



A Nocturnal View of the Lunar Landscape

Venturing and Adventuring in Adjectives

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Long before the ill-defined beginnings of English in the first millennium, Luna was the ancient Roman goddess of the moon—exquisite, radiant, and cherished within mystery cults. Her name is derived from Latin *luna*, which also means moon. So the early Romans who worshipped her personified that luminous orb we sometimes observe in the evening sky.

In English, our equivalent to Latin *luna* is, of course, *moon*. And from this word, we derive many compounds, including *moonlight*, *moonshine*, *moonbeam*, *moonquake*, and *mooncalf*, ‘a foolish person.’

But there is a problem. *Moon* is a noun. So what do we say if we want to use *moon* as an adjective, as in referring to, for example, the landscape of the moon? In other words, how can we change the form of *moon* to create an acceptable adjective that we can place in front of *landscape*?

With many English words, if we wish to transform a noun into an adjective, all we need do is append an adjective-forming suffix to the end of the word, which will change the part of speech of that word. Thus, by adding the appropriate suffix, we can turn *book* into *bookish*, *acid* into *acidic*, *butter* into *buttery*, and *access* into *accessible*.

But this will not work for moon. *Moonish* and *moony*, for example, are not Standard English, and *moonic* and *moonible* are downright barbaristic. Of course, in certain contexts we can use *moon-like* and similar compounds, but to speak of a “moon-like landscape” suggests we are talking about a landscape on Earth that resembles the moon and not the landscape of the moon. So what can we do?

We can return to Latin *luna*, remove the *-a* of this word to get its base *lun-* and add the English adjective-forming suffix *-ar* to this base, forming

the adjective *lunar*, which is equivalent in meaning to the noun *moon*.

Now if we want to have a little fun, we can append an additional suffix *-ian* to *lunar*, forming *lunarian*, which, as any unabridged dictionary will tell you, is an inhabitant of the moon. Or instead of adding *-ar* to *lun-*, we can append *-ate* to it, forming *lunate*, which means crescent-shaped, as in “By time you find the little shed with the lunate woodcut above the door, you’ll probably be twirling to the Aztec Two-Step.”

If we then remove the *-e* of *lunate* and add a second suffix *-ion* to it, we derive *lunation*, which is a noun used to describe the period between one new moon and the next, i.e., the lunar month of 29-and-one-half days. Or if we discard the *-tion* and replace it with Latin *tellus*, “earth,” we come up with *lunatellus*, an astronomical model displaying the relative motions of the moon and earth. And if all of this “word-building” seems loony to you (a word completely unrelated to *lunar*, named after the weird cry of the piscivorous *loon*), we can remove the *-ellus* from *lunatellus* and tack on the suffix *-ic* to it, forming *lunatic*, a person the ancient Romans considered “moonstruck” and hence crazy.

The classical Greek goddess of the moon was *Selene* (pronounced seh lay’ nay), from which we derive the English name *Selina* and the chemical element *selenium* (coined after its association with the element *tellurium*, itself named after Latin *tellus*, ‘earth’). Indeed, H. G. Wells, in his *The First Men in the Moon*, referred to the inhabitants of the moon as *Selenites* (rather than *lunarians*), though he was not the first to do so, honors here going to James Howell in 1645.

In technical terminology, the scientific mapping or charting of the moon is *selenography*. But if we



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plus a puzzle, some SICS!, and EPISTOLAE

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replace the *-graphy* with *-logy*, we derive *selenology*, which is the scientific study (rather than mapping) of the moon. And if we swap the *-y* of *selenology* for the combined suffixes *-ic* and *-al*, we come up with *selenological*, which is the scientific equivalent of the Latin-derived adjective *lunar*.

All of which brings us back to our initial question: How do we convert the noun *moon* into an adjective that can be placed in front of *landscape* to denote the landscape of the moon? And the answer, of course, is that we cannot. But, depending on the context, we can use either *lunar* or *selenological* as a substitute adjective.

Such adjectives, which are identical or nearly identical in meaning to a given noun but have an entirely different form, are called *collateral adjectives* since their forms, rather than being derived from the nouns they represent, are parallel to or “collateral” with the form of those nouns. In English, most collateral adjectives are complex, three-or-more-syllable words derived from Latin or Classical Greek, while the nouns they denote are generally simple one- or two-syllable Anglo-Saxon words.

Thus, *night*, a simple Anglo-Saxon word, is represented by the collateral adjective *nocturnal*, which is derived from Latin *nocturn-*, the base of *nocturnus*, ‘by night,’ plus the English adjective-forming suffix *-al*. So instead of jabbering about “a night view of the landscape of the moon,” we can discourse, in more elegant terms, about “A Nocturnal View of the Lunar Landscape,” a phrase that uses two collateral adjectives, *nocturnal* and *lunar*.

Similarly, *day*, an Anglo-Saxon word, is portrayed by the collateral adjective *diurnal*, which is derived from Latin *diurn-*, the base of *diurnus*, ‘daily,’ plus English *-al*. Though if we are speaking about something that occurs only on “this” day, the word we should use is *hodiernal* (from Latin *hoc*, ‘this’). And if the event recurs every day, as, for example, the time we awaken each morning, we should use *circadian* (from Latin *circa dies*, ‘about days’) to describe this daily rhythm.

Morning, likewise, is described by the collateral adjective *matutinal* (Matuta was the Roman goddess of the morning, and *matutine* is a rare astronomical term meaning ‘rising very early in the morning, generally at or just before dawn’).

Evening is represented by *vesperal* (Vesper is the evening star, also known as Venus; and the tongue-twisting *Vespertilionidae* is the most common family of bats in the United States—bats that become active in the evening, especially at dusk). *Twilight* is characterized by *crepuscular* (from Later *creper*, ‘dark, dim, dusky’; the *Vespertilionidae* is both a vesperal and crepuscular family of bats). And *dawn* is personified by *auroral* (Aurora was the Roman goddess of dawn, identified with the Greek goddess Eos, the base of which yields our Greek-derived collateral adjective for *dawn*, *eoan*).

Aurora also turns up in *aurora borealis*, another name for the northern lights, so called because Pierre Gassendi, the French astronomer who coined the term in 1621, fancied these lights to be a second coming of dawn from the northern (*borealis*) horizon. Thus *boreal* is a collateral adjective for *north*, the *north wind*, or the *northern regions*; and *hyperborean* (from Greek *hyper-*, ‘over, above, beyond’) is a collateral adjective for the far northern regions.

But if we journey to the far southern regions of the world, we can still observe these iridescent or rainbow-like lights (*Iris*, a derivative of the Greek noun governing *iridescent*, was the Classical Greek goddess of the rainbow; and *iridial* is a collateral adjective for *rainbow*), though there they are called the *southern lights* or *aurora australis*, a phrase popularized by Captain James Cook in 1773 which derives, in part, from Latin *australis*, ‘southern.’ Thus *austral* is a collateral adjective for *south*, and *Australia* (with the place-name forming suffix *-ia* appended to the appropriately capitalized *austral*) is the ‘southern land’ near where the Captain observed the antipodean aurora.

But we need not tarry in the southern hemisphere to explore collateral adjectives. We can discover all we want right in our own homes, with our families, and throughout our neighborhood.

When we rejoin our kinfolk after our voyage to the antipodes, we will undoubtedly receive a *sponsal* (husband or wife) embrace from our *connubial* (marriage) counterpart. And as we extend a *paternal* (fatherly) or *maternal* (motherly) greeting to our children, we shall, it is hoped, receive their *filial* (son or daughter) acknowledgments of our *sem-*



piternal (everlasting) love and guidance. From our siblings, we may derive a *fraternal* (brotherly) pat on the back or *sororal* (sisterly) touch of the hand, and from the *canine* (dog) member of the family we may careen from a *saltant* (jumping or leaping), *osculatory* (kissing) “hello.”

For dinner, we may have a *piscine* (fish) or *galinaceous* (fowl) dish, along with a *cucurbitaceous* (cucumber, squash, melon, pumpkin) or *convallariaceous* (asparagus) antipasto.

After dinner, we may take a *postprandial* (after-dinner) stroll to walk off our *cibarial* (food) delights. Or if we are experiencing *soporific* (sleep) proclivities from our *aristological* (dining) epicureanism, we may instead wish to schedule an *ante-jentacular* (before-breakfast) constitutional for the *proximate* (next) morning. Given the latter, if we are not beset by *pluviose* (rainy) or *niveous* (snowy) elements and the *nubilous* (cloud) activity is not *tonitruous* (thunderous), we may wander to the *civic* (city) *zoological* (animal) garden for a *matutinal* (morning) sojourn.

In the garden, we may observe *ovine* (sheep), *bovine* (ox, cow, bull), *ursine* (bear), *leonine* (lion), and *macropodine* (kangaroo) quadrupeds basking beneath *umbrageous* (shade) trees or roaming about *campestral* (field) and *fruticose* (shrub) ranges. In the *herpetological* (reptile) house, we may gaze upon *saurian* (lizard), *ophidian* (snake), *chelonian* (turtle, tortoise), and *eusuchian* (alligator, crocodile, gavial) residents of the *meridional* (southern) climes. And in the *ornithological* (bird) wing, we may witness dazzling displays of *aquiline* (eagle), *psittacine* (parrot), *pavonine* (peacock), and *phoenicopterous* (flamingo) brilliance and elegance.

As we return home and reflect upon our *hesternal* (yesterday) and *hodiernal* (this day) adventures, we may wonder how we began with lunar landscapes and wound up with peacocks and flamingos. In this reflection, we will perceive the unearthly power of language to discover and disclose wonder in the most *quotidian* (daily, ordinary) and *supernal* (heavenly, lofty) experiences of our lives.

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Anything But Pregnant

A Compendium of Colloquialisms

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There was a time when women did not get *pregnant*. A fortress might be *pregnable*, and a pause might be *pregnant*, but women gave birth without going through *pregnancy*, at least as far as polite language was concerned.

Pregnant has had its ups and downs in the English lexicon. The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that the abstract meaning appeared before the biological, editorializing: “It is remarkable that [the abstract sense] should appear so much earlier than the literal sense.” Chaucer used the word abstractly in the 14th century in *Troilus* (“a pregnant argument”); so did Shakespeare in the early 17th century in *Twelfth Night* (“My matter hath no voice, Lady, but to your owne most pregnant and vouchsafed eare”). Milton used it in its biological sense in the late 17th century in *Paradise Lost* (“My womb pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown”); and Goldsmith, in his 18th century *Natural History*, used it in relation to seals (“We are not certainly informed how long the females continue pregnant”).

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, *pregnant* became a dirty (or at least dirty-ish) word, one to avoid under most circumstances. It appeared in medical publications (“Mental changes are common in pregnant women,” Allbutt’s *Systema Medical*, 1899) but not usually in novels or stories. In George Thompson’s 1851 novel, *The Outlaw, or, The Felon’s Fortunes*, for example, the amplitude of Isabella Rich’s waist proves her to be in *that state in which ladies love to be who love their lords*. A couple of pages later, another euphemism surfaces: she is in *an interesting condition*.

In England in the 1920s, the London *Daily Express*’s “Don’ts for Reporters and Sub-Editors” required the use of *in a certain condition* for *pregnant*. Across the ocean, however, *pregnant* enjoyed a comeback: according to H.L. Mencken’s *The American Language*, “Even *pregnant* returned to



good society.” At the same time, several cutesy slang terms became popular among English speakers: *preggers* (Oxford and Cambridge Universities), *preggo* (Australian), the abbreviation *PG*, and *preggy*. Further into the 20th century, people who considered themselves refined continued to avoid the word. American maternity shops in the 1950s and 60s, for example, coyly referred to their customers as *ladies-in-waiting*.

Foreign words have sometimes been substituted for *pregnant* to add a note of class. The French term *enceinte* has been in use in English since the 19th century and is the most popular of these; indeed, when Lucille Ball’s real-life pregnancy was incorporated into the television program *I Love Lucy* in 1952, CBS would allow only *expecting* and *enceinte* to be spoken on the air. Vladimir Nabokov, in his 1941 article “The Art of Translation,” complained of this kind of over-delicacy: “Perhaps the most charming example of Victorian modesty that has ever come my way was in an early English translation [of *Anna Karenina*]. Vronsky had asked Anna what was the matter with her. ‘I am *beremenna*’ (the translator’s italics), replied Anna, making the foreign reader wonder what strange and awful Oriental disease that was; all because the translator thought that ‘I am pregnant’ might shock some pure soul, and that a good idea would be to leave the Russian just as it was.”

Other terms for *pregnant* range from the euphemistic—*in a delicate condition*—to the vulgar—*knocked up*—to a combination of the two—to *have a bun in the oven*. (This last expression is not to be confused with the early 20th century expression *to have a bun on*, meaning ‘drunk’). From the late 19th century, a woman might have a *bun*, a *cake*, or simply *one* in the oven. The expression may sound benign, but *oven* had been a vulgar term for the female pudendum since the 18th century. And speaking of the female pudendum, in the late 17th century a pregnant woman in England was said to have *joined the club*—the *puden* or *pudding club*, that is, a mythical organization named after the slang term for both pudendum and semen.

As far as euphemisms go, the oldest expression for pregnancy is probably also the most delicate: *with child*, in use in English since at least 1175. In

the King James translation of the Bible, Mary is *great with child* (Luke 2:5); in the New English translation she is *expecting a child*; in the New World translation she is *heavy with child*. Not until the Living Bible, first published in 1971, is Mary obviously pregnant. Other gentle euphemisms include *in the family way* (American, 1796) or *in a delicate condition*; in Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* (1849), Mrs. Micawber finds herself *in a delicate state of health*.

The most common euphemism is probably *expecting*, but there are a wide variety of terms for just what is expected. Perhaps *an addition to the family*, *a bundle of joy*, *a blessed event* (or, in some cases, *a blasted event*, and if the gender is known, a *hevent* or *shevent*), or money-related terms such as *the little dividend*, *the little deduction* and *the expense*. Men can get in on the expecting front: the term *expectant father* was in use in the U.S. by 1862. Parents may also be expecting *a visit from the stork*, from which come the phrases *storked* and *ringing the stork bell*. (The belief that the stork delivers babies is apparently Scandinavian in origin; it may stem from the stork’s reputation for taking good care of its young.)

Then there’s the euphemism for pregnant that isn’t really a euphemism: *in trouble*. Generally applied only to unmarried young women, in trouble means one thing when your mother yells it after “You are” and before “young lady” (in which case you’ll be grounded) and another when your neighbor whispers it about you. Favored by judgmental gossips, *in trouble* when applied to boys means *in jail*, *into drugs*, or simply *in trouble*; when applied to girls, it almost always means pregnant. In a 1976 *Rolling Stone* interview, rock musician Patti Smith said of her own teenage pregnancy, “It developed me as a person, made me start to value life, to value chance, that I’m not down in South Jersey on welfare with a nine-year-old kid. ‘Cause every other girl in South Jersey who got in trouble at the time is down there.”

An *accident* or *surprise* is an unplanned child, whether the parents are married or not. The ever-loyal Mrs. Micawber reminds us, in *David Copperfield*, that “accidents will happen in the best-regulated families.” In the early 20th century



(ca. 1909), the British expression *Irish toothache* came into use, sometimes abbreviated *ITA*. This is, of course, an English joke at the expense of the Irish, mocking Irish Catholics forbidden to use birth control—the idea being that in Ireland, pregnancy must be as common as toothache.

If the child's parents are not married, there are of course a host of words for him or her, some nice and some nasty. In modern usage are *illegitimate*, *out-of-wedlock*, and *love child*, but in the late 16th century, such a child might have been deemed a *by-scape*, *by-slip*, *by-chop*, or *by-blow*. By the 18th century such a child might have been described as *born on the wrong side of the blanket or the covers*, *born in the vestry* (as opposed to in the church), or *come through the side door*. Not-so-nice terms include *love-brat* and, of course, *bastard*, which has lost much of its literal meaning and is now a general insult. A *trick baby* is one conceived between a prostitute and her client. Pub slang from Great Britain gives us *the result of a lark in the park after dark* (1930s).

Some terms for *pregnant* refer to the physical act of sex, including *bumped*, *popped* (UCLA slang, late 1980s—to *pop* was to impregnate) and *knocked up*. This last is probably the most common American slang term; the English meaning of *knock up* is simply wake up, as in “I’ll knock you up in the morning”—additionally, in England, to be *knocked up* is to be *knocked*, exhausted. In Australia, *It’s not the bull they’re afraid of, it’s the calf* is a common way of expressing the idea that women are not afraid of men or sex per se; they are afraid of the consequences: pregnancy and a child.

Other terms relating to the future are *rattle shopping*, *preparing the bassinet*, *rehearsing lullabies*, *knitting*, *waiting for the patter of little feet*, and *learning about diaper-folding*. There are clever word-jokes like *infanticipating* (American, 1940s), *heir-apparenting*, *full of heir*, *fragrant* (a near-rhyme for *pregnant*), and *on the road from here to maternity* (a reference to the 1953 film *From Here to Eternity*). And my maternal grandmother referred to pregnant women as *babying*, a term she may have invented.

Still other terms compare the mother-to-be to a brooding hen (*on the nest* or *nesting* in the United

States and *clucky* in Australia) or compare the shape of a pregnant woman to a large fruit—*she swallowed a watermelon seed* or *she has a watermelon on the vine*. Indeed, the pregnant woman's shape is often fodder for slang terms: she might be described as *eating for two*, *awkward* or *in bad shape*. In the early 19th century she might have been described as *having a bay window* (a term usually applied to men's large pot or beer bellies) or *wearing the bustle wrong* (1830 or later). Later in the century in the American South, a visibly pregnant woman was *wearing the apron high*; a regional mountain ballad of the period, “Careless Love,” contains the lyrics:

Once I wore my apron low;
Now I wear my apron high.
Love, oh love, oh careless love!
See what love has done to me.

One particularly violent slang term, *the rabbit died*, originates in a pregnancy test invented in 1927. The possible-mother-to-be's urine would be injected into a rabbit; a few days later, the animal's ovaries would be examined for the presence of the hormone HCG. In this test, the rabbit *always* died, so the slang term is a misunderstanding of the science involved. Modern tests do not require any such carnage (although trying to pee on that little stick might make you want to kill somebody).

[*Jessy Randall would like to acknowledge Russian scholar Anna Bendiksen and 19th century literature scholar Paul Erickson for their help with this piece. Her own little bundle of joy is now a year old.*]



B Is for Body

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Let's play a shapes game. Let's pretend for a moment that B isn't a letter but a picture. What does it show? Look: B. Turn the page clockwise for a second so the curves of the B come down toward you. What do you see? I see breasts. Wishful thinking, you say? Well, maybe, but why shouldn't we have a picture of breasts in our alphabet? They're important. The Chinese root for 'mother,' *mu*, is written with a B-like pictogram showing breasts, [INSERT CHINESE CHARACTER HERE--SEE HARD COPY], and no one thinks that's strange. Besides, not only does B look like breasts; it also begins most English words for them: *breasts*, *boobs*, *bazooms*, *bust*, *bosom*.

Breasts are rounded body parts that come in pairs. So are *eyeballs*, the *balls* of the feet, and the *balls* or *bollocks* of men's groins. Likewise the *buns* or *buttocks*: the *bottom*, *backside*, or *behind*—further known as the *bum* to Brits, *booty* or *boots* to American blacks, and *butt* to Americans in general. I've also heard the ad hoc B expressions "move your *Buxton*" and "shake your *bon-bon*," for the fact is, it's not breasts that are B's true specialty—it's bottoms, and not just in English, either. "Make your butt like candy," says a Brazilian ad for a diet clinic: "Make your *bom bom* like a *bon-bon*." Another Brazilian word for 'butt' is *bundas*. (*National Geographic Traveler*, Jan.–Feb. 2001, p. 54.) Indonesians say *buntut* and *bokong*. The Dutch say *billen*. Afrikaaners say *boude*. At a web posting of scores of international words for 'butt,' fully one-ninth begin with B (kiana.net/nbt/ButtWords.html).

All Blown Up

B means womanly roundness. Personal-ad shorthand for a non-thin female is *BBW*, "Big Beautiful Woman." A woman with a plentiful bottom is *broad-beamed*. A big-breasted woman is *buxom*, and if that's all she's got going for her, she's a *bimbo*. The French artist Sophie Calle, who has devoted individual days to living out different letters of the English alphabet, chose on her B day to become a "*Big-Time Blond Bimbo*." (See the cover

photo of her recent book *Double Game*.) But why stop at one bimbo when you can evoke a whole bunch? A few years ago I saw this teaser for a graphics file on America Online: "A *bevy* of *bovine-ly blossomed bronzed bikinied blockhead blonde babes bouncing bodaciously become brainlessly, blindly beachward bound*." Woman, archetypally round! Camille Paglia, writing about the Venus of Willendorf, a fat little prehistoric fertility figurine, called her "*bulging, bulbous, bubbling . . . bent over her own belly . . . eternally pregnant. She broods, in all senses . . . swollen . . . weighed down by her inflated mounds of breast, belly, and buttock*" (*Sexual Personae*, 1990, pp. 55-56).

Paglia's intuition got it exactly right: B is about swelling, inflation, bulges. In a paper¹ published the same year as Paglia's book, the linguist John Lawler used very similar terms to gloss *bl-* words like *blimp*, *bladder*, *bloat*, and *blister*. They represent "contained fluid," he said, "(either liquid or gas) under pressure, with distinctive distension of its container, producing a natural roundness." Plain *b-* represents it too, as in *barrel*, *ball*, *balloon*, *billow*, and Paglia's "*bulging, bulbous, bubbling*." And how do we make balloons and bubbles bulge? By blowing: we *blow* bubbles, *blow up* balloons.

Blowing, you see, because B evokes "airiness" through mouth-pantomime. It's an airy sound. Put your hand in front of your mouth and say "buh"—you'll feel a very distinct puff of air that you can't feel if you say "nuh" or "yuh" or most other consonants. I'm certain that the air-puff made by articulating the sound of B is why many languages, including our own, tend to use B words to name inflated, bulging things. And the written letter has evolved a bulging shape to reinforce the idea, a shape explicitly resembling the most bulbous part of the self-interested mammals who invented the alphabet: a nice round bottom.

Big bottoms! Anything inflated seems big almost by definition. Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary partly defined *big* as "full of something . . . distended, swoln." *Big* is one of the prime B words, one of the prime B ideas. When Jonathan Swift created a race of giants in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), he called them *Brobdignagians*. The biggest dinosaur was a *brontosaurus*. The Bible mentions a



huge animal called *behemoth*, thought to be the hippopotamus (Job 40:15). That's Hebrew, but big animals tend to have B names in English also: *bull*, *bear*, *buck*, *boar*, *buffalo*, *bison*, *bronco*. Australians call big male kangaroos *boomers*, and elephants are known to circus people as *bulls*. I had an elephant named *Babe* as a child, and the big blue ox of the legendary lumberjack Paul Bunyan was named *Babe* too.

Paul *Bunyan* was a giant himself, of course, and it's very common for fictional B characters like him to be oversized. Watching TV one afternoon a few years ago, I suddenly noticed a fat cartoon lady called "Aunt *Bertha*," and then a few minutes later in a different cartoon, a huge wrestler called "Lardo, the *Belgian Behemoth*." I knew I was on to something. Eventually, though, it became clear that B's "body" and "bottom" connection concerns "animality" as much as "size." The bottom is the most prominent part of the body; and popular speech often equates it with the entire body: *save your butt*, *get your butt over here*. But it's also the least civilized part of the body: part sexual lure, part outlet of the digestive system, the last stop of the unlovely process that begins with *burps* and winds through *bellies* and *bowels*. We can't disown it, all that sexual and digestive stuff, but we can give it dirty names, and they're often B names.

B Is for What?!!!!

So much so, in fact, that in P.G. Wodehouse's novel *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* (1939), Viscount Bosham objects to being addressed as "Lord B.": "It sounds as if you had been starting to call me something improper and changed your mind." Improper indeed! B is the bawdiest of letters, giggling from the *bathroom* to the *bedroom*. It's *the birds and the bees*, *the beast with two backs*—sex in all its variations. Ordinary sex is *boffing*, *balling*, *bonking*, and *boinking*—plus German *bumsen* and French *baiser*. Variations include *gangbangs*, *blowjobs*, *buggery*, and sado-masochistic *bondage*. A penis is a *bone*, a vagina a *beaver*, a sphincter a *bunghole*.

Bawdy B! *Bawdy* itself is an adjective from the noun *bawd*, which means a 'madam,' a woman who runs a *bawdy house*—a *brothel* or *bordello* full of lissom nude girls: *bare-assed*, *buck naked*, in the

buff, in their *birthday suits*. Half a century ago, strip shows were called *burlesque*, and curious men watched *blue movies* and ogled nightclub *B-girls*. What exactly is a B-girl? Supposedly it's short for *bar girl*, but who knows? B is helplessly suggestive. During a walking tour of France in 1878, Robert Louis Stevenson chatted with some village women who thought our word *bread* sounded "frolicsome and racy"! (*National Geographic*, Oct. 1978, p. 541.)

You know what else sounds frolicsome? B names for clothes that cover B body parts, however scantily. *Bustiers* more or less cover breasts, for example, and *bikinis* more or less cover breasts and bottom. A man's bottom is covered with *boxers* or *briefs*; and before full-length trousers became popular in the early 1800s, men wore knee-length trousers called *breeches* (pronounced "britches"). Somewhere along the way, that garment gave its name to what it covered, creating a new word for 'butt or rear end'—*breech* (pronounced as spelled), as in *breech birth* or *breech-loading* guns. (French also links butts with pants: butt is *cul* and knee-breeches are *culottes*.) Nineteenth-century women's trousers were called *bloomers*, although few women dared to wear them. A more conventional B accessory for a woman in olden days was a *bustle*, a little butt-enhancing pad worn under her skirt. Her breasts, which would now be covered by a *bra*, were formerly pushed up with a *bodice*; and the ripple of snowy gauze that peeked above the bodice to veil the breasts was called a *buffon* in English, a *bouffante* in French—literally, a 'puff.' Bodice itself is an antique word for 'corset' (which is why steamy historical novels are called *bodice-rippers*), and it originated as a variant spelling of the English word *bodies*, just as *corset* is from the French *corps* 'body.'

Belles and Beaus

Lovely bodies, so *buff* and *beautiful*. Imagine a *bathing beauty*, a *belle of the ball*, a *beach bunny*, a *blond bombshell*, a *bodacious babe*. Remember that all-B riff I quoted earlier about the "beachward bound" blondes? Think *Baywatch*, think *Beach Blanket Bingo*. Of course, there are men at the beach too: *beach bums*, *beach boys*, *bodybuilders*, *bare-chested beefcakes*—*burly* guys, all *bulked up* with *bulging biceps*. Think Mitch *Buchanan*, the



Baywatch lifeguard played by David Hasselhoff.

Since B men fit the “hard and muscular” stereotype and B women the “soft and curvy” stereotype, it’s entirely fitting that John Lawler (who linked *bl-* words to “inflatedness”) linked *br-* words to “primitive sex-role stereotypes.” These are the animal selves that B’s embody. Look at the life trajectories outlined by *br-* words. For women, who give *birth* to *babies*, the *br-* path is *braids*, *broad*, *bride*, *breed*, *brood*, *brats*. For men, who *boast* and *battle*, it’s *brawn*, *brag*, *brave*, *brawl*, *brutal*. My colleague Margaret Magnus says that if B were a fairy tale, it would be *Beauty and the Beast*. If this isn’t clear already, we need only look at typical B-name characters in stories and movies. They’re embarrassing, they’re so perfect.

Other B men are just slobs and idiots, though often funny ones, like Archie Bunker, Al Bundy, Mr. Bean, Beavis and Butthead.

B women are pure sex. *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) has a barmaid called *Bet Bouncer*. Updike’s *Rabbit, Run* (1960) ends near a pinball machine called *Bouncing Betsy*. (Come to think of it, I once called a classmate *Bountiful Beth*, which amused her, fortunately.) Little *Betty Boop* shimmies through movie cartoons. *Bombay Boola* the belly dancer perks up Garbo’s film *Susan Lenox* (1931). Beautiful *Buffy* slays vampires on TV. On the comics page, *Doonesbury* features the curvaceous *Boopsie*, *Beetle Bailey* has Miss *Buxley*, and *Blondie* has pretty *Blondie Bumstead* (née *Boopadoop*). The most famous children’s doll in the world is a curvy blonde named *Barbie*. There are real B women too. A girl named Mary Cathleen Collins turned herself into the voluptuous actress *Bo Derek*. Ex-showgirl Barbara “*Bobo*” Sears married one of the Rockefellers. And the original BB was *Brigitte Bardot*, the French cutie who inspired Sophie Calle’s *Blond Bimbo* act.

B men are more complex than B women. Sometimes they can be sexy, too, either in okay ways, like James *Bond* and Rhett *Butler*, or in very bad ways, like Travis *Bickle* and Norman *Bates*. More often, though, B men are simply violent. Remember my cartoon wrestler, the *Belgian Behemoth*? Well, *Bruiser Brody* was a real-life

wrestler. Stallone’s boxer was Rocky *Balboa*. *Bull Bushka* is a stocky football coach in the comic strip *Funky Winkerbean*. K. C. Constantine’s novel *Brushback* has a jockish bully named *Bobby Blasco*. Bullies make good villains, of course: Ichabod Crane had his *Brom Bones*, Popeye had his *Bluto*. A friend of mine calls his crazy boss *Bozo the Beast*. Wife-beaters make good villains too: *Bobby Benedetto* in Anna Quindlen’s *Black and Blue* (1998), *Billy Bigelow* in the musical *Carousel* (1945), and the protagonist of Thomas Dunn English’s poem “*Ben Bolt*” (1843), whose sweet Alice with hair so brown “wept with delight” at his smile and “trembled with fear” at his frown.

Other B men are just slobs and idiots, though often funny ones, like Archie *Bunker*, Al *Bundy*,

Babbitt, Mr. *Bean*, *Beetle Bailey* in the comic of that name (the one with Miss *Buxley*), the cartoon duo *Beavis and Butt-head*, and Shakespeare’s *Bottom*. You know, *boors* and *bozos*, *buffoons* and *bubbas*—especially “*big, bumbling, beefy*” ones, as my mother once remarked. *Bl-* names are especially good at conveying this. One of the most endearing of all fictional slobs is John Belushi’s drunken frat boy *Bluto Blatarsky* in the movie *Animal House* (1978). In much of the English-speaking world, Bluto and his buddies would be called *blokes*—ordinary and unpretentious guys, the kind of men personified as *Joe Blow* in America and *Joe Bloggs* in Australia. Many made-up *Bl-* names specifically signal blandness, averageness: Leopold and Molly *Bloom* in Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), or the office drones Max *Blumf* and Susan *Block*, who appeared together one day in the comic strip *Dilbert* (Feb. 1, 1998).

The best one-word gloss for B is “unrefined,” a quality that draws reactions ranging from genial amusement to outright disgust. B is dismissive. A little nowhere town in American slang is *East Buttfuck* or *East Bumblefuck*. The British intensifier *bloody* and its B euphemisms are mostly scornful: *bloody* awful, *blooming* idiot, *blasted* fool. We spit out our scorn along with B’s little air-puff: *bitch*, *bastard*, *bullshit*.



Two Bubbles

Another notable characteristic of B is doubleness. As you've probably noticed, an awful lot of made-up B names have two B elements in a row, from *Belgian Behemoth* to *Bombay Boola*. Alliterative names are found with all letters—think of Tiny Tim and Peter Piper—but B alliterations are much more common than any others. They're funny. Pick up any comic novel and you'll probably find a double-barrelled B name in it. For example, the Wodehouse novel I mentioned earlier has two: detective *Buxton Black* and jealous boyfriend *Bricky Bostock*. (*Ben Bolt* from the old poem gets mentioned too.) Other Wodehouse stories feature *Beefy Bingham* and the boxer *Battling Billson*. Double-barrelled B's are as common as air: *Big Ben*, *Big Bertha*, *Big Brother*, *Big Bird*, the *Big Bang*, *Big Business*, *big bucks*, the *big boys*, the *big bad wolf*. And that's just with bigs.

There are plenty more without bigs: the *Baby Boom*, *boomerang babies*, the *Bronx Bombers*, the *Butcher of Baghdad*, *Blackbeard*, *Bluebeard*, *Buffalo Bill*, *Buffalo Bob*, the *Bible Belt*, *Black Beauty*, *Beau Brummell*, the *Brady Bunch*, the *Beanie Babies*, the pudding called *brown betty*, the British army musket *Brown Bess*, Melville's *Billy Budd*, the song characters *Billy boy* and *Bill Bailey*, Clint Eastwood's *Bronco Billy*, and the African-American cowboy-movie star Herb Jefferies, the *Bronze Buckaroo*.

I came across half a dozen double-barrelled B's the week I was writing this section. The newish comic strip *Baldo* is about a dreamy Mexican-American teenager named *Baldo Bermudez*. When his family dresses up as a Mexican-style band, his father calls them the *Balladeering Bermudezes*, although Baldo himself prefers the name the *B Boys and Girls* (Mar. 16 and 19, 2001). In the Mar. 18 men's fashion supplement of *The New York Times*, which took bachelors as its theme, the phrase *Broadway Brummells* appears on p. 78, and *bachelor boudoir* on p. 90—along with a 1970 photo of Hugh Hefner “cuddled on a fur blanket with his then-paramour and Playmate, *Barbi Benton*,” aboard their private plane, the *Big Bunny!*

With all this doubleness I think we're back to unconscious echoes of bottom-cheeks. Who was

that romantic Southern gentleman? Rhett *Butt-ler*? Here's the name that clinched it for me: in John Knowles's boarding-school novel *A Separate Peace* (1959, chap. 7), the narrator recalled his athletic-looking classmate *Brinker Hadley*: “Brinker's salient characteristic” was “his healthy rump . . . those healthy, determined, not over-exaggerated but definite and substantial buttocks.” The context is matter-of-fact rather than erotic: a B character is equated with a healthy rump. It's a B thought.

Other writers have B thoughts too. In *Walden*'s chapter “Spring,” Thoreau mused on how the word *lobe* ends with “the soft mass of the b (single lobed, or B, double lobed).” A century later, A. H. Fremont's *Alphabet Flip Chart* (1974) noted that B's “make *bubble* sounds in words,” and that the little *b* even “has a ‘ball’ or ‘bubble’ at the bottom of the letter. The big B has two bubbles.” Pop! *Bam!* *Boom!* *Bang!* There go the bubbles! That's another “salient characteristic” of B: “loud noises,” the sounds of inflated-looking things exploding (*bursting*, *blowing up*), being hit (*beaten*, *buffeted*, *boxed*), or creating semi-articulate noises (*howling*, *braying*, *babbling*).

Bingo!

“Big round things,” “silliness or contemptibility,” and “impact and loud noises”—readers of VERBATIM will recognize these three B qualities as identical to the three “nasal-stop” qualities I described in “The Most Lively Consonants in the World” (XXV/3, Summer 2000). Nasal-stop words contain consonant-combinations like *mp*, *ng*, *nk*, and *nt*, which yield noisy *thumps*, round *rumps*, and slobbering *drunks*—compare B's *bumps*, *butts*, and *boozers*. I remarked that the first of those words, *bump*, was “the most typical and versatile” nasal-stop word of all, for it embraced each of the three potential nasal-stop meanings. That makes *bump* a perfect B word too, since it variously denotes “impact or its noise”, “rounded thing,” and “amusingly contemptible thing” (“lay there like a *bump* on a log”).

I can't really explain the congruence of meanings between B's and nasal-stops, but it is undeniably present. Even though I made no effort to include a lot of B words in the earlier article, about 50 of my 400 nasal-stop examples were also B



words—an eighth of the total. (For instance, *bang*, *bundle*, and *bumpkin*.) It's also interesting that a lot of "bell sounds" like *clang* and *jingle* are nasal-stop words, while *bell* itself is a B word, and England's best-known *bell* is called *Big Ben*. Round and noisy!

I also observed in my earlier article that English nasal-stop meanings are often matched in Indonesian nasal-stop words, like *dentang* for English *clang*. This happens to be true with many Indonesian B words as well, like *besar* for 'big,' *bundar* for 'round,' *bulat* for 'ball, circle,' and *bahak* for 'burst of laughter.' Indonesian even matches English by supercharging some words with both features, a B plus a nasal-stop: *buntut* 'butt' (mentioned earlier), *busung* 'bulging,' *banting* 'to hit,' *bentet* 'to burst,' and *bising* 'noise.' These are extraordinary parallels for two unrelated languages.

What are we to think, except that B is a cosmic prankster who uses earthlings as ventriloquist's dummies to tell its jokes? In March 2001, when the airplane manufacturer Boeing suddenly announced that it would be leaving its longtime headquarters in Seattle, a local TV station promptly dubbed this the *Boeing Bombshell*. So reported *The New York Times* on Mar. 22, and three days later it illustrated its weekend summary of the Boeing story with a photo of a jet flying out of Seattle. The picture's caption? "*Buh-bye*"!



Notes

John Lawler, "Women, Men, and Bristly Things: The Phonosemantics of the BR- Assonance in English," *Michigan Working Papers in Linguistics*, Winter 1990, reprinted 1992 in *The Joy of Grammar: A Festschrift for James McCawley*, ed. G. Larsen et al. (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins). For more on B, see Margaret Magnus's book *Gods of the Word: Archetypes in the Consonants* (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson Univ. Press, 1999), especially the Introduction and pp. 52 and 87-93.

[Ralph Emerson's last article for VERBATIM, "Denaturalized Profanity in English" appeared in Vol. XXVI/2.]

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Sympathy and Empathy

Matthew Beam
Toronto, Ontario

The other day a friend asked me the difference between *sympathy* and *empathy*. She thought people in her office were using *empathy* in place of *sympathy* as a way of making the expression less pitying. Although her inference sounded reasonable, I knew through vague, dictionary-perusing memories that there was a bit more to it. I looked up empathy in my handy but not altogether objective *ITP Nelson Canadian Dictionary*, cross referenced it quickly with my *Random House Webster's*, and came up with some ambiguous results.

The object of empathy is understanding. The object of sympathy is the other person's well-being.

Both dictionaries indicated that *empathy*, the translated word and concept first used in Germany in 1904, was the identification with the feelings of others. Both definitions are short and to the point. *Sympathy*, on the other hand, a word that has been around since Aristotle, has a longer list of meanings, shades of definition. From the two dictionaries I found a loose agreement that *sympathy* is a harmony between people, a sharing of feelings. Short of parsing harmony with identification and spiraling further into etymological abstraction, I decided to search out some other sources on the matter.

The most helpful, lucid comparison that I found was in a paper by Allison Barnes and Paul Thagard of the Philosophy Department at the University of Waterloo (1997) called *Empathy and Analogy*. Here, we learn that the word *empathy* was first used by Germans Rudolph Lotz and Wilhelm Wundt as an aesthetic term whereby the “beholder physically imitates the object (art) and imaginatively projects himself”. But more to the point of my investigation, the researchers noted that “the Greek derivation of the prefix *em-* means ‘in’ or ‘within’, while the prefix *sym-* means ‘with’, ‘along with’ or ‘together’.” With *sympathy*, you feel or share the emotion, with *empathy* you understand the feeling without experiencing it. The paper quotes Lauren Wispe’s “History of the

Concept of Empathy” to clarify the meaning further: “The object of empathy is understanding. The object of sympathy is the other person’s well-being.”

While I had managed to distinguish between these two words, some new questions arose. Why were people suddenly using *empathy* instead of *sympathy*? In world where adverbs are endangered and complex ideas are whittled down to conceptual tooth-picks, was it possible that people were actually thinking about what they were saying? What was my friend doing as the giver and receiver of this corporate empathy? In searching for the answers to these questions, I found myself on a windy, well-trodden but not always well-marked road toward Empathy.

The E-word is big on the bookshelves these days. These books range in theme from business to

parenting, and in voice, from clinical and research-based to anecdotal and self-help. In *The Power of Empathy: A Practical Guide to Creating Intimacy, Self-Understanding, and Lasting Love in your Life* (2000), Arther P. Ciaramicoli and Katherine Ketcham’s version of empathy is “an intelligent, deeply respectful exploration of what lies beneath the surface of our world”. Using anecdotes from his work as a psychologist, Ciaramicoli shows how empathy becomes the panacea for all of our interpersonal struggles. In *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (2000), Martin L. Hoffman describes empathy as “an affective response more appropriate to another’s situation than one’s own”. Hoffman argues that through inductions, positive reinforcement of empathic behaviour, a child or a poor empathizer can learn the script of understanding.

Despite these subtle variations, the experts do appear to agree on its fundamental principles. Empathy is a “genetic endowment”, allowing us to think not only about ourselves, but for the good of our species—without empathy, we would face the world individually and struggle to survive. With this cognitive predisposition and the right circumstances, humans are able to comprehend how other people




feel. As eight month babies, we simply mirror others' expressions, laughing when others laugh, crying when others cry, but by the time we are ten years of age, most of us can understand others' feelings and motivations by simply reading their facial expressions and body movements. And while not all of us have learned to empathize as effectively as others, the authors of empathy insist: we all have the tools to get better.

Improving oneself, in the corporate sense, is the theme of Daniel Goleman's, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998). Here, Goleman debunks our belief that intelligence (IQ) equals success; it is our ability to glean people's emotions that will shoot us up the corporate ladder. The thinking goes: if you empathize with your boss, customer, or peer, you will understand them better, and more effectively give them what they want—the perfect strategy for getting what you want. Goleman's book had corporate buzz written all over it. Had my corporate friend not heard of this prophetic tome?

As it turned out, my friend's copy of *Working with Emotional Intelligence* sat unread on her office bookshelf. She had not officially learned Goleman's version of empathy and, yet, the word had infiltrated her office vernacular. In a perfect world, where everyone reads the books that they should, the understanding of empathy, albeit through the desire to achieve corporate success, would be clearer. Instead, the word was likely introduced by some "knowers" (those that had read the book), spread around her office like the flu, then reshaped through need and attrition.

My friend's definition of the word, that of "making sympathy less pitying" is only part of its remarkable, new meaning. Along with sounding less pitying, there is a sense of expediency to empathy, which fits perfectly into the corporate model. In our fast-paced, over-worked Western society, who has time to sympathize? Proferring the word in this case is a way of saying, "I understand . . . Now, let's get on with it". By using *empathy* instead of *sympathy*, one can provide the utmost in understanding, without having to offer a tissue.

[Matthew Beam is a Canadian author, journalist and photographer living in Toronto, Ontario. His young adult novel, *In Clouds* (Stoddart Kids), will come out in the spring of 2003.]



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EPISTOLAE

a couple letters are TK in this space.



The Trouble With Janus Words

David Galef
Oxford, Mississippi

When I was six years old, my mother bought a package of dried fruit at the supermarket labeled “pitted dates.” Having once almost broken a tooth on a cherry stone, I approached them warily. I bit carefully around each core, but found to my surprise—and confusion—that the pits were missing. “So *why*,” I demanded, my surprise now turned to annoyance, “do they call them ‘pitted dates?’”

My mother sighed. “‘Pitted’ means that the pits have been removed. Some words are like that.” I had to content myself with that explanation for a while. It didn’t help that the grapes we liked at the local fruit and vegetable market were advertised as *seedless* rather than *seeded*, though *seeded*, like *pitted*, means the opposite of what it sounds like. Clearly, I wasn’t the only one mixed up by such words, and the produce market wasn’t taking any chances. Later on, I learned that the household activity my mother so abhorred, *dusting*, could actually mean the contrary, as in *dusting* my cinnamon toast with sugar. And I thought it curious that people could pay a *bill* or a document demanding money with a *bill* that was the money itself. In a literature course at college, I learned that a label existed for such trickster terms: *Janus words*, from the Roman god of doorways who faces both ways.

Some linguists have tagged Janus words as examples of *antiphrasis*, generally a rhetorical device for using a word in a sense opposite to its usual meaning; or *enantiosis*, a figure of speech that conveys the opposite of what’s said. But both terms border on irony, and that’s not what these curiosities are all about. I’ve also heard Janus words described as *auto-antonyms* or, most simply, *contranymy*s, and though both labels have a homemade sound, they better convey the sheer contrariety involved. Some see Janus words as confused and at odds with themselves, like Siamese twins who quarrel. Others see them as evenhanded and accepting of opposition, the essence of Whitman’s pluralistic view of America in *Song of Myself*: “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)”

Whichever way you see them (or c: none of the above), they’re fun to grapple with. In any event, once I got the concept, I wanted more instances. Formerly, I’d simply trusted to serendipity and patience. Around the time that I learned the proper term, I began actively to seek out examples. That started me down a road that’s beginning to look like a primrose path.

It all began with *cleave*. As everyone knows, to cleave is to slice or sever, but it also can mean to adhere or stick to, albeit in a somewhat archaic sense. The King James Bible provides one of the more famous instances of the second meaning: “If I do not remember thee,” apostrophizes the speaker to the state of Zion in Psalm 137, “let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.” A related pursuit to collecting Janus words is figuring out how the meanings split apart. *Cleave* derives from the Middle English *cleven*, if that helps (I don’t think it does). But since one sense of the first definition is to split along a natural line or division, perhaps the connection between the opposed meanings is that a cleavage creates distinct adherents. In any event, *cleave* is one of the primary Janus words, prized by all collectors. *Hew* is another often-cited instance, with the commonest meaning of ‘chop’ undercut, so to speak, by another sense: to hew to certain beliefs; i.e., to follow or cling to them. This duplicity that combines cutting and attachment applies to a couple of other Janus words, as well. You can *trim* your hair, but you can also *trim* your dress with blue velvet, if you’re so inclined. Similarly, you can *clip* your nails, or you can *clip* your dog onto a leash.

Another category concerns motion and its opposite, immobility. You can run *fast* as the wind, or you can, perhaps with the aid of two burly guards, hold the prisoner *fast*. *Still* poses another such instance, straddling the senses of ‘not moving’ and ‘b continuous.’ A talented poet can exploit such an ambiguity to great effect. In Yeats’s sonnet “Leda and the Swan,” detailing the rape of a swanherd by Zeus in the guise of a swan, the opening reads: “A sudden blow: the great wings beating still / Above the staggering girl . . .” The image of stasis and impact, of abruptness and repetition, makes for an oxymoron in a phrase: eternity in an instant. Later in the poem, the coexisting contrariety of



fixed versus continuous time will show how one act of sexual violence can lead to the fall of a city.


Looking elsewhere: a few Janus words involve vision and its enfeebled cousins, blindness and occlusion. My favorite is *oversight*, which in most instances means a mistake, as in a bank oversight leading to the loss of funds, but which in the more familiar form *oversee* plainly means to supervise. My own theory as to the linkage is that “seeing over” promotes both a privileged view and the inclination to miss what’s below. Since another amusement with Janus words is to use both senses in one sentence, my private advertising firm (in my dreams) came up with this slogan for a bank: “We carefully oversee your funds so that no oversights occur.”

Screen became a Janus word through the advance of technology. At one time, a screen was simply a flat vertical surface that usually blocked whatever was on the other side; hence, to hide behind a screen. You could even, by extension, screen out noise. Then came cinematography, which projected its effects onto a screen—and eventually *screen* became a verb for showing a film; i.e., to display, the opposite of blocking from sight. It’s odd to think of the cinemas that screen new films in pocket theaters so cramped that the person in front of you can screen your view. Similarly, *scan*, which originally meant to read in full detail, also means to look at quickly or cursorily. My guess as to the appearance of this second meaning dated it to the advent of computers that take in everything rapidly, but the usage seems to predate punch cards, so never mind. In fact, the term goes back to scanning verse, which is not necessarily to take in the full meaning but simply to note the meter: a careful reading but quick and without semantic import.

Other legitimate Janus words include *model* as either the template from which all others are copied (“I am the very model of a modern Major-General,” sang Stanley in Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Pirates of Penzance*) or a mere copy (“Don’t be impressed—it’s only a model,” you might say about the Tower of Pisa that leans in Las Vegas). Or consider *buckle*: to fasten tight or collapse, allowing this intriguingly ambiguous sentence: “She always

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THERE’S MORE. SEE FOR YOURSELF.

wore such cheap footgear that her shoes buckled.” Other examples: when you get a *strike* in baseball, it’s because you failed to *strike* the ball. Also: *let* as allow vs. hinder—really meaning obstacle, as in a “let” in tennis. “The server’s first let let the opponent catch her breath.”

So what’s the problem with Janus words? Well, who ever established the ground rules? For instance, though *cleave* is *cleave* and *hew* is *hew* and the twain shall always meet, with *clip* we’re really dealing with two words: *clip* from the Old Norse *klippa*, ‘to cut’; and *clip* from the Old English *clýppan*, ‘to surround or embrace.’ In an unsigned paragraph in VERBATIM Vol.I/3, Laurence Urdang pointed out this discrepancy but politely left open the question of how to treat it. A purist might insist that a true Janus word be one word with two meanings rather than coincidental orthography, as with the totally disconnected *entrance* for “door” versus *entrance* for “hypnotize.” To take this idea further: does it matter whether the opposed meanings came from the same idea, that a dollar bill, for example, is really a receipt just like the bill it pays? This point is also true of *note*, as in an IOU but also a banknote to pay off the IOU. I’ve also heard *splice* nominated as a Janus word, on the grounds that it combines two opposite operations, cutting and connecting, but, as my Uncle James used to say, “So what?”

One of the problems is that not many commentators have written about what ought to constitute a contranym, though amateur collectors abound. An essay by Zellig Bach called “The Imperative of



Opposites” in VERBATIM Vol.X/4 included a few Latin examples, such as *altus* (‘high’ or ‘deep’), or *sacer* (‘sacred’ or ‘cursed’). I have the pages of Bach’s essay in front of me, but these days, I also have access to electronic sources. Hard copy has given way to the ethereality of the web: try <<http://www.linguistlist.org/issues/6/6-74.html>> or the more idiosyncratic <<http://graphics.lcs.mit.edu/~seth/misc/selfantonyms.html>>. Both provide as many examples as possible, or even more.

These linguaphiles are determined list-makers. It should be a harmless pastime (I know an old man who collects spoonerisms), but in can lead to over-extension. To illustrate by way of analogy: try gathering examples of onomatopoeia; that is, words deliberately formed to imitate their meaning. After amassing instances like *buzz* and *bang*, and maybe *hush* and *whisper*, you start impatiently pressing ill-suited candidates into service. For instance, *fire* may sound incendiary, but its etymology from the Greek *pyr-* has nothing to do with its *fi-* fricative. Eventually, you get into the state of mind (or what I call the hopeful ear) in which you start vehemently arguing that *round* clearly sounds circular. At that point, it’s time to reassess. The same is true of Janus words. So much depends on rigged context.

But try telling that to the list makers. A lot of so-called Janus words encompass one broad meaning that serve several functions, as with, say, *break-down*. To have a nervous breakdown is to fall apart, whereas a chemical breakdown is often used for analysis; i.e., to put something together, but the idea is the same. Another uncertain candidate is *oblige*, as in ‘to do a favor for,’ and *oblige*, as in forcing someone to do something he doesn’t want to do. But if you look closely at “I obliged him by meeting him at the station” and “He was obliged to meet me at the station,” the underlying idea is the same: someone going out of his way. The same is true of *protest*: you can protest a decision or protest your innocence. The reason that *protest* got on the Janus list is the distinction between protesting against or for, but you can just as easily *shout* happily or angrily, and no one’s elevated *shout* to the ranks. The most extreme instance of Janus-pushing is the humble *resign*. Forwarded as a synonym for abdicate or step down, it’s perfectly acceptable. But

wait! Suppose we make it *re-sign*, as in ‘sign up again,’ and therefore ‘enlist,’ the opposite of to quit. At which point I counter the “But wait!” with a related interjection that could almost be a Janus phrase to it: “Wait a minute....”

Go off and *give out*, on the—is it third hand by now?—make for iffy propositions: “The bomb’s set to go off any minute” versus “The guard goes off at three.” Or “The man continued to give out free samples until he finally gave out at midnight.” ‘Explode’ isn’t really the opposite of ‘quit,’ just as ‘handing out’ doesn’t really contradict ‘ceasing.’ Maybe these are slant examples, like slant rhyme. Similarly, you can argue that *pack it in* means ‘as much as possible’ but also ‘give up.’ Their intersection derives from stuffing one’s suitcase to leave. Slants, no question. Or consider this conundrum: *arbitrary* is the opposite of ‘fixed,’ but it’s also in a sense the opposite of ‘random.’ Should it join the club?—a *club* accepts members, but a spiked *club* keeps them away—stop!

Yet other levels of contronyms exist for exploration. A full collection of Janus words might include terms that have shifted to opposite meanings over the years, like *sensational*, from ‘lurid’ to ‘wonderful,’ or *unbelievable*, from ‘ridiculous’ to ‘great’—though they’ve mostly lost their former connotations. Or one could go the opposite route and pick out some new ones. *Cool* used to mean ‘indifferent or negative,’ but for some time has meant ‘fine.’ *Bad*, as any rapper can tell you, is ‘good,’ just as *phat* isn’t ‘fat’ at all (does altered orthography disqualify it?).

What about the opposite of Janus words?—words that ought to be contrary but in fact have the same meaning, such as *unravel* and *ravel*? How about *restive* and *restless*? Or *inflammable* and *flammable*—though *flammable* was coined merely because many figured that *inflammable* meant ‘not capable of bursting into flames,’ so does that count? Whose rules are we using?

Oh, I could go on . . . *Ah, go on*, as my mother used to say, meaning the opposite.

[David Galef, a frequent contributor, teaches at the University of Mississippi.]



HORRIBLE DICTU

Mat Coward
Somerset, Britain.

I'm quite willing to accept that *incredible* has two meanings—'unbelievable' and 'marvellous'—but I do wish journalists would make some attempt to keep the two untangled. Instead, we get ambiguous usages such as this, from a TV listings magazine: "It's all good fun—and, incredibly, based on a true story." Even more worryingly, a British newspaper, celebrating its election as Newspaper of the Year, found a celebrity willing to congratulate it for "How well it coped with these awful events and delivered so many incredible reports from the front line."

Incredibly, this column's War Against Errorism has not yet resulted in total victory. In particular, my attempts to prevent the unnecessary slaughter of millions of trees, by wiping out redundant prepositions and such, is failing miserably. A local paper, covering the refurbishment of a chip shop following a fire, reports that the restaurant "has undergone a complete change inside—it's all tiled out." A TV critic bemoans the fact that modern television personalities are required to provide "signed-off proof that they can laugh at themselves," while an unusually busy politician was forced to resign from a public transport board because "he had become so conflicted out by his paid consultancies."

I could continue off on that track all day, but I am distracted by a newsletter from an authors' rights organisation informing me of changes to copyright regulations, and their consequences for writers. These include a requirement that "Course pack clearances must be rolled into the main blanket licence"—and then, perhaps, slung from one's saddle alongside a rifle and a banjo.

Of course, what irritates me won't necessarily be what irritates you—but if so, you have only yourselves to blame. I am always delighted to hear from readers about their own Horribles, via either of VERBATIM's usual addresses. Paul Cooper of Albert Lea, MN, writes that "My Horrible comes from your article: 'It's not unusual for words . . .'. If it is incorrect to say 'I ain't got nothing' then it is

incorrect to say 'It is not un'!" Mr Cooper, clearly not a Tom Jones fan, concludes: "All double negatives are bad whether or not they are snotty upper class double negatives or not."

I must admit this is one which would never have occurred to me; grammatical education was not much in vogue when I was schooled, and I have no real *issue* with double negatives—provided they do not obscure meaning. If this column were to concern itself with grammatical rules, I suspect I would be exposing myself to charges of hypocrisy in almost every line.

When it comes to sniffing out euphemisms, I feel more confident. The Mayor of London has recently established a London Older People's Strategy Group, marking the arrival in this country of a term which is common in the USA. Are *older* people older than *old* people? Or, perhaps, younger? If not, what do they need that *er* for?

The same city is considering introducing driverless trains on its Underground railways; as a result of new technology, I trust, rather than entirely at the insistence of accountants. Despite being known as "no-person operation trains," they will in fact be staffed by "Train Captains." The use of *Captain* here seems fairly loose, since the Captain's job will be to inspect tickets. You could call him a *Ticket Inspector*, I suppose, if you were a real pedant.

Careless, or deliberately misleading usage can, as readers of this magazine do not need persuading, have significant and concrete effects. In the UK, the Post Office is currently trailing proposals to abolish First Class and Second Class stamps, so that in future "all mail will be First Class." Cynics suspect that all mail will, in fact, be Second Class—but some of us would simply like to know how it is possible to be First Class in a single class system.

[*Mat Coward's web page is <http://hometown.aol.co.uk/matcoward/myhomepage/newletter.html>.*]

SIC! SIC! SIC!

"NFL takes a weekend of silence to mourn those involved in attack" [*cover headline of Packer Report Vol. 29/25, September 22, 2001. Submitted by Joseph Gerharz, Chicago Illinois.*]



CLASSICAL BLATHER

Weird Tools, Improbable Jobs

Nick Humez

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The late singer-songwriter Georges Brassens wrote, and used to sing, his *Ronde des jurons* (“Round of the Oaths”) in whose verses he lamented the passing from Modern Standard French of the swearwords which gave such character to medieval Gallic discourse, followed by a refrain which strung about 30 of them together (*morbleu, diantre, ventre-saint-gris, jarnicoton*, etc.)¹ A similar case might be made in English for the disappearance, or at least marginalization, of quaint names for occupations and implements which have all but disappeared from the mainstream. Such terms are meaningful enough to people still in the trade, but have a way of sounding to the non-initiate as if they were fabricated of whole cloth and the speaker is just having the listener on.

A couple of decades ago we visited a rural tool shop in an out-of-the-way barn in northern New England in the company of our old friend Ross Faneuf, a native of East Concord, NH. We came on a small wrench, about three inches long, with a hole in one end for a hexagonal nut and its handle not flat but offset. “Oh, that’s a snath wrench,” said Ross, and seeing our puzzlement went on to explain that a *snath* (also spelled *snathe*) is a scythe handle, and that wrench is for loosening and tightening the bolts on the two handpieces (called *nibs*) so they could be adjusted to the size and taste of the person doing the scything. *Snath*—the *-th-* is voiced—turns out to be a variant of *snead*, originally ‘bit, slice’ (from Old West Saxon *snæ_an*—the *-æ_*—being pronounced like the *-ath-* in *slather*); as such it is related to both the *snicker-* (cf. both German *schnitten*, ‘snip’ and *schneiden*, ‘cut’) and *-snee* of *snickersnee*²—the *snee* of a scythe being its blade.

The language peculiar to a given trade or occupation is an integral part of its identity, for it both allows practitioners to show that they are insiders, and excludes outsiders, by the ease with which the

former communicate within their specialized universe of discourse. This is notoriously true of the sea, as any novice who has tried to make sense of a dockside conversation between two true salts, or two boatbuilders, can readily attest.³ While some terms of lumbering and forestry have entered mainstream usage (e.g. *logjam*, *logrolling*, and *skid road*) others remain locked within the trade, such as *peavey*—the pole for manipulating logs whose business end combines a steel pikepoint and a C-shaped spike on a hinge—and the *holedad*, a tool with “a long tapering blade on one side for making holes and a short square blade on the other for clearing brush,” according to Lee Bush, who used one during a stint planting trees in a burned-over area of forest in New Mexico’s Sacramento Mountains.⁴

Silversmithing likewise has a wealth of specialized tool names, our favorite being the *nurling iron*.⁵ This is a length of wrought iron or steel with an L-bend on one end to fit into an anvil or stakeholder, and on the other end another L-bend going the other way terminating in a polished knob on which smiths place an object (e.g., a globular teapot) whose sides they wish to bulge out beyond the limits of what can be reached by the face of a *repoussé hammer* (*repoussé* being, as its French name implies, creation of relief on a surface by pushing it out from within; its opposite is *chasing*: working the surface from outside with a set of punches, the inside of the vessel being filled temporarily with pitch to absorb the shock.) When the center of the nurling iron is given a sharp whack with a big mallet, the knob on the end gives the work a smart rabbit-punch from inside on the rebound.

Bellmakers still know (as the rest of us mostly do not) that a *crotal* is a small bell made of a sphere with a ring at the top and a slit at the bottom, struck from within by the rattling around of a small pebble or ball of metal: Ordinary sleighbells are crotals, as are the bells attached to bands on the legs of dancers, whether southwest Indians or English morris teams.⁶ *Crotal* comes from Greek *krotalon* ‘clapper, rattle’ via Latin *crotalum*; it will come as no surprise, then, that rattlesnakes are given the genus name *crotalus* (e.g. *Crotalus adamanteus*,



the diamondback rattler; *adamant* still meant ‘diamond’ in Renaissance English, whence its use today to refer to a metaphoric hardness in human disposition). Another name for a crotal is a *grelot*; now obsolete in English, the word is a direct steal from French, in which it is still current. It is related to the French name for a cricket: *grillon* (originally Latin *gryllus*; compare Italian and Spanish *grillo*), undoubtedly imitative of the insect’s stridulating sound.⁷

Workers in plaster and cement use such tools as a *hawk*—a flat mortar-board on a handle, as distinct from a *hod*, which is V-shaped and used for carrying bricks⁸—and a *bull float*, which is a lightweight (nowadays often magnesium-alloy) pole and arm used for skimming the surface of an area of freshly-poured cement or concrete. (Bone floats were used to similar purpose but, as the name implies, were often made from bone, especially seal- or even whalebone, which could be polished smooth and was naturally oily, thus tending to repel the sticking of stray gobbets of cement, plaster, etc.)

Printing had a rich vocabulary much of which has passed into oblivion with the replacement of linotype and cold-type galleys by computer typesetting. A *type stick* was a hand-held frame used to transport a set of letters from the type case or rack from which they had been taken to the bench on which the galley was lying into which they were to be set (e.g. as a headline); like the *hod*, it was V-shaped, but with one end closed and at the other end a movable arm (sometime on a spring) which would be set to hold the type temporarily in place. When we worked for a newspaper in southern Maine during the 1990s, we noticed that few newcomers had any idea why the story-name field on the computer files for the daily’s articles was called *slug*—another survival from linotype days when each line of type, including the headline for less important items not requiring cold type drawn from the cases (as above), would be a cast slug of pot-metal from the machine, bearing the impression of the brass matrices for each string of letters. And Paul Sampson⁹ reminds us that a *quoin* was ‘an adjustable wedge for holding printing type in place in a chase, which is a frame that holds type in the bed of a press.’

Newspaper help-wanted ads often feature titles otherwise rarely heard outside the trade, baffling the casual reader in search of a job. Bruce Harris Bentzman, writing from northeastern Pennsylvania, tells us he once worked as a *hanker*: “You have surely noticed, when you bought an electrical appliance, that the cord that hangs from it is neatly wound, first in long loops and then in a tight spiral along the middle. My job, all day long, was to hank electrical cable.”

And some weird job titles begin as local jokes that gain general currency by their aptness. One candidate working its way into general parlance is the Jewish term *hassidonder*, which despite its morphology has nothing to do with Hassidism but rather, writes David Weinstock, means “a synagogue usher. His job is to keep order in the congregation, and his cry to the unruly, to force them back into their pews, is ‘Hey! Siddown dere!’ I learned this word from my father, and have used it and been understood.”

Errata/corrigenda:

*O Judas Priest!*¹⁰ Sharp-eyed reader Colyn Phillips apprises us of our transposition of the euphemized Deity and the place of eternal unpleasantness in our fall 2001 column (“Baddabing, Baddabang”): The bumper sticker *actually* reads “Heck is where people go who don’t believe in Gosh,” and not contrariwise. Phillips also expresses surprise at the omission of what seems to him (and to us too, now he points it out) an obvious origin for *baddabing*: the vaudeville rimshot (usually preceded by a short roll on the snare drum) responding to an onstage comedian’s punchline, especially as used ironically when the joke has been a particularly lame one. (Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti represented this sound as *skiddlyboom* in *A Coney Island of the Mind*.) It is possible that the musical gesture of the roll-and-rimshot gesture is a carryover from its naïve-pictorial use by circus bands, the extended roll on the snare drum both accompaniment for and symbolic of the dramatic tension in an acrobat’s or juggler’s manoeuvre whose successful completion is punctuated by a rimshot, a strike of the cymbal, or both.



Notes:

1 *Morbleu* is a transparent euphemism for *mort*-[de-] *Dieu*, ‘God’s death,’ and *diantre* for *diabole*, ‘(the) devil!’ *Ventre-saint-gris* is far more obscure but possibly fills in for *ventre Saint-Marie* ‘(by) Saint Mary’s womb!’ *Jarnicoton* throws a red herring by its queer spelling; but *jarni-* is a phonetic rendering of *je renie*, opener to the “Burgundian oath,” *je renie Dieu* (‘I deny God’)—considered so shocking to medieval ears that it was often euphemized, according to Jan Huizinga (see his classic *Waning of the Middle Ages*, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1954, pp. 162-63) as *je renie des bottes* (‘I deny . . . my boots’). This would suggest that *jarnicoton* (‘I deny cotton’) was probably an alliterative euphemism as well, but for **jarnichrist*, (‘I deny Christ’), an hypothesis bolstered by another of the oaths in the chorus of the Brassens song: *jarnidieu*.

2 Much of my information on *snath/snead* comes from the *Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia* (New York: Century Company, 1895), whose ten volumes are still a gold mine of etymological information, thanks in part to the eminent Yale philologist William Dwight Whitney, who oversaw the project. *Snead* also turns up as *sneed*; but to complicate matters, *sneed* is itself also a regional variant of *snood*, the band or cap formerly worn by Scottish or Irish maidens to signify their unmarried state, whose Old West Saxon ancestor is not *snæ_an* but *snod*, ‘fillet,’ related to Icelandic *snuthr* (‘a twist, twirl’), modern English *snare* and *snotter*, the latter a short figure-eight loop of rope, partway up a mast, whose eye holds the inner end of a sprit extending the top of a sail. On page 5731 of the *Century Dictionary* (just two columns after *snickersnee*) one will find *sniggle*, defined as ‘to fish for eels by thrusting bait into their hiding places.’ Here is a verb that surely has rich possibilities for figurative use in describing modern economics, not to say politics.

3 This is a boon for lexicographers, professional and amateur alike; just as the successful athlete may become a coach (or occasionally, a TV sports anchor) on retirement from active, nautical dictionaries have provided a number of former master sailors an opportunity to demystify the lingo of the water once they are safe on dry land. The standard joke among boatbuilders is that they do not so much retire as run out of money, which may explain why there are far fewer boatbuilders’ lexicons in print to explain such terms as *spiling*—Ross Faneuf defines this as “‘transferring the exact curve of an existing plank onto the next plank so it can be cut to an exact fit’—and *fairing off*, ‘hand-planing a hull so all the curves are clean and smooth,’ which may be a convergence from achieving a “fair” curve and *fay/faying*, ‘pieces that lie together or join.’ A *faying piece* is sometimes employed to improve/cover a rough joint and make it fair. The most physically exhausting job in traditional boatbuilding, as it is done over your head” (personal e-mail, 9 March 2002).

4 Bush e-mailed us, when we inquired if it rhymed with Spanish *soledad* or (almost) with American English polecat, that *holedad* “is a decidedly two syllable word. My spelling of it is arbitrary because I learned it in the rustic conditions of a tree planting camp . . . and never saw it written down. The Texans among us pronounced it without any trace of an *L* and would start the *D* of *-dad* while still stretching out the *-oe-* as in *hoe*. It rhymes more with *crawdad* than *polecat*.” An alternate name for this tool, Bush says, is *rhent*.

5 Nowadays more frequently referred to as a *snarling iron*. For the use of this ingenious tool, including an excellent illustration by Dorothy Briggs, see Henry Kaufmann, *The Colonial Silversmith*, Camden, NJ: Thomas Nelson, 1969, pp. 82–83. The *nurling iron* should not be confused with a *knurling iron*, which, Faneuf explains, is “used to knurl a piece of turned work, that raised diamond pattern about 1/32” you see occasionally to make a tool nonskid. It consisted of two hardened steel wheels, each with a pattern of ridges just like a single-cut file, going the opposite way on each wheel. They are mounted in a pivoting appliance one above the other, in a bar which pits into the tool rest of a lathe. You feed it into the work so both wheels bite, then traverse the carriage and each wheel cuts (or more properly upsets) one half of the pattern.”

6 Whence the expression, “Pull the other one, it’s got bells on it.” According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the *morris* of morris dancing is from Middle English *moreys*, from French *morois*, both meaning ‘Moorish.’ Crotals are charmingly discussed (and nicely illustrated) in Eric Hatch and Eric Sloane, *The Little Book of Bells*, New York: Hawthorn, 1964, p. 15.

7 According to the *Petit Larousse*, the expression *attacher un grelot* means ‘to take the initiative,’ much as we might say *bell the cat*.

8 I am indebted to my former student, David Gubkin, for this information. It is this variety of *hawk*, rather than the avian raptor, which turns up in the expression *can’t tell a hawk from a handsaw*. Hod-carrying, as every fan of Irish music knows, was the occupation of Tim Finnegan, the hapless laborer whose fall was rendered retroactively non-lethal by an accidental spillage of whiskey on his shrouded body in the song “Finnegan’s Wake.”

9 Author of “Airspeak,” VERBATIM XXIV/1 (Winter 1999), pp. 8–9.

10 The favorite expletive of our late friend Charles A. Haynes, Jr., a deacon of Boston’s Old South Church before retirement to his home parish in Ellsworth, Maine.





As The Word Turns

Some Goode Olde Englishe Dirte

Barry Baldwin
Calgary, Alberta

The other side of Samuel Johnson's Latinate lexical coin shines in captain Francis Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785), edited 1931 most appropriately by Eric Partridge, compiler of the *Dictionary of Underworld Slang* (1950) and sundry similar works.

Grose (c. 1731–12 May 1791—he choked to death at dinner) was well placed to be a connoisseur of coprolalia: friend of Robbie Burns, a military man, and (so his 19th century memorialist John Camden Hotten, himself a lexicographer, records) “the greatest joker and porter-drinker of his day,” especially visible in the Holborn King's Arms and Leicester Square Feathers Tavern, also in nocturnal low-life slumming.

In what follows, the quoted definitions are Grose's own; my scholia follow in parentheses; despite Grose being in its bibliography, most of these meanings are not in the *OED* (2nd ed. 1989).

Apart from *c**t* (sic), ‘a nasty name for a nasty thing,’ Grose offers a rich vaginal catalogue of synonyms for what he generally calls ‘a woman's privities,’ including:

bite “The cull wapt the mort's bite; the fellow enjoyed the wench heartily.” (cp. French *bite* = Penis)

Carvel's ring (a variant too long to quote on Boccaccio's Putting the Devil in Hell)

cauliflower (cf. the now mild French endearment ‘Mon Chou’)

cock-alley or *cock-lane* (Shakespeare and company often pun on ‘Cock’; Cock Lane was an actual 18th Century London address)

commodity (also punned on by Elizabethans)

crinkum-crankum (properly, any mechanical device or toy—interesting moment in the history of technology; cf. the sexual play on clock-winding in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*)

dumb glutton (cf. *dumb watch* = ‘a venereal bubo’); these may add point to the Beaumont & Fletcher title *Dumb Wife of Cheapside*—see John

Aubrey's *Brief Lives* for these playwrights' colourful sex lives)

madge (transferred into 19th Century American slang—Partridge; cf. *madge-cull* = ‘passive homosexual,’ also the modern Northern English *nadge* = ‘fuck’)

man trap (about as obvious as it gets)

mouse trap (did Agatha Christie know this?)

muff (no sign of American *muff diver*; my cue to perpetuate Canadian columnist Mark Steyn's description of Ellen Degeneres and Anne Hecht as “Muff Divas”)

money ‘Commonly applied to little children’ (very proto-Marxist! And a fresh nuance for the Money song in *Cabaret*? Cf. Victorian *spend* = ‘come to orgasm’)

monosyllable (see Partridge's long note on this and cognate euphemisms, the conversational equivalent to a printed blank such as at the end of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, where Grose reports the view that the word *c**t* is to be understood)

old hat “Because frequently felt.” (not quite the modern meaning! Is this early rhyming Cockney slang, *old hat* = ‘twat’? Cf. the Americanisms *hat rack* = ‘prostitute,’ *hat & cap* = ‘gonorrhoea’)

Tipperary fortune ‘Said of Irish women without fortune.’ (Grose only hints at the anatomical sense in the rest of his gloss; other sources confirm its versatility = ‘bottom, breasts, vagina’)

Now we tackle the gentlemen, *tackle* being the operative word—‘a man's genitals.’ This sense survives in British argot—in my schooldays we more prudishly said *wedding tackle*.

Grose falls short of the 52 penile synonyms inventoried in Gioacchino Belli's (1791-1863) Roman dialect sonnet, and does not match his own vaginal variety. No doubt an imbalance resulting from a man-made dictionary: 18th century women were equally borborological, *billingsgate* being already equated with fishwomens' foul language.

Though used in a 1737 Rabelais translation, and as old as Shakespeare's Henry V, *cock* does not have a separate entry, but the anatomical sense is acknowledged under *cock alley/lane* (‘the private parts of a woman’) and such other spin-offs as *cock bawd*, ‘a male keeper of a bawdy house.’ At the risk of disappointing East Londoners, there seems no



connection with *Cockney*.

Prick, whose written history goes back to 1592, is here, briskly defined—'the virile member'—and printed in full, though Grose reaches for his asterisks when explaining the *beggar's benison* ('May your ***** and purse never fail you') and *gobble p-k*, 'a rampant, lustful woman.'

Some expressions were no doubt more literary than everyday—how many people really referred to their own or another man's equipment (not a Grose term) by the Latinate *arbor vitae*?

Pego, a favourite with Victorian pornography, is already established. *Plug tail* and *whore pipe* are crudely obvious. Modern British *John Thomas* started out as *man Thomas*. I find it hard to divorce *sugar stick* from The Archies' *Sugar Sugar* hit, or *silent flute* from Duke Ellington's definition of *clarinet*—'an ill woodwind that nobody blows good.' More macho types will have laid claim to possession of a *lobcock* 'a large relaxed penis' than to be *double-jugged* or *hopper-arsed*, 'having large projecting buttocks.'

Testicular Terminology: *bawbels* (also = *trinkets*, hence a fellow's jewels); *gingambobs* or *thingambobs* (was Gracie Fields aware of this?); *nutmegs* (now an English soccer verb—do the players know their Grose?—and how will this play in Connecticut?); *tallyways* or *tarrywags* (= 'penis' in the singular); *twiddle diddles* (sounds painful); *whirlygigs* (also slang for the pillory).

How many were *rantallions*?—'One whose scrotum is so relaxed as to be longer than his penis,' a condition also known as the *whiffles*, a sense missed in Ivor Brown's *Chosen Words* (1955).

Despite the Sex Pistols, basic *ballocks* or *bollocks* is here, along with *cods*, both applied to Anglican clergy (all Christian denominations take a pasting in Grose—another article there), delightfully coupled thus: "A rude fellow meeting a curate, mistook him for the rector, and accosted him with the vulgar appellation of *boll-cks* the rector. No, Sir, answered he; only *cods* the curate, at your service."

Grose will recur. Next time, though, we enjoy the gorgeous prose of 17th century biographer John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, especially that of Oxford don Ralph Kettle who—unlike modern educationalists—much enriched the English tongue.

Epithets: the Great, the Good, the Golden-tongued and the Terrible

Susan Elkin
Sittingbourne, Kent

Remember Fluellen in Henry V? That garrulous, unconsciously funny, but unshakeably loyal Welshman is distressed by the French soldiers having sneaked into the English camp during the battle of Agincourt. "Expressly against the law of arms." The French have killed the English boys who had been guarding the luggage. Then Fluellen starts to sing Henry's praises for promptly responding to the slaughter with a parallel atrocity.

Given to wordy, stereotypically Welsh, digression and often forgetful in his excitement, Fluellen suddenly asks Gower his companion, apparently apropos of nothing: "What call you the town's name where Alexander the Pig was born?" The joke is that in the heat of his earnestness Fluellen has got the wrong epithet for Alexander. And in Fluellen's sing-song Welsh accent, which Shakespeare captures so perfectly, the word *big* sounds like *pig* which actually looks funnier written down than it usually sounds in the theatre.

"Alexander the Great," protests Gower dryly. "What I pray you" Fluellen demands, "Is not pig great? The pig, or the great, or the mighty, or the huge, or the magnanimous, are all one reckonings, save the phrase is a little variations."

The point, of course, is that when someone has acquired an epithet—as Alexander the Great did—many centuries ago, you can't suddenly paraphrase it. An epithet is for ever and it has to be right. But once they become an integral part of someone's name epithets are, when you think about it, strange things. It's like having you entire life and achievements summed up in a single word. You are reduced to a one-word epitaph or obituary—probably while you're still alive.

Take *Ivan the Terrible*, Tsar Ivan IV of Russia (1533–84). His one-word memorial reminds us that he was infamous for his appalling cruelties although he was also a man of great energy. That word *terri-*



ble, which is about all most of us know about him, is actually misleading. In Russian he is *Ivan Grozny* which is closer in meaning to *Ivan the Awesome*.

Or what about *Philip the Amorous*? He was King of France from 1060–1108. His claim to fame is pretty timeless. He traded in his wife for a newer model. He abandoned Bertha, his Queen, and took off amorously with Berstada, wife of the Fulk of Anjou.

Then there was *Ethelred the Unready* (986–1016) who was King of England from 978. He has been judged for over a millennium for his lack of foresight. First he tried to buy off Danish invaders. Then in 1002 he ordered a massacre of Danish settlers which provoked an invasion by Swyen I of Denmark and led to a long war. The epithet posterity has attached to Ethelred seems a bit harsh since he was only a babe in arms when he became king (the result of someone murdering his half brother) and died before he was 30. What chance did he have to learn readiness?

Many epithets are adjectival, with the adjective rather oddly preceded by the definite article as in Frederick (or *Peter*, *Catherine*—and several basket ball teams of others) *the Great*. Then there's *Alphonso the Brave*, *William the Silent*, *Harper the Blind* or—delightfully—*St Peter the Golden-tongued*. This last, pleasant sounding chap was Archbishop of Ravenna. He died in about 450 A.D.

Happily history has also ushered through its pages a large number of people it chooses to remember for their goodness. There was, for example, *Haco the Good*, King of Norway (920–961) and *Philip the Good*, Duke of Burgundy in the fifteenth century. More recently Queen Victoria's beloved husband, who died of cholera in 1861, is often referred to as *Albert the Good*.

Some other epithets are based on nouns. Back briefly to Shakespeare. There's a very nasty, but horribly plausible, little scene in *Julius Caesar* when an ugly mob turns on and strings up a man called Cinna. It's a case of mistaken identity. "I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet" the poor man cries desperately. "I am not Cinna the conspirator." But the crowd has muddled its epithets and nothing can save the unfortunate Cinna. Something similar, although less serious because it leads only

to temporary imprisonment happens to *Pompey the Bawd* in the witch-hunting world of Vienna in *Measure for Measure*.

Shakespeare neatly makes the point that an epithet's function is to distinguish the holder from others with the same name. We mustn't confuse *Mary the Virgin* with *Mary Magdalene* for example. Neither must we muddle *Charles the Martyr* (Charles I of England executed by his subjects in 1649) with *Charles the Fat*, *Charles the Simple*, *Charles the Fair*, *Charles the Foolish*, *Charles the Affable* and *Charles the Bold* who were all kings of France between 870 and 1477.

Away from the annals of fiction and drama, in the real life of history, is Thomas Cromwell, *Maul of Monks*. He's a good (if not exactly admirable) example of a distinctive noun-based epithet which alliteratively sums up in three words the action of the man who carried out Henry VIII's vicious and greedy 1530s plan to destroy the monasteries of England and drive out the monks.

How much nicer to be remembered as *Malcolm the Great Head* as Malcolm II, King of Scotland 1057–93 is. Sometimes he's called *Malcolm Canmore* which comes from the Gaelic *ceannmore* meaning—guess what—'great head.'

Henry the Navigator sounds like a decently constructive sort of chap too. He was a Portuguese prince who sailed here and there in the fifteenth century and was instrumental in the discovery of the Madeiras and the European exploration of the Guinea coast of Africa. He set up an observatory and a training school.

Vlad the Impaler is a mysterious figure. He was a fifteenth century Romanian Prince with brutal—although probably not vampirish—habits. Long seen as the model for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Vlad has, it seems, been the victim of five centuries of unfairly bad press. And most scholars now think the connection between Vlad and Bram Stoker's fictional *Dracula* (1897) is pretty spurious.

Religion, folklore and legend have lots of characters who are identified in the shorthand of noun-based epithets, too. Take the four chaps named James in the New Testament. They have to be epithetically distinguished as *James, the son of Zebedee*, *James the son of Alphaeus*, *James father of*



the apostle Judas and James the brother of Jesus. Beyond the Bible are *Jack the Giant Killer*, *Schwanda the Bagpiper* and *Billy the Kid*.

Then there are fictional phenomena like *Dennis the Menace* and *Beryl the Peril*. They are characters in the long running UK children's comic paper *The Beano*. If they ever had surnames they've long since been forgotten in favour of their epithets.

If you're a Welshman (or woman) or if your forebears were Welsh, you are very likely to be called *Jones*—unless you're a *Rhys*, an *Evans* or a *Griffiths*. Nearly nine pages of the 2002 Cardiff phone book are devoted to *Joneses* (*Jones* means nothing more exotic than 'son of John' and it's unclear why Johns should have been so thick on the ground in Wales). Traditionally the several *Joneses* in any Welsh village needed some sort of personalising epithet applied in the musically inflected accent of the province. Handles such as *Jones the Post*, *Jones the Van* and *Jones the School* are commonplace.

When I was a child my father, unsurprisingly, knew several men named Jim. One was a gas-fitter by trade who did several evening jobs for us—installing fires, cookers and so on. My father dubbed him *Jim the Gas* and cheerfully addressed him as such. The man seemed to quite like his epithet.

Epithets—via Latin from the Greek *epithitos* 'added'—often take other forms dispensing with the central definite article. In the case of *Capability Brown*—eighteenth century English landscape gardener whose real given name was Lancelot—it's more than a nickname. His epithet *Capability* is a character description. More recently epithets such as *Ol' Blue Eyes* and the *Crooner* got attached to Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby respectively. In both cases the epithet is a summary of the charm and attraction of the man.

George III—who famously 'lost' the American colonies in 1763—is known as *Farmer George* because, when he wasn't inflaming the Americans to revolution with his unreasonable behaviour, he was a keen and progressive farmer with extensive agricultural holdings.

On the subject of that "old, mad, blind, despised and dying king" as Shelley described

George III it is worth pointing out that kings and queens since time immemorial have been assigned numbers as a form of epithet to distinguish them from each other, since strings of them seem routinely to get the same given name. Alan Bennett's wonderful play *The Madness of George III* had to be retitled *The Madness of King George* when it was filmed in 1995. Rumour had it that it was feared that some American moviegoers might not understand the numerical epithets of English monarchs and assume that this was the third film in some kind of series.

Epithets might be an over simplification but nomenclature such as *Attila the Hun*, *Robert the Devil* or *Richard the Lionheart* certainly add a bit of spice to history. Fluellen knew that. So did Shakespeare.

[Susan Elkin is a frequent contributor to VERBATIM. Her last contribution was "Out of the Mouths of . . . Twins" in XXVI/2 (Spring 2001).]

EPISTOLA

Re: Favorite Word Contest

Facetiously, I decided to enter your contest, and contemplated providing a word that contained all the vowels, such as "antiseriously." (Suspect.) Then, abstemiously, I decided to eschew such juicy ovrds and endeavor to find a word that contained each vowel only once, and in alphabetical order—but separated here and there by consonants.

Alas, the job proved to be too difficult, and I had to give up, but it was fun trying.

Sincerely,

Dudley F. Church
Bend, Oregon

SIC! SIC! SIC!

Seen on a bottle of mineral water: "Purified using naturally occurring ceramic earths, coconut and anthracite carbons, ion exchange and ultra-violet light, this bottle contains water that has a clarity and taste that are unbeatable." [Submitted by Tony Hall, Aylesbury. "Seems a lot of trouble to go to, just to make a bottle . . ."]



Colourful Language

Martin Gani
Como, Italy

Colours have enabled many languages to create picturesque metaphors and logic defying expressions. However, every hue does not necessarily convey the same meaning(s) in every language.

Most Europeans tend to turn green with envy but not the French who distinguish themselves from the rest by assuming a yellow tint and becoming *jaune d'envie*. Germans maintain their reputation for precision by making a distinction between the almost innocuous green with envy, and the near pathological case of yellow with jealousy, *gelb vor Eifersucht werden*. The Swedes use the compound *svartsjuk* (literally 'black ill') to describe serious jealousy. In Japan *to have a black stomach* (*hara guroi*) goes much beyond envy and jealousy; it means you are wicked. In Turkey *black* (*siyah*) is an extremely dangerous black market (or *karaborsa*) commodity—opium.

When it comes to anger, red is naturally popular but again the French stand out from the crowd by also changing into blue, *dans une colère bleue*. They may use remarkable skill to contain their anger by limiting themselves to *jetez un regard noir* 'throwing a black look' rather than using offensive language and then being forced to apologise with: "pardon my French." The Italians and Germans show a darker side of themselves by turning black when they lose their temper; hence they are, *nero di rabbia*, and *sich schwarz argern* respectively. In another nuance, Germans are capable of turning their interlocutor white with anger, *zur weissgluht bringen*. In Japan it is a tough job to discern an angry, excited or frightened individual who will turn red or *aka* when livid but also *aka* if flushed with excitement; if he or she assumes a blue colour *aoku naru* only then can we say our subject is frightened. The Japanese are positive that somebody is truly terrified if in addition to turning blue-faced they release an accompanying *kiroi koi* 'a yellow scream.' Colour-coding a voice is not exclusive to the land of the rising red sun; in Italy a 'white voice,' *voce bianca* describes a falsetto timbre.

Entertainment in general has inspired various colour associations. In France, drunkenness is accurately graded. If you're just tipsy, you're *gris* 'grey.' As the inebriation process progresses, the colour, unsurprisingly, deepens—*etre noir* 'to be black' is to be 'drunk as a lord,' to describe the same state the Germans use blue—*blau werden*. The Spaniards encourage someone to tuck into their food with *darse un verde*, 'give oneself a green,' the Italians read *un giallo* 'a yellow,' denoting a detective story or *un romanzo rosa* 'a pink novel' which is none other than a romantic tale where the handsome (and hopefully wealthy) male protagonist is a *principe azzurro* 'blue prince.' English speakers may listen to the *blues* when they are blue (hopefully this condition is endured once in a blue moon), and watch *blue movies*. For Italians pornographic movies are 'red-light films' *film a luci rosse*. The Spanish-speakers invite off-colour stories when they ask for *chiste verde* 'green [dirty] jokes,' an ageing Don Juan is called *viejo verde* 'old green' whereas a widow with the same inclinations is branded with the appellation *viuda verde*.

The Spaniards, and their Latin American brothers-in-language, are not obsessed with green; other colours also have their place in society. Press sensationalism, perfectly exemplified by the British tabloids, is called *ammarillismo* 'yellowism'. (The English version is *yellow journalism*.) If the article is written by a mediocre writer he or she will be a *gris* 'grey' journalist. Once the editor gets rid of the untalented scribe, the staff may drink to it in the Russian style downing their sangria, or another sufficiently alcohol steeped beverage, in one go by toasting not *bottoms up!* but *fondo blanco* 'white bottom.'

We shall never know who first came up with the *white lie*, an obviously useful, even necessary, abstraction in the English-speaking world, bearing in mind no other major language felt the need to colour a lie. But there is at least one exception, in the rare case of a Japanese momentarily losing subtle communication skills, as when *caught red-handed*, may attempt to let loose *a red herring* and tell a 'bright red lie' *makkana uso* which in plain language is a downright fib. Just as bizarrely the French felt it necessary to paint a laughter yellow



rire jaune to depict a suppressed chuckle, the Italians opt for green, *ridere verde*, for the same, stifled merry sound.

Money matters have also prompted coloured utterances, when the Italians are short of cash they are *al verde* ‘in the green’ but the Swedes are green when they are wealthy: *vara pa gron kvist* ‘rich as green.’ The Turks are black and white in their intent when they say, *ak akçe kara gán içindir* ‘white money [savings] is for a black day.’ Yellow boots must be (or have been) awfully ‘in’ in Turkey, if some Tom, Dick or Harry attempts to rob their hard-earned white money, Turks describe this average person as a *sari çizmeli Mehmet a’á* ‘Mr. Mehmet in yellow boots.’ Turks, as if to prove their fondness for things black or white (there are in fact two words for ‘black,’ *kara* and *siyah*, and two for ‘white,’ *ak* and *beyaz*), they named the two seas that surround them *Kara Deniz* (the Black Sea) and *Ak Deniz* ‘white sea’ (what the rest of us know as the Mediterranean). Neither the Italians nor Germans believe in handshake deals or gentlemen’s agreements: to formally seal and sign a contract they like to ‘put black on white,’ *nero su bianco* or *schwarz auf weiss niederschreiben*. One colour most people seem to agree about is that when one’s bank account is *in the red* one has no money and there is no way round it, whatever one’s colour may be.

[*Martin Gani has written, and still does, for a number of travel and general interest publications ranging from The European and Take a Break in the UK to World & I, Italian America, and France Today in the US.*]



SIC! SIC! SIC!

“They [evolutionists] say science is based on the ability to verify or falsify findings through experimentation and observation.” [*spoken by Bill Rice of Cleveland’s WCPN Radio, on All Things Considered, National Public Radio, March 12, 2002.*]

Animal Lamina

Adrian Room
Lincolnshire

It was while I was reading about the dog-gods of ancient Egypt that I realized the appropriateness of the term: a dog that was also a god, a dog that was not only an animal with four legs, a tail, and a bark, but an animal that possessed an additional layer or lamina as a deity. *Dog as god*, one word reversing the other. The descriptive, moreover, equally applies to the pet dog, who is a sort of domestic god. Do we not love and revere our dogs?

I then stopped to consider. Was there any other animal whose name revealed some appropriate attribute or meaning if one reversed it? The results surprised me. Allowing for a loose reversal, with pronunciation taking precedence over spelling, many names answered.

The cat, for example, may be a soft and sleepy household pet, but it is also, and especially in its wild state, a combative creature. The *cat* is an *attacker*, that *tacks* on to its prey (as a bird or mouse) or its foe (as a dog or another cat). But also, in home mode, the *cat* will lovingly *attach* itself to its master or mistress. The *cat* is thus both *attacker* and *attacher*.

I warmed to my theme. How about some farm animals? The *cow*, if you reverse her name, is a *woc*. And what is that? The answer is *work*. The cow is kept purely for her ability to work as a provider of food (meat), drink (milk), and clothing (hide). Even her horns and hooves can be used to make glue. The same *woc* also represents the root of the cow’s name in some other languages such as Latin and Italian *vacca*, French *vache*, and Spanish *vaca*.

How about the *horse*? A horse is much more than just a farm animal. It is a courser and a charger, and the animal above all others which one mounts and rides. The reversal of its name is essentially expressed in *sore*, since the rider seeks to better his opponent, to make him literally or mentally *sore*, while he in turn may well become (saddle) *sore* in the process.

A *sheep* is regarded as a mild and gentle animal, symbolizing peace. The *lamb* that is its young is a



small creature (ignoring the silent *b* on the first word and soft *s* on the second). It also so happens that the Armenian word for a sheep is *mal*.

Out in the country, but certainly not on the farm, are the *fox* and the *wolf*. The fox is noted for his cunning, and will mock or *scoff* at those whom he has outwitted. He will also *scoff* his food or the prey he has killed. The *wolf* hunts in packs, which run or *flow* over the plains. The *mouse*, similarly, is usually found in nests or families that *swarm* or overrun a building. The *rat* is associated with water (*river rat*, *water rat*, *drowned rat*), and so is a sailor or *tar*, even living on ships. The *mole* lives underground, tunneling through the soft earth or *loam*.

How about the big cats, the zoo animals? The *lion* reverses his name as a word close to *noel* or *nowel*, otherwise Christmas. He is the king of beasts, lord over all, just as Christmas is the king of feasts, when the Lord was born (The lion in fact features in Christian imagery, and readers of C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* books will recall the magnificent lion Aslan as a Christ-figure.) The *tiger* is almost equally exalted, and his name reversed is Latin *regit*, 'he rules.' The *tigress*, on the same lines, reverses as *surgit*, 'she rises.'

The *monkey* and the *donkey* have somewhat similar names which at first sight seem to produce meaningless reversals, *yeknom* and *yeknod*. But the monkey can be seen to be *ye gnome*, with old English *ye* ('the'). The monkey resembles a miniature human being, or gnome. He is also traditionally wise (Greek *gnome*, 'thought,' 'opinion'). The donkey is also wise, and is thus the (*ye*) one who *knowed*, a rustic dialect word for a rustic animal. The reversal of the name also reveals *nod*, the animal's characteristic head movement.

The hidden lamina possessed by the names of animals is also present for some of the more exotic types, even those with non-English names. Thus the *gnu* is an *ungulate*, or hoofed animal. It is also a type of antelope, as is the *dik-dik*, whose reversed name gives *kid*, the young of a goat, an animal to which antelopes are closely related. The *goat* itself is famous for its use as an army mascot, when it is draped with the regimental colors in the manner of the decorated *toga* worn by a victorious Roman emperor in a triumphal procession.

There are more, but I am running out of space. However, I cannot end without mentioning the birds, and as exemplar select the *swan*, whose reversed name reveals Greek *naus*, 'ship.' Who has not enjoyed the metaphor, and visualized the swan as a stately ship that sails along? The imagery is not uncommon in poetry: "I have seen old ships sail like swans asleep" (James Elroy Flecker, *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*).

Readers will probably have appreciated the title of this article, which shows that many an *animal* has its *lamina*, the extra layer or meaning that lies hidden in the reversal of its name.

[Author note TK]



BIBLIOGRAPHIA

Cattus Petasatus. The Cat in the Hat in Latin., by Jennifer and Terrence Tunberg. Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., October 2000. 75 pp. ISBN: 086516472X, US\$16.95

For the student and teacher of Classics alike, the great enemy in the first years is boredom. In contrast to living languages, the instructor cannot vary her approach with lively discussions of culture, contemporary issues, and—most importantly—cannot reinforce the forms and syntax of the language through natural oral communication. Since speaking these languages is both difficult and artificial, students are denied the exhilaration of true communication, and must often adjust their personal learning style to the needs of a dead, highly inflected language in which, generally speaking, only the most noteworthy and complex texts have survived. This usually means memorizing declensions and drilling conjugations. Books that attempt to offer classical culture often do so in the form of dry supplementary essays. At the same time, enrollment in Latin courses by Middle School students has increased 100 percent since 1985.

Enter Jennifer and Terrence Tunbergs' Latin translation of Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat*, titled *Cattus Petasatus* ('the cat in a traveling cap,' the



normal Latin word for *cat* is *feles*, from which we derive *feline*). Like the two children of the story sitting drearily indoors, Classics students, particularly the young, will be delighted by the character and antics of the Cattus. Jennifer and Terrence Tunberg, both at the University of Kentucky, Lexington and specialists in medieval Latin, have previously translated *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. For *The Cat in the Hat*, they chose an octosyllabic trochaic verse form that was popular for drinking songs in the Middle Ages (the book includes a detailed note on this, with examples from medieval poetry). Their vocabulary is generally classical. The result is a clever introduction to the sounds and rhythm of the (late) Latin language. You may recall that the story begins:

The sun did not shine.

It was too wet to play.

So we sat in the house

All that cold, cold, wet day.

Now, even if you don't know Latin, read aloud how the Tunbergs render this. Accent every other syllable, beginning with the first:

Imber totum diem fluit

Urceatim semper pluit.

Taedet intus nos manere:

Numquam potest sol splendere

Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel) wrote the book for beginning readers using a vocabulary of 223 words (by my count, the Latin version employs about 482 words, and includes a glossary). The offbeat nature of the book and general ease of its vocabulary makes it perfect for sight reading with beginning Latin students.

The book includes the original illustrations by Geisel, with two modifications. The graphic *Bump!* on page 5, heard by the children in herald of the Cat's arrival, has become *Frrrrragorrrr!* (Literally 'Noise, din!' but a great choice as the English *bump* is not onomatopoeic either—Geisel's genius is to bring the delight of the words themselves to young readers, even in his illustrations.) It's all here: the naysaying fish who, in the original, is horrified by a game that the Cat calls "UP-UP-UP with a fish" still finds himself precariously balanced in his glass bowl at the tip of an umbrella. In this episode the Latin-speaking Cattus still made me laugh aloud by crying out *Piscis, ecce, nunc ASCENDIT!* The unforget-

table and destructive Thing One and Thing Two appear as Maius and Minus.

Finally, the Latin text of the Tunbergs has a small surprise in store for readers. As a child I was always amazed by the wonderful machine that appears at the end of the story (p. 57)—a typical Seussian contraption with robotic arms and a whimsical industrial design. In the original, this vehicle, which cleans up the house and removes all traces of the Cat's mayhem just as Mother is about to arrive, is illustrated but not mentioned in the text. The Tunbergs have described for us in Latin the many hands coming forth from this *raeda*, which the glossary translates appropriately as 'car.' *Raeda* is a word that came into Latin from Celtic; Julius Caesar uses it to describe a four-wheeled traveling chariot. Students will no doubt be delighted to learn that the Cattus employs a means of transportation related at least etymologically to the vehicles of the savage warriors of Gaul.

We should look forward to the Tunbergs' next installment of the Corpus Seussius. Perhaps it might be *Hortensius Hears a Who?*

—Brian Deimling



INTER ALIA

(From The [London] Times, March 13, 2002):

Sir, It is good to be reminded of the ellipsis (letter, March 12; see also letters, March 6, 8 and 9). "He done good" is not ungrammatical after all. It is an ellipsis, standing for "He (has) done (that which is) good".

Master the ellipsis, and you will never speak ungrammatical.

Yours sincerely,
MILLETT,
House of Lords.
March 12.



OBITER DICTA

Dog-Lime Days

Jerome Betts
Torquay, Devon

Anne Born's book *The Torbay Towns* (Phillimore 1989) quotes from a Devon geologist's mock-epitaph of 1869. One stanza begins: "Here rests his head on balls of *album graecum*,". This substance, the dry chalk-like dung of dogs used in medicine, rhymed with 'seek 'em' in the Latin pronunciation of the time. The Oxford Word and Language Service has supplied an entry in the *OED Additions Series* Vol. 3 (1997) which gives three further citations of *album graecum* between 1607 and 1877 and reveals it could also be applied to hyena-droppings.

Another important use for the astringent material was in tanning, under the name *pure*, also written as *puer* or *pewer*. It 'purified', 'pured' or scoured hair and grease from goatskins. Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) describes the capital's *pure-finders* who sold buckets of dog dung to the Bermondsey tanneries. Mayhew noted that some yards preferred "the dark moist quality" and others the "limy-looking sort."

Is this white weather-dried variety what the Rutherford New Jersey author William Carlos Williams had in mind in his poem *Pastoral* of 1917? He mentions "the old man who goes about/ gathering dog-lime." No British or American dictionary seems to include *dog-lime*. Was it a coinage by William Carlos Williams or an unrecorded New Jerseyism? It is unlikely to exist today, as the canine contribution to tanning and therapy is over, unless you include the PAT dogs who visit hospitals to cheer up patients.

[Jerome Betts comes from Herefordshire, but for the past 30 years has taught EFL at South Devon College in Torquay. He has contributed verse and articles to a wide range of UK magazines, from Shooting Times to English Today.]



EPISTOLAE

Dear Ms. McKean: [To you from me]:

Perhaps the grammatical mavens among VERBATIM readers can explain what I consider an extremely vexing writing style in *The New York Times*. Invariably, when discussing a change over time, a *Times* journalist states it in the order: "to x from y." For example: "In the last ten years salaries have changed to \$10 an hour from \$8.50." Or, "The population center has migrated to the southeast from the northeast."

I find this extremely disconcerting. I am completely programmed to consider change chronologically, from the past to the present, not to the present from the past. And when an article is discussing percentage changes over time, I actually have to stop and think through what the writer is implying, whether 'decreasing to' or 'increasing to' from 'the past amount.' Am I the only person who finds this disconcerting and unintuitive?

Consider how such a policy rewrites the following:

To Eternity From Here

To nuts from soup.

" . . . to shining sea from sea"

" . . . to the home of the brave from the land of the free"

"To earth from earth, to ashes from ashes, to dust from dust . . ."

"Creeps in this petty pace to the last syllable of record time to day from day . . ."

Does this disturb anyone else???

Sincerely,

Elizabeth R. Cardman

Urbana, Illinois

[These could be called examples of hysteron proteron (also called praeposteratio or "the cart before the horse"), the reversal of a causal, logical, or chronological sequence. This is usually only recommended for the in media res approach to dramatic or narrative writing, so I have no idea why it's being used in these rather pedestrian surroundings in *The New York Times*. Perhaps the writers are bored?—Ed.]



In note that in [VERBATIM XXVI/3], page 22, there is a list of alleged “ghost-words,” including “*rimple*, vt. to wrinkle.” In fact, *rimple* is a perfectly good word in its own right, though now obsolete.

In the publication by my grandfather, W. W. Skeat, “A Student’s Pastime,” a selection of the notes he contributed to “Notes and Queries” (Oxford University Press, 1896), p. 143, he quotes a line by the poet George Crabbe, “As gilds the moon the rimpling of the brooks.” Note that, as my grandfather indignantly noted, *rimpling* was later altered by Crabbe’s own son to the commonplace *riffling*.

As regards *sammy* in the same list. This is surely the same as *shammy* [leather], i.e. ‘wash-leather,’ and not a ghost word.

With all good wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Theodore Skeat



RE: VERBATIM XXVI/4 (Autumn 2001)
“Baddabing, Baddabang” note 22 on “jake brake.”

[A jake brake is a] brake system for semis, large tractor-trailer vehicles. The system is made by Jacobs Vehicle Systems and uses engine compression as an assist to regular service brakes. The operation can be quite noisy and some cities or areas have ordinances against their use in heavily populated places.

Tom S. Reyenga
Del City, Oklahoma



Yesterday I purchased a copy of the VERBATIM book. This morning I learned about pleonasties. This afternoon I caught Bill Gates on *cnn.com* discussing the AIDS epidemic problem. It’s a shame he didn’t mention the non-problematic AIDS epidemic.

Thanks for the fun,
JP Meyer

BIBLIOGRAPHIA

The Dictionary of Wordplay, by Dave Morice. Teachers and Writers Collaborative, ISBN: 0-915924-97-8, 320 pp, paper \$19.95.

This book starts auspiciously with a foreword by Ross Eckler, the editor of *Word Ways* magazine, a magazine for people who love making language do tricks and whose heads don’t hurt when they read sentences like “Suppose we have a heterogram [words of a given length with no letters in common]. We need one precisely defined set of letters to constitute its reversal, which may not be a word, so that probability of finding such a word is the number of words of that length divided by the number of possible letter sequences.” (from *Word Ways; The Journal of Recreational Linguistics* 31/4 [November 1998] “Reversible Heterograms” by Rex Gooch). The afterword is by Richard Lederer, a VERBATIM contributor (and wildly successful word writer) both early and late.

Morice himself works with *Word Ways*, and has often been featured on National Public Radio in the States. This dictionary, which has what must be a completely non-coincidental total of 1,234 entries is definitely worth having. I feel I could assign a VERBATIM article out of every entry (well, every entry that doesn’t have as an example something like this:

TEE (9 + 13 + 13 = 35)

QUIZZICAL (.4 + 3.3 = 7.3 = 0.1 + 0.1 + 7.3 + 3.5 + 8.5 + 4.5 = 35)

as *sumgram* ‘two or more words whose letters have sumword values that add up to the same amount’ does).

The book is made more useful still by the index to the dictionary that gives sources and authors for the concepts defined and by a great bibliography.

This is a valuable addition to any word-lover’s reference shelf, and these friendly, straightforward definitions should encourage readers (especially those with calculators, or even better, computer programming experience) to become better word-players, or to jump in where before they had been holding back. I, for one, will be looking for *hidden middle names*, like the one found in HORATIO NELSON.

—Erin McKean



EX CATHEDRA

The New Contest

Now that all the excitement of our “favorite word” contest is fading (it was released to the news wires and VERBATIM was mentioned on the radio in Washington, DC, San Antonio, TX, and on the BBC), it’s time to think about the next contest.

Ken Greenwald suggested that we follow in the footsteps of the *Washington Post* Style Invitational, and have a redefinitions contest. He’s sent some of his own redefinitions as examples:

grammarian (n.), a recently wed grandmother

eloquence (n), a form of cruel and unusual punishment

romanize (v.), to turn into lettuce

transliterate (v.), to scatter rubbish across state lines

irredentist (v.), the nonstandard form of, in spite of or without regard for your dentist

parse (v.), (the transitive verb from the adverb), to sprinkle the herb

lingua franca (n.), an Italian pasta/frankfurter delicacy

doxology (n.), the study of medical practitioners

faux pas (n.), a father who is also the enemy

raison d’etat (n.), a fruitful insurrection by an ingredient faction at a breakfast cereal factory

These are fun, and funny, and the *Washington Post* Style Invitational is a marvellous institution (if you don’t live in the *Post*’s circulation area, I strongly suggest that you read their features online at www.washingtonpost.com).

Several other correspondents have suggested that we do a Sniglets-style contest where we ask readers to either find or invent words for nameless or obscurely named everyday things. (The canonical sniglet is the word *aglet*, ‘the plastic protector for the end of a shoelace.’)

Those of you fortunate enough to live where you can hear CBC Radio One may be familiar with Jane Farrow’s *Wanted Words* show and books, where Canadians do some snigletizing, coming up with such words as *hameo* ‘the bit part played by people who try to get on camera behind reporters or sportscasters, waving their arms and holding up

signs,’ and *showincidence* ‘the puzzling experience of being subjected to TV reruns even though you don’t watch a lot of TV.’ Also worthwhile and fun, but not where we’re going with our next contest.

Our next contest is all about the flexibility of English and the positive talent it has for the extension of meaning. Although it’s entertaining to make up clever new words, and it’s amusing to redefine words that we’ve already got in wry new ways, it would be both fun and useful to extend the senses of old and obsolete words to be meaningful today. In other words, to make new figurative senses for words that have only dreary concrete meanings.

That’s fine in theory, you say, but I need examples!

A favorite word of mine, for obvious reasons, is *erinaceous*, an adjective meaning ‘like a hedgehog.’ It is mostly used in a zoological sense, but cries out for a figurative use to describe people with prickly or bristly manners. Another word with a figurative meaningspace that’s wide open is *hemianopsia*, ‘half-blindness, or loss of perception of one-half the field of vision.’ This word is absolutely demands a figurative use: “No matter how much you explain the entire procedure, Bill only grasps the basics. I’m sure he has hemianopsia.”

A quick troll through an unabridged (or even a standard) dictionary, the *Oxford English Dictionary* online (www.oed.com; subscription only, but check with your public library; both the Chicago and New York City public library allow free online access to regular cardholders upon the entry of your card-number), or simply your own professional jargon or common vocabulary will give you ample fodder for figurativizing.

What should the figurative meaning of *megilp* ‘a mixture of mastic resin and linseed oil added to oil paints’ be? There must be something we can devise. How about *illuviation* ‘the introduction of salts or colloids into one soil horizon from another by percolating water.’ Words this fine can’t be crowded into their little specialist pens, never to be let out into the wider world. (Definitions from *The New Oxford American Dictionary*.)

Now all we need is a name for the contest. Suggestions welcome by mail or e-mail.

—Erin McKean



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Across

1. Mediator finding her rent-books showing some confusion (6,6)
8. Animals reared by religious establishment caught between having nothing and plenty! (7)
9. Mercury, perhaps, aware of the birds (7)
11. Baggage—author's lost key (7)
12. A voice in Schumann's first work conducted with love (7)
13. Dash! I'm having to turn the light back on (5)
14. Point to a cut lip and hear why treatment produces blue gums (9)
16. G-man, perhaps, to sing softly about "One from the Dordogne" (9)
19. Allow about a quarter—that's the minimum (5)
21. He didn't trust his wife to return a greeting (7)
23. "Far from the madding crowd's ---- strife"—Gray (Elegy) (7)
24. Prominent foreigner got in the way (7)
25. Celebrate one going in the register (7)
26. Perverse to ask whether the ship is able to circle America (12)

Down

1. One who'd turned out for a dance (7)
2. In mid-morning there's lots of food (7)
3. Such useless uphill work! (9)
4. False and treacherous place, America (5)
5. Like a complex little dictionary I become familiar with (7)
6. Piece of fruit I note wrapped in crumpled paper (7)
7. Stubborn Scotsman first to count out debtors' notes (12)
10. Wounded? This should help (4,2,3,3)
15. Against the conversion of e.g. Eric Porter (9)
17. Catastrophe liable to hide classic suicide (7)
18. Complaint of one beset by mental trouble (7)
19. Facial spottiness appears advanced. Exit yours truly (7)
20. A noble Roman moving right up the tree (7)
22. Decimal—frequently recurring (5)