

THERE

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I can't believe it: there isn't there. I'm at the Ottawa Public Library--Rideau Street Branch. Without too much trouble, I just got in the "general subject" module of the public-use computer, entered TH, hit the return key. Nothing on "there": "therapy" is followed by "thesis".

This can't be...must be something wrong with the alpha search. I approach the information desk, patiently wait while the "busy" municipal employee self-importantly scrutinizes the library card of all library cards, finally files it, looks up and in a resigned voice: can I help you, sir?

I feel all guilty and inferior. Not only due to the resigned tone, but also to this guy's glasses perched in that awe-inspiring intellectual position halfway down the nose, and secured with a fat yellow string going around the back of his neck.

I summon the few bravery cells I got left, politely explain what has just happened: would he double-check for me, please? He tries, same results: well, am I satisfied now?

My voice falters: well, is it possible that the computer made an error? Nothing here either, he announces triumphantly after examining a thick printout; don't I know that computers don't lie? I thank him and leave, resisting the urge to invite this guy to come have a look at a couple of computer reports I get at work.

All this leaves me in a mild state of shock. Nobody, but nobody, has written anything on there. There, that most important and versatile word. Well, right there and then I decided to try and remedy this therelict situation, to show there for what there is, and it is my fervent hope that what follows will help to position there somewhere in the hall of fame of the English language.

First and foremost (Mr. Fraser, my English Lit teacher in high school, was in love with this paragraph opener, so we French kids would use it widely, usually good for a pass mark), there is not some lonely inactive word stuck in some corner by itself. Au contraire (another one of Mr. Fraser's loves). Very much like a theredevil, there flies all over the place. For instance

- 1 There can be spread around (thereabouts)
- 2 There can be all mixed in (thereamong)
- 3 There can be way up there (thereabove)
- 4 There can be there first (thereinbefore)
- 5 There can be there later (thereinafter)
- 6 There can be subtracted (therefrom)
- 7 There can be multiplied (thereby)
- 8 There can be opposed (thereagainst)
- 9 There can be with us all (therewithal)

Take motherhood: how could a mother talk to baby if there didn't exist? When baby is sad: there, there...poor baby. When baby is first successful on the potty: THERE!

And my wife: how could she end with emphasis a sermon-on-the-kitchen-mount directed at me? You wanna know why I'm mad at you...I'll tell you why I'm mad at you...you didn't take the garbage out Tuesday morning...you never wore that shirt I gave you last Christmas...you always sneak looks at that divorced blonde next door...you always leave your cup of coffee half-full in the basement...THERE!

Let's not forget the male country-and-western singer. That one eternally in trouble with his love life. How could this poor soul sort through his feelings if there wasn't there to kick off his sad wailings? Statement of departure: THERE she goes...walking away...or: There goes my baby [bay-pause two seconds-bay] with someone new...She sure looks happy [haa-pause two seconds-pay] I sure am blue. Statement of after-effects: THERE's a tearrr...in my beerrr...or: THERE's nothing left for me to do...But cry-i-i-i-ing over you...

There also leads the way in many other areas. Without there to play follow-the-leader, how could we possibly say THERE you go...THERE is a difference...THERE's more than meets the eye...THERE's light at the end of the tunnel...THERE's a fly in the ointment.

But there does not insist on always leading, or always being in first place. Certainly not. There is often considerate and humble: Second place: Here, THERE and everywhere...Third place: Right in THERE for strike three!...Fifth place: Behind every successful man THERE is a surprised mother-in-law...Tenth place: And a quack quack here, and a quack quack THERE.

Take me. Who went to a completely French separate school from grades 1 to 8? Can you imagine how grateful I am to there? There added flexibility and contour to my tongue. How's that, you ask? Well, it's the beginning: the "TH", still an inevitable "D" for me. No, no, Denis, it's not dare, it's THere, TH, THere: hold your tongue against the inside of your upper lip, now gently bring up your bottom teeth until they touch the front bottom of your tongue...now let "TH" all come out as you bring your tongue down such that the sound emerges from in between your upper lip and your tongue..THERE, that's better.

Makes me nervous. What if after all that deep concentration, I forget what I wanted to say next?

Well, all good theres must come to an end. My problem: how do I wrap up in a manner that does justice to the literatical savoir faire of what you've read so far, and to do so with a touch of unexpectedness that critics expect to be present in a conclusion? Then it came to me: evasive goals.

Yes, evasive goals.

For as far back as I can remember, I always wanted to get there...like, if I could only get there, I'd be there. But every time I got there, there wasn't there. But now that I'm getting up in age, therefore saturated with wisdom, it's all clear to me now: how fortunate I am that there wasn't there when I got there, because if there had been there when I got there, then I'd now be there, therefore not here...THERE YOU GO!