

WONDER WORDS



All the Poems of John Robert Colombo (2005)

Parts of the World (2006)

Autumn in August (2007)

End Notes (2008)

A Far Cry (2009)

End of Greatness (2010)

Entresol (2011)

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A Standing Wave (2013)

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Late in the Day (2015)

Immense Estates (2016)

Here for Now (2017)

More of Less (2018)

Future Considerations (2019)

Remains to Be Seen (2020)

No Longer Now (2021)

Every Other Word (2021)

All Over Once Again (2022)

A World Elsewhere (2023)

Wonder Words (2023)

Wonder Words

John Robert Colombo

Colombo & Company

2023

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ISBN-10 1-894540-96-4
ISBN-13 978-1-894540-96-4
EAN 9781894540964

< www.colombo.ca >
< jrc.colombo.ca >

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42 Dell Park Avenue
Toronto M6B 2T6 Canada

Cover Design: Bill Andersen

Dedication:
To the Spirit and Spunk of OULIPO

Printed in Canada.

Do you still not know how, on earth, nothing that delights is lasting?

Apollo's rhetorical question asked of Orpheus in Claudio Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo*. The English translation of the passage in the libretto, composed in Italian in 1607, runs like this: "Do you still not know how, / On earth, nothing that delights is lasting?" Music critic Alex Ross, "The Shakespeare of Opera," *The New Yorker*, 13 Nov. 2017, recalls it musically as "Nothing delightful here below here endures."

Man appoints, and God disappoints; or, before we can turn about, our consistencies and our wishes have been otherwise than we anticipated.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German man-of-letters, 6 Nov. 1830, *Conversations with Eckermann and Soret* (London, 1850) translated by John Oxenford.

The poplar is looking at my window. / The leaves are whispering about something, / The sky is full of shining stars, / Darling, where are you now?

Lines from the lyrical poem "Again, as Before," aka "Again, as Before, Alone," composed by the Ukrainian poet Danyl Ratgauz, one of the "Six Romances" (Opus 73, No. 6) that P.I. Tchaikovsky set to music in April-May 1893. The set of compositions brings to mind Richard Strauss's posthumously performed *Four Last Songs* (1950) also based on lyrical texts.

I once knew a Scotch sailmaker who was certain, dead sure, there were people in Mars. If you asked him for some idea of how they looked and behaved, he would get shy and mutter something about “walking on all-fours.”

Marlow, narrator of Joseph Conrad’s novel, *Heart of Darkness* (1912).

Asia, Asia, Asia,
Age-old marvelous land of old wives’ tales,
Where fantasy like a princess lies asleep
Lost in the deep forest of mysteries.

Opening lines of Tristan Klingsor’s poem “Asie” (Asia), translated from the French, set to music by composer Maurice Ravel for his song cycle *Shéhérazade* (1903).

The search will continue. Not until the empirical resources are exhausted, need we pass on to the dreamy realms of speculation.

Edwin Hubble, observational astronomer who distinguished between stellar dust and the stellar stars of entire galaxies, when both were known as “nebulae,” *The Realm of the Nebulae* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1936).

Then it is dark; it is a night where kings in golden suits ride elephants over the mountains.

Last sentence of John Cheever’s short story “A Country Husband” (1954) collected in *A Vision of the World: Selected Short Stories of John Cheever* (1978).

Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it.
[Repeat.]

Note in the sketchbook of artist Jasper Johns dated 1964, quoted by Susan Tallman, “The House that Johns Built,” *The New York Review of Books*, 13 Jan. 2022.

It seems to be a mixture of theosophy & primal scream therapy & disco dancing the well-known techniques of sects of fixation on a father figure, restructuring of the personality in group sessions, clique solidarity & an excuse for obstreperous behaviour not normally tolerated in the dour conformity of Islam

Sufism described by the late adventurer and Orientalist Bruce Wannell in a letter to a friend written in 1991 as quoted by Robert Irwin in his review of *Tales from the Life of Bruce Wannell* (2020) edited by editors Barnaby Rogerson and Rose Baring, “Freelancer, Freeloader, Free Spirit,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8 Jan. 2021.

Nonsense suggesting sense is a familiar pattern. Nonsense suggesting the numinous is not.

Adam Gopnik, essayist, comparing and contrasting the artistic expressions of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear, “Knowing Mr. Lear,” *The New Yorker*, 23 April 2018.

What matters is not the identity of the sacred object but the transfiguring intensity of the gaze fixed upon it.

Alex Ross, music reviewer, discussing the imagery of film

director Andrei Tarkovsky, “The Icon-Maker,” *The New Yorker*, 15 & 22 Feb. 2021.

I would like to write as if I had remained silent.

Statement made by the Hungarian poet János Pilinszky as quoted by Peter Sherwood in his appreciation, “Lost Diamond: A Centenary of János Pilinszky,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, 26 Nov. 2021.

Neurosis is the inability to tolerate ambiguity.

Attributed to the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud by biographer Peter Salmon in *An Event Perhaps: A Biography of Jacques Derrida* (2020).

The eye teaches scepticism; the eyelid teaches faith.

Stanley Cavell, philosopher, quoted by Christopher Benfey, “The Hum of Humanity,” *The New York Review of Books*, 12 May 2022.

You must overcome the past by doing something in the present that helps you in the future.

Psychotherapeutic approach to depression and anxiety articulated by Bertrand Piccard, Swiss psychiatrist, explorer, and environmentalist, quoted by Ben Taub, “Close to the Sun,” *The New Yorker*, 10 Oct. 2022.

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A - Z

A

A

It is often the case and so oddly interesting and that the prefix *a* turns a positive word into a negative word, whereas the suffix *ana* adds the positive meaning of *the study of*.

Absence

The absence of an amazing presence is in itself an amazing astonishment.

Most difficult is the task of illustrating the absence of an anticipated presence.

Abstract Expressionism

Abstract Expressionism had a great run in New York City and its environs from the 1940s to the 1970s or so. The style of painting so dominated so many arts scenes in so many Western cities that it was soon dubbed by artists working in unrelated fields to be best called Abstract Suppressionism.

Acadia

It happened at some long forgotten prehistoric time that the realm of Arcadia turned into the domain of Acadia.

Accounting

You can always add more but then you can never add less.

Adulterine

There are two words here: *adultery* and *adulterine*. Every adult reader intrinsically knows the meaning of the first word, though he or she will have to strive and strain to understand the meaning of the second word.

Advanced Degrees

John Robert Colombo, etc., et cetera, etcetera, etceteras

Aesthetic Experience

To recite a poem, to read a work of fiction, to view a painting, to listen to a musical composition, to appreciate a ballet is to leave one's nightmare and enter into someone else's daydream.

Affairs

Our lives consist of a series of sad affairs, some of them sexual in nature, all of them sooner or later sadder for sure.

Affirmative Action

The social policy of "Affirmative Action" was so named in the United States in 1935 and was legislatively enacted by the Kennedy administration in 1961. Since then there has been an "Affirmative *Reaction*," to coin a phrase – and ever since then what a headache both Action and Reaction have been!

Affluence

There is quite a marked difference between affluence and flatulence. It might be dubbed the difference between molto wealth and ill-health.

After & Before

“After Walt Whitman” means the passage that follows the adverb *after* has been inspired by the American bard. “Before Walt Whitman” is meaningless except to the extent that the passage that follows the adverb *before* was written in imitation of the Good Gray Poet though it could not have been written prior to his birth. I spent some time and effort to imagine an instance in which this impossibility, this instance of future prediction, could legitimately occur, but I failed to do so.

Afterlife

It might be “heaven” in the singular or plural in the “heavens.” It might be one way or the other. What we expect or at least suspect is that the afterlife may be plural or multiple like “hell” or “hades” or “Armageddon” or Megiddo in the Middle East or “nowhere and nothing at all.”

Age

After the age of eighty there is no part of me that works properly on its own or properly in the presence of the other parts. Why this should be so, I do not know. It’s a cheat, or a *chouse*, it is!

When I was a youngster, I desperately wanted to be a lot older (but certainly not as old as the oldster that I now am).

Our age is not a period of time but an exclamation mark in the passage of time.

Agnize

I've been speaking English and no other language all my life (so far anyway) without once encountering the word *agnize*. It turns out it is a legitimate word, not a neologism, and its meaning may be guessed at because it looks like part of the extended word *agonize* which offers the key to its meaning: *realize, recognize*. This is the first time I am putting the word *agnize* to use. It might well be the last time!

Aguish & Anguish

Aguish is frequently confused with *anguish*. The former word (which recalls *ague*) refers to a feverish or shivering fit; the latter word refers to mental or physical pain and suffering. An interesting distinction.

Alien Beings

No one who is alive today will ever know if we are alone in the universe. But it is possible that our dim and distant descendants, whether recognizably human or not, will know

for certain, one way or the other. They themselves, our progeny, may be the aliens.

Alienation

I am not an alien being but a human being, though I do admit to being a being, that is, alienated much of the time.

Aliquot

The other day my wife asked me to define the word “aliquot” because I had used it in a poem and she did not recognize it. Checking its entry in our two-volume *Oxford English Dictionary*, I discovered the word is old, it dates back to the Sixteenth Century, and it is a practical term, being used in chemistry to refer to “the portion of a potion,” “a portion of a solution,” “a factor, a divisor,” *i.e.*, “a specimen or a sample of a whole.” Simply put, it is a part of something bigger than itself.

All

“That is all, but it is not everything – or ever even enough.”

Alone among Many

It is the secret of the saint though not that of the martyr to regard oneself as alone among many. At any one time it is difficult to find a quorum or jury of adults who have attained

that level of being or of conscious awareness.

Alphabet

The universe is composed of matter and energy, but what constitutes my particular world is all the letters of the alphabet of the single but secure language that I speak and write with a clear delight and a little difficulty.

A More Perfect Union

There is a grammatical error in the opening words of the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America. The Preamble begins most memorably: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity,” etc. The error lies in the use of the word “perfect.” “Perfect” is perfection in itself and cannot be made “more perfect.” Words come as positive, comparative, or superlative, and “perfect” is already superlative. Yet it is a striking phrase, finalized in September 1787.

Anagrams

What can we make of some of the anagrams of some of the world’s capital cities? Let’s see. Amsterdam is SMART DANCE. Athens is HASTEN. Budapest is PUB DATES. Buenos Aires is SENIOR ABUSE. Cape Town is WE CAN

TOP. Copenhagen is OPEN CHANGE. Ottawa is AT A TWO. New Delhi is WHEN I LED. Paris is PAIRS. Prague is A PURGE. Rome is MORE. Washington is SAW NOTHING. Wellington is WELL TONING. What can we make of these? Nothing! Nothing at all, it seems!

Angels

Angels are the spirits of human beings ascending; ghosts are the spirits of human beings descending.

Anger

The Anger of the Gods oils the wheels of hate to make them run faster, whereas the Grace of the Angels adds sand, gravel, or salt to retard their turning.

There is an expression “good and mad” that amuses me because it should be “good and bad” if only because being angry or being mad is a cause that serves no useful purpose at all.

Anthology

An *olio* is another word for an anthology, a collection of things that may be of literary interest. This book that you are reading (or skimming) is an *olio* of odds and ends largely

devoted to language and culture.

Anthropology

Anthropology is the scientific study of mankind's cultures and civilizations. It began to take shape in the last quarter of the 19th century, the same period that Theosophy and subsequently its offshoot Anthroposophy were founded as cultural movements.

Antipodes

Immensities and intensities are obverses. Indeed they are the cosmic antipodes.

Black and White are antipodes ... as are Black and Might ...
Black and Right ... Might and White ... Right and White.

Aperçu

An *aperçu* is defined as a brief and entertaining observation or remark. I like to think it describes many of the thoughtful witticisms in this collection.

Aphorisms

I continue to write aphorisms like this one and the other ones in this collection in order to keep mentally alert.

Appetite

In the singular, *appetency* refers to the pressing need for food or for a specialized desire that will not be denied. In the plural, *appetencies* refers to the object of a natural propensity like lust or a natural and overpowering craving or desire.

Arcadia

It was some time after Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden that it came to be known as Arcadia and then a thousand or two years later as Acadia.

Arcane

The arcane, being difficult to pin down, is mainly met with disdain.

Arguments

Subterfuge works like a centrifuge. Its arguments are circular.

Art

The characteristic of a work of art that sets it apart from the handicrafts of man and the forms and reforms of nature is that an artwork is either self-reflective or self-reflexive.

It is the popular conception that art is artful and beautiful. But there is also the parallel conception through the ages that the artful may be the awful rather than the beautiful. Awful-looking art is especially popular these days.

Artificial Intelligence

AI stands for Artificial Intelligence, but is computation anything more than the proof of the process of active intelligence? AI is alien in the sense that it is non-human, inhuman, the product of the procedure that used to be called cybernetics.

Aseity

Aseity is the Latin term that combines three words, *a* (from) and *se* (self) plus *ity* (quality or condition). It refers to the principle that we are the originators of ourselves and independent of everyone and everything else. It is the belief that we ourselves and not the gods or the fates have changed us even one iota. It is psychologically related to the philosophy (or psychology) of existentialism.

Atomic Bombs

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are always named in that order – the first followed by the second – and with hope the last.

Aum

The Sanskrit word *aum* is believed to be the eternal symbol and sound of the universe. So it is a coincidence that *aum* is part of the word “trauma.”

Auschwitz

Even the name of the camps dedicated to concentration and extermination at Auschwitz in Nazi-occupied Poland runs the nine-letter alphabetic compass of barbaric horrors from A to Z.

There are few English-language anagrams of the name of the Polish concentration and extermination camp complex at Auschwitz. They are unpromising: *a cuts whiz; chat wiz us; uzis watch.*

Authoritarianism

It may be argued that our understanding and appreciation of the history of authoritarianism proceeds backwards rather than forwards ... from the Canadian philosopher George Grant to the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato.

Avant-garde

The problem posed by the *avant-garde* is that it gives rise to the criticisms and critiques of the *avant-disregardists*.

Award

“Award” is a noun. It is also an adjective that in this instance

modifies the noun “show.” The two words may be either singular or plural – *i.e.*, “award show” or “awards shows.” What is being “awarded” is professional recognition with the public presentation of a trophy, etc., to signify meritorious or at least popular achievement.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda is an alternative traditional medical system identified with Ancient and Modern India. The Sanskrit term could be translated “science of life.”

B

B-side of Life

If anything at all of my life is recorded for descendants, I hope it is the B-side, the so-called flip-side, rather than the A-side, the so-called main-side ... personal preference, by the way, as the B-side is also the “bonus”-side.

Bahá’í

The essence of Bahá’í (and of all the world’s finer religions) is the following prayer which is credited to its founder, Bahá’u’lláh, known as The Báb, meaning “The Door.” It goes like this: *O God! protect me from myself!*

Behavior

I am unable to act without enacting. Both behaviours seem to me to be at the same time authentic and artificial.

Besides

Besides a work of art on the wall of the gallery will be the artist's sensorium, beside itself, alongside it, so a work of art may be said to bestride itself.

Between and Among

There is a decided difference between fornication and adultery and it may be sensed in the subtle difference between these two words: *between* and *among*.

Book Awards

I sometimes think the annual awards for books published in the United States outnumber all the books published annually in the United States. There might be as many as a half dozen awards for every single book published in any one year. How is this possible ... if it is possible at all?

Books

Some books stand erect on shelves, some lie asleep on bedside tables, some nestle in laps and allow their pages to be turned, but there are some that run away to take sanctuary in the human heart.

Breasts

When women approach late middle-age, two breasts merge into one bosom.

British Empire

The British Empire was in many ways a brutish empire but it was not a beastly one except to the degree that all empires are to a great degree necessarily beastly.

C

Camera

The device known as the “still camera” tells us as much about the photographer as it does about the subject that is photographed. The name of the device should be spelled “still ca ME ra.”

Canadians

Neither a former people nor a future people, Canada is simply people. Indeed, a mass of people (or peoples in the plural), who have every reason (except for ignorance or indifference) to regard themselves as citizens.

Canadians seem to be up-front, and we are, though we are not in the forefront.

CERN

CERN is a reference to the European Organization for Nuclear Research. Expressed otherwise, it is a conCERN of majuscule disCERNment.

Certainties

I find I am uneasily positioned between a pair of serious certainties, coming into existence and going out of existence.

Chaise Longe

It's been a long time since I've stretched out on a *chaise*

longe. Come to think of it, it's been even longer since I've even seen one.

Chalk Lines

A photograph of a person may capture that person's personality, bodily apparel, and way of life. It may also seek to capture that person's aura, air, halo, nimbus, and from time to time his or her "chalk lines." (Yet the latter have to do with police investigations and mortality.)

Change

Whatever happens next will not be the end of this world or the beginning of a new world or the continuation of some world or no world at all. It will be a deft and decisive change in our circumstances and hence in our lives and our personalities.

Chief Feature

Each one of us possesses what has been called a *chief feature*. It may take the form of a consuming passion or the shape of a characteristic failing. The passion or the failing is the defining factor in the life of each one of us.

Childbirth

The word *childbirth* refers to the delivery into the world of an infant or a *neonate*. It bursts unforgivably and unforgettably into life.

Chirality

In the morning I look in the mirror and I recognize myself. By

the evening the very same “myself” looks in the very same mirror and barely recognizes itself. Thus I am chiral and achiral at different times of the day, at least in my experience and imagination.

Choices

We stand between nature’s inevitabilities and mortal impossibilities, ineluctably.

Citizenry

As a youthful student, I yearned to be “a citizen of the world.” Now as a retired senior, I yearn for “a world of citizens.”

Cleverness

I would like to write a sentence that is wise rather than a sentence that is clever. But I assume I have still again written the latter rather than the former.

Cliveden

It is only a matter of time before every setting of Eden turns into a Cliveden set.

Cohn, Roy

The bodies of J. Edgar Hoover and Antonin Scalia have lain in state in the U.S. Rotunda, rather than in locations that they might well have shared with the body of the late lawyer Roy Cohn.

College

A college used to be a division of a university, but these days it is merely a collegiate institute: a collage or a montage or a mosaic of what once it was.

Colombo, Realdo

Realdo Colombo was an Italian surgeon and anatomist at the University of Padua. (He is not known to be a predecessor of John Robert Colombo, Canadian anthologist and creator of the present work.) Realdo Colombo (*c.* 1515-1559) holds an honoured place in the study of human anatomy since he once served as an anatomist to Andreas Versalius and is credited with the earliest dissection and description of the clitoris.

Communication

To use terms familiar from the early days of radio, both you and I need both a “sending set” and a “receiving set” to communicate in today’s world.

Communication went from oral to social to local to global. At the present rate it will go from global to solar in fifty years and from solar to galactic in five hundred more years, should mankind last so long.

Communion

One wonders if the first Catholic communion wafers were really *matzah* in disguise, *i.e.*, unleavened bread.

What idle scholars do is confuse the simple and symbolic act of Communion with such words as Eucharist, sacrament, and impanate – as well as transubstantiation and consubstantiation.

Compliment

They go together: not knowing how to extend a compliment, not knowing how to accept a compliment.

Confession

It is unfortunate that there is no solution to be found in absolution, no salvation to be found in genuflection, so what should be made of confession?

Conservationism

Conservationists, being fundamentalists at heart, aim to conserve both the good and the bad. Environmentalists are (as the word suggests) “mentalists” who presume to read minds and anticipate the direction that natural history will elect to take.

Conservative Party of Canada

The Conservative Party of Canada, once called, quite rightly, the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, these days is neither progressive nor conservative but populist and opportunistic in nature.

Constitution of the United States

If the U.S. Constitution is inviolate, as the late Justice of the Supreme Court Antonin Scalia used to maintain, why does it have Article V, the article known as the “Amendment Clause”? And why has the Constitution been revised in major ways on 27 occasions between 1792 and 1992?

The late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia adopted the term “textualism” to interpret the statutes of the U.S. Constitution, but he preferred to call his approach “originalism.” He sought to determine the meaning of the statute at the time that it was passed, claiming that this was

the best guide to its meaning in the present, oddly.

Contraction & Expansion

It is a surprising coincidence to realize that during the year 1929, while the stock market was contracting and plunging the economies of the world into the Great Depression, the astronomer Edwin Hubble was establishing for the first time that the universe itself was expanding and doing so at ever greater velocities.

Contumacy

The fact that I fail to remember the meaning of *contumacy* or *contumacious* is a sign of a stubborn refusal on my part!

Conversion

A conversion, religious or secular, involves multiple and extended conversations with oneself and with other people too.

Cosmopolitan & Cosmopolite

A cosmopolitan is most contented when *both* at home *and* abroad.

Cosmos

The fate of the cosmos, unknown to us, forever will remain unbeknown to us and presumably so to our descendants (if any) as well.

Covid-19

The worst period in my life began in March of the year 2020. As I keyboard this judgment (on August 1, 2022) the terrible period is soon to enter its third year on Earth and it shows little indication of diminishing or departing the planet.

Craic, The

The colloquial Irish term for “having fun” is “the craic.” It refers to having a jolly good, late-night time. It may be derived from the English word “crack,” if only because the Celtic word retains the figurative meaning of “slit” or “cleft.”

Crossing the Line

When “the line is crossed,” whether the Rubicon or the Red Line or the Green Line, all the politician or the publicist has to try to do is replace it or erase it. The creative writer may effortlessly do the same on his computer.

Cultural Criticism

Cultural criticism is the weapon of choice of avant-disregardists.

Culture

The passage from the state of barbarism to the state of civilization must cross the tract known as acculturation.

Curate, To

I wonder when it was that the verb “to curate” began to replace the verb “to edit” or “to co-ordinate” instead of just “to collect.” I imagine it was about the year 2010. Today the verb is not limited to dealing with literature, for even music directors now “curate” their concert programs.

Cures

There are at least four cures that may affect the body's ills and society's ails. The first is arbitration, the second is mediation, the third is meditation, and the fourth is contemplation, in that order.

D

Darkness

Darkness is deceptive because we assume that shadows and shades lead inevitably to Hell or to Hades, which is what indeed they are said to do.

Day and Night

A day in my life is twelve hours of perhapses; a night in my life is twelve hours of nevers.

Death

I know, because I have been told, the day of the week and the month of the year and the year itself that I was born, but not the year or the month or the day of the week that I will die. Why?

It is a sobering thought that everyone who has ever lived in the past is now well and truly dead.

If the population of the Earth is currently 8 billion people, it is estimated by the United Nations that the total number of human beings who have lived and died on Earth before now is 108 billion.

The word *depth* is five letters long and so is the word *death*. Each word has four letters in common. The uncommon letters are *p* and *a*. Apparently *depth* is not to be confused with *death* any more than is not to be confused with *depth*.

It does happen. It is a mistake when it does happen. And it annuls itself and it nullifies so much that went on before – on borrowed time – a gift of quotation marks to be sure and simultaneously insecure.

One day, exhausted, I will run out of words. For me the two final words will sound like *dies irae*.

Death Again

Death does not divide us. It joins already divided parts without forethought, indiscriminately, for it turns you and me into two parts, us. A dead twosome.

Decomposition

Works of art may be composed, recomposed, decomposed, and then composted.

Delible

Some acts, some thoughts, some emotions, some desires seem to be *indelible* whereas others seem to be *delible*. Perhaps this is simply one version of the age-old distinction between the seriousness of sin: *mortal* sin is major and unforgivable, whereas *venial* sin is minor and forgivable. *Indelible* ink is not to be erased.

Deontology

It is unfortunate that the majority of adults have no idea of the meaning or the importance in everyday life of the principles of deontology and, indeed, hardly anyone even knows what the word means.

Destruction

What we most prize we eventually pry apart.

Demi-gods

Far from being an atheistic period, our era on Earth has overseen the births and deaths of such demi-gods, false gods, and graven images as those of Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, and Mao, to limit the list to those despots whose names readily spring to mind.

Deracination

When a land becomes a country, when a country becomes a state, when the state becomes a nation, it is formed at the expense of a great many of its subjects who are thereupon subjected to *deracination*.

Destruction

What we most prize we eventually pry apart.

Determination

The natural world is predetermined and to some extent so is social behaviour but whether either is predetermined is still a puzzle to anthropologists and a mystery to everyone else.

Developing Countries

I wonder how many of the so-called “developing countries” have demonstrated any development at all over the last half-century.

Devil

The English word “irremediable” includes the French word *le diable*, “the devil.” Yes, this is the same devil “that lurks in the details.”

The English word “devil” includes the word *evil*, just as the French word “diable” includes the word *able*. Does this mean that “the devil is able to do evil,” or that “evil is what is done by the devil”?

Deixis

It is not just a word that may be deictic, such as “tomorrow,” but expressions too may be deictic, sentences also, even paragraphs, not to mention chapters, books, whole literatures, and indeed all the languages of mankind, ever.

Destiny

The problem with destiny is that it is so secretive, being a form of *clandestinity*.

Disasters

When a Magus is about to expire, the planet recoils in response and there are floods, wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other more-or-less natural disasters in anticipation and as consequence.

Distance

A love that begins in apogee, that is far away, may end in a hate that is in perigee ... that is close at hand.

Distinctions

Distinguishing between the brain and the mind, the heart and the soul, the body and the self is a task that is close to impossible at the best of times and even worse at the worst of times.

Disease and Diseur

The first half of my life I felt I harboured a *disease*; the second half, a *diseur*. Whereas the former inspired me without limit, the latter unremittingly appraised me. Both figures added badly needed corrections to my personality.

Divina Commedia, La

Dante Alighieri composed three narrative poems – *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* – and he called the suite *La Commedia*. Giovanni Boccaccio was so impressed that he gave the suite the title it bears to this day: *La Divina Commedia*. My sole contribution to the name-giving is that the *Inferno* could better be titled *la Terra, il Mondo*, or *il Terreno*. It is horrifying when the reader realizes that the scenes here are set on the rocky terrain of Earth rather than deep in the bowels of Hell.

Dogma

I have long been convinced, frivolously, that there is a relationship between the familiar word *dogma* and the nonce word *godma*. The latter is the term that for me affirms that dogma has answers for all questions, like a *godma*, a godmother.

Dominion Day

Every Canadian knows instinctively that Canada is “The True North” and that its anniversary is celebrated on July the First, 1867. But not everyone knows that the proper name of the holiday is Dominion Day, not Canada Day, as it came to be known after 1982. For me, and my kind, it remains Dominion Day.

Dreams

It is said our dreams bespeak our wish-fulfillments or betoken our fear-fulfillments.

Our dreams are lived in the grammatical tense known as “the historic present” and, come to recollect it, so are our lives.

Dubitable

Dubitable is a dutiful word, found in every dictionary, but *indubitable* is a faithful word residing on the tip of everyone’s tongue.

Duelling

Do women ever fight duels, or is it only men who settle disagreements in this manner and fashion?

It has been said that the Great War saw the end of the culture of the duel. It has also been said that the fighting of the Great War was itself a form of duelling.

Dying

There should be a Chinese proverb from the Shang Dynasty that regards dying as an ordeal because that is the nature of dying. Experience establishes that it is a slow process at first, one that accelerates with the passage of the years, and an experience that ends life, whether long or short, with a fast flicker of days and nights: certainly an ordeal. Yet there is no Shang proverb about this transition.

E

Early Childhood Education

We yearn to play, we are taught to pray, usually; but we eventually learn to prey, tragically.

Earth

As far as we know, the planet Earth is the sole planet of our solar system to be placed into quarantine by its inhabitants. It is as if Earth is afloat in the shroud of its own devising, a caul of viruses.

Ebonics

Whatever happened to ebonics? Not so long ago it was maintained that as a legitimate form of English expression it should be accepted without prejudice by the business community.

Economists

Franklin Delano Roosevelt served as the U.S.'s John Maynard Keynes in the same way that John Maynard Keynes served as the U.K.'s Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Education

The function of education is edification, that is, enhancing the social and moral improvement of the human species.

Election Debates

I watched one-quarter of the two-hour federal election debates on television the evening of September 9, 2021, and concluded that it was not a debate that I was watching but an interrogation that I was listening to, an examination that I was overhearing, or an inquisition that I was witnessing. The candidate was being accused of actions or inactions, or attitudes of all sorts, and of being required to justify everything *holus bolus*. There was hardly any argumentation or any exchange of opinion at all.

Elephantine

The large and the little in the world of animals and insects: the eleph-ant!

Embodying

This is a misleading word. *Embodying* consists of two words with contrary meanings that are so conflated so as to suggest simultaneously both birth (to embody) and death (to die). Confusing.

Endemic

Everyone yearns for an *endemic* to *end*, In point of fact, an *endemic* is a local outbreak, unlike a global outbreak, which is called a *pandemic*, after the Greek word *pan* for “all.” It characterizes an outbreak that is not limited in extent. A *pandemic* is an *epidemic* that goes global for a long period of time, so to speak.

English Language

Let us study the English language, chronologically, period by period – First, Early, Modern, Contemporary, Late, and Last

Environmentalism

The cry of the conservationists and the environmentalists is always the same: “The end is near!” Yet the ending is never near at all because it is always nearing ... forever on its way here. It never does seem to arrive.

Epeiric Sea

Hudson Bay is known to geographers and oceanographers as an epeiric or epicontinental sea. Like the Baltic Sea it extends far into the interior of a continent. The term also describes the partially enclosed North Sea (which a century ago was known as the German Sea).

Epicist

There is a word that is new to me though it is one that gives its meaning away right away. That word is *epicist* and it refers to a poet who specializes in the composition of narrative poems of epic-length. If it has an antonym it is presumably someone who specializes in minuscule poems ... and perhaps that word is a *microist*.

Escroquerie

The French noun *escroquerie* is so exquisite in shape and sound that the English-speaker forgets that what it means is *abuse, cheat, con, deception, defraud, hustle, misuse, scam, sting, swindle, trick*, etc. Perhaps its best equivalent in

English is the noun *cozenage*.

Everlasting

Whatever in our world or our experience may be considered to be everlasting? Nothing, nothing at all.

Evil

Even worse than *evil* is *re-evil*. The former is bad enough; the latter is even worse, amounting to *evil* being done in return.

Is there anyone who is naive enough or incredulous enough to doubt that the words “the evils of the world return” are meaningful and applicable in the world today?

Evolution

In our academies we have (to coin a phrase) “counter-evolutionaries,” whereas in our political parties we have (to employ the accepted term) “counter-revolutionaries.”

Exercise

We exercise to scale down our extrasize.

Existentialism

The word *existentialism* stood for a philosophical proposition about man’s nature in the 1940s, but by the 2020s it had become synonymous with any question about living or dying.

Expansion of the Universe

The expansion of the universe and the rate of its expansion and the size of the known universe were established in 1929 by Edwin P. Hubble and Milton L. Humason of the Mount Wilson Observatory near Pasadena, California. We discovered that the universe was expanding as the world's economy was shrinking.

Expectancies

We cherish our anticipations of expectancies.

Experience

What we know today is what we believed we understood yesterday and what we expect to experience tomorrow.

Extrasensory Perception

Extrasensory Perception (or ESP) is the assumed ability to perceive through unknown senses, especially to read the minds of other people. In this way it resembles the craft of espionage.

F

Failure

In life we have a choice to foul-up or fall down. These are the two major forms of failure.

Faith

We are urged to “keep the faith” because without it there is no evidence whatsoever for the validity of one's beliefs. Still, we fear “losing our faith,” but it is impossible to lose what one has never possessed, as non-existence has no existence

whatsoever.

Fall Fair

The world is a fall fair if only because human lives are unequal and human beings are like the fall weather – foul and unfair.

Fame

In his day the early fame of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was as unexpected and was as hard to explain as that of Thomas Stearns Eliot in his early days.

Fashion

When clothing comes to be regarded as costuming, it takes on a strife of its own.

Fatuity

“Being on the right side of history” must be one of the most fatuous of expressions that was ever devised. Next in line is “being on the wrong side of history.”

Fidelity

Fidelity makes sense to the degree that one has a good sense of what infidelity entails.

First Responder

In an emergency the untrained First Responder is likely to be the first person to be in the way when the trained responder finally arrives.

Flying Carpet

The Flying Carpet led to Fabulous Firebird and that led to the Oriental Rug and that led to the Red Carpet and that led to the Flying Saucer and that led to Ecu Broadloom with assorted Area Rugs and Scatter Mats. Downhill all the way!

Foreplay

My left hand holds your right breast. My right hand holds your left breast. When in love it is ... left, left; right, right.

Fortinbras, Crown Prince

It falls on the shoulders of the Crown Prince Fortinbras to avenge the death of his father and to replace the displaced Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, in the line of Royal succession. He realizes the populace needs to be governed and that it requires to be given the necessities of life. These days no man is more needed and more central than a Fortinbras.

Found Poetry

“Found poetry” is assumed to be a trick or a prank (if only because it looks so easy to rewrite rather than to write) whereas in their approach to aesthetics the “found arts” are really quite astonishing and exacting, being an *exaptation* that has been described as “unlike an adaptation it is a utilization of a structure or feature for a function other than that for which it was developed.”

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalist Christians do better than communicate with the spirits of the dead. They also claim to be able to commune with beings and entities that have never lived at all, such as gods, deities, divinities, saints, angels, devils, etc.

Furies, The

When the flames of the fires of the Furies eventually die down, they are replaced by the eerie calmness of the Eumenides.

Future

We burble on about *the* future, as if there is only one future, whereas there are many possible futures. We also burble on about the *foreseeable* future, as if it were foreseeable or evitable, whereas even the near future, even tomorrow, is unforeseeable in evitable.

If there is a Scroll of the Future, already inscribed, our destiny has been written in invisible ink, our fate in indelible ink.

Futurity

All that we know about futurity is that it is *increate*. This is a tricky adjective that has two (possibly related) meanings: either something exists though it was never created, or something may exist but not as yet exist.

G

Garden

A garden is but an etiolated forest.

Garden of Eden

Each one of us spends nine months in the Garden of Eden before we are expelled into “the wilderness.” Our lives are then spent wandering over the face of the earth, often its desert locations.

Geiger Counter

It is interesting to consider that the humble Metal Detector might have given birth to the sophisticated Geiger Counter and that the Geiger Counter might yet give birth to some type of a advanced Mental or Affective Counter.

Gemstones

Among gemstones, a moonstone is transporting, whereas a sunstone is transcending.

Gender

These days some men and some women seem to me to be neither he male nor female.

Human gender has been engendered through untold generations.

German Nomenclature

In the Federal Republic of Germany, which in the past century has undergone so much upheaval, both geographical and political, a tectonic plate could be regarded as a Teutonic plate.

Gerunds & Gerundives

I like to think that gerunds are male whereas gerundives are female. Allow me to leave it to the reader to search out the reason why this difference is a reasonable one.

Germans

“Not Germans but Nazis” is a remark associated with World

War II. But there would be no Nazis except for the prior existence of the Germans.

Ghazal

The verse form that is known as the *ghazal* is said to be the most satisfying and exquisite of all forms or genres in literature. The sole exception to this statement is the verse form's name is Arabic, which in print looks like the bird "gazelle" but sounds in English like "guzzle," quite inelegantly to be sure.

Glossary

As soon as I come upon a single gloss, I forged and fashioned my own glossary to display it.

Goal

Some people yearn to climb Mt. Everest, other people are content with Mt. Kilimanjaro. I will settle for any old monticule ... which the dictionary defines as a knoll, mound, or hillock, etc.

God

"God has many bests" is an old saying that frequently fell from the lips of the Christian social democratic reform leader J. S. Woodsworth. It reminds us that we should assess everything on its own merits. At the same time it is also true that "God has many *beasts*" and that these menace mankind at every step on our journey from birth to death.

God and Gods

I find it impossible to imagine that I could become a god

because I cannot imagine that there is a god or ever believe that there are gods or forever sense what it would be like to be one or another or all of them separately or all together at all!

Good

The other day it occurred to me that there is a decided difference between someone being described as “good or bad” or someone being described as “good or evil.” The former “bad” is a moral deficit; the latter “evil” is an immoral excess.

There was only one person I ever encountered who spoke about the achievement of “the Good” in our lives and that was George P. Grant. He was a fine man and mighty philosopher, and he expressed his thoughts without looking embarrassed about them at all.

Graphomania

An obsessive impulse to write is the meaning of the word “graphomania.” Related to it and extending from writing into speaking are such terms as “hypergraphia,” “scribomania,” “logorrhea,” and “verbosity.” I suspect some poets suffer from extreme graphomania.

Guided Missile

The expense of constructing one single guided missile is about as much as the cost of erecting one single apartment building that it is capable of demolishing. So both sides lose. It is a dreadful form of potlatch.

H

H

The expletive “Jesus H. Christ” is considered irreverent and sacrilegious because the eighth letter of the English alphabet, which is *H*, has no role to play in the Saviour’s name. Yet biblical scholars point out that in the Greek alphabet “IHC” is a recognized abbreviation of the name of Jesus. *Eta* is the seventh letter of that alphabet and in shape resembles the English letter *H*.

Handy

If you are handy with your hands, with what are you randy?

Heart

It is said that the heart is buried deeper in the human body than is the soul, though it is also said that the soul, unlike the heart, detaches and vacates the human body at the point of death.

The heart has reasons of its own, said the French philosopher, whereas the soul has neither reasons nor weight, though there have been quasi-scientific attempts to “weigh” the human body at the point of death. At one time twenty-one grams was felt to be the “weight” of the human soul at its departure from the human body.

Heaven & Hell

The Bible describes, in all, four hells and seven heavens. When you are told about them you are expected all by yourself to make known your preference among them!

Heaven may or may not exist, but if it does it is a certainty that it is neither a haven nor a harem. Hell assuredly exists, but it is certain to be pretty dreadful without being in the least

dreadfully petty.

Height

All my life I yearned to stand six feet tall, but my maximum height came in at 5 feet 9.5 inches tall. That is vertical. In the future there is the chance for me to achieve a horizontal length of 6 feet.

Hell

Conditions in Heaven are said to be vague and elusive, but conditions in Hell are anything but that for the reason that they run from hellfire through haemorrhage to haemoglobin.

Heroin

The use of heroin makes no one, neither a man a hero nor a woman a heroine, except perhaps in the eyes of the would-be heroin user.

Heydrich, Reinhard

Adolf Hitler referred to Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the Gestapo, as “the man with the iron heart.” His widow Lina dismissed this characterization of her late husband and maintained to her dying day that he was always a secondary figure in the Nazi hierarchy and not really responsible for Nazi atrocities.

Hibernation

One day it occurred to me: what we are doing, these long, dark afternoons and evenings of December 2021, is sleeping ... napping, really ... another word, perhaps, for hibernating.

History

The history of Christianity has been told and retold repeatedly over the millennia but it is safe to say that it has never once really been told at all. It is not told at all, but tooled.

Histories in Brief

Continents, climates, centuries, cultures, countries, crises, combats, chronicles, crimes and their consequences ... histories in brief.

Ho! Ho! Ho!

“Ho! Ho! Ho!” is the opposite of “Oh! Oh! Oh!” as Santa is the opposite of Satan.

Hollywood

The point of origin of Hollywood is not the American peepshow or raree show but it is located in Bavaria, being the Bayreuth Festspielhaus of 1876.

Holy Rollers

It has been at least half a century since I have heard the description of ecstatic Christian fundamentalists in the wild throes of religious fervour falling down on the barn floor and writhing about as “holy rollers.”

Hope

Hope is our understanding that over time we may repair what we despair.

Humanity

We *human* beings, to the extent that we are *humane* beings,

live in three worlds contemporaneously. To wit, *the inside world, the outside world, and the non-sided world.*

Humming Bird

The humming bird is a small bird, perhaps up to five centimetres in length. It looks perfectly harmless. Yet if it measured five feet rather than five centimetres in length, it would be extremely dangerous!

Hymn

“Jesus loves me, this I know; his house is in the village though.” Why in blazes does this idiotic rhyme haunt me? The opening line comes from the hymn composed by Anna Bartlett Warner, followed by the opening line from Robert Frost’s poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” Odd juxtaposition!

Hysterias

In terms of the various levels of hysteria, I am *low-sterical*, rather than *high-sterical*. The latter (however spelled) is more customary than the former.

I

I

Great is the difference between the statement “God and I” and the statement “I and God.” At least I feel there is a difference, but without some urging, I am hard-pressed to define the difference.

If I say, “I am,” there are really two of me. If I am indeed

right, then there are really three of us.

Idioms

One of the most monstrous of idioms is the one that follows:
Next to impossible.

The be-all and the end-all is another way to refer to the
before-all and the after-all.

If only

If only are two common words. *If* is a conjunction; *only* is an
adverb. Multiple meanings are possible here but the
commonest meaning is the woeful affirmation of what is
impossible or if not possible at least what is unlikely to occur.

Ignorance

Some things are a dead certainty, like the cosmos itself, or
like human ignorance and impetuosity.

Impasse

Over time, each and every pass generates a bypass or
imposes an impasse.

Improv

From “improvisation” to “improv” is but a baby step to take
in the world of entertainment, yet it took a long time to
attempt it. “Yes, *and*” has always been more exciting than
“Yes, *but*.”

Indigenous Peoples

Canada’s *indigenous* peoples are its disenfranchised peoples,
so as a group they might be described as the country’s

disindigenous peoples.

The strength of the world's indigenous peoples has been called the "Power of No." Come to think of it, the weakness of the world's indigenous peoples has also been called the "Power of No."

Inerrancy

It used to be that when the Pope as the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church spoke on the subjects of Faith and Morals he did so with inerrancy. Now it is Protestants who say they believe that Biblical inerrancy is characteristic of the entire text of the King James Version of the Christian Bible. The KJV as well as its adaptations are not just limited to matters of Faith and Morals; they cover such events as the creation of the planet Earth some six thousand years ago and the anticipation of its destruction in "our time."

Inflation

We know for sure that we face inflation when the fee to cover the cost of the preparation of the annual income tax declaration amounts to more than the amount of the earnings that it reports.

Inflation & Deflation

The inflation of the prices of services and supplies is accompanied by the deflation of the values of services and supplies.

In Plain Sight

The interesting phrase “It is hidden in plain sight” is commonly encountered in print and in speech. That is possible because what is supposedly hidden is “in plain insight.”

Inner Man, The

The three English words “the inner man” have a multitude of possible meanings not to mention some non-meanings as well. The word “man” is regularly confused with two Arabic and Islamic words, the first of which is “*imam*” (which refers to “a leader in worship”) and the second of which is “*iman*” (which refers to “a believer in the faith”). There is much room for confusion even here!

Innocence

From innocence to experience is a banality. From innocence to ignorance is a platitude. From ignorance to wisdom is a windfall (should it occur).

Insight

Instead of the vision for which I yearn, I experience the vistas of sorrow, sadness, and sameness.

Each and every slight is eventually accompanied by an insight.

As for insight into the lives of men and women, the answers lie in the past, the questions lie in the future, and whatever lies in the present is perplexity.

Inslight

Here is a portmanteau word, a neologism in fact, that combines two words: An *inslight* is the *insight* that may follow a *slight*.

Inter Alia

Inter alia is a familiar Latin phrase for “among other things,” whereas *inter alios* is an unfamiliar phrase for “among other people.”

Intelligentsia

The *intelligentsia* is less “a looking glass” than it is “a looking class.”

Intersectionality

The only credence I am able to extend to that currently popular but bastard term *intersectionality* is the following succession of the seven states of the human being: infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, maturity, age, dotage.

Intuition & Instinct

It is difficult to distinguish between an *intuition* and an *instinct* in words alone, although the sense and the feeling of them are quite distinct. An intuition is emotional and suggestible; an instinct is corporeal and directional. An intuition draws one in a new direction; an instinct leads one along a familiar pathway.

Invention

An *invention* is a short musical composition that employs two-part counterpoint. A *sinfonia* is such a piece of music that employs three-part counterpoint. So is it possible that a marriage might be considered a two-part *invention* whereas

a *ménage à trois* might be considered a three-part *sinfonia*?

Iota

This poem is the size of an iota, so short is it. In fact, even its meaning might be considered to be no more than an iota's iota, it being equivalent to the difference between *anymore* and *any more*.

It

I lost it – whatever it is or whatever it was; now I cannot remember – either on the left bank of the Varanasi Ganges or on the right shore of Great Bear Lake of the Northwest Territories.

IT & AI

IT stands for Information Technology whereas AI stands for Artificial Intelligence. I imagine these pursuits operate on the same in principle, for reasons I would explain but I am unable to do so in two short sentences.

Itches

Reasonable and well-balanced people learn to itch when and where they are able to scratch.

Ivy League Colleges

Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., and Yale University in New Haven, Conn., U.S.. are two “ivy league colleges” that have some explaining to do – to me at least. How is it that so many prominent and disingenuous American Republicans were students of Law at one or at the other or at both of these outstanding institutions?

J

Japan

Since 1945 I have debated with myself and with other people both like-minded and other-minded that Douglas MacArthur, General of the Army of the United States, was right about his decision to allow Hirohito to remain Emperor of Japan following the country's surrender to the victorious Allies in 1945. Arguments pro and con continue to be waged to this day.

Jewish Emancipation

The Jewish people are the beneficiaries of two emancipations: the first one in Central Europe that commenced in 1791; the second one in Palestine that commenced in 1948. The first emancipation conferred the rights of national citizenship upon the Jew though not upon the Jewish people; the second emancipation established the State of Israel for the Jewish people. The Jewish people and the State and indeed the population of the world are better for these two enactments.

Jocasta

Even the sound of her name – Jocasta, the mother of Oedipus in Ancient Greek mythology – is able to send shivers up and down the spine of every man who hears it or remembers it or imagines it.

Johns, Jasper

When I first saw Jasper Johns's now-famous *Flag* painting at MOMA in New York City, which dates from 1954-55, I thought, "This is not Pop Art. This is Folk Art." I think I was half right at the time.

Justice

Justice is achieved not through the passing of laws but through the training and the restraining of people.

K

K

K is the eleventh letter of the English alphabet and it refers to or represents many things, including the element Potassium, *karat* the measure of gold in a mineral (whereas *carat* is a unit of a diamond's weight), and *Boltzmann's Constant* ("the proportionality factor that relates the average relative kinetic energy of particles in a gas with the thermodynamic temperature of the gas").

Knights-errant

Don Quixote de la Mancha and Cyrano de Bergerac are the two most befuddled but beloved knights-errant to be encountered in the literature of the world. The Spanish knight represents the illusions of daylight, the French knight the disillusion of night-life.

Knowledge

In time the knowledge that we acquire about life will fill the palm of one's right hand. In time the misinformation that we acquire about life will fill the palm of one's left hand. That leaves neither hand free to acquire more knowledge.

L

Landscapes

On the whole mountains are no longer higher and valleys are no longer deeper than they once were.

Language

Language may be viewed as the *gauge* of all things. Interesting to note is that its sound-like (*gauge*) may be either a noun like *a gage* (as in a *guaranty* of value) or a verb like *to gage* (as in *exchanging* collateral).

Language is a mine field and a mind field as well as a field of mine.

Languages, Dead

There are no dead languages, only long deceased speakers of languages that were once alive in the sense that they were understood when chiseled in stone or spoken or sung. Since their sounds were misplaced or displaced and hence lost through the ages of mankind, I like to think such words still swirl around us in the atmosphere much of the time.

Late Earth, The

I suppose I should call it “the late great earth,” But that sounds cheeky because the reference is to an immense planetary body, third from the Sun, known as the planet Earth. Robert A. Heinlein referred to “the green hills of earth” and Carl Sagan described it as seen from outer space as “a pale blue dot.”

Lawyers

Politicians and journalists employ such euphemisms as “the ensuing decade” with a great degree of certainty if only because increasingly lawyers, solicitors, attorneys, counsellors-at-law, justices, judges, jurists, advocates, etc., determine the nature of the present day, the immediate future, and the decades ahead.

Lebowitz, Fran

She is so brainy the New York celebrity should be referred to as Fran *Lebowits*.

Legacy

My agency precludes my legacy.

Letendre, Rita

Quebec-born painter of murals; the embodiment of the spirit of the *Refus global* manifesto; the expressions of the liberated woman.

Liberal Party of Canada

The Liberal Party of Canada, when led by Lester B. Pearson and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, was the *keystone* national liberal political party. But under Justin Trudeau it became a *headstone party* or, if I am permitted to coin a phrase, a *gravestone party*, one dedicated to *woke* principles – if only because it never really *woke up*.

Lies & Truths

It is said that lies are more easily told in business offices on Fridays and Mondays than on other days of the week, and certainly more regularly than truths.

Life

The two essentials of existence are matter and energy. The two essentials of the existence of the human race are rise and demise.

The key to *life* is the word that is formed by its second and third letters. All else is spelled out by its first, second, and fourth letters.

A life that has been once lived turns into the file of a life that has once been lived. The words have the same four letters in common but they are out of order.

Life around us could be better and should be better. Life around us could be worse and might be worse. The difference is the word *might*, which carries two meanings: possibility and power. Mankind has the possibility and the power to make life better or worse.

There is indeed a God of Life. This deity is best known as the Goal of Life.

We are cast as “extras” in the melodramas of our lives.

The attractions of life and especially its subtractions are all distractions.

We experience the sadness of madness, the actions of passions, the languor of “the long littleness of life.”

My life at this time resembles a myriorama, a series of concatenations or near repetitions that represent progression without any progress.

Life is sometimes *lively*, sometimes *deadly*. Of these opposites, *lively* is better than *deadly*, if only because *lively*

is by its nature repetitive, whereas *deadly* is by its nature lethal and inescapable, inevitable and unavoidable ... and that in other words it signals the natural end.

Here is life as it is known to us: *Non-existence ... entry ... existence ... exit ... non-existence.*

There comes a time in every man's life and also in every woman's life when he and she come to the conclusion that "enough is enough." That time is "just around the corner," so to speak, as they are "boxed in a corner" and "no more will be tolerated." It should be obvious that what I have in mind is a long life and old age.

Sometimes I think our lives are previews for out-of-town plays seemingly destined for Broadway or the West End.

I wonder if this life that we are living is a theatrical rehearsal or perhaps an out-of-town preview for a theatrical production that should soon open on Broadway or the West End. But please note that the Broadway that I have in mind is Broadway Street in San Francisco, and the West End that comes to mind is the district in Winnipeg, not Manhattan.

The first half of one's life is acclivous, the second half declivitous.

Life & Death

The phrase "life after death" is as much a *cliché* as the phrase "death after life" for nothing (not even death) lurks after life.

It has been wisely observed that the opposite of life is not dying but death itself.

The brain of my heart, the heart of my head, the head of my body, the body of my torso, the torso of my trunk, the trunk

of my loins, the loins of my livelihood, the livelihood of my life, the life of my spirit, the spirit of my existence, the existence that once was ... me!

Travelling through life is like being a rider aboard a Japanese express train, let's say the ultra-modern Shinkansen, one that safely proceeds at top speed from point of departure to point of designation, halting at the marked spot on the designated platform of the right station precisely on time.

Liminality

The word *liminality* acquired a cache in the 1960s that it has yet to lose though it is fading fast. One reason for this might be the fact that the ten-letter word, which conjures up the suggestion of limitlessness, includes the five-letter word *limit*, which is not at all a characteristic of *liminality*.

Lincoln, Abraham

Abraham Lincoln was unquestionably a great leader of 18.5 million American people, yet it does seem appalling that the death toll of 700,000 Americans during the four years of the U.S. Civil War was awful in itself and then followed by the terrible, thirteen-year-long Reconstruction Era with its 2,000 extra-legal lynchings.

Lion

In the jungle the lion reigns as “the king of the beasts,” or so the saying goes, but the gigantic marble sculpture of the Lion of Knidos (now recumbent in the Grand Court of London's British Museum) has lost a limb and both its eyes are gone, not to mention most of its strength, so the beast is piteous and yet appealing to an appalling degree.

Literary Criticism

During the 1960s and 1970s I was uncertain whether I was more partial to Structuralism or to Deconstructionism. The parallel theories seemed to me at the time (and right up to the present time) to be two halves of one single whole.

The more content there is, the less contentment there is, and the more discontent there will be, once textual scholars commence their critiques.

Living Together

I cannot live with her; I cannot live without her. That leaves me in a quandary and her in a predicament.

Loose Ends

Loose ends are a lot more than odds and ends, though dealing with them, *i.e.*, tying them up, as the idiom goes, is a daunting task, one that is put off hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, even year by year. Yet they haunt us still.

Lozenge

A lozenge is, to the surprise of many, a medicinal pill that makes the *zen* go down.

Love

When it comes to love, we say we “fall in love” or that we “fall out of love,” but we do so without moving at all. It seems the emotions move all by themselves.

Lubitsch Touch

The German-born, American film director Ernst Lubitsch was uniquely credited with possessing “the Lubitsch Touch.” He specialized in dark comedies and bright tragedies, all produced and directed with subtle and consummate sophistication.

Lucasta

Lucasta means “pure light” in Latin. It serves as a lovely name for a young woman. The name was coined by the English poet Richard Lovelace for a collection of poems that he wrote to honour his lover in 1640. Disappointingly, the woman’s given name was not Lucasta but Lucy.

M

MAD

MAD stands for “Mutually Assured Destruction.” What this military doctrine and principle of national security and argument for deterrence has achieved over the decades since 1962 when it was so named is mostly “Mutually Assured Discussion” is not destruction.

Mad Magazine

Issues of the satiric *Mad Magazine* – generally referred to as *MAD* – were published by EC Comics from 1952 to 2018. When it ceased publication, its anserine-like mascot Alfred E. Neuman was replaced by the real-life Donald J. Trump.

Mage

At one time there was the ancient Akkadian who was a

prince, a priest, a philosopher, a scholar, a linguist, a mage, a musician, and a traveller named Ludicrous.

Magic

Magicians who boast about “the reveal” keep still about “the conceal.”

There are some superb physicians and surgeons who are well loved who are flummoxed to realize one day or one night their top-hat of doves or rabbits will no longer spout doves or rabbits.

Manners

The young boy was well-mannered and asked, “May I please be excused?” Since he was dining with well-mannered adults, he was immediately excused.

Married Couple

We are two people who live together as one person, or perhaps I should say we are two persons who live together as one people. No, that makes even less sense. What is it then that we are?

Martians

When I think of the planet Earth being invaded by the denizens of the Red Planet, I think of the Martian invaders with their ugly eyes, their hateful gaze, and their numerous tentilla (as imagined by H.G. Wells).

Me

There is “a me” with a meaning and a measure that exists, whatever we may hope or whenever we may fear.

Meaning

Every event is an advent, a coming, even a second coming so to speak, with the possibility of meanings of interest.

Media

With today's media, there is one step that separates *trance* from *entranced*, but many more steps that separate *common sense* from *presence*.

“*In medias res*” is an English phrase from the Latin that means “in the middle of things.” Perhaps no other word – *media*, the plural of *medium*, *i.e.*, the electronic media – so characterizes the social life of the Western world in the Twentieth Century.

Medley

The longer I live the greater is my conviction that the structure of the world is modeled on that of the musical medley. Musicians recognize the “medley form” in music as one that abruptly moves from one over-orchestrated melody to another, without cause or pause, thereby making a loud impression about less than a lot.

Melancholy

“Holy melancholy” is a term that is agreeable, if only for the reason that it begins with the four-letter word “holy,” as in the catch-phrase “holy matrimony.”

Memory

To remember is not quite the same as to never forget.

Men & Women

A man may be expected to stare at a woman who is attractive in a manner that is extractive.

A poem or other work of art may well remind us of what we have half-known all our lives.

Metaphysics

Is supernatural physics the opposite of natural metaphysics? If so, both are in trouble.

Mine and Thine

Many years ago the belongings we had acquired over the decades were mine and thine. Now they belong to the two of us – and they are ours – and they are well-worn and wearing-down and wearing-out – and neither one of us much cares about them any longer.

Misgivings

I have never suffered a misgiving *per se*, but like most people I regularly suffer misgivings in the plural.

Money Pit

The “Money Pit” is a reference to the fabled site of a presumed pirate’s treasure trove and the major tourist attraction on Oak Island in Nova Scotia’s Mahone Bay. However, the real “Money Pit” in the Atlantic Provinces is Muskrat Falls, the Hydro Dam Project of Newfoundland & Labrador, subsidized by the Federal Government, a “sink hole” if there ever was one.

Moon

Few people are aware that the word for being farthest from the moon is *apolune*, whereas the word for being closest to the moon is *perilune*.

Moon & Sun

The Moon is naked and nude, but the view is less revealing and appealing than that of the sight of the radiant splendour of the Sun, fully clothed in flares and flames, yet a single glimpse of even a single ray of the Sun's "divine shine" is enough to blind the beholder's sight for an hour if not for a lifetime.

Mortals

I struggle to find the most appropriate term to use to describe myself and to characterize my fellow human beings throughout the countless ages of mankind. We are *beings*, to be sure. Whether we are really *human* is the question.

Mortals may be the best term to use because, being *mortal*, they – and we – are doomed to die.

Human is a neutral term, so it is probably appropriate to use to describe ourselves, yet how *humane* we are as individuals is yet to be established.

Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives, which rises east of the Old City of Jerusalem, has many associations with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, so many in fact, that I like to think of the Mount of Olives as losing its "O" to become "the Mount of Lives."

Muskoka

What is remarkable about Muskoka, the cottage country north of Toronto, is its summer weather: rainfall, storm warnings, dampness, wetness, choppy waters, mosquitoes, lightning, thunder, etc. Otherwise Muskoka is amiable and congenial.

N

Names

The Gods of Old thrived on hearing their names and titles being repeatedly revered in worship. One wonders why there was – and why there is – such a deep-seated need on the part of the Gods of Old to be idolized.

Native Land

Unceded land is generally land that is unseeded and going to waste. The non-indigenous Canadians who favour returning unceded land to the indigenous peoples, the first inhabitants, are likely to be those Canadians who have never toured an Indian reserve, now known as a First Nation.

New Deal

We do not need a New Deal, as many maintain, but a New Realism.

Negro, Negroni

That word “Negro” is shunned except when it is spelled *Negroni* and thus identifies a cocktail that was first served, some sources say, in 1919 in Florence, Italy, by a French General named Pascal-Olivier de Negroni. It is composed of

gin, vermouth, and Campari. Apparently the cocktail has to be “stirred, not shaken.”

Northwest Territories

The Northwest Territories lie east of the Yukon Territory and west and south of Nunavut (Canada’s third territory). NWT spans twice as much land area as the U.S. State of Texas, but in 2020 was said to have only 570 miles of paved road.

Nothing

A big nothing is nothing little. But nothing little is a big nothing.

Nuclear Energy

We have found that whatever is *nuclear* is by its essential nature *unclear*, like bombs, energy, medicine, power, radiation, reactors, storage, warfare, weapons

O

Obituary Notice

Today’s issue of *The Globe and Mail* carried an obituary notice that was almost entirely written in the first person. A difficult achievement. (October 2, 2021)

Obsequiousness

Men who “kick ass” are ready at a moment’s notice to “lick ass” and *vice versa*.

Oil

It is not the oil itself but the *turmoil* caused by the oil that causes mankind such ongoing grief.

Om

The Sanskrit sound *om* is believed by Tibetan and other Buddhists to be the primordial sound of the universe. *Om mani padme hum* is described as a powerful, six-syllable mantra of Tibetan origin. It is said to mean “Hail, O Jewel of the Lotus.”

Ontic

Since as long as I remember, until recently at least, my problem in life has been that I experienced reality as *ontic* rather than as *ontological*.

Opera

The musical term in Italian that best describes the way the world works is *opera seria e buffa*. In French it is *opera seria et buffa*. In English it is *opera seria and buffa*. In its various spellings, it refers to serious action and plot and comic action and plot, much like the antic ways of the world.

Operatic performers require period costumes – at the very least dramatic and indicative styles of dress – indeed “grand” ... like opera itself.

Opinions

Our own opinions are based as much on our own expectations, experiences, or exaggerations, as on those of other people.

Opportunity

The time is not right for what is wrong ... at any time at all.

Opposites

These concepts are not polar opposites but semi-polar opposites, so to speak: Quality-quantity, equity-inequity, equality-equality, etc.

Opuscle

A brief or short composition, literary or musical in nature, is known as an *opuscle* in English, from the Latin *opusculum*. The genre has not entirely disappeared in either writing or performance, for it survives in the form of such works as the haiku, the couplet, the adage, the fanfare, and some military march music.

Oratory

The two words *epideictic oratory* refer to contrived vocal presentations (like funeral orations, political addresses, or commercial harangues) rather than impromptu appeals from the heart or the head.

Orientalism

Orientalism is the title of Edward Said's influential study of Western responses to Eastern experiences. Published in 1978, it was widely noted, frequently reissued, and widely translated. Any revised and corrected edition should be re-titled *Disorientalisms*.

Orion

Orion is both a magical and a spectral word. It is magical

because of its eldritch sound; it is spectral because it identifies a magnificent constellation that includes Earth.

Otherwise

Things may always be done otherwise. Actions can be undertaken otherwise. Likewise, thoughts might be simultaneously both wise and otherwise.

P

Pagne

No one ever looked as good in a *pagne* as Johnny Weissmuller who played Tarzan of the Apes in the American movies of the 1930s and 1940s. *Pagne* is French for the loincloth or breechclout that was worn by native males in Africa at least in these movies.

Pain

Why is it that, when it is so painful to bend down to pick up what has fallen to the floor, everything seems to end up upside-down on the floor?

Pain & Pleasure

Pain lasts seemingly forever, pleasure seemingly without measure.

Paris

There is a big difference between Paris, Ontario, and Paris, France, though the difference is more apparent from the vantage-point of Paris, France, than it is from that of Paris, Ontario.

Participles

It could be that participles may be male (gerunds) or female (gerundives). Is it likely?

Past

When the past is described as “antique,” we have in mind how outdated it seems today and how breakable are its artifacts, customs, and ideals. We forget that antiques, however ancient, commonly outlast artifacts, customs, and ideals, especially those that first saw the light of day yesterday or the day before yesterday.

Pelion on Ossa

Long lost is the idiom “to pile Pelion on Ossa” which alludes to an impossible task to reach the top of Mount Olympus. How much has been lost over the ages.

Pentagon, The

The Pentagon serves as the headquarters of the U.S. Department of Defence in Arlington County, Virginia. It is said to be occupied by “pentagoons.”

People

People are pretty straight-forward, especially when one considers how screwed-up is the human race.

Some people resemble loaves of unleavened bread, like *matzo*. They never rise to the occasion.

Peradventure

Even one single peradventure is superior to any number of

impossibilities.

Performing Artists

Blue jeans as well as many performing artists (especially of Rhythm and the Blues) come pre-distressed.

Person

Precocious was I, yet not at all regarded as precious.

Personal Effects

Allow me to run on ... personal effects, impersonal effects ... personal defects, impersonal defects ... personal affects, impersonal affects ... *et cetera*.

Petroleum

Every country in the world has *soil* which means *oil* and along with it comes *turmoil*.

Philosophers

I am surprised that so few biographers of philosophers find that significant personality traits are shared by Søren Kierkegaard the Dane and Ludwig Wittgenstein the Austrian.

Philosophy

Everyone may be a philosophizer, but not everyone may become a philosopher. You need to know something about philosophy to become the latter, but few are the philosophizers who know much at all about philosophy.

Plague

I might have anticipated an *ague*, but who would ever have anticipated a *plague*? Covid-19 took me by surprise. I continue to apologize to my adult children and to my grandchildren for such bad timing on my part.

Four centuries ago Shakespeare observed that “all the world’s a stage.” That was true then and it remains true to this day, though these days it’s also true that all the world’s “a plague” and everywhere its inhabitants are in a “a rage.”

Plisetskaya, Maya

To marvel at the sight of a daemon overcoming a woman, behold the ballerina Maya Plisetskaya as she succumbs to the bewitching rhythms of Ravel’s “Bolero” as choreographed by Maurice Béjart for the Ballet du XXe Siècle. Filmed in 2012, it remains accessible on YouTube (as of October 2021).

Plots

Some action-filled movies and some of the novels that inspired them have more plots than a well-tended burial ground.

Poetic Justice

We hear about *poetic justice* all the time and relish it when it occurs to other people though not to ourselves. Yet it is misnamed, for it should be called *poetic injustice*. We really, really hate that, especially when it is showered on other people and not on ourselves.

Poetry

The notions and sentiments are about to become a portion of

a poem when they sometimes fail to make it on their own. But the words, once found, do resound.

Poetry, Found

It's a minor form of the poetry of the Modernist period. The writer Howard Engel wittily but wickedly dismissed it as "lost prose." But seriously, "finding" aesthetic values rather than creating them makes one aware of the often-overlooked values inherent in everyday objects and work-a-day prose that are otherwise dismissed in esteem or entirely overlooked.

"Poetry by other means" is a convenient phrase identified with the literary critic Marjorie Perloff. Of particular interest to her is the use made of passages of "non-poetic" prose and even the use made of passages from the poems of other poets in one's own "found art." She finds it of particular contemporary relevance: and so it is!

Poetry, Prose

The test of whether or not free verse is simply lines of prose that do not end at the right-hand edge of the page is to try it. Do so by scanning the text and then deleting the spaces at the ends of the lines and then justifying the right-hand edge and only then print it out – as prose. The text probably reads even better that way than it did as a free-verse poem. For the cognoscenti, this is the way to turn free verse into prose poetry.

Poetry & Non-poetry

What I have been composing are what have been called "non-poetic works of poetry," and they *are* works of poetry and they *are* non-poetic.

Poets

The great poet of New York and the great poet of New England never met but could have done so. I am referring to Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and Emily Dickinson (1830-1886). Whitman systematically organized all his poetry under the rubric of “Leaves of Grass”; Dickinson wrote all her poems on scraps of paper and left them in chests of drawers in no discernible order.

Police

Most protestors cannot spell when they hoist their own signs, a clue to the fact that they often cannot read or think clearly. When they wave banners that read “Defund the Police,” they should have second thoughts and be waving banners that read “Defend the Police.”

Politicians

Politicians are given to “tying themselves up in knots.”

Politics

The composition of the practice of politics is one-third politesse, one-third jiggery-pokery, and one-third skull-duggery.

The question I have is the following: “*Politics* a noun but is it a singular noun or a plural noun?” It strikes me that the study of the subject is singular; after all, it is described in curricula as *a political science*. Otherwise the practice of the discipline is in the plural, and thereby lie the lies.

Polls

The abbreviation of a “politician” is a “pol,” whereas the

abbreviation of what elects a politician or a pol in the first place are the results, usually, of a public opinion “poll.”

Pornography

“Perfectly naked,” the idiom has it. But wouldn’t it be more striking if the idiom went like this: “Imperfectly naked”?

Pornography is said to be largely concerned with “tits and slits.”

Possibility

“Whether possible or appropriate” is an expression that I favour, in spite the fact that I favour equally its opposite, the formulation “Whether impossible or inappropriate.” It is possible for me and for everyone else who wishes to do so to value them equally.

Power

Chinook, Iroquois, Manitou, Mohawk, Orenda. These are names that were given by North American Aborigines to Native tribes and to ancestral beings believed to wield prodigious powers. In the early 20th century, such names were hijacked by the North American aviation industry to identify the latest in powerful military and civil jet engines.

There is no one man who is mighty enough or one woman who is almighty enough to move the Earth on or off its axis. It takes a celestial body like a Moon or a Sun to accomplish that.

Nothing is more powerful than the Power of Yes unless it is the Power of No.

Prayer

The verb *to pray* refers to addressing a solemn request – a prayer to an object of devotion to effect a change – in effect, a *plea*. But it seems the imperative form of the verb – *to pray* – has a secondary meaning, summarized in the words *pray continue*, meaning “if you don’t mind.”

Precarity

It has taken mankind to the Twenty-first Century to find a way to describe the social and economic conditions of the class of people who live precariously. The condition is nowadays known as the *precarity*.

Preferences

When I say I prefer the music of Mozart to the music of Bach, I am expressing a preference in taste. Preferences are personal and individual and a reflection of one’s musical knowledge and listening experience. I am not engaging in interpretation or clarification or making a musical point when I express such a preference.

Presence

Some people will be overcome by the spirit of an amazing presence; other people will be undone by the sense of a disarming absence of the spirit of presence. Same difference; different end results.

In a curious way, the sense of presence may serve as the sense of transcendence.

Priest, Catholic

A Catholic priest is a man who enjoys dressing up in raiment

like that regularly worn by a woman.

Priorities

There are priorities that are generally agreed-upon, and there are improprieties that have yet if ever to be agreed-upon. It's unlikely there will ever be agreement upon the latter. A real mess for mankind.

Privacy

Your experiences, thoughts, and feelings are more personal and less public than the parts of you that are regularly regarded as private.

Piracy and privacy are almost the same word.

Probative

Probative is a word favoured by advocates for it refers to an argument that *proves* a position taken; its opposite is *prejudicial* which does the reverse and *disproves* a position taken.

Professional Classes

Among members of the professional classes, there is no end of pros and tyros, but at first it is hard to tell the pros from the tyros – the full-timers from the newcomers.

Progressive

The Republican Party of the United States may be considered a socially regressive political party except for the fact that it is really quite progressive ... in that it resembles progressive diseases like Alzheimer's, Creutzfeldt-Jakob, and Dementia.

Prophecies

There are two types of prophecies or predictions, and these are either prognostications or vaticinations. The former offer a reasoned view of the future that is likely to come to pass, identified with the French seer Nostradamus. The latter issues a foreboding about the actual future, like those promulgated by prophetic Popes like Sylvester II, Sixtus IV, Urban VIII, Julius II, Leo X, and Paul III.

Prosodion

The ancient Greek processional hymn was in its day known as the *prosodion*. It is not entirely unknown or unheard in modern times.

Providence

Providence is not anyone's spiritual state, fate, or destiny. It is simply the largest city and the capital city of the State of Rhode Island, the city where H.P. Lovecraft was born, where he wrote his fiction, and where he died.

Providential

The adjective *providential* once meant "heaven-sent." Now it is associated with assurance and insurance companies.

Psychiatry

Do not mix shrinks.

Public Figures

We witness the inanity of our elected officials, appointed guardians, and public figures against the backdrop of the insanity of our times.

Publication

The editors of *The New Yorker* use the idiom “came out” with respect to the publication or the launch of a new book. What this practice brings to my mind is a new and yet unopened book being presented to members of high society at a debutant ball in the Southern United States.

Publishing Companies

Publishing companies used to be referred to in a genteel way as “publishing houses.” These days the small ones are “publishing hovels” rather than houses, whereas the gigantic ones are “publishing behemoths.”

Pun

A *pun* is routinely dismissed as “the lowest form of wit” whereas *paronomasia* is maintained to be a literary device of the highest order. Yet *paronomasia* is simply the Greek term for *pun*. The word means “a play on words that sound alike” or “dual meaning.”

Putin, Vladimir

The late Bob Hoskins, the English character actor of stage and film, except for the eyes, had the facial appearance of Russian President Vladimir Putin. (Putin’s eyes resemble those of the KGB agent that he was, and what Hoskins never was.)

Puzzles

I have always thought that to complete a crossword puzzle was to engage in a mindless activity. But there is a form of the crossword puzzle that is more mindful and more rewarding and that is known as the acrostic puzzle. It has the

merit of revealing a hidden quotation, usually one that is inspirational in the extreme.

Q

Quality

Arts, acts, emotions, entertainments, feelings, ideals, ideas, intuitions, relations, relationships, thoughts, etc., may be categorized under these headings: Primary, Elementary, Secondary, Tertiary, Graduate. This categorization is much more apparent viewed from the Graduate level than it is from any of the other levels.

Quasi-human Beings

There are said to be chronological records and related evidence of the movements of quasi-human beings across the seven continents and the seven seas of the Earth that have remained undetected and hence unknown to mankind since antiquity. But where are they – the chronological records if not the quasi-human beings?

Questions

Is there any difference between a questionable question and one that is question-begging?

Questions & Answers

To pose a question is to propose its answer.

R

Rage

An age of rage is followed by a period of peace, which in turn is followed by more rage and then by diminishing periods of peacefulness.

Read

To read and to be read and to be reread amount to the same activity. To be unread is something else entirely.

Reading

Try as I might I find it impossible to distinguish between or among such terms as “reparative reading,” “paranoid reading,” and “performative reading.”

I read more than a lot. In fact, I even read when I am sound asleep, in the sense that I seem to see lines of type in my nightmares, words that make some sense for a little while and then no sense at all.

To read a book about Religion is to learn a lot about society. To read a book about God is to learn a lot about human nature. To read a book about the Devil in Hades is to learn that all is not well in our world.

Reading Matter

In what ways does reading really matter?

Reaver

The reaver orders the captive wearer of clothes to disrobe, shed garments, strip, unclothe, undress. Thereupon the captive is readdressed and redressed and then it happens all over again. At times like these, it is better to be the reaver rather than the wearer.

Relationships

Everyone wants something from a romantic relationship and that *quid pro quo* extends from interest and gifts to attractions and interactions.

Religion

What bothers me about an organized religion is the internal and external movement to turn it into a “re-legion.”

Religions

It is not true that *each one* of the world’s major religions is corrupted at its core; yet it is true that *one-half of each one* of the world’s major religions is corrupted at its core.

Relic

Description of a religious relic: Immortal Remains.

Remembrance, Book of

When the death of a notable person occurs, a white-covered Book of Remembrance is opened in his or her honour. Then alongside it is opened a second book, this one a black-covered Book of Disremembrance. It exists in the minds of not entirely sympathetic mourners.

Resistance

It is much easier to rise from your knees in a church than from your knees in your crypt.

Reveille

In Germany, the Nazi's wake-up signal was not to give "the reveille" but "to rail and revile."

Revelation

What is most revelatory is of the most relevance.

Riding

Allow me to surmount a mount and a mountain dismount and I will be all set to be a cavalier chevalier.

Rights

Rites of passage take place over days and nights until they are *passé*. Rituals proceed over nights and days until they are overturned. Rights remain in place until they turn into wrongs before our very eyes and ears.

The conflict between one human right and another human right is vexing to be sure, but as philosophers have long noted, when such a conflict occurs it is wrong-headed and short-term and hence will not long endure.

Rituals

Imagine rituals and rites, ceremonials and observances, to be routines of mindfulness.

Royalties

My books generate modest royalties, so much so that their earnings could rightly be referred to as “peasantries.”

Rubles

Wherever there are rubles there are rarely scruples but troubles are guaranteed.

Ruins

These days I am little more than a ruin among the runes.

Ruminations

I float in the *see* of vision as I swim in the *sea* of thought.

S

Sages

There are more sages *per capita* in the Far East than there are in the Far West, if only because the burden of presaging lies in the hands and heads of Eastern sages, whereas the whole business lies in the algorithms of the computers in the corporate offices of Western opinion pollsters.

Saint nor Martyr

Neither saint nor martyr be / For a life that’s fancy-free.

Scenester

This is a little used noun, *scenester*. It refers to a person who

tries hard to fit into a specific social or cultural scene.

Schafer, R. Murray

At Koerner Hall in Toronto, I sat beside R. Murray Schafer, the composer of avant-garde music and the theorist of “the soundscape.” I soon realized that he could see with his single eye more than I could see with my two eyes, and that he could hear as if he had not two ears like me but all of three ears.

Science

Science is little more than cause and reflect.

Scripture & Literature

There is no sacred scripture or great work of literature still in existence that is not the object of extensive study and analysis by a scholar of religion, of history, of imaginative literature. All such works have one characteristic in common: there exist so many variations in expression and interpretation that no one reader knows explicitly what the texts say or is able to affirm if anything is consistent at all.

Scriptures

The sacred scriptures of someone else’s religion seem incredible and unbelievable alongside the sacred scriptures of one’s own religion. In fact, the texts make no sense whatever outside the boundaries of that religion.

Secrets

The contemplative life concentrates on open secrets rather than on closed commonplaces and therefore is all the more uncanny for it.

Sense & Nonsense

There is sense in nonsense but no sense at all in senselessness.

Shame

The silence that accompanies shame is the shame that follows silence.

Silence of God

The so-called silence of God is nonsense, and so is the so-called word of God. God (or the so-called God) takes the wrap for all of the acts and deeds committed by mankind, whether they are deemed “crimes” or “offences” or “sins.”

Sins

The so-called “secrets of the confessional” – admissions of sins by the penitent that are shared with the shriver or priest – are really those sins that are on display for everyone to see and watch and appreciate on dedicated television channels.

Skill

Why is it so difficult for me (for one) to appreciate that the call for artifice will attempt to overtake the appeal of artistry?

Skin Colour

I studied my face in the bathroom mirror for a few moments only to find that I am neither foul nor fair, neither white nor black, neither brown nor red, neither yellow nor nondescript, but instead I seem to appear to be beige, ecru, pale, taupe, tan, or white.

Sky

The sky – that minimal region of the heavens that is visible as a canopy over our heads wherever we are standing on the surface of the Earth – is half bright or half dark, depending on the time of day or night, or night or day.

Sleep

I fall into a *fast* or *sound* sleep and, trust me, it is a *vast* sleep.

The state of sleep is the most common Altered State of Consciousness known to human beings.

Societies

Casts are encountered in the East, classes in the West, cults in the South, and inukshuks and igloos in the North.

Social Class

The study of “social class” includes the consideration of class struggle, *i.e.*, the clash between the lower classes and the upper classes. The study makes for quite exciting reading but in reality is thoroughly depressing.

Solioonensius

This awe-inspiring term (a real mouthful, possibly of Dervish extraction) refers to a “cosmic law” and a “great process of reciprocal destruction” caused by positions assumed by the planets of the solar system along with the “abnormal conditions of being-existence” of human beings on the planet Earth. Much is made of this “process” by G.I. Gurdjieff in *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* (1950) who described the Sinking of Atlantis and the rise of Bolshevism in Russia as two expressions of it.

Space

Space is enriched from vast cradles of fresh stars as well as the vast cemeteries of fallen stars.

Outer and inner space have little in common, aside from the supposition that external space is infinite and internal space is eternal.

Spacetime

If spacetime is more than a mathematical model, it would seem that space is infinite and time is eternal: the very nature of our unknown universe.

Speech

Sounds lead to syllables on the way to the rhetorical analysis of speech and its assumed or supposed signification.

Spies

I never remember whether it was Whittaker Chambers who was the Soviet spy or Alger Hiss who was the Soviet spy. The latter's name, which has a sinister ring to it, is somewhat responsible for this mix-up.

Sports

The description "colour commentator" is no longer being heard to refer to light-hearted sports reporting by personalities on radio, television, and the internet ... for obvious reasons having to do with race.

Stability

If you stare at an object that is stationary for long enough, it

will appear to move of its own accord. If you try to stand still, even for a brief period of time, you are certain to start moving without realizing it. Stability and instability are twins.

Stars

The stars in the heavens appear so minuscule because of their great distance from Earth. Who knows? Maybe there are individual stars that are as vast as our solar system, vaster even than our place in space, which is a somewhat negligible locale in the Orion Arm of our very own Milky Way Galaxy.

There are favourable stars in the sky and in the same sky unfavourable stars – both bright stars and dark stars – as well as unmeasured realms of space that host not one single star at all.

Statue or Statute

The next time a mob of reactionaries topples a public statue of Sir John A. Macdonald, someone should vociferously object and shout, “Stop! Observe the statute of limitations!”

Statues appeal to life and to the heart; statutes appeal to history and to the head.

Stellification

We mortals yearn to roam the Fields of Stellification, but we know in our hearts and in our heads that we never will be able to do so because they are incredibly remote from us in time and space.

Sterculius

There is a little-known Roman god named Sterculius. His name is derived from the Latin word *stercus*, “excrement.”

(Other translations are stench, odour, manure, feces, etc.)
Sterculius was recognized to be the guardian of the privy.

Suicide

I have yet to decide whether the act of suicide is revealing of one's weakness or of one's strength.

Sun

It has been maintained that in the distant past the sun did not rise in the East and set in the West, but evidence exists that, instead, the sun rose in the North and set in the South.

Sunbeams & Moonbeams

Sunbeams turn into moonbeams by midnight and back into sunbeams by first light.

Supply Chain & Blockchain

The notion of the "supply chain" for the efficient movement of goods may not be new, but it acquired its present global perspective in the first decade of the 21st century, at about the same time that "blockchain" as a form of accounting by computerized ledgers came into its own. Oddly, the former began to break down at about the same time as the latter acquired its popularity. (Oct. 3, 2021)

Surprise

Although I find the routine of daily life during the pandemic to be stifling and indeed enervating, I live in a perpetual state of "startlement."

T

Tall Tale

This is not just another tall tale because the one that I am currently relating happens to be the tallest tale of them all.

Tarot Cards

A pack of Tarot cards is no more arcane or sibylline than a deck of Myriorama cards.

Taste

Each one of us is born with the sense of taste. Some of us develop that sense so as to distinguish between and among levels of taste. Only a few of us have the discernment necessary to experience what has been called rightly called “good taste” in food and expression and life.

Tattoo

Another word for “tattoo” is “regret.”

Teaching

Once the Teaching Master learns that his students believe in the existence of an Invisible River, then his foremost task is to construct for them an Invisible Bridge.

Teaching & Learning

What is required of the teacher is to determine what the pupil does not know and what the student assumes to be known

and then supplement and supersede as may be desired or required.

Te Deum

“Te Deum” is the title of an early Christian hymn that is sung at Thanksgiving Services and addressed in Latin “to God.” It is not to be confused with the single word “tedium.”

Theatre

It dismays me to see an excerpt from a scene from a classical play or a grand opera that is shown on television. The actors and the action always appear so feigned and phony – so “mixed media,” it would seem.

Ties that Bind

We speak with eloquence about “the ties that bind” but haltingly about “the ties that blind.”

Time

There is an immemorial tradition that there was an epoch when there was no time at all. Yes, and that period – or non-period – that epoch perhaps – was thereafter known as “once upon a time.”

It was a hip-hop artist and performer who intriguingly titled one of his songs “Everything Ends Last Year.” He is known professionally as “Open” Mike Eagle and with fellow composer and producer Caleb Stone he wrote the passage-of-time composition which is 2:22 minutes in length for his 2020 album titled *Anime, Trauma and Divorce*.

Toronto

The City of Toronto was called “the City that Works” by the journalist and correspondent Anthony Astrachan in 1975. Since then it has acquired the reputation of being a humdrum place that does not work at all.

Tourism

The memory of the Grand Tour of Europe in the 19th century will be succeeded by the excitement of the Grand Tour of the Planets of the Solar System in the 23rd century.

Toxicity

It has been asserted that the series of words that begins like this – conic, iconic, ionic, ironic – always ends like this – toxic.

Traffic Jam

A traffic jam may be referred to as “a jam of motor-carts.

Trump, Donald J.

Former U.S. President Donald J. Trump has the sole skill of being able to kill off rational discussion with a blast of irrational discourse.

Trump considered himself to be quite a genius in all things, but the truth is he is only quite ingenious in being begrudging and disingenuous.

Translators

It has long been maintained that the task of the translator of a poem is to compose a poem that resembles the original but

in a different language. But what is being long maintained is often long of tooth and hardly worth doing in the first place. Does the English language need yet another poem? What it needs is a poem that has the shape and feel of one that would not naturally have been composed in English in the first place.

Translators are ideally interpreters, even at times spokespersons or mouthpieces, tasked with creating representations rather than facsimiles or copies.

Trust Fund

A trust fund enhances a young man by leaving him taller, brighter, healthier, more confident, and more successful in society than he would otherwise be, whereas such a fund leaves a young woman more desirable as well as more particular about her suitors.

Tunes of Brigadoon

Dune June moon noon prune ruin soon swoon tone tune.

Tyrants

Autocrats are the aristocrats of dictatorship and despotism.

U

U

U is a title of respect in the language spoken in Burma, now Myanmar, for a man, the equivalent of “Mr.”

Ukraine

“The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain.” Since 2021, the rainfall in Ukraine has come largely in the form of guided Russian missile attacks.

They might be close to equivalent: the cost of manufacturing and delivering and detonating a Russian guided missile or the cost of rebuilding a Ukrainian apartment building after its aerial demolition. Both sides lose; neither side wins. The costs are excessive in both instances.

Unabridged

A text is regarded as “unabridged” when it is too long to be read in a single sitting and found to be lacking in available abridgements.

Understanding

The world has much more to feel and to experience than it has to perceive and to understand.

United States Supreme Court

The Roman Catholic Church manages 20,000 church buildings throughout the United States – make that number of church buildings 20,001. Since the year 2022 that figure includes the U.S. Supreme Court Building with its quorum of Catholics of one Chief Justice and eight Associate Justices, located at 1, First Street, Northeast, Washington, D.C.

V

Values

I find increasingly that I am *nefar*, that is both *near* and *far* from the world of today's values, indeed coetaneously so.

These days – the 2020s – it is difficult to see the world of values as other than *declivitous*, that is, “downward sloping.”

Vanity

There is a vein of thought that is entirely vain and hence totally thoughtless.

Vantage

Vantage is important if only because it offers the viewer some unanticipated but obviously valuable *advantage*.

Vantage Points

In the theatres of war and life we yearn to be seated in the *loges* but yield enough to be sent to the *parterre*, aka *the pit*, for the duration of the performance.

Velleity

Velleity is a word encountered more often in print than in speech. It is an eminently forgettable word that refers to a weak wish rather than a strong desire. Hence *velleity* in the singular (or *velleities* in the plural) is used too seldom to be memorable.

Verse

I find much modern verse to be – *ugh!* – perverse. It is seldom perverse in an interesting way; indeed, it is seldom even verse *per se*. One has to persevere to read any amount of it at all.

Here is a test of the quality of free verse: Copy the lines but ignore the lineation or line-breaks so the text appears on the page to be a paragraph of prose. The next day from memory try to reproduce the original lineation.

Coeval with the *life of the line* is the *width of the page*.

Vice-versa

The difference between a saint and a sinner is *vice-versa* or *vice-adversa*.

Vicious

“Viciousness” means full of vice, bad habits, thoughts, actions, etc. It may also refer to someone who is “second-in-command,” who may harbour resentments of the “first-in-command.”

Vietnam

The United States Armed Forces fought for twenty years in a state of Vietnamania.

W

War

“The war to end all wars” is how H.G. Wells described the outbreak of the Great War of 1914-18. He was premature in his hopes, as he lived to see the outbreak of the Second World War of 1939-45. These days we face what could be regarded as the Post-World War, that is “a war to end not wars in themselves but the world as we know it.”

Waiting

Over the course of my life I am spending a lot of time waiting for people to arrive and depart and for events to occur. Then, abruptly, tragically, the waiting is no more.

Walk of Life

The Walk of Life is our perambulation about the boundaries that extend from birth through life to death but not before, during, beside, or beyond them.

Watchmaker

Much do I admire the new and sophisticated “communications slogan” adopted by Vacheron Constantin, the fine watchmaker based in Genève, Switzerland: “One of Not Many.”

Weapon

A handgun is not the property of the shooter; a handgun is the owner of its user.

Weather

Some parts of me inform the rest of me that I am enduring a rough period in my life. For instance, last week it was so cold in the morning that I hesitated to crawl out from under the blankets on the bed. This week, in contrast, it is so hot that I am aware that there are no blankets at all to heave off the bed.

Weight

People in their thirties worry about adding weight, whereas people in their sixties worry about losing weight.

Wife

My wife may be best described as “cervine,” which means “like or pertaining to a deer,” though in this instance it would be safe to best to spell the word “dear”!

Willies, The

There are some words or expressions that give me the willies ... and “the willies” is one such expression!

Wink & Blink

There is a big difference between a wink and a blink: the first being voluntary, and presumably purposeful; the second being involuntary, and presumably meaningless.

Wisdom Literature

The problem with “wisdom literature” is that it is not wise in the ways of the world though it is savvy with respect to the byways of words.

Woke and Wok

Woke and *wok* are two quite different words. The former word is the past participle of the verb “to wake” as in “to wake up” or “to stay awake” especially about matters of race relations and social inclusion. The latter word is a noun that refers to a popular Chinese cooking pot. Perhaps the words have some characteristics or features in common. If so, I am not aware of them.

Women

Stare into Marlene Dietrich’s face long enough and eventually

you will see every woman who ever lived. Stare into Greta Garbo's face long enough and you will see no one you know except every female who has ever resisted growing up.

To think about one woman is to compare her with another woman, but to set eyes on one woman is to recall all other women.

The relationships that I have had with women are of two types: further and farther, examples and instances, between and among.

I have learned that some women are tall, some are small; some are bossy, some are beleaguered; some are beautiful, some are beguiled; some will fornicate, some will adulterate; some will be or do none, or all, of the above.

Word, The

The contest we face is between the potency of the world that encircles us and the primacy of the word that dwells within us.

Words

No truer words were ever spoken or written than these four which are associated with a number of artists but especially with the *memento mori* of the French painter Nicolas Poussin in 1637-38: *Et in Arcadia ego*. The meaning in Latin is "I too am in Arcadia." In other words, death will be found elsewhere, being everywhere, as it has the last word.

Words of Wonder

Readers of this work should note that it is not that this is a collection of wonder-working words. These are not words of wonder, but wonder words, that is, words meant to make one

wonder, not perform wonders!

Work

Why is it that events keep interfering with intents?

World

The longer I live, the more I realize that our planet and its population are equally commonplace and singular at the same time. The planet is commonplace because it is but one of billions and because it changes without warning. Its population of billions of people is singular because it too changes without reason.

Each word is a world that is separate unto itself.

The world should be [*insert here your own words to describe what it should be like*] but isn't.

Worries

Worries are wounds that heal only with the advent of demise.

Wounds

Slivers give me “the shivers.”

Writing

There was a time when all pens had nibs and those that used ink were known as fountain pens. Then some writing instruments acquired metal balls, as in ball-point pens, in Europe called “biros,” after the last name of their Hungarian-Argentine inventor. At long last they were replaced by felt tips, called markers. Imagine: It all began with feather-tips!

X

X

“My X-Ring goes on my finger before I go out the door every morning. It is a constant reminder to me of the person I have become by being a part of the Xaverian family.” These two sentences are taken from an on-line promotion for St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada. Rating systems placed “Saint S of X” as No. 1 in “Student Satisfaction.”

Y

You

You refers to one person or to a group of people who are being addressed as the subject of a verb or as the object of a verb or preposition. Thus do grammarians always know how to define a word.

There is “the you,” there is “the inner you,” and there is “the you out yonder.” Make of that three-fold distinction what you and your favoured theologian may think to be appropriate under the circumstances.

Z

Z

Z is the final letter of the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet and it is pronounced *zed* or *zee*. It is also the least frequently used letter of those in the alphabet. *E* and *T* are the two most frequently used letters; *J*, *Q*, and *Z* are the three least frequent, *Z* being, as noted, the least used of all the alphabet's twenty-six letters.

Appendix: Contronyms

A *contronym* is a lexicographical term for a word that has two meanings rather than one single meaning and that these meanings are opposed in whole or in part rather than united in agreement. *Synonyms* are different words that have the same meaning. *Homonyms* are words that sound alike but have different meanings. *Antonyms* are words that are their opposites in meaning. *Heteronyms* are words that are similarly spelled but differently pronounced. Another name for a *contronym* is an *antilogy*, and yet another is an *enantiodrome* (which is Jungian, as *reaction formation* is Freudian).

Here is a selection of some well-known *contronyms*, some eighty of them in all, including compounds, though there are assuredly many more in use, some of which could be seen to share characteristics of members of the above categories of somewhat related terms. Although not so identified, these *contronyms* may be nouns, adjectives, verbs, or adverbs.

apology aught bill bolt bound buckle chuffed cleave clip consult
continue custom dike discursive dollop draw dust enjoin fast fine
finished first degree fix flag flog garnish give out go grade
handicap help hold up hysterical lease left liege literally mean
model moot nery off out overlook oversight peer presently put
out puzzle quantum quiddity quite ravel refrain rent resign rock
sanction sanguine screen seed shop skin splice stakeholder story
strike table temper throw out toss out transparent trim trip
unbending variety wear weather windup with

1 Aug. 2021

Wonder Words is a collection of sentences that give expression to expressions: ideas, ideals, thoughts, notions, feelings, emotions, moods, errors, truths, falsehoods, commonplaces, etc. These take the form of adages and apothegms that intriguingly sidestep “common sense” in an attempt to convey to the reader some degree of “uncommon sense.” So these compositions, whether they take the form of aphorisms or of adages, far from being age-old, are brand-new compositions. They have been composed in the spirit of exploration and discovery, innovation and invention, scholarship and showmanship, by **John Robert Colombo** who is the author, editor, compiler, and translator of a great many books including compilations of quotations and literary anthologies. A list of these books appears on his website (www.colombo.ca). The present publication is not unique for it follows in the wake of the same author’s previous collection titled **Every Other Word**.

