

Connotations in Contrast

This Kibbitzer is based on a dissertation by a Turkish-speaking postgraduate student of theology:

Original	Revision
... the artistic structure and excessive and charming praise distinguish the cultic hymn from the primitive prayer.	... its artistic structure and heartfelt yet sometimes excessive praise distinguish the cultic hymn from primitive prayer.

What caught our attention here was the 'clash of connotations' in the expression 'excessive and charming'. The student confirmed that the negative connotations of *excessive*, as illustrated by the following citations, were intended

1 and the ways in which plants ward off the excessive attentions of insects. Costa Rica is th
2 eir behaviour. Soil abuse and degradation, excessive deforestation and over-grazing all occur
3 upporting their claim that the police used excessive force while arresting them. James Stodda
4 turb them. They may suffer because of the excessive noise of machinery that emits high frequ
5 y's economic woes. It is accused of having excessive profit margins, abusing its economic pow
6 s if used in too great a quantity. It gave excessive salivation, pains in the belly, and caus
7 erior segment. These defects are due to an excessive splanchnic uptake of thallium 201 after
8 f waking up and preparing for the new day. Excessive stress can damage the heart and it might

Equally, the contexts of *charming* show that its connotations are positive, though here the positive connotation may be modified by the possibility of insincerity (as in 10):

9 ish Opera; and the music, sophisticated and charming by turns, was a draw. At the Coliseum to
10 m home. Telephone ..." Or another: "Wanted, charming girls. Earnings beyond your wildest drea
11 on as a great listener. 'He's an enormously charming, kindly and encouraging scientist who li
12 Of course, the people who buy this charming little toy will all be gentle, peace-lov
13 eb with consummate skill. He has produced a charming, lucid, and accessible book that is the
14 s not quite the epitome of new man. "He's a charming man, very nice, very friendly. He makes
15 . Gernsback described science fiction as 'a charming romance intermingled with scientific fa
16 at after a race. He had strong wrists and a charming smile. Hoomey couldn't think of him at f

Our first thought was that rather than eliminate the difference in connotation, we might emphasise it:

'... .excessive yet charming praise ...

The following citations illustrate this use of *yet*:

17 etic control, muscle fibres have a sophisticated yet flexible genetic program which instructs
18 ination of compelling photography with detailed, yet accessible text, presenting the young re
19 , Hegley has diligently ploughed the same narrow yet fertile furrow, and this "winter warmer"
20 this paper, we concern ourselves with a related, yet inherently different problem, namely: Wh
21 3 details how well the UK has performed. Sadly, yet predictably, it concludes the Government
22 the architecture and street-plans of this great, yet illusory city. Its inhabitants must also
23 re all "frock flicks" which painted a realistic, yet romantic picture of class-ridden Edwardi
24 all who had helped to win victory. In a sombre, yet uplifting ceremony, attended by leaders

We next looked again at 'excessive'. Might it not be academically more 'diplomatic' to say that cultic hymns are 'sometimes excessive'? To restrict the scope of 'sometimes' to 'excessive', it then becomes necessary to reverse the order of the two adjectives:

'charming yet sometimes excessive praise ...'

In the same spirit, our attention finally fell on 'charming' again. Was the quality of mere 'charm' not too superficial for this context? After some discussion we hit on the adjective **heartfelt**, which as in the following citations emphasises the genuineness of the feeling behind the praise:

25 nd I have given a formal but nonetheless a heartfelt apology."
26 rted popularity. He was driven by deep and heartfelt convictions about the way the Church sho
27 of the genre for nearly 30 years, won the heartfelt enthusiasm of a large audience. If his v
28 ngel'. The first illustrated perfectly the heartfelt purity of her voice; the second, with it
29 a profound punster. 'A spirited, funny and heartfelt response to academic criticism's loss of
30 sort of bloke, with warm Welsh eyes and a heartfelt smile that always looks just this side o
31 urney to Wales, but a simple wreath bore a heartfelt tribute: Ricardi Felici (rich memories).
21 o responded with such a rich outpouring of heartfelt warmth, affection and support (not to me

Finally, for anyone who would like to try it, here is a short exercise based on concordance data. What is the missing word in the following citations?

33 ad burst into tears as the memories of his brief yet _____ shining moment came back to him
34 y be different. Here are some examples of simple yet highly _____ meals. Fish meals - Pr
35 pment of cognition. Jean Piaget, in his profound yet often _____ work Biologie et connaissa
36 imes there was one controlling image: an active, yet _____, boy or girl, eager and willi
37 ccessful is that the two companies are the same, yet _____. Since taking up residence in
38 th him describe him as professionally ambitious, yet _____ and mild-mannered. Those close
39 r Butler looks at the possibilities with a cool, yet _____ eye. He recounts each of the epi
40 . The bear is a telling symbol: large, powerful, yet _____. And, in this case, of course,

Words different, glorious, nutritious, obscure, pleasant, ponderous, sympathetic, thoughtful

[Check](#) your answers