



The American Spelling Reform Movement

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Brooklyn, New York

As a gradeschooler, I loved to browse through my mother's library-school textbook of the Dewey Decimal Classification System. Not only did its 1,647 pages seem to provide an extremely detailed and comprehensive outline of the entire scope of human knowledge, but the book also had the fascination of being printed throughout in the "reformed spelling" advocated by the decimal system's originator, Melvil Dewey. A note headed "Reazons" states, "Uzers of the Decimal Clasification ar entitled to kno why the author feels compeld to recognize practicaly the urjent claims for reform in English spelling, by adopting enuf of many needed chanjes to call every reader's attention to the crying situation."

What elementary-school student, or what person learning English as a second language, wouldn't welcome a reform that changed the spelling of *asthma* to "asma" (as it is sensibly spelled in Spanish), *rough* to "ruf," *friend* to "frend," and *flaccid* to "flaksid" or "flasid"? The ultimate goal of such a reform—which would render the spelling bee obsolete—would be to establish absolutely logical and consistent rules for the spelling of English. Anyone hearing a word would then automatically know how to spell it, as is essentially the case with such languages as Italian and Spanish. In 1876 William D. Whitney, a professor of philology at Yale and editor of the *Century Dictionary*, stated that "the true and sole office of alphabetic writing is correctly to represent spoken speech." Hailing this pronouncement, Melvil Dewey elaborated, using the numeral "1" for the indefinite pronoun, "Writing is attempt to convey to 1 at a distance (either in space or time) what wud be spokn to 1 close at hand, and therefore writn word shud represent spokn word as exactly as posibl."

This was certainly not a new idea. Projects to reform the spelling of American English predated

the Declaration of Independence. And even earlier proposals to reform British English had led Jonathan Swift, in 1712, to condemn what he called "the foolish opinion advanced of late years that we ought to spell exactly as we speak."

For centuries English spelling had been in the gradual process of reforming itself without any plan. Chaucerian spellings tended over time to be simplified—for example, *fysse* became *fish* and then *fish*. Well into the eighteenth century spelling remained highly idiosyncratic, even among the literary elite, and no reader coming upon an odd spelling would draw unflattering conclusions about the writer's education or intelligence. No dictionary was sufficiently impressive to establish one spelling as correct and all or most deviations as incorrect.

All that changed with the publication, in 1755, of Samuel Johnson's monumental and scholarly *Dictionary of the English Language*. It became so highly respected that its spellings were soon, for better or for worse, widely accepted as definitive. Melvil Dewey, incensed by the Johnsonian perpetuation of many illogical spellings, complained of the lexicographer that "uzing neither rime nor reazon he embalmd in a book, with the weight of his great name, simply the usaj of London printing offises, which wer run almost wholly by Dutch and German printers, many of whom knew no English."

As early as 1768 the polymathic Benjamin Franklin, then living in London as the diplomatic agent for Pennsylvania and several other colonies, proposed a radical reform of English orthography based on phonetic principles. His goal was to designate for each sound in the language a letter, or combination of letters, that would always represent that sound and no other.

Taking the conventional alphabet of twenty-six letters, Franklin began by removing six: *c, j, q, w, x,*



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and *y*. He then added four consonants of his own invention: for *sh* (as in *shell*), *ng* (as occurs twice in *hanging*), for nonaspirate *th* (as in *that*), and aspirate *th* (as in *thin*). He also invented two new vowels: one for the *uh* sound (as in *must*) and one for *ah* (as in *not*). Thus his alphabet ended up with twenty-six letters, six of them his own innovations.

The long *a* sound would be spelled *ee* (so *came* would be “keem”), the long *e* sound would be spelled *i* at the end of a word and *ii* between two consonants, and the long *i* sound would always be spelled with his *uh* symbol plus *i*. No letter was ever to be silent.

Franklin’s abortive proposal was intended for both Britain and America, but it soon inspired the reforms championed by arch-lexicographer Noah Webster, directed exclusively at American English. Shortly after the end of the War of Independence, Webster began to advocate the new republic’s adoption of what he called Federal English, arguing that “a national language is a band of national union” and maintaining that Americans, having shaken off British government, should shake off the antiquated and cumbersome British spelling of English as well. He tried to enlist the support of the Founding Fathers for Federal English, which would differ from British English in the “perfect regularity” and common-sense simplicity of its spelling. He first set forth his proposal to the general public in an appendix to his book *Dissertations on the English Language*, published in 1789. There he suggested the removal of all silent letters (so that *bread*, *built*, and *give* would be spelled *bred*, *bilt*, and *giv*) and the regularization of spellings so that, for example, the long *e* sound would always be spelled *ee*. Thus *speak*, *grief*, and *key* would be spelled *speek*, *greef*, and *kee*.

Not until 1806, in his first dictionary, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*, did Webster present his suggested reforms as faits accomplis. There his spellings of many categories of words differed emphatically from what were then (and, in some cases, still are) the accepted British spellings. Most notable of the reforms that took firm hold in American usage were the deletion of the *u* from words like *colour*; the removal of the final *k* from words like *magick*, the reversal of the

final *r* and *e* in words like *theatre*, the reduction of the doubled consonant and the final *e* in words like *programme*, the changing of the final *ce* in words like *defence* to *se*, and the simplification of *plough* to *plow* and *draught* to *draft*.

Alas, the remainder of Webster’s career, until his death in 1843, was a steady course of retraction in the matter of spelling reform. In his massive and definitive work *The American Language*, H. L. Mencken informs us that *croud*, *fether*, *groop*, *iland*, *insted*, *leperd*, *soe*, *sut*, *steddy*, *thred*, *thret*, *thum* and *wimmen* appear only in the 1806 edition. In his *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), he went back to *crowd*, *feather*, *group*, *island*, *instead*, *leopard*, *sew*, *soot*, *steady*, *thread*, *threat*, *thumb* and *women*.” In the 1838 edition Webster yielded even more ground to tradition, though he retained a few favorites—*aker* for *acre* and *tung* for *tongue*—which were removed from editions issued after his death.

Another spelling reformer was an extraordinary man named William Thornton. Born in 1759 in the West Indies, Thornton received his M.D. degree in Scotland in 1784. Four years later he settled in Philadelphia and became an American citizen. A highly talented amateur architect, he won the competition for the exterior design of the U.S. Capitol’s north and south wings, flanking the domed rotunda; those wings were duly built according to his plans. Among his diverse writings are a tract calling for the abolition of slavery and a plan for a canal through the Isthmus of Panama. Thornton’s greatest gifts, however, were in the realm of invention, both mechanical and intellectual. He and a collaborator claimed to have invented a steamboat a decade before Robert Fulton launched the *Clermont*. And, working alone, Thornton devised improvements for firearms and for distillation apparatus. In 1802 he found a happy niche as the first superintendent of the U.S. Patent Office, a position he held until his death, in 1828.

Thornton’s contribution to spelling reform was made in his book *Cadmus; or, a Treatise on the Elements of Written Language . . . with an essay on the mode of teaching the surd or deaf, and consequently dumb, to speak*, published in Philadelphia in 1793, having won a gold medal from the



American Philosophical Society in January of that year. Thornton appears to have taken Franklin's orthographical system as his point of departure, but Thornton's alphabet had thirty letters, seven of them his own inventions. Like Franklin, Thornton jettisoned the letters *c*, *q*, and *x*, but he retained *j*, *w*, and *y* (used only as a consonant). Thornton then added five consonants: one for *sh* (as in *shell*), one for *ng* (as twice in *hanging*), one for nonaspirate *th* (as in *that*), one (the Greek letter theta) for aspirate *th* (as in *thin*), and one for *wh* (as in *what*). Finally, like Franklin, he added two new vowel characters, *uh* and *aw*, and he made vowels long by doubling them or by making diphthongs (so *my* became *mai*).

In his book's preface—which was printed both in conventional spelling and in a translation into his new system—Thornton called upon his “dear countrymen” to make the “American Language . . . as distinct as the government, free from all the follies of unphilosophical fashion, and resting upon truth as its only regulator.” Thornton argued for the adoption of his system on the ground that children could master it perfectly in a matter of weeks, rather than taking years to gain an imperfect mastery of conventional spelling. This benefit would also speed the assimilation of non-English-speaking immigrants. Too, he asserted, the compactness of text printed with the new alphabet would cut the cost of typesetting and would reduce the number of pages needed for a book, thus making American editions not only more easily readable but also less expensive than British editions of the same works.

During the nineteenth century, eccentric proposals for spelling reform proliferated with as much vigor and variety as did proposals for utopian communities. They also evaporated with equal rapidity, at least until the stalwart Dewey appeared on the scene. He was born Melville Dewey in 1851 in upstate New York, near Watertown, a few miles inland from Lake Ontario. While still a student at Amherst College, he found the three causes to which he would dedicate the rest of his life: the development of a logical system for cataloguing library books, the simplification of American spelling, and the adoption of the metric system as the American standard. Shortly after graduating

from Amherst, in 1874, he simplified the spelling of his first name to *Melvil* and for a brief time even spelled his last name *Dui*.

Settling in Boston, Dewey went into business selling library supplies, making his office double as the headquarters of the enterprise he founded and incorporated as the American Metric Bureau. When Dewey was elected secretary of the newly created Spelling Reform Association (SRA)—established at the International Convention for the Amendment of English Orthography held in Philadelphia in August 1876, during the Centennial Exposition—his office also became the headquarters of the SRA. That same year he published the first edition of his *Decimal Classification and Relative Index*, a twelve-page pamphlet that would develop over the years into my mother's 1,647-page thirteenth edition, published in 1932, the year after Dewey's death.

Dewey was a handsome, strongly built, and athletic six-footer who was so forcefully self-righteous that he felt justified in stooping to deviousness and backstabbing in order to exercise absolute control over any enterprise in which he took part. A real muscular Christian, he forbade smoking, drinking, and gambling at the upstate—New York Lake Placid Club, which he founded in 1895 as a retreat for the families of upper-middle-class WASP professionals like himself.

Although Dewey would devote much time and effort to the cause of spelling reform, his principal career was in the field of library science. Soon after his appointment as the librarian of Columbia University, in 1883, he established and headed a school of library economy there. In 1889, when he became director of the New York State Library, he moved the school to Albany as the New York State Library School. Dewey was also one of the founders of the American Library Association and, in the early 1890s, served two terms as its president.

Dewey's public career was brought to an abrupt end in 1906 by the scandalous revelation that he rigidly excluded Jews from membership in the Lake Placid Club. Forced to resign from his New York State positions, he retreated to Lake Placid. There and at a winter home in Florida he remained busy for the rest of his life with his work as secre-



tary of the Spelling Reform Association and as the compiler of successive editions of his book on decimal classification.

In the 1870s spelling reformers were divided into those who demanded immediate radical change and those who advocated gradual reform, beginning with a few modest innovations, such as dropping the *ue* from words like *catalogue* and substituting *f* for *ph* (e.g., *fotograf*). Dewey was a gradualist, but a militant one. “By evolution, not revolution,” he wrote, “we shal stedily move toward the

“English orthography . . . is archaic, cumbrous, and ineffective; its acquisition consumes much time and effort; failure to acquire it is easy of detection.”

ideal, when the greatest languaj the world has yet seen wil hav 40 distinct syns for its 40 distinct sounds, and becauz of its manifold advantajes wil becum the common tung of the world, known in adition to his vernacular by every inteligent inhabitant. . . . Except for its scandalusly complex speling, English is betr fitted than any other languaj for universal use. English has strength, simplicity, conciseness, capacity for taking words freely from other tungs, and best of all has the greatest literature the world has yet produced.”

Over the next twenty years spelling reform made steady progress, by no means all of it attributable to Dewey. One of the first to do more than simply talk about reform was Joseph Medill, owner of the *Chicago Tribune*, who in 1879 ordered his editors to adopt a few simplified spellings—including *thru*, *tho*, and *thoro*—as the house style. Medill declared that it was monstrously cruel to “perpetuate the tyranny of absurdities and irregularities [of conventional spelling] that fill our schoolhouses with misery, and keep millions of English-speaking people in lifelong bondage to the unabridged dictionary.” The *Tribune* defiantly lengthened its list of simplified spellings during the 1930s and stubbornly retained them until 1975, when it yielded to complaints from parents and teachers that the paper’s deviation from traditional orthography was confusing Chicago’s schoolchildren.

During the 1890s, a few state legislatures passed bills calling for simplified spelling to be taught in public schools, and the prestigious

American dictionaries began to acknowledge the call for reform, first by listing simplifications in appendices, and eventually transferring some to the main entries as acceptable alternatives.

The turning point came in February 1897, when the National Education Association (NEA) resolved that all of its official correspondence and publications would thenceforth use simplified spellings for twelve words: *catalog*, *decalog*, *demagog*, *pedagog*, *prolog*, *program*, *tho*, *altho*, *thoro*, *thorofare*, *thru*, and *thruout*. This move brought

the issue of spelling reform to wide public attention and forced even many conservatives to take seriously what they had previously dismissed as the folly of cranks.

In his influential book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), University of Chicago economics professor Thorstein Veblen pointed to the mastery of the complexities of traditional spelling as one of the ostentatious distinctions cherished by the snobbish élite. “English orthography,” he wrote, “satisfies all the requirements of the canons of reputability under the law of conspicuous waste. It is archaic, cumbrous, and ineffective; its acquisition consumes much time and effort; failure to acquire it is easy of detection.”

When the Simplified Spelling Board (SSB) was founded, in 1906, Melvil Dewey was among its charter members, but he was already too tainted with controversy to be elected an officer. The SSB’s first public act was to propose a list of three hundred words whose revision seemed most urgent and sensible. The new spellings ranged from *analis* and *dettor* to *fotograf* and *stopt*.

The SSB was subsidized almost entirely by Andrew Carnegie, who donated a total of about \$250,000 to the cause by the time of his death, in 1919. According to Dewey, “The far-syted Carnegie made his great gifts for simplifyd speling for 2 chief reazons. He had givn the Peace Palace at the Hague, and recognized that a common tung was the greatest protection agenst war. . . . The canny



Scot knew also that it wud do more than all else combined to extend and strengthn our commerce.” This second point had been touted at least since 1897, when a speaker at the convention of the National Association of American Manufacturers said, “I believe that the highest interest of Christian civilization and of humanity would be served by making the spelling and pronunciation of the English language phonetic.” He claimed that if spelling were to be made logical, then it would take less than fifty years for China and Japan to become English-speaking Christian nations whose populations would constitute an enormous market for American products.

In 1906 Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), who was on the SSB’s board, wrote an essay purporting to advocate reforms to be implemented gradually over a period of years. (Clemens surely wrote his essay with his tongue at least partly in his cheek, but one problem with spelling-reform texts is that even the most serious often look like parodies—and vice versa.) The reader of the following excerpt will notice that as soon as Clemens mentions a proposed change, he adopts it for use throughout the remainder of the essay.

In Year 1 that useless letter “c” would be dropped to be replased either by “k” or “s,” and likewise “x” would no longer be part of the alphabet. The only kase in which “c” would be retained would be the “ch” formation, which will be dealt with later. Year 2 might reform “w” spelling, so that “which” and “one” would take the same konsonant, wile Year 3 might well abolish “y,” replasing it with “i,” and Iear 4 might fiks the “g/j” anomali wonse and for all. Jenerally, then, the improvement would kontinue iear bai iear with Iear 5 doing awai with useless double konsonants, and Iears 6–12 or so modifaaiing vowlz and the rimeining voist and unvoist konsonants. Bai Iear 15 or sou, it wud fainali bi posibl tu meik ius av thi ridandant leterz “c,” “y,” aand “x”—bai now jast a memori in the maindz av ould dodererz—tu riplais “ch,” “sh,” aand “th” rispektivli.

Fainali, xen, aafter sam 20 iers av orxografikl riform, wi wud haav a lojkl speling in ius xre-wawt xi Ingliy-spiking werld.

[Translation: Finally, then, after some 20 years of orthographical reform, we would have a logical,

coherent spelling in use throughout the English-speaking world].

Clemens eventually concluded that simplified spelling would simply “substitute one inadequacy for another; a sort of patching and plugging poor old dental relics with cement and gold and porcelain paste.” The problem, he declared, was that “our foolish alphabet . . . doesn’t know how to spell, and can’t be taught.” The solution was to adopt a phonographic alphabet based on Isaac Pitman’s system of shorthand. Then anyone who heard a word clearly pronounced could write it correctly with a few quick strokes of a pen, though not as quickly as a stenographer taking down true shorthand. “What I am offering for acceptance and adoption is not shorthand,” he stated, “but longhand written with the shorthand alphabet unreduced.”

President Theodore Roosevelt was so enthusiastic about the SSB’s three hundred new spellings that in August 1906, while Congress was on vacation, he ordered the Government Printing Office to adopt them. Objections from the reconvened Congress were so vehement that Roosevelt had to back down, though he continued to champion the cause. As long as he remained in office, spelling reform appeared to be inevitable. However, Roosevelt’s successor, William Howard Taft, was nonchalant. Shortly after Taft’s inauguration, in March 1909, the *New York Sun* carried an editorial headed “Spelling Reform” and consisting of just one word: “Thru.”

Over the next several decades the spelling-reform movement lost most of its steam, gravely weakened by Carnegie’s death and the end of his funding. But the movement never died out completely. A system of simplified spelling called Anglic was developed in 1930 by the Swedish philologist R. E. Zachrisson, who, recognizing that English was becoming the preeminent international language, felt the need to make its spelling easier for those learning English as a second language. *Spelling*, a magazine published jointly by Dewey’s Spelling Reform Association and a British sister organization, the Simplified Spelling Society, printed in its June 1931 issue the Gettysburg Address in Anglic, beginning: “Forskor and sevn yeeرز agoe our faathers braut forth on this kontinent a nue naeshun, konseevd in liberty, and dedikaeted to the



propozishon that aul men ar kreaeted eequel.” Zachrisson published his proposal in book form in 1932, but whatever enthusiasm there may have been for Anglic did not survive World War II.

Nevertheless, the spelling-reform movement lives on to this day—and is now reaching a greatly expanded audience through the Internet. On the websites of the American Literacy Council and of the Simplified Spelling Society (UK) one can read about such systems as New Spelling (developed in 1948 by British phonetician Daniel Jones and dialectologist Harold Orton) and Cut Spelling (developed in the 1970s by Australian psychologist Valerie Yule, who recommends simply removing superfluous letters). In Cut Spelling, “numerus variant patrnz for th same sounds ar reduced to ther comn lettrs,” and “som comn words wich confuse lernrs ar regulrized, so that *ar* parallels *bar*, not *bare*; *wer* parallels *her*, not *here*; and *tuch* ceses to resembl *pouch*.”

A sample of New Spelling, which never enjoyed anything even remotely like the fad of the New Math, informs us: “We rekwier dhe langgwej as an instroument; we mae aulsoe study its history. Dhe presens ov unpronounst leterz, three or for diferent waez ov representing dhe saem sound, three or for uesez ov dhe saem leter: aul dhiz detrakts from dhe value ov a langgwej as an instroument.”

What will come of it all? Hu noez?

[Richard Whelan is an independent cultural historian who specializes in the history of photography. His published books range from the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson to a study of rainbows in art, literature, and mythology.]

[Note: Illustrations of Franklin and Thornton’s new characters, omitted here for typographical reasons, can be seen on our website at <http://www.verbatimag.com>.]



INTER ALIA

A request has come in for any information about the slang placenames *North Cackylacky* and *South Cackylacky*, used for North and South Carolina. Responses may be sent to the Editor.

The Sneeze: More Than Just Ah-Choo and Bless You

Jessy Randall
Colorado Springs, Colorado

In my high school math class, a sneeze and its responses became a form of coded communication. A boy and a girl in the class—let’s call them Romeo and Juliet—were very much in love, but the teacher had separated them on account of their constant talking. So Romeo was in the back left corner, and Juliet was in the front right. Mrs. Buck thought this would keep the noise down, but the young romantics found a way to express their love anyhow. Here is an example of what might happen in a typical class period:

Romeo (letting out an enormous fake sneeze):

“Wahhhh-CHOO!”

Juliet: “Bless you, Romeo!”

Romeo: “Thank you, Juliet!”

Juliet: “You’re welcome, Romeo.”

This might happen once, twice, or thrice in a day, Mrs. Buck steaming at her desk but unable to forbid such an innocuous exchange. Of course, by the second or third fake sneeze, the rest of the class had learned to take part, so ten or fifteen voices might chime out *Bless you*, *Gesundheit*, or *Salud*.

Culturally, language has become attached to the sneeze, much more than it has to other involuntary noises, like the cough or hiccup. How do people respond to the sneeze in different cultures and languages? And for that matter, do we all sneeze as we do in English, *ah-choo*? Or is the sound of the sneeze transliterated differently in other languages? After all, an English cat says *meow*, whereas Spanish and German cats say *miau* and Indonesian cats say *ngeong*. Does this also pertain to the sneeze?

It sure does. English alone has several variations, which can be found in children’s literature of the past half-century or so. Karla Firehammer’s flea sticks to the American standard *ah-choo* (*The Flea’s Sneeze*, published 2000), and so do all the farm animals in Andrea Zimmerman and David Clemesha’s *The Cow Buzzed* (1993). Mercer Mayer published a wordless book with the title *Ah-Choo* in 1976.



Spelled slightly differently, *a-choo* is the sound in Marilyn Singer's *Solomon Sneezes* (1999), and *achoo* is the sneeze of all the animals in Colin West's *One Day in the Jungle* (1995) and of Elmo, the Sesame Street muppet, in Sarah Albee's *Elmo Says, Achoo!* (2000).

Olga Cabral's *The Seven Sneezes* (1948) contains a plethora of sneeze words: *a-choo*, *a-cha*, *a-chachoo*, *kerchaya*, *choo*, *buttonmyshoe*, *switcheroo*, *katchoo*, *katchim*, *katcham*, *katchibble*, *fiddle-faddle*, *skedaddle*, *fumadiddle*. *Aaatshoum* represents a donkey's sneeze in Roger Duvoisin's *The Three Sneezes and Other Swiss Tales* (1941), and *aaaaa-aaaaa-aaaaa-ca-chew* represents a bear's sneeze in Jan Brett's adaptation of the Ukrainian folktale *The Mitten* (1989). There's also *kerchoo* (Joan Heilbruner's *Robert the Rose Horse*, 1962); *ka-choo* (Rosetta Stone's *Because a Little Bug Went Ka-Choo*, 1975); *ka-chow* (James Flora's *The Day the Cow Sneezed*, 1957); and *atishooooooooo* (Ruth Brown's *The Big Sneeze*, 1985).

Ruth Brown grew up in London, and indeed, in British English the sneeze is generally written out *atishoo*. Other English picture books use variations on this expression: *atisha atisha atishoooooh* in the Rev. W. Awdry's *Thomas the Tank Engine Railway Series* (first published in the 1940s); *t'shoo* in Angela McAllister's *The King Who Sneezed* (1988); and *atishooo* in Margaret Mahy's *The Horribly Haunted School* (1997), in which a boy is allergic to ghosts. And in the British version of the children's song "Ring around the Rosie," the third line is "atishoo, atishoo" ("ashes, ashes" in the United States). (Popular belief has it that this song is about the bubonic plague, but there is no evidence to support this. The first published version of it appeared in Kate Greenaway's *Mother Goose*, 1881, more than two hundred years after the last outbreak of plague in England; in this version, the third line is "hush, hush, hush, hush.")

Earlier versions of the British sneeze include *Atcha* (from one of the characters in Richard Broughton's 1873 novel, *Nancy*) and—surely a one-time exclamation for comic effect—*Er-tchiouert-chiou!* (from Hood's *Comic Annual*, 1878). In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, Punch stuck with more familiar variations, like *a-tschoo*, *atishoo*, and *atichoo*. In South African English, a

sneeze is sometimes written as *atishoo* and sometimes as *kertishoo*.

(By the way, before you jump to any conclusions—it seems unlikely that the word *tissue*, as in Kleenex or Puffs, evolved from the British *atishoo*. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *tissue* began to be used to mean handkerchief-type-paper, the kind you blow your nose on, only in the twentieth century. It was in use as early as the fourteenth century as a word describing a kind of gauzy cloth—Chaucer, 1366: "The barres were of gold ful fyne, Upon a tyssu of satyne"—and continued to be used this way up until the eighteenth century, when it was used to describe gauzy paper, and went from there to the modern meaning.)

A Korean sneeze is transliterated *eichi*, and this may also be said in response to a sneeze. In Polish, *apćik* is the written sound; in Serbian, *apćiha*; in Czech, *hepći*; in Slovak, *hapći*. The Russian version of *ah-choo* is transliterated *ahpchkhee*; the Chinese Pinyin version is *aaaa-qui*, pronounced "ah-chee."

And by the way, Douglas Adams suggested, in his *Hitchhiker's Guide* books, that God created the universe by sneezing. In case you were wondering how such a sneeze might have been represented, we can turn to Esther Dendel's published version of the Liberian folktale "You Can't Unsneeze a Sneeze" (published 1995), in which God's sneeze is written "Ka-chew! Ah-ashish!"

A sneeze can sound like a name or a word, and vice versa. In Richard Houghton's *Monographs Personal and Social* (published 1873), for example, a preacher "at once sneezed out the name Ker-shaw several times in various intonations." And in Ogden Nash's "Allergy in a Country Churchyard" (*Good Intentions*, 1942) Mr. Weaver "said 'A cashew,' and the man said 'Gesundheit.'" (This, it turns out, is an old stand-up routine joke, repeated by the imitable Fozzie Bear of the Muppets, among others. The joketeller may ask the audience to identify *cashew*, *tissue*, *fichu*, *a shoe*, *ketchup*, or *curfew*, in order to respond *Gesundheit*.)

Now, if you are really into the transliteration of sneezes, I recommend (with some trepidation) visiting www.sneezefetish.org, where you will find links to stories containing sneeze transliterations of which these are only a small sample: *Hiih . . . IIS-*



SHOO! Huh-atssschh! ehhpTish! HahSSSCHHT! ha-he-KMPFahh! huhchih huchih huhchoo hmm-pchiw hmmpcheeeeew! and last but not least, huh, huh, aahh. aahh. AAH ATCH TITCH ooo-OO-ooo!

But back to our somewhat less titillating subject. So, once you've ah-choo'd, how might others respond? In American, British, South African, and Australian English, people usually say *God bless you* or just *Bless you*. A longer version is *May God bless you and the Devil miss you*. Many English speakers use the German response; some use the Spanish.

In German, people say *Gesundheit*, 'Health,' to which the sneezer may respond *Gesundheit ist besser als Krankheit*, "Health is better than sickness." In Dutch, the term is similar, *Gezondheid*, or sometimes *Proost*, which is similar to the British *Cheers*, used in toasting. (For that matter, someone once said *Cheers* to me after a particularly violent sneeze, but I think that he was just kidding.) The Afrikaans response is also similar: *khesunheit*. The Yiddish response is *Gezuntheit*, 'Health,' for the first two sneezes, but on the third some people say *Gay schoin in drerd, hust schoin ein kalt*, loosely translated "Go to hell, you have a cold." Other possible responses would be *Dulst du voksen ve a Purim koilisch*, "You should grow like a Purim bread," or *Tszu gezondt, tszu langa lebidike*, "To health, to long pleasant years."

In French, the response to a sneeze is *A tes souhaits*, "To your wishes" (that is, "May your dreams come true"). If you know the sneezer particularly well, you may say *A tes amours*, "To your loves." In Spanish, you can say *Dios te bendiga*, "God bless you," or *Jesus*, to which the sneezer may respond *Amen*. Others say *Salud*, 'Health,' and may keep going if the sneezer keeps sneezing: in one variation, the sequence is *Salud* on the first, *Salud y dinero*, "Health and money," on the second, and *Salud y dinero y amor*, "Health and money and love," on the third. In another variation, it's *Amor, Dinero, and Felicidad*, "Happiness," for the first three. On the fourth, people might say *Alergías*, "Allergies," a joke that comes up in other languages, too. In Portuguese, people say *Saúde*, "Health," or *Deus te ajude*, "God help you," to which the sneezer answers *Amen*.

Like Hebrew and Spanish, Japanese has a sequence of sneeze responses, in several versions.

One goes like this: *Ichi homerare*, 'Praise'; *Nikusash*, 'Criticism'; *San-kenashi*, 'Disparagement'; *Yottsu-ijo wa kase no moto*, "Sign of a cold." Another goes *Ichi home*, "One to praise"; *Ni soshiri*, "Two to slander"; *San wareware*, "Three to be laughed at."

Eastern Europeans mostly use a phrase meaning "To your health," which can also be used in making toasts. In Serbian and Croatian people say *Na zdravlje*; in Slovak *Na zdravie*, in Polish *Na zdrowie*, in Lithuanian *I Sveikata*, in Russian *Bud'te zdorovy* or, for more intimate acquaintances, *Bud' zdorov* (for men) and *Bud' zdorova* (for women).

In both Israel and Iran, people wish the sneezer health: *La'Briut* in Hebrew, *Afiyat bashe* in Farsi. The Farsi sneezer's response is then *Elahi shokr*, "Thanks to God for health." In Turkish, people say *Çok yaşar*, "Long life."

In the first couple of hundred years A.D., the Romans responded to a sneeze with *Absit omen*, "May the omen come to nothing," or with some version of *Salus*, 'Health.' A character in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (book 9, chapter 41) entreats health for his wife after a sneeze "in the customary words" (*Solito sermone salutem ei fuerat imprecatu*), but these customary words are not given. Adlington's 1566 translation has him saying "Christ helpe." Later, during a plague in the time of Gregory the Great (590–604 A.D.), conventional wisdom held that death might come with a sneeze, and so people would say *Deus te adjuvet*, "May God help you, in response."

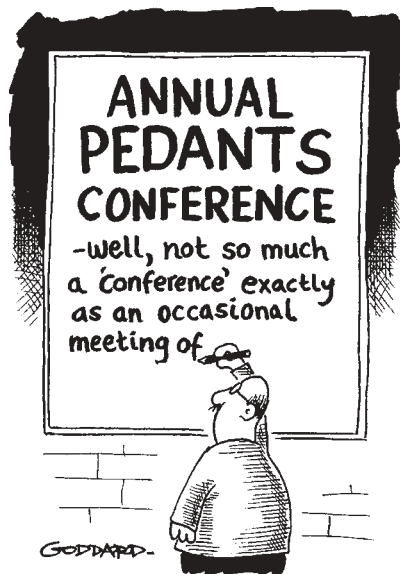
Cliff Walker, editor of *Positive Atheism* magazine, objects to being blessed after he sneezes, for obvious reasons. He writes: "My favorite response . . . is to note the rhythm of the way the individual says, 'God bless you!' Then, I mimic that rhythm in saying, 'No thank you!' and then immediately follow with a big, disarming grin. All but the most serious blessers of sneezes will immediately see that they do this out of cultural habit—without ever having considered that many of us actually listen to the words, that we are not superstitious about it (and in most cases, neither are they). Most importantly, it conveys that the God bless you! invocation does make some of us uncomfortable." (Visit www.positiveatheism.org for more information.)



For an answer to Walker's complaint, see Leslie K. Arnovick's "It's Nothing To Be Sneezed At: Discursization in the Polite Bless You!" in *Diachronic Pragmatics: Seven Case Studies in English Illocutionary Development* (1999). (Say that ten times fast and you might end up with a sneezing fit.) Arnovick argues that *Bless you* has become almost completely divorced from its original meaning, saying "To tell the story of the sneeze *Bless you* we must move from Judeo-Christian, pagan, and folk traditions to secular and expressive conversational instances." At the same time, she recognizes that "sensitivity to cultural diversity" may, in time, discourage the use of *Bless you*, and asks, "Might it not become more polite not to say *Bless you*, to substitute *Gesundheit* or say nothing at all?" (She also mentions that *good-bye* evolved from *God be with you*, so Positive Atheist Cliff Walker may have to come up with a way of handling *good-bye*, too.)

An episode of the television show *Seinfeld* offers one possible solution. According to Jerry Seinfeld's character (Season 3, Episode 319, "The Good Samaritan"), if you really want to make a person feel better after a sneeze, you should say not *God bless you* but *You're SOOO good-looking*. Maybe this will become the common English sneeze response of the future—a sort of secular blessing, a compliment.

[*Jessy Randall has written for VERBATIM about pregnancy terms (XXVII/2), terms for menstruation (XXVI/1), and words from Harry Potter (XXVI/2).*]



The Politically Correct US Supreme Court and the Motherfucking Texas Court of Criminal Appeals

Using Legal Databases To Trace the Origins of Words

Fred R. Shapiro
New Haven, Connecticut

I admit I have had some second thoughts as to the appropriateness of the title above. Perhaps I should have called it "The Politically Correct United States Supreme Court and the Cocksucking Texas Court of Criminal Appeals." The meaning of my title will become apparent as I proceed.

Historical lexicography is the study of the etymology, chronology, and meaning of words and phrases by means of a method first proposed in Germany in the early nineteenth century and later exemplified by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. This historical method requires that each meaning of each word be traced, to the extent practicable, to its earliest appearance in print, and that all developments in the word's usage be illustrated by dated and documented quotations using the word. The project of tracing words and phrases to their earliest appearances in print is an enormous and difficult one, involving research of a highly sophisticated and ingenious nature. Now, however, human ingenuity can be supplemented by automated searches, retrieving the earliest usage of a term in the documents covered by a database.

I first recognized this utility in 1978, when, as a student at Harvard Law School, I used Lexis to "ante-date" the earliest citation for the word *mootness* in the *Oxford English Dictionary Supplement*. This search occurred a year before Nexis came into existence and was undoubtedly the earliest use of a full-text online database for this purpose.

In a January 1979 letter, I proposed to the *OED Supplement* staff that Lexis be employed to obtain citations for "legal terms or other words, such as perhaps business or technological terms, likely to occur in law reports." This suggestion was not immediately taken up, but in 1982 the *OED*



Supplement began to use Nexis for citation collection, both for early examples of words and phrases and for quotations filling gaps in their word files.

Because Nexis's coverage begins only in the 1970s, we are in the realm of what Robert Burchfield has called short-term historical lexicography, and it is only for recent neologisms that Nexis will have utility in tracing early uses. For these, however, Nexis will often antedate the evidence of even the richest traditional citation files: OUP's extensive Nexis searching testifies to this fact.

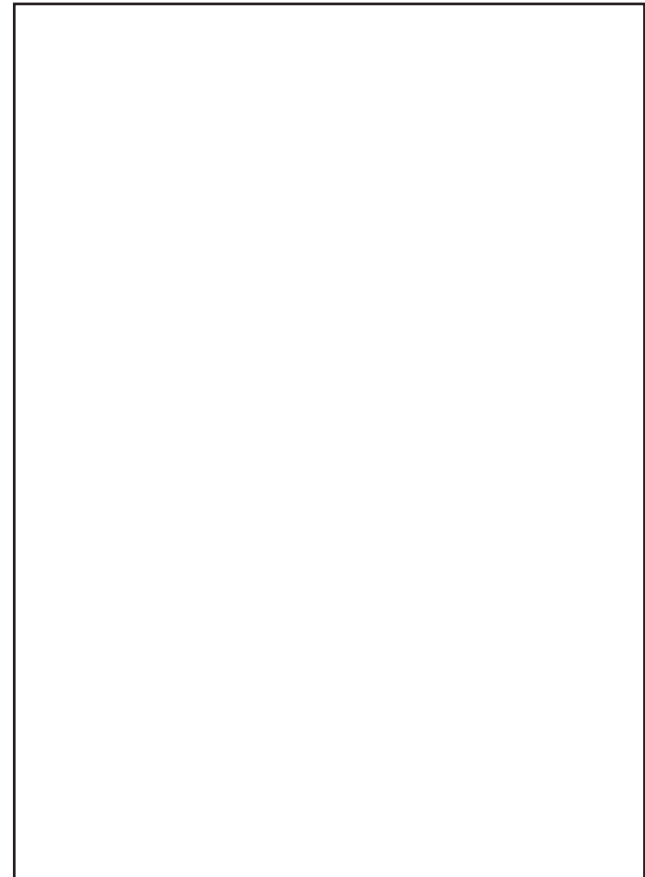
The two legal full-text databases, Lexis and Westlaw, do have historical coverage extending far enough back to be useful for "long-term historical lexicography." Many of their files begin in the nineteenth century, some even earlier. Although the judicial opinions in these files feature a limited vocabulary—legal jargon and such other words as are admitted into the conservative discourse of appellate judges—interesting results can be obtained. I have used these databases to push back the origins of the term *executive privilege*, to trace the expression *human rights* to 1787, and to antedate hundreds of other legal and nonlegal terms listed in the *OED*.

Perhaps the most spectacular antedating I have found through legal database searching is the phrase *politically correct*. At the time I searched for this very important buzzword, the earliest example of *politically correct* known to lexicographers was from a 1936 book by H. V. Morton. Amazingly, however, Lexis and Westlaw reveal that these words appeared in the landmark 1793 United States Supreme Court decision, *Chisholm v. Georgia*.

In that case Justice James Wilson wrote in his opinion:

The states, rather than the people, for whose sake the states exist, are frequently the objects which attract and arrest our principal attention. . . . Sentiments and expressions of this inaccurate kind prevail in our common, even in our convivial, language. Is a toast asked? 'The United States,' instead of the 'People of the United States,' is the toast given. This is not politically correct.

The usage here, referring to linguistic etiquette, is actually quite close to the current meaning, although without the satire now associated with the term. I contributed this citation to the *Oxford*



English Dictionary, where it now stands as the *OED*'s first use.

An even more important term than politically correct is *fuck*. This is, of course, an ancient word, traced by the *OED* back to 1503. Recently, an entire book was devoted to the history of the "F word," entitled *The F Word* and compiled by Jesse Sheidlower, the Principal Editor of the *OED*'s North American Editorial Unit. In his introduction, Sheidlower writes, "The word may not have been openly printed in any form in the United States until 1926."

Lexis and Westlaw show otherwise. John Baker, a securities lawyer and amateur philologist in Washington, D.C., recently discovered through a Westlaw search that *fuck* was printed in the *Reports of Cases Argued and Decided in the Supreme Court of the State of Missouri* in 1846. The case of *Edgar v. McCutchen*, appearing at 9 Mo. 768, consisted in its entirety of the following:

McCutchen sued Edgar for slander. The slanderous charge was carnal knowledge of a mare, and the word *fuck* was used to convey the imputation. After a verdict for the plaintiff, a motion made in arrest of judgment, for the reason that the word



used to convey the slander was unknown to the English language and was not understood by those to whom it was spoken; and the case of *Hanna v. Adams*, 3 Mo. Rep. 222, among others, was cited. The action was overruled, and Edgar appealed.

PER CURIAM. Because the modesty of our lexicographers restrains them from publishing obscene words, or from giving the obscene signification to words that may be used without conveying any obscenity, it does not follow that they are not English words, and not understood by those who hear them; or that chaste words may not be applied so as to be understood in an obscene sense by every one who hears them.

This occurrence certainly seems to count as an openly printed usage of the word. (A librarian who faxed me a photocopy of *Edgar v. McCutchen* noted that “the volume fell open at that case,” so even in pre-online days it may have attracted the prurient interest of law students.)

Let us turn to another celebrated vulgarism, namely *motherfucking*. The *OED*'s earliest citation is dated 1959, from Norman Mailer. Sheidlower's *The F Word* traces *motherfucking* back to 1933, from John O'Hara. The early literary examples all print censored forms like *mother-f-----*. Only with Jack Kerouac in 1951 do we see spelling out in full.

The Texas courts, however, were there long before. In 1889, the Texas Court of Appeals decided the case of *Levy v. State*. The report, at 28 Texas Court of Appeals Reports 203, 206 (1890), features the following colorful passage:

According to Sumner, he spoke of defendant as “that God damned, lying, thieving son-of-a-bitch”; according to Bates, as “that God damned lying, cow-thieving son-of-a-bitch, Marshall Levy,” and according to McKinney, as “that God damned mother-f—king, bastardly son-of-a-bitch!”

In 1897 the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals one-upped the Court of Appeals, printing *motherfucking* spelled out in full. *Fitzpatrick v. State*, 37 Tex. Crim. 20, 22, notes:

The charge was further excepted to, because it failed specifically to instruct the jury upon insulting words towards a female relative; and defendant requested a special instruction upon this point, as follows: “You are instructed, that if prior

to the shooting of deceased by defendant, the deceased called the defendant a ‘mother-fucking son-of-a-bitch,’ and the defendant, on account of said language and under the immediate influence of sudden passion caused thereby, if any, shot and killed the deceased, then you are instructed, in such a case, the defendant could not be guilty of a higher offense than manslaughter, if guilty of anything.”

In the West Publishing Company unofficial report of *Fitzpatrick* in the *Southwestern Reporter*, 38 S.W. 806, the key word is printed *mother f-----g*. A later headnote added by West editors actually bowdlerized the language: “A charge that the defendant was ‘a mother and sister riding son of a bitch’ is not such insulting language towards a female relative as to require its submission as a specific adequate cause to reduce the homicide to manslaughter.”

A final “potty mouth” antedating from Lexis and Westlaw is *cocksucking*. The *OED*'s first use is 1923, from a letter by E. E. Cummings. This dating is improved upon by the *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, with a ca. 1911 citation. Again, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals was there first. In *Ed Herd v. State*, 43 Tex. Crim. 575, 576, 67 S.W. 495, 496 (1902), the court wrote:

One question led to the declaration that he [deceased] called Mr. Herd, there on the ground at the time, a ‘damn dirty son of a bitch’ and a ‘cock-sucking son of a bitch.’ I warned him of the nature of the language, and he [Farabee, deceased] said it was the truth. (The brackets appear in the original.)

My focus here has been on the use of legal full-text databases to trace the origins of words and phrases. There are many other databases of historical texts on the World Wide Web of enormous linguistic value, including Accessible Archives, HarpWeek, JSTOR, Library of Congress American Memory, Literature Online, Making of America, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Questia, and University of Virginia Electronic Text Center. These cover materials such as newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals, books, literary works, and congressional documents.

[Fred Shapiro is the associate librarian for Public Services, a lecturer in Legal Research, Yale Law School, and editor, Yale Dictionary of Quotations.]



HORRIBILE DICTU

Mat Coward
Somerset, Britain

A TV listings magazine recently promised a documentary which “takes a look at the lives and innermost thoughts of six young women who regularly commute from England to Aberdeen to work as lap dancers in an adult establishment.” I have no idea how many lap dancing establishments there are for juveniles in Aberdeen, but I will say that in my day we considered ourselves lucky if we got a school disco.

The word *adult* is surely redundant there, as is the phrase *up to* in a letter to the press from the Mayor London, denying reports “that my income reaches up to £260,000.” Do politicians get paid by the word?

Numerical redundancies are just as welcome here as any other kind (indeed, all readers’, and all reader’s, Horribiles are welcome; please send them to VERBATIM’s usual addresses). Steve Finz, of The Sea Ranch, California, has noticed a trend for celebrities to say, “after receiving information that changed the way they think, ‘It made me do a complete 360.’ I guess two 180s are even more of a turnaround.”

Steve was also impressed by a TV ad for the film *Anaconda*, which “warned, in letters that filled the small screen, ‘When it gets you in it’s clutches, your history.’ That one,” he points out, “is triply *sic*, since snakes have coils rather than clutches.”

Occasionally, a homonymic error can create a useful new phrase, as in this report from the business pages of a British daily: “John Lewis is not mutually owned in the same way as building societies. It is more akin to Bupa or the Co-op, a collectively owned entity represented by people elected from its grass routes.” Obviously, *grass routes* are those via which the *grass roots* make their wishes known.

Sometimes, it’s safer just to stick to one businesslike word and repeat it until you feel you’ve got your point across. Thus, a spokesman for a power company defended the amount it had paid to sponsor a sporting event by insisting that “we believe we

can actually place a value on every percentage point of value we generate,” and adding: “We believe it is good value.”

Just for a change, after some of the literally incredible *incredibles* of recent columns, here is evangelical pop star Sir Cliff Richard explaining to an interviewer how he came to be “born again”: “When I read about Jesus in the New Testament I just thought: ‘If it’s true, this has got to be the most unbelievable thing’.”

I try—I really do—to control my passion for *literallys*, but I’m afraid these two literally forced their way in at gunpoint. First there was the TV athletics commentator, so impressed by the efforts of competitors in the hop, skip, and jump that he burst out with, “These triple jump athletes are literally human kangaroos!” Then, continuing the interspecies theme, we have a publisher’s catalogue noting that “unlike every other domestic animal, the cat evolved as a solitary animal, not a group-dweller—so in a household context is almost literally a fish out of water.” (First-rate deployment of *almost*, don’t you think? Extra marks for that.)

Here’s an etiquette puzzle for you. According to a news report, a senior Californian politician was famous for making “a special point of building bridges between fellow Latin-Americans and the African-American community.” Now then: since a Latin-American is someone who comes from Latin America, while “American” is (albeit, somewhat imperialistically) used to mean a citizen of the United States, shouldn’t the aforementioned public servant be building bridges on behalf of his fellow *Latin-American-Americans*?

I was delighted to read that “a private prison firm faces losing its multi-million pound contract after 16 escapes in eight months—nearly four times the national target.” I never knew there was an official target for the number of people who should escape from jail—but it just goes to show that, here in Britain, we still believe in the old sportin’ values.



[Mat Coward’s web site is <http://hometown.aol.co.uk/matcoward/myhomepage/newsletter.html>.]



Jumpers and Rounders and Tops, Oh My

Allison Whitehead
Stifford Clays, Essex

The London Underground is full of curious phrases and idioms not normally understood by an outsider. Are there any other jobs where your colleagues are known as *Dims* and *Doms*, where *four feet* aren't four feet at all, and where *jumpers* are not of the woolly kind?

Acronyms are rife on the Underground. Train Operations Managers are called *Toms*, Duty Operations Managers are known as *Doms*, and Duty Incident Managers are rather unceremoniously referred to as *Dims*. Direct-recruit train operators (those recruited from outside the company, rather than existing employees being trained in the role) are known as *drops*.

The track (or the *road*, or *permanent way*, as the Underground refers to it), consists of two *running rails* (on which the train wheels run), a *pozzy* rail, and a *neggy* rail. These latter two carry the positive and negative electrical currents. The *four foot* is the gap between the two running rails, which doesn't measure four feet at all. The *six foot* is the gap between two running lines, e.g., for northbound and southbound running services. But it isn't six feet wide. The distance between two pairs of running lines is wider. It's not usually *ten feet* but is still referred to as such.

As a train driver, if you are in the process of *winding up*, then you'll be starting your train. You may do a *rounder* before your meat break, which in other words will mean going to the end of the line, round and back to where you started. If you are lucky, you may get only a *snip turn*, which is a short shift. As a *top* (or train operator), you would hope never to see a *jumper*, as these can turn into *one unders*. And once again in English: people who deliberately jump off the platform in front of the train invariably end up underneath it.

If a red signal turns green just as you reach it, it is said to have *dropped off*. There are also *police-men* on the track who will trip and stop you if you

try to go too fast. But these policemen aren't human—they're *train stops*, which lower if you are travelling at less than ten miles per hour. Any faster and you get *tripped*, or stopped automatically. Another safety feature is known as the *dead man's handle*—the handle used to operate the train. If the driver should collapse or let go of the handle for any reason, the train will stop.

Elsewhere, there might be dissent among the passengers if the *peds* aren't working. For the uninitiated among us, this stands for the platform edge doors in operation on the Jubilee Line.

Finally, some phrases the passengers might hear over the P.A. system: *Passenger action* could mean that a passenger alarm has been activated on a train or there is a disturbance of some kind. *Signal failure* is self-explanatory, but *track failure* seems to be a catch-all term which applies when the electrical current is interrupted or when there is a problem which can't be easily identified, a perfect term to end on, as even the Underground isn't sure exactly what it means.

[Allison Whitehead wrote on Nostradamus in VERBATIM XXVI/4.]

INTER ALIA

Good news for lovers of dictionaries, words, and especially dialect words (i.e., all VERBATIM readers). The newest volume of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (DARE) is nearly here!

Volume IV, P-Sk, will be out in December from Harvard University Press (0-674-00884-7, \$89.95, £59.95). With more than a thousand pages and more than six hundred maps, this volume will satisfy your need to know where they call potluck dinners *pitch-ins* (Indiana) and where they call them *scrambles* (northern Illinois) and illuminate you as to the nature of *red dog roads*, *parka squirrels*, *scallyhoot*, *pinkwink*, *paddybass*, *sheepshead*, *skat*, and *quill pigs*.

Compiled and edited by Joan Houston Hall (sometime VERBATIM contributor) and her staff in Madison, Wisconsin, this continuing project is based on in-depth interviews with people all across the country and is one of the great treasures of American lexicography.



To Curf and Thrash, and Vex and Dash

Jerome Betts
Torquay, Devon

Although I speak a more or less nonregional variety of British English, expressions from childhood in the country do occasionally well up. I once used the word *curf* in a piece of verse, and only postpublication comments that told me the term was not in general circulation. What else, though, do you call the heavy iron hoe used for earthing up potatoes? A check with *Wright's Dialect Dictionary* revealed that it was normally spelled *kerf*, was related to the slot made by a saw cutting through a branch, and in the hoe meaning and *curf* spelling was confined to Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

This made sense, as I was born and intermitently brought up in the centre of Herefordshire. Six months at a village school certainly lodged several other local expressions and pronunciations in the passive vocabulary, such as *bannut*, 'walnut', *pitch* 'steep road' and *tump* 'mound,' which children fresh from a spell in postwar Portsmouth at first misheard as *dump*. I still have a *hacker* for lopping small branches and think of the operation that now takes place inside a combine-harvester, but once in a marvellous red-painted static machine standing by a rick, as *thrashing* and not the somehow effete-sounding *threshing*.

It happened again with the word *tranklements* in an article about auctions. However, this word, which rose spontaneously to the surface of my mind to describe the sort of small ornaments and knickknacks found on family mantelpieces, turned out to be an inheritance from my parents' Birmingham and Black Country youth. It made me wonder what other local or idiosyncratic items were embedded in their speech, possibly to emerge years later in mine.

My mother's emphatic use of *horse-road* for road was certainly a Black Countryism. Words like *bellock*, 'complain,' and *mither*, 'bother someone,' were taken as idiolect, though later realised to be widespread in the Midlands. Also from the Black Country must have been my father's occasional "I'd

as lief." Something that sounded like *sapie*, rhyming with *scrapie*, usually said with a nose-wrinkling expression of distaste, seemed to refer to food that was insipid or slightly tainted. I have not been able to track this down, and it could possibly have been a personal coinage.

An expression that definitely seemed to be part of a devoted couple's private language, heard for the last time during one of my parents' playful bickerings over small sums of money only a few days before my father's death, was "You've *swicked* me!" So it was fascinating recently to come across *swick* as a verb, in *The Pocket Scots Dictionary*, (Aberdeen University Press 1988), with the meaning 'to cheat, deceive, swindle,' presumably from the Old English *swician* 'to deceive.' A legacy from the Scots maternal grandfather who died some twenty years before I was born?

The grandfather I did know had, within the family circle, a strong Black Country element to his speech, but the only expression retained in my mind's ear is "Dash my buttons!" in moments of exasperation at such things as cats molesting newly sown seeds. Again, I thought this a personal coinage, until reading Anne Bradford's *Drawn by Friendship*, containing the texts of more than six hundred self-illustrated postcards sent by a Lancashire clergyman, J. T. Wilson. One of the last, dated November 21st, 1883, begins: "Dash my Buttons—My dear Sir—Dash anything—"

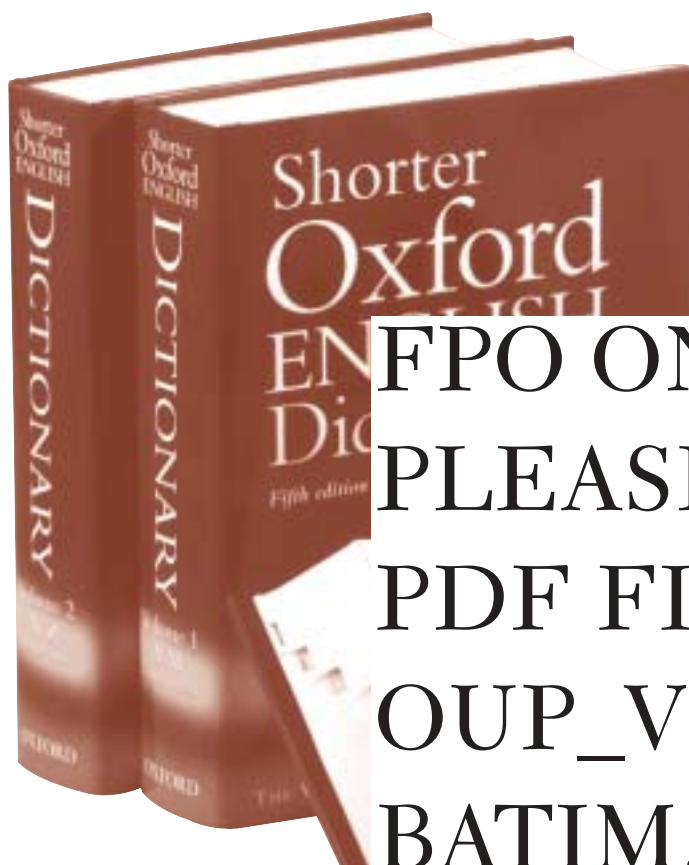
My grandmother's speech was much less Black Country, but once again the mind's ear has been imprinted with only one utterance. Something my brother and I did caused her to be really *vexed*. This probably made an impact as a hitherto unheard and unread word, with a consequently powerful if mothbally flavour.

Will the early-wired children of today similarly be recalling in the future the, to them, odd expressions still natural to the precomputer generation?

[Jerome Betts has taught English as a foreign Language at South Devon College in Torquay for the past 30 years. He contributed "Dog-Lime Days" to VERBATIM XXVII/2.]



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—Garry Wills

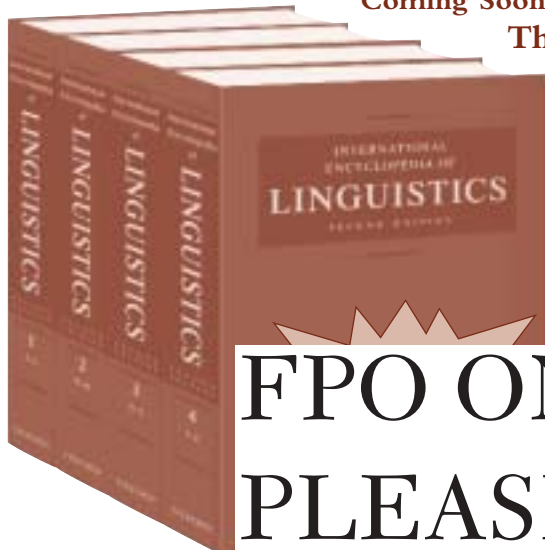
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CLASSICAL BLATHER

Quaint Crimes, Archaic Punishments

Nick Humez
argentarius@juno.com

Common to humanity worldwide, it would seem, is the desire that bad guys get their just deserts. Theologically this leads to a variety of afterlife states, depending on the community of believers, in which the evil we do in this world is punished in the next.¹ But most societies have laws, often of considerable complexity, providing for retribution in the present life; and the English-speaking world, much of whose jurisprudence is rooted in British common-law tradition,² is no exception. And like our language, our laws have changed over time, so that what once was considered a crime may today be thought gauche but unprosecutable (e.g., blasphemy), whereas other behavior formerly considered beyond the law's reach may become criminalized following a shift in the consensus of the public's perception of a given offense or offender (such as abortions and those who perform them).³

The bill of rights with which the constitution of the United States was initially amended,⁴ in order to gain its passage by states whose citizens were leery of excessive government power and mindful of recent outrages committed by British occupying armies,⁵ includes a now-familiar prohibition on "cruel and unusual punishment." As a result, even for offenses that remain in our legal codes as crimes, the sentences tend to follow, or at least parody, a rationalist-empiricist worldview rather than a punitive-orthodox one. Courts have generally construed the "and" as meaning "either cruel or unusual" rather than "both cruel and also unusual." There have been exceptions, such as the drunk driver who, convicted of causing an accident, was ordered by the judge to send a check of a nominal amount (\$1) to the family of the victim on the anniversary of the accident, for the rest of his life—an unusual sentence but hardly a cruel one by the normal standards of his community.⁶

Still, for the most part, by the end of the twentieth century punishments in the United States had settled down to a limited inventory of retributive genres: monetary fine, imprisonment, or death.

Indeed, *incarceration* as a punishment in and of itself is a relatively recent development in human history, derived from the post-Enlightenment belief that in a controlled environment it would be possible to rehabilitate prisoners and other social deviants.⁷ In the late 1700s the Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham proposed a model prison called the *panopticon*, so called from the fact that its cells were arranged around a central tower in such a way that the guards could see everything that went on (obviating, Bentham added, the need for locks, since who would attempt to pick a lock in plain sight of a keeper?) Before that time, however, prisons were mere holding tanks, places of confinement for prisoners usually awaiting some other disposition, such as execution (e.g., of notable prisoners following their display in a Roman general's triumphal procession, such as that of Marius over Iugurtha,⁸ the Numidian king being afterward strangled in the *carcer* of the Eternal City), the payment of debt (a fate that the novelist Daniel Defoe escaped only by seeking sanctuary in Whitefriars⁹), or the extraction of ransom (as happened to Richard the Lion-Hearted when he fell into the hands of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI in 1193 on his way back from crusading in Palestine).¹⁰

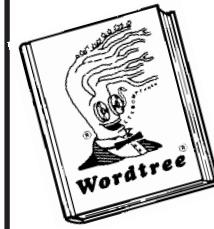
By contrast, actual judicial sentences before Enlightenment penal reforms often entailed bodily harm, temporary or permanent: branding, amputation (used both for forgery and for seditious writings),¹¹ whipping, the *pillory* or *stocks*,¹² the *ducking stool* or the wearing of *scolds' bridles*,¹³ to these might be added the vernacular refinements of *tarring and feathering* and *riding out of town on a rail*, both of which were notoriously employed by American colonists against Tory sympathizers. Capital punishment likewise came in various forms, hanging being the commoner's end (sometimes jovially glossed as *up the long ladder and down the short rope*,¹⁴ being *turned off*,¹⁵ or *doing the air jig* or the *dance upon nothing*).¹⁶ By contrast, the nobility was afforded the courtesy of being beheaded, either by a *heading axe* or with a two-handed sword.¹⁷



Nastier deaths awaited those who committed such crimes against the crown as raising a rebellion or an actual attempt upon the sovereign's life: *Hanging, drawing, and quartering* was the fate of the hapless Dr. Rodrigo Lopez, convicted of conspiring to poison Queen Elizabeth I in 1594;¹⁸ this gruesome mode of execution began with a hanging designed to choke almost to death but not quite, before cutting the condemned down, then making an abdominal incision and hooking the intestine to a windlass (the guts thus extracted being burnt before the victim's face), and finally beheading and sawing the body into four pieces. (France and China,¹⁹ on the other hand, quartered victims by tying them to four horses or oxen.)

Burning by itself (at the stake) was practiced against designated heretics on both sides of the Protestant Reformation in England;²⁰ by Mary Tudor's time the custom was to tie a bag of gunpowder around the neck of the accused, which often (though not always) exploded with a mercifully fatal result when reached by the flames. We tend to associate burning at the stake with the *autos-da-fé* of the Spanish Inquisition, but such executions were merely the final act—executed by civil authorities and not the Church—of the drama of interrogation designed to coerce the accused into admitting guilt for heretical deeds and thoughts. Nevertheless, such devices and instruments of torture as the *rack*, the *brodequin*, or 'wooden boot,' thumbscrews and *pilliwinks*,²¹ the *strappado*,²² or the *peine forte et dure*²³ were in common judicial use throughout Europe; as Robert Held points out, "Nothing went on in inquisitorial dungeons . . . that would have seemed excessive, let alone unusual, to any plebe, burgher, or prince of the times."²⁴ Moreover, as Elaine Scarry has astutely noted, the persistence of torture to this day, with all its technological refinements, is testimony not so much to its efficacy as a means of obtaining information (which the torturer or his superiors may in any case already possess) than to its semiotic durability as "the translation of all the objectified elements of pain into the insignia or power, the conversion of . . . human suffering into an emblem of the regime's strength."²⁵

Readers who have served on a jury may at times have thought the long-winded posturing of attor-



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neys to be a torment in its own right. Lawmakers, for all that many of them have been lawyers themselves, are not incapable of sympathizing with this sentiment, which is why statutes exist in many jurisdictions prohibiting *barratry*,²⁶ an old-fashioned word for frivolous litigiousness. Sumptuary laws—ordinances outlawing conspicuous consumption—go all the way back at least to Rome, where among the laws on the Twelve Tables was a prohibition on burying gold and silver ornaments with the dead, an exception being made for dental bridgework.²⁷ Among the *blue laws* enacted by the Puritan citizens of New Haven, Connecticut, was a provision for a whopping £300 fine for anyone who "wears clothes trimmed with gold, silver, or bone lace above one shilling per yard."²⁸

Some quaint criminal charges are apocryphal, either in meaning or in fact. The definition of *mopery* as "exposing oneself to a blind person" has been gleefully embraced by American writers from H. Allen Smith in the 1940s to Thomas Pynchon five decades later, apparently without foundation; the actual offense (whose name derives from a secondary meaning of the verb to *mope*,²⁹ 'to walk away, make off') is 'loitering while walking,' and, like laws against vagrancy, functions as a sort of legal wildcard, a one-size-fits-all charge that can easily be applied to annoying people by irritable authorities. In a similar vein, an informant has told me that some acquaintances of his were supposedly arrested in a town on Cape Cod in Massachusetts during the late 1960s for *lurking with intent to loom*:³⁰ 'loitering for the purposes of appearing menacing.' *Fiat justitia, ruat coelum*.³¹



Notes:

1 Such places of torment for departed souls sometimes entail an element of poetic justice as well. Thus in Greek myth we find Tantalus, whose offenses included revealing the secret of the banquets that kept the gods immortal and then serving his own son, Pelops, in a stew when a couple of deities dropped in and his larder was otherwise bare, suffering from perpetual hunger and thirst down in Tartarus, in sight of fruit and water that receded whenever he reached for them; see Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths Complete* (Penguin, 1971), §108, whence the term *tantalus* for a liquor cabinet whose contents can be seen but not tasted unless one has the key to unlock it. The orthodox Christian Hell allegorized nearly two millennia later by Dante owes much to the Greeks' Tartarus, though with a heavy admixture of the taxonomies of sin worked out by Aristotle and Cicero, as pointed out by Dorothy Sayers on page 139 of her translation of *The Inferno* (New York: Penguin, 1980), so it is no surprise that four of the five rivers of the classical underworld—Acheron, the Styx, Phlegethon, and Lethe—should be incorporated in the poet's vision of the abode of the damned as well, along with not a few characters from Greco-Roman myth and epic, such as Minos and the Minotaur, the Furies, the harpies, and the centaurs, Dido and Aeneas, and, of course, the poet Vergil himself as Dante's cicerone. (Indeed, Sayers identifies Book VI of Vergil's *Aeneid* as a source "from which Dante derived so much of the geography and machinery of the *Inferno*.") Wholly in keeping with the late medieval allegorical tradition, punishments fit crimes in the *Inferno* too: The lustful are driven perpetually by a dark wind: A "howling darkness of helpless discomfort," Sayers observes, these sinners' punishment is "simply the sin itself, experienced without illusion" (p. 102); the violent against God, Nature, and Art are condemned to the circle of burning sand (onto which falls a constant rain of fire); thieves inhabit a circle full of snakes, as befits their guile, and change shape horribly, parodying their sin of failing to distinguish between "mine" and "thine." But other Western societies allotted to the non-virtuous an indiscriminate oblivion: In the postmortem court of the Egyptians, the sinner whose heart was found to be heavier than the feather that was the hieroglyph for "justice" (*ma'at*) would be summarily devoured by the crocodile-headed monster Amemait, as J. Viaud notes in his essay "Egyptian Mythology" in *The New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (New York: Crescent Books, 1987), p. 41, while Norsemen who failed to fall bravely in battle and be carried up to Valhalla by the Valkyries were doomed, after their nine-day journey through the Wood of Iron to Niflheim, to be annihilated by the death-goddess Hel. (For a synopsis of Norse cosmology and afterlife, see http://www.angelfire.com/art/brim2001/norse_stories.htm.)

2 With occasional exceptions, notably in the more equitable laws regarding the division of property between

divorcing men and women in the U.S. states whose civil code is derived indirectly from the Roman Code of Justinian, either through the Spanish *Partidas of Alfonso the Wise* (e.g., New Mexico) or the *Code Napoléon* (Louisiana).

3 Abortion was not a criminal offense in England, for example, until the middle of the nineteenth century (§§ 58–59 of the Offenses against the Person Act of 1861). Although the Roman Catholic Church, during the papacy of Pius IX (beatified along with Pope John XXIII in 2001), came down emphatically against abortion for any reason whatever in 1869, medieval churchmen, notably St. Thomas Aquinas, believed that fetuses did not have souls until "quickened," i.e., until signs of stirring were present, generally in the third trimester of pregnancy. In the United States, the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) in effect legalized abortion in the United States by reframing the issue as one of the privacy rights of the pregnant woman. For the state of British abortion law in the mid-twentieth century, see C. J. Polson's *Essentials of Forensic Medicine* (Oxford, England: Pergamon Press, 1962), pp. 381–389; for an interesting examination of the sexual politics of reproductive technology, see also Susan M. Squier's *Babies in Bottles* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), especially pp. 63–76 and 96–99.

4 Although Amendments 1–10 are generally regarded as *the* Bill of Rights for historical purposes, civil liberties of U.S. citizens are also enumerated in clauses within the Constitution itself that prohibit the suspension of Habeas Corpus (except in wartime), bills of attainder, and ex post facto laws. Additional rights were added by Amendments 13 (abolition of slavery), 14 (guarantees of due process and equal protection), 15 (civil rights of persons of color and former slaves), and 19 (female suffrage).

5 Such as the floggings, of a thousand lashes each, administered to two inhabitants of Waldoboro who attempted to return home from the loyalist colony-within-a-colony appropriately named New Ireland, established on Penobscot Bay during the American War of Independence by British forces after fending off the Massachusetts navy's attempt to capture Fort Bagaduce (now Castine). See James S. Leamon, *Revolution Downeast* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p. 177.

6 I am indebted to Jennifer Holan for this example.

7 For an interesting discussion of the role of county "Houses of Correction" in the management of the insane in Massachusetts at the beginning of the nineteenth century, see Mary Ann Jimenez, *Changing Faces of Madness* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987).

8 The war with the Numidians coincided with the emergence of the rival strongmen Marius and Sulla and hence might be viewed as the beginning of the end of the Roman Republic. Sallust's *Jugurthine War*, together with his *Conspiracy of Catiline*, is available in a translation by S. A. Handford (New York: Penguin, 1963).



9 This former cloister in London being, as Anthony Burgess notes in his introduction to Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (New York: Penguin, 1966), "one of the 'liberties' where the King's writ did not run." Imprisonment for debt was ended in both Britain and America by bankruptcy laws passed in the 1800s, although under certain conditions—e.g., the concealment of assets—debtors may be confined indefinitely under a judge's power to find them in contempt of court, one such defendant in Philadelphia recently having lost his appeal for release from a sentence now in its sixth year thanks to his intransigence in refusing to obey the judge's order in his divorce to reveal all that he actually possesses.

10 A fourth reason—a kind of preventive detention at the government's pleasure—allowed a middle ground when a noble offender could not be readily punished but clearly would be an embarrassment if allowed at large. Elizabeth I thus kept her rival cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, comfortably mewed up in a series of country estates and castles for more than two decades (1568–1587) before finally having her beheaded with a sword following the discovery of Babington's regicidal plot.

11 As soon as John Stubbes, a Puritan, had his right hand chopped off (in 1579) for writing his *Discoverie of a Gaping Gulfe*, a pamphlet stridently opposing Elizabeth's proposed marriage to Francis of Valois (the Duke of Alençon and younger brother of the king of France), he is said to have doffed his hat with his remaining hand and called out, in a loud voice, "God save the Queen." This has been generally taken for gallantry, but it is not inconceivable that it may have been meant as irony. See Elizabeth Story Donno on Stubbes in Sir John Harington's *Metamorphosis of Ajax* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 124 (note 85).

12 More dangerous than cartoons of life in Puritan New England would suggest. The stocks immobilized legs and feet but left the head free; the pillory confined head and arms. In either case the prisoner was at risk of being pelted with anything from garbage to bricks, by indignant passersby or, worse, fellow citizens with a serious grudge; death from a fractured skull was not unheard of.

13 An explanation and pictured examples of scolds' bridles, also called *branks*, are given on pp. 151–55 of Robert Held's *Inquisition/Inquisición* (Florence, Italy: Qua d'Arno Publishers, 1985), a bilingual catalogue for an exhibition of instruments of torture on tour to various European cities from 1983 through 1987. I am obliged to Paul DeVore for bringing this horrifying but wholesome book to my attention.

14 The opening line of an anti-Protestant children's verse from Northern Ireland, included in performances by the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem during their concert tours of the 1960s.

15 That is, by the hangman after he and the condemned had mounted the ladder together.

16 Since both executioner and prisoner had to climb the ladder, the latter's feet were not tied; unless the fall broke the neck immediately, the strangling victim legs would writhe in the air.

17 An example of which—with no poll on the back and a broadly curving and offset blade on the front—is still in the Tower of London; a photograph of it appears on p. 10 of Henry Kaufman's *American Axes* (Brattleboro, VT: Stephen Greene Press, 1972).

18 Lopez, a Jewish physician who had fled to England from Spain in 1559, was physician to the queen at the time he was accused of plotting to kill her at the instigation of Philip II of Spain. The case for and against his guilt, and the possible role of the Earl of Essex, is examined in a BBC "Open University" website, <http://www.open2.net/renaissance2/doing/conspire.html>. Before the invention of the trap-door gallows (or *new drop*), deft hangmen came to pride themselves on being able to turn the condemned off the ladder in such a way that the fall would indeed break the prisoner's neck; but executioners took care not to kill prematurely when drawing and quartering were supposed to follow.

19 For France, see Barbara Levy, *Legacy of Death* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 13 and 42–45; this book is a fascinating history of the seven generations of the Sanson family who served as executioners of Paris. A vivid description of a Chinese judicial quartering in the era of magistrate Dee Jen-Djeh (630–700 A.D.) is provided by Robert Van Gulik on pp. 273–74 of *The Chinese Bell Murders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), one of many mystery stories in the Chinese style written by Van Gulik after the enthusiastic reception given his translation of the classic *Dee Goong An* (Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee.) The Dutch career diplomat was also an assiduous collector of Asian erotic art.

20 The Smithfield executions by fire of Anglicans during Bloody Mary's brief Counter-Reformation are vividly related in John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (Old Tappan, NJ: Spire Books, 1968), originally published in England during the reign of Elizabeth I and an instant best-seller; it would go on to be one of the three commonest books in seventeenth-century New England, along with the *Bay Psalm Book* and the Bible.

21 Used by the Burgundians and their English allies to coerce a confession from St. Joan of Arc during the Hundred Years' War, the *brodequin* was also employed in an unsuccessful attempt to extract the names of accomplices from Robert-François Damiens, who attempted to assassinate King Louis XV of France in 1757. For this act of *lèse-majesté* (from Latin *laesus majestatis*, 'affront to majesty') Damiens was condemned to be quartered alive. (See Levy, op. cit., pp. 42–45.) *Pilliwinks* (Middle English *pyrewykes*) were a type of fingercrusher. Bonebreaking as a form of interrogative torture is to be distinguished from



the judicial *breaking on* (or *with*) *the wheel*, a form of execution in which the condemned was either tethered to a horizontal wheel that was turned as the executioner systematically broke the bones with an iron bar, or else tied over a set of hard fulcra against which the wheel itself was smashed to crush the bones between them. In either case, once the victim was broken, the limbs were braided in between the spokes of the wheel, which was then set up on a pole so that birds could peck at the body. Though Levy (op. cit., p. 13) says that the “punishment was said to have originated in Germany,” at Rome clubbing a naked criminal to death while his neck was fixed to the ground by a wooden fork was already referred to as “an old-fashioned execution” by the time of the first Caesars; Suetonius’s *The Twelve Caesars* (New York: Penguin, 1957), reports that the fleeing emperor Nero, on learning that the senate had condemned him to such a fate, overcame his cowardice enough to stab himself to death instead. The last sentence to the wheel in France was handed down in 1788, on a man named Louschart, convicted of killing his father in a political argument; but a Paris crowd that sympathized with the condemned man’s revolutionary sentiments mobbed the scaffold and freed Louschart, and the executioner—Charles-Henri Sanson, later called “the keystone of the Revolution”—barely escaped unscathed. King Louis XVI graciously pardoned Louschart and ordered the punishment forever stricken from the French law code (Levy, op. cit., pp. 68–69).

22 Or in French, *vestrapade*. This consisted of tying the prisoner’s hands behind him, lifting him to a great height, then dropping him so that his arms would be dislocated. The shipboard version was called *la cale*, and came in two forms: *la cale sèche* (‘dry fall’), in which the victim was dropped almost to the deck, and *la cale humide* (‘wet fall’), in which he plummeted into the water (Levy, op. cit., pp. 13–14).

23 This term referred to pressing someone under a door weighted down with rocks in order to force a plea in court. Giles Cory, the only defendant at Salem to be executed other than on the gallows, was so treated during the witchcraft trials of 1692. See Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 8.

24 Held, op. cit., Introduction, p. 15.

25 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 56.

26 Laughlin McDonald, in *A Civil Rights Odyssey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, in press), mentions several instances in which segregationists in the South used barratry statues still on the books to impede suits by civil rights activists. Courts actually convicted several defendants (in, e.g., Georgia), but the sentences were overturned on appeal. Freud alludes to barratry penalties in Europe as well, in his *General Introduction to*

Psychoanalysis (New York: Washington Square Press, 1962), as an analogy when speaking of patients who blather on about matters irrelevant to the treatment as paying for the session in any case—the equivalent, he says, of “being fined so many Kroner for wasting the time of the court.”

27 Humez, Alexander, and Nicholas, *A B C Et Cetera: The Life and Times of the Roman Alphabet* (Boston, MA: Godine, 1985), p. 50.

28 Marcus Bales was kind enough to send me the list of archaic statutes that included this item, headed by a note stating that they were called *blue laws* because originally they were printed on blue paper. This origin may be apocryphal, but that it did at least originate (first appearing in print in 1781) in reference to New Haven’s legal code, and was only later generalized to apply to such laws elsewhere, is confirmed at the entry for *blue-laws* on p. 600 of the first volume of the *Century Dictionary* (New York: The Century Company, 1895)—a work compiled under the direction of one of New Haven’s most eminent linguistic scholars, Yale University’s long-time professor of Comparative Philology and Sanskrit, William Dwight Whitney.

29 Attested in *The American Mercury* magazine in 1928, and elsewhere even earlier, according to Eric Partridge’s *A Dictionary of the Underworld* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 449. My thanks to Bruce Harris Bentzman for pointing out this reference.

30 John G. Mulvey, for many years a history teacher in northern Vermont.

31 “Let there be justice, though heaven fall.” According to the 16th edition of *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1992), p. 119, the maxim is sometimes attributed to Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (d. 43 B.C.)

[*Nick Humez is the author (with his brother Alexander) of Alpha to Omega: The Life and Times of the Greek Alphabet (Godine, 1981), ABC Et Cetera: The Life and Times of the Roman Alphabet (Godine, 1985), and Zero to Lazy Eight: The Romance of Numbers (with Joseph Maguire, Simon and Schuster, 1993).*]

Answers to Crossword Number 90 ACROSS
 1. Records 5. Cedula 9. Dwarf 10. Overtures
 11. Craven 12. Grimaldi 14. Idiot 15. Ytterbium
 18. Nefertiti 20. Arson 22. Belcanto 24. Corona
 26. Cheapjack 27. Terai 28. Sestina 29. Ardency
 DOWN 1. Redaction 2. Chapati 3. Reflector 4. Scot
 5. Chevrotain 6. Datum 7. Lorelei 8. Assai
 13. Lysistrata 16. Readopted 17. Mendacity
 19. Falter 21. Sportan 22. Backs 23. Appu 25. Skua



A Headful of Words

Nigel J. Ross
Milan, Italy

Our heads are stuffed full of words and yet somehow our brains manage to make sensible use of them. It's a curious situation that the poet T. S. Eliot describes as "the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings." Amazingly, up until fairly recently, we had only very rough ideas as to how our brains process language. However, developments in neuroscience investigations mean that researchers are starting to gain a much more legible picture of what happens in our heads when we speak, listen, and read. Researchers are currently using the fascinating technique of "brain imaging" to investigate various aspects of how our brains handle language, including how we deal with our own language and foreign languages, and how dyslexics handle words.

Just ten or fifteen years ago, most scientific knowledge of how our heads processed language stemmed from research on patients with brain damage. Scientists studied people who had suffered strokes or other forms of brain impairment, and they gained a reasonable idea of which areas of the brain controlled which functions.

For quite some time it has been known that the left-hand side of the brain is generally more involved in language functions. This is true for 97–98% of all right-handed people (who make up around 90% of the population). Most left-handers (around 67–68%) also use the left hemisphere for language functions, though left-handers in general tend to make more use of both hemispheres when dealing with language. Left-handers are generally good at art and music, and at recognising faces, but in many cases they have greater difficulties with language, and dyslexia appears to be more common among left-handers.

It takes very little to show that for most right-handed people, it is the left-hand side of the brain that is at work when language is being processed. Try this little experiment. Read a paragraph or so of this article aloud and at the same time, tap a finger of your right hand in a fairly regular rhythm. Then do the same thing while tapping a finger of your left

hand. You probably noticed that you had a harder time tapping with your right finger because it is your left-hand side of the brain that is doing all the work (processing the language and controlling the movements in your right hand).

For the vast majority of people, therefore, the left hemisphere of the brain controls language functions, and certain specific areas within the left hemisphere can be singled out as "language centres." Decades of observing brain-damaged patients allowed researchers to piece together a fairly good picture of what goes on in our heads when we use language. Many of these language areas are located deep inside the brain, far from the cortex, especially around what is known as the *Sylvian fissure*—a deep pleat in the brain that runs more or less parallel to the line from the eye to the ear. Close to the Sylvian fissure lies *Broca's area*, which is mainly involved in controlling the mechanical aspects of speech. Another nearby sector, the temporal lobe, looks after hearing perception. Within this latter part of the brain, *Wernicke's area* is believed to be responsible for finding words and feeding them to other parts of the brain. Next-door, the *angular gyrus* (a *gyrus* is a "ridge" in the brain) helps to make sense of the words and letters we come across when reading.

Only fairly recently have researchers been able to gain a clearer picture of what happens inside the brain, thanks to techniques known as *brain imaging* or *neuro-imaging*, which make use of machines originally developed for medical purposes, such as the widely known *CT scanner*. Much more effective for linguistic purposes, however, is the *PET scanner*, providing *positron emission tomography* scans. A PET scanner detects a radioactive substance that has been injected into or inhaled by a subject or patient. When in the bloodstream, the substance tends to gather in the most active areas of the brain, and PET scans therefore indicate the areas that are at work during any particular mental task. Research using brain imaging is giving us more and more information about how our brains work. In the language field, interesting research is being carried out into how the brain functions while learning a language – a native language or a foreign language—and how dyslexic subjects approach reading.

Researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis have confirmed



that during listening the most active brain areas are in the temporal lobe (responsible for hearing perception) and in the prefrontal cortex (responsible for understanding language). Conversely, during language production, the most active area is Broca's area (responsible for motor control of the voice).

Various other experiments have compared how the brain handles the mother tongue and a foreign language. The learning process is normally very different: young children learn their mother tongue effortlessly and spontaneously; later in life adolescents or adults learn a foreign language in a more structured way, often with a good deal of study. It should come as no surprise, therefore, to discover that different brain areas are used for the mother tongue and the foreign language. Experimental work carried out in France by the Laboratoire de Sciences Cognitives et Psycholinguistique, in cooperation with an Italian team from the San Raffaele Hospital in Milan, has identified these very areas.

The experimenters found that when subjects listened to a text in their mother-tongue, the most active areas in the brain, as expected, were those in the left hemisphere, mainly the upper and middle areas of the temporal lobe and the lower frontal gyrus. When listening to a foreign language, however, no general patterns emerged as far as brain activity was concerned. What the scientists eventually realised was that the different subjects were handling the foreign language in different ways. While all subjects were handling listening tasks in their mother-tongue more or less in the same areas of the brain, there was an amazing variety in the way that the foreign language was being deciphered. Some subjects were using their right hemisphere, others were relying on Broca's area (normally used for controlling speech) and the front cortex. In other words, it appears that the traditional "language" areas of the brain are off-limits when learning a foreign language, and other less specialised areas are assigned to the new language.

Another research project carried out by the San Raffaele Hospital in Milan and University College London has investigated how the brain handles reading in Italian and English. The two languages are in many ways poles apart as far as reading is concerned. Italian is highly "phonetic" in its written

form, while English is very much the opposite. Each letter or combination of letters in Italian has essentially one pronunciation: the 33 letters and combinations in Italian represent the 25 sounds in the language. In stark contrast, English uses a total of 1,120 letters and letter combinations to represent its 40 sounds, with a great deal of ambiguity and redundancy in the system. Thanks to their "shallow" spelling system, Italian children learn to read extremely accurately in their mother tongue after just six months of schooling, while English mother-tongue children are still at a lower level after three years of teaching.

The researchers found that English readers were consistently slower at reading. By means of brain imaging techniques, it was discovered that all subjects were using the same parts of the brain during reading: areas mainly located in the left hemisphere—as expected—and especially the prefrontal cortex, the upper, middle, and lower temporal areas, as well as the upper temporal gyrus in the right hemisphere. There were, however, significant differences between the two groups of subjects. English readers tended to show greater activation of both the lower left temporal region and the frontal gyrus. Italians did not tend to activate these "extra" areas, though they did show some increased activity within the common area, specifically at the junction between the upper temporal gyrus and the lower parietal lobe. Clearly it is a more complex task to read in English, and more areas of the brain are involved.

Researchers have also been using brain imaging techniques to investigate dyslexia. Dyslexia long perplexed scientists, not least because numerous dyslexics display above-normal levels of intelligence along with their serious reading difficulties. Thanks to imaging techniques that show the brain in action, scientists have recently been able to identify brain areas that are in some ways related to dyslexia. Although there is still a good deal of research to be done, it is becoming clear that the angular gyrus, located towards the rear of the brain, is a key area in understanding more about dyslexia.

The angular gyrus is very actively involved in interpreting the letters and words that we read. Research has revealed that dyslexic subjects show less activity in the angular gyrus during reading tasks than do subjects without the disability. It



appears that dyslexic subjects' angular gyrus does not function in the customary way, the area being used insufficiently or inadequately. As a result, other brain areas may be pressed into service instead—areas such as the inferior frontal gyrus, which is usually associated with spoken language.

An international research team—embracing scientists from Canada, France, Italy, and Britain—has recently been analysing the cultural diversity of dyslexia, since its occurrence varies from country to country, being particularly prevalent, for example, in Britain and the U.S. (twice as many Americans as Italians are considered to be dyslexic). The research team wanted to investigate the problem by testing Italian dyslexics, whose “shallow” spelling system facilitates reading, comparing them with English and French dyslexics. It emerged, however, that from a biological point of view all dyslexics were equally impaired in their reading. PET scans during reading showed the same reduced activity within the left hemisphere in dyslexics from all three countries, specifically in and around the angular gyrus. There is obviously a common neurocognitive basis for dyslexia, the different reading abilities among dyslexics of the various countries being due to different spelling systems. The shallow spelling system of languages such as Italian or Spanish do not present such a serious hurdle to readers with milder forms of dyslexia, while more complex spelling systems, as used for English or French, aggravate the problem.

The previous study of Italian and English subjects demonstrated that English mother-tongue readers used “extra” parts of their left temporal areas. Similar results emerged when French subjects were also taken into consideration. When dyslexic readers from the three countries were compared, however, no such distinctions could be made. Whatever their mother tongue, all dyslexics showed less activity in the left middle, inferior, and superior temporal cortex and in the middle occipital gyrus.

Little by little neuroscientists are finding out how our brains deal with words, precisely which parts are responsible for certain language tasks, and why speakers of certain languages make greater use of certain areas. Clearly there is still a vast amount of research to be carried out, though we can perhaps

now hope to have a clearer idea one day of how our brains “wrestle with words and meanings.” Perhaps we will get to know whether better foreign language learners tend to use a certain part of their brains and if there are ways by which the more suitable areas can be “coaxed into action.” And perhaps the time will come when dyslexics can be helped to overcome their disability thanks to a greater understanding of what’s going on in their heads. Neuroscientists will presumably have a lot more to tell us in the future.

[Nigel Ross teaches English Language, Sectorial Varieties, and History of the Language at the Istituto Superiore per Interpreti e Traduttori (Fondazione SCM) in Milan.]

SIC! SIC! SIC!

A listing on the ABE booksellers site (<http://www.abebooks.com>) offers this title for sale:

Ticknor, Caroline: Hawthorne and his Publisher.

It’s only \$10, from Bodacious Books in Nashville, if you’re willing to risk it! *[Submitted by Adam Moore.]*

Also found on the web was this nugget: Thebesttranslator@hotmail.com wrote: Dear List Members, I am The BEST TRANSLATOR ever been. To which one of the put-upon list members replied, “Not into English, you’re not.” *[Submitted by Juliette Shapiro.]*

From New York Times Daily e-mail News Summary, 25 April 2002

“Supreme Court Considers Whether Privacy Law Gives Students the Right to Sue.

It appeared unlikely that the Supreme Court would find a right to sue for breeches of privacy in educational records embedded in a 28-year-old statute.” *[From the New York Times daily email news summary, April 25, 2002. Submitted by Ed Dell, Peterborough, NH., who remarks: Breeches don't provide all that much privacy in any case—too short!]*

“I’ve actually heard people change their minds about the building,” said (biology division administrator Mike) Miranda . . . *[From the Pasadena Star-News, Sunday, September 8, 2002. Submitted by Robert L. Sharp.]*



Word Sites Online

Michael Quinion
Thornbury, Bristol

The World Wide Web is well served by sites that feature the English language, especially its history and its peculiarities of vocabulary. Some of the better known and more popular ones are listed here.

Mailing lists

A Word a Day <<http://www.wordsmith.org/awad/subscribe.html>> Anu Garg's list is the granddaddy of online words' mailing lists, now with more than half a million subscribers. A new word is sent out every weekday.

Merriam-Webster's Word of the Day <<http://www.m-w.com/service/subinst.htm>> A free seven-day-a-week service featuring a word, with a commentary, taken from the publisher's *Unabridged Dictionary*.

Vocabulary Mail <<http://www.vocabularymail.com>> A daily mailing, featuring between one and three words. The emphasis, again, is on building one's vocabulary.

Word of the Day <<http://www.dictionary.com/wordoftheday/list/>> Another seven-day-a-week service which is strongly biased towards vocabulary building.

Word Spy <www.logophilia.com/WordSpy/subscribe.html> Each weekday, Paul McFedries chooses a term culled from newspapers and magazines. The emphasis is on neologisms, so many of the choices reflect journalists' inventive wordsmithery.

World Wide Words <<http://www.worldwide-words.org/>> My own take on words from a British standpoint; in weekly e-mail newsletter that is linked to a website.

Regular Web columns

OED Word of the Day <<http://www.oed.com/cgi/display/wotd>> Each daily word page consists of its full *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, with all its subsenses and examples.

Take Our Word for It <<http://www.takeourword.com/>> Melanie & Mike discuss word etymologies. The site is updated weekly, and you can join a mailing list.

Word Detective <<http://www.word-detective.com/>> This is the web archive of pieces on word his-

tory by Evan Morris which appear in his syndicated newspaper columns. Updated every month.

Writings on words

Ask Oxford <<http://www.askoxford.com/>> A compendium of information about words, including *Quote of the Week*, *Ask the Experts*, and word games.

Martha Barnette's Fun Words <<http://www.fun-words.com/>> An entertaining compendium of quirky words.

Mavens' Word of the Day <<http://www.randomhouse.com/wotd/>> From the Word Mavens of Random House. This has now closed, but an archive of past pieces gives answers to queries about the meanings of words and expressions.

Urban Legends Archive <<http://www.urbanlegends.com/language/etymology/>> This discusses, and debunks, some of the stranger stories about the origins of words that circulate online and off.

Vocubula Review <<http://www.vocubula.com/>> A monthly online magazine celebrating the "opulence and elegance" of the English language.

Word for Word <<http://plateaupress.com.au/wfw/articles.htm>> Articles on words and phrases by Australian writer Terry O'Connor.

Word Fugitives <<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/fugitives/>> Barbara Wallraff of the *Atlantic Monthly* features words that ought to exist but don't.

Online dictionaries

American Heritage Dictionary <<http://www.bartleby.com/61/>> The complete text of the 2000 edition, searchable by entry, definition, or full text.

OneLook Dictionaries <<http://www.one-look.com/>> Provides searchable access to a large number of online dictionaries. Multilingual.

Oxford English Dictionary Online <<http://www.oed.com/>> Full access requires a paid subscription, but you can access the Word of the Day and read the regular newsletters free.

YourDictionary.com <<http://www.yourdictionary.com/>> Another collection of dictionary links, to 1800 dictionaries in some 250 languages.

[Michael Quinion is the editor of the *World Wide Words* electronic newsletter. This webliography was adapted from the one that appears in *Weird and Wonderful Words*, edited by Erin McKean (with illustrations by Roz Chast), Oxford, 2002.]



An Appeal to Writers Everywhere

Tony Ladds
Brecon, Wales

I am sure we are all very concerned about the world shortage of full-stops (or periods, as our American cousins would have it) which has been brought about by the huge increase in writing during the latter part of the twentieth century and the profligate use of these punctuation marks by irresponsible writers seeking to emulate the likes of Ernest Hemingway by writing in short, staccato sentences simply for effect! Whilst I won't deny that this can be an effective ploy if used sparingly, I do feel that the time has come to call a halt to this practice, otherwise (according to the latest expert forecasts) there will be no full-stops left by the middle of the century and then how will the future generation of writers as yet unborn ever be able to finish their sentences?

You may suppose that science will solve this problem for us, but here I must sound a note of caution, particularly with reference to the new breed of genetically modified (GM) full-stops currently being imported to this country without proper labelling or other means of identification! Some of you may already have used these Frankenstein full-stops without realising it, and we must continue to press the government to introduce a three year moratorium on the importation of these GM full-stops until such time as the proper research has been fully carried out, otherwise who knows what trouble we may be storing up for the future?

For those of you who don't know, these GM full-stops have been genetically engineered in America (and we all know what they have already done to our native language!) by taking a gene from the dot over the letter *i* and introducing it into the molecular structure of our own English full-stop, with who knows what possibly catastrophic consequences? One nightmare scenario is that such genetic tinkering could so weaken our native full-stop to the point where it could become physically incapable of stopping a sentence in full flow, with the potentially disastrous consequence of letters, indeed maybe even whole words, tumbling off the end of

paragraphs and falling to their death on the paragraph below, inserting themselves willy-nilly into the text and rendering the entire page indecipherable!

As a direct result of this shortage of full-stops, underground experiments are reported to be taking place in certain unenlightened parts of the world, into the possibility of splitting the umlaut, a prospect which fills me with dread, for who knows what awful and as yet unforeseen consequences may follow? On the face of it you may think umlaut splitting to be a good way of dealing with this shortage—after all, there's a plentiful supply of them, and hardly anyone uses them nowadays except a few Germans and Scandinavians, but please bear in mind that all responsible scientists, both in this country and in laboratories as far away as the U.S., Japan and South Africa have already abandoned these experiments for fear of setting off a potentially disastrous and unstoppable chain reaction which could destroy our entire vocabulary! Of course, our own government has imposed a complete ban on such irresponsible and dangerous practices, but evidence has recently been uncovered that indicates certain Middle Eastern governments are not only sheltering these literary terrorists but have been actively sponsoring their research into umlaut splitting and the wholesale production of ersatz full-stops! Even as I write, an international coalition of right-minded governments around the world is taking steps to eradicate this threat before it is too late, and great pressure is being brought on a certain rogue government to hand these people over or suffer the consequences—we must all hope that these efforts are successful, but in the meantime we should be asking whether we might not have contributed to this state of affairs ourselves?

I would respectfully suggest, my fellow writers, that the answer to this problem is in our own hands—we should be writing much longer sentences and availing ourselves of the full range of punctuation marks available to us in our native language! I don't propose to list them all here as space does not permit, and in any case some punctuation marks need no recommendation from me (I am thinking particularly of those unashamed self-publicists, the inverted commas, forever standing up waving to attract attention to themselves), but I



would like, if I may, to put in a word for the shy, retiring, and much misunderstood colon: less well known than its brash second cousin the semicolon, it is nevertheless a very useful little device that has sadly fallen into disuse from, I suspect, an unreasonable prejudice against it simply because it shares a name with the lower section of the large intestine as it enters the rectum—whilst I appreciate that the mental picture conjured up every time a colon is used is not, perhaps, an attractive one, I would say (in the words of The Bard), what is in a name?

Finally, a word of caution about using sawn-off exclamation marks! I know some of you have been tempted to do this when you've been unable to obtain a sufficient supply of the real thing, but I must tell you that you are misguided; not only is the dot in the exclamation mark a poor, undernourished thing compared with the fully mature native full-stop, and therefore capable of stopping only very short sentences, but more important, they were never intended for this use! They were created in vastly smaller quantities in the first place, so should this practice become widespread the existing supply would rapidly run out, and we should be leaving future generations of writers not only with no satisfactory way of finishing their stories but also depriving them of the ability to emphasise a point, and would that be fair? By all means use the exclamation mark in its entirety where it is appropriate (but only one at a time please—the use of the triple exclamation mark so beloved by headline writers in some of our tabloid newspapers is not only wasteful, it is grammatically incorrect and, let's face it, rather tacky!!!), but let us call a halt to this pernicious practice of using sawn-off exclamation marks in place of full-stops, before it is too late; ask yourselves, do you really want to use mutilated punctuation in this way?

And so my friends, let us all pull together in conserving our precious supply of full-stops by using them only in situations where no other mark will do, as I am about to do myself for (as the more observant among you will already have noted), the very first time in this entire article—that is to say, when you have finally, and definitely, reached

THE END.

BIBLIOGRAPHIA

Predicting New Words: The Secrets of Their Success, by Allan Metcalf, Houghton Mifflin, 224 pp, \$22.00 0-618-13006-3

I greeted the news of this book with quite nearly a shout of joy. I was lucky enough to hear Allan Metcalf, Executive Secretary of the American Dialect Society, outline his theory (complete with chart) of how to predict the success of new words several years ago at a meeting of the Dictionary Society of North America. There was even some discussion of printing his grid in *VERBATIM*, but I thought it would be too opaque without accompanying commentary.

In this book, however, we find the accompanying commentary, and fine commentary it is, too. Metcalf writes lucidly and with a light touch and is a first-rate explainer (possibly due to many years of teaching at MacMurray College in Illinois).

He's given his scale for predicting the success of new words a fun name—the FUDGE scale, which lets him use the term “FUDGE factor,” certainly a plus. FUDGE stands for the factors that make it up: Frequency of use, Unobtrusiveness, Diversity of users and situations, Generation of other forms and meanings, and Endurance of the concept. He uses this scale deftly to judge the longevity of words like *nerd* and *prosultant*, *pro-life* and *couch potato*.

My favorite chapter was “Natural Birth and Rebirth,” where Metcalf points out that words are not children, in that they can have more than one set of natural parents. If a word can be thought of, it can be thought of at different times by different people, and it's often the case that the thinker-upper with the best access to the media is anointed as the coiner even if your Great-Aunt Sadie said it every day of her life beginning in 1932. He gives several examples from the web of people coining *linner* as a blend of *lunch* and *dinner*.

Combining a gentle introduction to his theory with interesting examples of both successes and failures with stellar research and plenty of citations, *Predicting New Words* is an excellent book for anyone who is interested in new words or who wants to try their hand at coining a few.

—Erin McKean



EPISTOLAE

Re: VERBAITM XXVII No. 2 Spring 2002, “B is for Body”

There is an old puzzle, often discussed, as to why so many composers’ names begin with the letter B.

The Bachs help to enlarge the category but there is also Bartok, Bax, Beethoven, Bellini, Berg, Berlioz, Bernstein, Bizet, Bliss, Blow, Borcherini, Boulez, Boyce, Brahms, Bridges, Britten, Bruchner, Buxtehude, Byrd. . . . Oh, I forgot Borodin and Busoni!

And the conductors: Boult, Beecham, Bartioli, Berenboim . . .

B’s outnumber all other letters in the classical listings.

Yours sincerely,
Stuart Porte
London

Susan Elkin’s article on Royal epithets misses one interesting example.

The Eastern Roman Emperor who ascended the Throne, briefly, in 741 A.D., only to be deposed, then restored in 743 and who then reigned until 775, was, as we all know, Constantine V. He is known to history as Constantine V, Copronymus. Constantine the Shit.

Yours
Brian Robinson
Brentwood, Essex, UK.

The article on Janus words in the Spring number (Vol. XXVII/2), which recently arrived, reminds me of one which I have not seen listed among such words: *washable*. A number of years ago a physician gave me a prescription for topical hydrocortisone “in water-washable base.” I asked him whether that meant able to withstand washing (as in *washable fabric*) or capable of being washed out (as in *washable ink*). He admitted he didn’t know, but that had always been how he wrote the prescription.

Edward G. Voss
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Thank you for another fascinating issue (Summer 2002). I found Dean Juniper’s article “180 Degree Homonyms” especially interesting. Curiously, Mr. Juniper expressed puzzlement over what he regards to be a new meaning of the word *sanction*—to penalize. While I have not checked the *OED*, I suspect that both meanings—‘to permit’ as well as ‘to punish’ an action—have a long history in our language because both are already present in the Latin verbal parent (*sancio*). Cicero, for example, used the verb both ways—*Sanxerunt autem alia legibus* Rep. 1, 2, 2 ‘they sanctioned (i.e., permitted) other things with laws’ and *Solon capite sanxit* Att. 10, 1, 2 ‘Solon sanctioned [the matter] with the death penalty.’

Allan Mahnke
Minneapolis, MN

Some time ago this correction appeared in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*: “Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch station in Wales was misspelled in an Associated Press caption with a photograph that appeared yesterday. The *Union-Tribune* regrets the error.”

The name of that fifty-eight-letter Welsh village certainly presents a spelling challenge to anyone—particularly those not familiar with the Welsh language. Not surprisingly, therefore, I noticed that it was misspelled in the article “Bangkok Unabridged,” by Paul Blackford (Vol. XXVI/1). Whereas there should have been four *l*’s in a row, two-thirds of the way along (see above), there were only three. The reason for the four *l*’s is that the first two are at the end of a word (*drobwill*, ‘whirlpool’), and the latter two *l*’s are at the beginning of the next word (*llan*, ‘church’). Actually, it’s not as odd as it appears; it’s as if in English we didn’t have spaces between the words, and while looking into the water you were asked, “Canyouseeeels?”

I hope the following observations won’t be considered nit-picking, but there a few other inaccuracies and omissions that I feel compelled to comment upon. The first is that Mr. Blackford makes the statement that “the small town in Wales



was originally called *Llanfairpwllgwyn*, which meant ‘St. Mary’s Pool of the White Haze.’ In fact, a translation of *Llanfairpwllgwyn* should contain the word ‘church’ (*llan*), and there is no mention in Welsh of any ‘hazel.’ Historically speaking, the correct original name of the village was *Llanfairpwllgwyngyll*—which does include the ‘hazels’ (*gyll*, the plural of *hazel*).

The author also mentions that the original name “was lengthened by a cobbler who wanted to pinpoint further its location near St. Tysilio’s church and a red cave.” This explanation is true but incomplete. It represents a significant omission because of the existence in the full name of *gogerychwyrndrobwll*, ‘close to the fierce whirlpool,’ the inclusion of which is not mentioned. Finally, a small point, but the name of the saint should be spelled *Tysilio* (not *Tyslio*).

A loose translation of the entire name would be something like this: (*Saint*) *Mary’s church by the pool of the white hazels close to the fierce whirlpool by [Saint] Tysilio’s church near the red cave.*”

T. L. Bernard

South Hadley, Massachusetts

P.S. As *r*’s next to *n*’s (*rn*) tend to look like an *m*, let me clarify that in the spelling of *chwyrn* it is *r* followed by *n*!

On page 18 of Vol. XXVII/3 (Summer 2002), Tom Bentley advises us that “in formal written usage, *whom*, as the object of a verb, is the only acceptable choice according to 87 percent of the [American Heritage Usage] panel.” On page 23, Nick Humez, no doubt disadvantaged by not having read Mr. Bentley’s note, tells us that family names “are the vital indicators of who we live with and who we must avoid, who we may marry and who we must not even kiss . . .”

Like the man sez, ya pays yer money and ya takes yer cherce.

Ed Rosenberg
Danbury, Connecticut

I am half Italian, and even have an Italian high school degree. I recently returned from a visit to Firenze and can corroborate Mr. Gani’s most interesting article.

Around 1980, when working in Switzerland, I noticed that at least the German Swiss were not very good with their Anglicisms: In Zürich there was a small, elegant ladies’ apparel store that called itself “Boutique Ripoff,” possibly because it sounded so Russian; and in Davos I saw a sign on a store that proclaimed: “Come in, it is open,” unaware of our “we are open” and simply translating the standard German signs that read: “Es ist offen.”

Best wishes to you and to Mr. Gani,

Felix R. Rosenthal

Thank you for printing Richard Lederer’s “Stamp out Fadspeak”! (XXVII/3) You go, girl!

When I read it I was all, “a new guru is setting new parameters for the language. Maybe this will bring about a paradigm shift.” You know what I’m saying?

I mean, it’s a quantum leap that makes me go, “Hey, it’s a world class epiphany.” A better way to prioritize our speech utilization won’t slip under the radar for anybody with both oars in the water.

So let fadspeak go down in flames. Maybe that doesn’t float your boat, but that’s the way the cookie crumbles. If you’ve got a complaint, put a zipper in it.

Later,

Clement H. Kreider, Jr.
Wall Township, New Jersey

In “Words: the Stealth Weapon of War” in the Summer issue (Vol. XXVII/3) Howard Richler erroneously states that the War Department of the U.S. became the Navy Department. In fact, the former was founded in 1789 and the latter in 1798, and the two coexisted (the War Department consisting only of the Army) until they were merged into the Defense Department in 1947.

Doug Hoylman
Chevy Chase, Maryland



INTER ALIA

We've been receiving regular visits from our UPS driver lately, bringing us more books than we have space or time to review.

However, many of them are certainly worth mentioning, and, as space permits, we'll try to keep up with the flow.

The first in the pile is from Levenger Press, the publishing arm of the Levenger "Tools for Serious Readers" catalog. (I am still waiting for the "Tools for Frivolous Readers" catalog, featuring, as I'm sure it does, boxes of chocolate topped with marabou puffs and various types of bubble bath.) Their catalog features beautiful desk accessories, highly designed, tweaked, and polished—journals, pens, bookmarks, pushpins, and extra-special paperclips. The book is a new abridgement of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*, done by Jack Lynch, a professor of English at Rutgers (ISBN 1-92954-10-0).

It's a very pretty book (and ought to be, at \$39.95!) with the headwords, sense numbers, and for some odd reason, the attributions of the citations, in a mossy green ink. Lynch has cleaned up the alphabetization a bit and replaced those jarring long *s*'s—the ones that look like *f*'s—with our modern short *s*.

The appearance, at intervals, of a little black cat in various poses (meant to recall Johnson's cat, Hodge) was a little too twee for me, as was the vaguely Celtic type of the guidewords. Otherwise, though, I'm never against a new dictionary, and if you have a spare \$40 gathering dust and no copy of Johnson of your own, you might as well spend it here.

If you really, really like palindromes, Jon Agee, the author of *Sit On a Potato Pan, Otis*, has a new book of cartoons with palindromes (or should that be palindromes with cartoons?), *Palindromania!*

In this book you can See Boffo Bees, read Diana Bruno on Urban Aid, Stack Cats, and ponder Was It a Car or a Cat I Saw, and many more. Many of the palindromes have been grouped in extended comic strips. As has been said before, if you like this kind of thing, this is the kind of thing you really like. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002, 0-374-35730-7, \$15.51)

—Erin McKean

United States Postal Service

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Managing Editor (Name and complete mailing address)

N/A

10. Owner (Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.)

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
Word, Inc.	3000 W Beltline Highway Middleton WI 53562-0828

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 The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes:
 Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months
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13. Publication Title VERBATIM, The Language Quarterly		14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below Quarterly 2002	
15. Extent and Nature of Circulation		Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)		2500	2500
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 1 and 2)		1100	1100
1. Paid in Advance (Subscriptions, single copies, and other paid circulation)		1	0
2. Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales (Do not include paid circulation outside the United States)		325	380
3. Other Classes Paid Through the USPS		750	750
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 1, 2, and 3)		1426	1480
d. Free or Nominal Rate (Do not include paid circulation)		750	750
1. Outside-County (Do not include paid circulation)		650	650
2. In-County (Do not include paid circulation)		100	100
3. Other Classes (Do not include paid circulation)		50	75
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate (Sum of 1, 2, and 3)		300	300
f. Total Distribution (Sum of b and e)		356	375
g. Non-Distribution (Sum of 4 and 5)		1770	1642
1. Copies Not Distributed		720	658
2. Office Use, Leftovers, Spoiled		2900	2500
h. Total (Sum of f and g)		2500	2500
i. Payment of Postage (Do not include postage paid by addressee)		80	70
16. Publication or Distribution Statement <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Publication required. Office address as of October 2002		17. Publication Mailed Date 1 October 2002	

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil penalties.

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- Complete and file one copy of this form with your postmaster annually on or before October 1. Keep a copy of the completed form for your records.
- In space where the circulation or security label is to be placed, include in items 10 and 11 the name of the printer or copier/printer and the date of printing. Also include the names and addresses of individuals who are distributed by you, except for 1 percent or more of the total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities of the publishing corporation. In item 11, if none, check the box. Use block letters if more space is required.
- We want to furnish you circulation information called for in item 15. Free circulation must be shown in items 10b, 1, and 2.
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- If the publication had Periodicals authorization as a general or newspaper publication, the Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation must be published in its final printed issue in October. If it is not printed after October, the form must be printed after October.
- In item 15, include the date of the issue if it is not the date of publication or if it is not published.
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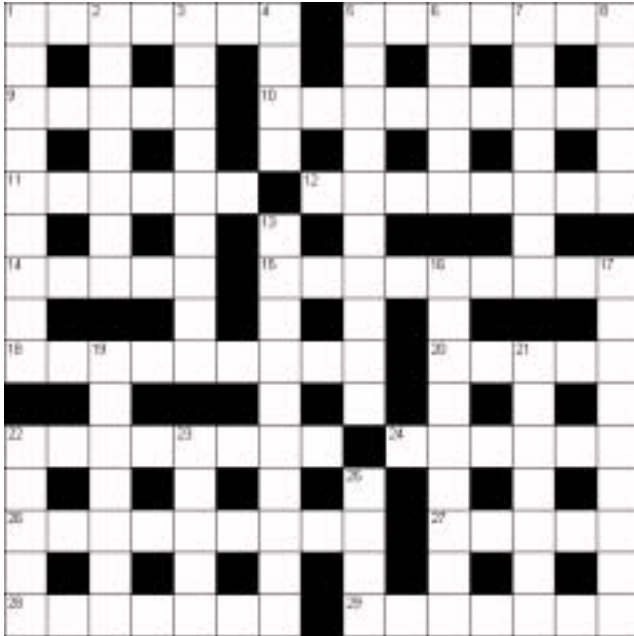
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Clues—Across

1. Playthings up to now unsurpassed? (7)
5. African currency everyone rejected for the mark (7)
9. Little bit of World War Four (5)
10. Concerted initiatives (9)
11. Cowardly bird gets caught first (6)
12. Clown, rather unpleasant, getting laid off (8)
14. Amin reverting to type (5)
15. It may be true, perhaps, out East there's no middle class—it's elemental (9)
18. Old consort would enter it if ordered (9)
20. Minister beheaded for crime (5)
22. Band outside may love a style of singing (3-5)
24. Business man with a cigar (6)
26. A penny-pincher motorist bought this for his car (5-4)
27. Although it's quite rainy, carries a sun-hat (5)
28. A poet's last words keep recurring here (7)
29. Heat can dry middle of sheet put through wringer (7)

Clues—Down

1. Editing material for socialist movement (9)
2. Bread man had at lunchtime, perhaps (7)
3. A person considering a road safety device (9)
4. Finding a way around company tax (4)
5. Breaking out of thin cover, a deer (10)
6. Bit of information given to Caesar (5)
7. Knowledge of flowers having a fatal attraction (7)
8. As shown in score, very inconclusive attack (5)
13. Leader of old feminists provides Italy with stars (10)
16. Study chosen and taken up again (9)
17. Fix a large settlement for slander (9)
19. Changes following a note and seems hesitant (7)
21. Odds on gold went swiftly into the pouch (7)
22. Apparently goes in for punting in Cambridge (5)
23. I join up with Father coming back, and get support (5)
25. A bird others turn to? (4)