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As the year draws to a close, dictionary publishers have been on the hunt for their word of the year.

You may recall that, in 2021, Oxford University Press acknowledged the scale of Covid-related innovations in the English lexicon, producing a booklet of words of the year rather than identifying a single champion lexical entry.

This year they have run a word-off between three choices from their lexicographers, with public votes deciding the winner. The contenders were metaverse, #IStandWith and goblin mode – an interesting selection, linguistically as well as in terms of social commentary.

In metaverse a prefix meta- ('beyond, above', as in metadata, metatheory) is added to verse denoting realm or domain (as in universe, Twittersverse). The usage of this word in October was four times that of the same period in 2021. In metaverse, according to Oxford, "we see the conceptual future brought into the vernacular".

From its origins in science fiction to represent a virtual reality in which we interact with avatars, metaverse has



Goblin mode means something along the lines of unapologetically slovenly.

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Goblin mode

Language Matters

become a common term for a dramatic replacement of the internet or even its replacement.

#IStandWith is strictly a phrase and not a word, used in social media as a tag to show that you align with a person or cause. Interestingly, it is not yet listed in the online version of Oxford's own English Dictionary.

The final contender, goblin mode, is also neither a word nor listed in OED online.

It has been used since about 2009 to show a rejection of societal norms, but it has gained traction this year to indicate

that you are resisting the return to normal as lockdowns end.

As its word of the year, Cambridge has selected homer. This unusual choice was influenced by a peak in searches on its website in early May when it was the solution to the word game Wordle.

Americans immediately knew it as an informal term for a home run in baseball, but it had Wordlers outside the United States scratching their heads, opening their search engines and tutting in dismay.

As did the American spellings humor and favor. The Wordle game is now published by the New York Times. Hence the American influence.

Collins has picked a word that speaks

of ongoing political, social and environmental turmoil around the globe – permacrisis, an extended period of instability. This word takes the clipping or contraction of perma- from permanent, and adds it to an existing word, crisis, a pattern that already exists in words like permafrost and permaculture.

For the Merriam-Webster dictionary folk, the 2022 word of the year is gaslighting, which they call "a word for our time". It refers to the manipulation of opinion through fake news, misinformation and conspiracy theories, usually undermining our existing views or causing us to doubt them.

It is reported that searches for gaslighting on Merriam-Webster's website increased 17-fold in 2022 compared with 2021. Let us hope that this is a momentary blip. It does not imply a permacrisis of deceit.

Closer to home, Macquarie Dictionary in Australia has a People's Choice word of the year. It is bachelor's handbag, a supermarket roast chicken that typically comes packaged in a small plastic bag with a handle.

So which "word" won the Oxford vote? The result, announced on December 5, favours goblin mode and quotes the following example from The Guardian newspaper: "Goblin mode is like when you wake up at 2am and shuffle into the kitchen wearing nothing but a long T-shirt to make a weird snack, like melted cheese on saltines."

Not currently the new normal in our household, but who knows?

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theguardian

Royals a mirror in which UK sees itself

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by Stuff newspapers.

Faced with the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's six-part Netflix series, many will dismiss them as a

distraction at a difficult time for the nation. In one perspective, that is a completely fair response. It is the underprivileged many who have the deeper grievances against contemporary Britain, not the super-privileged few like Harry and Meghan.

And yet it is not as simple as that. As in the past, the royal family is still a looking glass in which Britain can see itself. The picture it sees is often distorted. But it is almost never irrelevant. When Prince Harry talks about the "pain and suffering of women marrying into this institution", he speaks from the heart about both his mother and his wife.

Viewpoint

The monarchy should take those words very seriously.

But the monarchy is not the only target of the documentaries. Much of the Sussexes' anger and indignation is focused on the British media, which they view with implacable hostility and contempt, often with very good reason. Meghan is surely right to say, at one point, that she was, in effect, left to be the prey of stalkers, as Diana, Princess of Wales, was before her.

It is not just the royals who need to be compelled to learn from these films. So do the media, too much of which remains blind to its own failings, as well as to its role in the sad personal stories that these documentaries ultimately reveal.