is not characteristic of spoken Sanskrit and modern Indic languages; the *udātta* ("raised") and *svarita* (a combination of *udātta* and *anudātta*) discussed by Panini in his grammar are musical tones and not a matter of stress. Verner's comparison of shifting Sanskrit syllabic lengthening to shifting Germanic stress is highly questionable simply because no voicing or unvoicing takes place in the Sanskrit verbs, such as *pat*, *cit*, *vṛt*, and *vep*, unlike in some Germanic verbs. Is it not possible that Verner's law of voicing is due to some other factor—for example, the influence of another language on Germanic? Commenting on the many exceptions to Verner's law and on the noted exceptions to Kuhn's law, Bruce Mitchell, the distinguished author of *Old English Syntax* (Oxford: Clarendon–Oxford UP, 1985), writes: "If caution and acquiescence, rather than enterprise and independence, were the primary attributes for explorers or inventors or scholars, we might still believe that the world is flat and might live in a world without internal combustion engines and television sets" (*NM* 111 [1990]: 290). We must continue this questioning of Grimm's law as well as of Verner's. Then, only then, can we come up with new discoveries.

Finally, the defenders of sound laws assume that languages are too systematic and that they even exhibit rule-controlled mechanical changes. Languages are, however, as Dr. Johnson observes, "very often . . . capriciously conducted." Of course, I would not dismiss summarily the old lawmakers of languages. I still teach my students Grimm's and Verner's laws, but I add that Grimm and Verner are not the final authorities and that linguists and scientists alike are fallible. So, as I carp at the empty promises of scholars and smile at the vanities of scholarship, I still foolishly cherish this Panglossian hope: the best is yet to come.

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Jonsonian Theme Parties

To the Editor:

I read with interest the letter of Gary Schmidgall and reply of Bruce Thomas Boehrer in the March issue (Forum, 106 [1991]: 317–19), not only because Ben Jonson's "Inviting a Friend to Supper" is a poem in which I have long taken superficial and gustatory delight (and I would have *loved* to sit down to table with Jonson) but also because it is a pleasure to see two men accusing each other of lacking a sense of humor.

But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and we ask of a poem whether and how it "works." One of the ways Jonson's poem works is—no surprise—as an invitation to a meal. As such I have tested it twice, and it served admirably both times.

Perhaps the most memorable of the events that Jonson's "Inviting a Friend to Supper" helped to convene occurred in the spring of 1982, in Normal, Illinois. There were fourteen of us in all, adults and children, and I am sure all the ecumenical group would agree that it was a glorious yet secular Easter afternoon—"the forms and bounty of American holiday dining" indeed!

Surely Jonson knew what Schmidgall and Boehrer haven't recognized—that no host or hostess ever occupies "an absolutist position . . . seeing all, controlling all, and defining all," as Boehrer writes in his essay ("Renaissance Overeating: The Sad Case of Ben Jonson," 105 [1990]: 1071–82; 1075). As for me, I never knew who broke the wineglass or what was done with the pieces; attempted conversational gambits were prone to being interrupted by bons mots like "Helene, is the mixer *always* supposed to emit smoke like this?"; and hospitality became the composing of such remarks as "*Of course* you may play with the teddy bear, darling, but try not to throw up anymore" and the deciphering of overheard comments like "He feeds her *Friskies*?" (part of a discussion of the new movie *Cat People*). We had touch football on the lawn among scatterings of crocus and late-spring snow, and we took group photos minus one (the cook). Though the excruciatingly expensive and arduously concocted homemade country pâté never "worked" (and it turned me off forcemeat for months), the bountiful meal was bountifully enjoyed (and a whole ham was surplus), and the archaism of the meal (and its invitation) provoked the responding archaisms of notes and flowers next day—in short, no little thanks to Jonson, a swell time was had by all.

It may seem trivial that I have responded to the quarreling of Schmidgall and Boehrer with my memoiristic application of Jonson's "Inviting a Friend to Supper" to an occasion the poem inspired. It probably is. But an argument, too, is a meal, and such as Schmidgall and Boehrer, who would attempt to partake without properly observing the party clothes and spirit, I would send back to Jonson:

> It is the fair acceptance, sir, creates
> The entertainment perfect, not the cates.

HELENE SOLHEIM
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