheelchair but when I told him about Oscar he agreed that I could use him instead.

There was great excitement when Oscar arrived at the hospital. All the nurses wanted a ride on him. Everyone thought he was beautiful. Oscar wallowed in their admiration. I was allowed to ride him in a safe space, but was warned not to let him loose around hospital staff, patients or visitors.

When I left for a stay in a hostel, he came too but to our mutual sorrow, Oscar was relegated to a back yard with no protection from the elements. What was most disturbing was that I could

white settlement), at the official reading of Governor Phillip's Commission, there was music — played by a naval band of drums and fifes.

Fifes and drums were also used as the accompaniment to the punishment or public disgrace of a serviceman. In fact the earliest piece of music known by name to have been performed in Australia is *The Rogues' March*, played at the drumming out on 9 February 1788 of a soldier who had been caught in the female convicts' tents.

In time, the colony would be home to larger military bands, augmented by strings, playing for church services as well as secular ceremonial occasions. By the 1820s Elizabeth Macarthur would have been able to enjoy "quadrilles and waltzes, sentimentally homesick airs and martial songs of a conventionally patriotic kind . . . [,] charms against the night and the unknown." (Covell)

Performed, presumably, by those "Lady and Gentleman Amateurs" so often referred to in newspapers of the day.

None, for me, however, has the romance of the Worgan piano.

I believe that the fate of that piano — its adventures down the

years under successive owners and its eventual arrival at some museum (or, St. Cecilia forbid, at some rubbish dump) — would make a fascinating tale to tell.

The problem is, of course, that there are few, if any, unequivocal records of what happened after Worgan and the Macarthurs to Australia's first piano.

Even though three keyboard instruments survive at Camden Park, New South Wales (the Macarthur country homestead), none of them is the Worgan piano. One is a non-functional 19th century pump organ made by the Estry Company in Illinois, another is a 4½ ft upright piano (I don't know its vintage) and the third is a 1940s grand piano.

There is one old piano at Elizabeth Farm, Rosehill (the original Macarthur home), but this is an 1835 upright.

For a novelist, on the other hand, such a narrative keyboard exercise might, on the face of it, profitably warrant some wistful contemplation, don't you think?

If only Annie Proulx hadn't already used the idea first, with her *Accordion Crimes*.

is echoed by the *Penguin Australian Encyclopaedia* (1990, ISBN 0 670 83148 4):

British musical forms and preferences were transported to the founding colony, in the fashion of the time, as trappings of the drawingroom. The need for social establishment in a mainly convict population, reinforced by recurring waves of British middle-class immigration, resulted in socially useful music-making that was conservative in every sense of the word.

Covell's reference to Mozart, incidentally, is telling, I think.

We First-Fleet-haunted Australians tend to forget that the illustrious German composer did not die until 1791. Indeed, between 1788 and his death, Mozart composed over 75 works, including three symphonies (among them the *Jupiter*) and two piano concerti, not to mention *The Magic Flute* and the *Requiem*.

Back to the piano in question.

If Covell is right and it was indeed "light and shallow-toned", then almost certainly Worgan's instrument was a square piano. Invented in Germany in the 1740s, the square piano had its strings at right angles to the keys and was more compact and far less expensive than a grand piano. It met with great success in England especially, where it was built and sold in great numbers, often by

German immigrants. London manufacturers of the period included Adam Beyer, John Broadwood & Son, Johannes Pohlmann and Johannes Zumpe & Gabriel Buntebart.

You know, I'm no historian, but I doubt strongly whether Orchard's description of the Worgan piano as "a piano that was landed at Circular Quay, Sydney, in 1790 from *H.M.S. Sirius*" could be correct. What we can say is that 1790 might have been the date or the *Sirius* might have been the vessel — but we can't claim both as true. The primary and obvious reason is that in March 1790 the *Sirius* was completely wrecked at Norfolk Island, three months before any landings from England that year (namely the Second Fleet) could take place.

Robert Hughes, on the other hand, describes Worgan as "the naval surgeon who brought the first piano to Australia on the *Sirius*", the "brought" implying that his piano came with him.

So take your choice: the first piano in Oz arrived on the *Sirius* in 1788, or on one of the ships in the Second Fleet two years later.

Worgan's piano was not the first musical instrument brought to New South Wales, however. As early as 7 February 1788 (twelve days after

not get to him. I moved on from that hostel, trying out a number of others. In the ones in which he was welcome, the terrain was too difficult for me, or there were too many fast cars. Then I moved to Manly, lovely Manly, where I had lived with my parents during the war years.

What fun we had there! I would ride Oscar along the ocean front, then down to the harbour. As I rode him down past the Manly pool where I used to swim, and onto the wharf to watch the ferries berth and leave again, I would tell Oscar stories of travelling on those ferries in the blackouts at night, with the ferry musicians playing "When the lights come on again", an English wartime song. Or I would tell him what it was like to go for a ride on the Ferris wheel where at the top you felt you could almost touch the stars. Oscar was a good listener never interrupting.

Some days we would go for coffee on the Corso. The shopkeepers never resented his presence at their outside tables and would rush to move chairs out of his way. Then came the day when builders started digging up roads and footpaths. Getting

around was no fun, unless we stuck to the Corso. Small children loved him and would race up to ride him sitting in front of me. Oscar was very gentle with them, moving slowly and being careful to avoid the bumps. But I was finding it difficult to ride him over the broken roads and footpaths. One day we both nearly had a bad fall. I knew his time was almost up. But first the local newspaper wanted to take his photo with me riding him. That really was our last ride together.

It was very painful having to part with him but a man bought him and promised to be kind to him. The last I heard was that he was enjoying the fresh air and open spaces of country life.

To replace him I bought the "Rascal", a frisky little devil, younger and smaller than Oscar, and very fast. A "show-off". If I don't control him, he'll tip me off, run into a restaurant or even people without stopping to apologise. Guess I'll learn to control him one day. He's a clever little scooter but I doubt he'll ever be as faithful as my first scooter, dear old Oscar.

— Joan Willmott-Clarke

A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

“All clichés should be avoided like the plague” (a sign on a news editor’s desk) is presented by Pam Peters’ *Cambridge Australian English Style Guide (CAESG)* as a nice oxymoronic example of “do as I say, not as I do”. It echoes, doesn’t it, that unforgettably self-contradictory exhortation of MGM’s Samuel Goldwyn, “Let’s have some new clichés”.

We all know what a cliché is — a phrase, once startlingly fresh in its imagery, perhaps, but now predictably stale through overuse. And that’s the intriguing thing. Despite its tarnished image, each clichéd phrase was once brand spanking, sparkling new, and its shine has worn off only because it has become *too* successful.

Or, as *Times* critic Bernard Levin has nicely put it, “today’s striking thought is tomorrow’s platitude, and next week’s cliché”.

No doubt some *Bikwil* readers will also be aware of the word’s derivation:

The word *cliché* means “stereotyped” in French, where it once referred to the stereotyped block cast from an engraving, from which multiple copies could be printed. Our clichés recast unique events in a standard mould. (*CAESG*)

David Crystal’s *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (1997 paperback ed. ISBN 0 521 59655 6) has this to say:

In clichés we see fragments of language apparently dying, yet unable to die. Clichés emerge when expressions outlive their usefulness as conveyors of information. They are dying not from underuse, as with the gradual disappearance of old-fashioned words . . . , but from overuse.

There are some valid everyday uses for clichés in speech, however. According to Crystal’s wide-ranging book,

The passing remarks as people recognize each other in the street but with no time to stop, the selfconscious politeness of strangers on a train, the forced interactions at cocktail parties, or the desperate platitudes which follow a funeral: these are the kinds of occasion which give clichés their right to be.

Even for writers, as *CAESG* points out, they have some value:

Clichés are a particularly tempting resource if you have to write a lot in a short time. For journalists it’s a way of life, and a crop of clichés can be harvested from the pages of most daily papers, predictable phrases which readers can skim over . . .

Having led you this far, I have to plead guilty to mixed feelings about clichés.

write about such interests clearly and accurately.

Although Elizabeth was busy with her children, she paid serious attention to the future of the farm, particularly during John’s absences overseas (1801-5 and 1809-17). She worked hard to secure their business against failure, determined to keep the farm going so that her family could enjoy the good life. She continued to expand Elizabeth Farm, their property at what is today Rosehill, and began to breed Merino sheep with even better wool than John had been able to achieve.

By the 1820s the Macarthurs had become the biggest land owners in New South Wales, and while her primary objective had always been to ensure that her family was well provided for, along the way Elizabeth Macarthur helped establish Australia’s wool industry.

In the meantime, she had begun to learn the piano, thanks to the musical surgeon.

Orchard goes on to acknowledge his “first piano” source as a letter in the Mitchell Library, written by Elizabeth Macarthur in 1791 to a friend in England, a Miss Kingdon.

Having quoted her letter further, regarding her rapid progress not only in learning to read music but

also in performing *God Save the King* and something called “Foot’s *Minuet*”, he concludes with these words: “This event records what was most probably the landing of the first piano in Australia.”

Fifteen years later, in his *Australia’s Music* (1967), Roger Covell would again refer to the Worgan piano as “the colony’s very first piano”.

With his characteristic disdain for bland musical derivativeness, Covell suggests that the piano,

. . . the herald of innumerable musical evenings of the utmost respectability and decorum during the following century and more, would have been one of those light and shallow-toned instruments for which Mozart wrote his sonatas and piano concertos. Mozart’s music would certainly have followed Surgeon Worgan’s piano out not long after; but the truth is that Australia missed most of what was best in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century music. The dominant influence in colonial music-making of an official or respectable sort was the sweet vapidness into which the idiom of Mozart’s lesser contemporaries and successors declined in the early years of the nineteenth century.

Later he comments:

The earliest free settlers would have been concerned at the time with keeping up the niceties of polite music in London.

Such scorn regarding genteel musical soirées in early Australia

medical profession (as a surgeon's mate and surgeon) till about 1800, retiring on half-pay to take up farming, though with little success.

Thanks to its publication in 1978 by the William Dixon Foundation at the State Library of NSW, his diary (*Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon*) is now more readily available as a primary source for historians. Although it covers no more than the six-month period from 20 January to 11 July 1788, interest in the journal persists chiefly because of its first-hand account of the new colony and its description of the land and its indigenous inhabitants.

My earliest brush with the hypothesis that the Worgan piano was in fact Australia's first occurred when I read W. Arundel Orchard's book *Music in Australia* (1952):

In New South Wales . . . are found the earliest records of cultural activity in Australia, one of which mentions a piano that was landed at Circular Quay, Sydney, in 1790 from *H.M.S. Sirius* whose surgeon, to whom the piano belonged, evidently had some musical ability. The incident is referred to in a letter written from Camden by Mrs. Macarthur in which she refers to "Mr. Worgan, who was surgeon to the *Sirius* and happened to be left behind when that ship met her fate at Norfolk Island. Our new house is ornamented with a new pianoforte of Mr. Worgan's and he kindly means to leave it with me and now, under his direction, I have begun a new study . . ."

Orchard is of course referring to Elizabeth, intrepid wife of pioneer woolgrower and egotistical trouble-maker John Macarthur. Today Elizabeth Macarthur (1766-1850) is recognised in her own right, having played a crucial part both in John's success as a farmer and in the social life of the fledgling settlement.

The Macarthurs had arrived in New South Wales with Second Fleet in 1790, and once they had set up house, Elizabeth quickly made contact with the rich and powerful. In his *The Fatal Shore* (1986), Robert Hughes has described the Macarthurs as "the founders and prototypes of the colonial gentry". They were in fact snobs, with little sympathy for the poor, the self-righteous Elizabeth, for example, being highly affronted during the voyage out at the way the convict women conducted themselves.

Snob she may have been, but Elizabeth Macarthur is generally regarded as the first "educated" woman in Australia. Since childhood she had been extremely fond of matters cultural, and now in New South Wales showed a keen interest in colonial politics, local flora and fauna — even the Aborigines. Her privileged position gave her an unrivalled perspective and her education enabled her to

On the one hand, I share with countless other lovers of the English language no desire to suffer again utterances that are as monotonously wearying as the following conventionalisms:

democratically elected
fall through the cracks
fundamentally flawed
Information Superhighway
last-ditch attempt
mandate to govern
on a scale of 1 to 10
pushing the envelope
raft of (measures/problems/ . . .)
the reality is
recipe for disaster
sends the wrong message
thinking (wo)man's pin-up
tyranny of distance
user-friendly
warts and all.

Yet, at the same time, clichés used with finesse in the right context have added immeasurably to my life. That context is, it goes without saying, the intentionally humorous one. When I'm in the mood, I can think of little else as satisfying as experiencing a passage methodically piled high with cliché atop cliché. This is especially the case when the text in question has a mock-heroic intent.

Alternatively, notes the *CAESG*, ". . . [w]riters sometimes use

clichés deliberately as a way of parodying a style, and the parody itself controls and limits their use".

Now, what better parody of a certain style could there have ever been than *Yes (Prime) Minister?* Its virtuoso scripts by Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn made it Her Majesty's favourite TV programme — and Margaret Thatcher's, too, who in its heyday (and hers) commented, "Its closely observed portrayal of what goes on in the corridors of power has given me hours of pure joy".

From the linguistic point of view, rather than the political, that show skilfully satirised political/civil service jargon (mainly circumlocution from Sir Humphrey) as well as throwing in many a mixed metaphor concoction (always from Jim Hacker), and occasionally an appalling pun or a linguistic pedanticism ("Thank you Bernard").

This is from the episode entitled *The Writing on the Wall*:

Sir Humphrey: Well Minister, if you asked me for a straight answer then I shall say that, as far as we can see, looking at it by and large, taking one time with another, in terms of the average of departments, then in the final analysis it is probably true to say that, at the end of the day, in general terms, you would find, that, not to put too fine a point on it, there probably

wasn't very much in it one way or the other, as far as one can see, at this stage.

Jim Hacker: Is that yes or no?

Sir Humphrey: Yes and no.

Jim Hacker: Suppose you weren't asked for a straight answer.

Sir Humphrey: Oh, then I should play for time, Minister.

How about an author from a different place and time — Frank Sullivan, say? He was an American humourist (1892-1976) who from the early 1930s was a long-time staff member of *The New Yorker*. His perhaps most famous piece was *A Garland of Ibids*, a witty parody of earnest academic writing overloaded with footnotes.

But of more direct relevance here is his series of sharp yet somehow mellow satirical interviews with Mr. Arbuthnot, an expert user of clichés. Each of these discussions spoofs a particular vocation, such as literary criticism, movie making (*pace* Sam Goldwyn), tabloid reporting of crimes of passion and violence . . .

The Cliché Expert Testifies on Literary Criticism begins this way:

Q Mr. Arbuthnot, you are an expert in the use of the cliché as applied to literary criticism?

A I am told that I am, sir.

Q We shall soon find out. What is this object, marked Exhibit A, which I hold?

A That is a book.

Q Good. What kind of book is it?

A It is a minor American classic. Truly a prose epic.

Q And what kind of document is it?

A It is a valuable human document.

Q Very good, Mr. Arbuthnot. Please continue.

A It is a book in which the results of painstaking — or scholarly — research are embodied and it should interest all thoughtful readers. This reviewer could not put it down.

Q Why not?

A Because of its penetrating insight into the ever-present problem of international relationships. It is a sincere and moving study of an American family against the background of a small college town, and it is also a vivid and full-blooded portrayal of the life of that true child of nature, the Southern Negro.

Q How is it written?

A It is written with sympathy, pathos, and kindly humor. It throws a clear light on a little-understood subject and is well worth reading.

Q How is it illustrated?

A Profusely. It is original in conception, devoid of sentimentality, highly informative, consistently witty, and rich in color. Place it on your required-reading list.

And let's never forget the great P.G. Wodehouse, of whom in the cliché connection it has been written that his quote marks around verbal banalities are "invisible" — i.e. clichés aforethought.

Clavierübung

[*Memorable Moments in Music* No. 2]

Jane Campion's *The Piano* brims with haunting cinematographic images. Take, for instance, the sight of Holly Hunter and Anna Paquin sitting forlornly by the piano on the bare New Zealand beach as the surf swirls around them. The instrument has just been landed with great difficulty, and as I recall the scene now I wonder how much antipodean trouble a certain other keyboard might have caused when it was brought ashore.

I am referring, I should add, not to a fictional instrument, but a very real one — "the Worgan piano", as it is labelled, which is accepted as the first ever to arrive in Australia.

Relevant in this connection is the fact that, until the completion of Circular Quay in 1850, landing facilities in Sydney Cove remained quite deficient.

In 1788 Captain Arthur Phillip, commander of the First Fleet, had confidently asserted that "ships can anchor so close to the shore that at very small expense quays may be constructed at which the largest vessels may unload".

Yet for the earliest years of the colony only two small and inadequate jetties were available, the Government Wharf (mainly for the use of the Governor), near the present-day corner of Loftus and Alfred Streets, and the Hospital Wharf on Sydney Cove's western side (The Rocks).

The Worgan piano must therefore have required some awkward effort when transferred from ship first to flat-bottomed barge then to shore — if not because of its weight, which as we shall see was probably not excessive, but more as a result of the rudimentary wharf facilities available.

But who, what or where was Worgan?

George Bouchier Worgan (1757-1838) came to New South Wales as surgeon on *HMS Sirius*, the flagship of the First Fleet. He had joined the British Navy in 1775, serving as surgeon's second mate from February 1778, then as naval surgeon from March 1780. He remained in New South Wales only until 1791, when he returned to England to continue in the

Where Three Ways Meet

The concept of changing traffic signals that regulates traffic all over the world today was created by an African-American inventor, Garrett Augustus Morgan (1877-1963), who patented the idea in 1923 after witnessing a collision between a horse-drawn vehicle and an automobile. For good measure, he invented safety helmets and gas masks for firefighters, as well as a zigzag attachment for manual sewing machines.

Astronauts are taller in space than on Earth because of the lack of gravity to weigh them down.

As everyone knows, William Shakespeare was an actor as well as a playwright. But were you aware which part he played in *Hamlet*? No? Well, it was the role of the ghost. (Shakespeare as true “father” of *Hamlet*?)

And you all know that “bloody” is called the Great Australian Adjective. But did you ever suspect that its sound-alike cousin “ruddy” was in such bad odour in Victorian England that Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan in 1887 had to change their opera from *Ruddygore* to *Ruddigore*?

The mental illness of Wagner’s patron, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, was probably genetic. His brother Otto used to suffer weeping fits and barked like a dog. He was eventually locked up as insane. His aunt, Princess Alexandra, went about asserting that she had swallowed a grand piano made of glass. Such is the power of music.

It used to be considered unlucky to put on the left shoe before the right (cf. L. *sinister* = “left”), or to put either shoe on the wrong foot. This latter superstition would have suited the working man, then, because it wasn’t until the 1800s that separate left/right shoes were even made for the likes of him.

The tallest mountain in our solar system is to be found on Mars. Its name is Olympus Mons and it is nearly 15 miles high.

Of all the London Underground stations, St. John's Wood is the only one with a name not to contain any of the letters of the word “mackerel”. Essential knowledge, that.

— Bunty

But he needs a separate article (or more) to himself. Any takers?

As you might expect, there is some fascinating stuff relating to clichés to be found on the Internet. If you want impress people with your taste for classical erudition, for example, I suggest you visit a site called *Classics Teachers’ Page* (<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/cliche.htm>), where you can pick up a handy selection of such phrases as

augean filth
Olympian detachment
saturnine character
Scylla and Charybdis
stentorian roar
stygian gloom,

and so on (about 70 of them).

A differently slanted Web site I like is that entitled *Children’s Answers to Clichés* (<http://www.nanceestar.com/KidsOnCliches.html>). This lists the answers a class of (U.S.) fourth-grade students gave when asked to provide original endings to some famous sayings.

Cast a glance at these literal but entertaining approaches:

A bird in the hand is . . .
(a real mess)
A rolling stone . . .
(plays the guitar)

Don’t bite the hand that . . .
(looks dirty)
I think, therefore I . . .
(get a headache)
If you lie down with the dogs . . .
(you’ll stink in the morning)
Laugh and the whole world
laughs with you; Cry and . . .
(you blow your nose)
To err is human . . .
(to eat a muskrat is not)
You can’t teach an old dog
new . . .
(math).

Before I wind up, just in case you want to explore the whole subject more thoroughly, let me quickly recommend a diverse quartet of cliché-oriented books.

First, Nigel Rees’ *The Joy of Clichés*. This funny book from 1984 provides “a complete user’s guide to clichés for every situation”, or at least for every British situation:

. . . step by step instructions offer advice on how best to employ them so that you will soon be able to speak and write clichés like a native. Emulate the masters of the art — top politicians, journalists, television personalities, trade unionists and romantic novelists to name but a few. Note how successful many cliché-users have become — the Queen, Arthur Scargill, Barbara Cartland, William Whitelaw — they must know what they’re doing!

The next two, let me warn you, take the opposing view to Rees —

namely that there is no fun whatsoever to be derived from using a cliché, only shame. Even so, both offer some groovy examples of the cliché-monger's art.

Naturally, there's Eric Partridge's *A Dictionary of Clichés*. My edition is a paperback of 1978, ISBN 0 7100 0049 9. It is a book "full of things better left unsaid", the publisher's blurb informs us, "hackneyed phrases, idioms battered into senselessness, infuriating Gallicisms, once-familiar quotations and, *longo intervallo*, tags from the ancient classics".

Now the *Thesaurus of Alternatives to Worn-Out Words and Phrases*, by Robert Hartwell Fiske (1998, ISBN 0 89879 601 6). "If our language seems languid, it's partly because our metaphors are moribund", says Fiske, so his aim is to help us avoid "reaching for the easy word or phrase rather than seeking the most accurate, most vigorous one".

A fourth book is Walter Redfern's *Clichés and Coinages* (1989, ISBN 0 631 15691 7), sadly already out of print. While not as straightforward to read as the others I've mentioned, Redfern's scholarly and thorough dissertation is well worth perusal. One of its strengths is its full bibliography,

which lists additional useful works (including many in French) few of which I was aware of.

Like Crystal, Redfern sees clichés as both "Musak of the mind" and assisting "social lubrication". But however you regard them,

. . . [t]hey are highly contagious, and there is no known immunity, except possibly silence . . . and even that only conceals the infection.

Finally, there is a little booklet from 1983 issued by the then Australian Broadcasting Commission. It's not exclusively about clichés (far from it), but *Watch Your Language!* (ISBN 0 642 97263 X) does open with a lovely cliché-saturated passage which went to air as a purported news item on the *AM* programme way back in 1971, on April Fool's Day. I commend it to you.

So where does all this leave us writers?

If "resisting clichés takes mental energy", as *CAESG* declares, the implication has to be, I presume, that when our brain gets weary we should give in and flaunt them.

Heck! My brain's been feeling tired for (p)ages . . .

— Harlish Goop

Bread

In the beginning is the word,
word begets word
and a poem quickens in my head
when I think of bread.

A shop window I pass daily
brims with bread:
a flood of loaves to feed a few.
Five once fed a multitude.
My family eats five and more a week.

I work no miracles but simply work:
words are my work
and daily I taste their bread
savouring texture and sound to glean
centuries of meaning from the grain.

The wisdom of worlds lived and gone
lives on in words.
Who touches the pulse in the heart
of the grain shares a perpetual feast
and bread eaten becomes bread given.

I crave my daily bread becomes
a poem in my head
and lives to quicken other hearts
to life — even one would be enough.
striving for each day's bread I hunger

for the whole slice, the full loaf,
not for bread alone
and not from greed: I taste it once
and want no more, no less, than to celebrate
each day the bread all families eat.

— Bet Briggs