

# Unremembered Loss

*For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss.*

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## They

The American Dialect Society made an interesting choice last year. So did the Chicago Style Guide. They made a decision about the word ‘they.’

The American Dialect Society selected ‘they’ as their word of the year. The Chicago Style Guide added a new usage for the word.

‘They’ is not a new word. We all use it everyday. It is a third person plural pronoun – *they had a good time at the wedding*. When used in the present tense the difference can be seen between ‘they’ and the singulars, he, she and it. *They go to the movie vs. He goes to the movie*.

What’s new is that ‘they’ has been accepted as a non-determinate singular pronoun. Okay, I know this makes me a geek, but the fight over the proper usage of ‘they’ has been raging for the last 150 years. ‘You’ went through a similar transformation from plural to singular. You can see this in how we use it in the example sentence from above – *you go to the movie*, instead of *you goes to the movie*.

I’ve been using ‘they’ instead of ‘he or she’ in my writing for years. For me it just feels less clumsy than ‘he or she’. Which of the following sentences feels better to read:

*After completing the form, the contestant must take it to the station where he or she must sign it in view of the station manager.*

*After completing the form, the contestant must take it to the station where they must sign it in view of the station manager.*

For me the question also comes up when I write about a sentient robot, which is neither male or female, but is also not just an object so it doesn’t feel right either to refer them as an ‘it.’

*X372 took in all the signs, a broken branch, a strand of hair and the scent in the air. After a moments consideration, they continued down the path in search of the fugitives.*

The use of singular ‘they’ builds on centuries of usage, appearing in the work of writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare,

and Jane Austen. In 2015, singular ‘they’ was embraced by the Washington Post style guide. Bill Walsh, copy editor for the Post, described it as “the only sensible solution to English’s lack of a gender-neutral third-person singular personal pronoun.”

The thing that swung the writing community was not the simpler phrasing or giving more status to robots, it came out of the increasing conversation about how to refer to people who may identify as themselves as “non-binary” in gender terms. More specifically, how these people want to be referred to.

The choice of ‘they’ is just one of many words that are making the circuit or have already come and gone. Among the choices are e, ey, per, sie, they, ve and zie.

Of this list, only two roll off my tongue and feel gender neutral – “they” and “per” – and “they” is already part of the language so it has a big advantage, but only time will tell.

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Thanks for taking this little jaunt into the guts of writing with me. It’s been a while and I kind of miss it. Also, please let your friends know about the newsletter. <http://www.douglasclarke.com/lists>

Here is a story using the various 2015 American Dialect Society winners and runner ups in the categories of: word of the year, most useful word, most creative word, most unnecessary word, most outrageous word, most euphemistic word, most likely to succeed word, and least likely to succeed word. “They” won both word of the year and most useful word. Can you guess the winners in the other categories?

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Jet walked through the quad, taking in the post **Berniementum** of the dispersing crowd. **They** heard someone say, “Bernie really **mic dropped** with that comment about Trump needing to pick up a paper or at least hire someone else who would.”

Jet smiled to **themselves** when **they** spotted the man holding the “**Thanks, Obama** for trying to take away my guns. Now I have a reason to use them.” If he didn’t have such a **dadbod** or look so **lowkey**, Jet might have sent out a **trigger warning** to all **their** friends on Twitter, but this guy was obviously just going to go home and put in some time with his **sitbit**. He was really only **ammosexual** when he was with his **squad**.

**They** passed the new **White Student Union**, its sign promising **lit** for all who came in. **Swipe left** was all that went through Jet’s mind, **they** were in no mood for the **microaggression** of the self-righteous rich kids who had their parents donate the money to build it, even if technically Jet was one of them.

Then turning the corner there **they** were. All of the **Berniementum** was gone. The country didn’t matter. This was personal. Praise looked up. Their eyes met.

“Did you see him?” Praise asked.

“Sure did, Jet said. “He’s one **on fleek** guy. He’s let his hair grow out a little and he had it in a **man-bun**. The protesters in the audience where **fish gaping** when he **shaded** Trump, not that that’s hard.”

“Did you see me?”

Jet’s smile disappeared, replaced with unblinking eyes.

“I saw you, standing with **mom**. Not a care in the world. You’re so lucky.”

Jet smiled again, “You mean Julie. **Yaaass**, she **adults** everything. You know, she’s only nineteen. I know a lot of guys who would like to **Netflix and chill** with her.”

“How about you? I saw you looking at her and not seeing me.”

“I. I wasn’t looking at her. I was listening to Bernie.”

“And holding Bernie’s hand?”

“I wasn’t holding anyone’s hand.”

“I know, my hand was just hanging there being **lowkey**, like I had been listening to some guy **sharewashing** me about how **Uber for friends** is going to change my life. How it’ll be a **hoverboard** for my love life, when all I’m thinking about is how you **ghosted** me.”

Jet’s smile was **schlonged**. Jet stood there looking at the ground. A long moment stretched into a too long one. “I didn’t **ghost** you.” Another long moment passed. “I just... Someone was **shading** me online. I didn’t know what to do. It was so **unlit**. I so wanted to feel **on fleek**, but I felt like a **manbun** on some **dadbod**. I was **schlonged** and thinking about just giving up.”

Jet looked up into Praise’s eyes. “I would have, too, if it hadn’t been for Julie being a **mom**. She told me that my **squad** wasn’t online, that I should just cut the cord, so I did.”

Praise’s expression softened.

In a very quiet voice Jet said, “Are we really over, **or nah**?”

Praise reached out and pulled Jet into a hug. “**Or nah!**”

Jet returned the hug.

“You really didn’t **swipe me left**! I feel like such an idiot. I just thought, you know, Julie is such a **mom**, anyone would be lucky to be with her.”

“She’s not my type. Hey, you want to go **Netflix and chill**?”

Praise had a smile that was almost blinding, “**Yass**.”

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That’s it for this month’s newsletter. If you want to read the old-style version of this story you can find it on my website, douglasclarke.com. Next month I’ll be giving you part two of my super hero story.

Doug