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Very shortly we will live in a culture that calls any lightweight cultural commentator with a gift for coining aphorisms a philosopher. Very shortly we will live in a culture in which the job title 'cultural commentator' will be spoken or written without irony. Very shortly the only people whose opinions matter on any given subject will be those who are writing about it in the newspapers. Very shortly every stand-up comedian will not only have written a novel, but will have bumped all non-comedian novelists off the shortlists of prestigious prizes.

Very shortly glibness will edge out sincerity.

Very shortly those people who do write about important subjects in the newspapers will have become so glib they will routinely use oxymorons for effect but without any sense of their proper rhetorical function. Very shortly, the oxymoron as a piece of rhetorical language will become nothing more than a contradiction in terms. Painstaking yet slapdash. Hesitant but fluent. Glibly sincere.

Very shortly we will live in a country in which all native speakers will appear to be asking a question every time they make a statement. Very shortly we will greet acquaintances in the street with an 'All right?' or a 'How's it going?' to which we will not expect an answer, and nor will one be forthcoming. Questions will become redundant, will become historical forms of address.

Very shortly real-time TV drama that is meant to last one hour will include the ads in the minute count. Incorporating commercials into the framework of the fiction only helps us to absorb their existence and necessity more deeply into our lives.

Very shortly it will become standard practice for shop assistants to greet us not by offering help, but with the query 'Are you all right there?'

Sometimes I'll travel via York station even though it's not on my route. I'll go out of my way to spend half an hour on the platforms there. I'll just sit and listen to the station announcer. It's always the same one, and yet it's not a machine, it's not a recording. No one would make a recording like it, after all. That would miss the point. It's station announcing as performance art.

The station announcer at York sings her announcements.

'We apologise to customers for the late arrival of this train.'

The station announcer would also have to make other announcements. Obviously, apologising for the late arrival of trains is something she has to do quite a lot. So you could sympathise if some accountant somewhere suggested she be replaced by a machine.

Very shortly, they will replace her with a machine. But until they do, I will continue to make detours on my rail journeys around the country just to listen to her voice.

Not for the voice per se, because I could go along armed with recording equipment myself and take home a recording of her voice.

But that would miss the point as well. Because part of the point is sitting on York station platform, being surrounded by York station. Sensing the span of the engineer's dream of glass and steel above my head. Tasting the soot in the air from steam locomotives long dead and

gone—mothballed in the railway museum down the road. Watching the shadows fall, the light move, the people float by.

Sometimes the text of her announcement changes, yet she sings it in the same tune.

'The train standing on platform twelve is the delayed fourteen-oh-five from Doncaster.'

Very shortly there will no longer be a York station. It will have been replaced by Rowntree's York or York Nestlé.

It doesn't matter that people would prefer it to remain York station, it will inevitably find itself sponsored.

Very shortly you will say to yourself that there is only a finite number of books you will get to read in your lifetime and you will, for the first time, really understand what that means. Very shortly you will know in your gut that one day you are going to die.

Very shortly they'll run out of film titles. 'The Flower of My Secret', 'The Innocent Sleep'. What do these mean? Ocean's 11, Ocean's 12, Ocean's 13.

Very shortly there will be only mediocrity. There will no longer be excellence, until the mediocre is redefined as excellent.

Very shortly there will be no more lemonade, only 7Up and Sprite.

The reason I alighted at York was because I was travelling to Hebden Bridge and someone at King's Cross had recommended changing trains at York instead of at Leeds. I had to go to Hebden Bridge to come to terms with my mortality. So I was feeling pretty vulnerable when I got off at York.

When I had rung King's Cross I had encountered a recorded message. A woman's voice told me that my call would be answered shortly. Every thirty seconds the message replayed. After five minutes, it altered slightly and told me that my call would be answered 'very shortly'. I waited a further fifteen minutes but my call was not answered. I hung up, remembering an occasion when my wife and I had arrived at a house we had rented for a holiday. It was by a sea loch in the west of Scotland. On arriving we found it to be infested with insects and so rang the letting company from a callbox to complain. A recorded message gave out a helpline number. I rang it and another recorded message told me that my call would be dealt with 'very shortly'. It took twenty minutes.

Very shortly the living will outnumber the dead. There will be more people on the planet than have ever lived and died.

Very shortly the one thousandth suicide will leap from the Golden Gate Bridge.

Very shortly the difference between very shortly and the present moment will be virtually nothing, as thin as the line between life and death, between release and execution.

Very shortly.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Nicholas Royle.*