

Pun!  
A play on words

by  
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## PERFORMER

What's a homophone? A phone Elton John uses?  
Ding! That's a point.

Welcome, welcome. Come on in. Don't pay any attention to my presence- They're under the tree at my grandmothers. That's a metaphor.

What's a metaphor? It's a one less than five.  
Ding! That's a point.

For those of you that have just gotten here, or are still arriving, don't worry, the show hasn't started without you. Or rather, you haven't missed anything that matters. Matters? I'd rather mat his!

Ding! Another one.

Hello there! Did you visit the concessions? Are there concessions? Ah, theater! The last true starving art. Unlike the Latter-Day Saints, we don't do it for the prophets.

Ding! That's a point. I know what you're going to ask me next, and the answer is Eclectic.

Now, I've been here for... (*Checks watch*) ever. Don't let the guise fool you-it's better to let the gals.

Ding!

When I first got here the walls were decked with images; glyphic, cursory, a kind of apathetic retelling of some kind of caveman narrative. Storytelling was born in the firelit caves of a Neanderthal race, a race that, according to the crude artwork in natural history museums, looks a little like the Cuomo family portrait. And its purpose to show how the ape evolved into man. Conversely, you could just look at Rush Limbaugh. I know, I know, you can't make fun of someone with cancer, but it's my philosophy that without things like cancer, we can't call laughter a medicine, so when it comes to curing cancer, let's hope there's no Rush.

Ding!

Oh, I do enjoy wishing ill on others. So do you. Don't act all holier than I- you have as many holes as I do, sir.

Ding!

That joke, like my penis does not work on the ladies.

So, where was I? Oh yes, Caveman, the genesis of the narrative story. I've been here. In this same exact spot, ever since the etchings on the rocky walls of Lascaux depicted me as a

quadruped. I'm not saying I can't make a couple extra limbs work as a diva of accessories, but the horns were a bit much. The advent of words happened later on in our story. The first written language was Sumerian, developed in Mesopotamia around 3400 BCE. Before Christian Entanglement. Embarrassment. Erroneousness. That's the best. An error in judgment that has lasted over two-thousand years! There ought to be a word for that. Oh wait, there is- America! The great Christian experiment. Are you proud of your country? Hashtag, me too. Ding! I don't think I get to count that one.

Sumerian, the first written language. But what was the first word? Where do words come from? Why do I ask? Glyphics on the walls of ancient caves depicting stories of ancient peoples ravaged by ancient plagues, by beasts of ancient lands, somehow became symbols of sound, small discriminate, somehow interconnected sounds of communication from one generation to the next- a sort of promissory note- what life may bring. What it was to be, to exist in a moment. Maybe a warning. We can't pinpoint the first word exactly, which is a bummer, but linguists at a University somewhere- I think in Europe. Do you know why Europe? You don't!?! Well then, go back to bed. Ding! Now I know what you're going to ask me next, and the answer is cuneiform.

So these Linguists came up with a group of words they call cognates. Which is not what I use to snare dude's junk in dark alleys on otherwise boring weeknights. That is a cock net, not a cognate. No, cognates are words that sound similar and mean the same thing across different languages. Like the word "you." Honey, you is a cognate. "You," "Vous," "Tu," I wanna say "Jew," but that might be insensitive. I know most Jews are. But there is a list of the very first words- words that these linguists in Europe decided were the oldest written words. Do you want to know what they are? I'm going to tell you anyway.

Thou  
I  
Not  
That  
We  
This  
What  
Man  
Ye  
Old

Mother  
To hear  
Hand  
Fire  
To pull  
Black  
To flow  
Bark  
Ashes  
To spit  
Worm

A poem, by (name of Actor playing the performer)

Thou and I are not that.  
We, this thing, what man hath wrought.  
Ye old mother, to hear her voice again.  
With a hand in fire, to pull away is futile.  
Black flames to flow like the bark of a dead tree.  
Ashes on the ground. You can just see through the spit, to  
earth, scorched and buried. And there he is- the worm- carrying  
off parts of us.  
Parts of who we used to be.

I call it Paronomasia, or the first.  
Then I thought, no! A pun. More suitable to the occasion. What  
occasion? The occasion of life! Life is much more a comedy than  
a tragedy. Because it's told by the people who are still alive.  
The tragic ones, well, they get to die. The rest of us, in the  
meantime, are just part of the cosmic punchline. So, reductive  
though it may be, life can and should be finally written as a  
pun. A limerick.  
There once was a species called man,  
With four limbs, two eyes and a plan,  
But try though we might,  
There's no meaning in sight,  
So what the fuck are we trying to understand?

I've never been good at scansion.

The first written story was the epic of Gilgamesh. About the  
oppressive king of the Uruk. Tales of debauchery and physical  
feats of strength- you know rudimentary mythology- Or West  
Hollywood on a Sunday. The Mesopotamian version of Ovid. Which  
became the Homeric version of Aeschylus- which is just the Greek  
version of Shakespeare, which is the Elizabethan version of  
Brecht, who is the modern father of theater. At least, to those

of us who appreciate the medium and not just the words. People talking back and forth does not a medium make. You know what a medium makes? Contact with your dead gram-grams!

Ding!

*The Persians*, Aeschylus. First play ever written. At least, the first play ever written that still exists. So, rather like philosophy itself, it doesn't matter if the chicken or the egg came first, it only matters if someone was there to hear it. Which is also the sound of one hand clapping right in your face before you were born, which was made by god, who made everything except himself. Which begs the question: Please please stop talking. But you know what they say: You can't mix a metaphor into a bowl of butter and make a biscuit fly.

The first song ever written is called Hurrian Hymn number six. Which makes me wonder, were they also hurrying him five times before? And why was he taking so long. Also, if you discover how to write, don't you write down parts one through five before adding the sixth? How bad were these parts? Those crazy ancient Syrians! Syrian? I like Ian!  
Ding! Think about that for a minute.

It was 3400 hundred years ago. The song was dug out of the ruins of the city of Ugarit. Well the written down version, not the song itself. You can't bury a song in rubble, a good thing for Billy Ray Cyrus. The song was discovered in the 1950s on a clay tablet inscribed with cuneiform text. What's cuneiform? It's what I wear for Fleet week.

Ding!

It's a cute little uniform. Cuneiform. It's not funny if I have to explain it.

No, actually, cuneiform is the oldest form of writing words. It's a step past symbols of sound, which was a step past cave drawings. Which is just a step beyond how President Trump addresses the nation. A lingual evolution. So pictography to symbol, symbol to alphabet, alphabet to Twitter. Evolution favors the mouth breathers.

The first opera ever written is called *Dafne* by composer Jacopo Peri. There are no surviving accounts. It's been lost to the ash heap of time. A moment of silence seems apropos.

My favorite word is obsidian.  
I just like saying it. Ob-sidian.

It's a black glass that's formed by the cooling lava of a volcano.

I'm also partial to lavender. The sound. The color. The scent. The flavor. It's really multi-purpose. How many other things can be in your deodorant, your tea and your toilet bowl cleaner? Which brings me to my point:

A child will begin to say sounds around three months. Between twelve and eighteen months, a child will use content words. "Cookie", "mommy", daddy comes later, unless he's taken his viagra.

Ding!

Around the age of two, a child will begin to put words together to make sentences. And by five-years-old, nearly all native language is learned. Completely fluent. I know what you're going to ask me next, and the answer is forty-eight hundred.

If you Google "what is the most beautiful word in the English Language," Do you know what comes up first?

Any guesses? Anyone?

Eclectic! I know. I don't know who they asked. You know what they say about polls? They're not very bright!

Did you hear about the Polish carpool? Every day they meet at work.

Ding?

No?

Well, I kind of ripped that off, anyway.

The first movie wasn't written at all. It was called *The Horse in Motion* and it was a moving image you spun around in a box that you looked through called a zoopraxiscope. How's that for winning at Scrabble? It was a series of images of a guy on a horse. And it appeared to move. Like a flip book where each page has a drawing much like the page before but with a subtle difference. Kind of a perfect metaphor for the monotony but inevitable changes in life. Like the ancient cave walls it was just images. This was in 1878. The movie, not this talk. That's not that long ago. You know universally speaking. In fact, if all of a human history is one year, and we're at midnight on New Year's Eve right now, 1878 would also be midnight on New Year's Eve. We're talking milliseconds, here. Speaking of things that no one asked. The first true screenplay is considered to be *A Trip to The Moon* by George Melies. Which I think you can watch on Netflix. You should. It's narratively about as sophisticated as the label on a frozen dinner. But it's history. Living in the

modern medium of digitalized entertainment, a relic amidst modernity, like the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Speaking of sorry assholes, you should see the other guy's! Ding!

You have to pay attention, cuz he ain't free.  
No? You have to keep up, or he'll run away with down.

You have a pun reflex? I get it.  
A pun is just a quip, a crack, a gag.  
Although a gag can also be the sign of true love.  
Are you lost?  
Stop wandering!  
Right, right? Not all who wander...  
And I know what you're going to ask me next and the answer is the Black Plague.

A sneeze.

Excuse me! Do you know why we say "God bless you" when someone sneezes?  
Yeah, the black plague. If you heard someone sneeze during that fucker you better wish them a blessing cuz they're most likely dead by nightfall. Speaking of sneeze, in Old English it was spelled with an F. It was fneze. I swear to god. Look that shit up! It was fneze! Sounds like a Dicken's villain.  
Yes, I spent a lot of my youth lost in my Dicken's. I had a portable paperback. I always had Dickens in a pocket.  
I can still hear my mother saying, "Keep your Dicken's in your pants!" She didn't like me reading in front of guests. But when a growing boy discovers his first Dickens...it's very serious.  
To make a long story short, we fnezed in the old days.  
Why did it change? Besides being a really dumb word? Well, I guess stupid people in the middle ages couldn't tell the difference between a lower-case f and an s.  
Evolution favors infection.

The average person says forty-eight hundred words per day. So that would be thirty-three thousand, six-hundred a week. Which means the average person uses how many words per year? Nearly 1.8 million. So if the average person lives eighty years, what would that be...?

A hundred and forty million. That's it.

That seems oddly small. That's the numbers of words you'll say in your entire life.

So it would take roughly 80 years to count to a hundred and forty million, if all you did, during your waking hours, was count.

It's not very high. We should be able to count higher than that in eighty years. The goal of an entire lifetime can't even reach two hundred million?

A kid's sand bucket, you know those little plastic brightly colored buckets kids take to the beach. One of those, filled with sand, has more grains of sand in it than all the words you'll ever say. One tiny, tacky colored child's toy can hold more than you'll ever be able to speak. A patch of sky, the size of your hand, has more stars in it. I wish I had a third comparison. For symmetry. Drops of water, perhaps, in a Starbucks Grande.

"He who has seen everything, I will make known to the lands. I will teach about him who has experienced all things. The totality of knowledge of all. He saw the secret. Discovered the hidden. He went on a distant journey, pushing himself to exhaustion, but then was brought to peace."

And he carved on a stone all his toils. And he spoke the words he'd carved, and he spoke some more. And when he ran out of words he stopped.