

C: Archaism (Grammatical Blemish) – minus 8 pointsKJVism

Good old familiarity. In David Lean's *This Happy Breed* (1944), you end with the sense that the family houses no longer feel the same, inevitably changed over time. Likewise words tend to change meaning. For example, *conversation* in the KJV days meant how folks live, but nowadays means how folks talk (see Php.1:27). No doubt how we talk reflects how we live, and how we live reflects how we talk. Still, keeping translation up-to-date will better witness to God. Many hymns are based on KJV language, and need translation in order to avoid confusion. There are nouns and verbs that aren't biblical, are simply from the KJV tradition, and now, being dead, no longer speaketh. Christian Humanism understood that folk should not hold the present as definitive, and should go back to source for perspective and clarity: understand the past; understand the now. The bigger picture is not just of source words, but the original scriptures, and this has been far better reconstructed than in the days of King James, allowing better versions in today's languages. As to individual words, Mary's soul did *megalunō* the lord (Lk.1:46). This isn't the same as magnifying it, though it was in KJV days. "*Magnify' today means to make something very small appear very large. So when we magnify God it sounds to a modern ear like God is a microbe under the microscope*" (Page 2004:97). Sometimes song leaders take the time to explain that we can't make God any bigger, then have us sing "come magnify the lord with me." Philosophers might say that God is the source of size, himself trans-sizeable, hence omnipresent, even transcendent. So, why have *magnify* in Scripture, as the NKJV/NRSV do,¹ if it needs converting into today's terms? Must we cling to the familiar?

"Just as certain parts of the traditionalist wing of the church want to keep the King James Bible and the 1662 Prayer Book because 'the language is so poetic,' a lot of modern traditionalists want to keep the same old vocabulary in use in their worship songs. These people wouldn't speak that way and wouldn't want their preachers to use the same antiquated language, but they don't want to have songs in a modern language" (Page 2004:104). For some it will remind them of their youth. Once upon a time, many believed that the NT writers made up their own words because they didn't know proper Greek. Then archaeology discovered large amounts of NT type Greek, which showed that Greek had acclimatised from the highbrow Parthenon, to the common market place. In other words, generally the NT writers had simply used the common, rather than the cultured, classical Greek, in which to speak to the common people in the streets. Is this not a pattern for lyricists? In my early days of discipleship, which was within Pentecostal Evangelicalism, the choice of Bible version was either the KJV (archaic), the Living Bible (street talk), or the RSV (God alone was archaic!). I enjoyed all three, and each offered lessons.

On balance, I reckon that songs should be up to date. Neither Olde Worlde English nor Latin is sacred, though *relevancy* under deity is, as the RC network appreciated when it moved away from Latin. When not in Rome, why do as the Romans do? Biblical language was the common, relevant language of the people, so to be biblical is to be current: KJV Onlyism, even in style, is unbiblical. Old hymns that are worth keeping can often be transmitted, either by reworking their themes into new songs, or upgrading their style of language. On the latter, much work has been done, as in the *New Catholic Hymnal* (1971), and *Hymns for Today's Church* (1982/7). For simple changes in meaning, the task is to analyse what parts should be changed, then

¹ Others: praise (ERV/NCV/NLT/NOG); glorify (CEB/NIV); proclaim the greatness (NJB); exalts (NET).

generally within the limitations of rhyme, metre, and authorial ideas,² to decide how they should be changed.

Some expressions have exceeded their best-use-by date. Languages live in flux. For instance, did *the LORD of Hosts* mean the Master Chef? Did it mean Radegast, perhaps to whom John Scotus was served up in 1066? Or did it mean that Yahweh was the commander-king of more than enough armies to protect his people?³ Take another example. In revising the RSV, the NRSV translators decided that “I will accept no bull from your house” could be improved on, and that’s no bull.⁴ Other archaic words common in lyrics, include *exalt, anoint, seek, extol, bless, fortress, tower, burden, robe, garment, canopy, gates, captives* (Page 2004:98). We can add more, such as the mystique term *minister*, especially as a noun. Today’s English requires *servant/helper*, and for the verb, *serve/help out*. How many teach that only some Christians are *ministers, or priests*? That some specialise in full time church service does not warrant them alone being called *ministers*. There are many more changed words, such as *chariots, swords, and Onwards Christian Warriors* never made fame.⁵ And with the Christmas donkey, the idea of Jesus born in a *manger* is often trotted out.⁶

Some Christians love antique talk, as in Richard Adam’s *Watership Down* where the rabbits welcomed the warren smelling of the rabbitry of generations past—the familiar and secure. But such can lull us to sleep, and say to non-Christians, or new-Christians, that Christianity is really for Dark Age traddies. It’s something the Wesleys tried to avoid. “*The language of the hymns of Methodism is distinctly the most modern diction to be found in C18 verse. It is comparatively seldom that we encounter any of the verbal mannerisms of the period,*” mannerisms which perhaps aged Watts more quickly (Henry Bett’s *The Hymns Of Methodism*, 1954:34). Ironically, to sing Wesley songs as they wrote them will *miss* the most modern diction to be found in C21 verse. Language relevancy had a long history in Roman Catholicism, though it proved difficult to demote the ‘Tridentine’ Latin Language Mass in favour of Mass in the local languages of the masses involved. Some Roman Catholics still oppose the change as a unique selling point lost. Biblical language was the common, relevant language, and translation of Scripture and songs needs to take account of language changing with time. The Bible has a long history of translation, ideally by quality translators, into local languages for local folk. Even the Quran has translations, yet Muslims recognise that no translation can be perfect. Elizabethan English in church is fine if we’ve got the right Elizabeth. And whether she defends the faith through, and from, her ministers, long may she reign. Many snatches from other languages, some ancient, still exist as meaningful additions to current English. However, a snatch is not syntax. It is an addition, not the basic structure. A well crafted song in olde worlde language, for an olde worlde feel, can have a positive impact. For example, Cliff Richard’s

² This can be complicated by variants. Songs used to get more changes as they travelled the globe, so tracing back to the original wording involves research, and authors might have written variants. Also, where authorial theology seems wrong, should one correct it or propagate the theology deemed wrong?

³ This expression (eg in Is.1:24) is of the suzerain king, *Yahweh* to his people, having potential command over many armies: invincibility. Roughly the MEV divide into 4 groups: the formal equivalent (*LORD/God of Armies*: CEB/NLT); the functional equivalent (*LORD/God all powerful*: ERV/NCV/NIV); the archaic formal (*LORD/God of hosts*: NKJV/NRSV); and the technical which shows the Yahweh-covenant connection (*Yahweh Sabaoth*: NJB/NOG). The NET falls into the first three groups.

⁴ See Bruce Metzger’s *The Bible In Translation*, 2006:159, on Ps.50:9.

⁵ But Sabine Baring-Gould’s (1865) *Onward, Christian Soldiers*, did.

⁶ Are McKeehan & Heimermann Jesus freaks if they believe their best friend was born in a manger? Are they in good company? A catchy song, but they didn’t understand that *manger* meant *feeding trough*. Jesus was possibly born at Joseph’s parents’ house, on the ground floor where guests’ animals could be sheltered, then placed in a *manger* to sleep. It’s *manger* (CEB/NET/NIV/NJB/NKJV/NLT/NOG/NRSV), [*feeding*] box (ERV), or *feeding trough* (NCV).

Millennium Prayer was a throwback to the KJV (sadly with deutero-canonical material mixed in), though he properly translated *trespass* from C1 Jewish speak, into general idiom—at least if ‘sin’ is general idiom in a world that disdains absolute judgement. Whether full modernity of language would have improved its evangelistic quotient, is moot. Its Christian witness was unpopular to christophobes, yet it was a strong witness to the general public. Likewise Handel’s *Messiah* still stirs the heart.⁷

A number of terms have all but left the public domain. Consider a Christmas carol by Charles Wesley, *Hark How All the Welkin Rings*.⁸ Whereas it’s fine for longterm Christians who have cracked the code, in public singing should we not bias towards non~ and newer~Christians? Do we still welcome the welkin? And what does hail, the Sun of Righteousness...risen with healing in his wings mean to the average person in the pews, or those we’d wish in the seats? *Hail* is *welcome/hello*. The rest is a reference to Mal.4:2 (Mal.3:20 in some MEVV). The NKJV reads, “The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings”: the capitalised *His* shows it’s taken to be messianic. The NIV reads “the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.” The NCV, “goodness will shine on you like the sun, with healing in its rays.” Traditionally this was taken to mean that the radiant sun symbolised messiah, who would come with spiritual life and enlightenment like the invigorating sun-rays of a new dawn. And surely, if not its only meaning, that was its central meaning? The pivotal Yahweh Day. Because of its very profundity it should be conveyed in clear language. If it’s worth keeping, it’s worth updating. In churches where nonbelievers hear this at carol services, if sang unchanged, is there added explanation, or do they leave believing it’s about “a chicken with a medical degree” (Page 2004:86)?⁹ If we wish to connect with lyricists of bygone Christmases, we should wish to revamp their wording so that today’s singer may sing as mentally in tune with, say, Wesley, as his original singers were¹⁰

Ye or You?

Though the 1611 KJV was written when Early Modern English was the style, and *you* had replaced *thou*, it was pitched in the previous, Middle English, style, “more or less bound [to] the language of 1525” (Alister McGrath’s *In The Beginning*, 2001:274). It was born old. In this style, there was a singular *thou* (nominative)/*thee* (accusative, or dative), and a plural *ye* (nominative)/*you* (accusative, or dative). But if formal, rather than informal, it was always *you*. If a genitive form, the informal singular was *thy/thine*, otherwise it was *your/yours*. In 1611, common English, influenced by the French *vous* (*parlez-vous français?*), had turned to using the old singular forms for addressing family and inferiors, but the KJV, locked into Tyndale, as the Bishops’ Bible had been, used the singular for God, human beings, and demons—celestials, terrestrials, and infernals. Today, singular or plural, the normative, accusative, and dative forms, are *you*, and *your/yours* genitive. Even the standardising

⁷ www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXh7JR9oKVE; <http://artofwomanliness.ning.com/video/christmas-food-court-flash-mob>.

⁸ Nowadays better known as *Hark, The Herald Angels Sing*, it’s been modified: *welkin* meant *high sky*, and also features in a poem pasted in 1883 onto the side of the Australia/English Ashes’ urn: When Ivo goes back with the urn, the urn / Studds, Steel, Read, and Tylecote return, return / The welkin will ring loud / The great crowd will feel proud / Seeing Barlow and Bates with the urn, the urn / And the rest, coming home with the urn.

⁹ At least it’s better than my pet hate, antichristian *Away in a Manger*. I suspect that the Mothers’ Union, or such, invented the myth of a cryless baby, to whom mothers may croon without disturbance. A sickly song, for a docetic child? R T Kendall compared “no crying”, with Once In Royal David’s City’s line, “tears and smiles like us he knew”—“it was the first sign of human likeness” (*Meekness And Majesty*, 2000:67).

¹⁰ We might also consider changing from the prospective view to the retrospective view. From carol reincarnationalism, to incarnationalism; from re-enactment, to remembrance. His birth is not expected, and I have done a retake in chapter 10.

revision of 1769 kept some of the previous Middle English, including variants of *you/your/yours*. What is second nature in one's mother's tongue/language, can be far from second when it's far from your mother. Yet some still argue that Middle English beats Modern English, because it could differentiate between singular and plural forms of 'you.' Not that it always did so. After all, why does the KJV have your god (Dt.1:30), followed by thy god (31)? The Hebrew text doesn't change. Or thy god (Dt.6:15), followed by your god (16)?¹¹ I guess it goes at least back to William Tyndale, ringing the changes for the sake of style: vary style, keep interest. Whether or not it is a sad fact, the fact is that most today do not know the difference. Even among KJV readers, many probably don't realise the difference, not having been taught Middle or Early Modern English. I for one see no good reason for songs, where a singular is clear in context, needing a Middle English singular *thou/thy/thine*. And no good reason to toggle between the two types of English.

OK, here's an example of a toggle: Jesus, *thou* art precious...*your* worth I see... in everything *you're* precious. For consistency we could have Jesus, *thou* art precious... *thy* worth I see... in everything *thou* art precious, or Jesus, *you* are precious...*your* worth I see... in everything, *you're* precious.¹² Why start with Art? Put another way, if this song had been written in the current consistent style of the last option, would there be any sense in rewriting it as one the other ways? If the reply is "no sense," then writing it as it was, was nonsense. And why on earth should Christianity vie with postmodernism for the nonsense trophy? Let's not be daft. Now, besides sounding odd to newer ears, the *thy/thou* style is often misunderstood. Consider: "I appoint unto you a kingdom... that ye may eat and drink at my table.... Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (KJV: emphasis added). All well and good, but whom did Satan seek? "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (NRSV). That is almost perfect.¹³ The you to be sifted is *humas*, a plural you; the thee as prayed for and to strengthen, is *sou*, a singular you. So, Jesus prayed only for Peter (*sou*) to sort out the others (*humas*). I think I missed that in my KJV days, but to say that the 'number' distinctions are always important is going too far. We can have the important issues brought out by other means. To say that anachronisms are more theological is inept: we worship a being who is plurality, though his emphasis is oneness. Granted, if ever our language reverts to having plural vs singular pronouns, we should then biblically prefer the singular. Indeed, the pointedly prefer a singular to a neutral pronoun, might seem the way to go for unitarians, such as Witnesses, that pointedly deny that deity is societal. In the years when *thine* was fine, the singulars (he is one being) never denied his plurality (one being of three persons) but were an emphasis choice. Those years are long gone. Nowadays, the non-numbered pronoun nicely covers the fact that he is plurality in singularity, the eternal society.¹⁴ To say that the older singulars are

¹¹ Dt.6:16 is "thy god" in Mt.4:7/Lk.4:12. Compare also Ex.20:2/Dt.5:6 (thy), with Lv.25:38/26:13 (your).

¹² *Jesus Thou Art Precious* (date and author unknown—possibly Pentecostal). Salient lines: Jesus Thou Art Precious / Precious To Me, / More And More Day By Day / Your Worth I See / Saviour, Baptiser, Healer, And King / In Everything You're Precious To Me (http://kccsongs.netfirms.com/new_page_J.htm#J7).

¹³ For Lk.22:29-32, the NRSV is best.

¹⁴ Society is plural: Jhn.1:1 has the idea that the Word was with God [the father], and was in substance God, both worked out in detail in John's Gospel. Many examples can be given of the plural singular: eg molecules only exist as pluralities; four one dimensional lines of matching length, at right angles, make a one two dimensional square, and six squares of matching size, at right angles, make one three dimensional cube; it takes more than one person to make one family.

more reverential, is unbiblical: *thees* and *thines*, and more importantly their Hebrew and Greek equivalents, were used equally for man and for deity. To say that anachronisms sound better, is unbiblical: anachronisms are confusing and off-putting—the scriptures were written in then contemporary language. Finally, there have been pronominal distinctions between deferential and familial forms of address. Tolkien noted how in The Shire “*the deferential forms had gone out of colloquial use*” (3.F2.1107), one reason Denethor found Pippin, who thus addressed him as an equal, amusing. Songs before 1931 didn’t use the common language ‘you,’ for deity. Among the first lyricist to move into the common use of ‘you,’ was ‘Jan Struther,’ who wrote both *Mrs. Miniver*, and *Lord of All Hopefulness* (1931). This hymn, addressing God as the *lord*, slipped in an informal pronoun: give us, we pray, your bliss in our hearts instead of thy bliss. Gradually folk realised that there should not be two languages, an antiquated and a contemporary, and that the Bible had been written in the language of common people. But qualms lingered. Even the New English Bible (1970), hesitant, reverted to archaism to have *deferential* pronouns for deity. While old pronouns rarely feature in new songs, many old songs need updating for the sakes of non/new-Christians. Some hymnbooks, for example *Hymns in Today’s Language*, target this aim.

Sageism

In that it’s no longer the way we now talk, sageism is an archaism, howbeit a recent one. It is a serious misunderstanding, an unintentional divide and exclusion of some for whom Christ died. Though curiously, some boys, girls, and women, were deliriously excited in 2003, when they became men!¹⁵ Some people just don’t see that once upon a time songs rightly used expressions such as *men*, and *every man*. At that time, they were *globally* inclusive terms. Nowadays, they’re only *parochially* inclusive. English has changed its pattern: even older songs should be brought into line. In inclusive settings, *men* often sounds both sexist (excluding adult female human beings), and ageist (excluding pre-adult human beings—commonly called children). I have coined this term *sageism*, to combine sexism and ageism. For Lk.5:10, the old NIV had ‘men’ (sageist), the NIV Inclusive, had ‘men and women’ (ageist), the NIV has ‘people’ (inclusive). Catch-up has been staggered. Some songs proclaim salvation for men and women, but preclude it from children—or so it can sound to children.

Equality is not a great and glorious god, so much as a fickle god of virtue and folly. Great evil has been done in its name. Albert James Lewis suffered some blindspots. Once he asked if so and so was invited to the Regiment get together. On being told no, he said that he felt it was unfair, regardless of the fact that so and so had never belonged to the regiment. Politics has shown that same blindspot, legislating as in, what is intrinsically out. Alas, outside its domain Equality becomes a tyrant. It is wrong either to ignore it, or to be enslaved to it. Within its orb, let us discriminate, asking the right questions. For instance, what about contexts where *men* and *kings* might be what is both said and meant? If so, to change to *people* and *monarchs* is misleading. Equality, keep out! It is also sexism to needlessly remove a contextual gender component, potentially scandalous to the exclusive gender. Likewise, C20 maternity units were for *women* to give birth, not *people* to give birth. These are examples of sexism in *exclusive* contexts. Differences should not be squashed. Removing exclusive talk about boys, girls, men, women, would be sexism, even ageism, as much as speaking in exclusive terms when the inclusive is meant. Sageism works both ways. Avoiding both errors, we should ask whether gender/age terms, in our songs, are properly exclusive or inclusive.

¹⁵ See Garrard & Smith’s (2003), *Here I Am (Majesty)*.