

Laughter at the Slaughter

by Dennis Payton Knight

They are laughing at us, the folks who slaughtered our English spelling system. To prove it, in that opening sentence alone dangle fifteen purely ornamental letters: the A and the E in *are*, the UGH in *laughing*, the L in *folks*, the UGH and one of the E's in *slaughtered*, the W in *who*, the UGH in *thought*, and, ironically, one of the L's in *spelling*. The E and the Y in the word *they* are suspect too. Maybe they collaborate to make an A sound, and, on second thought, the UGH in *laughing* and *slaughter* seem to collude to form an F sound, but how? Do they mix it up in the larynx and make us *cough*?

The absurdity of silent letters is exacerbated by inconsistency. For instance, why does the AUGH poppycock that makes *laughter* rhyme with *after* make *slaughter* rhyme with *slotter*? It's even more peculiar when you consider that one crummy S turns the joy of laughter into a capital offense.

Ornamental letters are the bane of the spelling bee; *phlegm and pterodactyl, muscle and mnemonic, asthma, apropos, receipt, and knead*. The lazy H makes *honest* dishonest, and the B makes *subtle* too subtle. You can't even chew on the G in *gnaw*, and who knows who stuck the K in *knows*? *Faux* has three worthless letters, AUX, and yet is short an O. You have to laugh at our whole English lexicon.

Why are there two E's in *bee*? And how did the lyrical word *rendezvous* ever come out of Webster's sausage grinder?

Ridge, bridge, edge, ledge and fudge – phooey! Damn the N in *damn*, and double damn the N's in *autumn, column, condemn, and solemn*.

Why is *ghost* haunted by an H? *Aisle, island, and debris* are long on S's and *ballet, castle, gourmet, listen* and *rapport* are long on T's. You skip the O in *you* and pronounce the U, and you disregard the U's in *colleague, guess, guest, guard, guide, guilt, guitar, and tongue*. Shouldn't *have to* be spelled with an AUGH? And don't get me started on *half* as a fraction. Yes, you have to laugh.

Even my own surname, *Knight* is half again too long. You pronounce N, I and T, and throw away K, G, and H. The Knights, by the way, got knighted first in England, where they have a town pronounced "Wulserly" which reads "Woolfardisworthy." And how sauced were they when they got "Wustersher" out of "Worcestershire?"

Forgive me for being ungrateful and maybe politically impolite, but in the final analysis, I think we should blame English on the English.