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## *Searching for the First Words*

Rosemarie Ostler  
Eugene, Oregon

Have you ever wondered, as you studied an artist's rendering of our remote ancestors, what they actually said to each other as they strode across the veldt? If so, you are not alone. Thinking people have speculated about the nature and form of early language since classical times. In the centuries after the Renaissance, searching for the original language was practically a cottage industry. Until the mid-nineteenth century, all serious linguistic scholars had a theory about the first language.

One important issue was the question of which language was current in the Garden of Eden. Most people voted for Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament. The story of the Tower of Babel seemed to suggest that everyone on earth spoke Hebrew until Jehovah "confounded their speech." Another popular candidate was Aramaic, also a Biblical language.

For those not persuaded by the Babel argument, there remained plenty of other choices. Syriac, Chaldean, Greek, and Latin, all known to be ancient, were obvious possibilities. More recent languages were proposed too. Loyal nationalists tended to support their own country's speech; German, Italian, and Gaelic were heavy favorites in the Adamitic stakes. An Antwerp physician named Jan van Gorp (also known as Johannes Goropius Becanus), wrote a 1569 treatise arguing that Flemish contained as many primitive features as Hebrew, if not more. He supported his claim with dozens of freewheeling etymologies deriving various European languages from Flemish. In spite of the relaxed etymological standards of the time, other scholars greeted van Gorp's derivations with incredulity. Constructing fantastic word histories became known as *goropizing*.

The scramble to claim the original language, and by implication the Garden of Eden itself,

inspired a Swedish former military officer named Andreas Kempe to publish a satirical pamphlet in 1688 called *The Languages of Paradise*. In it he describes a fictional beer-drinking party where the participants begin discussing the problem of which language was spoken in Paradise. (An unusually serious topic for a beer party, but they didn't have the option of talking about televised sports.) Predictably, several people mention Hebrew, but the author's alter ego, Simon Simplex, reminds them of the story of Magog, Noah's grandson. According to the Bible, Magog migrated to "the isles of the Gentiles," which many Swedes of the time took to be Sweden. Since this event occurred before the confusion of tongues at Babel, the language of Magog's descendants—that is, Swedish—must be the original Edenic tongue.

Kempe was following the standard scholarly Swedish line with this proposal, but then he added an unusual twist. He concluded that although God spoke Swedish, Adam responded in Danish. He doesn't say what Eve spoke, but the serpent tempted her in French. According to Kempe, it's not surprising that Eve fell. French, the traditional language of seduction, "works with the whole body in such a way that even the wisest person can be deceived."

People continued to argue furiously about the language of Eden for another hundred years. As late as 1799, J.G. Hasse located the Garden of Eden in Eastern Prussia, based on the discovery of amber deposits there. The philosopher Fichte claimed that German was the best candidate for *Ursprache* because it was a "pure" language of ancient roots, unlike the Romance languages, which relied heavily on Latin for their vocabulary. Two Irish authors, Rowland Jones and James Parsons, insisted that Gaelic was the closest language to the original. Noah Webster agreed. He

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plus the crossword puzzle and some SICS! and EPISTOLAE

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believed that Irish was one of the oldest tongues, if not absolutely the first. In *Dissertations on the English Language*, he connects it with such ancient languages as Phoenician, Hebrew, Punic, and Gothic.

Not everyone agreed that the original language was still extant. Some people believed that it had long ago disintegrated, or at least become unrecognizable. Their goal was to recreate it. Most followed the Goropian model, combing through living languages or remnants of recently obsolete ones to discover the primordial utterances. The idea was to get back to the basics of the uncorrupted original speech.

Rules of etymology during this era were fairly loose. Frenchmen Charles de Brosses and Antoine Court de Gébelin, working independently, both went on the assumption that all vowels were interchangeable with all other vowels, and all consonants were interchangeable with all others at the same point of articulation. The bilabial consonants *m*, *b*, and *p*, for example, were all treated as the same sound. This approach allowed for plenty of scope when constructing word histories. The goal of both researchers was to work backward toward the original words and syllables. To this end, De Brosses filled twelve volumes with extended etymologies and Court de Gébelin filled nine.

De Brosses, president of the French Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, thought that the germs of speech were physical. He believed that language evolved naturally through the shape of the vocal organs, combined with external factors like the climate and the nature of the thing being named. Primitive language users in cold climates would have spoken in monosyllables and used mostly consonants. They would choose “rough” sounds like *r* for rough objects, but would round their mouths when discussing a round object. To get to the roots of the first language, De Brosses tried to discover the true character of each word as opposed to its conventional meaning.

Like de Brosses, Court de Gébelin thought that language evolved naturally, with a basis in onomatopoeia and human physiology. His project was compiling a dictionary of primitive universal word roots. He believed all the roots were monosyllables, with each sound designating an object in nature. *A*, for instance, which requires a wide-open mouth, is

an expansive character. It sits at the beginning of words, as he says, “like a monarch before his subjects.” It expresses strong feelings of sadness, pleasure, and the like. As the French verb ‘have,’ it denotes superiority and dominance. As the French preposition ‘to’ it expresses possession. Every syllable had an intrinsic purpose in Court de Gébelin’s view. If he could figure out what it was, he could recover the original linguistic unity of the world before Babel.

Here is an example of how Court de Gébelin treated monosyllables. He claimed that *tar* and its variants *tor*, *ter*, and *tro* signified ‘force’ in early European languages, with the collateral notions of roughness and rapidity. From this word stem he derived *torrent*, *target*, *terror*, *troop*, *trillion*, and Latin *taurus* ‘bull,’ French *trancher* ‘to cut,’ *trois* ‘three’ (because many primitive peoples only had names for numbers up to three, so three signified a crowd), *entre* ‘between’ (because one between two makes a third), *très* ‘very’ (which has force behind it), *trop* ‘too much,’ *intrigue* (which implies difficulties), and a number of others even further from the original, such as *extravagant* and *transcendent*.

Rather than tracing each word’s known history, Court de Gébelin focused on the sounds that he considered significant. Almost any word with a *t-r* combination was swept into the mix. This intuitive, free-form method of word comparison was common in the eighteenth century. Researchers molded words to fit their theory, rather than the other way around. Nonetheless, Noah Webster, who had several offbeat theories of his own and appreciated a good one, called Court de Gébelin’s work “the most curious etymological analysis ever exhibited perhaps in any language.”

Webster was deeply interested in the question of the original language. He especially admired another linguistic theorist of the time, an Englishman named John Horne Tooke. (Horne Tooke was born John Horne. He changed his name in honor of his friend and patron, William Tooke.) Horne Tooke was a lifelong radical. At one point he was jailed for seditious libel because he noisily supported the cause of the American colonies. He created the Constitutional Society to agitate for parliamentary reform. He also campaigned for a seat in Parliament and eventually gained one.

Horne Tooke laid out his theory of early language in *The Diversions of Purley*, a two-volume work of more than a thousand pages. The scene is set at Purley, William Tooke's country estate, where a few of Horne Tooke's friends are gathered. The talk turns to the original form of language (still evidently a popular party topic), and Horne Tooke's friends feed him leading questions. He responds to these at complicated length. The book includes many detailed etymologies.

**He proposed nine primordial words, all of which conveyed some aspect of striking, pressing, force, or motion. They were *ag, bag, dwag, gwag, lag, mag, nag, rag, and swag.***

Horne Tooke believed that every word was either a representation of an idea or object, or an abbreviation of one. He reduced all of language to a group of original nouns and verbs. Other parts of speech—prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, adverbs, and adjectives—were simply abbreviated versions of the original nouns and verbs. For instance, he believed that all uses of *from* derived from the Old English noun *Frum*, meaning 'beginning.' Therefore, all uses of *from* in English could be paraphrased as beginning: *figs came from Turkey* means 'the beginning place of figs is Turkey'; *the lamp hangs from the ceiling* means 'the place of the lamp's beginning to hang is the ceiling'; *from morn till night* means 'beginning in the morn.'

Horne Tooke would have liked to narrow down the original words to nouns only, but he couldn't manage it. For years, he worked on a third volume that was supposed to round out his system, but he was evidently unsatisfied with it. He burned the manuscript, along with much of his correspondence, shortly before he died.

Scots minister Alexander Murray approached the issue of original syllables from the opposite direction, starting not with etymologies but with the syllables. He proposed nine primordial words, all of which conveyed some aspect of striking, pressing, force, or motion. They were *ag, bag, dwag, gwag, lag, mag, nag, rag, and swag*. Murray then elaborated these elements into a multitude of descendant words. He believed that speakers began by compounding the monosyllables, then gradually softened the resulting words until they

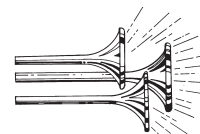
dwindled into the prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and other parts of speech found in modern language.

Oddly, the last part of Murray's two-volume *History of the European Languages* is much less radical than what comes before it. He discusses some of the regular sound correspondences among European languages that Indo-Europeanists were starting to notice. He also remarks that the chance resemblance of a few words is no guarantee that two languages are connected.

Murray, Horne Tooke, and other late eighteenth-century researchers considered their work scientific and their methods rational. However, by the 1850s, they looked increasingly eccentric, not to say downright cranky. Up-to-date philologists worked by meticulously comparing languages, sound by sound. They claimed sound/meaning correspondences across languages only when those correspondences obviously formed a regular pattern: Greek *māter*, Latin *māter*, Sanskrit *mātar*, English *mother*.

Little by little, Indo-Europeanists were piecing together the first concrete evidence of a "parent" tongue. When they finally did reconstruct part of this extinct language, they still had gone back only a few thousand years in time. Reaching for the Garden of Eden began to seem irrelevant and absurd. The Paris Linguistics Society put the final kibosh on old-style origins research in 1866 with Article II of its bylaws: "The Society will accept no communication dealing with either the origin of language or the creation of a universal language."

They must've heard the one about the devil speaking French.



[Rosemarie Ostler recently published her first book, *Dewdroppers, Waldos, and Slackers: A Decade-by-Decade Guide to the Vanishing Vocabulary of the Twentieth Century*. (Oxford, 2003)]

## *Speak of the Devil: Dangerous Names*

Jessy Randall  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Common wisdom (or lack of it) holds that speaking certain words aloud—especially names—can be perilous, either to the speaker or to the person or deity or creature named.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, expressions like “Talk of the devil, and you’ll see his horns” and “Talk of the devil and he is bound to appear” are at least as old as 1650; Mathew Prior’s 1701 poem “Hans Caravel” contains a variation: “Forthwith the devil did appear./ For name him, and he’s always near.” The current shortened version, “Speak of the devil,” usually has a more benign meaning: an implication that just after you say someone’s name, he or she may enter the room—which could get you in trouble if you were saying something unkind, but probably will not cause you to burn eternally in Hell. Ozzy Osbourne’s 1982 album *Speak of the Devil* makes reference to the earlier, scarier meaning: the idea that you can call up the devil by speaking his name.

In Goethe’s famous play “Faust,” the title character’s first experience with the supernatural occurs when he reads a book and “pronounces mysteriously the sign of the spirit.” A spirit appears, saying it has been “compelled” to do so. (Both quotes are from Anna Swanwick’s translation.) Similarly, in the 1988 movie *Beetlejuice*, if you say the name of the eponymous devil-like creature three times (the similarity of his name to Beelzebub is no coincidence), he will appear. And the characters in the Harry Potter books hesitate to say the name *Voldemort* aloud, and instead use euphemisms like “he who must not be named” or “you-know-who,” for safety’s sake.

(Many people believe that saying something bad out loud can make it come true—I’m sure we have all known people who whisper the word *cancer* as if saying it out loud will cause an outbreak. The practice of whispering *cancer* is common enough that one charity’s slogan is “Let’s not whisper about breast cancer, let’s roar.”)

The slumber party game of “Bloody Mary” hinges on a similar principle: you enter a darkened room (often a bathroom), say *Bloody Mary* three times, and look in a mirror, at which point Bloody Mary’s face reflects back at you and scares you to death or claws your face off or something of that sort. (Just who is this “Bloody Mary”? The original Bloody Mary was the English queen Mary Tudor, who burned nearly 300 people at the stake during her mid-16th century reign. But the Bloody Mary being summoned in the game seems to be a different character, sometimes known as *Mary Worth* or *Mary Wolf*, whose face has been horribly disfigured.)

Conversely, some religious people consider the name of the God of the Israelites too sacred to be spoken aloud; it was therefore replaced in prayers and rituals with other words such as *Adonai* ‘My Lord’ or *Elohim* ‘God.’ Some Orthodox Jews will go so far as to replace the *o* in *God* with a dash on any written or published work (*G-d*) so that it’s all right for the paper to be destroyed. This practice, which seems to be relatively recent, stems from a belief that the name of God itself contains power, and that destroying it in its written form is dangerous. Depending whom you ask, the rule pertains to any version of the name of God, or only the tetragrammaton (*YHVH* or *YHWH*, pronounced *Yahweh* or sometimes *Jehovah*), or only the tetragrammaton in Hebrew characters.

Other names, when spoken aloud, do harm to the one named rather than the one calling him or her up. In the Grimm fairy tale, bad things of one sort or another happen to Rumpelstiltskin when the miller’s daughter speaks his name. In watered-down versions, he loses the child the woman owes him and runs in circles or has a temper tantrum and pulls out his hair; in Grimm-er versions, he gets so angry that he breaks himself in half. In the early nineteenth century, in Germany, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm recorded the name of the dwarf in this tale as *Rumpelstilzchen*; other German variations include *Hipche Hopche*, *Doubleturk*, *Holzrührlein Bonneführlein*, *Nägendümer*, and *Kugerle*. Similar tales in other languages use other names, of course: *Kruzimuegeli* in Austrian, *Ropiquet* or *Ricdin-Ricdon* in French, *Tarandando* in Italian, *Panczimanczi* in Hungarian, *Gilitrutt* in

Icelandic, *Kinkach Martinko* in Russian, *Purzinigele* in Tyrolese, and *Marie Kirikitoun* in Basque. Variations from the British Isles include *Tom Tit Tot* in English, *Trwtyn-Tratyn* in Welsh, *Trit-a-Trot* in Irish, and *Whuppity Stoorie* in Scottish.

The idea that a name can have power over the thing named is widespread enough that an old English superstition (from West Sussex, to be precise) holds that it's bad luck to say a child's name before the baptism.

Wizards or magic-users in the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons* can summon a magical being if they know its "true name." Once summoned, the being sometimes becomes the wizard's slave, to some extent. Not so in the case of "Hastur the Unspeakable," also known as "He Who Must Not Be Named," a lizard-like creature with 200 tentacles. According to the *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Deities & Demigods Cyclopedia*, "Any time the name Hastur is spoken, there is a 25% chance that Hastur will hear and send 1-4 Byakhee [giant bat-like creatures] to slay the speaker. If the Byakhee are defeated, there is a 25% chance that Hastur himself will appear to destroy the blasphemer."

The silliest example of a dangerous name has got to be *Macbeth*. Many theater folk consider it bad luck to say it anywhere backstage, and will instead use "The Scottish Play" or "The Bard's Play." (If you do accidentally say it, one antidote has you leave the room, turn around three times, break wind, spit, and then knock on the door and ask permission to re-enter. Or you can just quote a line from *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene iv, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us.")

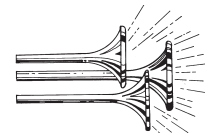
The supposed bad luck surrounding *Macbeth* is rooted in a 19th century superstition that the witches' song in the first act of the play ("Double, double, toil and trouble/Fire burn and cauldron bubble ...") had the power to cast evil spells. At that time, it was not the name of the play thought to be evil, but the tune of the witches' song. This bad feeling eventually extended to any of the music of the play or quotations from it.

Nevertheless, the play remained popular with audiences, so that by the 1930s, a troupe in dire financial straits might put on "The Scottish Play" as a sure-fire money-maker. The troupe might still go

under, however, so via backwards logic, *Macbeth* came to be associated with ill-fortune.

According to Richard Huggett's *The Curse of Macbeth and Other Theatrical Superstitions* (Picton, 1981), some believe that it's the last line of the play (Malcolm's "So, thanks to all at once and to each one,/Whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone") that holds the danger, and so this line would be left out at the dress rehearsal or perhaps at all rehearsals. Producer Emile Littler believed so strongly in this that the actors were not even allowed to know the last line (or *tag line*) of any play until the first performance, when a uniformed attendant would release it just in time for the final scene. Forbidden tag lines included "And now our evening work is done/We hope you've all had lots of fun" (*Cinderella*) and "And that's the story of Robin Hood/We know you'll come back to this wood" (*Robin Hood*). One actor in a production of *Aladdin* remembers not being allowed to recite the tag line even on the first performance, so that the last line was "di dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum,/Dumdiddi, dumdiddi, dumdiddi, DUM!"

[*Jessy Randall recently wrote for VERBATIM on the subject of pregnancy words, in XXVII/2.*]



## EPISTOLA

I was very pleased to read Mat Coward's exposure of the grotesque mis-use of the word *self* and to learn that I was not alone in my hatred of it. (XXVIII/2) I cannot improve on his theory that it may originate from the old-fashioned commercial "business English," or formality, or perhaps in my view, a bogus attempt at gentility.

To conclude with another *horribile dictu: true fact*.

N. Hamment  
Bolton, Lancashire

## Letters Can Be Words

Kathryn Wilkens  
Upland, California

Who is *Etaoin Shrdlu*? I wondered.

It was printed in bold vertical type on a page in my college yearbook. I thought it must be someone's name—it had a vaguely Baltic sound—because I couldn't find it in the dictionary. When I asked people on the yearbook staff, they simply laughed and exchanged knowing glances; no one would clue me in. I searched encyclopedias to no avail. I finally decided it was an obscure in-joke with the yearbook staff and I would never learn its meaning. Still, I wondered about it for years.

*Etaoin Shrdlu* puzzled me because it was the first time I had been unable to decipher a string of letters since I'd learned how to use a dictionary. Even before I could read, I had been fascinated by the mysterious squiggles covering pages in books. When I was introduced to the alphabet, I was happy to learn there were only 26 different squiggles to learn.

Although the primary purpose of letters is to represent sounds so that speech can be written down, each letter of the alphabet also has a unique identity. Some are words by themselves: the indefinite article *a*, the first-person pronoun *I* and the vocative *O*.

But when you stop to think about it, every letter can stand alone as a word, not just those three. Imagine a child eating alphabet soup exclaiming, "I found a *K*! I found a *P*! I found a *Z*!" Or a Scrabble player lamenting, "If only I had a *U* to go with my *Q*." In those cases, the letter-word is self-referential.

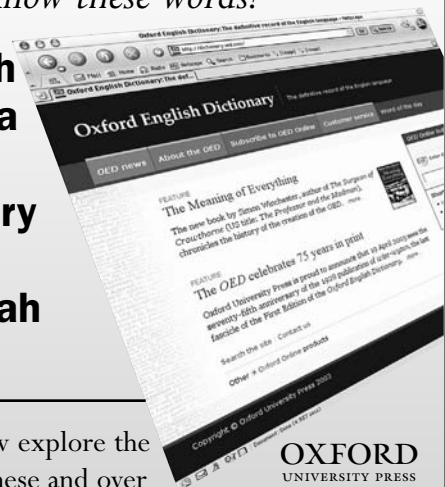
A letter can also be a word not because of its sound or meaning, but because of its shape, size or position in the alphabet.

Majuscule letter-shapes are often used to describe objects. How else would we refer to *A-line skirts* or *A-frame cabins*? Machines have *O-rings* and *D-rings*; a building has *I-beams* and *H-beams*. We talk about *C-clamps*, *G-strings*, *J-strokes* (in canoeing), *S-curves*, *U-turns*, *V-neck sweaters*, *V-8 engines* (and tomato juice drinks) *K-rations* and *Z-bars*. Some letters, like *W* and *R*,

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don't get used too often, while others are over-worked because of their classic shapes. Take *T* for example; it turns up in *T-shirt*, *T-bone*, *T-joint*, *T-strap*, *T square*, *T-bar* and *T-maze*.

The letter *X* is unique because it can function as a verb, as in "He *Xed* out the line." Its crossed shape gives us the term *X-stretcher*. It also stands for an unknown quantity or variable as in *X-factor* and *Generation X*. I don't know exactly what it stands for in *X-rated*, but everyone knows what kind of movie that is! The letter *X* is also used as a symbol or logogram. Depending on context, we read it, not as *ex* but *cross* (*Railroad Xing*), *by* ( $2X4$ ), *times* ( $3X4=12$ ) or *power* ( $7X$  binoculars). It even stands for *Christ* in the abbreviation *Xmas* because the Greek word for Christ starts with the letter *chi* which looks like an *X*.

Sometimes you see the letter's name spelled out, as in "We came to a *tee intersection* on the trail," or "The geese flew overhead in a *vee*." An addition to a building is usually called an *ell* rather than an *L*. The letter *Y* spelled out is *wye*. Surveyors use a *wye level*, and railroad tracks may be laid in a *wye formation* at a station to enable the train to change directions.

It might be the letter's size rather than its shape that gives it significance, as in the printing terms *em* and *en*. An *em space* (or *em dash*) is wider than an *en space* (or *en dash*) because *m* takes up more room than *n*.

Letters have acquired significance because of their location in the traditional line-up of the alphabet, with the first few letters getting the most use. *A, B, C, D, E, F* and *G* name musical notes and keys. In sizes of shoes, batteries and bras, *A* and multiples of *A* are the smallest. We talk about the *ABCs*, or basic principles, of something.

We use these letters to indicate grades of eggs, beef and bonds, with *A* (or multiples of *A*) being the best. This *A-is-best* idea carries over into other expressions. Would you rather be an *A* student or a *C* student? Wouldn't you like to be on someone's *A-list*? If you were an actor, would you want to appear in *B-movies*?

The letters standing the middle of the alphabet don't get much use, but the last three do. In geometry we talk about the *X-axis*, *Y-axis* and *Z-axis*. The *XYZ* indicates the end of something as evidenced by the lyrics of "Teach Me Tonight"—"Starting with the *ABC* of it, getting right down to the *XYZ* of it."

Using letters as words is not confined to the Roman alphabet. English has also borrowed Greek letter names for words. Again, many are based on the letter's shape: *delta* or *deltoid* refers to something shaped like a triangle ( $\Delta$ ) and *sigmoid* means shaped like the Greek *S*, *sigma* ( $\Sigma$ ). The letter *iota* is small, so its meaning is 'a very small quantity.' We talk about the *alpha* (beginning) and the *omega* (end). *Alphabet* is the most obvious example of a word derived from the order of Greek letters.

Similarly, *futhark* is another name for the Scandinavian runes. It comes from the order of the first six runic letters: *f, u, th, a, r* and *k*.

Finally, there are two expressions that come from the order of letters as they are lined up on machines. The first one, *QWERTY*, describes the common typewriter or computer keyboard because those letters appear across the top row.

The second one is a two-word phrase that, while it has no real meaning, is instantly recognizable to people in the printing profession. It was used to indicate the compositor had made a mistake and

the line should be omitted or recast. I learned this at the International Printing Museum in Orange County, California, where I attended a gala reception. I strolled around admiring the antique presses, then stopped in front of a Linotype machine. Raising my glass to sip some Chardonnay, my hand froze in midair. The crowd's murmuring faded away, as I drowned in a private sea of ecstatic revelation. "Oh my God!" I said.

"What's the matter?" asked my husband.

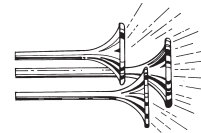
"Look!"

"Oh, wow, a Linotype machine," he said sarcastically.

"I know, but look at the keys."

He read off the first two columns of keys, "*E-T-A-O-I-N. S-H-R-D-L-U*. Those are the 12 most common letters in English," he said. "So?"

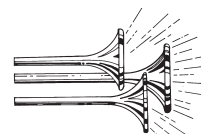
[*Kathryn Wilkens is a former English teacher. She has a master's degree in linguistics from California State University at Fullerton, and has written for The Los Angeles Times, America West Airlines Magazine, Writers' Journal, Dolls, and others.*]



## EPISTOLA

(Re: XXVIII/1) Melanie Falcon's article on Pig Latin introduced me to three "little" languages I'd never heard of, but left out the one perhaps most familiar (after Pig Latin) to Gen-X Americans—"Ubby Dubby," made popular on the 1970s PBS kids' show *Zoom*. And Orin Hargraves's "pre" article neglected to include the most odious and oft-repeated "pre" formation: "pre-boarding," a service most airlines offer to those who need extra time getting on the plane.

Jessy Randall  
Colorado Springs, Colorado





## As the Word Turns

### Jane's World

Barry Baldwin  
Calgary, Alberta

Jane Austen the word fancier can't fully be savoured by those who know her only via Merchant-Ivory.

Devotees of America's summer pastime should rejoice that she introduced *baseball* to English literature via *Northanger Abbey*. Not coined, though; unknown to the *OED*, it had cropped up in the 1744 *Little Pretty Pocket Book*.

I used innocently to assume that *at the hop* 'dance' was a 1950s rock 'n rollism owed to Danny & The Juniors. In fact, it entered English in 1739. Jane, not cited by *OED*, has it twice, once in a youthful letter and again in *Sense & Sensibility*.

Her three volumes of *Juvenilia* show how Jane was enriching the language from her early teens, e.g. the adverb *deedily*, re-used in *Emma*; after her, it shows up only in an 1859 academic treatise.

Likewise, *sweep* 'driveway.' *OED* begins its history with *Sense & Sensibility*, but it had already appeared in her novelette *Catherine*.

She is the first accredited user of the verb *coddle*, in *Emma*, having a quick impact on the *Antiquities* (1816) of her (ultimately) admirer, Sir Walter Scott.

Scott's "tituppy misses" betrays another Austen debt, namely her *tituppy*, applied to a gig in *Northanger Abbey*.

In a letter criticising her niece Anna's fictional efforts, Jane denounces the phrase *vortex of dissipation*: "I cannot bear the expression; it is such thorough novelistic slang." Shades of her own Marianne Dashwood (*S&S*) condemning *to set one's cap at* as "a most odious expression," albeit Jane had ventured it in her precocious *Lesley Castle*.

*Vortex of dissipation* had been used twice, by Maria Edgeworth in her *Moral Tales, Breakfast* (1802), and in Dr James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), a volume Mr Collins ostentatiously picks up and reads in opposition to novels in *Pride & Prejudice*.

Not always an enemy of slang, Jane took *in for it*' (i.e. 'in trouble') from Restoration playwright Farquar via Richardson's *Pamela*. *Pin-money* was similarly a stage word of the time. Her *Penguin Juvenilia* editors (Doody & Murray) miss the precision of her application of *toad-eater* in *Lesley Castle* to a woman; Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785) defines it as 'a poor female relation, or reduced gentlewoman.'

Grose notes *row* 'disturbance' as Cambridge student argot; the earliest *OED* attestation is 1787; Jane was soon on to it, in her potted *History of England*.

She has an apparent monopoly on the noun *coze* 'chat' (*Mansfield Park*): does this clarify the later *cozer/cozey* (male & female stool pigeons), surmised as Yiddish in Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of the Underworld* (1950)?

Jane seems to have invented (in her *Letters*) *I am a honey*, not in *OED*; *mamalone* (Turkish-style headgear); *nidgetty* (pertaining to midwives); and *epigrammatism* (later picked up by Poe, 1849), in her own retro-assessment of *Pride & Prejudice*.

Also epistolary are the unknown *talobert* ("... the talobert skin made me laugh a good deal.") and a Kentish coachman who "really drove *as fast as Caz*." This mystery word would make sense if read as *Caz*, since that leads to the expression *as good as caz* (*caz* 'cheese'), meaning to achieve complete success at something, attested in Henry Vaux' *New & Comprehensive Vocabulary of the Flash Language* (1812).

R.W. Chapman, authoritative editor of her *Letters*, wished to emend *distinguished kindness* to *distinguishing*. But Fanny Burney (*Cecilia*) has *distinguished politeness* and the poet Rowe (*Ulysses*) *distinguished hatred*; the French letter-ending *sentiments distinguées* might also play a part.

*Querulous serenity* (*P&P*) seems a unique oxymoron; I imagine Carol Shields in her lovely *Jane Austen* (2001) is paying stylistic homage when she describes Jane in Cassandra's sketch as exuding "a querulous air of sad reasonableness."

To adapt the last sentence of *Northanger Abbey*, "I leave the tendency of this essay to be settled by whomsoever it may concern."

[Barry Baldwin remarks "A nod to Mike Myers for the title—clear demonstration of Austen's Powers."]

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## HORRIBLE DICTU

Mat Coward  
Somerset, Britain

“I’ve been arachnophobic since I was about 12,” a TV actress told an interviewer (who was clearly not triviaphobic). “It doesn’t matter if spiders are spindly or hairy, if I see one, I squash it with complete impunity.” She didn’t say which authority granted her this license, but at least she used one wrong word instead of two or three unnecessary ones.

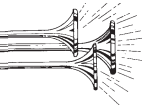
I am in real and present danger of being buried by a tottering mountain of “unnecessaries,” so I hope you’ll indulge me while I unburden myself of a few of them.

The West Indies cricket team was recently required to “*front up to* another formidable challenge,” while Britain’s deputy prime minister was, in his master’s absence, “*heading up* the government”—a now unavoidable redundancy which I always think has a faintly alimentary ring to it.

No doubt, during his time in charge, the Deputy PM will have reason to employ one of his catchphrases: “The government’s future intentions are clear.” No-one ever asks him what the government’s past intentions are, which strikes me as a dreadful dereliction of democratic duty.

I’d love to discover a form of therapy which could prevent TV and radio anchormen from ending an interview with “Dr. Expert, thank you very much for the moment,” as if reserving the right to withdraw their gratitude later in the light of subsequent developments. I do understand that they’re only trying to sound polite. In live broadcasting, “Thank you very much” actually means *Goodbye* (or, more to the point, *Stop talking right now*). “Thank you very much for the moment,” therefore, means *Stop talking right now, but don’t go anywhere in case I want you to start again*.

Every now and then a word gets bored with its usual beat, and begins to attach itself to sentences in an orgy of unnecessariness. Have you noticed that, suddenly, everything is a *skill*? Schoolchildren are no longer taught to read; they are taught *reading skills*. An ageing rock musician is “still admired



for his guitar-playing skills.” Or “for his guitar-playing,” to put it another way.

Sometimes the border between unnecessaries and stressification is unclear, as in the case of a Glasgow restaurateur who used spoof love letters as part of a marketing gimmick, and got into trouble with some unamused potential clients. When one man threatened legal action, she told him it was “just a joke,” but laments that “he was not over-convinced.” I often hear or read *not over-pleased* and *not over-impressed*. What was originally a jokey format is well on its way to becoming—like “I support him 110%”—a minimum unit of conversational currency, beneath which intentness is insufficiently over-conveyed.

No doubt the next batch of readers’ own Horribles (sent to this column via any of VERBATIM’s usual addresses) will mention the phrase which has dominated British political news this year. The government’s “dossier” (actually a PR handout, not a dossier, but we’ll let that pass) on Iraq’s troublesomely invisible weapons of mass destruction was, according to outraged civil servants, “sexed up”—that is, made to seem more interesting and urgent by means of exaggeration and by replacing conditional words with definite ones. In other words, *sexed up* is yet another way of saying that politicians are lying (being “economical with the truth”), without actually calling them liars.

I have some hopes that this annoying euphemism has been so overused over such a concentrated period that it will burn out before achieving wider circulation. With any luck it’ll take “sexy,” to mean exciting or of-the-moment, with it. Perhaps the saddest thing about *sexy* is that its essence is the quality of being attractive to the young—and yet it’s only ever used by the middle-aged. I recently heard the editor of a newspaper’s business section explaining that his mission in redesigning his pages was “To make finance sexy to younger readers.”

As that bloke by the pond very nearly said, “All clichés breathe lies of tired desperation.”

[*Mat Coward’s web site is <http://hometown.aol.co.uk/matcoward/myhomepage/newsletter.html>. Send your horribles to him by mail to our address or c/o editor@verbatimag.com.*]

## Translators: Know Thy Culture

Sharon Queano  
 Ville St. Laurent, Quebec

In *The Hours*, Virginia Woolf ends her life by walking into the deep waters of the river. She moves with a kind of spent grace, as though letting her mind unleash poisons in the remaining few seconds of her existence. Her husband, Leonard, will be free at last, and her tormented soul appeased. Watching that scene reminded me of Irène de Buisseret because she, too, committed suicide, and was also a writer. Her reasons for wanting to die are unknown; she was a solitary person not prone to confiding in anyone. According to Jean Delisle, the chairman of the Translation Department of the University of Ottawa, she had one close friend.

Ms. de Buisseret's *Deux Langues, Six Idiomes* (Carleton Green Publishing Co. Ltd., 1975, 1989) did not catch the public's attention because of her suicide, let's be clear on that. It stands on its own merits. Her work is a triumphant demonstration of how extralinguistic knowledge, and especially knowledge of culture, can be a boon to translators. Born to a Belgian diplomat father and a Russian mother, she was trained as a lawyer in France, immigrated to Canada in 1947, became a respected professor and writer, and, in the early 70's, was Chief of the Translation Department of Canada's Supreme Court. Just when her enviable career appeared to be going well, she drowned herself in the Rideau Canal in Ottawa on April 28, 1971. She was 53.

After her death, colleagues of Ms. de Buisseret tried to find a publisher for *Deux Langues, Six Idiomes*. Professor Jean Delisle said that their search took awhile, but Jeremiah Green of Ottawa agreed to publish it, reducing the original 600-page manuscript to a work of about 400 pages. Translators in Canada cheered when they heard the news.

### *Deux Langues, Six Idiomes*

Ms. de Buisseret writes in the first pages, "whether bad, mediocre, good or excellent translators, we are all sick, contaminated in varying degrees," but it would be sheer speculation to say that she was already depressed when she started

Light

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The Quarterly of Light Verse

THE TROUBLE WITH NOSTALGIA

It's hard to see how,  
 When I come to review it,  
 What's glamorous now  
 Was so dull living through it.  
 —JOYCE LA MERS

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*Deux Langues, Six Idiomes*. In Part I, she discusses the ills plaguing writers and the common pitfalls in translation, providing numerous examples of translation theory and its applications. She cites the works of writers, philosophers and politicians, and although some might find her quoting excessive, Ms. de Buisseret's level of intellectual sophistication shines. A voracious reader, she quotes Molière, Shakespeare—and yes, even *Playboy* with ease, and illustrates how they can be translated accurately. She reminds translators that without cultural awareness, something does get lost in their translations. She encourages perfection as she takes the reader through an enlightening re-structuring of sentences that work better. Even Ms. de Buisseret's collaborators were thinking of calling *Deux Langues, Six Idiomes* the translator's bible.

The book acts as an early warning device to inexperienced wordsmiths. Consider the word *eventually* as in, "eventually, we shall negotiate." A translator unfamiliar with the nuances of language, would translate it, "eventuellement, nous négocierons." Ms. de Buisseret offers a better alternative: "un jour, le moment venu, nous

négocierons,” explaining that in French *eventuellement* means a possibility; in English, *eventually* points to certainty.

Ms. de Buisseret cleverly tackles the six varieties of the country’s two official languages: British, American and Canadian for English, and universal, neo and Quebec for French. Although *Deux Langues Six Idiomes* is a manual for French to English translation, nothing about it is insufferably pedantic; it is an enjoyable journey into jargons, regionalisms, gallicisms, anglicisms, false friends and spaghetti sentences. To crystallize her ideas, she divides certain pages into two to three columns showing the sentence to be translated, how it is usually translated, and what she calls a more “svelte” translation. It is her version of quality assurance in the manufacturing process of words. In *Portraits de traductrices* (University of Ottawa Press, 2002), Professor Delisle mentioned that the author believes full immersion is the only “sovereign remedy” to all language ills and the key to understanding context.

The whole gamut of translation material—literary, scientific, technical, political, religious, business and legal—dictates that a translator must have access to a myriad of specialized lexicons, data bases and terminology banks. Dictionaries alone can be a translator’s worst enemies. The author covers a variety of material skillfully: New Left, Hippie, biblical, Anglo-Saxon proverbs, slang, and McLuhanism, and even includes what she calls *Ameryiddish* expressions. On page 234, for instance, how does one translate the sentence “this program has not been bar-mitzvahed yet” (source not given). On the next column, she explains the Jewish tradition of confirmation for 13-year old boys; hence in a figurative sense, she says that to be “bar-mitzvahed” means to be approved, agreed to, or ratified.

Humor reigns in any discussion of language pitfalls, and Ms. de Buisseret made sure that readers would have plenty to chuckle about. Here’s one: “stained-glass English,” according to the author, is language used by the English clergy. A wealthy American visiting England found a small village captivating. He donated a considerable sum of money to the local church, and it was a timely gift

seeing that church’s roof needed urgent repairs. The grateful Vicar wanted to heap praise on the distinguished visitor so in his next sermon, he said, “Providence indeed has sent us this timely succour.” In English, *succour* of course means ‘aid, assistance.’ Red in the face, the angry American walked out, thinking the Vicar said *sucker*.

Ms. Buisseret’s book satisfies a translator’s need to explore the facets of the two languages as spoken in the six selected regions of the world. The style is informal, the content effective, practical.

Sadly, I realize that her suicide will always remain a mystery. Perhaps Ms. de Buisseret believed that the only way to live in the hearts and minds of her admirers, friends and colleagues was to depart. She took her own life to give life to *Deux Langues, Six Idiomes*, a sincere intellectual effort to serve, indeed delight, future generations of translators.

At least that’s what we hope.

[Sharon Queano lives and works in Montreal, and does freelance writing and translating (French to English), to make her full time job more tolerable.]

## EPISTOLA

The Russians have a phrase they use in their errata slips: *zamechennie opechatki*, which I like to translate as ‘mis-prints we [just happened] to note,’ so I just happen to have noticed [in XXVII/4]:

p. 22-A at bottom: *statues* for *Statutes*

p. 29-B I’d prefer “mis-spelled” [rather than *mispelled*, which is what we had.—Ed.]

These can happen to anyone. There are some marvelous examples of or even collections of hilarious mis-prints: none of them come to mind at the moment, but maybe this will qualify. It’s a “column-break” or a “filler,” the little factoids used to round out empty space at the bottom. It’s better seen by the eye than read aloud:

“In a single drop of water, there can be as many as thirty million germans.”

I take delight in forwarding that to German friends, though I always explain that *Keim* is German for *germ*, a word likely to be unknown to them.

John R Krueger

## *Rumplestiltskin or Rumpelstiltskin?*

*The seven common misspellings of my  
five-letter name*

John Huebl  
Rockville, Maryland

Recently I received in the mail a certified copy of the title to my car. My name was spelled one way—*Huble*—on the title itself, and another way—*Hubel*—on the envelope in which it came. On the same day, I received financial papers on which my name was spelled *Huebel*. The multiplicity of spellings is not surprising. Indeed, over the years I have learned that unless you are one of the very few people who grew up with my name, spelling it is virtually impossible. I imagine that even the young wizards featured in the movie *Spellbound* would be undone by my name.

The correct spelling of my name is *H-U-E-B-L*. This may or may not be the way it appears in the byline to this article; I rarely see it spelled the same way twice in one document. Although the name is comprised of only five letters, there are seven ways in which it is commonly misspelled.

The first common misspelling of my name is involves the transposition of its two vowels. Except when preceded by the letter *q*, the letter *e* will usually precede the letter *u* when the two vowels appear adjacently, as in *sleuth*, *rheumatic*, *Teutonic*, and *feudal*, the latter of which sounds kind of like *Huebl*. The misspelling also may involve an auditory miscue: the letter *u*, when pronounced, sounds something like *eeu*. Thus, the successive pronunciation of *H* and *u* sounds similar to the pronunciation of *H*, *e*, *u*. For these reasons, upon hearing me say, *H*, *u*, the speller often will write *H*, *e*, *u* as the first three letters of my name.

Thus the first common misspelling: *H-E-U-B-L*.

The second common misspelling of my name involves the fourth letter, *b*, and, like the first common misspelling, may stem from an auditory mistake. When pronounced, the letter *b* sounds very much like the letters *b* and *e* pronounced successively. Thus, when I pronounce the final two letters

of my name—*b*, *l*—the speller hears three letters—*b*, *e*, *l*—and duly records them.

Thus, the second common misspelling: *H-U-E-B-E-L*.

If the speller of my name has made both mistakes described above, he will have written the third common misspelling: *H-E-U-B-E-L*.

The fourth common mistake happens upon the speller's application of a rule of English grammar. In English, if you want to make a long *u* sound, you put an *e* after the letter *u*. However, the *e* does not immediately follow the letter *u*, but instead follows an intervening consonant. Examples are many, and include words such as *tube*, *cube*, *lube*, et cetera. Thus, upon hearing the word *Huebl*, the listener already has formed the sequence *H*, *u*, *b* in his mind, with the *e* to come sometime later. He writes *H*, *u*, *b* even as I am saying *H*, *u*, *e*. He does not, however, catch his mistake upon hearing me dictate the letters. Why not? Because the letters *e* and *b* rhyme. Thus, when I am pronouncing the third letter, *e*, it rhymes with the incorrect third letter, *b*, that he has written in accordance with the English rule. Further, as he follows through with the English rule, placing an *e* after the *b*, he hears me say *b* as he writes *e*. Once again, due to the rhyme, he fails to realize his mistake. Thus, there is a triple-threat of error: 1) the letters *e* and *b* rhyme; 2) in my name their positions violate the rules of English grammar; 3) in my name they are adjacent.

Applying the rule of English grammar, as above, produces the fourth common misspelling: *H-U-B-E-L*.

In three of the four misspellings above, both the first and second syllables of my name have been misspelled. I have offered both auditory and grammatical explanations for the errors. Specifically with regard to the second syllable, however, there is yet another explanation for the mistakes, and it involves yet another rule of English grammar. I distinctly recall my third-grade teacher telling the class that every syllable must have a vowel. My name, however, is not from the Anglo-Saxon. It is Austrian. There is no vowel in the second syllable. There are two vowels, mind you, in my two-syllable name, but they are squished together in the first syllable. Nevertheless, a person spelling in the

English language will want to insert a vowel in that second syllable. Thus, the errant *e* between the *b* and the *l* is allowed to stand, even if the speller is not entirely sure that that is what he heard me say.

Suppose, however, that the speller was listening carefully, and distinctly heard no *e* between the *b* and the *l*. She still may err by applying two rules. The first, discussed above, is that every syllable must have a vowel. The second is that when the letter *l* follows a consonant at the end of a word, it is followed by an *e*. Examples are numerous: *candle*, *table*, *little*, *staple*, et cetera. Thus, even though I stop speaking once I have pronounced my fifth and final letter, *l*, the speller adds the silent *e* for me. Perhaps her mind his playing tricks on her: I did not pronounce the *e* because, after all, the *e* is silent.

Thus, if she was listening very carefully, and recorded everything else correctly, she may have written the fifth common misspelling of my name: *H-U-E-B-L-E*.

If, on the other hand, she added the final *e* in addition to one of the other mistakes discussed above, she may have written either of the sixth or seventh common misspellings: *H-E-U-B-L-E* or *H-U-B-L-E*.

Listed together, then, the seven common misspellings of my name are as follows:

*Heubl*  
*Huebel*  
*Heubel*  
*Hubel*  
*Hueble*  
*Heuble*  
*Huble*

Despite a lifetime of seeing my surname misspelled, I do have a few consolations. First, my parents christened me *John*. I very rarely am asked to spell my first name, and have seen it misspelled so rarely that its rate of accurate spelling by others honestly could be described as 100 percent. Second, the letter *H* in my surname always is correct. No other letter sounds like *H*. Further, as it is the first letter in the name, there are no preceding letters with which to get it confused. The *H* is steadfast, true, unerring. This may seem like small consolation, but to paraphrase the singer/song-writer Meatloaf, one out of five ain't bad.

I suspect that some of my readers may be dubious with regard to the above list of misspellings of a name that contains only five letters. They might ask, could such misspellings be due to my speaking too quickly when spelling my name for others? In response, I can only assure my readers that when dictating the letters of my name, I speak very slowly and deliberately. Many years ago, I even went so far as to adopt the explanatory sequence long used by my father when spelling his name over the phone: *H, U, E-as-in-Elephant, B-as-in-boy, L*. Unfortunately, these phonetic cues rarely educe accuracy.

I know that not all of my readers will find me credible. But I am sure that Mike Krzyzewski, coach of the Duke basketball team, would believe me. That's *K-r-z-y-z-e-w-s-k-i*, pronounced *Shuh-shev-ski*. Which brings me to my final consolation. I know things could have been worse. I could have been Polish.

Addendum: a week after writing the above, I received two letters from my bank. That my last name was spelled *H-U-E-B-L-E* did not surprise me. That my first name was spelled *J-O-H-N-N*, did.

[*John Huebl (that's H, U, E-as-in-Elephant, B-as-in-boy, L) is a lawyer. Before going to law school, he picked up an M.F.A. in creative writing at Columbia University, and enjoys writing in his spare time.*]

## EPISTOLA

I've been a speaker of *Op* for about 50 years & am still in touch with pals from 8th grade to indulge in it (& drive our significant others as crazy as we used to drive our teachers). The version I use calls for *op* in front of each vowel sound. The *umbrella* example in M. Falcon's article [XXVIII/1] needs another *op* at the front, before the *um*. The complete rendering would be *opumbropellopa*. While I'm writing, I wonder if she or any reader knows a similar language called *Alfalfa*. Those same teachers used to drive us nuts speaking it & would never tell us how it works. I know it was legit because we could pose a problem to one teacher who would Alfalfa it to another & the other would give a valid response.

R. Kathleen Dillon  
 Brooklyn, New York

## Teacherese

Tim Kane  
Chula Vista, California

If you were *FEPed* out of *ELD* because of *decoding with automaticity*, should you be concerned? What about if your *multiple intelligence* requires *differentiation* or *scaffolding* with more *realia*? Confused how to react? These are easily understood phrases—if you happen to speak Teacherese.

The vocabulary we teachers throw around every day is often daunting to the average listener. Some of this lies with the desire to elevate teaching above the stereotype of the elderly lady writing addition problems on the chalk board. The quandary lies in the teacher's knack for developing new vocabulary on the fly, while constantly modifying existing phrases to meet new political demands. Take *CART*—a specialized bit of acronym specific to my district. *CART* stands for *Collaboration And Reflection Time*, and it means that teachers at a grade level have time to meet during school while various curriculum experts work with the students. The term, however, has taken on a life of its own. We now refer to the curriculum experts as “*CART* teachers.” Additionally, our school has added an extra hour of collaboration time on a different day, and because of our compulsive need to name things, we have dubbed this “a la *CART*.” Now you begin to see the eccentric process by which new terms are created in the teacher world, and also why it is almost impossible to track down the true origin of any such word or phrase.

Today, having a student take a test sounds much more complex than it used to. For one, tests are called *assessments*, and students don't take assessments; assessments are *administered* by the teachers. (Somewhere an English teacher is groaning at the use of passive voice.) This is in response to a political move to standardize education in the U.S., otherwise known as *standards-based education*. The *standard* is the newest term for what a student is required to learn. Every standard has a *benchmark* that must be reached to show that a student has acquired a certain subset of knowledge. Put these together and you have the *benchmark assessment*, which is a fancy way of saying test. These are cosmetic modifications.

You might hear a teacher say, “I graded the assessment using a four point rubric.” What in heavens name is a *rubric*? Having only known the term from within the context of teaching, I found the etymology quite bizarre. *Rubric* originally referred to a red colored earth, often used as a pigment in ink. When law titles were written in red ochre, they became known as *rubrics*, and this developed into the meaning ‘an authoritative rule or direction. Finally, when teachers took over the term, it transformed into an instrument through which they could assign a grade to an assessment. The rubric often has a point value—zero to four or zero to five being quite typical. Each point on the rubric has certain criteria that must be met to reach that “grade.” This has led to the process of creating *anchor papers*—student examples of work that meet each point value. The idea here is to take the subjectivity out of grading. Ironically, when grading papers, we still use the classic red pen, harkening back to the original meaning of *rubric*.

The queerest use of language comes when teachers discuss the process of teaching. Gone is the genteel lady reading stories to kindergarteners. Today's teachers are versed in the latest psychological research into the learning process. For example, Howard Gardner from Harvard University theorizes that the human brain has more than one way of being intelligent, hence his book *Multiple Intelligences*. Modern teachers have latched onto this idea as though it were a sacred dogma. You may hear teachers talking about reaching all the multiple intelligences. According to Gardner there are seven of these intelligences. The primary three that most teachers acknowledge are *visual*, *auditory* and *kinesthetic*—one who learns through physical actions. This has led to the term *TPR* (total physical response) where a concept is taught through motion. When faced with different levels of ability in a classroom we *differentiate* the lesson, meaning we teach it differently to different groups of students based on their mode of learning.

Teachers are interested in building *schema*, *scaffolding* the instruction, and using *realia*. (Apparently constructing a building is a popular metaphor for a teaching a child.) By building *schema*, the teacher hopes to create new knowl-

edge for the student to build upon. *Schema* refers to prior or background knowledge, and so when tackling a new subject, we sometimes *gift* students with the *prior knowledge* that they will need in order to understand the subject. *Scaffolding*, originally a temporary structure to support workers, here is used metaphorically to prop up a student's brain. We give students temporary support, a scaffold, to help them accomplish a complex task that they would be unable to do on their own. *Realia* actually derives from the world of museums where it refers to a museum piece patrons could touch and explore with their hands. Used interchangeably with *models*, *specimens* and *objects*, *realia* is often never mentioned in a museum context. The teacher, however, has seized the concept as a way to show students real things in the classroom. *Realia* differs from the term *manipulative*, which does not represent the real world. *Manipulatives* are touchable objects used solely in mathematics to help *kinesthetic learners*. *Realia* is synonymous with the idea of a model, so it's not surprising that we teachers *model* our instruction. *Modeling* is just how it sounds, minus the catwalk. When a new behavior is introduced (from going to the library to adding decimals), each step is modeled correctly for the students.

Most of our concern with language lies with reading, specifically reading with *fluency*. *Fluency* is the speed and ease at which a student can read a given piece of text. To become fluent, you must first learn to *decode*. The association with code breaking is quite apt here. To *decode a text* means that you can make meaning out of the various letters. If you realize that each letter has a sound, you have developed *phonemic awareness*. This leads to *phonics*—an understanding that each group of letters makes the same sound pattern. Finally, when you can read a word automatically, with little effort at decoding, then you are said to have *automaticity*. Politically this method of teaching reading is in vogue. Previously the focus was on *whole language* development, and some of its trappings still survive. *Whole language* views reading as a natural, real-world experience. Rather than break the words into *phonic* chunks or *phonemes*, it stresses the whole text. The emphasis on the real world has led to classrooms with *text-rich environments*—having many

things around the room for students to read, from books to wall decorations to pictures with captions.

Finally we are left with the hundreds of acronyms teachers create to save time and befuddle onlookers. A great many of these acronyms concentrate on students who do not speak English as their primary language. These students are sometimes called *Second Language Learners* from the term *ESL*, 'English as a Second Language.' *ESL* is out of vogue, replaced by the equally ambiguous *ELD*, 'English Language Development.' Second language learners have become *English Language Learners*, *ELL* or sometimes just *EL*. The *EL*, 'English Learner,' has also replaced the *LEP*, 'Limited English Proficient.' Still alive is the *FEP* student, a 'Fluent English Proficient' student. This is the goal of an *ELD* program, so when a student becomes proficient, the term becomes a verb and the student is *FEPed* out of the program. The idea of *Bilingual Education (BE)*, where instruction is in both English and a second language, is currently slipping out of vogue to be replaced with the *English Only* or *EO* classroom. The *EO* class is also called *English Immersion*, the idea being to immerse the student in English so that he may better acquire the language. This runs contrary to the idea of *BICS* and *CALPs*. *BICS* stands for 'Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills' and it is the everyday language a student uses to communicate—playground talk. *CALP* stands for 'Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency' and refers more to the academic use of the language.

When you hear a teacher talking about using *TPR* and *realia* to reach the kinesthetic learners, you needn't be put off. All the teacher means is that the kids will be acting out various birds while looking at samples of feathers and eggs. A far cry from the traditional image of an elementary school teacher. And perhaps that's the underlying purpose of Teacherese. By giving the jargon a pseudo-scientific and political edge, it reinforces that teaching is a professional occupation. That's not to say we don't have fun with our vocabulary. Here's one for you. When students are reading a non-fiction text, we have them make a Facts, Questions, and Responses chart. This is abbreviated *FQR*. Just think about how that acronym might be pronounced.

[*Tim Kane is a teacher of sixth grade. He is currently completing his second novel.*]



## CLASSICAL BLATHER

### *Sententiæ Antiquæ*

Nick Humez

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Old saws cut clean.<sup>1</sup> Like any tool that has had a lifetime or even multiple generations of use, they seem to fit our mental grasp with just the right weight and balance, and for that reason have the virtue of being memorable even when we forget more quotidian items (the name of the fellow who always nods off ten minutes into our class; the clever place we stashed our spare keys). And more than memorable: We snicker at the sententious farewell speech Shakespeare puts in the mouth of Polonius to his son Laertes, who is anxious not to miss his boat, for who of us has not heard much the same sort of thing from our own elders when they've reached a time of life when their wisdom seems to have boiled down to a mere potpourri of clichés?

But almost every cliché was a truism once, and even a novel one. The Roman who invented *e pluribus unum* to describe a singularity made of multiple ingredients surely could not have predicted that his felicitous coinage would be stamped onto every bronze penny in a republic two millennia distant and an ocean away (let alone that its inhabitants would put on it a spin that was political rather than culinary).<sup>2</sup> Such phrases are often the only Latin some of us ever learns, while for others they may be the gateway to an addiction to classical languages that a lifetime cannot shake.<sup>3</sup>

Civic mottoes, many in Latin, are elements of the heraldry of public life, the verbal part of coats-of-arms or government seals familiar if you live in that jurisdiction but less apt to be so if you're from somewhere else. Most Mainers recognize *Dirigo* ('I guide') as their state motto, whereas if you ask someone *from away*,<sup>4</sup> the answer is likely to be "Vacationland," which has adorned the state's license plates for half a century. Going the other direction is dodgier yet: How many readers can name the respective states (if not their own, or an adjacent one) whose mottos are *Per aspera ad astra*

(‘through difficulties [literally, the rough stuff] to[wards] the stars’), *Crescit eundo* (‘it grows in its going/as it goes’), *Si quaeris peninsulam amoenam circumspice* (‘If you seek an unspoiled peninsula, look around you’) or *Ense petit placidam sub libertate quietem* (‘by the sword it seeks peaceful rest under liberty’)?<sup>5</sup> (A notable exception is Virginia’s *Sic semper tyrannis* (‘Thus ever to tyrants’), from its having been shouted by John Wilkes Booth as he leapt from the presidential balcony at Ford’s Theatre, broke his leg, and limped offstage after shooting Abraham Lincoln.) With national mottoes we are more familiar: the Great Seal of the United States, reproduced on the back of the one-dollar bill, bears the *e pluribus* motto in the scroll on the eagle’s mouth, while the obverse of the seal has the phrases *Annuit coeptis* (‘He/it has favored [our] undertakings’) and *Novus ordo seclorum* (‘A new order of the ages’) above and below the curious pyramid surmounted by the eye of providence.<sup>6</sup>

Another source of Latin tags is the legal profession, both its maxims and its shorthand for various types of actions and writs. Article I of the United States Constitution states that the “privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus* shall not be suspended, except when in cases of rebellion or invasion may require it,” and also stipulates that “no ... *ex post facto* law shall be passed,” abuses to which the former colonies, still smarting from the high-handedness of royal governors, were especially sensitive. (*Ex post facto* means ‘after the fact,’ such a law having the effect of creating a retroactive criminal liability for an act not illegal at the time it was performed; *habeas corpus* means literally ‘Let him have the body,’ and is the formula which begins several type of common-law writs whose purpose is to bring a person before a judge or court rather than indefinitely detaining such people without trial.<sup>7</sup>) Another type of writ is called *mandamus* ‘we command’; issued by a superior court, it compels an official act or duty to be performed.

*Stare decisis* ‘to stand in respect to things decided’ refers to the doctrine of following the precedent of prior courts’ decisions insofar as they do not conflict with fundamental principles of justice. *Nolle prosequi* ‘to wish not to prosecute’ refers to an declaration by a plaintiff or prosecutor that a

legal action already filed is being dropped; the tenth edition of Merriam-Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary* dates the original expression to 1681 and the verb to *nol-pros* from the late 1870s. *Nolo contendere*, on the other hand, is a plea entered by a defendant to concede that one will not fight an indictment while declining to admit guilt,<sup>8</sup> an option sometimes exercised by draft resisters and war-tax protestors when brought to trial during the Vietnam War.

Legal maxims include *Salus populi suprema (est) lex* ('the well-being of the people is the highest law'),<sup>9</sup> *De minimis non curat lex* ('the law does not sweat the small stuff'),<sup>10</sup> *Paribus sententiis reus absolvitur* ('When the votes are equal, the perp walks'),<sup>11</sup> and the (often rhetorical) question *Cui bono?* ('To what good?' i.e. "Where's the benefit of it?")<sup>12</sup> What such sayings have in common is their affirmation of general principles by which the laws are to be interpreted; they may be thought of as meta-legalities rather than laws unto themselves.

The medical profession has also greatly enriched English with Latinisms, a holdover from when Latin was the lingua franca among university students all across Europe. (In consequence, to this day most medical terminology remains either Latin or Latinized Greek.)<sup>13</sup> *Primum non nocere* (commonly translated as 'First do no harm') is actually a Latin gloss from the Greek of Hippocrates, who wrote in his *Epidemics* that "As to diseases, make a habit of two things—to help, or at least to do no harm."<sup>14</sup> Hippocrates is also the source for the Latin tag *Vita brevis, ars longa* ('Life is short, art is long')<sup>15</sup> Nor have the doctors a monopoly, for lay writers as well have given us maxims about medicine and health, such as Cicero's *Valere malo quam dives esse*, "I would rather have health than wealth."<sup>16</sup> Some are distinctly skeptical about the profession: Elsewhere Cicero complains how *medici, causa morbi inventa, curationem inventam putant* ('Doctors, having found the cause of a disease, think they've found the cure too'),<sup>17</sup> while Quintilian, a century later, would sharply observe that *medicina mortuorum sera est* ('Medicine is too late for the dead').<sup>18</sup>

Not surprisingly, yet another source for Latin mottoes is the church. Until the Protestant

Reformation, both liturgy and scriptural readings in European churches were exclusively in Latin; in Catholic countries they continued to be so until the Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII in the early 1960s. And although Anglican parishioners have heard services in their own tongue since the Tudors, several parts of the liturgy are to this day still known to Episcopalians by their Latin openings, such as the *Venite* ('O come [let us sing unto the Lord]'),<sup>19</sup> the *Magnificat* ('[My soul] doth magnify [the Lord]'),<sup>20</sup> the *Nunc Dimittis* ('[Lord,] lettest thou [thy servant] depart [in peace]'),<sup>21</sup> and the *Sursum Corda* ('Lift up your hearts'),<sup>22</sup> as well as the names for parts of the ordinary of the mass (the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei*). Familiar too are many quotations from St. Jerome's *Vulgate*, his Latin version of the Bible, dating from the late fourth century A.D.: *De profundis clamavi* ('Out of the depths have I cried [unto Thee]'),<sup>23</sup> *Cantate Domino canticum novum* ('O sing unto the Lord a new song'),<sup>24</sup> *In te Domine speravi, non confundar in aeternum* ('In Thee, o Lord, have I trusted; let me not be confounded forever').<sup>25</sup> Bits of liturgical Latin pop up in our conversation too, as when we say *mea culpa* ('my fault'), though most Protestants, at least, may be unaware of its traditional context as part of the Catholic general confession.<sup>26</sup>

And there is an abundance of Latin tags from literature. We all speak of being wary of Greeks bearing gifts, and many of us can readily quote the original: Virgil's *Quidquid id est, timeo Danaos et dona ferentis* (literally, 'Whatever it is, I fear the Greeks, especially the ones bearing gifts').<sup>27</sup> Again, say *Jacta est alea* and many will not only translate it accurately as 'The die is cast' but also recall who said it (Julius Caesar as he crossed the Rubicon).<sup>28</sup> We may react to something disagreeable and new-fangled by exclaiming *O tempora, o mores!* ('O the times, o the customs!')<sup>29</sup> And those who believe themselves right though clearly outnumbered will sometimes still say *Victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni* ('The winning side pleased the gods, but the losing one pleased Cato').<sup>30</sup>

While the percentage of educated westerners who have actually studied Latin has declined over

the last century and a half, dictionaries of classical quotations (and websites to the same purpose) have arisen to bridge the gap. The most charming of these is surely the signature pink pages in the middle of the larger Larousse dictionaries, between the regular vocabulary and the proper names section. Headed *Locutions latines et étrangères* ‘Latin and foreign expressions,’ the *pages roses* include a fair sampling of the Latin tags a reader might expect to encounter, with occasional snippets of Italian, German, and English; thus *alma mater* ‘fostering mother’<sup>31</sup> is preceded by *all right*, phoneticized as “[ól ra-itt]” and glossed as *Locution anglaise: Tout va bien, tout est en état, vous pouvez aller en avant* ‘English expression: all goes well, all is as it should be, you may go forward.’ Or as the Italians might put it, *va bene* ‘it goes well.’


*Errata/Corrigenda*

A reader in France, Olivier Kaiser, has kindly called my attention to a minor howler in “Pants on Fire” (VERBATIM XXVIII/2): ‘Liar’ in French is not *menteux* but *menteur*. (That’s if he’s a man; the feminine is *menteuse*. And that’s the truth.)

*Notes*

1 In this they resemble new brooms, whose clean sweep is proverbial, or at least has been so since the 13th century, according to *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations* (16th ed., ed. Justin Kaplan. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, p. 775:11). Of equal antiquity is *The Oxford English Dictionary’s* earliest reference to *saw* in the sense of ‘sententious saying;’ an early reference in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from a manuscript of proverbs attributed to king Ælfred dated 1275. In Langland’s *Piers Plowman* (1362) a character is scolded for inadequate acquaintance with the Bible since “On Salamones sawes seldom [thou] bi-holdest.”

2 The phrase—actually *e pluribus unus*—is from Virgil’s *Moretum*, line 104. He is describing a salad rather than a *satura*, a culinary mélange whose closest modern-day equivalent is probably the Italian *antipasto*; the *Century Dictionary* (ed. William Dwight Whitney, New York: Century Company, 1895, p. 5349) states that the Latin expression *per saturam* meant “in the gross, confusedly,” and hence that the term *satura* came to refer to “a species of poesy, orig. dramatic and later didactic, peculiar to the Romans,” the spelling *satire* and its obsolete variant *satyre* arising because of a confusion with the word *satyr* (ibid.). *Menippean satire*, named after its supposed origi-



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nator, a Syriac Greek named Menippus (fl. 250 B.C. and reputedly born a slave, according to the *Century Cyclopedia of Names*, ed. Benjamin E. Smith; New York: Century Publishing Co., 1894, p. 676), was a satiric mixture of prose and poetry, a famous example of which is the *Satyricon* of Petronius, *arbiter elegantiarum* (‘standard-setter of high taste’) to the emperor Nero until implicated in Piso’s assassination conspiracy (as was Seneca; see note 15 below) and forced to commit suicide in 66 A.D. (ibid., p. 799). Its longest surviving section, the *cena Trimalchionis* ‘Trimalchio’s feast,’ lampoons a rich and oafish freedman’s ostentatious banquet (roast sow stuffed with sausages being just one of innumerable items on the menu) in a masterful exercise in repeatedly arousing readers’ disgust, only to pull us back from the brink of actually vomiting. (I here draw closely upon “Nausea in the Cena Trimalchionis,” an unpublished monograph written by my brother Alexander for a graduate seminar on Petronius at the University of Rochester in the spring semester of 1966. See also our discussion of satire in Humez and Humez, *A B C Et Cetera: The Life and Times of the Roman Alphabet*, Boston: David R. Godine, 1985, pp. 103–109.)

3 Along with sword-and-sandal flicks, of course. A surprising number of my colleagues from various classics departments have confessed to me that like mine, their interest in Latin and Greek was kindled or at least exacerbated at a tender age by such films as *Spartacus*, *Ben-Hur*, *Jason and the Argonauts*, *Helen of Troy*, and even the egregious 1955 *Ulysses* (whose greatest moment is surely Odysseus’s surprised inquiry of Circe, “Why—what are all these pigs doing here? ”What indeed?)

4 This expression for a person who was not born and brought up in the state is unique to Maine, as far as I know, but any reader with attestations from elsewhere is urged to come forward.

5 In order, these are the mottoes of Kansas, New Mexico, Michigan, and Massachusetts. *Ad aspera per astra* was proposed to the Kansas state senate by its secretary, John J. Ingalls, who claimed to have seen it in the office of

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a lawyer under whom he had clerked as a young man. Its meaning is essentially the same as the expression *per ardua ad astra*, the motto of the Irish family of Mulvany and, since 1913, of the Royal Flying Corps and its successor, the RAF; it appears to have been an amalgam of two quotes from the *Aeneid*: XII:892–3 has *ardua pennis astra sequi*, ‘to follow on wings through difficulties to the stars’ while XI:641 has *sic itur ad astra*, ‘that’s how to get to the stars.’ New Mexico’s *crescit eundo* is possibly from Virgil’s description of the evils of rumor in *Aeneid* V.173–188; Michigan’s motto is an obvious steal from a Latin tag applied to Sir Christopher Wren at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, which translates as ‘If you would seek his monument, look around you.’ The Massachusetts motto is a truncation of a line by Algernon Sydney (1622–1683) alluding to tyranny; yet taken together with the image of the Indian bowman on the state shield, it would appear to be a thinly veiled allusion to the Bay Colony’s sanguinary victory over its native inhabitants during King Philip’s War in the 1670s. For other Latin state mottoes, see [www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0801718](http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0801718) or [www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/7013/statemottoes](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/7013/statemottoes).

6 A discussion of the symbols and mottoes of the Great Seal can be found at <http://greatseal.com/mottoes>. *Annuit coeptis* and *novus ordo seclorum* are both adapted from Virgil, the latter possibly from *Eclogues* IV:5 (*seclorum nascitur ordo*, ‘a (new) order of ages/worlds is born’), the former almost certainly from *audacibus annue coeptis* (‘favor bold undertakings’) a phrase Virgil uses both in his *Georgics* (I:40) and his *Aeneid* (IX:625). The seal was adopted on June 20, 1782, by the Continental Congress, Charles Thomson (its secretary from 1774 to 1789), having recommended both of the mottoes on the obverse.

7 It would appear to be no accident that the framers did not merely restrict the suspension of *habeas corpus* to states of emergency, but specifically limited it to instances of armed struggles conducted on U.S. soil. To those who long for greater rigor and efficiency in the apprehension and punishment of social deviants, rescinding civil liberties that coddle offenders often seems irresistibly seductive. But to achieve this end in a nation predicated on a set of explicitly formulated procedural rights, it may be expedient to resort to modes of discourse that are usual and customary only in time of war, whence last year’s marketing of a bill broadening federal authority to search and seize to Congress as the “Patriot Act.”

8 *Web 10*, as it is affectionately called even by its detractors, is the source for most of the definitions adapted for this paragraph. *Nol-pros* as verb turns up in fiction as well, e.g. in the title story of John Trotwood Moore’s *Tom’s Last Forage* (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury Press [1926]), a sentimental tale of a former Confederate officer’s Reconstruction-era relationship with his faithful ex-slave turned aide-de-camp.

9 According to H. A. Riley’s *Dictionary of Latin Quotations* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1886), this saying was purportedly “derived from the Laws of the Twelve Tables at Rome,” but that “Aristotle has a similar maxim.”

10 Riley (*op. cit.*) cites this only as “Legal Maxim,” but cites as an interesting example “The theft of a pin, for instance.” Judge Henry A. Shute genially gives it in lieu of further self-identification at the entry under his own name in the appendix listing the names and glossing the subsequent lives of the inhabitants of his home town of Exeter, New Hampshire who appear in his *Real Diary of a Real Boy* (Chicago: Reilly & Lee Co., 1906).

11 A saying of the 17th-century British jurist Sir Edward Coke, according to Riley (*op. cit.*), but the principle goes back to fifth-century B.C. Athens: In *The Furies* of Euripides its origin is given as a precedent set by Athena herself when she descended to cast the tie-breaking vote in favor of the acquittal of Orestes for matricide.

12 Unattributed by Riley (*ibid.*), though he follows it with a converse seldom heard nowadays: *Cui malo?* (‘To what harm?’) However, Cicero asks the question in his defense of Milo (*Pro Milone* XII.32), *Cui bono fuerit?* (‘Of what good was it?’)

13 Those outside the profession, of course, may regard its use of Latin as a deliberate technique of mystification; Sganarelle, Molière’s willy-nilly physician, exploits Géronte’s ignorance to deliver a preposterous string of Greco-Roman terminology (e.g., “the head, which we call in Greek *nasmus*”—*nasmos* is indeed real Greek, but actually means ‘a flowing current or spring’) and pseudo-quotations from Hippocrates to convince the old man of his erudition and curative powers (*Le Médecin malgré lui*, act II, scene 6.) A very helpful introduction to basic medical Latin and its Greek borrowings can be found in chapters 12 and 13 of the third edition of Tamara Green’s *Greek and Latin Roots of English* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). While intended primarily as a textbook, it is a useful reference work as well, not least for its concise glossaries of Latin and transliterated Greek terms.

14 *Epidemics*, book 1, chapter 11. This translation is from page 71 of the 16th edition of *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, edited by Justin Kaplan (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992).

15 *Ibid.*; the entire quote is from Hippocrates’ *Aphorisms*, section 1, in which it begins the first item, the rest of which reads ‘the occasion instant [or: the opportunity fleeting], the experiment perilous, and the decision difficult.’ The Latin gloss got a boost from Seneca, who uses *Vita brevis est, ars longa* as the opener for his essay “On the Brevity of Life” (*De Brevitate Vitæ*). As it turned out, his own life proved briefer than statistical expectancy, for Nero made him commit suicide along with Petronius (see note 2 above).

16 Slightly adapted from his *De Officiis* II.78.

17 *Tusculan Disputations* III.10

18 In his *Declamatio Maior* XII, where Quintilian employs it metaphorically in the broader sense of ‘Better never than late.’

19 Psalm 95 in the King James Bible. (The numbering of the psalms in the Catholic Bible is slightly different.)

20 Luke 1:46–55.

21 Luke 2:29–32.

22 The preface to the *Sanctus*.

23 Psalm 130.

24 Psalm 98.

25 The opening of Psalm 71, and the final words of the *Te Deum*.

26 The full phrase is *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa* (‘My fault, my fault, my most grievous fault’); this is accompanied by striking one’s chest. (The French term for this is *battre son coulepe*; in the *Song of Roland*, the title character, Charlemagne’s nephew, does this at the point in the story when he knows he is mortally wounded.)

27 *Aeneid* II.49; the speaker is the priest Laöcoön, who correctly distrusts the wooden horse left for the Trojans to take inside their walls. Unfortunately, he and his sons are promptly strangled by a huge snake (the subject of a well-known sculpture from the School of Pergamum, now in the Vatican).

28 “Crossing the Rubicon” has itself become proverbial. This stream marked the boundary between Italy proper and Cisalpine Gaul, inside which a general was not to lead his army without express permission of the Senate; to do so amounted to a declaration of civil war. Another phrase attributed to Julius Caesar is based on a mistranslation fostered by Shakespeare, *Et tu, Brute?* (‘You too, Brutus?’) What Julius actually was reported to have said was more poignant, and in Greek: *Kai su, o teknon?* (‘Thou too, my bairn?’)

29 Cicero, at the beginning of the first of his two speeches against the conspirator Cataline.

30 From Lucan’s epic poem about the civil war between Pompey and Julius Caesar, the *Pharsalia* (I.128). Marcus Porcius Cato, great-grandson and namesake of the austere Cato the Censor who nagged the Senate into the Third Punic War by ending every speech with *Delenda est Carthago* (‘Carthage must be destroyed’), had backed the Pompeian side; it cost him his life.

31 Nowadays used almost exclusively to refer to one’s college, it was formerly applied by poets to refer to their country, according to the *Nouveau Petit Larousse Illustré Dictionnaire Encyclopédique* (Paris: Larousse, 1951), pink page 1117.

[Want to see your favorite subject receive the full-on, multifootnoted Humez treatment? Send suggestions for future Classical Blathers to editor@verbatimag.com.]

## Witty Dutch Neologisms

Jacqueline Schaalje  
Givatayim, Israel

One of the easiest ways to make a Dutch neologism, apart from pilfering the domineering English language, is to take two old words and stick them together. In Dutch, compounds are a common occurrence, much more so than in English. Whereas the English ‘front door’ consists of two words, in Dutch you write *voordeur* (there are other doors, like *zijdeur* (‘side door’) and *achterdeur* (‘back door’), and other useful words like *keukendeur* (‘kitchen door’) and *tussendeur* (‘connecting door’)—this to reassure readers who may have been left wondering: “But what about the other doors?” The diphthong *eu* is pronounced as in the French *neuf*. There are tens of compounds for Dutch doors, clearly demonstrating what a rich source of language renewal this field is.

Without trying to detract from the expediency and occasional beauty of compounds, it is plain to see that the proclivity to rehash words into longer and longer compounds can be abused by Philistines and bureaucrats who love making Dutch even more cumbersome. In the Philistine category there is *blitztrip*, a melding of the German word *blitz*, and *trip*, borrowed from English; it means a short trip that was used by the newspapers to describe Bush’s lightning tour in Africa. It can also be used to deride the voyages of holiday-starved Americans stretching themselves over the globe. Back in the old days, nice chubby Americans in sun hats and shorts ‘did’ Europe in five days: one day they were in the Uffizi in Florence, the next day they visited Legoland in Denmark. Well, they do not go to Europe anymore, and that idea can be found in *blitztrip* too: *blits*, a homonym of *blitz*, means ‘fashionable.’

These compounds come from officialdom: *euthanasiacriteria* (‘euthanasia criteria’) and *toetsingscommissie* (‘controlling committee’), which, besides forming a hazard for semiliterates and Dutch learners, are ugly. Both words are intricate inventions to describe new juridical procedures that deal with euthanasia. (As some readers probably know, this is legal in Holland, but falls under

strict rules that could save the lives of persons who are not absolutely sure that their suffering is insufferable; and in some cases do just that: the law both protracts and protects patients who have requested their doctor to *euthanasieren* them. This last one is the new verb.)

Luckily, some new finds do indeed enrich the language, and are witty, as the title of this article promises.

High-tech is always good for some new words. That is to say, *Internet* and *SMS* are not new anymore, but new applications are still being invented as we speak. *Muisklikactivisme*, ‘mouseclick activism,’ is an apt term that denotes the lazy, but potentially very effective political activity that spares one from climbing barricades and shouting oneself hoarse. Just a one-click act is enough to sign a petition on the web site of Amnesty International against stoning a woman to death, just to give a rather sad example, or beef up the account of your favourite fundraiser. However, dabbling in on-line politics could get you a *muismarm* (frp, ‘mouse’ and ‘arm’). This does not refer to an ergonomic gadget as in English, but to the injury itself, or *RSI* (Repetitive Strain Injury), that is caused by too much mousing. Invented several years ago, it is now an established word that is used by doctors and laypersons alike.

As some redundant Internet techniques were discarded in the last years, some ended up on the *internetkerkhof*, or ‘Internet graveyard,’ which neatly expresses how widespread the ‘high-tech failure’ was, or *dotcomflop*, sometimes shortened to *dotflop*. An *elfseptemberexcuus* ‘eleven September excuse’ explains why the bubble burst, and why some other conventional branches, like tourism, have flopped as well: 9/11 did them in. But whether high-tech shares are going up or down, a *digibeet* has trouble understanding all of that. I have checked whether this coinage also occurs in English, by googling *digibete*, which is also the Dutch spelling of the adjective of *digibeet*. The result is that the English version crops up here and there, but most mentions are Dutch. Of course, that does not make a decisive claim about where the word originated.

It is a bad time for phone companies, and some have to work even harder than others, as witnessed

by the funny *belkabouter*, ‘call dwarf’—a small company that tries to wriggle into the market that is dominated by giant corporations.

Telecommunications has also influenced this tongue-twister: *spraakwaterschade* contains the word *spraakwater*; itself an older amalgam of ‘speech’ and ‘water,’ respectively, which means an alcoholic drink that boosts one’s inclination to speak. Combine this with ‘damage’ and the picture is clear: a mobile phone that has been rendered dysfunctional by a wetted tongue.

A *belbios* alludes to these old-fashioned institutions where you reserve a ticket for the movies (*bios* is ‘cinema’). Surely this word would have long been replaced by *SMS-bios* or *internetbios*, but they lack that nice ring. (Note that in Dutch, *internet* is written with a small *i*. But it is just as revered.)

Some of these compound neologisms sound like they have escaped from a cryptogram. Dutch cryptograms, in fact, abound with compounds. Maybe the high occurrence of traffic neologisms is explained by the long hours that many Dutch commuters need to overcome by thinking out crypto words while they are in a traffic jam. A *kijkersfile* is a congestion (*file*) caused by too many watchers (*kijkers*) of an accident. *Flitspaalgedrag* means the kind of submissive ‘behaviour’ (*gedrag*) just before arriving at the point on the highway where the presence of speed monitoring cameras (*flitspaal*, literally: ‘flash pole’) is suspected.

The Dutch worry a lot about noise caused by modern transportation. *Fluisterasfalt* is a special type of asphalt with double density that absorbs the noise: *fluister* means ‘whisper.’ Three provinces and 33 municipalities have staged a revolt against national hub Schiphol which promised that its new fifth runway would be a *milieubaan*, or ‘environmental strip.’ They were promised by the Airport Authority that it would only be used infrequently in order to allow its citizens intermittent peace between take-offs and landings: they feel cheated because the runway is just as often grated by planes as the others. This probably says something, too, about what an eroded concept ‘environment’ has become.

As much as the Dutch hate noise, they are fascinated by motherhood, and children are an unexpected fashion accessory. On the topic of large fam-

ilies, *duomoeder*, or ‘duo mother’ is the modern version of it: it refers to a lesbian couple with children. A *zwekrok* is a particularly disgusting-sounding term. It stands for a ‘swell skirt,’ not to be confused with a ‘nice skirt’ although it may be also that. It is one of these maternity garments that pregnant women needed until the naked-belly fashion made them redundant. A *zwangerschapsstring* might be the only maternity patent that will survive these wicked times: this ‘pregnancy string’ has a large cloth to cover the bulge on the front and a mere strip behind.

The Dutch queen is the victim of one of the meanest cryptic neologisms. As she has not filed a complaint yet with its inventor, a TV satirist, there may be something in it. *Beacontractor* is a play with Her Majesty’s first name *Beatrix*. Politicians, who have not managed to survive more than four years in the cabinet, while her reign goes on and on, attest that she does not eat them for breakfast. She is just a control freak.

Lest Dutch learners think they can make their own Dutch words—once you get the knack of the basic ones—by combining a noun and a modifier, this is predictably not so when the modifier is an adjective. Let’s go back to our handy door example. In the case of *glazen deur* ‘glass door,’ the space is necessary. Let us hope that one of the most frequently used phrases (some say exploited) in the last year, *preventieve oorlog*, ‘preventive war,’ will stay synonymous with the intervention in Iraq.

Another technique should be fairly simple to get for a Dutch learner with a command of English: pick any English word, preferably from computers, and stick a Dutch suffix on it. Tip: try verbs first; in Dutch the infinitive ends with *-en*. Thus we get *computeren*, *printen*, *scannen* (the double *n* is for the pronunciation) and *branden* ‘burning CDs.’ *Surfen* is an older verb, used for ‘windsurfing’ as well.

This way of making verbs is inexhaustible. Also words from fitness are borrowed from English, like *steppen* (used in its new meaning of ‘working out on steps,’ and the old meaning of ‘riding a scooter’) and *stretchen* to describe a stretch class. *Speeddaten* is something one does after the required shape has been attained in order to keep up with this exhausting new sport.

These verbs can even be conjugated according to Dutch grammar rules, but this—for some unfathomable reason—still sounds a bit funny, and in order not to become a laughing stock it is best to go for the infinitive. Conveniently, Dutch uses the form of ‘I am going to’ a lot, so an uttered “ik ga steppen” would not surprise anybody.

New Dutch verbs can also be made from abbreviations, like the official word *wobben*. This is taken from *wob*, also found as the endearing diminutive *wobje*, which stands for *Wet Openbaar Bestuur*, ‘Act Public Rule’—in practice it means a nasty investigation into expense invoices that can throw a civil servant’s career into the dungeon. In order to explicate that things get personal, *wobben* is used in combination with a pronoun, i.e. *iemand wobben* is ‘to *wob* someone.’

This article is not going to be complete without mentioning Harry Potter. But this time it is the Dutch translator Wiebe Buddingh’ who is going to be credited. His name is the first one that I have seen with an apostrophe at the end, but this slight eccentricity may be forgiven him because he has done a wonderful job with J.K. Rowling’s text.

In the vast majority of cases, English books, films, cartoons and other spin-offs from the overpowering Anglo-Saxon culture are translated with the English names and catchwords intact; that is why it is such a surprise to learn that Buddingh’ has translated the Potter equivalents in full. In no other case in recent years have the names in a foreign book been Dutchified so completely. In, let us say, the 1950s, this was quite usual, when globalisation was still held in check and Dutch and English were not in a major culture clash. As of now, other European countries, like Germany and France, still dub their foreign television shows. Literature, including children’s books, gets the same treatment. So in the French and German translations of the Potter books we find laughable specimens of Muggle handiwork: “L’Ecole Des Sorciers Hogwarts” and “Harry und seine Qidditch Mannschaft.”

Buddingh’ himself has stated in an interview that his independent approach, which was supported wholeheartedly by his publisher, seemed the right thing to do: “In translation certain inventions

or jokes get lost, but by translating the names it is possible to add a new joke.” And before the joke sinks in a reader can have a few delightful seconds of bafflement. It’s free!

In the best cases completely new words have been invented, like *dreuzel* for *Muggle*. This combination of the Dutch diphthong *eu* (like in *deur*) and *zel* is brilliant. There are some other Dutch words with *euzel* that, although they are not intentionally negative in connotation, have something distasteful about them, like *reuzel*, ‘goose fat,’ and *peuzel*, ‘eating with relish,’ like a giant with a sweet tooth for humans. And another rule applies: in order to detract even more from a pejorative, you could say that the more consonants are heaped at the beginning of a word, the more slowly the word comes into gear. *Dreuzel* is a perfect example of this: it resembles *treuzel*: a slow person. Lastly, its similarity to the English word *drizzle* is probably not accidental: if *drizzle* is not real rain, but an ineffective drip, the *dreuzels* are lacklustre compared to wizards.

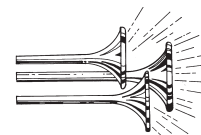
Another examples: *zwerkbal* for *quidditch*. *Zwerk* is an archaic word for ‘sky.’ In fact, it had become so obsolete that Buddingh’ has—thanks to Rowling—staged a full-blown revival! Needless to say, the combination with *-bal* did not exist yet. Another nice one is (there are hundreds) *Wegisweg* for *Diagon Alley*. The Dutch word is really a phrase that has been contracted into a compound, playing upon a pun (*weg*) for both ‘road’ and ‘gone.’ So the road is gone, in other words, which sounds appropriately mysterious for a magic bazaar. *Weg is weg* has a second meaning: ‘gone is gone,’ and in this it resembles a commercial slogan that is published during the sales season: *op is op*, sometimes written as *op = op*, which means that supply is limited. Buddingh’ has turned it into *weg is weg*; this has a slightly sinister feel to it, it makes you think of shopping but it ends with a vanishing.

Some translations are more literal, like *de gouden snaai*, seemingly a straightforward translation of ‘the golden Snitch,’ but here too there is an innovation, because, although the verb *snaaien* does exist, *snaai* does not exist as a noun. Although there are many verbs in Dutch that are made by attaching the suffix *-en* to the noun, and vice versa,

there are others that do not allow it; for whatever reason history has allowed only one form to survive. Purists would say that because Buddingh’ introduced *snaai* as a noun, this does not mean that intellectuals can now say and write “I have just returned from my *snaai* in the super,” but they could use it in a humorous way. And if we readers want to see the Potter words in another five years, we should start using them.

The most interesting conclusion that can be drawn from all this, is not just that English words are a rich source for new Dutch words. That is hardly new or inspiring. But when it means that the basically rather rigid Dutch language can be made more flexible and colourful by allowing new words to spin off into nouns and verbs and adjectives, it could really be a way to enrich the language and create more possibilities for expressing subtle nuances. This is exactly what Dutch needs in order to survive next to his big brother, English. In addition, the Potter books, glory to one wizard translator, prove that fantastic stories and ideas can be expressed in Dutch with as much success as in English, without sounding queer or old-fashioned, as some authentic Dutch products tend to do that lack a skilful author and that cause consumers of culture so often to resort to something English. The proof will be in the pudding: when J.K. Rowling learns Dutch.

[*Jacqueline Schaalje is a correspondent for a Dutch newspaper in Israel, and has published in some American magazines, mainly about history. She has an MA in English.*]



SIC! SIC! SIC!

An investigation led Florida’s Department of Financial Services (DFS) to revoke Peter Waldon’s license for fraud. [*From the November 2003 AARP Bulletin. Submitted by Edward T. Dell, of Peterborough, New Hampshire..*]



## Words That Sell

Allison Whitehead  
Stifford Clays, Essex

Would you like to discover how advertisers persuade us to buy their products? They don't always advertise the product itself, they advertise the advantages of it—and they do so by using some of the most powerful words in the English language.

Ads must use simple language; the words must not confuse or lend any doubt as to what the buyer will get if they purchase the product or service. Classified ads are paid for by the word, so each word must earn its place. This is why words such as *discount*, *opportunities*, *secrets*, and the perennial favourite, *free*, abound. The advertiser must arouse the readers' curiosity enough for them to request further information. Display ads, where the advertiser may try to sell a product 'off the page,' have more space and thus more words, but there should still be no waffle.

Shock headlines may be used to get our attention, ie. "Alcoholism—are you at risk?" "Will your pension be enough to support you when you retire?" and "Are you losing £££'s on your savings each month?" The product or service will then be introduced as a solution to the problem. This approach is more cunning—rather than shouting about the benefits of their product, the advertiser is warning of what will happen if you don't use it. Other adverts use a more positive approach by using words such as *learn*, *discover*, and *improve* to lure the reader in. Phrases such as *how to*, *you can*, and *cash in* suggest the reader will be able to join others who have already been successful at using this product.

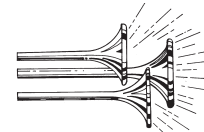
Where money is involved—earning or saving it—actual figures may or may not be used. Although terms like *get rich*, *earn a fortune*, and *unlimited earnings* sound attractive, adverts which mention a particular amount can attract more attention, and be more realistic—especially if the amount is proven within the advert. The same applies to saving money. "Earn an extra £50 a week in your spare time," "Save £1000 a year by moving your mortgage," and "Invest £10 a month into your

future now!" are prime examples of headlines which promise a level of saving or earning we can all relate to.

In short, the words used in an advert should be those that can invoke a feeling or desire within a potential customer. They should appeal to the basic instincts within all of us—to make or save more money, to love and live well, to stay fit and healthy, and to be able to spend more time doing the things we love, and doing them better. To that end, the most powerful word in all advertising—*free*—can have several meanings. It can mean a free gift, certainly, but adverts can also promise to free up more of your time, free you from the tyranny of working for others, free you from your mortgage ten years early, free your mind from worries ... and so on.

But most importantly, it lures us—the reader—in, and that's exactly what the advertiser wants.

[Allison Whitehead wrote "Jumpers and Rounders and Tops, Oh My" in XXVII/4.]



## THEY

The floating pronouns of Lover's Leap  
Were a dastardly devilish crew,  
The lot wore disguises in various sizes  
And fewbody knew who was who.

You and I were exempt from pedantic contempt,  
Everyone recognized We;  
Us and Them—trivialities of workplace mentalities,  
As were Him, It, Her, Me, He and She.

But, They, in disguises of various sizes,  
In arguments, lukewarm to livid,  
For general reference, everyone's preference  
For last-defense footnote and *ibid*.

So They was promoted as most often quoted  
On topics from world war to whey,  
But They, in confusion, jumped to a conclusion,  
And gave up the ghost—so they say.

—Robin R. Yuran

## EPISTOLAE

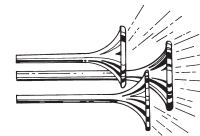
Indeed this physiological response [the sneeze] is “More Than Just Ah-Choo and Bless You.” (XXVII/4) In early antiquity, perhaps as far back as Sumerian civilization, many believed a sneeze ejected the sneezer’s soul. If ever-lurking evil spirits were to be prevented from capturing such dispersed souls, prompt and vigorous action was necessary. Hence local and regional deities were called on ritually to avert catastrophe, a custom that lives on in “Gesundheit and God bless you.” So did the sign of the cross repel the hemophagic Count Dracula. Randall didn’t include *skat* among the many prophylactic words and phrases available. Without fail, my maternal grandfather in eastern North Carolina pronounced a strong *skat* after anyone sneezed. *Skat* seems in the beginning to have been used primarily to drive away cats and cats were known in a more satanic time as familiars of the devil, eager to capture errant and erring souls. *Skat* properly enunciated should therefore protect the sneezer from imminent danger.

*Thrash* and *thresh* appear to be used indiscriminately in many regions in referring to beating and flailing. (re: “To Curf and Thrash, and Vex and Dash,” XXVII/4) What then of *thrush*? More than a half-century ago, in some rural South Carolina counties, “good country people” would take lunches after church and picnic on hospital grounds before going visiting inside. That they often knew not one of the patients mattered not a whit. The nursing staff was overwhelmed and many visitors were able to satisfy their broad medical curiosities. During the week the numbers were fewer but there were still some hall rambler. Attracted perhaps by the smell of ether, braver folk burst into the operating room and were quickly run out by vehement “Scats!” Sometimes restraining traffic at night wasn’t so simple. Working in our local hospital before my last year in medical school in the summer of 1948, I was examining a child in the emergency room. She had a cottony, sticky exudate in her throat that could only be a yeast infection, known medically as *moniliasis* or *candidiasis* and to the laity as *thrush*. Intent on my examination, I was unaware a hospital rambler was looking intently

over my shoulder. When I turned to her, she spoke, rather oracularly, “Hits the thrash, doc. Git a vargin that ain’t never seed her paw to breath on it and hit’ll go away.” Such a therapeutic entity not being immediately available, standard medical treatment had to be resorted to—with satisfactory results.

(Re: *Cackylacky*) I have lived in either North or South Carolina for more than seventy years and have not heard *Cackylacky* mentioned in either.

John H Felts  
Winston-Salem, N.C.



(Re: “The Humble Origins of Chad” XXVI/2)

In *Timpson’s Book of Curious Days* by John Timpson (Jarrod Publishing, Whitefriars, Norwich NR3 1TR), there is an item for March 2nd.

“Wot, No Respect for St Chad?” The name of St Chad, who died on this day in AD 612, came in for a certain amount of ridicule during the last World War. Anyone of that generation will remember the drawings of a bald-headed, long-nosed little chap with a question mark growing out of his head, peering over a wall. The caption read: “Wot, no ... ?” depending on what particular shortage we were complaining about at the time. He was the creation of the cartoonist “Chatt”—George Edward Chatterton—who adapted his nickname to Mr. Chad.

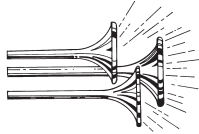
Many people therefore have a rather bizarre picture of the real Chad, who was probably bald and may well have had a long nose, but spent little time peering over walls. He was one of England’s earliest missionaries, with his headquarters at Lichfield. He became the patron saint of medicinal springs, and since many pilgrims were cured at Chad’s wells, the name *Chadwell* lives of around London and elsewhere. But according to the Royalists who defended Lichfield Cathedral during the Civil War, his powers extended further than that.

The attacking Parliamentarians were led by Lord Brooke, who tempted Providence before the battle by praying that, if his cause were unjust, he might die. He was not only tempting Providence, it seems, he was also tempting St. Chad. because this

happened on St. Chad's Day in 1643, and after all this was his cathedral. The general had hardly got off his knees before a brace of musket bullets struck him down.

And somewhere a saintly voice may have murmured: "Wot, no respect?"

Dempsey Hurst  
Riverside, California



These health re-definitions have been in my file for some time. Not original with me but I do not know the source (I found a clipping undated from *Chemical and Engineering News* saying that it arrived from an unidentified source in the nursing department at New York University.)

*Artery*: The study of paintings.

*Bacteria*: The back door to a cafeteria.

*Caesarian Section*: A Roman neighborhood.

*Dilate*: To live long.

*Nitrates*: Cheaper than day rates.

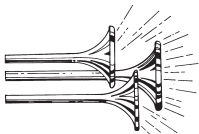
*Node*: Was aware of.

*Outpatient*: Someone who fainted.

*Postoperative*: Letter carrier.

*Terminal illness*: Getting sick at the airport.

Saul Ricklin



Sic! Sic! Sic! *Horribile Dictu!* "Moving? You know the drill—let us know right away, by phone, email, or those funny things with stamps on." I wouldn't combine the singular forms of communication with the plural "funny things with stamps on." I expect more from VERBATIM.

Ben Cohen

[We've changed our little blurb. However, we're not going to adopt the slogan "expect more from VERBATIM" just yet. —Ed.]

[A] recent mailing mentioned a possible contest, "Words You Wish Existed." This letter is not about that contest or any other; I want to know a particular word that I know exists but which I've forgotten. Perhaps you can help me.

The word I'm looking for refers to the quality possessed by babies and baby animals that elicits a "cute response" in adults, something like a caregiving response in adults.

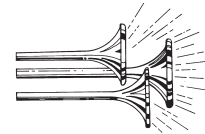
The "cute response" was named by Konrad Lorenz. He noted, in pandas for example, the apparently disproportionately large heads compared to the body, the round head with the big eyes; their clumsiness and tendency to sit on their rear ends, all reminding one of a baby needing nurturing.

The word is not *neoteny* or *neoteinia* from biology, meaning the prolongation of immaturity.

Thank you for your help in this matter.

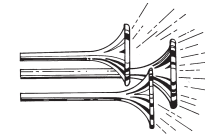
John A. Peters, MD  
Scituate, Massachusetts

[Readers? Any answers? —Ed.]



## SIC! SIC! SIC!

Bits and bytes are easily recycled back to their composite electrons, it is true, but <http://www.annabeth.co.uk/playtarot/home.html> (a site where a Playmobil character reads your fortune from a Playmobil Tarot Deck) we are informed "This is where digital composting comes in." All the better to fertilize your digital garden, we suppose.



A flyer for swing dance lessons at the Durham (N.C.) Armory reassures wallflowers that "Most swing dancers don't have a partner. It's a social dance where everybody dances with everybody." (In a big circle?) The flyer goes on to assert that the dances are "smoke-free, alcohol-free events so it's fun for all." (Tipplers and smokers may not agree.)

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## INTER ALIA

### *Words in the North and the South*

Gifford Bull

Lake Ridge, Virginia

John Rieves and Miss Jennie Crumpton were an elderly couple in Starkville, Mississippi, and they were interesting and admirable people. We loved them both. They were a little frail and so we tilled their garden for them, and they knew we were gardeners, too.

About 5:30 one morning the phone rang and it was John Rieves.

“Gifford. You like English peas?”

“Sure do.”

“Well, we’ve picked all we can use and we’ve froze all we can freeze, and we given away all the family wanted. We’re going to cut ‘em down. If you want some, come on out.”

We knew that John Rieves meant now, not some time later, so we dressed and drove out Reed Road to the Crumptons. Miss Jennie was fixing breakfast and I already knew where the garden was, so I went on down and started picking peas. After a while, John Rieves came down to join me. At his age, John Rieves was quite bent over and walked with a stick. I was starting to pick from the top of the pea vines, but John could see the bottom ones better. He would point with his stick and say, “Gifford! You missed one. Look, here’s another one.”

I said, “In Yankee Land, where I come from, we just say *peas* and we know they will be green peas. Here if you ask for peas you’ll get Crowder peas, or maybe black-eyed peas.” This led to a discussion of the way words were used differently in the North and the South, and John Rieves, a pretty good word man himself, had something to say about that.

You have to know that *carry* has different connotations in the North and in the South. In the North *carry* largely means you pick it up in your hands, or at least in your arms. “Carry your bags to your car for you, mam?” “The groom carried his new bride over the threshold.” “I liked her looks when I carried her books in Kalamazoo.” *Carry-on*

*luggage* on the airline is held in your hand, or nowadays, by extension, it’s pulled down the aisle behind you, but then you lift it up into the overhead luggage bin. In the South, the word can have quite an extended meaning. “I’ll carry you to the airport.” In both places, however, you might say, “The raft was carried downstream,” or “the wind blew the papers into the air and carried them away,” or “He was carried away by his emotions.”

Then he told me this story.

In World War I, John Rieves enlisted in the Army and was assigned to the field artillery. He was sent to Massachusetts for training, not as one of a whole contingent of Mississippi boys but all by himself. His Massachusetts mates were entranced by his Mississippi accent, and teased him. John Rieves, always ready with words, gave as good as he got.

His little squad was practicing marching when they came to the top of a hill.

“Halt!” called the squad leader. “Cadet Crumpton! You’ve just come up this hill, and you look down the other side, and there’s a whole bunch of the enemy down there. What’cha gonna do?”

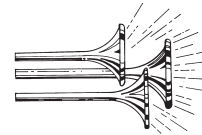
“Well,” said John Rieves, “First thing I’d do is train the guns on the enemy, and then carry the horses and the caissons to the rear.”

All the rest of the squad collapsed on the ground, hooting with laughter.

“You’re going to carry the horses? Do you know how heavy a horse is?”

Didn’t stop John Rieves for a minute.

“I said *carry* ‘em. I didn’t say, *tote* ‘em!”



## SIC! SIC! SIC!

Mary Louise Bean sent us this ad headline from the *New Haven Register* [Connecticut]. It reads: “Blemishes Available Selected Sizes & Color \$90.” [*We have previously seen only ads that promise to get rid of blemishes, and usually for a much lower tariff.—Ed.*]

# EPISTOLAE

1. Which page of the Sunday, August 3, 2003, *New York Times* do you read?

Page 8, “Vienna’s Grandeur Fails To Mask a Sense of Loss,” by Richard Bernstein: “The Albertina [Museum] is the former Hapsburg palace that housed the drawings by da Vinci, Michelangelo and Albrecht Dürer in the royal collection ....”

Page AR 26, “Does *The Da Vinci Code* Crack Leonardo?” by Bruce Boucher: “... the author’s grasp of the historical Leonardo is shaky. One small but telling point comes in Mr. [Dan] Brown’s references to Leonardo as ‘Da Vinci,’ as if that were the painter’s last name, yet it is no surname but simply a reference to the fact that he was the illegitimate son of Ser Piero of Vinci, in the Florentine territory. Like other great artists, Leonardo is invariably referred to by his given name and not by da Vinci.”

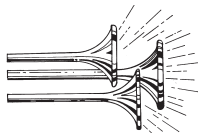
2. Which edition’s index of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* do you use?

Eleventh Edition (1911): “*Caratacus*: see *Caractacus*” (p. 148).

Fifteenth Edition (1991): “*Caractacus*: see *Caratacus*” (p. 296).

And a SIC!: “When Stephen Bishop was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease, his life changed forever. [from the Danbury News-Times, August 31, 2003. p. 1] Shows the danger of diagnoses.

Ed Rosenberg  
Danbury, Connecticut



Hey, you people!

Let me, at the outset, say that I’ve been enjoying VERBATIM for quite a few years, and hope to continue to do so for a few more.

Now, to get to the the purpose of this letter, the real purpose, that is: a reaction ot the “I before E?” article [in XXVIII/1].

When I was in elementary shoo (so long ago that they then called it “grammar school”) I learned

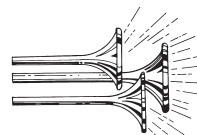
“I before E, except after C,  
And when pronounced ‘ay’—  
As in *neighbor* and *weigh*.”

Later, in first year high school (now, I believe, the equivalent, third year junior high) I learned the rubric “sEIZE the wEIRD forEIGN shEIk.” These two immortal principles take care of many of the apparent inconsistencies of the article: for example: *eight*, *heinous*, *feign*, *reign*, *vilain*, *inveigled*, *surveillance*, *beige*, *veins*, *deign*, et al. Other examples may be explained their being in a language other than English (of course, *sheik* is one), e.g., *Pleiades* (likewise an exception because of its being in two syllables that separate the *e* from the *i*, *beige* (also a “double”), *Zeitgeist*, *vermeil*, and *kaleidoscopic*. In fact, if all of Pat Sheil’s examples are examined under one (or more) of the above standards, I believe there will be a minimum of horrorifics.

Best regards anyway,

Berthold M. Levy  
Melrose Park, Pennsylvania

[This is, of course, entirely true, but takes all the fun out of it. —Ed.]



## SIC! SIC! SIC!

Kenneth W. Way of North Granby, Connecticut, sent us an advertisement from the *Heartland America* catalog of May 2003. It shows a device that permits one to “Know the Time To One Millionth Of A Second Plus Outdoor Temperature!” Mr. Way explains that this “must be directed toward a select group who love mathematical puzzles.”

**MOVING? You know the drill—let us know right away, by phone, e-mail, or even with a real letter, stamps and all. Don’t miss any issues of your favorite language magazine.**

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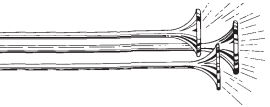
## EX CATHEDRA

When I was a girl in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the *Journal-Sentinel* used to carry the syndicated columns of Sidney J. Harris. Every once in a while (not too often so as not to try his editors' patience) he would run a column he called "Things I Learned While Looking Up Other Things."

This, then, could be called "Things I Found While Looking For What Was Supposed to Be In This Space," or even, "Things I Meant to Put In Previous Issues But Forgot To."

For instance, for some time I have been meaning to bring to your attention the *Pun American Newsletter*, which is published in Deerfield, Illinois. Our international readers need not be scared off by the "American" in the title (although they may, quite rightly, be scared of puns, especially ones like "The midget said it is better to have loved a short girl than to never have loved a tall"), as the puns themselves seem to know no borders (or shame). If you like puns, you'll like *Pun American*, if you don't like puns, shudder and move on. To subscribe (US\$11.95 for six four-page issues) or to request a sample, write to *Pun American*, 1165 Elmwood Place, Deerfield, IL 60015.

Another publication you should be aware of is the recent *100 Words Every High School Graduate Should Know* (Houghton Mifflin, softcover 2003, 0-618-37412-4, \$4.95). Edited by the lexicographers of American Heritage, this is an expansion of a very popular press release (and very attractive poster) put out to promote the publication of the *American Heritage College Dictionary* in 2002. Despite its inauspicious, marketing-brainstormed birth, it is a very attractively-designed book that makes (as the marketers no doubt knew it would) a nice present—and it's even slim enough to fit in a large format envelope. You may argue over the inclusion or omission of certain words (*yeoman* to me seems fairly inessential, at least for high-schoolers who aren't humming Gilbert and Sullivan, but we all know the *y* section of the alphabet has mighty slim pickings) but the book as a whole is interesting and any project that encourages students to learn more words (instead of pointlessly haranguing them about the words they do use) is certainly worthwhile.



If you are interested in the internal workings of VERBATIM, you have probably noticed the new names on the masthead. We have been fortunate enough to add to our board Joan Houston Hall, of the landmark *Dictionary of American Regional English* (and, if as a VERBATIM reader, you do not have the four volumes now published, or at least visit them regularly in your library, you are really missing out) as well as Michael Adams, a professor of English at Albright College in Pennsylvania, and himself the editor of *Dictionaries*, the Journal of the Dictionary Society of North America (and familiar to VERBATIM readers from his articles in XXIV 1 & 2 about Slayer Slang). We are also lucky in that Arnold Zwicky, noted linguist (and a past president of the Linguistics Society of America) and Simon Winchester have agreed to join our board as well, and will be added to the masthead as soon as the official letters have gone out.

In other "internal workings" news, we have now heard the final word from the Internal Revenue Service, and we (or rather, Word, Inc., the corporate parent of VERBATIM) are an official nonprofit organization. As such, we are going to begin applying for grants to fund pet projects, especially those that encourage more writers to write for us and those that help new readers find us. If you know of grants you think we should be applying for, please let us know.

It was highly gratifying, and not a little flattering, to learn how many VERBATIM subscribers purchased *Weird and Wonderful Words* (Oxford, 2002, hardcover, 0-19-515905-5, \$16.95) last year, either for themselves or as a present for someone else. Oxford permitted me (in fact, even encouraged me) to skulk around further in the dusty and cobwebby corners of the *OED* and other dictionaries, and *More Weird and Wonderful Words* has just been published (Oxford, 2003, hardcover, 0-19-517057-1, \$16.95). The cartoonist for this volume is Danny Shanahan, of the *New Yorker*, and he approaches his task with, well, inhuman glee. (And he sketches a mean Abraham Lincoln.) In response to comments made on the first book, this new one has pronunciations! (And a reassurance to those of you have heard my frequent mispronunciations—these were written by noted orthoepists Constance Baboukis and Enid Pearson, late of Random House. )

If you have heard me mispronounce something, perhaps you were listening to your radio. Perhaps you were even listening to *The Next Big Thing*, a radio show hosted by Dean Olsher and distributed by Public Radio International. The (long-suffering) Mr. Olsher regularly invites callers to phone in with new words that they particularly admire, and I inform them of their choice's chances of making it into the dictionary. (The dictionary in question is *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, for which I serve as editor.) Mostly, the chances are 'slim,' and 'fat,' as the old joke goes, but hope (and neologism) springs eternal. The words are interesting and the callers are, too. If you would like to check out the show (and possibly call in with your new word), stations and times are listed at <http://www.nextbigthing.org>.

If you would like to hear me mispronounce something in person, I am available for speaking engagements. Or, of course, you could just pick up the phone and call our offices—especially if you would like to enquire about or extend your subscription, send a gift subscription, enter a change of address, or just suggest a topic that you would like to read about (or write about) in VERBATIM.

Speaking of subscriptions, and their renewal—unlike many other magazines, which mail you renewal notices every twenty minutes, it seems, VERBATIM can only afford to send you renewal notices twice—once just before your subscription expires, and once just after. (If we find ourselves in funds, we may do an additional “please come back” mailing once or twice a year to those whose subscriptions have expired.) Please renew promptly, if you're inclined to renew (and we hope you are!).

This issue is dated “Early Winter,” as the first issue of this volume, XXVIII/1, was dated “Winter,” and we figured that two issues, separated by an entire year, both dated “Winter,” would earn us the eternal enmity of those librarians kind enough to keep us in their institutions' collections. Early winter is traditionally a time for resolutions, and ours for 2004 is to have every issue come out On Time. On Time, for purposes of this resolution, means that you should be reading the Spring issue of Volume XXIX before April, the Summer issue before July, the Autumn issue before September, and the Winter issue before the end of calendar 2004.

## A Pun Expunged

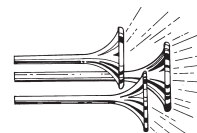
In recollecting Xanadu,  
The words that Coleridge changed were few;  
Among the few he found to fix  
Was “twice *five* miles” instead of *six*,

Which shows that he did not ignore  
The truth that sometimes less is more.

But, more than that, he also knew  
What harm a heedless pun may do  
To poets whom the pun defiles,  
For “six miles” might evoke *sick smiles!*

Though puns were greatly to his taste,  
That pun was one to be effaced.

—Henry George Fischer



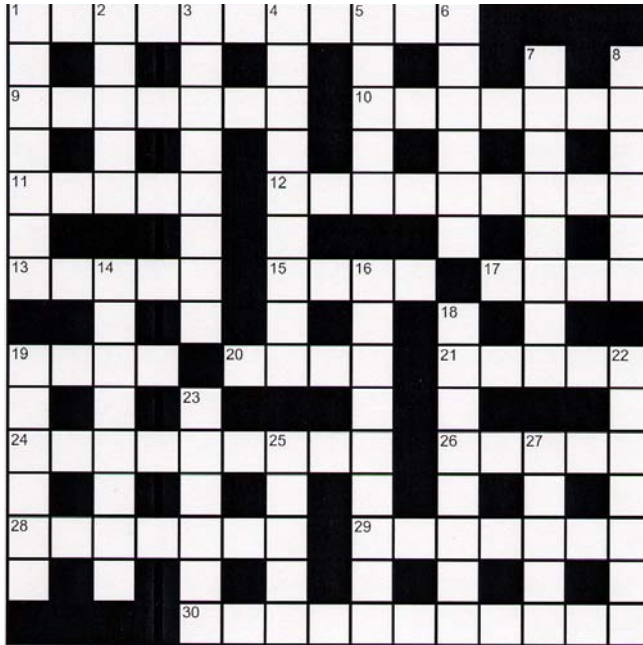
ACROSS  
1. PLAYER PIANO (anag., & lit.) 9.  
URANIUM (cranium, changing C to U) 10.  
GATEMAN (rev.) 11. S + HARD (& lit.) 12.  
EXEC + RATES 13. ABODE (anag., & lit.)  
15. (c)LOSE (& lit.) 17. PARTY POLITICS (&  
lit.) 19. VOTE (anag., & lit.) 20. (h)EDGE 21.  
(f)LATTE(r) 24. SKEPTICAL (anag.) 26.  
GIG(L)I (& lit.) 28. G(AL)ILEE 29.  
OLIV(I)ER 30. GE(M)OLOGISTS (& lit.)

DOWN  
1. P + RUSSIA (& lit.) 2. itAQ ABANDONS  
3. EVILDOER (anag.) 4. PU(MME)LED  
5. ANGLE (2 defs.) 6. (r)OTTERS 7. A +  
M(ETH)YST (the anag.) 8. UNESCO (anag.)  
14. ON THE SLY (anag., & lit.) 16. ST. +  
EEL + W + OOL (too W. Lee rev.) 18. F +  
LAGING (& lit.) 19. VI(SAG)E 22.  
E(M)IGRES (rev.) 23. STA(LA)G 25.  
CR(E)AM (& lit.) 27. GA(I)NS (rev.)

Solutions to Cryptic Crossword 95

## Anglo-American Crossword No. 95

Compiled by Robert Stigger



## MISCELLANEA

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### Across

- 1 I only appear to be manipulated (6,5)
- 9 Metal-head gets a fresh start? (7)
- 10 Monitor returned ID (7)
- 11 Fragment of something solid (5)
- 12 Corporate honcho deserves curses (9)
- 13 Adobe, perhaps (5)
- 15 Wind up behind the leader (4)
- 17 Feature of party pollitics (4)
- 19 Cast veto? (4)
- 20 Advantage of offsetting investment without a bit of hassle (4)
- 21 Unlimited praise for fancy coffee preparation (5)
- 24 Mistrustful of awful slick tape (9)
- 26 Movie character capturing J-Lo's heart (5)
- 28 Biblical site of rapture entered by Muhammad's son-in-law (7)
- 29 Shakespearean actor, one appearing in a hit musical (7)
- 30 Experts in rocks, including the ultimate of them (11)

### Down

- 1 Power bordering Tsarist state (7)
- 2 Iraq abandons controlling Gulf (5)
- 3 Veiled or disguised malefactor (8)
- 4 Beat attracted fetching madame (9)
- 5 Fish fork (5)
- 6 Aquatic mammals uncovered rats (6)
- 7 A hit computer game, "Guarding the Alien's Quartz" (8)
- 8 International agency U.S. once blasted (6)
- 14 Not exactly honestly (2,3,3)
- 16 Buffer state John W. Lee set up (5,4)
- 18 Beginning to fatigue and falling behind (8)
- 19 Appearance of decrease in challenge (6)
- 22 I am packing clothing material up for political refugees (7)
- 23 Prison camp for men only outside Los Angeles (6)
- 25 Stuff filled with an essential vitamin (5)
- 27 Amidst unexpected difficulty, I lifted profits (5)