



THE POOR PRINT



My Perfect Life: A Careful and Complex Design

Emma Gilpin

The squares line up evenly and perfectly, forming a beautifully neat grid which I can scroll through, a photographic record of all the best moments of my life from the ages of 15 to 19. Four years of my little life, cherry picked to create a filtered reel of selected highlights.

This is my Instagram account and it is one of my proudest achievements. When I find myself feeling listless, Instagram is often my first port of call; it's like an art gallery that I can visit whenever I want a flash of beauty and my feed is full of illustrations, interior design, cute girls on expensive holidays, cute girls looking cute, cute girls with all their cute girl friends, books, bunnies and Berlin.

A lot of psychologists and writers have been investigating and exploring the impact that social media has on us and I think that Instagram is one of the most interesting online spaces. Whilst Facebook is a place to connect with family and share photos of

friends, parties and holidays, ranging from goofy selfies with cousins to gorgeous edgy shots which might have been taken by professional photographers, Instagram's focus is entirely on the aesthetic.

You can design a life where it is always sunny, you are always on holiday or at a party (even months after the holiday/party is over, *#tbt*) and you never feel lonely, or a little bit rubbish. Your feed is completely in your control; you can never be tagged in an embarrassing photo of you eating a burger, which is seen by too many people before you have a chance to send a self conscious "Hi Chloe. I don't like this photo..." Your life is there, curated and edited into a beautifully packaged version of itself that you think other people might want to see.

I don't necessarily think that this is a bad thing. I enjoy looking through my Instagram photos and seeing this version of my life reflected back at me. It shows me how many fun and exciting things I have done, reminds me of con-

certs I went to when I was 16, T-shirts I loved and wore to friends' birthday parties, art projects I was proud of, bops, holidays and days out with my family.

But equally, there are some days, less good days, when I have nothing I would like to share with the people who follow me on Instagram or when I look through those photos with a more critical eye. I look through those photos and see a series of lies staring back at me, because that was the day when I had really bad food poisoning and that was the day when I was overwhelmed by work stress.

Or simply because there are so many things that an Instagram photo doesn't tell you. For every 1000 words a picture speaks, there are 10,000 that it doesn't. Two of the cute girls in that night out photo might have had a terrible argument when they got drunk. The guy who just uploaded a gorgeous snap of him on holiday in the Maldives might be feeling a bit fat today. People aren't lying or trying to deceive other people when they upload these photos, but it is an easy way to feel in control of a life that is often a lot

more complicated than the sleek grid which gives an Instagram account its minimalist beauty.

When you're having a bad day and start scrolling through Instagram (or Facebook or Snapchat or Twitter) it's easy to forget that the fun, perfect, exciting lives that other people seem to be living whilst you're writing a mediocre essay are edited and filtered. It's easy to allow yourself to feel pangs of jealousy and inadequacy.

Sometimes I wonder whether I should delete my Instagram account, whether I am simply contributing to this bizarre and perhaps damaging narrative about the perfect life, whether I am simply caught up in a competitive game of who can get the most "likes". But of course, I do like seeing photos of my friends having fun at university, I like seeing the cheesy grins of people who I haven't seen since the summer holidays and I especially like the bunnies. Maybe every Instagram account should come with a disclaimer. Proceed with caution: the rest of my life is not this beautiful.

Follow me on Instagram, like for like? @emmatheowl ■

'Statues'

Aidan Chivers

A willow emerges from his watery roots,
Holds his rippling partner in a tight embrace
She dangles, trusting, floating on her icy bed:
He stands, and holds, and feels, and breathes.

Across the water, in the moonlit air,
Two statues, breathless, face each other and gaze,
Formed by the hand of a shapeless craftsman
Who has fashioned them there in time and space.

Air glides soft over their ancient bodies,
And their mirrored features, stuck in time:
Frozen lips, carved together on marble faces -
Eyes gleam bright from the smoothed-out stone.

Yet warm breath reaches out, touches and strokes -
And a rosy glow returns to skin:
Blood rushes, cheeks soften, lips yield, eyes blink,
A two-fold Pygmalion and a return of selves.

There's tree, and tree, and face, and face,
Thrown together in a setting which they did not choose.
In washed-out surroundings, drained of colour and sound
Two figures gleam and dance in their milky dust.

'Christopher'

Tom Davy

The ceiling splays a fresco for the crowds.

The round Sheldonian, Truth lies on high
And falls like words of Latin from the clouds
Whose black betrays the turquoise of their sky.

Time is not ours. So every stroke of brush
That paints the ring paints every second too;
We find ourselves entwined in circled hush,
Not seeing for ourselves the deeper blue:

Designs design our days. Drawing lines
On paper's pulse could he have known his role?
Now through a lens the daylight here confines

To Wren, and in the wood lies his scroll.
A pantry in the mind with life stacked tall

Holds shelves off which our mind's designs will fall.

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SLOW TRAVEL: Tour of Texas

Tobias Thornes

Global warming? There ain't no such thing! Didn't y' hear? That's just a conspiracy

I'd already seen the oil wells, relentlessly-churning and dotted across the desert like an insatiable swarm of mosquitos. But oil was not what frightened me in this dusty Texan town. That black gold was nothing more than liquid – mindless, formless, a trickling trickle flowing where it could regardless of what flowers of beauty were swallowed beneath its sickly stain.

What frightened me was the heedless contentment of the people who so blithely pumped it out. This wasn't the America I'd seen in Hawaii, nor even that I'd arrived to on the parched Pacific coast. This wasn't the Texas of the great thinkers of enlightened science, who'd even launched men to the Moon. What I saw here was the most tangible example of a state of opinionated, anti-science stubbornness, suspicious of anything foreign in concept or in substance, that has sadly begun to slink across the whole industrialised world. A people that saw the grim reality of climatic change ahead, and simply laughed and turned its back. This was America in denial. This was the America of President Trump.

How right he was, in this latter observation. At least the idea of climate change had reached here, I thought, grasping for consolation – even into the middle of the oil belt. But, for certain, nobody was listening. Though I was newly arrived in town, so much was already clear. Outside on the river-wide, ruler-straight highway, thousands of petrol-powered wagons, each as big as five horses, proudly purred. Inside,

the air-conditioning hissed and hot air like an undulating undercurrent. But many of the passengers remained silent, staring out into the wide, dry landscape beyond the molten metal shimmer of this baking grey road. Texas was in the midst of another painful drought, the latest in a succession that has dogged this country, returning like a biting invasive insect that refuses to be brushed away, since the turn of the millennium.

This was the land where the devastating effects of human interference were made so chokingly clear in the dust-bowl years of the 1930s, when the conversion of great swathes of grassland to ploughed fields literally blew up in the farmers' faces. When the rains fell slack, the unprotected soil was stripped away by rust-red wind storms, leaving only desert. And yet despite Texas' deepening droughts it's a state still in denial: still the country's biggest beef producer; still the sixth-largest extractor of oil in the world when ranked alongside entire countries; still guzzling the fifth most energy per person in the United States, generating more electricity than the whole United Kingdom. They say 'everything is bigger in Texas'. From what I saw, everything – from waistlines to the rich list's wallets, from pollution to poverty – was still expanding.

But as we made our way down from the vast agricultural acreages and colossal colonies of corn-fed cattle belching out their planet-warming methane, and slipped into the lush landscape of the breath-taking Rio Grande River, I was abruptly reminded that there was one thing in Texas that certainly wasn't expanding any more, immigration. There, beyond the rippling waters of the wide water-course that carved its stunning cascade through this red, rocky region so many millennia ago, I saw for myself the



'Sky'

Lucy Mellor

"Is the sky blue?"
Said sarcastically –
Analogous to
"Is the Pope Catholic?"
As though the Pope
Changes his faith
With sunrise
And sunset.

A mutiny of colours
Largely unobserved
Hang wistfully
Waiting for acceptance
Until time's end –
Rendering ordinary
Each blue sky
And white cloud.

It's getting colder –
Time to wrap up
In ourselves
Hurry along the street
With biting cheeks
Not noticing
Hazy dawn
And lazy dusk.

A delicate stroke
Paintbrush in hand
Sweeps across the sky
In a practised motion
Time and time again –
Stops and waits to admire
Pink clouds
And lilac skies.

Bursting in pockets
Of orange and red
Yellow and amber
Fiercely existing
Defiantly resisting
The inevitable
Skylines
And horizons.

Rare beauty
Meanders above –
Difficult to reconcile
The non-existence
Of an omnipotent
Creator creating
Every soft wisp
And gentle hue.

The Origins of Chaos

Anna Wawrzonkowska

In 1992, Gerard Nolst Trenité, a Dutch academic and linguist, wrote his famous poem: the Chaos. It is, perhaps, the best summary of the helpless confusion any non-native speaker feels when put against the whirling maelstrom of English spelling and pronunciation.

Dearest creature in creation
Studying English pronunciation,
I will teach you in my verse
Sounds like corpse, corps, horse and
worse.... (...)

Have you ever yet endeavoured
To pronounce revered and severed,
Demon, lemon, ghoul, foul, soul,
Peter, petrol and patrol?

Billet does not end like ballet;
Bouquet, wallet, mallet, chalet.
Blood and flood are not like food,
Nor is mould like should and would.
(...)

Don't you think so, reader, rather,
Saying lather, bather, father?
Finally, which rhymes with enough,
Though, through, bough, cough, hough,
sough, tough??

Hiccough has the sound of sup...
My advice is: GIVE IT UP!

You might wonder – that is, after you have finished banging your head against the keyboard in helpless rage, proclaiming that you will never be able to speak English properly – why exactly the pronunciation of the so-called easy language of communication is so jumbled up. The answer is twofold.

English pronunciation is not difficult per se – the sounds that it employs are fairly common and standard for most Indo-European languages, barring two oddities: [θ] like "th" in "thin", and [ð] like "th" in "then". What makes it difficult is the inconsistent arbitrary connection that it has to the written language (for instance, "th" could be either [θ] or [ð]). As it turns out, it is relatively easy to speak English – but much more difficult to read it.

Some languages are phonemic – i.e., the written form of the word consistently reflects the pronunciation of it, with a stable grapheme-to-phoneme (letters to sounds) connection, such as Italian or Finnish. English is very much not a phonemic language. This is understandable, there are few languages boasting perfect consistency... And yet! When one reads a line such as Trenité's Though, through, bough, cough, hough, sough, tough [ðəʊθru: bəʊkɒf həʊf həʊf, tʃəʊf], all logical reasoning flees in panic. Six different phonemic possibilities out of one spelling! Could there be any reasons for such chaos?

The answers, as often, lie in the darkness of the ages.

In this case, it is quite literally the Dark Ages. In particular, they can be found with Geoffrey Chaucer, the writer from this time who started the slow climb towards what is now considered the Standard English writing system. Before Chaucer's times, the writer usually based his orthography on more or less educated guesses - English was never consistently spelt due to low literacy, little experience with written texts, and difficulty in obtaining books. (The

printing press was yet to be invented.) The spelling was largely phonetic: people writing down Old English pronounced all letters. They sounded the w in write, the g in gnat, and the k in know.

Bearing that in mind, let us see what Chaucer's orthography was like – and, just in case, compare it to today's standard.

Original (c. 1390)

Modern orthography

Whan that April with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to
the roote,

And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;

Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete
breeth

Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge
sonne

Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages),

Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrymages.

When April with its sweet-smelling
showers

Has pierced the droughte of March to the
root,

And bathed every vein (of the plants) in
such liquid

By which power the flower is created;
When the West Wind also with its sweet
breath,

In every wood and field has breathed
life

into The tender new leaves, and the young
sun

Has run half its course in Aries,
And small fowls make melodye

Those that sleep all the night with open
eyes

(So Nature incites them in their hearts),
Then folk long to go on pilgrymages
(General Prologue, Canterbury Tales 1–12)

Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, from which the passage above is taken, was inarguably the most important work of his times. Enormously popular, as well as copied and countless re-written, for a long time it was the basis of written English – an 'ABC' that others would apply, and a primer from which they learnt.

However, even though Chaucer's writing had set a standard, that standard was consistently and tirelessly undermined. It might sound absurd, but shortly after Chaucer's death in 1400, the main people contributing to the diluted orthography of the English language were people whose grasp on English was questionable at best. Clerks and monks, who – prior to the re-instating of English as an official language around 1430 – spoke only French and Latin, were now forced to write in English as well; those Francophone scribes are to be thanked for the inconsistencies such as label (English) and table (French), bubble vs. double, enter vs. centre etc.

Even following the invention of the printing press the chaos was not constrained, but only grew further. The main group operating the printing press in England were... Belgians - with scarce knowledge of the language, but on the other hand paid more for longer words. Many natively English words,

such as eny or bisy, gained a corrupted spelling (any, busy), or were complicated needlessly: frend to friend, hed to head, seson to season, shal to shall.

However, the biggest dilution of orthography, which concluded English's departure from the land of phonemic languages, was in fact the fault of the Bible. After an Englishman called William Tyndale translated it to his native tongue (which was expressly forbidden at the time), he needed to flee the country; and so it was composed and printed by foreigners who spoke no English. What happened next is elegantly summarised by the History of English Spelling:

"They [Tyndale's writings] were also much reprinted, because English bishops kept having them searched out, bought up and brought back for public burning outside St. Paul's cathedral in London. With repeated copying, from increasingly corrupt copies, Bible spellings became more and more varied. Yet they were the first and only book that many families ever bought, and learned to read and write from too. When Sir Thomas More's spies finally managed to track Tyndale down and have him hanged and then burnt at the stake near Brussels in 1536, printers began to change his spellings even more, along with his name, in order to disguise his authorship. By the second half of the 16th century English spelling had consequently become very chaotic, with hardly anyone knowing what its rules were. Elizabethan manuscripts consequently became full of different spellings for identical words, on the same page, even including the Queen's own writings and the first authorised Bible of 1611."

From a historical point of view, it seems funny to think that the entire history of the English spelling – from the darkness of the Middle Ages until at least the late seventeen-hundreds – was created by two books: Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and Tyndale's Bible. In both cases, the conclusion is clear: can foreigners really complain about English being an orthographical mess, when the foreigners were the ones to mess it up?

After the chaos had started becoming inconvenient for everybody, there were of course attempts to phoneticise English again – but they fell against the powerful force of habit. It is due to another book – Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language – that Modern English got its own standardised orthography.

Johnson's goal was not the fool's errand to turn English into a phonemic language. Instead, he set a much more possible, yet still challenging task: to make one written word equivalent to one spoken word. By drawing single connection between a form and an utterance, he was able to take the shapeless cloud of 'there, theyre, thare, their' (any of which could mean either the place I'm pointing at, belonging to them, or we are) and sharpen it into something communicable. However, Johnson is also partly responsible for messing up the spelling even further: he was the one to put a b inside debt, l inside salmon, p in receipt, and many more. As David Crystal writes for the Huffington Post, "In trying to simplify the system, the reformers ended up complicating it."

And so, whose fault is it really? Is it on the French-speaking scribes? Is it on William Tyndale for letting foreigners publish the English Bible? Is it, finally, on Samuel Johnson and his dictionary, for insufficient effort to regularise the language? Of course, no one will ever bear the blame alone. Language development resembles an anthill; it moves swiftly and invisibly under the surface, and it is pushed forward, moved, and reformed by collective effort. Sometimes a leaf falls in and is incorporated into the complex structure of the tunnel; sometimes the wind changes and blows away many generation's worth of effort; and sometimes the workers abandon old tunnels for no particular reason at all and build something new. It's a collective work, an amalgam of a thousand thoughts and works and mistakes, all bound together by even less tangible things: trends, popularity, skill. And as they change, so the language – and its spelling – does.

Will English spelling change over time? Absolutely. The processes of change are far from being over (most people don't even put that h in rhubarb anymore, and what about hiccup/hiccup?) and most likely they never will be. The only defence one might hope to have against irregularity is to understand where it is coming from – a colourful, long, ever-so-diverse history of a nation and the way it thought. Every spoken word has a thousand years' worth of history behind it, and somewhere inside it, a reason – even if the reason is that some five hundred years ago, a man published a book and was burnt on the stake for it.

But hey, no one said that English wasn't difficult! It can be understood through tough thorough thought, though. ■

'Talking'

Lizzie Searle

Talking

I am talking. Silently. I tap the little places on the screen with my thumbs.

You're there when I type, listening in my head.

I have finished talking and look into your invisible face.

You don't say anything. You disappear from where you weren't.

I look back at my talking. Childish words on a smeared iPhone screen.

I am untalking. Silently. My thumb held down. You don't hear me.

I am drinking know. I can't see you're invisible face any more!

You hear me talking this time. Silently. In a room of your own that I don't know.

You don't say anything.