



Dictionary of Accepted Ideas

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Throughout his life Flaubert made it a game to eavesdrop for the cliché, the platitude, the borrowed and unquestioned idea with which the “right thinking” swaddle their minds. After his death his little treasury of absurdities, of half-truths and social lies, was published as a Dictionnaire des idées reçues. Because its devastating humor and irony are often dependent on the phrasing in vernacular French, the Dictionnaire was long considered untranslatable. This notion was taken as a challenge by Jacques Barzun. Determined to find the exact English equivalent for each “accepted idea” Flaubert recorded, he has succeeded in documenting our own inanities. With a satirist’s wit and a scholar’s precision, Barzun has produced a very contemporary self-portrait of the middle-class philistine, a species as much alive today as when Flaubert railed against him.

Dictionary of Accepted Ideas Details

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Josipa says

Zanimljivo štivo.

Neke od najboljih natuknica:

1. Instinkt - Nadomješta inteligenciju.
 2. Književnost - Zanimanje besposli?ara.
 3. Optimist - Isto što i idiot.
 4. Pjesnik - Otmjen sinonim za sanjara i šmokljana.
-

Eleclyah says

- ACHILLE

Aggiungere "dal piè veloce"; fa credere che si abbia letto Omero.

- BIANCHERIA

Non se ne fa mai vedere abbastanza.

- IMMORALITÀ'

Questa parola pronunciata bene valorizza chi la usa.

- PARTO

Parola da evitare: sostituire con "evento". "Per quando è atteso il lieto evento?"

Scritto in pieno Ottocento ma ancora attuale.

Dà da pensare, *n'est ce pas?*

Thomas says

Le bourgeois est l'ennemi du XIXème siècle après avoir été le héros du XVIIIème.

Flaubert et son génie ajoute sa pierre à la haine générale. Très effacé dans Madame Bovary, il utilise ici un style peut être moins célèbre mais beaucoup plus mordant.

Sorte de petite liste alphabétique des banalités bourgeoises de son temps, le Dictionnaire des idées reçues est tout autant un vrai bijou d'ironie qu'une vision critique et éclairée d'une chose que l'on connaît assez peu : les conversations bourgeoises du XIXème et non pas seulement ce que les romans de gare (qu'on a effacé de "l'histoire littéraire") ou la littérature (finalement peu réaliste) nous en donne.

Enfin, si tout cela ne vous suffit pas à vous jeter dessus, sachez que cela se lit en 30 minutes, fait beaucoup rire et permet de briller aisément en société (parce que citer une œuvre plutôt méconnue de Flaubert, cela n'a pas de prix)

Gavin Leech says

Stuff White People Like plus *Speak your Branes* , but minus two hundred years. This is Flaubert being bitchy

about C19th France bourgeoisie/hipsters: the contradictory and petty zeitgeist. I myself have used 'alabaster' to describe a woman, whoops.

Stephen Lindow says

BODY. If we knew how our body is made, we wouldn't dare move

CELEBRITIES. Concern yourself about the least details of their private lives, so that you can run them down

CHAMPAGNE. . . .pretend to despise it, saying: 'It's not really a wine.' Arouses the enthusiasm of petty folk

CHEESE. Quote Brillat-Savarin's maxim: 'Dessert without cheese is like a beauty with only one eye.'

DREAMS. Any great ideas one does not understand

PAGANINI. Never tuned his violin. Famous for his long fingers

POET. Pompous synonym for fool, dreamer

WEALTH. Substitute for everything, including reputation

Mariana Orantes says

Divertidísimo y esencial libro. Sirve para poner en jaque las ideas preconcebidas que uno suele tener de las cosas comunes y que suelta en pláticas sin más ni más. Todos tenemos algo así y hemos dicho cosas similares. Claro, también sirve para dejarnos ver el pensamiento de la época y como, sobre esos lugares comunes, también puede construirse o más bien, se construye la base de la literatura misma. Además, nos pone en evidencia: siempre hemos pensado más o menos lo mismo, siempre terminamos con juicios de valor más o menos iguales, ya sea en la Francia del siglo XIX o en el México contemporáneo. Los detalles, hay que ponerle atención a los detalles y siempre analizar lo que se dice en las afectadas pláticas de cafetín o en los salones de belleza.

Frederik says

"Børn - Udvis en bevægende ømhed over for dem, når der er andre til stede. "

"Champagne - Kendetegner festmiddage. Lad som om, De ikke kan udstå det og sig: "Det er ikke rigtig vin." Champagne virker opmuntrende på fattigfolk. I Rusland drikkes der mere af det end i Frankrig. Det er gennem champagnen, at franske ideer er blevet udbredt i Europa. I regentskabsperioden lavede de ikke andet end at drikke champagne. Egentlig drikker man ikke champagne, man "nipper til den"."

"Filosofi - Le altid hånligt af en."

Kaleb Horton says

Cute. Snide definitions of cliches. Not as good as Devil's Dictionary, which is the high water mark for that sort of thing. Written in the 1870s. Translated by Jacques Barzun. Apparently it was a huge pain in the ass to translate. Probably not worth all the work. Hope it paid alright.

Alexandra Alexyna says

Ideile regasite in carte m-au ajutat in multe conversatii

Teri says

Quite possibly one of my favourite books ever.

Virginia says

Grande Flaubert, grandissimo.

Me lo immagino lí, con l'orticaria alle orecchie per i fastidiosi discorsi, seduto a una poltroncina mentre Madama X parla con Madama Bla. L'unico modo di alterare questo stato é scaricare tutto su una penna, su fogli, e trasformare una cosa insopportabile in una cosa divertente.

E ha tutta la mia comprensione, dal momento che ho sempre odiato tutto ciò che deve essere fatto, detto, amato, odiato. Sarà che io non so essere molto mainstream, sarà che io non so essere una trascinatrice di masse.

Ed ancora, si può andare oltre questo. Perché é curioso vedere come alcuni dettami colloquiali siano rimasti (*Eccezione: dite che "conferma la regola" ma non azzardatevi a spiegare come*) e altri siano scomparsi o non facciano parte della nostra cultura. E quindi capire un pochino che pregiudizi potessero avere questi francesi, o quali che potessero essere i più quotidiani dei loro costumi. O ancora, non capirne una mazza per la lontananza del contesto.

"Bisognerebbe che in tutto il libro non ci fosse una parola mia, e che, una volta letto il dizionario, non si osasse più parlare, per paura di dire spontaneamente una delle frasi che vi si trovano."

Adorabile.

Jono Balliett says

literature: an occupation for idlers.

Geoff Cain says

I curse Jonathan for getting me into this! He sent me one of his cryptic messages one morning -- it was something about the deleterious effects of Tullamore Dew on the LeGare constitution and how he needed the hair of the dog and some Ambrose Bierce or Flaubert's Dictionary of Accepted Ideas. So I hadn't heard of the latter so I went out and found Barzun's annotated translation and then on another day I was at the University Bookstore in Seattle and found the novel that it was originally part of -- Flaubert's Bouvard and Pecuchet. Both of these books are lots of fun. I never took Flaubert to be someone with a sense of humor. Flaubert had been collecting the inanities of the bourgeoisie in notebooks for years. Just imbecilic things people say whenever they really don't know what they are talking about ("ah, the classics..." said with a knowing nod). I don't really curse Jonathan; these are good antidotes for all of the technology I have been slogging through lately.

soulAdmitted says

Sembra che l'unico modo per neutralizzare un luogo comune sia eliminarne l'oggetto (reale) di riferimento. Potrebbe rivelarsi preziosissimo per chi voglia fare autentica filosofia e sia alla ricerca di un plausibile punto di partenza.

Emma Sea says

no rating, as the wordplay doesn't always translate well. The 148 years probably doesn't help, either. Love me a commonplace book, though.

Lori says

Lori Ellison: The New Dictionary of Received Ideas

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The New Dictionary of Received IdeasShare

Wednesday, May 5, 2010 at 9:47pm | Edit Note | Delete

This is a stub, feel free to add. I've caught myself at some of these so it is for all of us. I am working on this in the spirit of Flaubert's from his particular take on his milieu in the 19th c in France from ours in the turn of the millenium here in New York.

Asperger's Syndrome: Nearly everyone mathematically or scientifically brilliant had it. Undiagnosed for so long. Talk about someone brilliant but unable to read people's faces in your family history who must have had it.

Berlin: Explain how you would like to live there like David Bowie. Say where you were when the Berlin

Wall fell. Pronounce "Ich bin ein Berliner." Try your JFK accent.

Bios: Talk the latest prize, grant, publication, residency or anything that you have won to each other. Walk away if there isn't any bio talk forthcoming from the suitably impressed other party.

Borges: Was blind. The map the exact size of the territory. The writer who retypes Don Quixote. Use "Borgesian" in conversation.

BP Oil Spill: first topic of conversation until there is another one to transplant it.

Coffee: Newly opened cafes serving coffee rather than ale helped create the Enlightenment. Those simple European espresso makers that go on a burner are made of aluminum, which can contribute to Alzheimer's. Caffeine can cause cysts in the breasts.

Derrida: Deconstruction and differance. Pronounce the latter with a French accent. Wonder aloud why no one talks about postmodernism anymore, or deconstructing anything.

Dyslexic: Use to mean stupid about someone not there. Claim yourself as an undiagnosed dyslexic when you were in school if you are of a certain age, and have been brilliantly successful in a non-academic, creative field, like derivatives trading, Hollywood, or abstract painting.

Enlightenment: Talk about combining the Eastern notion of enlightenment with the 18th Century period also known as the Enlightenment.

Freud: Eat the father. Call certain situations Oedipal. The Pleasure Principle. The Death Instinct. Call something someone said a Freudian slip. Find phallic symbols in absolutely everything that is longer than it is wide ad infinitum. Dub someone anal.

Foucault: Was into S&M. Gay S&M. The Ancien Regime and the Panopticon. Discipline and Punish. Use this phrase to bring it back to discussing S&M.

The French: Why listen to a country who thought Jerry Lewis was a genius. Remark on how none of the French were ever the slightest bit rude or condescending to you personally, contrary to the stories you had heard so much before going from practically everybody.

Global Warming: Remark how nobody talks about global warming in the dead of winter.

Green Party: Is strong in Germany. Wonder aloud if it can get a major political footing anywhere. Mention Global warming.

Hegel: Thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Use this formula for whatever equation and then mention, as in Hegel. Use "Hegelian."

Heidegger: Was a Nazi sympathizer. Wrote about Being and Existenz. Sartre ripped him off.

Hot Dogs: Don't eat them. Nitrates.

Hot Weather: Mention global warming.

Isaiah (Berlin): Tell the hedgehog and the fox story and apply it to anyone having been discussed.

JFK: speculate on Marilyn Monroe. Then talk about pet conspiracy theories.

Madeleine: Proust's.

Jung: (con) Was a Nazi sympathizer. If you get this in first shuts down having to hear:

(pro) There is a collective unconscious. The ubiquitousness of Sun Gods is one example that proves it.

Mention there was a woman who you thought was your anima when you were younger. The Puer and Senex.

Alchemy wasn't a misguided search for gold, it was an inner search. James Hillman.

Orwell: Call anything that reminds you of his writing Orwellian.

Melanie says

He wrote to Louise Colet in 1852: "No law could attack me, though I should attack everything. It would be the justification of Whatever is, is right. I should sacrifice the great men to all the nitwits, the martyrs to all the executioners, and do it in a style carried to the wildest pitch—fireworks... After reading the book, one would be afraid to talk, for fear of using one of the phrases in it."

s.penkevich says

'To dissect is a form of revenge'

-Gustave Flaubert in a letter to George Sand

Flaubert's *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas* is an ironic, witty, and outright humorous satire on the minds and manners of the everyday man, the philistines, as Flaubert would call them, that move within a higher society. Alphabetized within its pages are a wide variety of objects, ideas and people with a clichéd definition highlighting the 'accepted' opinions on them and instructions as to how to utilize such ideas to give the appearance of a culture-savvy citizen. For example:

'BEETHOVEN: Do not pronounce *Beethoven*. Be sure to gush when one of his works is played.'

As noted on the back cover, much of the *'devastating humor and irony are often dependent on the phrasing in vernacular French'*, making a translation difficult, yet this New Directions edition, with introduction and translation by Jacques Barzun, does a well enough job of getting much of the general ideas, insults and irony across, making this a very funny read.

Barzun's introduction offers a useful insight into the workings of this short book and Flaubert's mindset in creating it. As Barzun points out, Flaubert was outspoken in his disgust with 'philistines' and considered the social norms of culture to be a direct affront on education and the educated artist. While there are statements made in this book which are at times necessarily true, Barzun asserts that *'what damns them is the fact that they are the only thing ever said on the subject by the middling sensual man'*. Flaubert, spending most of his time around society which was *'not simply bourgeois and philistine, but invincibly repetitious and provincial'*, created this book to denounce these repetitions of such clichéd ideas that drove him mad. He stated that these *'repetitions proved more than signs of dullness, they were philosophic clues from which he*

inferred the “transformation of the mind under machine capitalist” (Barzun). This collection of repetitious ideas paints a comical caricature of this society Flaubert detested, yet offers such humorous depictions of the ideas presented that will have the reader laughing out loud at the bawdy satire. While writing this book, Flaubert stated in a letter, ‘*After reading the book, one would be afraid to talk, for fear of using one of the phrases in it.*’ The comedy is rich and, like a bad American comedy, desiring of quotation, yet quoting it ironically places you on the side of the philistines. If you can find this collection (especially if you speak French and can find it in its original form), I highly recommend flipping through it. It is often offensive, occasionally insightful, and always funny. Someone should remake this for the American redneck.

3/5 (while there are some gems, much of this is either lost on a modern/english speaking reader or just rather ordinary and un-funny. Worth reading for the funny though!)

A few gems include:

ARCHIMEDES: On hearing his name, shout “Eureka!”. Or else: ‘Give me a fulcrum and I will move the world.’ There is also Archimedes’ screw, but you are not expected to know that.

ARTIST: All charlatans. Praise their disinterestedness (*old-fashioned*). Express surprise that they dress like everyone else (*old-fashioned*). They earn huge sums and squander them. What artists do cannot be called work.

AUTHORS: One should ‘know a few’. Never mind their names

BUYING AND SELLING: The goal of life.

COFFE: Induces wit. Good only if it comes through Havre. After a big dinner party, it is taken standing up. Take is without sugar – very swank: gives the impression you’ve lived in the east.

EGG: Starting point for a philosophic lecture on the origin of life.

FAVOR: It is doing children a favor to slap them; animals, to beat them; servants, to fire them; criminals, to punish them.

GENTLEMEN: There aren't any left.

IMMORALITY: Distinctly enunciated, this word confers prestige on the user.

MACHIAVELLI: Though you have not read him, consider him a scoundrel.

NEIGHBORS: Try to have them do you favors without it costing you anything.

NOVELS: Corrupt the masses. Less immoral in serial than in volume form. Only historical novels should be allowed, because they teach history. Some novels are written on the point of a scalpel, others the point of a needle.

OPTIMIST: Synonym for imbecile.

PIDGIN: *Always* talk pidgin to make yourself understood by a foreigner, regardless of nationality. Use also for telegrams.

RELATIVES: Always a nuisance. Keep the poor ones out of sight.

REPUBLICANS: “The republicans are not all scoundrels, but all scoundrels are republicans!”

SELFISHNESS: Complain of other people's; overlook your own.

THINK (To): Painful. Things that compel us to think are generally neglected.

Vel Veeter says

So this is kind of like The Devil's Dictionary by Ambrose Bierce, which I also don't think is funny.

So I definitely didn't think this was funny. Even the editor of the collection was like “Look, it's hard to translate humor sometimes and also this isn't a really funny book.” Apparently Flaubert said something to the effect that the goal was make a super hilarious book that went on and on and on was hilarious at every hilarious turn.

Instead, here's some samples:

“Ice Cream: Eating it is dangerous.”

“Iliad: Always followed by Odyssey.”

“Imbeciles: Those who don't think like you.”

“Impiety: Thunder against it.”

“Invoice: Always too high.”

”

Architects — All idiots; always forget to put staircases in houses.

Englishwomen — Express surprise that they can have pretty children.

Black women — hotter than white women (see also brunettes and blondes).

Koran — Book by Mohammed, which is all about women.

Old People — When discussing a flood, thunderstorm, etc., they cannot remember ever having seen a worse one.

Blondes — hotter than brunettes (see also Brunettes)

Brunettes — Hotter than blondes (see also Blondes)

Sex — Word to avoid. Say instead, “Intimacy occurred...’.”

So yeah. It’s like watching a bunch of new comics trying out the same tired jokes from the 80s club scene and being really earnest about it and it just failing miserably. Occasionally something would make me smirk, but I cannot stress enough how bad I thought this was. Translations are tough, especially with pithy humor and puns. So maybe that’s why it just doesn’t work in English.

Basically go watch Kellyanne Conway do stand up instead.

Manny says

Flaubert, Gustave. Say he was a genius, but some of his books are more accessible than others. Mention the ending of *Madame Bovary*.

Idées reçues, dictionnaire des. Praise it as incredibly funny and insightful. Ignore the hundreds of entries that aren't the least bit amusing.
