

THE GOLDEN APPLE

No. Five

Apr. 1962

"What modern cat in this puny age, / Could play a beard upon the stage?"

This unpretentious screed, intended to be circulated with DISCORD, is composed and stencilled by Eldrin Fzot, who may be reached by means of letters addressed to him at 402 Maple Avenue, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Opinions and sentiments expressed by this publication do not, necessarily, reflect the true opinions and sentiments of the editor. I hope someone out there appreciates the wry, bitter, truth of those words. These days, if you say what you really think, the tab can get so steep it's not worth it.

I have often considered the possible benefits and consequences of holding forth for a few paragraphs on the subject of words that seem to give a lot of trouble to writers and would-be writers. Experience has shown that if you venture to set yourself up on a pedestal as a czar of grammatic usage, you gets rocks chunked at you every time you waver in the slightest from the paths of strict rectitude. Since I find myself on this path only fleetingly, I am understandably hesitant about dispensing dictums (dicta?) along these lines. But, if I may reserve the privilege of making a few mistakes myself in the future, we could discuss a few mistakes I've made or noticed in the past.

One of the most baleful words ever grafted onto the English language is the adjective, "naive." Relatively few people can both spell and pronounce this little stinker correctly; however, many can do one or the other. The writer who has encountered it only in verbal form, i.e., spoken, tends to go into deep funk if he has to spell it. The odds against hitting the right combination out of chance are astronomical. It's apt to come out 'nyeve,' or 'neieve,' or worse. It is a grim jest of creation that, before you can look a word up in a dictionary to find out how it's spelled, you have to know how to spell the damn' thing to find it. Conversely, the person who's encountered the word only in print is apt to find himself on thin ice if he essays to use it in conversation. The best course in such a case is to substitute the word, 'simple,' which means about the same thing and which is infinitely more manageable. Technically, naive is spelled with a special kind of lower-case letter "i," having not one but two dots over it. The purist can achieve this on stencil by filling in the single dot with corflu and chiselling the double dots into place with a good, sharp icepick and the steady hand of a brain surgeon. Some opine that the game is not worth the candle. You can closely approximate proper pronunciation by saying "nah-EEV," with the "a" sounded the same as in "arm." Some say "nigh-EEV," which is acceptable in all but the loftiest cultrual circles. The quality of being naive, that is to say, an act or state of artlessness, is called "naiveté." This is vocalized more or less as "nah-EEV'tay," sometimes "nigh-EEV-uh-tay," but we suggest the use of "innocence," if in doubt. To bungle the spelling or speaking of naive is to be naive.

By that same token, it is asinine to spell "assinine" with two esses, but many people try it every year. Another quirk which betrays a shaky hand on the literary reins is the improper handling of "its" and "it's." It's perfectly proper to say "it's" as a contraction for "it is," but the apostrophe is missing from its customary place if you are using "its" in the possessive sense.

TGA 5/2

Another pitfall is our old friend, "etc." The delusion that the c comes in front of the t is at least as widely held as the delusion that the painting, La Gioconda--often called the Mona Lisa--represents the Virgin Mary. The abbreviation "etc.," stands for "et cetera," and this, in turn, means "and other things." It's often translated as "and so forth," and it would be correct--though unusual--to abbreviate it as "et c." It's frequently telescoped into one word: etcetera, and the abbreviation may make use of the ampersand (&) in place of "et," which means "and" in Latin. If you wish to represent a progression of permutations by saying "and so forth and so forth and so forth," it is customary (though not mandatory) to write: etc., &c., &c. I've known people who would lace their conversation with the arresting sound of EKKT every dozen words or so and I recall, with a small cold shudder, one particular speaker--a college professor at Ohio State, who really ought to have known better--who concluded 87.3% of his sentences with ECCK-SETRA. Another was addicted to "if you please" in place of the humble period, but professorial foibles deserve a monograph of their own.

I well recall the time when I had to use the word perennial and I was quite unsure of how the letters went together. I hunted vainly for it in Webster's pages. Finally my wife came to my assistance and suggested I'd find it quicker under the p-e-r section than the p-r-e. The words which give me the most trouble are those with doubled letters out in the middle: colossal, sheriff, terrific, etc. Others are those elusive little buggers which end in -ence or -ance. As I scan back through stuff I wrote 10 or 12 years ago, I wince at the profusion of "enviornment," "iorny," "aporn," "personnell," ect.

"That was the year I was a semaphore in high school."

D I S C O R D
Redd Boggs
2209 Highland place N. E.
Minneapolis 21, Minnesota

RETURN REQUESTED

Dick Schultz
19159 Helen
Detroit 34, Michigan



"Like in that book, THE SEARCH FOR AUDIE MURPHY."
