

**Words and Language; Truth and Lies**  
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Editors are a mystery to me. I know only one: Henry Rosenbloom. He runs Scribe and has published 2 of my books. Because Scribe is a small publishing house, Henry also does some of the editing. He is amazingly good. In the revised edition of *Wordwatching*, I refer to a House of Lords decision. The point of the reference is that the name of one party includes the word 'mystery' in its sense of 'mastery'. The citation of the case is unimportant, but Henry checked it and found an error. I was deeply impressed.

*Wordwatching* is a book of essays about language. The fact that it is the barrister's stock in trade is accidental: I have always been fascinated by language. Unhappily, many people for whom language is a central part of their life's work are a bit careless about the way they use it. Go into any court any day and see whether you find the language inspiring, or even intelligible. If we were carpenters, we would leave our hammer and saw in the rain.

The point of language is to convey meaning. Ideally, it should do so accurately. Not all writers honour this ideal. The purpose of language may be betrayed by carelessness, foolishness or malevolence.

The results are found in three camps. In the first camp, we have language which contains no intelligible communication at all. In the second, we find language used as a sham to disguise the fact that the intellectual cupboard is bare. And in the third camp we find language used as a stalking horse for quite different ideas that dare not speak their name.

The first camp is mainly the province of art critics and fools.

The second and third camps are populated variously by representatives of big business, bureaucrats and politicians.

I want to speak about each, but I will finish with some recent reminders that language can be used powerfully and effectively if only we take enough care.

As in all things, when something of value is at stake, a few warriors will line up for the defence. I want to talk about four of them.

In 1755 Samuel Johnson published his great dictionary. In the preface, he lamented the chaotic state of the English language:

“When I took the first survey of my undertaking, I found our speech copious without order, and energetick without rules; wherever I turned my view, there was perplexity to be disentangled and confusion to be regulated ....”

He despaired at the scope and futility of his task:

“It is the fate of those, who toil at the lower employments of life, to be rather driven by the fear of evil, than attracted by the prospect of good; to be exposed to censure, without hope of praise; to be disgraced by miscarriage, or punished for neglect, where success would have been without applause, and diligence without reward.

Among these happy mortals is the writer of dictionaries; whom mankind have considered, not as the pupil but the slave of science, the pioneer of literature, doomed only to remove rubbish and clear obstructions from the paths, through which Learning and Genius press forward to conquest and glory, without bestowing a smile on the humble drudge that facilitates their progress. Every other author may aspire to praise; the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach, and even this negative recompense has been yet granted to very few.”

For the next 170 years, things went on much as before, although we dropped long Ss and terminal Ks and the Americans spiralled off into their own idiosyncrasies.

What Johnson had tried to do for orthography and etymology, Fowler attempted for grammar. In 1926, Henry Watson Fowler brought forth on the world one of the quirkiest books on grammar and style ever published in the English language. *Modern English Usage* combines erudition and grumpiness in a way unrivalled since Johnson. He set out to expose error and ridicule folly. His manifest irritation is only partly explained by the narrow diet of news available on Guernsey. He understood the difficulty of his task. Under the heading “Sturdy Indefensibles” he wrote:

“Many idioms are seen, if they are tested by grammar or logic, to express badly, and sometimes to express the reverse of, what they are nevertheless well understood to mean. Good people point out the sin, and bad people, who are more numerous, take little notice and go on committing it; then the good people if they are foolish, get excited and talk of ignorance and solecisms, and are laughed at as purists; or, if they are wise, say no more about it and wait ...”

On Split Infinitives he wrote:

“The English-speaking world may be divided into (1) those who neither know nor care what a split infinitive is; (2) those who do not know but care very much; (3) those who know & condemn; (4) those who know & approve; (5) those who know & distinguish ... those who neither know nor care are the vast majority, & are a happy folk ...”

And on Pedantry he wrote:

“**Pedantry**. May be defined, for the purpose of this book, as the saying of things in language so learned or so demonstratively accurate as to imply a slur upon the generality, who are not capable or not desirous of such displays. The term, then, is obviously a relative one; my pedantry is your scholarship, his reasonable accuracy, her irreducible minimum of education, & someone else's ignorance. It is therefore not very profitable to dogmatise here on the subject; an essay would establish not what pedantry is, but only the place in the scale occupied by the author; ...”

These grumpy old men of the English language, Johnson and Fowler, concentrated on rules – grammar, orthography and usage – without too much concern about the purposes for which language was deployed. Love poems or business letters; history or journalism: for them it was all grist for the mill or (as we might say nowadays) input.

Twenty years after the first edition of *Modern English Usage*, George Orwell took the subject a step further. His message about the mistreatment of language was delivered

both as an essay (*Politics and the English Language* (1946)) and as a novel (*Nineteen Eighty-four* (1948)). He was less concerned with the details of grammar and syntax, and more with the conscious misuse of language to conceal the speaker's true thoughts.

Orwell wrote:

“A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outline and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink.”

Latin is no longer favoured by politicians or bureaucrats, but abstraction has taken its place.

### **Dead Language**

The world is awash with examples of dead language – empty rhetoric dressed up in the current style, or empty maundering of abstraction piled on abstraction – all devoid of real content. These are the empty calories, the fast food of modern discourse. They are the staple of cheap magazines, talk-back radio some art criticism, most bureaucracies and all corporate communication.

More recently, in *Death Sentence – the Decay of Public Language*, Don Watson described the progress of that contagion into all areas of public language: education, commerce, the bureaucracy and politics. He holds up for hatred ridicule and contempt some examples from each domain.

#### **Education:**

“(The curriculum) ... speaks of English as: experimenting with ways of transforming experience into imaginative texts in different contexts for specified audiences. Or monitoring and assessing the most appropriate technologies and processes for particular purposes of investigating, clarifying, organising and presenting ideas in personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace contexts ...”

#### **Commerce:**

“This program is another example of how this organisation, comprised of 40 leading companies from 15 business sectors is continuing to move forward to address its important mission.”

#### **Bureaucracy:**

“Funding for legal aid is increasingly meeting less of the demand, but allocating additional funds on a one-off basis without a specific reason may be seen as an admission by the Government that funding is insufficient.”

#### **Politics:**

“I imagine the sorts of children who would be thrown would be those who could be readily lifted and tossed without any objection from them.” (P. Ruddock)

Of violations like these Watson says:

“The language of corporations is like a vampire without fangs. It has no venom or bite, but you don’t want it hanging off your neck just the same”

*Death Sentence* is a delicious mix of analysis and mockery, gently basted with Watson’s mordant wit. Let a few examples stand for the whole:

“Grammar is not the problem. To work on the grammar is like treating a man’s dandruff when he has gangrene. The thing is systemically ill. It does not respond to any form of massage or manipulation. You try surgery and when you finish there’s more on the floor than on the table. Look again and you realise that it has been a corpse all along. It is composed entirely of dead matter ....”

Of Bob Hawke:

“When speaking off the cuff he embarked on his sentences like a madman with a club in a dark room: he bumped and crashed around for so long his listeners became less interested in what he was saying than the prospect of his escape. When at last he emerged triumphantly into the light we cheered, not for the gift of enlightenment, but as we cheer a man who walks away from an avalanche or a mining accident.”

Don Watson recently published *Bendable Learnings*. Like *Death Sentence*, it contains some chilling illustrations of language which has had the life sucked out of it:

### **Markets sideways**

On top of experiencing relatively weak investment returns in sideways markets, hedge fund investors have many important issues to consider as we enter 2003, including conflicts of interest, regulation, style drift, opacity and capacity constraints.

9<sup>th</sup> Annual Hedge Fund Managers’ Conference, Phoenix, Arizona 2003

### **Absolutely key**

We think it’s absolutely key that we get the population of workers, students, residents and visitors up to a critical mass that’s sustainable.

Michael Harbison, Lord Mayor of Adelaide, *Adelaide Advertiser*, 15 May 2006

### **Outcomes/benefits realisation satisfies business drivers**

Whether the stakeholders are citizens, politicians, agency employees or other constituents, effective utilisation requires specific organisational change to satisfy the business drivers, thereby enabling the projects outcomes to be realised. The Tasmanian Government Project Management Guidelines refers to this stage of the project as outcome/benefits realisation.

Outcome Realisation and Organisational Change Management: the Tasmanian government approach

### **Drill down, set up, roll out – inject!**

You’ll drill down into how to set up and roll out a performance improvement framework in your organization ... You’ll benchmark how to integrate your

disparate systems into one streamlined performance management framework and how to inject greater customer centricity into your service delivery initiatives.

Performance Improvement Frameworks for Government Service Delivery Conference

Investigate how language has been used to construct representations of the artefacts and iconography of a particular culture in a range of texts, considering to what extent the texts are constructed in socially valued modes, and the ways they employ representations to reflect, reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies in terms of what social groups are included or excluded from a sense of community. Present your findings in a PowerPoint, with accompanying written text.

Sample Investigation Task for English from the WA Curriculum Council

These things have all (or most of them) got past editors: it is a chilling thought. It prompts a legitimate question: did the writer have any coherent thought to express when they wrote? If cross-examined about these passages, could the writers explain what they were saying? Too often, the inevitable conclusion is that they were just stringing together familiar buzz-words, hoping to achieve the talismanic effect of a charm bracelet.

### **Misleading Language**

So much for language which is dead. A torrent of words and not a drop of meaning.

More interesting is the next kind of language misuse: speech which serves to disguise the thing described. Depending on circumstances, it may be called tact, or diplomacy or doublespeak or lying. The proper description depends on the speaker's purpose.

Tact sets out to avoid giving offence. It suppresses or disguises an unhappy truth to spare the feelings of another. It is a down-payment on future favour. It is falsehood in the service of kindness. When tact is lifted from the personal to the national scale, it is called diplomacy.

Euphemism does not directly suppress the truth, but disguises it by substituting gentle words for harsher ones. Its success is limited in the long-term because the euphemism is readily identified with the underlying idea and takes on the colour of that idea. This process is readily seen in the progression of euphemisms regarding universal bodily functions, for example: water closet – WC – lavatory – toilet – loo – the Ladies/Gents room – restroom etc.

The intention of euphemism is benign, if somewhat fey. Its excesses of delicacy inspired Dr Bowdler to strip Shakespeare of any questionable content. Bowdler's Shakespeare was published in 1818 – before the Victorian age, let it be noted – and was probably influenced by the attitudes which spawned Mrs Grundy. In Morton's play *Speed the Plough* (1798), Mrs Grundy was the neighbour whose narrow and rigid views about propriety were a tyranny for her neighbours.

Tact is kind; diplomacy is useful; euphemism is harmless and sometimes entertaining. By contrast, doublespeak is dishonest and dangerous.

In *Death Sentence*, Don Watson turns attention to John Howard's famous letter to the people of Australia. It accompanied the fridge magnets which, as some of us reckoned at the time, were probably not adequate to protect us against terrorism. The letter began:

“Dear Fellow Australian,

I’m writing to you because I believe you and your family should know more about some key issues affecting the security of our country and how we can all play a part in protecting our way of life ...

As a people we have traditionally engaged the world optimistically ... our open, friendly nature makes us welcome guests and warm hosts ....”

Here is part of what Watson says of this greasy prose:

“This rose-coloured boasting smells of some nightmare ministry of information ... the phrase *as a people* might not be a lie, but it smells like one. And it sits askew to the element of conservative political philosophy that opposes all attempts to categorise people by class or historic tendency, or any other conceit that will serve as an excuse for eliminating them.

*The people of Australia* is not so rank because it does not carry the suggestion that some mythic or historic force unites us in our destiny. But if we must have *as a people*, then *traditionally* has to go, and not only because *optimistically* is sitting on top of it. It has to go because it is so at odds with Australian history it could be reasonably called a lie.

*Traditionally* we built barriers against the world we are alleged to have engaged so *optimistically*; *traditionally* we clung to the mother country for protection against that same world; *traditionally* ... we took less of an optimistic view of the world than an ironic, fatalistic view of the world.

The smugness of the sentence about our being lovely guests and warm hosts is so larded by fantasy and self-delusion, it transcends Neighbours and becomes Edna Everage.

It will occur to some readers, surely, that it has been *our nature* recently to play very cold hosts to uninvited guests, the sort of people we don’t want here, who throw their children into the sea, who are not fun-loving, welcoming, warm, sunny, etc.” ...

Given (our) recent history, we might wonder if the words are as ingenuous as they sound. The thought, even the subconscious thought, might have been of a piece with Medea’s ‘soft talk’. Thus – *as a people* Australians are very nice; people who don’t agree with this proposition are not nice people; people who are not nice are not Australians in the sense of Australians *as a people*. People who are not prepared to be Australian *as a people* should shut up or piss off back where they came from.

### **Doublespeak**

In his closing address at Nuremberg, US prosecutor Robert Jackson finished with a devastating attack on the Defendants. It is a rare piece of truly powerful legal writing:

“The fact is that the Nazi habit of economizing in the use of truth pulls the foundations out from under their own defenses. Lying -has always been a highly approved Nazi technique. Hitler, in *Mein Kampf*, advocated mendacity as a

policy. Von Ribbentrop admits the use of the "diplomatic lie." Keitel advised that the facts of rearmament be kept secret so that they could be denied at Geneva. ... Goering urged Ribbentrop to tell a "legal lie" to the British Foreign Office about the Anschluss, ... Goering gave his word of honor to the Czechs and proceeded to break it. ...

Nor is the lie direct the only means of falsehood. They all speak with a Nazi double talk with which to deceive the unwary. In the Nazi dictionary of sardonic euphemisms "final solution" of the Jewish problem was a phrase which meant extermination "special treatment" of prisoners of war meant killing; "protective custody" meant concentration camp; "duty labor" meant slave labor; and an order to "take a firm attitude" or "take positive measures" meant to act with unrestrained savagery. Before we accept their word at what seems to be its face, we must always look for hidden meanings.

Goering assured us, on his oath, that the Reich Defense Council never met "as such." When we produced the stenographic minutes of a meeting at which he presided and did most of the talking, he reminded us of the "as such" and explained this was not a meeting of the Council "as such" because other persons were present.

Goering denies "threatening" Czechoslovakia; he only told President Hacha that he would "hate to bomb the beautiful city of Prague."

Besides outright false statements and double talk, there are also other circumventions of truth in the nature of fantastic explanations and absurd professions. Streicher has solemnly maintained that his only thought with respect to the Jews was to resettle them on the island of Madagascar. His reason for destroying synagogues he blandly said, was only because they were architecturally offensive.

... When it was necessary to remove Schuschnigg after the Anschluss, Ribbentrop would have had us believe that the Austrian Chancellor was resting at a "villa." It was left to cross-examination to reveal that the "villa" was Buchenwald Concentration Camp. ... Confronted on cross-examination with a long record of broken vows and false words, (the Defendant Schacht) declared in justification ...:

"I think you can score many more successes when you want to lead someone if you don't tell them the truth, than if you tell them the truth."

This was the philosophy of the National Socialists. When for years they have deceived the world, and masked falsehood with plausibilities, can anyone be surprised that they continue their habits of a lifetime in this dock? ...

It is against such a background that these defendants now ask this Tribunal to say that they are not guilty of planning, executing, or conspiring to commit this long list of crimes and wrongs.

They stand before the record of this Trial as bloodstained Gloucester stood by the body of his slain king. He begged of the widow, as they beg of you:

"Say I slew them not."

And the Queen replied, "Then say they were not slain. But dead they are..."

If you were to say of these men that they are not guilty, it would be as true to say that there has been no war, there are no slain, there has been no crime."

We learned nothing from this, or perhaps we just forgot. The war in Vietnam produced such doublespeak expressions as:

Collateral damage (killing innocent civilians)

Removal with extreme prejudice (assassination)

Energetic disassembly (nuclear explosion)

Limited duration protective reaction air strikes (bombing villages in Vietnam)

Incontinent ordnance (bombs which hit schools and hospitals by mistake)

Active defence (invasion).

When Jimmy Carter's attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran – a catastrophic strategic blunder – he described it as "an incomplete success". When Soviet tanks invaded Prague in 1968, the manoeuvre was described as "fraternal internationalist assistance to the Czechoslovak people".

Doublespeak uses language to smuggle uncomfortable ideas into comfortable minds. The Nazi regime were masters at it. The Howard Government was an enthusiastic apprentice, and the press collaborated.

The victims of protective reaction air strikes, or incontinent ordnance, or active defence, or fraternal internationalist assistance often flee for safety. A small number of them arrive in Australia asking for help. They commit no offence under Australian or international law by arriving here, without invitation and without papers, in order to seek protection. Nonetheless the Howard Government, and the media, referred to them as "illegals". This piece of doublespeak was not just for tabloid consumption: it was official. When the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission held an inquiry into children in detention in Australia, the Department of Immigration made a submission. That submission was placed on the Department's web site. The full web address of the submission showed that it was held in a sub-directory called "illegals".

Like all doublespeak, "illegals" was used for a purpose: boat people are immediately locked up without trial. No doubt it seemed less offensive to lock up "illegals" than to lock up innocent, traumatised human beings.

They were also disparaged as "queue jumpers": a neat device which falsely suggested 2 things. First that there was a queue, and second that it is in some way appropriate to stand in line, in sight of your persecutor, when your life is at risk.

When the "illegals/queue jumpers" arrive, they are "detained" in "Immigration Reception and Processing Centres". This description was false in every detail. They were locked up without trial, for an indefinite time - typically months or years - in desert camps which were as remote from civilisation as it is possible to be. They were held



behind razor wire, they were addressed not by name but by number, and they rapidly sank into hopelessness and despair.

At a public meeting in the Barossa Valley in early 2003, I was on the same platform as Phillipa Godwin, who was an assistant secretary with the Department of Immigration. This was two or three months before Baxter opened, but I had obtained a copy of the ground plan of this new facility which Phillip Ruddock had described as a “family friendly” detention centre. The ground plan showed that it was surrounded by a “courtesy fence”. I asked Phillipa Godwin publicly why it was that an electric fence was described as a courtesy fence. I couldn’t quite see to whom the courtesy was being offered. She corrected me publicly and said “It’s not an electric fence ... it’s an energised fence.”

Wait for the energised cattle prods.

### **Enhancing the Truth**

It takes great skill to speak lies or half-truths without being caught at it. Equally, it takes great skill to use language to convey the truth and make it live.

Just as the use of cliché and abstraction can strip the life out of language, so concrete words and fresh metaphor can make it radiant. It may seem like an absurd idiosyncrasy to prefer concrete words to abstract words, but it is important because we remember images better than we remember sentences. Language which conjures up a vivid image is likely to leave its mark in a way a sentence of abstractions will not.

The trial of the Major German war criminals at Nuremberg provides a good example. Most of us have seen the famous photograph of the defendants in the dock at Nuremberg, flanked by UN guards, with Goering in pole position, Hess next to him, and the others in order of seniority. Rebecca West went to Nuremberg not to record its legal or political significance but to capture the atmosphere of the trial. She wrote an essay called *Greenhouse with Cyclamens*, in which she offered brief sketches of the defendants in the dock. Her description of them is as vivid as the photograph, and more powerful:

#### **Rudolf Hess**

Hess was noticeable because he was so plainly mad: so plainly mad that it seemed shameful that he should be tried. His skin was ashen and he had that odd faculty, peculiar to lunatics, of falling into strained positions which no normal person could maintain for more than a few minutes, and staying fixed in contortion for hours. He had the classless air characteristic of asylum inmates; evidently his distracted personality had torn up all clues to his past. He looked as if his mind had no surface, as if every part of it had been blasted away except the depth where the nightmares live.

#### **Julius Streicher**

He was a dirty old man of the sort that gives trouble in parks...

#### **Herman Goering**

Goering’s appearance made a strong but obscure allusion to sex. It is a matter of history that his love affairs with women played a decisive part in the development

of the Nazi Party at various stages, but he looked as one who would never lift a hand against a woman save in something much more peculiar than kindness. He did not look like any recognized type of homosexual, yet he was feminine. Sometimes, particularly when his humour was good, he recalled the madam of a brothel. His like are to be seen in the late morning in doorways along the steep streets of Marseilles, the professional mask of geniality still hard on their faces though they stand relaxed in leisure, their fat cats rubbing against their spread skirts.

In the early 1930s, Patrick Leigh Fermor decided to go for a walk. With characteristic Irish enthusiasm he walked from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople. His memoir of the trip was published as *A Time of Gifts*. He has a dazzling way with metaphor:

As I listened to the muffled vowels of the Slovaks and the traffic-jams of consonants and the explosive spurts of dentals and sibilants, my mind's eye automatically suspended an imaginary backcloth of the Slav heartlands behind the speakers: three reeds on a horizontal line, the map-makers' symbol for a swamp, infinitely multiplied; spruce and poplar forests, stilt houses and fish-traps, frozen plains and lakes where the ice-holes were black with waterfowl. Then, at the astonishing sound of Magyar - a dactylic canter where the ictus of every initial syllable set off a troop of identical vowels with their accents all swerving one way like wheat-ears in the wind ...

Closer to here and now, one of my favourite writers is Bob Ellis. He has the gift of isolating a key truth and capturing it unforgettably. In *Goodbye Babylon* he wrote about Winston Churchill and Kim Beasley, and about fathers and sons:

“The heart breaks in silence when, at sixty ... you see how truly simple things are, and how little it is our children really want: the male parent's love and forgiveness mostly, and his unfeigned esteem. Winston Churchill's agonized letters home from his hell in Harrow, where, a dyslexic and a dunce with a cloven palate and a squelching lisp, he tried to do well amid the sodomy and midnight bullying and so impress his eminent pox-ridden father, tellingly, sadly demonstrate this. For a school function he learned a thousand lines of Latin verse by heart, to recite in toto, squelch by squelch, before an audience of parents that was to include his father. But his father – and his beautiful, distant, American mother – did not turn up; he performed it all word perfect into a yawning void of gently applauding puzzled strangers.

...

I watched from time to time Kim speak while his father, like the God of Israel, observed from the second row. The two of them in the same cinematic frame – headmaster, pupil, boy at confessional, weary priest – told the same tale over and over: that this was a boy who, though a trier, would never – or never in his own mind – come up to scratch.

Churchill as a boy, like Kim, played with toy soldiers, inventing battles he might actually win, and in his melancholy Black Dog old age would say to his daughters, ‘I'm a failure.’ His last words, ‘I'm tired, tired of it all,’ were muttered

on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1974, seventy years to the day from his awesome thwarted father's death of syphilis. Fathers and sons: it's a game with no winners, only a snarling stand-off half a life long. The father resents the one who outlives him. The son will never forgive the rule of law that daily, nightly took his childhood bliss away.

And the lead soldiers move in serried ranks – redcoat, cannon, cavalry – towards the battle in smoke on a green hill that solves or ends it all.”

Language like this speaks with force and clarity which is inescapable and unforgettable. The message remains after the words have faded from memory. The tragedy is that most public utterances now are the polar opposite: bleached of all meaning, they stifle the capacity for thought and sap the will to live. It is a rare event these days to hear a politician or business person make a speech which is better than tedious. If any Australian Prime Minister makes a speech which is interesting, we are fascinated; if they made a speech which borders on the inspirational, we would ring the Lutine bell and declare a public holiday. And if a leading business person were to make an inspiring speech, we would probably want to elect her prime minister!

Keating made a few good speeches: the formal ones written by Don Watson, who knows a thing or two about writing. The informal ones we remember best are the frank exchanges in parliament when he could not be bothered hedging his bets. “I want to do you slowly” probably offended John Hewson and a few other people besides: but you could not mistake his meaning. Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations sounded good: not because it was great rhetoric (it wasn't) but because it was so direct and so honest. By contrast, Brendan Nelson's reply speech (which started well) was a mess, because he tried to work both sides of the street and his message ended up being so diffuse and contradictory as to sound like indecision at best, or hypocrisy at worst.

This is why we rarely get good speeches from politicians and business people, because it is the business of business and of politics to keep options open, to appeal to the broadest possible spectrum of public opinion, to please some without alienating the rest. So meanings are blurred and truth is covered over with an ambiguous fig-leaf. And language suffers as we become immured to the idea that language is just a mouthful of words, and arousing passion with speech is the province of playwrights or statesmen of an age past.

I do not mind if people get words wrong, as long as we can understand what they mean.

I do not mind if people seek to boldly split infinitives which have never been split before.

But I resent reading anything which leaves me wondering whether the author is actually saying anything at all.

And when we spot someone debasing the glories of this language of ours by using it to anaesthetise or deceive, we should all reach for a revolver.