

From the Back Verandah

Here again is the annual quiz. (Solution in November)

Kwizz Gig 4

1. What did composer Maurice Ravel do for harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler?
2. Which communication tool was invented by Ray Tomlinson in 1971?
3. Why was Marie Grosholtz often to be seen at the foot of the guillotine during The Terror?
4. What did Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) have in common?
5. Which jazz musician had the given names "Woodrow Charles"?
6. What was Chuneé doing with 152 balls?
7. How did Thomas Alva Edison combat his insomnia?
8. Which harpsichordist was executed in 1536?
9. Why is the military tank so called?
10. Which Australian singer was one of the original sixteen distinguished soloists for whom Vaughan Williams in 1938 composed his *Serenade to Music*?

— Fizzgig

BIKWIL

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Seven

Not the Seven Churches of Asia, nor the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Not the Seven Hills of Rome, either. What about the Seven Years War? No, not it. Not *The Magnificent Seven*. Not even the Seven Deadly Sins.

What then? Simply this: I reckon that on this seventh anniversary we all should congratulate ourselves on having made *Bikwil* the modest but addictive international success it has become. So here's to all of you. For my part, *Bikwil* has given me enduring satisfaction as I've brought to you the quiet

enthusiasms of readers like yourselves. It may be running on the smell of a few oily rags, but against all odds it *is* running.

And here's to another seven years. I having nothing to offer you but more of the same: essays, stories and poems — serious and whimsical — antidotes, all of them, to you know what.

Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to continue being part of our outrageous adventure.

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I thoroughly disapprove of duels. If a man should challenge me, I would take him kindly and forgivingly by the hand and lead him to a quiet place and kill him.

Mark Twain

A verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's written on.
Samuel Goldwyn

Quintessential Quirky Quotes

Monogamy leaves a lot to be desired.
Anonymous

For every credibility gap there is a gullibility fill.

Richard Clopton

In the nice-minded Department of Prunes and Prisms,
It's I for you
And euphemisms.

Ogden Nash

Colophon

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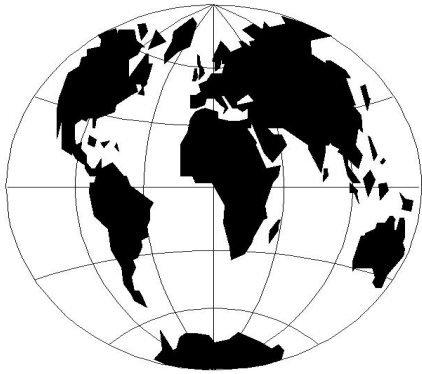
Web

Here are four sites bearing on English usage.

American Newspeak is a satirical ezine "celebrating cutting edge advances in Orwellian Doublethink, scavenged from the back pages of our finer newspapers". What more is there to say other than to remind you that this site is frequently updated with current examples and comment thereon?

Proudly displaying the motto "A society is as lax as its language", *The Vocabula Review* commits its efforts to spreading the good word about the proper use of English. It was fairly accurately described by one reviewer as "snooty but entertaining". What do you think?

"Entertaining, educational, and provocative", *The James Murray*



Line

Society has as its goal "to provide a safe harbor where those who care about English (and using it well) can share ideas, thoughts, questions . . . and take shelter from the storm" that seems to gather around doublespeak, vogue terms and other undesirable manifestations in the modern use of English.

"*The Rhetorica Network* offers analysis and commentary about the rhetoric, propaganda, and spin of journalism and politics, including analysis of presidential speeches and election campaigns." There are comprehensive news media links, a rhetoric textbook, together with a very useful primer of critical techniques. Run by Dr. Andrew R. Cline of Park University.

— TR

Internet sites referred to above:

<http://www.scn.org/newspeak/>
<http://www.vocabula.com/vocabulareview.htm>
<http://jms.webjump.com/>
<http://www.rhetorica.net/>

"A Word Spoken at the Right Moment Is like a Golden Apple on a Silver Dish"

[*Up-front Popularizers* No. 3]

The title of this essay is a Silesian proverb, quoted in one of his books by British linguist David Crystal. I've had occasion to mention Professor Crystal already in *Bikwil* (e.g. in my piece about clichés in Issue 20, July 2000), but if anyone in the language world deserves a *Bikwil* article to himself it is David Crystal. And what better place to publish it could there be than as part of the *Up-front Popularizers* series?

Born in 1941, Crystal has become internationally known not only for his research work in English language studies, but also for his application of linguistics in religious and educational situations, together with his promotion of a series of linguistic techniques for diagnostic, clinical and therapeutic uses. These days, he also edits general reference books, including *The*

New Penguin Encyclopaedia and *The Cambridge Biographical Dictionary*, for example. He also writes poetry and plays.

Although he is the author of hundreds of technical volumes and articles on linguistics, not unexpectedly it is the numerous works on language he has written for what we might call the "literate layperson" (e.g. your typical *Bikwil* reader) that have earned Crystal his widest renown, and that is why he belongs in *Up-front Popularizers*. I recently did a check of his Internet popularity by typing "david crystal" into Google. There were over fourteen thousand references. Not bad for a linguist.

I myself own several of his books in this easy-reading category, and I'm going to discuss each of these and hopefully give you some feeling for the sort of

subject he addresses and the decidedly effective way in which he does it. Before I do, though, I want to mention a few other reasonably “accessible” works of his that I hope to delve into when time and money permit. Those of you who enjoy my *Pink Shell-like* stuff might like to look out for mention of some of these in future columns.

Here they are:

- A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics
- Introduction to Language Pathology (with Rosemary Varley)
- Language and the Internet
- Language Death
- Discover Grammar (with Geoff Barton)
- Rediscover Grammar
- The Penguin Dictionary of Language

Turning now to the Crystal books I have in my home library, I’ll begin by looking at *Words on Words* (Hardcover ISBN: 0-14-029134-2), which he wrote in 1999 with his wife Hilary. This is the source of the quote that opens this essay. As the work’s title might have suggested to you, it is a book of quotations about language — the first of its kind, actually.

And what a great collection it is — over 5,000 quotations, “from sources as diverse as Plato and Winnie the Pooh”, as the publisher puts it. There are seven major topics, subdivided into 65 categories:

- Language
- Languages
- Analysing Language
- Good and Bad Language
- Words, Style Genre and Variety
- Postscript: Quoting and Misquoting.

While English-language authors strongly predominate, forty other nationalities are also represented. Where relevant, quotations are annotated with a brief description of the context, in order to aid in understanding of the full meaning.

There are three indexes: (a) Authors, (b) Sources and (c) Key Words, Phrases, and Concepts. The Key Words index is larger than that of most quotation books — huge in fact: 245 pages out of the book’s 580. It is designed not only to point us to quotations we might need on a specific topic, but also to help us find a quotation we only half-remember. To take a very simple example of the latter, this

- table [a motion]
- floor [an opponent]
- face [up to responsibilities]
- foot [the bill]

Verbs as nouns:

- [take a] walk
- [have a] good cry
- [be in a deep] sleep
- [make a] run [for it]

Yes, many times we use conversion without realising it. Look at this quintet of verbs in common use that were originally nouns. (The dates refer to the earliest verbal usage recorded by the *OED*.)

- contact (1834)
- focus (1807)
- house (1000)
- libel (1601)
- parent (1663)

David Crystal’s take (!) on conversion is worth reading:

Lexemes [i.e. minimal lexical units] can be made to change their word class without the addition of an affix — a process known as *conversion*. The items chiefly produced in this way are nouns, adjectives, and verbs — especially the verbs which come from nouns (e.g. *to bottle*) and the nouns which come from verbs (e.g. *a doubt*). Not all the all the senses of a lexeme are usually carried through to the derived form, however. The noun *paper* has several meanings, such as ‘newspaper’, ‘wallpaper’, and ‘academic article’. The verb *to paper* relates only to the second of these. Lecturers and editors may paper their rooms, not their audiences or readers.

(*Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, p. 129)

Of course, the older a given usage is, the more likely that it will be tolerated. But though it takes a while for such unconscious or reluctant acceptance to become established, anything is possible, I fear, given time. By now it’s too late for some words. Behold some contemporary uses of nouns as verbs that you may find as preposterous as I do.

- author (“our company authored the documentation”)
- conference (“please conference with your teacher and report”)
- dialogue (“let’s dialogue”)
- effort (“we’re efforting to work this out”)
- guilt (“she tried to guilt him into returning the money”)
- impact [*very common*] (“this will strongly impact the price of the company’s stock”)
- interface [*almost as common*] (“the managing editor must interface with a variety of freelance editors”)
- liaison (“he has agreed to liaison with the Division on behalf of those with problem cases.”)
- medal (“she’s certain to medal at the Athens Olympics”)
- task (“I have been tasked with a new project”)

I realise I’ve been preaching to the choir here, but there’s so much word tripe to enjoy out there. So don’t be surprised if you notice me waxing derisive in a future column.

Incidentally, this issue’s *Web Line* has some language sites you may be interested in exploring.

— Harlish Goop

A Word in Your Pink Shell-like

Yes, I wrote about it back in Issue 2, July 1997. But despite my long silence on this theme since then, it doesn't mean that the debate has not been on my wordster's mind.

In a nutshell, it's becoming even more popular today than it was in 1997 to draw attention to the widespread misuse of English. Current manifestations of this trend include recent publications like *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, by Lynne Truss (on punctuation) or Don Watson's *Death Sentence: the Decay of Public Language* (on "managerial" English).

Another common pet peeve you hear of is the use of nouns as verbs, and I must come clean: some of these I detest with a loathing you wouldn't believe — mainly the ones that exhibit laziness. My hatred of language laziness, I imagine, must have sprung from those years among Latin's nouns and verbs, with their five declensions, six cases, four conjugations, six tenses, two voices, three moods . . .

But this is *Bikwil*, and the editor won't permit naked negativism, though I've heard that I can moan a bit if I at least partly clothe my complaint in humour. Fortunately, some of these verbalising uses of nouns are so ludicrous that they are already down on their knees begging for the

"ha-ha response".

But, lest we mistakenly think that such usage is a 20th-century non-fictional Newspeak, developed from some Pentagon mind-game, let us remind ourselves: people have been doing it for ages. What's more, language scholars already have a word for it — *conversion*.

Here is a clear explanation by linguist Steve Seegmiller:

The process known as *conversion* — changing the part of speech of a word without changing its form — has a very long and honorable tradition in English. English happens to have no formal markers to tell us which words are nouns and which ones are verbs (unlike, say, Spanish, French, Italian, Russian, German, Turkish, and many other languages). This makes conversion so easy that English speakers have engaged in it for centuries, to the point where it is hard to think of any noun that cannot be used as a verb, and vice versa . . . English would not be English without these words, and without possessing the ability to make words by the same process.

(<http://www.linguistlist.org/~askling/archive-1998.1/msg00809.html>)

Examples he quotes, none of which we would ever dream of battling a pedantic eyelid at, include:

Nouns as verbs:
hand [a package]
book [into a hotel]

quote by Henry Ward Beecher "All words are pegs to hang ideas on" can be found in the Key Words index under *words*, *pegs* and *ideas*.

Here are a few choice quotations that have caught my eye during my many browsings:

The devil himself was learning the Basque language for seven years and then he only learned three words.

(Basque proverb)

It is the province of knowledge to speak and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.

(Oliver Wendell Holmes, snr.)

A sentence may be defined as a group of words, uttered in sequence, but without logical connection, to express an opinion or an emotion. A number of sentences if emitted without interruption becomes a conversation. A conversation prolonged over an hour or more becomes a gossip. A gossip, when shared by several persons, is known as a secret. A secret is anything known by a large and constantly increasing number of persons.

(Christopher Morley)

The circle of the English language has a well-defined centre but no discernible circumference.

(James Murray)

Propaganda is that branch of the art of lying which consists in nearly deceiving your friends without quite deceiving your enemies.

(Francis M. Cornford)

Words should be an intense pleasure, just as leather should be to a shoemaker.

(Evelyn Waugh)

The next book of Crystal's I'd like to look at is *English a Global Language* (1997, Hardback ISBN: 0-521-59247-X). Slight in size (150 pages), this book has nevertheless received a great deal of press coverage, perhaps because of its (for some) politically charged subject.

Politically charged?

I have beside me a review of *English a Global Language* that was published by Gordon Bilney in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 25 July 1998. Drawing on Crystal's Preface, he pointed out that the genesis of the book was in answer to a request by an organisation called US English whose members feared that English was running the risk of "losing the battle for linguistic supremacy . . . as the sole official language of the U.S."

Bilney went on to comment how disappointed the US English group would have been when they saw what Crystal had written. For one thing, Crystal is too objective and even-handed for people with a national cleaver to grind. Indeed, there is a section

about the “sole official language of the U.S.” debate towards the end of the book, where he concludes that

... in a climate where supporters of official English (no matter how moderate) have come to be routinely labelled ‘racist’, and immigrants wishing to use their own language (no matter how cultured) are castigated by such names as ‘welfare hogs’, it is difficult to see the grounds for compromise.

If English doesn’t need the help of an American law to rule the language roost after all, you might like to look in another political direction and speculate what the axe-at-the-ever-ready French think of the hegemony of English. (For a quick hint, look up *French* in the book’s index.)

The book addresses itself to three basic questions: What makes a world language? Why is English the leading candidate? Will it continue to hold that position?

Crystal maintains that what makes a global language depends primarily on who its speakers are, rather than on how many of them there are, or how easy it is to learn, or the size of its vocabulary, or what great literature has been written in it. “A language

becomes an international language for one chief reason: the political power of its people.” This might be military power or it might be economic power. Usually it’s both, supported by communication technologies (in the broadest sense of that term).

Why English, then? Because it was “in the right place at the right time”. Crystal devotes two chapters (the bulk of the book) to the history of growth of English’s dominance. Here is his summary:

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain had become the world’s leading industrial and trading country. By the end of the century, the population of the USA (then approaching 100 million) was larger than that of any of the countries of Western Europe, and its economy was the most productive and the fastest growing in the world. British political imperialism had sent English around the globe, during the nineteenth century, so that it was ‘a language on which the sun never sets’. During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted, almost single-handedly, through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower, and the language behind the US dollar was English.

The future of English as a (or the) global language, Crystal

overset by the shocking image it brought to mind (that a sister should be so lost to all sense of propriety!) and by George’s perverted enjoyment of it all. I was obliged then to repeat the psalm — I repeated it a full fifteen times if the truth be told — before I could finally pray for forgiveness.

When I walked into the music-room an hour or so later, I found everything in perfect readiness for the concert. The sofas had been pushed against the walls, rows of chairs set out, and the two instruments — one a grand pianoforte recently purchased from Broadwood, the other an older square pianoforte similar to my own instrument at Longbourn — had been placed at the far end of the room with a great urn of greenery positioned behind them.

So precisely placed, so polished did everything appear that I hesitated to sit down at the pianoforte to arrange my music. While a measure of calm had been restored to me — I was no longer angry with George — I had never felt less like performing. But the concert was less than three hours away — we would be dining at five o’clock — and I had vowed whilst in the chapel that I would

play as well as ever I could. This would probably be the last time that George and I made music together; I owed it to him — I owed it to myself — to give of my best.

With this resolve, I began my practice but whereas usually I could rely upon music to rescue me from myself, now it quite failed me. All I could think of was that in two days’ time the only friend I had in the world would be gone, that I had squandered the precious time remaining to us — I had insulted him and slapped him and pinched him — and that it was all Elizabeth’s fault. She had behaved disgracefully, and I ought never to have blamed George for spying on her — no self-respecting eleven-year-old boy (however sensible and clever) could be expected to resist such temptation.

And just as I determined to go in search of him to apologize, the door opened and Smythe (looking mildly aggrieved) poked her head around. She had been looking for me everywhere. It was now a quarter after three and my hot bath was rapidly cooling.

— Jennifer Paynter

we swayed about for a minute or so. His face was bright with nasty excitement, and even though his grip hurt, I was glad I had succeeded in provoking him. “Peeping Tom,” I panted.

But then just as suddenly as he had grabbed me, he let me go, turning back to the window and — as if in turn doing his utmost to provoke me — opened it as wide as its hinges would permit and leaned out to better view the lovers.

I ran from the room then — had I not done so, I felt I might have pushed him headlong out the window — but on reaching the door I heard him say (in pretty much normal tones), “Where are you going?”

“Anywhere! — I don’t care — so I no longer have to endure your company.”

“I shouldn’t go to the music-room,” he advised, still in a normal almost friendly fashion. “The servants will be setting out the chairs.”

“That will not bother me in the least!”

He shrugged and turned back to his window. I was frantically thinking of something I could say that would really hurt him. But all

I could think of was the childish taunt that I was glad he was going to London.

When he declined to answer, I slammed the door. I did not go to the music-room, however. I could not at that moment have sat down to play music to save my life. Instead, I went to a small room on the first floor which a previous owner of Netherfield had caused to be fitted up as a chapel. The room was never used for worship by any member of the present household, but occasionally George and I went there to play upon an old spinet which, when shut up in its oak case, had been designed to resemble a Bible.

I was desperate to sit quietly, to check my murderous thoughts — the desire to defenestrate George had not altogether left me — I needed to pray for calm, even if I was not yet ready to pray for forgiveness. As always, it was the psalmist’s words which brought relief: *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help . . .*

After reciting the entire psalm aloud, I prayed in silence for several minutes. I sought pardon for Elizabeth — for her wanton conduct — only to be once more

says, carries with it with some risks. These include widespread concerns that it will “maintain . . . in a linguistic guise the chasm between rich and poor” (linguistic power), that it will encourage people to be even lazier than they already are about learning other languages (linguistic complacency), and that it will make all other languages unnecessary (linguistic death).

It’s now time for us to move on to another of Crystal’s books — *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (1987, Paperback ISBN: 0-521-42443-7).

And what an appealing volume it is — 470 large format pages filled with easy to absorb essays and side-bars on every aspect of language imaginable, illustrated by over 600 maps, diagrams and photographs. And like other works I’m discussing here, it is written in a manner that will attract the beginning linguistics undergraduate and the amateur language student alike. Any technical language used is fully explained.

Here are the major categories Crystal deals with:

Popular Ideas about Language
Language and Identity
The Structure of Language
The Medium of Language:
 Speaking and Listening
The Medium of Language:
 Writing and Reading
The Medium of Language:
 Signing and Seeing
Child Language Acquisition
Language, Brain and Handicap
The Languages of the World
Language in the World
Language and
 Communication.

A listing like that above may give you an idea of the scope of this book, but it can do little justice to its *flavour*, so I think I should try to demonstrate it by quotations from some of the articles.

The first is from Chapter 12, *Stylistic Identity and Literature*, and Crystal is discussing the language of various literary genres:

The creativity poets seek takes many forms. It may involve the invention of totally new linguistic features, as in the neologistic vocabulary of James Joyce, or the typographical design of a poem by e.e. cummings. But it more often takes the form of a fresh use of familiar language, as when John Donne compares himself and his mistress to the legs on a pair of compasses, or T.S. Eliot’s Prufrock compares the

evening laid out against the sky to 'a patient etherised upon a table'. Above all else, poets fear banality. Whatever the literary era or tradition in which they find themselves, they are concerned to avoid what is linguistically boring or predictable, and to discover ways in which words can come alive, to convey fresh worlds of meaning. T.S. Eliot's phrase vividly captures the essence of their predicament: 'the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings'.

Here is quite a different sort of passage from Chapter 15, *The Statistical Structure of Language*:

Take a text, in any language, and count the words. Order the words in terms of decreasing frequency. According to statistical prediction, the first 15 words will account for 25% of the text. The first 100 words will account for 60%; and the first 4,000 will account for 97.5%. In short samples, however, considerable variation from these proportions will be found.

The next extract, a somewhat disenchanting one, is from Chapter 18, *Dictionaries*:

For a book that is viewed with a level of respect normally accorded only to the Bible, it is remarkable how casually dictionary-users treat their dictionaries. When people are asked what factors govern their choice of dictionary, most cite linguistically irrelevant matters, such as price, pictorial content, and size —

not in terms of the number of entries, but whether it would fit on a shelf, or in a pocket. Many people expect a dictionary to contain encyclopaedic information about historical events, people, and places. Most admit they have never bothered to read the Preface to their dictionary — the place where the layout and conventions of the book are systematically explained. As a consequence they are unable to say what the various abbreviations and symbols mean, or why they are there. The general conclusion is inescapable: most people who would check out every tiny feature of their new car before buying it are unaware of the power that lies under the bonnet of their dictionary.

A more optimistic feeling pervades the following paragraph from the same chapter:

The 1980s will one day be seen as a watershed in lexicography — the decade in which computer applications began to alter radically the methods and potential of lexicography. Gone are the days of painstaking manual transcription and sorting on paper slips: the future is on disk, in the form of vast lexical databases, continuously updated, that can generate a dictionary of given size and scope in a fraction of the time it used to take. Special programs will become available enabling people to ask the dictionary special questions (such as: 'find all the words that entered the language in 1964' or 'find all words ending in -esse'). Access to large machine-dictionaries will

appeared, walking from the direction of the stables. The figure straight away emerged from the shadow of the wall (I saw then that it was indeed Elizabeth) whereupon Mr Coates, glancing to left and right (but not, mercifully, upwards) went swiftly to her, taking her arm and leading her — bundling her almost — along the path to the orchard. I could barely make them out once they had reached the cover of the trees, but George continued to peer after them.

"Well?" I whispered, and then in a normal voice: "Can you still see them?"

He did not reply, so intent was he on looking.

"George?"

He pulled shut the window and I could see at once that he no longer appeared sulky and despairing — in fact quite the reverse. "Seems my mother was in the right of it after all."

"What do you mean by that, pray?"

"Good heavens, Mary, they were kissing! Don't pretend you didn't see."

"I don't believe you!"

He shrugged. "Have it your way." I heard him mutter something in which the word 'blind' was clearly audible.

"What? What did you say?" (He had now turned back to the window and so incensed was I that I actually slapped his arm.) "You and your *sotto voce* rude remarks! *What did you say, George Allardyce?*"

"Oh stow it." He was once more intent on looking out.

I managed to control myself from slapping him again, but the sight of his obstinate back — so upright whilst spying on my sister — provoked me into saying. "How dare you speak to me like that! You know that I cannot see as well as most people, and yet you can say *that* to me. And just look at you! the use you're putting *your* eyes to! Oh! you should be ashamed."

He ignored this, whereupon I pinched him — I confess it — but the shame of Elizabeth's behaviour — of his witnessing it — enraged me so. "You're no better than Peeping Tom!"

He turned then and grasped both my wrists — he was surprisingly strong despite his slight build, far stronger than me — and

voice was not quite steady. “Nonna says she will not go with us. She will remain here with my uncle.”

“Mr Coates means to stay on at Netherfield then?” I had not expected this.

He was fiddling with the window-catch, twisting it this way and that. “Mama says it is because of your sister — she says he cannot bear to leave his little Lizzy. She calls your sister *la lucertola*, ‘the lizard’ you understand — cold-blooded and with black unblinking eyes. She was harping on about her forever last night.”

“Oh George. It is all so horrid.”

We stood for a while in silence, George continuing to play with the window-catch. I felt sick in my stomach still, unable to think calmly. The tangle of loves and jealousies was past understanding — certainly past the understanding of my twelve-year-old self. If Mrs Allardyce loved Mr Coates, why was she marrying Mr Purvis? If not, why was she so jealous of Elizabeth? And did Nonna too still love Mr Coates? Why else had she chosen to remain at Netherfield? And what were Mr Coates’s feelings

towards both of them? What were his feelings towards Elizabeth?

George meanwhile had pushed open the window and was now looking out intently across the yard (the schoolroom overlooked the rear of the building, facing towards the coach-house and stables and beyond them, the walled kitchen garden and orchard).

“Mary,” said he suddenly, speaking very soft. “Come and look here.”

“What is it?” All I could see was one of the grooms leading Mr Coates’s horse back to the stable-yard.

“Your sister Elizabeth,” he whispered. “Cannot you see?”

I could then (but dimly) make out the figure of a girl standing very still beside a clump of hollyhocks in the shadow of the garden wall. “Are you sure it is her?”

“For heaven’s sake, Mary! Cannot you *see*?”

“No,” I whispered, annoyed. “Plainly I cannot!”

He was immediately contrite. “I did not mean to speak sharp. But it is her, I swear.”

We both watched, and after about a minute Mr Coates

become routine in offices and homes. One day, we shall not look up a word in a dictionary on a shelf but ask our home computer for the information we need. That day is not far off.

I have left the best-known Crystal book, and my favourite, till last — *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (1995, Paperback ISBN: 0-521-59655-6).

This celebrated book offers a unique experience of the English language in all its richness and diversity. Clear and accessible, it abounds with insights into how the language evolved and how it works. The *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* is the most comprehensive general reference book on the history, structure, and worldwide use of English ever written.

(from the publisher’s blurb)

. . . bedazzles . . . with an eye-popping presentation of . . . the mother tongue.

(*New York Times*)

I have been unable to think of a question this book cannot answer . . . I will risk predicting that Professor Crystal will not be superseded much before the message sent into space on Voyager I . . . receives an answer.

(*Times Literary Supplement*)

These are extracts from just three of the hundreds of published comments on Crystal’s

most famous work. Similar in outward appearance and internal design to the *Encyclopedia of Language* and with almost the same number of pages, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (*CEEL*, pronounced “seal”) is likewise a truly remarkable book — both in its scope and in its treatment.

As we did above, let’s examine some of its chapter headings. There are six Parts, subdivided into 24 Chapters (plus Appendices):

- The History of English
- English Vocabulary
- English Grammar
- Spoken and Written English
- Using English
- Learning about English.

You might perhaps be wondering how much overlap there is with the *Encyclopedia of Language*. Let me reassure you: there’s very little. The approach and writing style are certainly the same, but with one or two rare exceptions that’s as far as overlap goes. One book is general linguistics, the other a study of a particular language.

In his helpful Preface to *CEEL*, Crystal states his methodology:

I have tried to find a balance between talking about the language and letting the language speak for itself. Most spreads distinguish between an expository overview and detailed examples (largely through the typographic convention of main text vs panels). Then within each spread, I have tried to provide examples of the wonder which can be found when we begin to look carefully at the language. All languages are fascinating, beautiful, full of surprises, moving, awesome, fun. I hope I have succeeded in provoking at least one of these responses on every page. I would be disappointed if, after opening, a reader did not feel to some extent entertained, as well as informed.

(The word *spread* in that quotation refers to the double-page layout of each sub-topic.)

O.K., does he succeed?

Well, you know what my answer's going to be, and here are a few extracts to provide some evidence.

From *English during the Renaissance*, in Chapter 5, *Early Modern English*:

During the 16th century there was a flood of new publications in English, prompted by a renewed interest in the classical languages and literatures, and in the rapidly developing fields of science, medicine, and the arts. This period, from the time of

Caxton until around 1650, was later to be called the 'Renaissance', and it included the Reformation, the discoveries of Copernicus, and the European exploration of Africa and the Americas. The effects of these perspectives on the English language were immediate, far-reaching, and controversial.

From *Lexical Creation*, in Chapter 9, *The Sources of the Lexicon*:

Reliable comparative statistics are not yet available, but there does seem to have been a trend towards the increased use of affixes as a means of word-formation in English in the last decade or so. The trend looks set to continue.

The picture shows a sponsored reading aloud of the whole of *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* in ten hours by a team of over 300 people at the Ucheldre Centre in Holyhead, N Wales in August 1992. The organizers might have called it *Encyclopedia-aid*, but they chose *Encyclopediathon*. By the time the occasion was over, several other novelty lexemes had been coined, including:

encyclopedialicious
encyclopediaboom
encyclopediarama
encyclopediaspeak
encyclopediaism.

It was an honest occasion, in aid of charity, and so fortunately there was no *encyclopediagate*.

"I have heard the news, George." (I spoke as if to one bereaved.) "I hope it may not be true."

He continued silent for several moments and then burst out: "I knew it could not possibly last — living in the country and all of us together. But I did think — I *hoped* — it would have lasted longer than this."

I did not pretend to misunderstand him. "But is it absolutely certain? They are officially engaged?"

"Oh yes, and there was the most fearful row because Nonna and Uncle Jasper would not agree to it being announced here this evening — and so my mother went and asked Sir William Lucas and he has agreed to speak —"

"Sir William! Pray what has he to do with anything?"

"He has known Purvis forever — they were in business together." A pause and then he burst out afresh: "How *could* she though? A man like Purvis — a fat old clown with dyed hair who talks only of profit and loss —"

"Dear George." I pressed his hand. "When is the wedding to be?"

"I neither know nor care."

After a few moments however he said: "We are to remove to London the day after tomorrow. He has taken a house for us in Berkeley Square —"

"So soon!"

"You must write to me, Mary."

"Of course, of course I shall." The realization that he would be gone in two days was making me feel slightly ill.

"Mama says Sam and I are to have our own ponies and ride in the park every day — trying to turn us up sweet. And Sam is such a gaby, he thinks everything will be jolly and we will all live happily ever after."

I longed to put my arms about him, but he was wearing his sulky touch-me-not look. Instead I said: "It might not be so bad, you know. Your mama has always worried about money and now perhaps she will be happy."

It was a pathetic attempt to console him; I did not believe it for a moment and his reply was justly scornful. "My mother cannot be happy for two days together. You know it as well as I do." He had moved away from me and when he next spoke, his

Mary Bennet

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George was not waiting to welcome me when I arrived at Netherfield. (The horses had been needed on the farm the entire morning and as a consequence I did not leave Longbourn until well after midday.) And of Sam, Nonna, Mrs Allardyce and Mr Coates there was equally no sign. The servants however were very much in evidence attending to final preparations for the dinner, and now Nonna's personal maid, Smythe, came up to me and said that Nonna and Mrs Allardyce were shut up in their apartments and not to be disturbed, and that Mr Coates had gone out riding. And although previously it had been arranged that I would spend the night at Netherfield, and the bedchamber next to Nonna's assigned to me, now Smythe told me that no orders had been given for the room to be prepared.

"I am very sorry, Miss, but we've all been in uproar here — what with Master Sam fancying himself sick and calling for soups

and jellies and wanting his forehead sprinkled with lavender water — you'll pardon me for saying so, but you are by way of being one of the family — and one minute we're told one thing and the next, another."

Smythe was my favourite amongst the Netherfield servants, being both kind-hearted and efficient, and I was not afraid, for once, to speak up for myself: "I will at least need a room this evening in which to change my gown, Smythe."

"Of course, Miss, and I mean to wait on you myself — Mrs Rossi particularly asked that I help with your toilet — and if you are agreeable, I will draw a bath for you at three and dress your hair. You'll find Master George in the school-room, Miss."

And so I did. He was standing at the window with his face turned away but I realized at once that he had been crying. I went to him directly and took his hand and he seemed to welcome the contact though he said nothing.

From *Naming Fashions*, in Chapter 10, *Etymology*:

Some names are regionally distinctive: *Kylie* is an Australian name, but it began to become popular in Britain in the late 1980s as a result of the fame of Australian actress and singer, Kylie Minogue (1969 -). The meaning of the name is obscure: it may derive from an Aboriginal word for 'boomerang', or be an adaptation of another names, such as *Kyle* or *Kelly*.

From *The Articles*, in Chapter 16, *The Structure of Sentences*:

The article is often omitted in idiomatic usage when talking about human institutions and routines, means of transport, periods of time, meals, and illnesses:

go to bed
travel by car
at dawn
in winter
have lunch
caught pneumonia

A common error of non-native learners of English is to introduce an article in those cases where it is impossible or inappropriate, as in **I shall go to the bed now, *I have caught a pneumonia*.

Just before we leave *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, I ought to mention the variety exhibited in the splendid illustrative material that

is integral to the work's overall fascination. In addition to the many photographs (including one page of eight photos of people who've given their names to eponyms, and another showing six photos of different signatures from the hand of Shakespeare), there is a picture of the organs of speech, a table of letter frequencies in English, loads of newspaper and magazine headlines, word games, comic strips and cartoons galore, street signs, some graffiti, many, many maps (including one showing examples of foreign words borrowed by English), — plus scores and scores more.

So, why is it my favourite Crystal book? Firstly, I have a deep-seated interest in the English language and it continues to satisfy that; secondly, it's a big book, and thorough; thirdly, it's eminently browsable. Yes, I dip into this wonderful book often — I just open it at random and start reading.

Look, if you only ever buy one book on the English language, make it this one.

— Harlish Goop

Hooked on Jazz

[No. 2]

My interest in jazz started as a mild affliction and gradually developed into a mild addiction.

As a teenager I loved listening to Louis Armstrong play his cornet, but was not too fussed with his singing: it took me a while to appreciate and enjoy that aspect of his music.

Then — I suspect it was round 1960 — I heard Kenny Ball and His Jazzmen perform their version of *Midnight in Moscow* and I was well and truly hooked. I joined a jazz record club and listened to whatever jazz I could hear on the radio (my only source was the dear old

ABC), and this opened up all the varying forms of the music to me. I discovered such great musicians as Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Oscar Peterson, Zoot Sims and Keith Jarrett, etc., etc. I now have a collection of about 200 jazz CDs.

These days I particularly enjoy listening to the music of some wonderfully talented Australian jazz musicians. If we rewarded their talents the same way as we reward our sportsmen, a lot of these musicians would be millionaires.

A rather sad comment on our priorities.

— Col White

After Rain

Once more
 small precious gems
 on thirsting stems
 restore
 the vital strain
 that floods through vein
 of stem and leaf,
 pursue the thief
 which wore
 the petal's blush
 away, to crush
 the core
 of its delight.
 Oh, that rain might,
 to this bare field
 my heart, so yield
 its store
 and heart regain
 its vital strain
 once more.

— Bet Briggs