

A last-gasp effort to save the mother tongue

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By Elliott Warnock

About the only thing I don't like well-done is steak.

With that exception, anything well-done should be considered as admirable. I even admire a good lie. Didn't your favorite junior high school literature teacher tell you what a noble fellow Odysseus was?

He was one of the biggest liars in history; he lied to everybody. He lied to Athena (now that took guts); he lied to his son, to Cyclops, Circe; he even lied to his own wife after he was missing for nearly 20 years. But the Greeks think this guy was just great. And I have to admit I do too.

Maybe this is why I like writers so

much. Writers are really people given license to lie. To twist a cliché, there are few things as good as a good writer, and there are few things as bad as a bad writer.

What is all this leading to? (If you don't like my dangling preposition, remember what Winston Churchill once said: "That is something up with I will not put.") My goal in telling you all this is simple: I want to encourage better use of the English language.

Aha, you cry. Here is a columnist who has butchered, slandered, misused and downright abused the mother tongue. To that I eloquently reply, "Stick it in your ear."

I'm serious about this; I promise.

An occasional "ain't" or "y'all" doesn't faze me in the least. I can ramble on for minutes about the virtue of descending into the vernacular in writing. But I rankle at someone boasting "I are a graduate of Groton."

If you think that's minor, let me tell about an honors student who wrote a thesis containing somewhere around 20 spelling errors. This person went on to become a respected editor.

Oh, the pain, the pain.

A survey five years ago of the nation's incoming college freshmen revealed 25 percent of the fledgling scholars attended college to—and I'm not kidding—"improve their reading and writing skills."

The pain is becoming worse.

There was a time when a student couldn't receive an undergraduate degree from a university unless he could read Latin and/or Greek. I'd be genuinely, though pleasantly, surprised if 50 percent of the Carolina undergraduate student body could tell me what *lux*, *libertas* means in English. If those words don't ring a bell, try looking at the University of North Carolina seal sometime.

I know what you're thinking.

Here's a pompous jerk who imagines himself to be Edward Newman or John Simon.

To show my good faith in the Carolina students who desire to be good writers, I'm announcing the First And Only Annual Elliott Warnock Short, Short Story Memorial Classic Write-off.

The rules of the competition are simple.

- Write a short, short story, You may write about anything you wish, but entries must be 75 words or less. Articles of speech are not included in counting the words.

- Send your entry to:
Elliott Warnock
The Daily Tar Heel
Carolina Union
Campus, UNC 27514

- Include your name and phone number with your entry.

- Also include an explanation of what's wrong with the title "First and Only Annual Elliott Warnock Short, Short Story Memorial Classic Write-off."

- Entries must be received at the DTH office no later than Friday, Feb. 8, 1980.

- All entries become property of yours truly; however, if you come by the DTH office while I'm there, you can have them back.

- The overall winner(s) will be published in this column sometime after the contest closes.

- To be fair, there will be more than one category of writing, explained below. Not to be fair, I'm the sole judge and all decisions of the judge are final. (I am open to bribery and flattery.)

- Winner(s) will receive, from me, a six-pack of beer to be savored while he, she or they enjoy the thrill of victory.

- The categories: (1) Overall. The best short, short story. This winning entry will merit a six-pack of my choice, but I'll try to get you what you want. (2) The Max Steele Award. Professor Steele hates bad writers more than I do, I believe, so this winner will be the person who does more to insult and injure good writing. The winner will receive a six-pack of Iron-City Light, if still available. (3) The Hef, Boby and Larry Award. A special citation for obscenity. No beer goes to this winner, just a leer from the editors of *Weekender* and the *DTH*.

I know you people have it in you to do what it takes, so start working at those typewriters, folks. All entrants will have a chance to apply for staff positions at the *DTH*. Those entrants who can't figure out what's wrong with the title of this contest have a chance to replace me next year. ☐

Elliott Warnock is staff columnist for *Weekender*.

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