

**Anglais**  
**Prix d'étudiant – M. Benjamin Daniels**

Vintage – the stuff of memories

How is it that an old-fashioned trinket – an entity of the past exiled to the present – can avoid getting lost in the long series of long-forgotten items? Why did we decide, so arbitrarily, that vintage was in vogue despite harking back to a *different era*?

When the *Pequod* – which chased Moby Dick through the southern seas – finally sank under the blows of the white whale, the melancholic narrator Ishmael's sole reason for survival was the coffin – unused – of his friend Queequeg. One day and one night Ishmael spent out on the open sea inside the coffin before being picked up by the *Rachel*. Were it not for this single casket made of wood in a cemetery at sea, he himself would also have sunk.

Such is *vintage* – items not swallowed by the passage of time, items whose obsolescence offers them immunity in a world where they clearly no longer belong.

The first – and perhaps only – criteria to be classed as “vintage” is to go back at least thirty years. Unlike the artificial ruins dear to the Prince of Ligne, or digital photos with the “sepia” filter to restore (or remove) faux-Victorian colouring, or even more recent objects which are easy to artificially age (rustic bread, retro fashions or fake rotary phones), vintage objects must have actually originated in the era their appearance indicates. Born of nostalgia, bedfellow of old-fashioned and cousin to *kitsch*, vintage stands out by its lack of trickery. In the same vein as performance artists who employ their own blood to paint red onto their canvas – even though any old red colouring would have sufficed in the eyes of the audience – vintage boasts modesty *sans* imitation, readily sharing its genuine authenticity, its spectacular veracity.

*Belonging* counts more than believing – the aim is not to look dated, but to be *the real deal*. Vintage is not stuck in the past – the goal is not to speak of the past itself, but rather its peculiar presence in the present. “Vintage” is anything which, in the eyes of today, *looks like yesterday*.

Vintage does not claim that things used to be *better*, just that things used to *be*. Things *existed* even before the world went digital. The nostalgia in vintage is not for the era, but rather for the item itself – nostalgia for the retired tradition of buying something that can be held in the hand, that takes up space in the home. The purpose of vintage is not to stop the passage of time; on the contrary, it is to *preserve, insofar as humanly possible, a past where time still passed*.

It remains to be seen what will become of vintage when items no longer age – when, thirty years from now, or a hundred years from now, our immediate past will have naught to offer but abstract objects for those who, holding on to history, are still searching for the land that time forgot.