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一生當着幾量屐

明人袁宏道說："人情必有所寄，然後能樂。"清人張潮亦云："人不可以無癖。"人若沒有癖好，對什麼都不感興趣，生活不免索然乏味。王子猷呼竹為君，米元章拜石為丈，王世貞嗜書如命，無非為求一晌清歡而寄情於物。然而，若過分沉湎其中而不得自在，癖好反會成為心靈枷鎖。

《世說新語．雅量》有一則關於癖好的軼事：東晉名將祖逖之弟祖約，平日貪財愛貨，與聞雞起舞、中流擊楫的兄長截然不同。某日，祖約正在賞玩財物，忽然有客臨門。他趕忙收拾，東塞西藏之際，客人已至，還有兩個小竹簏未及收好，唯有側身擋住，一臉慌張尷尬。他的同僚阮孚乃竹林七賢之一阮咸之子，不僅嗜酒成癖，還愛收藏木屐。有人拜訪阮孚，見他神色閒暢，吹火熔蠟，一邊給木屐上蠟，一邊悠悠而歎："未知一生當着幾量[註]屐？"在晉人看來，愛財和愛屐並無高下之分，關鍵在於能否處之泰然。從阮祖二人的反應來看，誰的境界更高，不言而喻。

大文豪蘇軾也是個收藏家，尤愛藏硯蓄墨，對於"祖財阮屐"這個故事頗有感觸。他在《次韻答舒教授觀余所藏墨》一詩寫道："世間有癖念誰無，傾身障簏尤堪鄙。人生當着幾兩[註]屐，定心肯為微物起。"嗜癖雖屬人之常情，也要適可而止。人生苦短，若為物役，豈非自縛？蘇軾的老鄉石昌言愛墨，捨不得磨名家之墨；好友李公擇也嗜墨，親友的好墨都被他奪去，屋裏掛滿墨條。二人如守財奴般得物而不用，東坡先生感歎這實在是"非人磨墨墨磨人"。

熙寧十年，駙馬王詵建寶繪堂藏書畫，邀蘇軾為文作記。蘇軾在《寶繪堂記》忠告友人："君子可以寓意於物，而不可以留意於物。"欣賞物事之美以寄情趣，當須超然其外，方得自樂。若過度耽溺，反受其害。蘇軾憶述自己年少時好書畫，自己有的，生怕失去；別人有的，惟恐得不到。後來幡然醒悟："吾薄富貴而厚於書，輕死生而重於畫，豈不顛倒錯繆失其本心也哉？"自此視書畫為過眼煙雲，得之固喜，失之不念，才得以重拾樂趣。

隨着年歲漸長，閱歷益豐，人往往反思自身與物事之間的依存關係。蘇軾如是，李清照亦然。李清照年輕時，與丈夫趙明誠一同收藏書畫金石，助他完成巨著《金石錄》。她晚年在《金石錄》後序中坦言，癖好"名雖不同，其惑一也"，無論是錢財抑或書冊，皆為惑人心志之物。這位曾為購古玩不惜典當衣物的才女，何以如此感歎？

趙明誠與李清照住在青州老家那些年，收書甚豐。趙明誠把書冊鎖於書庫，每次取閱都須先開鎖，再登記，對藏書呵護備至。書本稍有污損，他就會叫妻子清理塗改。李清照不堪其擾，索性節衣縮食，另購副本自用。藏書本求適意，如今反添煩厭，或許這時她也如蘇軾般，興起"非人磨墨墨磨人"之慨。

靖康之變後，衣冠南渡。二人珍愛之物，大多被迫割捨。建炎三年，趙明誠獲授官，往建康受命。臨別時，李清照急切問道："如傳聞城中緩急，奈何？"趙明誠答道："從眾，必不得已，先去輜重，次衣被，次書冊卷軸，次古器，獨所謂宗器者，可自負抱，與身俱存亡，勿忘也。"言畢，便策馬而去。兵荒馬亂之際，枕邊人竟要求自己以藏品為重，甚至與宗廟禮器共存亡。那一刻，李清照想必百感交集。

江邊一別後不久，趙明誠便因病遽逝。李清照孤身帶着金石書畫繼續往南，一路顛沛流離，身邊的文物丟棄的、毀於戰火的、被盜的、怯於流言而獻給朝廷的，十之七八，最後只剩下一兩部殘破不全的書冊，與三數種價值不高的書帖。

飽經風霜後，李清照已不再是當年那個因為買不到《牡丹圖》而惆悵數日的少婦，此時的她甚至比蘇軾看得更通透豁達。她以自己大半生的憂患得失，勸誡"後世好古博雅者"："有有必有無，有聚必有散，乃理之常。人亡弓，人得之，又胡足道！"

李清照這番肺腑之言，不僅讓好古博雅者引以為戒，常人也可借鏡。誰家中沒有一大堆滿載回憶的舊物？然而，日積月累，舊物漸成負擔，致使人為物累，心為形役。"人亡弓，人得之。"那些曾與我們相伴的物件，終究會隨緣分散，流轉到別人手中，或受珍愛，或被遺忘。萬物聚散有時，又何須耿耿於懷？

註："量"、"兩"通"緉"（緉，古代計算鞋的單位），"幾緉"即"幾雙"。

SEAT OF THE MUSES

Museums always top our wish list when we plan a trip. They are places where you can see precious, fascinating and extraordinary things. But have you ever wondered how museums evolved into the public treasure troves as they are today?

The origin of the word "museum" gives us a clue as to how it all began. The ancient Greek word *mouseion* means "seat of the Muses", referring to a temple dedicated to the nine goddesses of literature, science and the arts. Over time, it came to mean a place for philosophical study, reflection and artistic exploration. An example is the Museum of Alexandria founded in Egypt around 300 BC. It used to house scholars and a famed library, serving more as a learning centre than a heritage shrine. While they were unlike the ones we see today, the early museums were proof of humanity's urge to gather, protect and share knowledge.

The story of museums remains uneventful until the advent of the Renaissance, when amassing collections of rare and exotic objects from faraway lands became more and more fashionable. Aristocrats, royalty and wealthy merchants displayed these precious things in "cabinets of curiosities", which ranged in size from a piece of furniture with drawers to an entire room. The best entertainment for venerable guests after dinner in 16th century Europe was surely a tour of the *wunderkammer*—the room of wonder. Every item in these opulent collections might tell a different story, but they all shared the same purpose of reflecting the taste, wealth and power of their owners.

The concept of museums as public institutions began to take shape in the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries when the belief that knowledge was a powerful tool for the betterment of society started to flourish. Private collections that used to be the exclusive domain of the rich began to open their doors to the public. Opened in 1683 after the wealthy antiquary Elias Ashmole gifted his collection to the University of Oxford, the Ashmolean Museum was widely recognised as the first modern museum in the world. More public museums emerged in the following century: the British Museum was founded in London in 1753, the Museum Fridericianum in Germany in 1779, and the Louvre Museum in Paris in 1793. Since the early 19th century, museums have become cornerstones of communities, serving as both educational hubs and symbols of civic pride.

Feature image: *Art and Rarity Cabinet* by Hans Jordaens III

In our time, museums have diversified in both content and form, offering an array of experiences far beyond traditional art galleries and historical exhibitions. Some even push the boundaries of what we expect from a museum. Created by Nobel Prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk, the Museum of Innocence in Istanbul curates everyday objects—cigarette butts, clothes, jewellery, photographs—that tell the love story of the protagonists in the eponymous novel. Here, the line between fact and fiction is blurred. Visitors do not just observe objects; they step into a narrative and experience the emotions of longing, nostalgia and lost love.

The Museum of Innocence raises interesting questions about the role of museums. Should they only display what are real and historical? Or can they create spaces where imagination reigns? Opened in 2022, the Museum of the Future in Dubai is another example that redefines what a museum can offer. Its bold shape and façade of intricate Arabic calligraphy are as futuristic as its contents. Rather than looking back, it presents a vision of tomorrow. Visitors can enter a world of advanced technologies, from astronautics to artificial intelligence, and contemplate how innovation will shape the future of humanity.

Not all museums, however, need to be serious. Some embrace humour and playfulness, challenging us to rethink the nature of art. The Museum of Bad Art (MOBA) in Massachusetts is a celebration of artworks that have gone spectacularly wrong. Instead of masterpieces, MOBA showcases works of askew proportions, baffling colours and confusing perspectives with immense charm. It offers a refreshing view of creativity and invites us to appreciate effort and imagination, even when the results are hilariously flawed.

Museums have come a long way from ancient temples dedicated to deities to today's cutting-edge institutions, and will certainly keep transforming as the world changes. Yet, at their core, they will always remain a place where we can wonder, think and learn—with a seat for everyone.

> For great things do not just happen by impulse but are a succession of small things linked together.
>
> Vincent van Gogh

A History of the World in 100 Objects

At the turn of the 21st century, Neil MacGregor, the then director of the British Museum, undertook a formidable task: to recount the million-year-long human odyssey with just 100 objects culled from the museum's vast collection.

"The whole project is an absurd one, obviously," MacGregor admitted, "to try to tell a history of the world anyway, let alone in 100 objects."

Nevertheless, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*—a series of 15-minute programmes first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 2010—became a runaway success, garnering compliments like "perfect radio" and "a broadcasting phenomenon". Brilliant on air, its lavishly illustrated companion book of the same title is equally mesmerising. As with the radio series, five objects are grouped chronologically under 20 intriguing topics such as "Ancient Pleasures, Modern Spice", "Inside the Palace: Secrets at Court" and "Meeting the Gods". From the two-million-year-old stone chopping tool from Olduvai Gorge in Africa to the solar-powered lamp made in China in 2010, these objects collectively weave a rich, coherent narrative of human activity across cultures and time.

If there is one thing that stands out in the book, it is the breadth of the objects that come from almost every corner of the globe. A few of them, like the Rosetta Stone or the statue of Ramesses II, are iconic and instantly recognisable. Some are less known but no less captivating, such as the mosaic wooden box from a royal tomb in the Sumerian city of Ur in Mesopotamia or the mechanical galleon produced in the late 19th century in the German town of Augsburg. Many are humble relics of everyday life, including pot shards found on a Tanzanian beach, and a ceramic roof tile from a temple in Kyongju, the capital of the Unified Silla Dynasty of Korea.

With an exceptionally well-informed docent, even the most mundane objects can be fascinating. In a clear and eloquent style, MacGregor uses his expertise and storytelling skills to bring these objects to life, shedding light not just on their historical contexts but also on universal themes such as religious tolerance, urbanisation, technological advances and women's rights. One particularly striking example is a suffragette penny—an ordinary British coin minted in 1903 with the slogan "VOTES FOR WOMEN" hand-stamped over the profile of King Edward VI. In MacGregor's hands, this small act of defacement offers a window into the long and hard-fought struggle for women's suffrage in Britain, inviting readers to reflect on the boundaries of civil disobedience and the fight for equality.

The diversity of the objects and MacGregor's engaging narration contribute to the success of this project, as does his choice of contributors and collaborators. Each vignette features input from experts across various fields—anthropologists, artists, writers, and even lawyers—many of whom share cultural or racial heritage with the objects in question. In his presentation of a brass plaque from Benin City, Nigeria, for example, MacGregor includes commentaries from Nigerian-born sculptor Sokari Douglas Camp and Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka. These multiple voices and perspectives add layers of meaning and offer personal reflections on the cultural significance of the objects.

As the title suggests, MacGregor is presenting "a", not "the", history of the world. Unlike conventional histories that focus on significant historical figures and events, this book allows objects to speak for the defeated and forgotten. While written records tend to skew towards the victors in wars, conquests and cultural clashes, artefacts left behind by the vanquished inadvertently take on the role of silent witnesses, reminding us of the people and cultures that created them. MacGregor urges us to see how these objects unite us together in our common humanity. He concludes, "Above all, I hope this book has shown that the 'family of man' is not an empty metaphor, however dysfunctional that family usually is; that all humanity has the same needs and preoccupations, fears and hopes. Objects force us to the humble recognition that since our ancestors left East Africa to populate the world we have changed very little."

It is with this broadened perspective that *A History of the World in 100 Objects* becomes not only a journey into our past but also a meditation on our future. The objects we leave behind today will serve as testaments to our achievements and failures tomorrow, telling our future generations who we are, where we come from, and how much or how little we have learnt from history.

Photos: British Museum / Wikimedia Commons

橘與橙

二十世紀描寫父親的文學作品當中，朱自清的《背影》堪稱經典。文中父親為作者買橘子，在月台攀上爬下的背影，可說是天下千千萬萬個父親的縮影。同樣以買水果刻劃父親形象的散文，還有香港作家麥樹堅的《橙》[註]。兩者時空情景縱不相同，所描寫的父愛卻同樣既含蓄又澎湃。

《背影》開首，朱自清憶述二十歲時回鄉為祖母奔喪，父親當時諸事不順，不但丟掉公職，還負債累累。縱然急於謀事，但兒子坐火車回北京唸書，他還是放心不下，親自到車站打點。作者自覺獨立能幹，聽見父親囑託茶房好好照應自己，認為他多此一舉，“心裏暗笑他的迂”，後來聽到他跟腳夫議價，又覺得他“說話不大漂亮”。朱父瞧見對面月台柵欄外有人賣橘子，便去買來給兒子在路上吃。他步履蹣跚跨過鐵道，還得費勁攀上對面月台，此情此景讓作者深受觸動：“他用兩手攀着上面，兩腳再向上縮，他肥胖的身子向左微傾，顯出努力的樣子。這時我看見他的背影，我的淚很快地流下來了。”

人生總有一時半刻，讓你頓悟、成長。對朱自清來說，目睹老父吃力攀爬月台的背影，就是那樣的瞬間。多年後，朱自清寫下《背影》。雖然自站台一別後，兩父子曾因各種緣故而漸生隔閡，但隨着人生歷練增長，昔日那個自以為是的青年，如今已能理解父親多一點。那些“朱紅的橘子”歷經百載仍未褪色變味，與那個踉蹌的背影一同成為父愛永恆的象徵。

《背影》用樸素平實的文字記敘作者對父親最深刻的回憶，《橙》則以輕鬆幽默的筆觸描述一個沉迷買橙的父親。麥父退休後愛到超級市場買橙，甚至總結出一套攻略：“買橙，一定要守候超市開門，只要捲閘一動，就得搶先彎身入內，搶一個購物籃，將新拆箱猶冷的橙搶放籃裏。”當超市橙的檔次降低，父親便捨近求遠，“從東莞搬回一箱贛南臍橙”。他甚至“不備手拉車，這麼挽着、提着、抬着過境”，顯然寶刀未老，仍能為家人勞心勞力。從昔日馳騁職場掙錢養家，到今天鉚勁上“戰場”買橙，任務雖有不同，守護家人的心意卻始終如一。

麥父買得好橙便洋洋自得，珍而重之。尚在學步的小孫女把臍橙當玩具扔在地上，他毫不生氣，反而“笑意豐盈”，隨後數晚低調善後，“悄悄搶先吃掉孫女擲爛的橙”，仍未摔壞的則留給家人。作者把一切看在眼裏：“那些橙不健全、多疤多痣、甜得詭異，且果肉敗壞……而唯獨這些橙才還原為真正的橙，原始、樸拙的橙。”也許只要用心體會，我們都能從樸拙之物發現真摯之情。

《橙》的作者已為人父，能從父親對買橙的執着領略到他對家人的愛。作者說一家“三代同住，居所空間日益緊絀”，雖然囤橙對家人造成不便，但他對父親無限包容，任由他不停買，家人不停吃。爸爸無法在超市隨心所欲買橙，作者擔心他“會因少了一項為家人勞心傷神的事務而失落”。大老遠辛苦搬來的橙雖然品質成疑，但為了顧及父親的感受，一家人仍滿口讚好。斯是陋室，卻因濃濃親情而溫馨甜蜜。

《背影》和《橙》通篇無一“愛”字，卻滿紙溫情。父親的愛深沉而厚重，從不宣之於口，只表之於行。橘與橙的故事相隔近一個世紀，同樣印證父愛如山。以物載情又怎會限於水果？加班後回到家中，母親給你端來的那碗熱湯，不也寄託了無言的關懷嗎？

註：收錄於麥樹堅散文集《絢光細瀧》

凡物皆有可觀。苟有可觀，皆有可樂。非必怪奇偉麗者也。

蘇軾《超然臺記》

The Poetic Thing

For many, a toy is just a plaything. But for Pablo Neruda, there is an old worn-out toy which provides a deeper attachment—a poetic thing that shaped the Chilean Nobel laureate's perspective on life and fuelled his passion for writing.

It all began in Neruda's childhood in Temuco, Chile. One day, while he was playing alone in his backyard, a tiny hand from a hole in the fence caught his eyes. It was a little boy whom he did not know. Before Neruda could react, the boy disappeared, leaving behind a toy sheep as a gift. The toy was not in good shape: the wool had already faded, and the wheels fallen off. Still, in Neruda's eyes, these imperfections only added to its charm. The wear and tear gave the toy a certain authenticity that made it feel alive. In return, he placed in the same spot one of his treasures—a pinecone full of fragrance and resin—hoping that the little boy would come back and find it.

Neruda never saw the boy again, and the woollen sheep eventually perished in a fire. That brief and wordless exchange, however, stayed with him. In 1954, the 50-year-old poet recalled this encounter in his essay "Childhood and Poetry", describing how the occasion had opened his eyes to a profound truth about humanity:

To feel the intimacy of brothers is a marvellous thing in life. To feel the love of people whom we love is a fire that feeds our life. But to feel the affection that comes from those whom we do not know, from those unknown to us … that is something still greater and more beautiful because it widens out the boundaries of our being and unites all living things.

This insight ignited within Neruda a flame he referred to as the "poetry light". He came to see poetry as a way of offering "something resiny, earthlike, and fragrant in exchange for human brotherhood". Just as he had left his pinecone for a stranger, he left his words for "people in prison, or hunted, or alone".

This "poetry light" illuminated Neruda's entire life, never dimming. By the age of 13, he had already started publishing his works in local newspapers. From *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, which explores love and longing with vivid imagery and striking intimacy, to *Canto General*, a sweeping epic that chronicles Latin America's history, Neruda's poetry captures the joy and struggle of human experience. His works resonate deeply with readers, not only for their personal revelations but for their empathy and solidarity, establishing him as one of the most significant voices in 20th century poetry.

In the same year that he wrote "Childhood and Poetry", Neruda published *Elemental Odes* (also known as *Odes to Common Things*), a collection of poems celebrating the basic things in daily life, such as fruit, clothing and furniture. This shift was a deliberate effort to reach out to a wider audience. He explained in the introduction to *Elemental Odes*: "I wanted to describe many things that had been sung and said over and over again … I had to touch on everything, expressing myself as clearly and freshly as possible."

With *Elemental Odes*, Neruda honours the quotidian with reverence usually reserved for the divine, connecting ordinary things to extraordinary themes. In the poem "Ode to a Chestnut on the Ground", for instance, the chestnut's fall is not merely a result of gravity, but an act of its own will to embrace its destiny. Biding its time in the soil, it will grow from a seed into another chestnut tree. With just one chestnut, Neruda encapsulates the cycle of life, reminding us that greatness can emerge from even the smallest and humblest beginnings. As the way he transformed ordinary things into "poetic things" touched readers and critics alike, three more volumes were published in the following five years.

Though not all of us have the same talent as Neruda for poetry, we can still learn a comforting truth from his childhood story: while the things we cherish might not last, the memories they leave behind can inspire something enduring and meaningful. Through his words, Neruda has immortalised his beloved toy sheep and the epiphany it sparked, moving readers across generations. As we turn the pages of his poetry, perhaps we may ask ourselves: what is the poetic thing in our lives that gives us inspiration and insight? And how might we, too, find beauty in everyday things?

阿堵物

清代桐城名士姚元之《竹葉亭雜記》載述了這樣一則軼事：某年除夕，姚元之到座師朱珪家拜年，閒談間"問公歲事如何"，老先生舉起胸前荷包打趣說："可憐此中空空，歷歲錢尚無一文也。"不久，僕人來報："門生某爺某爺節儀若干封。"朱珪戲謔："此數人太呆，我從不識其面，乃以阿堵物付流水耶！"朱珪為人清廉，嘉慶帝稱其"一世不談錢"，給他送錢可不正是"阿堵物付流水"，即俗語所謂"抌錢落鹹水海"？

錢為何稱作"阿堵物"？這得從另一位同樣不談錢的古人說起。《世說新語•規箴》記載，魏晉末年重臣王衍崇尚清談，自命清高，尤其討厭妻子貪財俗氣。王衍為顯高雅，從不說一個"錢"字。王夫人趁他熟睡時着人把錢撒滿牀邊，讓他沒法下牀，心想這樣他就不得不說個"錢"字了。豈料王衍醒來，只呼令僕人把地上的東西拿走："舉卻阿堵物！""阿堵"為當時口語，意為"這個"，"阿堵物"即"這個東西"。從此，"阿堵物"便成了錢的別稱。

王衍出身高門望族，位至宰執，自有清高的本錢。東晉學者王隱所言一針見血："……求富貴得富貴，資財山積，用不能消，安須問'錢'乎？而世以不問為高，不亦惑乎！"王衍連說個"錢"字也怕弄髒嘴巴，時人隱士魯褒非但毫不避忌，還特地寫了一篇《錢神論》，把外圓內方的銅錢戲稱為"孔方"，譏諷世人對之"親愛如兄"。文章如此描述錢可通神的社會現象："錢之所在，危可使安，死可使活；錢之所去，貴可使賤，生可使殺……夫錢，窮者能使通達，富者能使溫暖，貧者能使勇悍。"《錢神論》問世後，"疾時者共傳其文"，"孔方兄"這個稱呼不脛而走，流播後世。

有了"阿堵物"和"孔方兄"這些別稱，文人騷客提及錢的時候，頓時少了一點銅臭，多了幾分雅致。沒錢喝酒，是"愛酒苦無阿堵物，尋春奈有主人家"（張耒《和无咎》之二）；年關難過，是"阿堵元知不受呼，忍貧閉戶亦良圖"（陸游《歲暮貧甚戲書》）；"錢"途無望，是"管城子無食肉相，孔方兄有絕交書"（黃庭堅《戲呈孔毅父》）；世態炎涼，是"有堪使鬼原非謬，無任呼兄亦不來"（沈周《詠錢》之二）。

天下熙熙，皆為利來；天下攘攘，皆為利往。為了錢，有人背信棄義，有人不擇手段。歷代不乏控訴萬惡金錢的詩文。唐詩人羅隱《錢》一詩痛罵金錢顛倒了世道："志士不敢道，貯之成禍胎。小人無事藝，假爾作梯媒。解釋愁腸結，能分睡眼開。朱門狼虎性，一半逐君回。"南宋李之彥在《東谷所見》感歎"金旁著兩戈字，真殺人之物"。清狂士戴名世的雜文《錢神問對》則謂自金錢流傳人間，惑亂民志，以致萬惡俱起："天下之死於汝手者，不可勝數也！"

錢若有靈，定必感到萬般委屈。它無非是經濟發展的產物，又何罪之有？錢是善是惡，全在用者的抉擇。當家方知柴米貴，盛唐名相張說為政數十年，深諳"倉廩實而知禮節，衣食足而知榮辱"之理，對錢倒不是一味鄙夷。他的雜文《錢本草》以錢喻作藥，論其利弊得失，妙趣橫生：

> 錢，味甘，大熱有毒，偏能駐顏，彩澤流潤，善療飢寒困厄之患，立驗。能利邦國，污賢達，畏清廉。貪婪者服之，以均平為良；如不均平，則冷熱相激，令人霍亂。其藥采無時，采至非理則傷神。此既流行，能役神靈，通鬼氣。如積而不散，則有水火盜賊之災生；如散而不積，則有飢寒困厄之患至。一積一散謂之道，不以為珍謂之德，取與合宜謂之義，使無非分謂之禮，博施濟眾謂之仁，出不失期謂之信，入不妨己謂之智，以此七術精鍊方可。久而服之，令人長壽。若服之非理，則弱志傷神，切須忌之。

張說的馭錢七術，放諸今日仍能振聾發聵。從古時"有錢堪使鬼"到今天"有錢能使鬼推磨"，孔方兄的威力千載不減。新春將至，又到了孩子喜滋滋領利是的時候。何不把握良機，教導孩子養成量入為出的好習慣，又或鼓勵他們把部分利是錢捐給有需要的人？利是豐收的喜悅會隨春節結束而淡卻，真正讓孩子受用一生的無價之寶，並非銀行帳戶裏那串冷冰冰的數字，而是正確的金錢觀和仁善之心。

> 物有美惡，施用有宜，美不常珍，惡不終棄。
>
> 劉晝《劉子•適才》

What's in a Name?

Language is a living thing. It evolves with every conversation, adapts to technological shifts, and absorbs new slang expressions, constantly growing in unexpected directions. One of the most overlooked contributors to this growth? Brands.

Some brand names can take on a life of their own, transcending their commercial origins to become part of everyday vocabulary. Take "escalator" as an example. Originally a trademark coined by the Otis Elevator Company around 1900, it used to refer exclusively to Otis's own brand of moving staircases. However, as these futuristic devices became ubiquitous, the word was soon generically used to describe any moving staircase, regardless of the manufacturer. Interestingly, it even gave birth to the verb "escalate", which now applies to a broad range of contexts, ranging from rising tensions to intensifying situations.

Let's look at a few more examples. Do you say a vacuum flask or thermos? A separable fastener or zipper? An adhesive bandage or band-aid? A whirlpool bath or jacuzzi? Sticky notes or post-it? You probably use, without a second thought, the latter—which are (or used to be) trademarks—to describe goods or services in a generic way.

Even more intriguing is the phenomenon of brand names turning into verbs. This process—what some call "verbing" and linguists refer to as "denominalisation"—fills gaps in our language, offering a convenient and universally understood shorthand for actions we frequently perform. Expressions like "Just google it" and "It's photoshopped" illustrate this perfectly. While they might originally refer to using Google and Adobe Photoshop specifically, they are now often used to describe respectively the act of searching online with any search engine and editing photos with any software. As these terms are already embedded in our daily speech, they are often written in lower case.

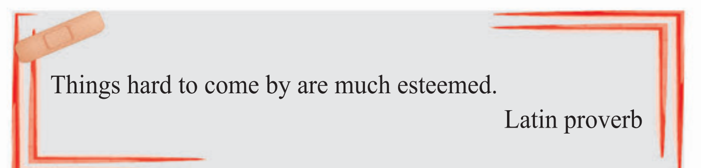
At first glance, it might seem harmless, or even flattering, for a brand to become part of the lexicon. But for businesses, it can spell disaster. If a trademarked name no longer identifies a specific brand and is instead perceived as an entire category of products or services, it might face what is known as "genericide" and lose legal protection.

One of the most famous cases of genericide is Aspirin, a painkiller developed by Bayer, a German pharmaceutical giant. In the legal case of *Bayer Co. v. United Drug Co.* in 1921, Bayer lost the exclusive right to use "Aspirin" as a trademark in the United States. The court ruled that the generic status of a trademark would depend on how the general public used the term, rather than how specialists such as chemists and pharmacists perceived it.

To avoid a similar fate, many companies have gone to Herculean lengths to educate the public about the proper use of their trademarks. Xerox, for example, has long fought against its name becoming synonymous with photocopying. A 2003 advertisement made the point in a humorous way, stating: "When you use 'Xerox' the way you use 'aspirin', we get a headache." In 2019, the company published a notice in a Manila newspaper to remind the public that Xerox is not a generic name: "As a registered trademark, XEROX is also not a verb or common noun and should therefore not be used to describe copying or copy services in general. So please don't use the word 'XEROX' as another word for 'copy'."

Some enterprises have taken it a step further. Velcro released a playful music video titled "Don't Say Velcro", in which actors playing lawyers sing about how Velcro is a trademark rather than a generic term for hook and loop fasteners. Similarly, Johnson & Johnson have tweaked its famous jingle from "I'm stuck on Band-Aid" to "I'm stuck on Band-Aid brand" to reinforce the idea that Band-Aid is a brand name, not a descriptive term. Companies discourage the use of plural form for their brand names, favouring "LEGO bricks" over "LEGOs", for instance, and use distinctive fonts to set their trademarks apart.

Companies pour millions into making their brand a household name and, ironically, spend even more to avoid suffering from their own success. While Juliet tries to tell Romeo that a name is nothing but a name in her famous soliloquy, those in the business world would have said, "A name is everything."


Things hard to come by are much esteemed.

Latin proverb

Not-a-Mindboggler

About Love

Love is an eternal theme in literature, and it is shapeless and formless. Poets often turn to rhetorical devices to convey this abstract concept. The following passage tells you how love is described in poems. Read it and fill in the blanks with words that best complete the sentences. Some letters have been given to you.

With similes and (1) m _ _ _ _ _ _ r _, love can be illustrated by analogy with everything in the universe, such as roses. In his poem "A Red, Red Rose", Robert Burns confesses his profound affection for his (2) b _ _ _ _ _ d with a vivid simile: "O my Luve is like a red, red rose / That's newly sprung in June". Thanks to the (3) S _ _ _ _ _ _ h poet's rich imagination, roses have become an enduring (4) em _ _ _ _ of romantic love.

Emily Brontë also compares romantic love to a type of flower. Yet, she does not view it through (5) _ _ s _-_ _ _ _ _ _ _ spectacles like Burns does. In her poem "Love and Friendship", Brontë likens love to wild rose-briars and friendship to holly-trees. Wild rose-briars are more vibrant when in (6) b _ _ _ m, but the poet urges readers to consider their nature: while wild rose-briars (7) _ i _ _ in the winter, holly-trees remain verdant in all (8) _ _ _ _ _ _ _ s. By (9) c _ _ t _ _ _ _ _ _ _ g the traits of the two plants, Brontë praises the endurance of friendship and ridicules the fleeting nature of romantic love.

Brontë would probably find an ally in Christina Rosetti, another Victorian poet who shared the same fondness for hollies. Whilst describing hollies as "bold and jolly" in a poem, Rosetti shows disdain for roses, writing: "A rose has (10) t _ _ _ _ _ as well as honey, / I'll not have her for love or money". To her, roses are not a sight of (11) j _ _ , but a potential source of (12) _ _ _ n.

Please send your entry by fax (2521 8772) or email (csbolrs@csb.gov.hk) to the Editorial Board of *Word Power* by **27 February 2025**. Watch out for our coming issue to see if you get all the answers right, and better still, if you are one of the lucky ten to win a prize. The Editorial Board will have the final say on the answers.

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第九十七期答案

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2. 石頭
3. 莫札特
4. 三十歲
5. 李英瓊
6. 《明暗》
7. 阿爾及利亞
8. 狄更斯博物館

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二零二五年七月第一百期主題：一百

歡迎同事投稿，細則請按這裏。

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