

SOOTINESS AND THE ARCH OF TITS

Following changes to the English education system and in particular to the way in which A-Levels will be examined, school pupils in future will be required to demonstrate ability in certain key skills. The principal skills have been identified as "Number", "Communication", and "Information Technology". A requirement of the last is that "pupils ensure work is accurate and makes sense", after which follows the suggestion that they "use a spell-checker".

Prompted by this, I ran a spell-checker programme on several sets of notes I give to my GCSE pupils. Here follows a brief digest of some of the results, which for convenience I have grouped under three headings:

Empire and Emperors: Emperors included Clouds, Dalmatian and Nerd, to say nothing of Tuberos. During the reign of Nerd there was a rebellion in Britain led by Queen Bodice. Earlier, resistance to the Roman invaders had been offered by Cataracts. The tribes of Britain included a branch of the Belgic Attributes. Other provinces in the Roman Empire were Aquatint and Judo. It was to mark the suppression of a revolt in Judo that the Arch of Tits was built.

Writers: The biographer Sootiness aside, there were the historian Tactics, the comic dramatist Plaits and, under the patronage of Meanness, there were Hoarse and Virgule. Virgule wrote a work called The Annelid which featured Queen Diode. There was also Cecil who published a defence of Callous Ruffs in which he attacked the sister of Clod Puncher.

Religion: Overlooking Roman households, there were spirits called Peanuts. Traditional beliefs regarding the underworld embraced such figures as Churn, the ferryman, and the Dandies who had to draw water into leaking vessels. As regards foreign cults, that of the Persian bull-slaying god Mothers was popular with soldiers, and another favoured eastern cult was that of Isis and her consort Soirees.

The possibilities for extending this collection are, of course, endless and there are doubtless many like me who will derive continued enjoyment from their acquisition of computer "literacy". In addition, these impersonal computer-generated gems seem to me to have an advantage over exam-paper howlers, the quoting of which has occasionally made me think just a little uneasily and guiltily, although I still laugh at them, of the rather superior Classics Master portrayed by Nigel Molesworth in *Down with Skool!* (1) I suppose, though, that what matters is the spirit in which howlers are related. Having raised the question, therefore, and also inevitably made a rod for my own back, I shall say no more about it here. Instead, I shall conclude with another delightful victim of the spell-checker, this time in a letter to parents regarding a projected school trip to Bingo Roman Villa.

1 See Geoffrey Willams and Ronald Searle, *The Compleet Molesworth* (London, 1985), p.31. The caption is: "And when I asked him the supine stem of confiteor the fool didn't know."

Dr T.J. Leary
Hampton School