

MARCEAUISMS

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Sometimes one comes across a quotation that gains enormously in significance when its originator is taken into account. I call such quotations **marceauisms** since it was the following quotation by the famous mime Marcel Marceau that drew the phenomenon to my attention: "Do not the most moving moments of our lives find us all without words?" This particular example satisfies because of the special association between its author and its theme.

Sometimes a marceausim is memorable because of a striking incongruity between its content and its author. Indeed, the quotation itself may be quite unmemorable, perhaps trite, until one notes the author. Thus, "I don't believe in mathematics" would be unlikely to ring down through the ages, if not for the fact that its originator was Albert Einstein.

The examples given are true marceauisms, of which I have only a few impressive examples. I should be pleased (and unsurprised) if readers were to turn up a few more. On the other hand, readers might be entertained by searching for or creating fictional or contrived marceauisms, either by falsely ascribing an actual quotation or saying to some real or notional person, or by making up a quotation, as well as its ascription.

Examples of this diversion are not hard to find. On the long-running BBC radio program "My Word" one of the protagonists (I think it was Frank Muir) was asked who said "Laissez l'herbe." Without hesitation he replied "Monsieur le parkkeeper de Hyde Park." In a similar vein, one might ascribe "You are what you eat" to Monsieur Mangetout. (For those who have not encountered him in the Guinness Book of Records, this is the performing name of Michel Lotito of Grenoble who entertains by eating shopping trolleys and bicycles—even a light aeroplane.)

Given the freedom to ascribe anything to anyone, there is no limit to the jokes that could take the form of marceauisms. One can make them up from scratch, as in Pontius Pilate's "I'd like to do something really special this Easter." Alternatively, one could continue where a pre-existing joke left off. For instance, given the one-liner "And apart from that, Mrs. Lincoln, did you enjoy the play?" one could have Mrs. Lincoln reply "It wasn't really much of a play, anyway."

Clearly, the marceauism offers potential for a great deal of entertainment. One could make the creation of marceausims the basis of competitive games, or of newspaper or magazine competitions, either by offering the quotation and asking for originators, or by naming originators and requesting quotations. For instance, "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" might attract such responses as "John Gotti, imprisoned crime boss," or, particularly in Australia where I live, "Santa Claus." There is also the possibility of competition in finding low-credibility marceauisms, utterances with extremely unlikely originators, such as Milton Friedman's "The best things in life are free." However, many difficult-to-believe things turn out to be true, so we should not be surprised if some of the best marceauisms are low-credibility ones. Indeed, it is their unlikely quality that makes them so striking, as the Einstein example illustrates.

However, enough of this marceauiousness (I couldn't resist the temptation to slip in a word with six consecutive vowels).