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One of the many pleasures of having been Kristin Davidse's student and, later, colleague for all of my adult life is that it has provided access to that inexhaustible store of good humour, instant native speaker judgement, great taste in art, and admirable photography skill that is her husband, Keith Carlon. One memorable e-mail I received from Keith, nearly twenty years ago now, was ominously entitled "Of computers and morons". In it, Keith indicated that a laser printer had been sitting, unconnected and still in its box, on the floor of her Erasmushuis office: might I stage an intervention and hook it up before it turned obsolete? After all, wrote Keith, "Kristin has many virtues and many talents, but among them are not to be found any computer skills".

I hope it won't seem cruel, then, if my contribution in celebration of Kristin's retirement strays into computer territory — luckily, though, nothing as practical as the installation procedures for laser printers in the early noughties. For some time, I have taken an interest in Internet memes and other forms of social media discourse, and in the ways in which they pair combinations of textual and visual form with meanings, allowing creative extensions within the limits set by constructional patterns (e.g., Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2017). For reasons that will become clear, I would like to discuss the form and meaning of one recent Internet meme, which appears to have emerged as recently as April 2021.[1] The initial four-panel grid of images and subtitles is given here as Figure 1; it shows the characters Anakin Skywalker (left) and Padmé Amidala (right) in a scene from episode 2 of the Star Wars prequel trilogy, *Attack of the Clones*. The (apparent) subtitles provided in fact do not occur literally in the scene, as reproducing the film dialogue would exceed the limited space available in the meme format; instead, they adapt the dialogue from an existing cartoon in which a turtle announces to a frog, "I want to change the world", but then refuses to answer the frog's question "For the better?" The relevant portion of the dialogue in the actual film scene is given in (1):

(1) Anakin: We need a system where the politicians sit down and discuss the problem, agree what's in the best interest of all the people, and then do it.

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[1] See the information provided on the meme collecting website "Know your meme", at https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/for-the-better-right, which also includes the turtle and frog cartoon mentioned immediately below.

Padmé: That's exactly what we do. The… the trouble is that people don't always agree.

Anakin: Well then they should be made to.

Padmé: By whom? Who is going to make them?

Anakin: I don't know, someone.

Padmé: You?

Anakin: Of course not me.

Padmé: But someone.

Anakin: Someone wise.

Padmé: Sounds an awful lot like a dictatorship to me.

Anakin: Well, if it works…

Figure 1. Original Anakin and Padmé four-panel dialogue grid.

In its own, very succinct way, the mini-dialogue in Figure 1 captures quite well the worrying turn the conversation takes, given Anakin's refusal to provide the reassuring reply he's invited to give. Indeed, the scene foreshadows Anakin's later turn to the dark side, when he will assume the title of Darth Vader. The intriguing image-text artefact in Figure 1, intertextually referring to a pre-existing cartoon, fully became a meme once it became part of a growing group of digital items which shared salient aspects of its original form and meaning, but had other aspects modified (cf. Shifman 2014; Wiggins & Bowers 2015), allowing its meaning (to voice a concern over someone's stated intentions or achievements) to be applied to ever more situations. As the examples we will see show, a number of visual and textual components form the core of this meme. Visually, we witness a zoom-in between two left-hand

depictions of the same character (Anakin, or sometimes others); the bottom, zoomed-in depiction is in some way unsmiling and serious. The right-hand character changes in terms of facial expression, from happy and smiling to serious and worried, suggesting different intonations that fit those changing emotional states. Textually, the left-hand cells of the grid are characterized by the absence of text in the bottom left cell; the right-hand cells, on the other hand, contain substantially the same text in both top and bottom cells (sometimes with minor variations, especially shortenings). The combination of this (near-)exact repetition with the changed delivery, suggested in the changed embodiment of the clouded over face, changes the meaning of the echoed line from "expecting confirmation" to "doubting that confirmation might be given" or even "regretfully expecting rejection".

Some basic iterations of the format simply 'label' or 'tag' the existing characters, textually (Figure 2) and/or visually (Figure 3). In Figure 2, by labelling Anakin as "Elon Musk" and Padmé as "Internet", the meme expresses misgivings as to the morally questionable intentions of billionaire investor, entrepreneur and occasional dabbler in international politics, Elon Musk, when it comes to the future of the Internet, in particular (presumably) his views on free speech on the Twitter platform.

Figure 2. Textually labelled Anakin and Padmé meme.

Figure 3 involves a visual type of labelling, in which Anakin has the Union Jack plastered over his face. Note the meme maker's care in preserving the zoom-in effect which is part of the meme's prototypical formal features: the flag in the bottom left cell is clearly larger than in the

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top left cell. Additionally, different from Figure 2 but like the remaining examples in this contribution, the lines of dialogue have been altered. While the text changes, the main textual components of the meme remain intact: no text in the bottom left cell, and a repetition of the same line across top and bottom cells on the right. The viewpoint effect ultimately achieved by staging the piece of fictive dialogue (Pascual 2014) in Figure 3 is one of gentle mockery as to the implied blandness of British cuisine — failing dismally to incorporate any of the flavourful spices sourced from across its erstwhile Empire.

Figure 3. Visually labelled Anakin and Padmé meme.

Our remaining examples show more radical departures from the original artefact, but maintain the essential ingredients: a four-cell picture grid; a zoom-in across the left-hand cells; a sombering of facial expression across the right-hand cells; a text-free bottom left cell; and an echoing of text across the right-hand cells; all in the service of questioning the good intentions or good sense of the opening gambit made in the top left cell. In order to produce Figure 4, the meme maker went to the trouble of finding different paintings of Emperor Napoléon and his wife Joséphine, so as to preserve the visual changes required in the meme. In its own — condensed and witty — way, the meme questions Napoléon's judgement in invading Russia in 1812. Although the invasion did, in fact, begin in summer, battles dragged on into a bitterly cold winter, whose harsh conditions helped to seal the fate of the campaign. Part of the comic effect derives from the sense the meme gives us that a simple exchange between Napoléon and Joséphine might have injected sufficient common sense to avert the ill-fated plan. Reducing the

military and political history of this complex episode to a frank exchange of views, supported by the sarky facial expression and imagined intonation on Joséphine's part, may seem flippant, but it may also reveal a truth about Napoléon's character and his failings as a military leader.

Figure 4. Mapping historical paintings onto the Anakin and Padmé meme.

Figure 5 turns the comic firepower of the meme onto a more recent pair of rulers: Queen Elizabeth II and the then Prince of Wales, Charles, now King Charles III. The different pictures photoshopped onto the original image again respect the visual requirements of the meme — the zoom-in in the case of Elizabeth, and the darkening of mood in the case of Charles. What the meme adds, though, is a temporal dimension that suits the meaning of this particular iteration of the meme well: Charles was the longest-serving British heir apparent and will be the oldest monarch to be crowned next year in May. Changing the faces from top to bottom cells in this particular grid not only according to the embodiment specifications required (zoom-in, change in facially expressed mood), but also in terms of the age of the person depicted, renders the dialogue depicted in the artefact even more strongly "fictive" than it already was. After all, people don't age by several decades in the course of a single speech exchange (though it may occasionally feel like it!). Moreover, the top-row exchange between a 25-year-old Elizabeth, newly become Queen, and Charles as a young adult is patently impossible, Charles having been only a little over 3 years of age at the time of Elizabeth's accession. The bottom-row exchange between the aged Queen, looking stern and unyielding, and her rose-cheeked yet pension-age

son, packs considerable punch, as we're easily tempted to interpret Charles' expression as one of despair at the thought it might never, in fact, end up being his turn. Recent events have rendered the meme outdated, of course, but until this summer it seemed to sum up the then Prince of Wales's predicament.

Figure 5. Photoshopping, and adding a temporal dimension to, the Anakin and Padmé meme.

With these examples in mind, we can now confront our final example, given here as Figure 6. In it, we see a certain professor who has entered the exalted state of academic retirement, and her long-suffering — as the cliché has it — husband, seeking confirmation of what the implications of this new life stage might be: will there now no longer be holiday evenings (or other stolen moments) spent in a corner of a hotel room or patio, beavering away at the laptop? Alas, answer came there none, and with the faint echo of the repeated question ringing in his ears, the loyal husband accepts that, perhaps, all the work is not yet done.

Of course, where work is really intellectual stimulation coupled with passion, and is pursued in mutually enjoyable collaborations with colleagues, who would want to stop it entirely, really? However much, or little, work the future holds, I hope it will be filled with happy encounters, with family and friends, with plentiful visits to charming travel destinations and temples of art (small or large), with a limitless supply of good books to (re)read and classic films to (re)watch, with many concessions being made to the cravings of a sweet tooth, with

peace of mind, and with — in that phrase from Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* — "little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark".

Figure 6. Anakin Davidse and Padmé Carlon: A cautionary meme?

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