

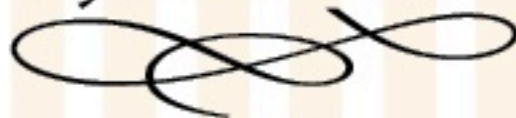
OLD GRAMMARIANS

OR

HOW TO KEEP FROM DROWNING IN PALTRY LINGUISTIC QUIBBLES



By Scott Gardner



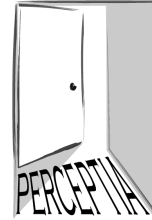
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By Scott Gardner

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Hiroshi Kobayashi
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PERCEPTIA PRESS

☁ NAGOYA ☁



2009

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Published by Perceptia Press, Nagoya, Japan in association with Panurgic Publishing
Senior Editor: Brian Cullen
Design, layout, & cover by Paul Lewis
Original cover photo taken by Nikki Gardner

1st Edition

Printing: 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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ISBN978-4-939139-78-6

Book Code: 101

Scott Gardner is an English educator and musician living in Okayama, Japan. He counts writing essays, songs, and poetry among his favorite pastimes, right up there with dipping candles and carving scrimshaw into his toenail clippings. He would be interested to hear of any successful pedagogical application for this collection.

Sample

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Paul Lewis and Brian Cullen for suggesting and supporting the book; to Teresa, Hiroshi, and Chad for their wit and imagination; to Amanda O'Brien, Kim Bradford-Watts, and Jacqui Norris-Holt for providing me the space; and finally to Nikki for tolerating the jokes in the first place.

The following essays previously appeared, with minor alterations, in *The Language Teacher*, a monthly journal published by JALT (The Japan Association for Language Teaching), from 2005-2008: Excessive Abbreviation (Hereafter, EA); My Printed Legacy; An Imaginary Interview with Benjamin Whorf; Leaked Excerpts from the OG's Private Teaching Journal; English for ESP (English Speaking People); At Long Last, Something to Do with Teaching; Review of the Literature; Celebrate Good Times, C'mon; Whence These Weird Words; Do Not Pass Go; The Minchi Code; Japanese Animation: They Gatcha Where They Wantcha; Mythical Japanese Characters and Creatures; Why Not Try Japanese Food? It Only Lives Once; Japanese Traffic; How to Waste Your Time; The Epic Cycle; My List of Must-do's in Kyoto/Nara; Nib Flipping and Other Senseless Violence; Phobe Probe; Adroit Underhandedness; Old Grammarians Never Die...; World Philosophy in Verse; Kill or Be Killed (aka Die or Be Dead); "I Suffer; It Must Be Somebody's Fault."—Nietzsche; Some Relief from Terminal Illness; Who Said It First?; The South Pacific Sinatra Workout; What Are the Sounds of One Hand Clapping?; Some Artistic Ru(m)inations; The Old Fibberian Recites Some Classic Fables. These essays are reproduced here by permission.

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Chapter 1: <i>On Language Teaching—All’s Well that Governs and Binds Well</i>	7
Chapter 2: <i>The Japanese Mind and Where It Can be Reached Most Weekends</i>	31
Chapter 3: <i>A Psycho-philosophical Look at Socio-anthropology</i>	51
Chapter 4: <i>Art is Long, Layovers are Longer, and Other Miscellaneous Essays</i>	71
Afterword	90

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INTRODUCTION



I'll never forget what Lev Vygotsky said about me once at a conference in Moscow: "I only want to say . . . that man controls his brain and not the brain the man." At least I think he was talking about me. I can't be sure because I wasn't there. But he certainly might as well have been talking about me, because I am without a doubt "that man."

I daresay that few people have as tight a grip on their brains as I do. (I can even make it squeak like a rubber duck.) Not only do I control it, I've taught it a few impressive tricks, like how to open and close the refrigerator. And mostly, after years of rigorous training and negative reinforcement—in the backyard and in the "bad room" in the basement—I've taught it how to write books. This book is the first in a series of one that I hope you'll enjoy and appreciate for the amount of labor my brain has put into it. Good boy, brain!

As a youngster I fancied being a journalist. I knew that being a journalist means getting the story right, because what gets printed as news today will be sealed forever in history. Unfortunately, I didn't become a journalist; I became a teacher. Teachers know that getting the facts straight is not essential because most of what gets said in class today will be forgotten forever by dinnertime. As the Old Grammarian in JALT's monthly publication *The Language Teacher*, I've written for an audience of teachers, using the teacher's assumption about facts, and thus I've been making bold claims of truth and reality that are actually based on fiction and comic functionality.

At times, however, I admit I've been concerned that some readers might actually think that I think I'm telling the truth about things in my column, and that those readers are going out and conducting their lives according to some "nugget" of truth they picked up from the Old Grammarian. This worry has caused me more than one restless night's sleep. Two, in fact. And the cat's snoring has caused many more.

I'm pleased to report, however, that for the most part the Teacher Model of Truth applies to my readers rather than the Journalist Model. Readers by and large don't remember what I tell them from one column to the next. People often come up to me and say, "Love your work. You should do a piece on that crazy Japanese traffic." I say, "I wrote one on that three months ago." "Well—do another one. It's much worse now."

It is under the assumption that readers who know my column have completely forgotten what was in it that I present to you this book of collected essays from *Old Grammarians*. They're not all here, unfortunately, but you'll never miss the ones that didn't make it in. If, on the other hand, you have never read my column before, this amazing book of entirely all new material will certainly leave you in stitches! And for that third category of reader—those who know the column and actually remember bits of it—I have included some actual really truly all new never seen before material to pad the book out a few extra pages. I'd better stop there. Stating so many truth tokens at once is causing my brain to tug uncomfortably at its leash.

Sample

Scott Gardner

October 2009

Okayama, Japan

How to Waste Your Time

AS I WRITE these words, I'm sitting in a franchise café, eating something called a *chokokuro* (not, as the name suggests, a chocolate-covered cockroach, but rather a chocolate-filled croissant), staring at a blue sign outside that proudly promotes a company called *Trite*. Fumes from the smoking section waft toward me with the aid of a thoughtlessly engineered air conditioning system. With my left leg figure-foured over my right, I can see that the elastic in my socks is giving out. In short, I've had nothing else to do for the last half hour. And, I have only one paragraph to show for it.

It's a pity that professional life in Japan creates such a dearth of leisure time and activities, especially since even as college students, so many Japanese have their choices of recreation dictated to them by domineering club and circle organizations. At my school, some 4th-year students who have retired from their clubs wander around like care-center geriatrics, unable to think of anything to do with the free time they suddenly have.

I'm intrigued by the university club system. I don't know about other schools, but most club and circle activities at mine take place in a dilapidated old building lovingly and oxymoronically called the "circle box." That geometric irony alone may be part of the clubs' allure, especially since the building itself is not visually appealing by any means, unless you can appreciate the powerful postmodern anti-message expressed in cinder blocks, carpet stains, and dust bunnies large enough to conceal, well, bunnies.

Typically, these clubs and circles are very demanding, calling members out at 6:00 in the morning, six days a week. But students insist it is all good for them. They tell themselves, "I must endure this living hell of a tennis circle because it will teach me important life skills, such as how to endure living hells." And what good is a hobby in Japan if it isn't exacting, enervating, and expensive? It sort of reminds me of my ill-considered desire in high school, in the landlocked American state of Utah, to get a scuba diving license. We trained for weeks in swimming pools, then for certification we made a four-hour drive to a hot spring in the Nevada desert to dive down 20 meters and kick up some mud. I've completely lost track of the license I earned for those efforts. Perhaps I left it down there in the muck.

Here are a few noteworthy hobbies pursued by acquaintances of mine in Japan:

Castle cruising—Some people get fulfillment out of studying and visiting Japanese castles. Japan has over 120 standing castles, some of them nearly pristine, others gutted and concrete-reinforced. To take one example, Matsumae Castle in Hokkaido has one of the few remaining examples of the famed “nightingale elevators,” which were meant to thwart enemy ninja trying to sneak in through the underground parking garage.

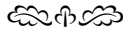
Temple trekking—Shikoku is home to 88 temples associated with the famous monk, Kukai. Pilgrims from all over the world come to visit each temple in what’s called the Shikoku Hachijuu-hakkasho. Although Okayama (where I live) would seem to be a logical starting point for the pilgrimage, with its impressive bridge across the Seto Inland Sea, most *henro* (pilgrims) choose to start from Wakayama—several prefectures away, and bridgeless. A few years ago, the Okayama City Tourism Bureau tried unsuccessfully to have a kiosk on its bullet-train platform designated as the 89th temple in the circuit.

Hanami hopping—This is a deplorable foreigners’ pastime which consists of showing a tourist’s interest in *hanami* (blossom viewing) parties, asking



drunken revelers silly “newcomer” questions about Japanese culture until invited to join in for free food and drink.

Trainspotting—Of course I mean the literal act of standing around at railroad crossings and identifying trains that go by. I did this once. We drove for two hours, parked, waited by a bridge with about 100 camera-toting enthusiasts, watched an old steam train roll by, and then left. When I got home and back on my sofa, I determined that “lint spotting” was easily as enjoyable.



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