

Andrew Cookson

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## THE FINAL WORD

“You know what advice I’d give to people, if I could, one piece of advice so that they’d never be convicted of a crime? Don’t do anything out of the ordinary. And that’s it. If you have a daily routine, stick to it. *Religiously*. That way there’s nothing to explain. That’s my advice - never, ever leave yourself with something to explain.”

J. Smith, on his release from prison, after spending 40 years inside for a crime he did not commit.

“You know what makes an epistolary novel unbelievable? When none of the letters go missing. I wish I lived in a world like that. And why do we only see the relevant letters? If you want to show a person’s life through their letters, why don’t we see them all? The utility bills, the flyers for delivery pizza firms, letters addressed to previous tenants and the rest. Just imagine now, doing the same with the modern day equivalent - a novel told through an exchange of emails. A festival of badly-written notes, carelessly devoid of grammar, baffling and patchy capitalisation, unspellchecked spelling, all bookended by an awkward and often incongruous approach to personal formality. Not to mention the deluge of spam from online casinos and drug vendors. Perhaps it’s not such a good idea after all.”

C. Johnson, prominent literary critic and neophyte blogger.

‘Do you ever wonder if we mistakes? I mean, not procedural mistakes or technical mistakes, things that actually don’t matter, but a serious mistake. You know, a completely incorrect interpretation, something where the wrong man goes to jail.’

The junior detective examined the exterior of a stocky mug while he spoke, no believer in tea leaves, he might almost have been reading the words from an unusually verbose design. At his feet lay two bodies, one living, one dead - the warm inspecting the cold - one intact, the other anomalously porous.

‘It looks like the sword passed all the way through the chest, in at least five places, with several other wounds to boot. Left lung, heart, aorta - all perforated. It would have been quick, but... Jesus, another sword.’ The forensic specialist looked up at his colleague from his prone position. ‘What is that, the third one this year?’

His elbows rested at the fringes of a scarlet puddle that emanated from underneath the victim. Now glossy and congealed, in a less-viscous state the puddle had set off across the floor in sinuous rivulets, which tracked and traced the microgradients of the ceramic tiles. This liquid flare seemed like a final, grasping attempt to signal for help; a help that came, but too late, and was thus no help at all. A few of these bloody threads mingled with the glass smashed from the backdoor, two immiscible components of a dangerous jigsaw that would spill the blood of the unwary.

‘Yeah, three. Though one of those might have been a long knife, the pathologist on that case couldn’t really be sure.’ He offered a welcome hand to the kneeling detective, whose joints cracked as he rose.

‘What’s the difference between a sword and a long knife anyway?’

‘Not much I guess if you get stabbed by either one.’ he replied and gave a humourless laugh.

‘Jesus. What a mess.’ The forensic expert peeled off the red and blue Latex gloves, before doing the same to the blue, flimsy shoe covers, dropping them all to the floor. Any further conversation was interrupted before it could begin, by the crackle of radios, a fraction apart, giving the impression of an echo in the room.

***‘When you’re done in there, can you come through to the study? There’s some of his paperwork on the desk. Bag and tag, would you?’***

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‘Look at science though, every so often they discover they’re wrong about such-and-such, and rewrite the textbooks and dole out prizes. Nobody blames the original researchers for getting the wrong end of the stick, nobody sues them or demands compensation. Can you imagine the same thing happening with us?’

‘Well...’ Avoiding eye contact, he instead focused his attention on the Professor’s crowded desk, which lay reluctant host to fifteen stacks of paper, each one threatening to collapse in an avalanche of disorganisation and d(ig)ust. The untidy surroundings gave special prominence to the few sheets of paper arranged neatly in the centre of the desk. Framed by this chaos, the fastidious alignment of those humble sheets with the hard edges of the desk couldn’t help but look suspicious.

‘No, it’s how could you be so incompetent, and here’s a lawsuit for this, and a disciplinary procedure for that. You know we really have short memories, don’t you think? All our history suggests that a fair portion of what we know will be overturned within our life time, and yet, we all think that the version of events we currently hold, will remain so forever. We never learn.’

Still refusing to engage his colleague, he held the papers up to the light, a first search for hidden messages or perhaps merely something to do. ‘Speaking of versions of events, perhaps we can focus and sort this lot out?’ Rank had its advantages.

‘But I’m not saying that we’re the only ones who would make the mistake. I mean that anyone who looked at the case, at all the evidence, would come to the same, wrong conclusion. Consider the situation that the whole story of the evidence lends itself to misinterpretation, that it meshes perfectly with our whole human methodology to make drawing the incorrect conclusion inescapable.’ Or perhaps it didn’t after all.

Succumbing finally to the junior detective’s questioning he asked, ‘But how would you know then, how would anyone know apart from the accused?’

‘Exactly, and doesn’t that fact give you the chills? Just imagine it, being that person, where the whole world, the entirety of the human race, all the people past and future finding you guilty, and you’re the only who knows otherwise.’ He leant on the windowframe, arms folded in the satisfied pose of an argument well put.

‘Not that I don’t sympathise with this hypothetical victim of yours, but if you keep thinking like that you’ll never be able to do your job, and before long you won’t be able to do anything at all. So, time to get back on the horse.’ He handed the stack of papers over.

Making no acknowledgement of the rebuke, the detective accepted the gift and peeled back the layers. ‘So, we’ve got a letter, no wait, make that two letters from a Thomas Wright to the deceased, regarding death of Philip Richardson. I suppose we can put these in the same bag then?’

‘Actually, wasn’t Richardson murdered recently as well? I think it was Davis running that case. We should probably bring him on board, see if there’s any link there. Okay, what else is there?’

'You've told me so many lies.'

'I warned you of that.'

Dear Prof. Ainsworth,

I read with great sadness of the passing of Philip Richardson, and I would be grateful if you could pass on my condolences to his family, friends and colleagues. As an undergraduate I had the great privilege of attending his lectures on philosophy and linguistics. Though I did not pursue a career in academia, one of my occupations is as a playwright and I like to think that my works contain some of his influence. I therefore wish to attend the memorial colloquium, and furthermore, I would like to propose a small tribute of my own for the occasion - a short play to be performed at the colloquium, which I hope will capture something of his essence and work.

Several of my plays have been published, and are periodically performed at theatres around the country. My most famous play, with which you are perhaps familiar, is *The Unexamined Lie*, which centred around two possible world-paths that could result from the failure, or not, to confront a simple lie. My innovation in this play was to have both possibilities performed simultaneously on the stage, with the action carefully choreographed so that the overlap between the two was not so great as to confound the audience's understanding of these concurrent events.

If you decide to go along with my suggestion, I would like to make a further imposition, and ask that you send to me any material written by Philip that you believe might best inform the script. Many thanks for taking the time to consider my proposal, and I look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Wright

'God must know that I'm innocent.'

'He knows the truth, yes.'

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Dear Michael,

Thank-you indeed for agreeing to consider my proposal, and for the loan of the various documentary materials. They proved to be extremely useful, and hopefully I have repaid this investment. Your explanatory comments, in particular, provided useful context, and I've added further responses to these as I deemed to be appropriate.

As for the play itself, I hope that you'll all agree that it reveals something essential about the man. My stylistic debt is probably obvious, but it seemed an appropriate model, given that play's various, and continued, interpretations down the years. In many ways I had to approach this task indirectly; my original attempt to write dialogue for such an erudite man in a more conventional, realist style was an abject failure.

The play is titled "Enough Is Too Much". I eagerly await your feedback!

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Wright

'I don't know why I listen to a single word you say.'

'Because I'm the only one who'll talk to you.'

## “The *the* or *the* the?” by Philip Richardson

**Linguists from Oxford University today announced** a breakthrough in the study and classification of the English language. The findings, to be published in the next edition of *The Journal of Language & Philosophy* by a team comprising two linguists and one philosopher, declare a new classification of the word 'the', which they contend will improve scholarly discourse in the fields of language and philosophy, and spark new innovations in literature.

Explaining the findings, lead researcher W. Russell, said, “Everybody is familiar with the word 'a' being the indefinite article, and the word 'the' the definite article, and one might think these are simple words, but actually *the* can be used

*“This is the linguistic breakthrough of the decade, it will prevent hundreds of unnecessary confusions every year.” M. Cooper-Smith, a linguist*

in many different ways and there are more than fifteen such instances listed in the dictionary. To give just a few, it can mark a proper noun, be used as part of a title, or conversely to mark a noun used generically, and even to indicate 'enough'. The usage which concerns us here, is when we wish to say that something is the pre-eminent or archetypal specimen of its kind.”

*“The' is such an elemental and familiar word, a fundamental particle of language, and yet it is still capable of producing such astounding developments.”  
T. Henry, philosopher*

What this means is that we now have a way to classify this particular usage of the word 'the' and codify its italicisation into a language standard, which has been named the definitive article. No longer will readers be required to judge from its context the meaning of the word, aiding not just native speakers of English, but also assisting foreign learners, removing one of the idiomatic quirks of English that occurs in both written and spoken form.

Philosopher T. Henry expressed his surprise at the findings, saying that it had been hidden right in front of us this whole time, “camouflaged by virtue of our own intellectual laziness”. “It's a situation that I think Wittgenstein would have appreciated,” he said, quoting the philosopher, “*A man will be imprisoned in a room with a door that's unlocked and opens inwards; as long as it does not occur to him to pull rather than push.*”

M. Cooper-Smith, a linguist from the University of Sussex, claimed that the work represented a significant breakthrough, and would remove many instances of confusion in the scholarship of literary theory and criticism. “It's hard to overstate the importance of this work,” he said, “indeed one might say it's *the* breakthrough of the decade.”

The work raises interesting questions about how quickly the textbooks will have to be rewritten to accommodate the new classification, and is engendering mixed feelings amongst academics, many of whom fear that other obvious discoveries are laying undiscovered, but at the same time are working excitedly in the hope that they might be the one to discover them.

*“A new word is like a fresh seed sown on the ground of the discussion”  
L. J. J. Wittgenstein, the philosopher and logician*

A spokesperson from the Oxford English Dictionary said that they were scrutinising the discovery closely, and that subject to final approval from the editorial board, the new classification would be included in the next print edition of the OED, and available online in the next few weeks. However, not everyone in the field of linguistics is convinced, with critics from rival universities going so far as to label the research “pointless” and “ill-considered”, with some even decrying it “as an unconscionable waste of tax-payers' funding”. The team remains undeterred, and says that they are already pursuing collaborations with academics in various foreign language departments with the stated aim of applying the discovery to other languages.

‘And if he knows, Reverend, why doesn't he do anything to help?’

‘He will. In Heaven.’

*[I thought the article, published in The Herald on 23/06/02, was amusing at the time, and executed with subtlety. This would still be my opinion if I remained ignorant of what happened afterwards. There was, what I would generously call, a confused response to it, as the following letters to James Rose, the editor, demonstrate. M.A]*

Sir, in this age of high student fees and severe cuts to research funding I hope beyond measure that the study performed by the University of Oxford, the results of which were recently discussed in the article by P. Richardson (“The *the* or *the the*?”, 23/06/02), was not funded from the public purse. It would be an outrage indeed if this were the case, and brings no glory on the researchers, the University of Oxford, or the government.

Yours faithfully,

Stephen Ford

'I don't recognise you anymore.'

'I no longer count that as a bad thing.'

Sir, may we, the editorial team at the Oxford English Dictionary, be permitted to take this opportunity to canvass your loyal readers for their assistance? In response to the recent feature discussing the latest research in grammar and lexicography (“The *the* or *the the*?”, 23/06/02), we wish to ask your diligent readers to please send us any and all instances of the definitive article. Our dedicated team will then catalogue them, and attempt to make an appraisal of the date of the first appearance of the definitive article in the English language.

Yours humbly,

The editors of the OED

'But not here? So, I'll get special compensation in Heaven, for all the shit years I have to endure in here?'

'*Special* compensation? No, not special. Heaven itself is *the* reward.'

## Definitively Not: A Rebuttal to “The *the* or *the* the?” by Peter Dickson

**The article published last week** (“The *the* or *the* the?”, 23/06/02) heralding the discovery of a new word, or, more accurately, a new classification for an existing word, or, and we see how ridiculous it becomes, to put it even more accurately, a new classification for a particular usage of an existing word, fortunately requires no new classification for itself. Any of flimsy, trivial or hoax would surely do.

For in construction the whole article appears to be nothing more than a series of connected sound-bites, but on this we might need to be charitable, and declare that the ingredients provided by the researchers permitted nothing other than the construction of a weak foam, from which insubstantial beginnings will soon collapse into nothing. Flimsy fits perfectly. Indeed, it is hard to wish for easier targets than such overblown declarations such as “*it is hard to overstate the importance of this work*”. Surely the article self-destructs on this point.

At times it isn't clear if the article is intended to be taken as serious journalism, or merely as an immature piece of undergraduate satire. Perhaps the author was aiming for a subtle emulation of Alan Sokal's infamous hoax. If he was, he missed. But for the subject matter, one might be inclined to call it tabloid journalism, and in case my meaning isn't clear, I mean that as a severe insult. Quite apart from the merits, or otherwise, of the subject matter, the author appears to be in thrall to the research and its producers, and offers only scant journalistic balance. That tabloids should fall prey to this is not newsworthy, but that this fate should come to a once august broadsheet is distressing indeed.

It is ironic that the academics quoted in the article refer to Wittgenstein, as though he might have approved of the research. Not only do they appear to lack a sufficiently tight grasp of their own work, they misappropriate the work of this giant of philosophy in the mistaken belief that his words, and thoughts, support their own conclusions. Rather, Wittgenstein argued persuasively against the need for such definitions; context is all. The innovation, if we can call it that, proffered by the Oxford researchers is not only unnecessary but also, contrary to their claims, potentially damaging to linguistics, not least in the limitations it imposes on the usage of italicisation.

Moving from the specific insult to the general danger, it must be emphasised that the publication of work of such staggering banality erodes the stature of the academic profession, eviscerating with a single strike the countless arguments made in favour of the necessary vitality of our scholarly endeavours. There is no shame in failing, indeed a lack of failure can signal a lack of ambition, but when such failures are plucked from the ground and held aloft as prime examples of noble achievements, then the whole community is tarnished, and its members made to look dishonest or foolish. I will let the reader decide which is worse.

To heap such praise and to deploy so large a quantity of words on so small a notion, demonstrates an imbalance of perspective so great that it can only have been produced by an unbalanced mind. Worse, I am fully aware of the irony of those words, it is regretful that they are necessary.

*[This was published the following week, again in The Herald, possibly that was a mistake on his part. I do wonder if he set out to write such a scathing and robust counter-argument. Perhaps a foul mood had taken hold of him that day, or perhaps he simply felt it was necessary to make the con work. For someone usually so careful with his words, the ambiguity of reference to “those words” is strange, I wonder if he was already sensing the first signs of the personal storm to come. M.A]*

'You're leaving? And why?'

'An accumulation of things both said and unsaid.'



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*[The following two letters were found in his private study at home. They were mounted on the wall as a pair; within the confines of the same brass photo frame. As far as I know nobody ever went into the study apart from him, certainly I never did. However, seeing those two letters now gives greater meaning to the line of Shakespeare's that he often quoted, "And one man in his time plays many parts." Most people when they quote that play start at "And all the world's a stage". I think his selection of a few lines further on was intentional and is his own humorous reference to these letters, and the acts that we portray depending on our audience. M.A]*

Dear Loyal Readers of The Herald,

It has come to my sad attention that a brace of articles recently published in this newspaper, purportedly the work of two different authors, were in fact the work of a single author, and appear to have been part of an obscure literary hoax. I would like to take this opportunity to apologise to our readership. Please rest assured that our editorial procedures have been thoroughly reviewed and alterations made so as to prevent such a fraud from ever again being perpetrated against our readers. I hope that I am justified in announcing that, from this issue onward, normal service is resumed!

Yours humbled,

James Rose, Editor

'Then I'm suffering for nothing.'

'I don't believe that's true.'

Philip,

I can only assume that your recent actions were some kind of revenge for our personal situation. I can see that it was a good prank, in some ways original, in others not, and the first article was, by itself, genuinely amusing. However you have exposed my newspaper, and by extension me, to ridicule, and so there can be no forgiveness. Furthermore, while I remain editor, there will be no further opportunities for you to publish in my paper.

Be in no doubt though, despite these efforts of yours, I am having the last laugh.

Your friend,

James

'Then I'll say some more, and retract others.'

'That's not the only reason.'

## Reminiscences of a Heavenly Dispute

There is a fable by that most famous of fabulists Aesop that tells of a battle between the Wind and the Sun. As with all deistic battles, these celestial cowards chose not to sacrifice their own bodies, but to enlist those of men, and make their battlefield here on Earth.

The Wind, I am the stronger of the two, the Sun, no it is I who possess the greater power, see that traveller far below us, the one with the cloak around his shoulders (there must have been others without such garments, who then reluctantly became innocent bystanders)? The Sun, let each of us try to remove the cloth from his back, and whoever should succeed we deem the stronger of us. And so that traveller, whose name was not recorded but who we might as well call Job, assumed his position as victim. The Wind went first and valiantly blew, his storm raging wilder with each anthropomorphic breath, but Job only cursed and proceeded to wrap the coat tighter around his body, where it remained. The Wind, blown out, gave up and the Sun set about the task. Hotter and hotter did his fire burn until finally sweat broke on the brow of Job, who was forced to pause his journey to remove the cloak, leaving the Sun a jubilant victor.

A conventional reading of this fable would go something like this: it is far better to influence with kindness, than with malevolent force. On the face of it a perfectly worthy lesson and, most would agree, sound moral guidance. As to whether it is a true statement or not depends upon what is meant by 'better'. Is it a comparison of morality, or merely of effectiveness? Evidence can be found in history to support either thesis. If Aesop had meant this as moral guidance, would it not have been better for him to be clear, and to say so? Perhaps denoting the Sun, The Good Sun, and the Wind, The Ill Wind? Some essential quality of the fable would probably be lost if such a modification were to be made, though we might trust Aesop's story-telling abilities to have found a way to make it work. In those ancient times the sun and wind were separate quantities, distinct entities, and possessed of personalities too. Today, in our enlightened times - though I think the confusions elucidated in this article demonstrate that in some ways they are anything but - the sun and wind are not so easily untangled; the sun heats the earth, the earth radiates some of this energy into the atmosphere, and buoyancy effects take over from there. So now they are just two parts of one phenomenon, a complex individual rather than two separate ones.

Furthermore, why is the sun identified as uniquely good, and the wind as uniquely bad? Too much sun leads to drought and skin cancer. Too much sun and too little wind above a large city can lead to smog. And even if we did not know those facts, some of which humanity has only recently acquired, we would still see that the sun's act of warming the gentlemen was not in and of itself a good deed. It wasn't done because he was cold and had wished fervently that the sun would shine and warm his bones. We could even ignore this, but still there would remain the fact that the sun saw nothing wrong in interfering with the life of an innocent passer-by. And this was an interference aimed at what? An interference achieving what? There was no great prize at stake, merely the shoring up of the crumbling ego of an elemental force, as if being an elemental force weren't cause enough to be satisfied with one's lot. We might excuse it as a one-off, and now that the matter is settled there'll be no further trouble between the two. For a short while, perhaps, but memories are short, and tempers shorter still, and the Wind, having recovered from a wounded ego, will soon suggest a new challenge, one chosen to better match his strengths. A house made of sticks perhaps, only this time imperilling not only a lone man, but his entire family too.

So just what was Aesop trying to say, and how should we interpret his words today? I argue that the real lesson to draw from the fable is this: language is imperfect and the stories that we tell with it are flawed. It is therefore warning us against attempts to draw lessons too concretely from fables. In essence he wrote a meta-fable, possibly the first of its kind, a fable to end all fables, and yet even this conclusion is necessarily suspect. This fable and his others remain, demonstrating that it's not so easy to learn this specific lesson. Perhaps that is what he meant then? Maybe it doesn't matter what Aesop meant for us to take from it; he is gone, but the text remains and now it must stand alone. All that I can be sure of is that however futile it ultimately might be, we must make every attempt to understand those words, lest they be misappropriated for a sinister purpose. Keep questioning then, and let the final lesson be: nothing – words, ourselves, the world – should be left to linger unexamined for too long.

P. R. 1996

'With respect Reverend, what you believe, that doesn't seem to help me much.'

'Would you prefer that I not believe it then?'

*[The essay seems to be part of a book that he was working on at the time of his death. This is the most complete piece of them, written some years ago, the rest exist only in bullet-pointed outlines of the key arguments. All are retellings, and in the retelling a re-examination, of Aesop's Fables, and I for one am sad that they will now never be given their full expression. M.A]*

*["Aesop: the first post-modernist?" could have been the title for the book. You're right though, it's an utter shame that we'll never see the rest of these essays. Though, if they were to have been anything like this one, which seems to skewer our attempts at taking anything useful from literature, it might be better that we live in ignorance. Then again, perhaps he's not alone in this. The Spanish author Javier Marías suspects that literature is "not really supposed to "answer" things, not even to make them clearer, but rather to explore — often blindly — the huge areas of darkness, and show them better." T. W.]*

*[The following are some of the diary entries that have been transcribed thus far. Some entries have been lost to the entropic indifference of water damage or to illegible handwriting, whereas others seem to contain little of intellectual interest. These entries then, necessarily constitute only a fragmentary record of his diary. M.A]*

3<sup>rd</sup> July '02

I've been told that keeping a diary is therapeutic, we shall see; let us consider this an experiment. What is undoubtedly true is that the previous outlet for my private meanderings is no longer available to me. "An accumulation of things both said and unsaid, which can no longer be overlooked," is what she said as she left. Rehearsed I don't doubt. At least I can be sure that a diary will never betray me, will never be active in betrayal, the information only extracted by force. I only hope that in the process I do not betray myself.

5<sup>th</sup> July '02

Today the news broke of my minor deception, that is, minor by my estimation, others rather predictably are taking a different view. James has issued a ban on my work ever being published in his paper again, though this troubles me least of anything. My back-stabbing head-of-department friend suspended me this morning, "pending the results of an internal investigation". Janet is still refusing to take my calls. I was annoyed at first, now I am glad she did; there is nothing I could have hoped to gain from a conversation with her. And so, I have nothing much else to do with my time than to read (an unexpected, and perhaps the only, benefit to emerge from this debacle). In the evenings it has become my custom to propose eulogistic toasts of single-malt in honour of satire on the sad occasion of its demise.

P.S.

Even though nobody is reading, I'm going to put forward my defence, lest it prove useful to be thus prepared.

If we consider it a dialectical certainty that any thesis will be met with an antithesis, and furthermore if I can state the opposing case just as well as any other writer (and by my estimation better), then why shouldn't I write both sides of the argument? As if the validity of the arguments should be influenced by consideration of the author's identity? What is so terrible about desiring the final word? Isn't that what all of us scholars secretly lust after?

*[I feel no small amount of shame here. Perhaps the Shakespeare quotation refers to me also. I had my private thoughts and public responsibility to balance. It was not intended as a personal betrayal, though I can understand why that's how it might have felt. The quote was his cryptic reproach, a wry private joke. M.A]*

12<sup>th</sup> July '02

There is no change in my situation at the university. HoD's investigation is proceeding at an excruciatingly slow pace, producing little of anything, let alone progress. My supposition is that nobody desires swift conclusions to be reached, so that even if the investigation rightly finds me innocent of anything substantively bad, the length of my banishment to the wilderness serves as a useful warning to others.

*[Perceptive. Again I am shamed. M.A]*

*[I think with the Shakespeare quote he was trying to partially absolve you. He recognises that you were trapped by your role. T. W.]*

19<sup>th</sup> July '02

The investigation continues on at its glacial pace, the minds' of its executors frozen in place, whilst I remain frozen out. More newsworthy is the letter I received today from a lawyer representing the Wittgenstein estate. A stranger thing I have not seen. They are threatening me with a vast array of legal weapons - defamation and plagiarism to name but two. Apparently the estate is unhappy with my quoting Ludwig Wittgenstein in the two articles, or to be more precise, they are unhappy with the particular use to which I put his quotes. Unprecedented.

*[His perspicacity seems to have deserted him here. M.A]*

23<sup>rd</sup> July '02

The house feels too quiet now. There is an all-pervasive silence, only broken if I am the one to break it. I have received no visitors. The clink of cutlery against plate during dinner, the echo of a cough in an empty room, these constitute my ambience now, without them all is unnatural silence. But a man-made silence at that. As a remedy I have taken to leaving the TV switched on at all times. Its emanations when filtered by the walls and empty spaces of the house become incoherent and strangely soothing, even if it is a poor substitute for the rich patina of organic noise.

'And what else?'

'You're not the only one anymore.'

28<sup>th</sup> July '02

I refuse to play their game; I shall turn my back and walk away. And what a fine day it is to leave one's life behind. If this were a film, the weather would be dismal, a raging storm blowing in allusive, resonant sympathy to the trauma experienced by the protagonist. But instead, the weather is bright and crisp, with a pleasing freshness to the air, carried along by a light breeze. The contrast with my life could hardly be stronger, and yet what a thing it would be to expect the weather to reflect my emotions, as though a narrative spotlight had taken a magical hold over the living world,

and could, and would, influence it for my purposes, and mine alone. The broad spectrum of human experience evident even in this small town would encompass too great a variation to be mirrored in the weather, and if it were, what a milestone in meteorology it would be. Narcissism indeed to expect the weather to be centred about our own personal axis! Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, Galileo Galilei, you tried to teach us, but we would not listen.

30<sup>th</sup> July '02

It occurs to me that the furore over the articles, whilst unwarranted in terms of the reasons given, has revealed something about my work, something that never I noticed before, or if I had, that I had managed to suppress. The fact that I can quote philosophers of old in support of my new work makes me question just how new it can be. Of course it is new, but is it revolutionary, is it asking questions that they simply could never have asked? I am starting to think not. Put more starkly - am I doing anything more than simply writing ideas inevitable to any academic operating in this modern climate? Could we take any scholar from the past and transplant him to the present day, and after a suitable period of orientation acquire those same insights from them? Is there anything uniquely modern about me? I'm not so sure, and the problem seems to be becoming increasingly acute. Such levels of self-reference within everything, and to everything else, that the risk of encountering the new seems vanishingly small. Perhaps I should dub it the Epsilon Problem.

Submerged by a deluge of source material that continually reinforces these connections through the enabling medium of shared languages, I see no way to halt it without taking drastic action.

My proposal then - a manifesto - is this:

1. To invent, from scratch and entirely through my own endeavour, a wholly new language in both written and spoken forms.
2. Conduct all scholarly efforts in this language.
3. Crucially, make no attempt to translate between this new language and any other, in order to guard against the possibility of intellectual pollution.
4. Only when I consider my work to be complete will I then translate it into English.

The goal of this philosophical project is nothing less than to formulate utterly new ideas, which ideas that possess no scholarly precursors whatsoever.

3<sup>rd</sup> August '02

*[This entry consisted entirely of what we might want to call "foreign squiggles", though that is a misleading term for them, unless we wish to categorise the human mind of another as a foreign territory, and perhaps it is. I would contend that even our own minds are foreign lands to ourselves. We are never permitted to enter, possess only rudimentary maps and everything we learn comes from self-serving press releases. All the while the country is engaged in permanent evolution, and so we never quite catch-up.]*

*I digress. Back to the characters, at the present time it is not clear what form they take, whether alphabetic or syllabic, or even something closer to the symbols of a pure logic system. Suffice it to*

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*say that they could not be transcribed, in any case their meaning is unlikely to become apparent anytime soon. The final corpus of works transcribed in this language will take several years to decode and translate, and only then can the debate over the proper interpretation truly begin. M.A]*

*19<sup>th</sup> August '02*

I am not well.

*[This appears to be the last diary entry he ever wrote, at least it is the final one in this journal, and we have yet to find any others. There is something rather poignant about these few, unknowingly, prescient words, "I am not well." Even though he recovered, they possess a finality that I find quite disturbing. M.A]*

*[To be so straightforward like that, so honest, I could imagine they were the most challenging four words that he ever had to write. T. W.]*

'Tell me this though, do you believe I'm innocent?'

'I read your case file.'

**Artist-pranksters on harassment charge – 15/08/02 [Excerpt from *The Herald*]**

A London-based performance art group, who call themselves “The Bastard Children of Babel”, appeared in court today on multiple charges of harassment and fraud. The prosecution claim that the group sent approximately two hundred letters to several unsuspecting victims. Each of the letters contained a threat of legal action, which was personalised to each recipient’s circumstances. In some cases, this information could only have been gathered through spying on the victim or through false pretences.

The group, who deny the charges, have not denied responsibility for sending the letters. They claim that it merely comprises an interactive, distributed artwork, which was designed to bring to life certain aspects of Franz Kafka’s novel, “The Trial”. In particular, the state of bewilderment experienced by the novel’s protagonist. The main conceit of this artwork seems to have been that the victims were unaware of their participation in the artwork, instead being under the impression that life and all her misfortunes, was the sole cause of their distress.

Anyone who suspects themselves of being a victim of this hoax is urged to come forward. The trial is expected to continue for two more days.

**Who are “The Bastard Children of Babel”? – 15/08/02 [Excerpt from *The Herald*]**

A performance art troupe founded just over fifteen years ago, they comprise a shifting membership and have been responsible for a number of notable prank-based artworks. Arguably their most notorious stunt was the painting of humorous and cryptic messages onto road signs, sometimes reversing their meaning entirely. Luckily for the group, though perhaps counter to their objectives, no serious accidents occurred as a result.

Their name derives from the situation that they claim must have occurred during the biblical incident of the Tower of Babel. Chiefly that any romantic liaisons that resulted in pregnancy would have led to a generation of bastard children, as once the linguistic confusion took hold, the respective parents would no longer have been able to marry. Given the subsequent teachings of that religion, it’s a subversive re-interpretation. Considered in more symbolic terms, their work aims to represent the resultant breakdown of societal conventions that chaotic events can create, and the art itself embodies such chaos. Some critics contend that they are mere tricksters, whose work should not be elevated, nor dignified by the attribution of any higher artistic purpose.

*[One of the members, one of the key members I understand, of that preposterous group, The Bastard Children of Babel, was a student of Philip’s. One can only presume that it was the idea of this student to target him. Not that any of it came out in the trial, as there were more serious instances under examination. I don’t know if the group is still active, though if they are their pranks must have lost their originality, as they have received no press for several years. Quite possibly the trial led to them disbanding. No great loss. M.A]*

*[It is at this point that I must confess to a small involvement with this group, a brief flirtation if you will. It happened many years ago, while I was still an undergraduate. I was not the only one of his students to belong to that group, though I can no longer remember their names. Anyway, after a couple of meetings the true purpose and character of “The Children” became apparent to me and I took my leave. It saddens me that they harassed Philip, particularly if it contributed to his mental breakdown in any way. Like you, I have not heard anything of them for a while. The last I did hear left me with the worrying impression that they were becoming increasingly willing to take violent action than before. T. W.]*



'What's that supposed to mean?'

'Don't you see? James...'

### **Obituary by Michael Ainsworth**

Controversial author, philosopher and neo-linguist Dr. Philip Richardson, died recently at the age of 56. Born in Yorkshire, he spent his early years in the other rose garden of Lancashire, one of three brothers. The most academic of his siblings, his secondary and further education took place at the local grammar school, after which he was awarded a scholarship to read philosophy and modern languages at Magdalen College, University of Oxford. After graduating with 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours, he stayed at Oxford to complete a DPhil under H. Williams and B. Spencer, the eventual title of his thesis being, "A Vague Understand of Wittgenstein". In it he attempted to provide a Bayesian reading of the early works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, though, as ever, the *Tractatus* resisted a definitive conclusion.

In what would become a defining characteristic of his work, his early post-doctoral research was an ambitious attempt to map the gaps of language. Obviously a problem that could not be tackled directly, he single-handedly embarked on a thorough categorisation of concepts that all the languages of the world could represent. By spotting the gaps in this linguistic map he hoped to discern the concepts with which the human brain was apparently unwilling to grapple. Recognising the importance of this work, a new field of scholarship emerged around him, with many students gaining their doctorates with him and his colleagues.

Sadly this was followed by an unsettled period in his personal life, including a divorce from his wife, an embarrassing discovery of a literary hoax played out in the pages of a national newspaper, and a short spell in a psychiatric hospital. On his release from that institution he entered what were arguably the most fertile and productive years of his academic life. Now a fellow of Magdalen, he began to move beyond his earlier work of simply cataloguing language, and took it upon himself to create an entirely new language *ab initio*, including its script, vocabulary and grammar. The stated aim of the project was nothing less than an attempt to create a private tool with which he could generate truly original ideas.

The reams of un-translated work that he left behind will surely occupy a generation of linguistic scholars as they attempt to decode this singular and unique language. It is our deepest loss that he will not be here to guide us in the task. Philip was found dead in his home, the apparent victim of a brutal stabbing. The police investigation into his death continues. He is survived by his ex-wife, and his two brothers. 13/02/2012.

*Note: a tribute colloquium is planned for early next year in memoriam. Anyone wishing to contribute a talk or paper is invited to contact Prof. M. Ainsworth for further details.*

*[And so, the obituary, which The Herald were gracious enough to publish. Perhaps at the end even James felt some contrition, though it would be quite out of character. In the event that you read one in another newspaper, I felt it best to include my own. As the one to know him best, it is surely the definitive account. To express what I could not in the forum of a national newspaper, I feel in equal parts responsible and innocent. The suspension led to his psychiatric admission, and yet if I feel shame and regret at these events, it seems that the extraordinary blossoming of his scholarship after this incident was directly a result of it, and so I feel a sense of pride too that I helped bring this about. And yet truth be told, none of this was planned, the good or the bad, and it seems to me to be too much post hoc justification, of which there is already an excess in the world. I hope with this obituary I have absolved myself, although it is not my judgement to make. M.A]*

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*[Sometimes it seems that post hoc comfort is the only kind we can find in the world, and one can not be blamed for grasping at it. The key is to recognise it, and then danger can be averted. T. W.]*

'And?'

'I don't see how you possibly could be.'

**Enough Is Too Much**

By Thomas Wright

A tribute (in one) act.

**CAST**

MAN ONE

MAN TWO

**ACT ONE**

*A man runs on stage, breathing heavily. He stops at the centre of the stage, facing the audience, and hunches over, hands resting on knees. He is wearing faded blue jeans, a pair of battered running shoes, and a crumpled white t-shirt. In his right hand is a single sheet of A4 paper.*

*After several minutes of deep breathing, he lifts his head to address the audience, his gaze still drifting slightly downward, speech stilted, the exertions of his running still present.*

MAN ONE

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.

*A second man, identically dressed, enters the stage from the same direction as the first. He too is out of breath, though slightly less so than the first. Throughout the following, unless indicated otherwise, MAN ONE meanders slowly around the stage, MAN TWO following a few weary paces behind.*

MAN TWO

*(Exasperated.)* Proposition 7, again?!

MAN ONE

Exactly! Right here. Right here it says it, but do they listen? *(Points to sheet of paper.)* No, they bloody well don't. They're all so damned arrogant, and presume to think it does not apply to them. Wittgenstein should have added a proposition 7.1, or a footnote of some kind: if it is unclear whether one can speak, assume that one cannot. *(Anger gives way to regret.)* I should have added it.

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MAN TWO

Well it's too late for that now.

MAN ONE

It's too late for anything now.

MAN TWO

Yes.

MAN ONE

Nothing I say will make a difference.

MAN TWO

No. Perhaps it never did.

MAN ONE

*(Depressed.)* So maybe nothing has changed.

MAN TWO

Perhaps, and yet...

MAN ONE

And yet, now this exists *(Brandishes the sheet of paper.)* and before it didn't. And something happened to me in between those two events.

MAN TWO

*(Reproachfully.)* Something happened to us.

MAN ONE

Yes.

MAN TWO

Irreversible.

MAN ONE

And the event recorded right here. *(Waves the sheet of paper again.)* At least the afterwards is not addressed, that is one whereof of which they did not speak.

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MAN TWO

We won't praise them for that.

MAN ONE

No, it was accidental.

MAN TWO

They got lucky.

MAN ONE

Ignorant of their own ignorance; they did not know that there was anything to speak about. If they had, they would have spoken, of that you can be sure.

MAN TWO

They said enough though.

MAN ONE

An obituary. (*Sigh.*)

MAN TWO

Think of it as (*Pause.*) our biography. Not an autobiography though, but ghostwritten.

MAN ONE

It was always to be ghostwritten, of that there could be no escape. But an autobiography, that would be a sad thing, evidence of unpopularity.

MAN TWO

Unimportance.

MAN ONE

Or inflated self-importance.

MAN TWO

Nothing good.

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MAN ONE

Except, except it would have contained only the salient full-truths, not the irrelevant half-truths.

MAN TWO

The obituary writers would protest. And who would be left to stand up to them?

MAN ONE

One would have to face them down before the end I suppose.

MAN TWO

Force the ending then? Enact the prophecy.

MAN ONE

Better than dying to a chorus of lies. *(Softly, thoughtfully.)*  
Lies. Lies. Lies. *(Animated.)* They're the difference you see.

MAN TWO

Between?

MAN ONE

Biography and obituary. Lies... the ease with which they escape the pen.

MAN TWO

Too rarely corrected.

MAN ONE

... and the possibility of them. The brevity of the obit leaves no room for references, and so the truth evaporates from the page. *(Mimes some quantity leaving the sheet of paper.)*

MAN TWO

We could have written the biography beforehand, not so unusual.

MAN ONE

Bah, to what purpose? Who would have benefited?

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MAN TWO

*(Helpfully.)* Future scholars of our work?

MAN ONE

No, the work stands alone. Or should.

MAN TWO

Naïve? *(Laughs.)*

MAN ONE

*(Sad.)* I know. They would trust the biography more. Welcome it, even. The distance of it. *The objectivity.*

MAN TWO

Autobiography is always viewed suspiciously; it sounds like only one side of the argument.

MAN ONE

It's a paradox then. Biography - more objective, less accurate. Autobiography - the reverse.

MAN TWO

The biographer tells us more about himself than his subject.

MAN ONE

So we should trust nothing but the recorded facts.

MAN TWO

Letters? Diaries?

MAN ONE

Back to the epistolary. And yet...

MAN TWO

And yet?

MAN ONE

Again it is incomplete. How is the reader to draw the correct conclusions from a mass of collated materials?

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MAN TWO

It's overwhelming.

MAN ONE

Nuance is lost, oral record is missing. I won't go on.

MAN TWO

And who is unflinchingly honest in everything they write?

MAN ONE

Stories are told. Deceptions are made.

MAN TWO

And if it were all accurate, how much would we need to define a life?

MAN ONE

Too much. More than exists. Something for every second. And if it did, who could hold it all in their mind at once, and make not one false connection?

MAN TWO

I can think of only one, and we know he doesn't exist.

MAN ONE

Some say he is *the* author.

MAN TWO

Better then to read fiction.

MAN ONE

It's *all* fiction.

MAN TWO

Sometimes we forget.

MAN ONE

Yes, sometimes.



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*They stand silently for a minute. Occasionally one of them gestures as if about to say something, but then thinks better of it.*

MAN ONE

But is language even the right tool?

MAN TWO

What else then? Nothing comes close.

MAN ONE

The best that there is, you think?

MAN TWO

It's probable.

MAN ONE

*(Sweep right arm left-to-right, palm facing up.)* And of the many, which one should we choose?

MAN TWO

Ah, the one you know best.

MAN ONE

And if that's not the best one? If none of them are?

MAN TWO

What is to be done?

MAN ONE

Invent one. A perfect language.

MAN TWO

Can there be more than one? *The* perfect language instead?

MAN ONE

Ah, a problem. It might be different for each person.

MAN TWO

A perfect translator would be needed too I suppose.

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MAN ONE

We should have made one before now.

MAN TWO

It was remiss of us.

MAN ONE

Nothing to be done about it now. Not by us at least.

MAN TWO

A good thing too that we left no Rosetta Stone.

MAN ONE

Why so?

MAN TWO

They would have weakened it. Despoiled the language through their use of it.

MAN ONE

*(Looking horrified, hands covering mouth and eyes, almost unable to say the words.)* A mutilated unicorn running amongst the horses.

MAN TWO

*(Oblivious to MAN ONE's horror. Cheery.)* Not a pretty sight.

MAN ONE

*(Hopefully.)* We are absolved then?

MAN TWO

*(Still oblivious, casually walking around the stage.)* Tragedy averted.

MAN ONE

*(Relieved.)* With no penance to be paid.

MAN TWO

And no judgement made.

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MAN ONE

Not by anyone that matters.

MAN TWO

Does anyone matter? (*Stops, and turns to look at MAN ONE.*)

MAN ONE

You shouldn't say that.

MAN TWO

Forgive me. (*Rushes towards MAN ONE.*) Sometimes I forget the things that I shouldn't say.

MAN ONE

It happens to us all.

MAN TWO

Even you?

MAN ONE

Even me. What is worse is when I forget that which I should say.

MAN TWO

Things might have turned out differently, had you remembered.

MAN ONE

She might have stayed.

MAN TWO

She might, but would it have turned out better?

MAN ONE

You think it would have soured regardless?

MAN TWO

You torture yourself with counterfactuals.

MAN ONE

And how would things be if I didn't?

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MAN TWO

In truth, an equal proportion of good and bad, in either case.

MAN ONE

So in the mean they vanish...

MAN TWO

It is the variation that provides the interest.

MAN ONE

You're right. I've nothing more to add.

MAN TWO

Then we've rested here long enough.

MAN ONE

Peaceful while it lasted.

MAN TWO

It can't last.

MAN ONE

I think there will be peace enough ahead.

*They both begin to walk slowly towards stage left.*

MAN TWO

Too much of it.

MAN ONE

And for too long.

MAN TWO

Far too long.

*They exit stage left together, side-by-side.*

**THE END**

'Then you didn't read it right. Read again. Read BETTER!'

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‘So, how do you feel about attending a colloquium on philosophy?’

‘It’s not what I signed up for, when I joined the police, I can tell you that much.’ He paused, and smiled. ‘I wonder if we could have them all done for wasting police time?’

‘Now that I’d pay good money to see. Unfortunately, our suspect might well be there, or maybe some leads. We’ve surely discovered motive enough, or suspicion of that, anyway.’

Nodding his agreement, the detective replied in the declarative, ‘This James fellow, right.’

‘What? No! The art group, The Bastard Children.’

‘Maybe we need to read this stuff again.’

‘Right.’