



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 concerts 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 @emmatheowl—like for like? ■

'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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Issue 16—*Dusk*

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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 cooked up by the Chinese. An' the leftists. You're a leftist, ain't ye? Now you listen to me, mister. You leave all that clap-trap out o' here. We're done with commies, we're done with Obama, now we're goanna take America back to bein' the great nation it once was, an' you can sling your hook if you dun' like it, 'cos we ain't lettin' nobody stand in our way.'

I was beginning to regret broaching the subject of climate change with this burly bartender, who, as he towered over me, looked somewhat more than my match. He must have a gun, I thought – everyone around here has a gun – and perhaps he wouldn't turn down the chance to chase me out of town with bullets at my heels, or worse. Certainly, I didn't fancy my chances in an old-style showdown. But then he just chuckled, and the other patrons – two well-built gentlemen who'd been quietly sipping sodas at the far end of the bar – chuckled with him. Evidently, they saw me more as a joke than a threat. 'You got yourself a crazy one there, Bill,' said one. 'I'd keep your crazy ideas to yourself, if I were you,' he laughed. 'No one's listenin', anyhow.'

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 pet-

rol-powered wagons, each as big as five horses, proudly purred. Inside, the air-conditioning hissed and sighed, taking the heat of half a dozen diners chomping stakes almost too big to bite. This was not a place of abstinence or climate-conscious constraint.

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 treacle 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.

The clapped-out old bus that jolted me into the deepest South of this southerly state was shared with Texans of an entirely different sort to the well-off white males who'd given me such short shrift. Here, I met a pantheon of wonderful diversity only observable amidst the poorer classes in such a country built upon migration. We were com-

posed of a spectrum of skin-colours and ethnicities; to my ears came a medley of American twang and Spanish scintillation, suffusing the 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 expand-

ing 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 modern-day enhancement of what was evidently not a punishing enough natural barrier – miles of desert and a magnificent but treacherous river – to deter travellers from the south. 'Trump's Wall'. A thousand miles of breachable, haphazard metal fencing that already scarred across America's rusty base in an attempt to plug the leaks, was now being replaced by a supposedly impenetrable span of solid concrete. Whether the billions of dollars required to complete it would ever be found I couldn't know, but already the finished sections had seen migration rates go the same way as America's climate change pledges and Texas' renewables industry. Migrant population levels were now as static as the blades on the Texan wind turbines that once supplied ten per cent of its electricity. But in time, of course, the cracks were bound to show.

Looking at the ugly structure ascending across this ruined paradise, it was clear that the president's promise that the wall would be 'beautiful' had turned out to be no more than a 'Donald Trump fact'. But the isolationism that the wall represents is sadly all too real. Cutting itself off from the needs of its neighbours; responding to the calls of climate scientists and the needy poor by simply shouting louder until they can't be heard; carrying on regardless to churn out the gaseous effluent of its luridly lavish lifestyle while the rest of the world burns: Trump's America was trying with all its might to shut out the truth. But it was designing for itself a prison from which there could be no release. ■

‘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* [ðʒ θru: bæʊ kɒf hʊk səf tʌf], 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.

| General Prologue, Canterbury Tales 1–12 | |
|---|---|
| Original (c. 1390) | Modern orthography |
| <i>Whan that Aprill 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 pilgrimages.</i> | <i>When April with its sweet-smelling showers Has pierced the drought 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 melody, Those that sleep all the night with open eyes (So Nature incites them in their hearts), Then folk long to go on pilgrimages.</i> |

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 countlessly 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

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 *hiccough/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

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 cant 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.