

The Hirsute Heart

by Finch, June 2016

Rapid growth is a storied hallmark of the web. Digital information spreads along quick-growing vines with twisting tendrils. Less celebrated is the accompanying inevitable rot as websites and hyperlinks die off. The topmost layer of glossy new growth is supported by an underbelly of decaying information. Servers across the planet are filled with defunct LiveJournals and GoDaddy sites, accumulating abandoned Tumblrs and Twitters handles. Searching the web for an elusive bit of information can lead underneath the top layer, to a labyrinth of dead information and dead ends. Here, every given fact or claim can seem more far-fetched than the last. At American Cyborg, our hunt for the origin story of a curious accident in digital communications turned into an odyssey, churning up interlocking myths about people and machines grounded in medieval cardiology, Portuguese slang terminology, and Harry Potter.



We set out to uncover the story behind the Hairy Heart. This tiny emoji's very existence pointed to the uncanny human-machine negotiations of boundary work, when people and computers translate messages back and forth across devices, languages, and operating systems. We felt it would make a good candidate for an *Excelsior!* Post.

Interestingly, we found out first there there is no relationship whatsoever between the term "emoji" (a picture sent via a bit of code) and "emoticon" (where characters are combined to resemble a face). While these visuals can be used similarly, with names so closely resembling each other, the terms developed independently. "Emoticon" is a

North American portmanteau of "emotion" and "icon," whereas "emoji" comes from the Japanese words meaning picture (e), writing (mo), and character (ji) [1]. This closely resembles the process of convergent evolution, where different creatures in different contexts end up developing the same traits.



Onto the Quest for the Hairy Heart!

Awhile back, we heard about this strange anomaly in the world of emojis. In particular, in the way emojis in texts and SMS messages are translated across different machines, for example from iOS to Android. This translation process is controlled by The Unicode Consortium. Made up of volunteers hailing from various stakeholding companies and nonprofit groups, the Consortium was founded in 1991. They originally decided characters for fonts like Wingdings and Dingbats. Today, they govern how emojis are represented across different operating systems [2].

In April 2014, it was discovered that iOS users who sent one particular emoji - a yellow heart - to their Android-using friends, were inadvertently sending what actually looked like a "hairy heart."



How did this happen? Why were Android users seeing a hairy heart? Emojipedia, our first stop in the search for answers, was little help [3]:

1. The reason why the yellow heart emoji looks a hairy heart on Android 4.4 isn't truly known, but it was speculated by Mark Davis in his 2014 Unicode Conference Keynote that it could have been a misinterpretation of the black and white reference artwork distributed by Unicode: ↪

1F47A	1F48A	1F49A	1F4AA
1F47B	1F48B	1F49B	1F4AB
1F47C	1F48C	1F49C	1F4AC

Purportedly, then, the original character was a black-and-white Unicode heart, its hue represented with a stipple pattern of dots. In other operating systems, this pattern was "misinterpreted" into a representation of "hair." While misinterpretations are all too common, we wondered -- what sort of interpretative logic could give birth to such a

strange character? The linked Mark Davis lecture was no help, as he cited the hairy heart simply as an exemplary "interoperability problem" [4] between visual design principles. So how did this mistranslation occur, precisely? Was it a man or machine that decided the stipple was a stubble?

According to an article on The Next Web [5], it was man who gave the heart its hair: illustrators for Android, iOS, and other OSes were given the Unicode character, and told to design an equivalent emoji in the "style" of their employer:



On November 1st, 2014, Google released Android 4.4, incorporating the harmless, heartfelt emoji in [Unicode 6.0](#).

However, the illustrators translating the reference drawings into an emoji that fit the [Android style](#), for some reason thought the dotted heart stood for the pink monstrosity above.

Unicode works in a way that means when an iOS user sends an unassuming yellow heart, it shows up as the pink, hairy beast straight out of a smartphone's fever dream.

So it was, in this telling of the event, a human being who made this decision - but what gave rise to the illustrator's choice, the logic behind her interpretation? Searching the internet further turned up spiraling offshoots of folklore and superstition, replete with vines of citations creeping deep into digital recesses.

Reddit users on the subreddit "r/WhatIsThisThing" [6] pulled myths from a wide set of cultures and belief systems. First, we saw the Hairy Heart associated with a malady, a chemical poisoning:

[-] Bardfinn 233 points 1 year ago

I suppose it is possible — and this is merely speculation — that the artist who drew the glyph did an image search for "yellow heart", was presented with images of uremic pericarditis, which produces fibrinous pericarditis — a hairy heart sac — and which sometimes presents as a yellow, "hairy" pericardium. So perhaps it is someone's poor translation of fibrinous pericarditis.

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Another tale woven by the same user said that the Hairy Heart was a reference to a Hairy Heart in the world of Harry Potter, denoting cold aloofness:

[-] Bardfinn 15 points 1 year ago

Best I can find is it might be an obscure Harry Potter reference :

http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/The_Hairy_Heart:_A_Guide_to_Wizards_Who_Won't_Commit

Perhaps the artist who made the glyphs in that font took artistic license.

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The Hairy Heart: A Guide to Wizards Who Won't Commit is a wizarding self-help book that topped bestseller lists. It is assumed that the book's purpose is to assist a witch or wizard to avoid having "a hairy heart," which is a Wizarding expression meaning to describe someone who is cold or unfeeling or who won't commit to a relationship. It should not be confused with *Hairy Snout, Human Heart*, a book about one man's struggle with lycanthropy. The origin of the expression "to have a hairy heart" roots to the fable *The Warlock's Hairy Heart*, where the character of the Warlock had hid his heart in his dungeon. This led him to having hardly any infatuation with any maiden and thus turning his heart hairy and his personality cold and untouched by any lady. [Z]

Yet another user said that the Hairy Heart had significance in his native language of Portuguese, and that it was a slang term denoting evil:

[-] usuariodopedro 3 points 1 year ago

i've seen some people using - in portuguese - the term: "coração peludo". Which means, literally, hairy heart. It's generally used to describe people who are mean/evil in a mocking kind of way.

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Still another found the Hairy Heart referenced in ancient medicine and the mythology of Judaism [8], denoting courage and strength - quite different from the chemical

malady of pericarditis, the mocking evil of Portuguese slang, and cold aloofness of Potter wizardry:

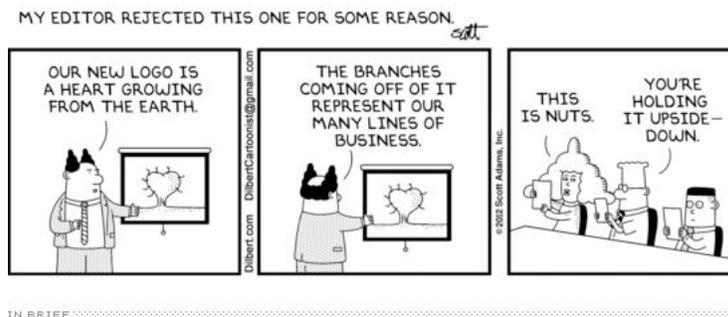
III The “Hairy Heart”

The ancients believed that some people are born with a **hairy heart** (*hirto corde*) and therefore excel over others in intelligence and in strength. An example of such a person was Aristomenes, who killed 300 Spartans but was finally captured. The Lacedaemonians cut his chest open while he was still alive and found a **hirsute heart**. This report of Plinius¹⁰⁰⁹ is also confirmed by others¹⁰¹⁰. Aristotle describes the same abnormality about the **heart** of Leonidas¹⁰¹¹. Nonnus, in the fourth century, stated that the Sabirers have **hairy** chests (*dasystemon*) and thick hairs on the **heart**, as a result of which they do not fear the god of war¹⁰¹². In addition, in the sixteenth century, Antonius Muret, known for his homosexual escapades, reported that, when he was residing in Venice, a robber-knight was sentenced to death and a *cor pilosum* was found by the executioner who dissected him¹⁰¹³.

In Jewish legend, such a powerful person is Judah, the son of the Patriarch Jacob. According to Rabbi Chanin, when Judah became enraged, the hair of his **heart** would pierce through his clothes and protrude exteriorly. He then took iron plates in his mouth and expectorated them, ground to powder¹⁰¹⁴.

The opinion enunciated by Morgagni in 1761¹⁰¹⁵ confirms this narrative, in that most reports of **hairy** hearts from antiquity are not based on anatomical observation. Rather a single fortuitous finding of such pericardial growth and proliferation in a strong person probably gave rise to the above folk belief.

A Hairy Heart also appeared in a rejected Dilbert strip, exploiting its ... anatomical resemblances:



And in a serendipitous nod to our search for the genesis of the Hairy Heart, we lastly found that the phrase appeared in a line by the band Genesis [2]:

Now, walking back home after a raid, he was cuddling a sleeping porcupine. That night he pictured the removal of his hairy heart and to the accompaniment of very romantic music he watched it being shaved smooth by an anonymous stainless steel razor.

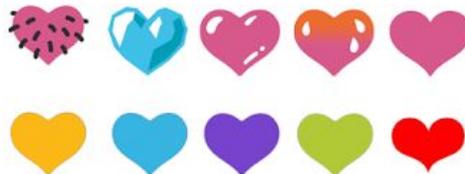
Today, the mistranslation has been "corrected." A November 2014 post on Emojipedia [10] declared the Hairy Heart dead. As so often happens with myths, it's been co-opted and institutionalized into the standard character set:

The Hairy Heart Is Dead

The most publicized oddity of the Android 4.4 emoji images was the hairy heart. This is how the  emoji looks² on Android 4.4:



This is now a standard yellow heart in Android 5, along with the other colors.



The myths, however, will last forever.

Internet users are rehearsing an old tradition, bringing fairy tales of men and machines with them into unfamiliar territory, this land of a different kind of fairy tale we call an algorithm.