

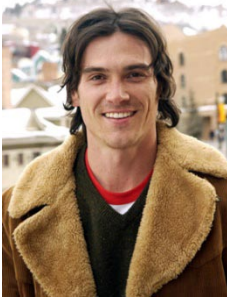
ESLR 0310 – Fall 2003

Movie Vocabulary/Idioms

Jesus' Son

(1999. Info at <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0186253/>)

Jesus' Son is a “tough” movie. By this is meant that many of the scenes and characters are disturbing to watch. This is a story about being spiritually lost.



However, the movie eventually says something profound about how anyone—even someone as lost as FH (the hero)—can find peace, joy, relationships, service to others, meaning...all the good things in life. It's about how, in the end, good intentions *prevail* (win), and even a very sad person can find happiness.

Normally, these movie notes include background information on soundtrack songs and music, and the artists who perform them. But this movie has so much interesting American popular music that it would have taken twice as many pages to cover it all! Just be aware that most of the music seems to place the action of the movie at some time in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Exception: Background information on the final song, *Farther Along*, is provided.

...**run off** with a man...

To “run off” with a man (or woman) means to suddenly leave your current spouse or lover and be with another.

...named **John Smith**.

FH refers to the fact that **John Smith** is a very common American name. It's so common that the narrator—or his girlfriend—might be making the name up, perhaps to hide the identity of the person.

John Smith is a very common name. Don't believe me? Reach for the nearest residential phone listings, turn to the **S**'es and check!

What a pair of lungs!

Beginning a sentence with “What a(n)...” is a common form expressing an emotional response to something. This can be a positive or negative feeling:



- What a **lovely gift!** (delight)
- What a **mess!** (disgust)
- What an **amazing discovery...** (amazement)

But I **get ahead**
of myself.

A common idiomatic expression meaning that the narrator suddenly realizes he or she needs to stop, back up, and explain things that happened earlier in the story.

People also commonly use the Progressive aspect: "But I'm **getting** ahead of myself."

If you **called ahead**, we would have...

To **call ahead** means to phone someone *before* showing up at his or her door. This way you can make sure they'll be there, or it gives them time to prepare for your arrival in some way; perhaps they want to tidy up the room.



That's a good one!



A common response to a joke; it means, "**That's a good joke!**" This expression can also be used to mock or ridicule someone who says something they feel is serious; it tells them you're not taking what they said seriously.

Fuckhead.

A very insulting word to use against someone, because "fuck" is an extremely crude word. To call someone a "fuckhead" is to say that he or she is stupid. McInnes says this to FH (Crudup's character; the hero).

This moment in the movie shows how *intonation* (the "music" of your speech) communicates the way a word should be understood. Normally, shouting "Fuckhead!" at someone implies that the word is meant as an *adjective*, as in the sentence, "You are a fuckhead!"

But if you listen carefully to the way McInnes says the word—and watch his *body language*—you can tell he obviously wants the word to be heard as a *proper noun* (a name), as in the sentence, "I now name you 'Fuckhead'." This is how our hero gets the nickname "Fuckhead" (FH).

This expression is, of course, *very* crude and insulting, and should only be used (if at all) in extreme anger, disgust, disrespect, or some combination of all three.

[religious conversation]

You will see FH on the street talking with a couple of guys. The conversation level is very quiet, but listen carefully; you'll hear some discussion of religious issues.

He almost **made it**.

In this context, FH is saying, "[McInnes] almost survived."

To "make it through" something means to successfully get through some difficult situation. To "make it to" something usually means to reach a desired goal in spite of *obstacles* (things that get in your way and try to stop you). Examples:

- He made it through the semifinals.
- The river-boating party made it through the rapids.



- I made it to the party, even though my car wouldn't start.

To "*almost* make it" is to come close to achieving your goal, but to fail or give up before you reach it.

Jehovah's Witness (JW)

A very interesting, and distinctly American, Judeo-Christian religious *sect* (subgroup). Jehovah's Witnesses are well known for their intensive *proselytizing* (introducing themselves and speaking to people in an attempt to convert them to their religion). "JW's" often go door-to-door in neighborhoods; you've probably met one! They say they are *witnessing* (testifying) to the reality and truth of *Jehovah* (the God of the Hebraic Old Testament); this is where their name comes from.

Jehovah's Witnesses have been one of the most controversial religions since Charles Taze Russell and the International Bible Students first began publishing the **Watchtower** in 1879. Just as Jesus originally lit the fires of controversy amidst the Jewish religious system, so too Jehovah's Witnesses have shaken the orthodox churches of Christendom by identifying them as part of Babylon the Great of Revelation and the promoter of false religious doctrines like the Trinity, hellfire and the immortal soul.

Source: <http://www.e-watchman.com/>

“Rest In Peace”

This is a reference to the “classic” line written on many tombstones. It expresses a hope that the dead have found peace after a life of joy and *sorrow* (sadness) on Earth.



“His left hand didn't know what his right hand was doing.”

An unusual *allusion to* (literary reference to) a statement by Jesus Christ in the New Testament of the Bible (the Christian scriptures):

Matthew 6

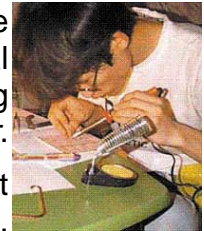
²“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, **do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing**, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Source: <http://biblegateway.com/>

soldering iron

A **soldering iron** is a tool used by people doing electrical work to solder electrical contacts (usually wires) together. A soldering iron gets *very* hot, and melts the *solder*.

Solder is an *amalgam* (blend of metals) that melts at a relatively low temperature.



Note that the “l” is “soldering” is *not* pronounced; it is silent! “**SAH-der-ing**”.

We've got some **dope** left, too.

Dope is a *generic* (general, “all-purpose”) slang word to refer to any and all *recreational* (“for fun”) drugs. Depending on the people you are hanging around and using drugs with, “dope” could be in reference to any recreational drug.

In the context of this story, however, it refers to **heroin** because that's the drug that interests these people.

...leave me **high and dry**...



To “leave someone **high and dry**” means to *abandon* (leave) him or her without one or more basic necessities.

The expression comes from boating, and refers to leaving a boat *high* (out of the water) and *dry* (not even wet).

...punched her
in the **gut**.

The **gut** is slang for the stomach or belly.

...**sorry-ass** car.

“Sorry-ass” is a slang *adjective* describing something *lame* (weak) and *pathetic* (pitiful, in a distasteful sense):

- He gave me a **sorry-ass** excuse for being late.
- He didn't have time to rewrite it, so he had to turn in that **sorry-ass** essay to his teacher.
- It was a pretty **sorry-ass** computer; I think it ran on an old pre-Pentium Intel™ chip. *Man*, it was slow!

Note this is a fairly *vulgar* (common, crude) term. It can be used between friends if you're describing something truly...sorry-ass. ☺ Another related expression is “lame-ass.”

gas man

In this context, **gas man** is slang for an *anesthesiologist*, a medical expert who administers *anesthetics* (pain-killing drugs) to patients undergoing surgery.



Don't chew my
head off...

Don't hassle or harass me about that.

stabbing
headache

This is actually pretty funny, if a little “dark.” If you think about it a bit, you'll understand why FH's clinic co-workers laugh at what he says. A doctor will often ask you to come up with an *adjective* to describe a pain you're experiencing, because different types of pain can indicate different diseases. There are many kinds of pain associated with headaches:

- dull pain
- throbbing pain
- “...like a tight band around my head”
- stabbing pain



People often describe their headaches as “a stabbing pain.”

It's just one of
those things...

This is an expression sort of like, “That's life!” (French: “C'est la vie!”) It's a way of explaining something by saying it's unexplainable. “That's the way things are; accept it.”

Try Nescafé™,
dad.

Nescafé™ is a popular instant coffee by the Nestle™ company. You just add hot water. A quick source of the drug caffeine, a popular, socially-acceptable "*upper*" (slang for a stimulating drug).



To call someone "**dad**" is a sort of *quaintly* (cutely) *obsolete* (outdated, out of fashion) slang.

James Brown



James Brown ("The Godfather of Soul," "The Hardest-Working Man in Show Business") is a popular American songwriter and entertainer. Among his most famous songs are:

- Papa's Got a Brand New Bag
- Cold Sweat
- Say It Out Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud
- Sex Machine

He died in December of 2006.

...hospital speed
stash.



Speed: Slang for methamphetamines. This is an "upper," a drug that gives you a heightened sense of energy and *alertness* (awareness of your environment/surroundings).

Stash: Slang for one's own supply of something, including drugs. Your supply of drugs is "your stash."

The idea here is that you can find most drugs—including many drugs that are considered desirable for recreational purposes—in hospitals and clinics.

double shifts

Example shift
schedule:

12mid-8am
night shift
morning shift
"graveyard shift"
8am-4pm
day shift
4pm-12mid
evening shift

A **shift** is a period of time during which you work at a job; typically an 8-hour period.

Shift work is typical for 24-hour workplaces, where there are multiple shifts to cover all hours of the day and night.

In this movie, this term is used in relation to an emergency medical clinic, which naturally must have personnel *on duty* (on the job) at all hours of the day and night.

To work **double shifts** means to work two shifts in a row (16 hours!). "Speed" might indeed help you—as Georgie suggests—though at some risk to your health.

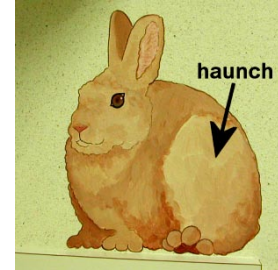
...try to stay
clean.

Try to *stay off* (not use) drugs.

...breakfast on
its haunches.

Haunches: The thighs of an animal.

To **breakfast on** something simply means to have something for breakfast. It's a formal, literary idiom, and is supposed to sound *incongruous* (out of place) here.



sudden
crispness

This whole speech by FH is sort of like bad poetry, so it *should* sound a little odd to you.

Crispness: When the air is very cold and dry, it is said to be *crisp*.

tang of
evergreens
stabbing me



Tang refers to a kind of enjoyably *tart* (strongly sour) taste, like a green apple or a tasty sour candy.

Evergreens are trees that stay green all the year around, even in the winter, like pines, firs and spruces.

Does everything
you touch turn to
shit?

This is a reference to the *legend* (old story) of King Midas, of ancient Greece.

According to the legend, Midas loved gold, and made a wish that everything he touched would turn to gold. To teach him an important lesson, the gods *granted* (gave) him his wish, with famously *disastrous* (destructive) results.

Shit, in case you didn't know, is slang for *excrement* (solid human/animal waste).



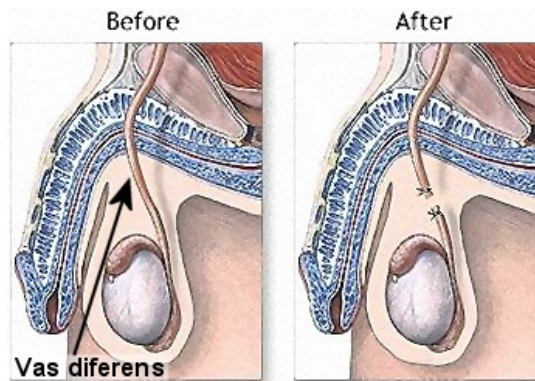
It's a name that's going to stick.

When a name "sticks," that means people find the name appropriate, and naturally start using it. You are "stuck" with that name.

You can "get stuck" with lots of undesirable things:

- You can get stuck with debts that someone else incurred.
- Your guest at a restaurant can leave and stick you with the bill.
- You may feel that a teacher has stuck you with a bad grade, though as we all know, it's really your responsibility. Right? ☺

vasectomy



A **vasectomy** is an operation a man can get to cause him to stop producing sperm. This is a very effective method of birth control when a couple has decided they want no more children.

The **Asian Taoists** called it...



Taoists are followers of Lao Tse, author of the *Dao De Jing* (道德經).

The Tao that can be followed is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the origin of heaven and earth
While naming is the origin of the myriad things.
Therefore, always desireless, you see the mystery
Ever desiring, you see the manifestations.
These two are the same—
When they appear they are named differently.

Source:

<http://www.human.toyogakuen-u.ac.jp/~acmuller/contao/laotzu.htm>

He's **convulsing**...

To convulse: **2. Pathology.** To affect with a succession of violent involuntary contractions of the muscles, so as to produce agitation of the limbs or whole body; to throw into convulsions (Oxford English Dictionary).

A tip: When you hear the doctor saying this about FH, you can see him convulsing.

...and you're
toting a big cart
of sins behind
you.

To **tote**: To carry, to transport.

Interestingly, while "to tote" can refer to carrying a heavy *burden* (load, cargo), it can also mean to carry a *light* thing, as in, "She was toting her little red purse."

She O.D.ed.

"O.D.ed" (pronounced "oh-deed") means "**overdosed**." In the movie, Michelle *dosed herself with* (took) too much of some kind of drug, probably a *depressant* (a drug that slows nerve function). Since most drugs have some level of *toxicity* (acting as a poison), overdosing can result in serious illness or even death. Overdosing on depressants can *induce* (cause) autonomic shutdown; vital functions like breathing and heartbeat stop and the drug user dies.

Amish...or
Mennonites

These are *devout* (having a strong faith) religious conservatives in America from the German Anabaptist tradition. *Anabaptist* means "against baptism," but this is a term of *derision* (disrespect, insult) that had been put on these people by mainstream Christians in Europe (Catholics, Lutherans, etc).



There is some *diversity* (variety) of religious opinion and lifestyle among these groups, but they all share a belief in a simple life and being humble before God.

sober

Not drunk on alcohol or "high" on recreational drugs. Clear-thinking.

I was **in** a little
better **shape**
every day.

To be **in shape** means to be healthy. While this expression usually refers to *physical* health, here it refers to *mental* health. This is a fine use of this idiom.

I was getting **my**
looks back.

Your "looks" is your prettiness or handsomeness. It's how good (or bad) you appear to others. It's always in the plural, and is used with a possessive of some kind:

- "I like Roger's looks!"
- "I don't like the looks of those storm clouds..."

To **get** something **back** means to have something again that you *once had*, then *didn't have*, and *now have again*.

This was, **all in all**, a happy time for me.

“All in all” means, “when you consider everything.” In other words, FH certainly continued to have some “low” and difficult times, but he’s saying that if you added together all his experiences, he was really quite happy, “all in all.”

mingle



To mingle: **6. intr. a.** Of a person: to mix, join, or associate *with* others, or take part in their activities or concerns; (in later use freq.) to move about at a social function, engaging in conversation; to circulate (OED).

weirdoes



“Weirdoes” is the plural of “**weirdo**.” **Weirdo** is slang for someone who is *weird*; “He’s such a weirdo.” When FH says this, he is actually being rather affectionate because he includes himself among the “weirdoes” he is meeting and working with.

Weird: **4. a.** Out of the ordinary..., strange, unusual; hence, odd, fantastic.

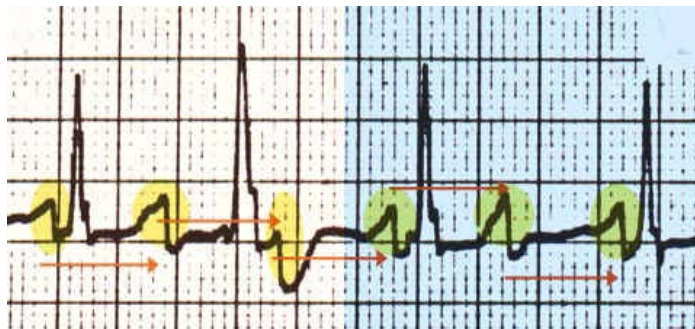
(Frequently in recent use) (OED).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that “weird” slowly evolved in Shakespeare’s plays, coming from the *adjective* “weyward,” meaning *wayward* (off the path that leads where you want to go), and was typically used in reference to



witches; women who play with evil magic.

I’d never even imagined, **for a heartbeat**,...



“For a heartbeat.” For even a second. For a very short period of time.

Farther Along
(song)

This is a tremendous song of faith and hope. Listen to the lyrics carefully, and especially the final *refrain* (the stanza that is repeated).

This is an “anonymous” song; no one knows who wrote it. It’s an old *gospel* (Christian; “good news”) song, but strongly *mystical* (directly feeling the mystery of existence and God) instead of repeating reassuring *doctrines* (specific beliefs), as many old *hymns* (church songs) do.

(We'll understand it all by and by)
Tempted and tried will oft' me to wonder
Why it should be thus all the day long
While there are others living about us
Never more rested, going alone

Refrain:

**Farther along we'll know more about it
Farther along we'll understand why
Cheer up my brother live in the sunshine
We'll understand it all by and by**

When death has come and taken our loved ones
Leaving our homes so lonely and drear
Then do we wonder how others prosper
Living so wicked year after year

Refrain:

**Farther along we'll know more about it
Farther along we'll understand why
Cheer up my brother live in the sunshine
We'll understand it all by and by.**