



## Broadway Musicals—Terms and Traditions

Gloria Rosenthal

Valley Stream, New York

"Everyone on stage for the Gypsy Robe." Half an hour before the opening night curtain of every Broadway musical the stage manager's voice booms over the loudspeaker and cast members, producers, directors, and choreographers respond to his call and appear on stage for a "behind the scenes" ceremony. The audience won't be permitted in until the event is over, all traces of this glorious ritual are gone and the stage is ready for the show. If you don't know that chorus members are *Gypsies* and you have no idea what the *Gypsy Robe* is, you might think a roving band of itinerant fortune-tellers had invaded the theater, hawking robes. Not so! Since 1950, the Gypsy Robe has shown up at every opening night of Broadway musicals to honor the chorus member with the most Broadway credits. The previous recipient makes the presentation of the Robe, the new honoree puts it on, circles the stage three times, and everyone touches the Robe for luck.

The Robe starts out as a starkly plain, unadorned muslin gown but by the time it is retired and a new one started, it will be covered with artifacts, mementos, and signatures representing the shows it has passed through, three-dimensional items (miniature leather jackets for *Grease*) or sketches (the blueprint of *Titanic*). Three retired Robes are at the Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, with 11 Robes in the custody of the Advisory Committee on Chorus Affairs at Actors' Equity. Terry Marone is the guardian of the Robes, and she oversees every transfer from show to show, while I am there photographing the ceremony.

Not all musicals receive the coveted Gypsy Robe, only those with cast members on *pink con-*

*tracts*. This is a literal description of chorus contracts and the phrase "No pink contracts in that show" means "No Gypsy Robe for them." Contracts for principals (featured and leading roles) are white.

If you hear a theatrical agent (also known as a *talent representative*) say he or she is expecting a *breakdown*, please don't call a psychiatrist. The breakdown is what agents receive from casting directors; it's a list of upcoming roles. Agents read these very specific requirements and then submit appropriate actors/singers/dancers to fill those roles. Following is a sampling of breakdowns for various roles, and is precisely what the agent reads:

*Prefer red-head, strawberry blonde or fair-haired child; must be able to carry a tune on pitch and with confidence; working knowledge of piano helpful; trained ballet and tap dancer a major plus; genuinely charming, top notch actor; legit soprano to an E; 40s police detective, 50s struggling salesman; a Midwestern credibility to all actors.*

With breakdown in hand, agents sort through their stable of clients to match talent to role. Good agents carefully select only the most qualified for each part, knowing if they send "just anyone," that casting director eventually loses faith and will not see that agent's clients in the future. Agent Dorothy Scott had about fifty 8 x 10 *glossies* (or headshots) on a wall opposite her desk. She studied the breakdown, surveyed her wall for likely candidates, pulled their resumes from her files to make sure their skills matched casting directors' needs, and submitted photos and resumes, hoping for audition times.

The performers with an exact audition time and place, say 10:40 a.m. at the Ford Theater for



## Contents

### Vol. XXV, No. 2 Spring 2000

#### Articles

<i>Broadway Musicals—Terms and Traditions</i>	Gloria Rosenthal	p. 1
<i>The Language of Porn Sites</i>	Fraser Sutherland	p. 5
<i>Evolution: Just a Theory?</i>	Steven Cushing	p. 9
<i>Antedatings From a Correspondent of Browne Willis</i>	John Considine	p. 17
<i>Fillers</i>	William H. Dougherty	p. 18
<i>Classical Swearing: A Vade-Mecum</i>	Barry Baldwin	p. 20
<i>Word Tax</i>	Luisa Orza	p. 25
<i>An Amendment to the OED's Definition of "Catchpenny"</i>	Brian J. Hanley	p. 27
<i>Bottom, Thou Art Translated</i>	Adrian Room	p. 28
<i>Have You Read Marx?</i>	Sid Brittin	p. 30

#### Columns

<i>Classical Blather: It's About Time</i>	Nick Humez	p. 13
<i>Horribile Dictu</i>	Mat Coward	p. 19

#### Poetry

<i>A Name Defamed</i>	Henry George Fischer	p. 26
-----------------------	----------------------	-------

#### Bibliographia

<i>Japan Style Sheet</i>	Christopher Girsch	p. 31
--------------------------	--------------------	-------

*Contributions:* VERBATIM will publish articles, anecdotes, squibs, letters, and other materials at the discretion of the Editor. If at all possible, please send your submission as an email attachment. Unless accepted for publication, unsolicited submissions will be neither returned nor acknowledged unless return postage is provided by the sender. Queries by email are STRONGLY recommended. Send queries or articles to the Chicago address below.

Benefactor: Dr. Warren Gilson

Editor: Erin McKean

Editorial Consultant: Paul Heacock

Copy Editor: Lorraine Alexson

Founding Editor: Laurence Urdang

UK Representative: Hazel Hall

Crosswords Editor: Pamela Wylder

©VERBATIM®, The Language Quarterly, ©2000, Vol. XXV, No. 2 Spring 2000. (ISSN 0162-0932).

VERBATIM is a trademark reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

VERBATIM is mailed quarterly from 1002 S. 12th Street, Louisville, Kentucky, 40210 USA, and at P.O. Box 156, Chearsley, Aylesbury, Bucks HP18 0DQ, England.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to VERBATIM, 1209 Dundee Avenue, Suite 8, Elgin, IL 60120-2256 (800-554-7470). Business and editorial offices are located at 4907 N. Washtenaw Ave., Chicago, IL 60625. email: [editor@verbatimag.com](mailto:editor@verbatimag.com) web page: <http://www.verbatimag.com>

For subscriptions in U.K., Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East (UK £18), please write to VERBATIM, P.O. Box 156, Chearsley, Aylesbury, Bucks HP18 0DQ, or email [verbatim.uk@tesco.net](mailto:verbatim.uk@tesco.net).

For subscriptions in North America (US\$25) or anywhere else not covered above (US\$30), please write VERBATIM, 1209 Dundee Avenue, Suite 8, Elgin, IL 60120-2256 (800-554-7470), or email: [editor@verbatimag.com](mailto:editor@verbatimag.com).



the Performing Arts, have an advantage over chorus members who show up at *cattlecalls* (also called *chorus calls*). Cattlecalls are open auditions with no particular times, just specified hours, such as 9 a.m. to noon, when those conducting auditions will see people. These open calls draw hundreds of hopefuls, who line up on a first-come, first-seen basis. They are waiting to be seen this day, hoping to be seen on stage another day. Open calls are not only for chorus members, but principals, too.

A favorite phrase of post-audition performers is the *call back*. No tricks there; it simply means the creative team liked what they saw in the first audition and they literally call the performer to come back, to return for another audition, whether to sing, dance, or read for a part.

Dance auditions are centered around the *combination*, a series of dance steps created by choreographers to test the talents of the dancers before them. The famous 5, 6, 7, 8 is how the combination begins, with dancers waiting for the next beat to start the combination. They've never had to put these steps together until it was demonstrated to them a short while before. This quickly rules out the weaker members and makes the stronger dancers stand out. Choreographer Rick Atwell says after that first view of a stage full of dancers, he puts the best ones together in groups of about ten as he feels this competition brings out the best in each dancer. While Rick makes notes, the rest of the dancers are usually practicing on the sidelines as they wait to be called in the next group.

If *call back* is a favorite phrase, *next* can be the most dreaded. We all know what *next* means in "civilian language." According to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* it refers to something that will follow, as in its example: *our next job will be clearing the land*. But to the practiced ear (and heart) of the auditioning dancer, the word is a strong indication that the choreographer is not interested and the dancer is likely to be thinking, "I better keep my day job." A perfect example of the use of this intimidating word hap-

pened to me, a non-actor/singer/dancer but with a Smithfield full of ham in my soul. I was visiting George Lee Andrews (currently in *Phantom of the Opera*) in his dressing room. When ready to leave the theater, we had to cross the stage to reach the stage door, exiting to the street. I suddenly stopped center stage, faced the ocean of empty seats, and with arms outstretched toward my phantom audience, sang out: "I want to be on Broadway. I want to be a star." And George, without missing a beat, said jokingly, "NEXT!" and I knew just what he meant. In one little word he told me I'd never be on Broadway, I'd never be a star.

All right, I'm not on stage, but I know what happens there. Take *extraordinary risk pay*, for instance. When an actor is taking an extraordinary risk—perhaps it's a sword fight in *Cyrano*, *the Musical* or climbing a rope in *Footloose*—extraordinary risk pay, sometimes called *hazard pay*, is added to the contract. Performers do get hurt, not often, but if you're on roller skates (*Starlight Express*) or wheeling across the stage on a bicycle (*Meet Me in St. Louis*), it's nice to know that while you're taking an extraordinary risk you are getting a little something extra for doing so.

While we're still on stage, let's consider the chiropractor's best friend, a *raked* stage. A raked stage is not something smoothed over by a gardener; it's a stage purposely built to slope downward from back to front. The audience can't see the slope, but dancers' backs and hips know it's there. Some choreographers favor a raked stage as it lends a special dimension to the dance, and a heavily raked stage was one of Bob Fosse's favorite devices (along with hats and gloves).

Some words or phrases are almost self-explanatory. A *dresser* dresses a performer for that first step on stage, and for myriad costume changes, sometimes in the wings, often in the dark. Dresser Julie Alderfer solves the "dark" part of this job by holding a small flashlight in her mouth, freeing both hands for buttons, zippers, and hooks. *Stage right* and *stage left* are as easy to



understand as is *triple threat*, if you've been paying attention to the references to singer/dancer/actor. And *take it from the top* has been used in so many Hollywood musicals that by now everyone knows it means to start over from the beginning of the song.

I saw definitive examples of "taking it from the top" when I was a guest at a Master Class conducted by musical director Jack Lee. A *master class* is a class in which somebody of significance who is currently working in the theater, such as a musical director or choreographer, has been asked to come to a location in which young people will appear in order to be judged and helped in song, dance, or acting. This is never a one-on-one event as guests must be present for this class. Jack listened to a dozen performers in about three hours, and I heard him say, over and over, "Take it from the top," often to the same singer four, five, or more times, with the singer's rendition getting better each time, following Jack's suggestions. A revelation!

Notes about notes: there are love notes, mash notes, Post-it® notes, and piano notes, but Broadway notes are like nothing else. The director, stage manager, and dance captain write notes to specific performers to tell one he's being too emotional, or another she's not kicking high enough. These notes are taken throughout rehearsals, into previews, and continue during the run of the show.

Just for fun, I offer a glossary of terms telling you what each one is, and what it is not.

*Flies*: the large area directly above the stage where scenery and lights are hanging, not pesky nuisances on a summer's day.

*Clean-up rehearsal*: tidying up the details of a performance, not actors being forced to shave

*Pit singer*: a singer, not needed on stage, who performs from the orchestra pit, not a really bad vocalist.

*Blocking*: when a director sets the position of performers on stage even before they learn their lines, not linemen protecting the quarterback from being sacked.

*Gypsy run-through*: a special performance at an off-time, when working actors get to see a show they'd never see otherwise, not that aforementioned band of fortune-tellers running amok

*Frozen*: the state in which a show can no longer be changed, not your TV dinner.

*Upstage*: the direction an actor takes when he moves away from the audience *and* when one actor pulls the focus from another actor by doing some sort of "business" not in the script.

*Mark*: this is the term used when performers walk through a rehearsal rather than doing a full-out performance, not the F you received on your college paper.

*Full-out*: when the performers are doing a full performance in rehearsal and are not "marking" the show and not overeating at a Sunday brunch (though actors can do that, too).

*Half-hour*: the designated time before the curtain goes up when performers must be in the theater not the extra time it takes your partner to finish dressing while you are ready to walk out the door.

*Walkers*: no, they are not rude audience members leaving at intermission, but they are orchestra members who are being paid (the union insists) even though they are not needed for a show requiring a smaller orchestra.

And finally, an explanation of why *gypsies* are called *gypsies*: years ago singers and dancers of the chorus went from show to show, as there were many more musicals on Broadway and they didn't have to stay with any one production. It is not so prevalent today as most gypsies stay with their show. I know many who've been with long-running shows (five years, ten years) from opening night and will be there until a closing notice is posted.

Yes, there is a *closing notice*. Not always expected by the cast, it is posted backstage one week before the actual closing.

And herewith, my closing notice.

[Gloria Rosenthal is the historian and advisor to Actors' Equity on the *Gypsy Robe*, an award-winning fiction writer, and a contributing editor at Games magazine.]



## The Language of Porn Sites

Fraser Sutherland  
Toronto, Ontario

Although most people seek out pornographic sites on the World Wide Web for the pictures, a few will find there the edge—the blunt edge perhaps—of language change.

Several routes get you there. A tapping of a key word or term sends a search engine like AltaVista, Infoseek, or the coincidentally named Excite on its web-scouring routines. This method at once points out porn sites' ubiquity. A search for "porn" on AltaVista, for example, turned up a total of 9,228,960 web pages. Even allowing for duplications and the presence of anti-pornography sites, this is an impressive tally, though it can present problems for those not seeking porn. A student who types "rubber" while diligently researching a school project may well find listings only distantly associable with rubber bands and rubber boots. Contrariwise, the porn-seeker who keys in "hardcore" without "erotica" beside it is likely to summon sites dealing with rock music, bodybuilding, and, for some reason, herpetology.

A focussed web search produces subsidiary link-embedded lists of sites that pretend to grandiose inclusiveness, like the coyly named Persian Kitty, or to exclusiveness of the "100 Best" type. The sites in turn give links to further lists or other sites, or to online newsgroups and bulletin boards, thus creating an impression of a system ramifyingly vast yet closed, claustrophobic, and solipsistic.

Entry to a site is usually halted temporarily by a more or less pompous legal warning against proceeding further if your state or country disapproves. Sometimes the site adds a pious, some would say hypocritical, injunction against child pornography. Viewers are now and then invited to subscribe to a service like CYBERsitter, Safesurf, or NetNanny, said to screen little ones from glimpses of the cybernetic Sodom and Gomorrah—and easily opted out of by the little

ones themselves. Sites may be freely accessed free of charge, or require a paid subscription and password.

The sites show and sell everything from dating services and magazine subscriptions to underwear and bedroom paraphernalia. But mostly they show or sell pictures, and these pictures are necessarily accompanied by words.

*X marks the spot.* The abbreviations *BDSM* (bondage and dominance, sado-masochism) *BBW* (big beautiful women), and *XXX* are common to both web pages and print, TV (in the sense of transvestite) less so. *XXX*, meaning "sexually explicit" and synonymous with *hardcore*, is in fact so common on and off the web that it's puzzling why lexicographers have left it out of their word-poor XYZ sections.

On the web, *X* can function as a euphemism as well as an abbreviation, rather as the asterisk did before the fully spelled-out "f\*ck" invaded print. Excite's search engine adds trailers or teasers to some links. In one case it asserts: "Absolutely free XXX!!—Candi gathered her silky xxx hair into a short brade [sic] and slipped the rubber xxx band about it. He made her watch what Sonja's xxx was getting, whispering teasingly in her ear. "No!" cried Janet, her hard pale features colouring up, "No!""

Sometimes an apparent abbreviation is merely a blatant attempt to get a site positioned first on a list. "AAA Dildo Warehouse" is presumably unconnected with the Amateur Athletic Association, or, for that matter, the American Automobile Association.

*Spellings.* "Camera" is always shortened to *cam*, as in *webcam* or *hidden cam*, the latter a staple of sites specializing in voyeurism ("These girls have cameras set up in their homes to show all us voyeurs what we are missing"). "Come" is invariably *cum*, often in compounds like *cumshot*, and even in the non-ejaculatory sense, as in "Cum on in!" "Pictures" are usually *pix*, less often *pics*.

Trendy spellings loom large, as in phonetically substitutable numbers and words ("Sex 4 All Gay", "10 Hot Men4u", "Cyntil8ing Erotic



Stories”, “M4M-4-Sex”) or the replacement of “s” with “z” (“Wild Boyz”, “Naughty Girlz”).

*Common words, uncommon senses.* A *gallery*, usually pluralized as *gallerys*, is a labelled set of pictures. Galleries may be labeled functionally (oral, anal, the usual), choreographically (couples, threesomes, orgies), by age (*teens*, often glossed as “barely legal”, or, at the other end of the spectrum, *mature*), anatomically (legs, pubis, breasts, buttocks), fetishistically (nylons, latex, panties, stockings), or by country or skin color (Swedish, German, Dutch, *Latino*, *Asian*—used interchangeably with *Oriental*—and *Ebony*, often used in preference to *Black*). A gallery topic may also apply to an entire site.

Each gallery will have several *thumbnails* or *thumbs*, which are miniature photographs that, upon being clicked, fill the screen with a detailed image. These words patently derive from *thumbnail* in the sense of something small or brief, as in *thumbnail sketch*.

*The Art of Titles.* Links have descriptive titles that differ to a greater or lesser degree from the corresponding sites’ URLs, the actual addresses where they are to be found. Many URLs are enigmatic, and even ostensibly descriptive titles may be ambiguous: “Beer Goggle Site” turns out to depict women wholly or partly undressed and seated on bar stools.

Listings for porn sites are heavy on puns (“Bootality”), alliteration (“Red’s Realm of Romantic Restraint”, “Lesbian Licking Leather Dykes”), and wordplay, as in “Adventures of Marky De Sade” in which “John MARKy and his ‘girlfriend’ Juliet and his best-friend Rasputin, and an assorted group of freaks play with themselves and frolic.”

Titles are sometimes ambiguous, or literal-minded: “Smoking Girls” reveals women, dressed or undressed, smoking cigarettes—a linking of one taboo with another, one supposes. Occasionally homonyms are employed to play sly tricks on the user, as in “Sandi’s Match Swingers”, describing itself as “Canada’s largest swingers website”. One of Sandi’s links is to “matches” all

right, but to *safety matches*—all you ever wanted to know about them. Much more explicit is “Bouncing Titties”, which alarmingly promises that “Giant, out of control jugs [will] bounce in your face”.

*Semantic reversals.* Following the lead of Black English, bad almost always means “good.” (The *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang* defines “bad” as “formidably skilled” or “wonderful; deeply satisfying”, both senses labeled “Black English”.)<sup>1</sup> Similarly, *sleazy*, *nasty*, *filthy*, and *slut* are all terms of high praise. This kind of semantic reversal also figures in sites favoring older or heavier women.

*Amateurs and others.* One huge list within Persian Kitty is devoted to *Amateurs*. The titles often incorporate personal names (“Alicia’s Home Spun Amateur Page,” “Cyberboobs: Paula’s Amateur Fun Page—40 pix of a blonde Miami babe, thumbnails”) and appear to suggest that a fathomless talent pool of wives, neighbors, and girlfriends is being tapped. Sometimes *Amateur Wives* are noted, as in “Miss B Haven’s Amateur Wives Club,” raising the question of whether there can be professional wives.

In any case, the primary definition of *amateur*, according to the *New Oxford Dictionary of English*,<sup>2</sup> is, as a noun, “a person who engages in a pursuit, especially a sport, on an unpaid basis” or, adjectivally, “engaging or engaged in without payment; non-professional”. When one considers sites with names like “Elan Exposed: A Stripper’s Private Backstage Retreat”, and in which videos and many other products and services are purveyed, it’s obvious that the traditional definition is wobbly, though a secondary meaning (“a person considered contemptibly inept at a particular activity: *that bunch of stumbling amateurs*”) may be nearer the mark. Plainly a new sense is needed, something like: “a person who operates a small business.”

*Neologisms and nonces.* Today’s neologism or nonce may be tomorrow’s commonplace. Many gallery titles are more or less self-explanatory, such as *babes*, single nudes, *outdoors*, pertaining



to sexual activity conducted on beaches, boats, or, more uncomfortably, rock-piles, and *bizarre* or *weird*, often featuring the vaginal insertion of fruits, vegetables, and glass vessels. One *bizarre* candidate is the newsgroup “alt.sex.plushies”. *Plushie*, a word that has yet to make it into general dictionaries, denotes one of “those big cuddly stuffed animals we’ve had all our lives. . . a lot more interesting and fun than blow-up sex dolls”. We’re advised to try the “Plushie Web Ring, which links together many plushie web sites of all persuasions.”

The neologism *upskirts*, found in voyeurs’ sites like “Upskirts, Pantyhose & Dirty Panties,” looks promotable. *Anime*, a word that dates from the 1980s, is sometimes found on porn sites (“Bondage Fairies” boasts “35 anime pix”) and is common elsewhere. The word’s making its way into general dictionaries: the *New Oxford* defines it as “Japanese film and television animation, typically having a science-fiction theme and sometimes including violent or explicitly sexual material.” Hence those bondage fairies.

*Maturity*. Together with *amateur*, and sometimes combined with it, *mature* constitutes a huge sub-genre, second only to *teens* in the age category. Galleries and sites are devoted to Over 30, Over 40, Over 50, and Grannies (“Granny Goes XXX”, “Granny Sexfest”). Implicitly, the older the better.

*Unlimited expansion*. Amid sites rife with vulgarisms, sometimes a pedantic note is struck, as in the oxymoronic “Wren-Spot: Expansion Fetish Archive”. *Expansion* is the rubric that encompasses very large women, women who are pregnant or lactating (elsewhere, specialized lists give links to “Milk Maids” and “Pregnant Pretties”), and “body inflation fantasy”, stories of people who inflate themselves with air like balloons—needless to say, imaginary. In many BBW galleries (sites such as “Astrid’s Heavy Honeys”, “Absolute Fat and Old Women”, “Ugly Fat Girls—21 pix, thumbnails”), women deemed to be oversized or outsized in a good way are called *plumpers*.

*Hair, not the musical*. Sometimes hair is the cynosure, as in “Hairy Women & Hairy Armpits.” But the most important category is hair color, customarily separated into *blonde*, *brunette*, and *redhead*. Redheads seem to have special cachet, one site subdivided into “nude redheads”, “teen redheads”, “amateur redheads”, “redhead hardcore”, “lesbian redheads”, and, somewhat redundantly, “hardcore redheads”. One list calls redheads *fire muffins*, leading one to suspect that the copywriter missed his vocation in not becoming a namer of new automobile brands for General Motors.

In the matter of hair color, one German site, “BZ auf Draht Girl-Galerie”, introduces terminological refinements for its 1,000 photos: “*Hell blond*” (light blonde, presumably bleached), “*Blond*” (fair-haired), “*Rot*” (redhead), “*Brunet*” (Brunette), “*Dunkelbraun*” (dark brown), and “*Schwarz*” (black).

This site offers a sidelight into the incursion of English into European languages. Producing a curious macaronic effect, the site’s internal links offer “*Nachrichten*” (news), “*Abstimmung*” (vote for favorite pictures), and “*Gästebuch*” (visitors’ book) but also “*Bingo*”, “*Countdown*”, and “*Team*”, along with the hybrid “*Tips und Tricks*”.

*Transactions*. Dictionaries haven’t done well by *transsexual*. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate* is the best,<sup>3</sup> though most repetitious, of a vague lot:





“a person with a psychological urge to belong to the opposite sex that may be carried to the point of undergoing surgery to modify the sex organs to mimic the opposite sex”. Such persons, usually men, also may resort to hormone boosts and silicon implants. A *transvestite*, dictionaries universally tell us, gets emotional or physical satisfaction by dressing in the opposite sex’s clothing. But sites like “Balti’s Transsexuals Club” or “Free Transvestite Teasers” use the terms interchangeably, though the preferred word is *shemales*, alternatively *chicks with dicks*, and less often, *trannies*. For these, surgery is not an option since it would remove the desideratum of a large penis accompanying large breasts.

*Bedtime stories*. Even in so visual a genre, text occasionally dominates in the form of erotic stories. These tend to be on the Grade 7 composition level. “Our First Experience,” within a site devoted to the claimed sexual prowess of African Americans, ends: “Well, after it’s all said and done, we had a great time and plan to do it again soon.”

The same may be said of the coining of so many words on these sites.

#### NOTES:

1 *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, Volume I, A–G. Ed. J.E. Lighter. New York: Random House, 1994.

2 *New Oxford Dictionary of English*. Ed. Judy Pearsall. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

3 *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition. Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1993.

[*Fraser Sutherland is a poet and lexicographer living in Toronto. As a poet, he’s published seven collections. As a lexicographer, he’s been involved in dictionary and thesaurus projects from Fitzhenry & Whiteside, ITP Nelson, Gage, Collins, Random House, and Bloomsbury. He hopes to write his own dictionary some day.*]



## EPISTOLAE

Jessy Randall (Vol. XXV/1) might like to know what the French think of the English. Covent-school girls in France refer to “that time of the month” as “The English have arrived.”

Until this was explained to me by my (French) wife, I could not understand why, when we visited her 90-year-old mother in a nursing home in Franch, she would say “Les Anglais sont arrivés” to the amusement of her geriatric friends who cackled merrily at the double-entendre!

Raymond Harris  
London



Susan Elkins, in her article “A Bestiary of Adjectives” (Vol. XXIV/3), has set me adrift in the Great Mid-Atlantic Language Gap.

I may be confused, but I believe that the BBC series *Doctor Who* was created on her side of the water, not mine. In her note from Sittingbourne, Kent, she clearly violates the whole thrust of how one character was presented in that series. Susan Elkins does so by the simple use of a single word. At the end of her article, she asks “Remember the dog in BBC TV’s *Doctor Who* series, which was called K9?”

I’m great fan of all the Doctors Who. Nonetheless, I don’t remember any dog (or near-dog, simulacrum of a dog, dog doll, or even a stray tooth) “which” was called K9.

The K9 presented in the *Doctor Who* series was a robot, definitely in the shape of a dog, but K9 was no literal son-of-a-bitch. He was endowed with believable personality—by which I mean “personhood.” K9 doesn’t deserve the relegation to brutishness, or perhaps to the realm of misspelled superstition, implied by calling him a “which.”

Like the Good Doctor, K9 clearly deserves to be called a Who, not a which.

Mike Salovesch  
Northern Illinois University





## Evolution: Just a Theory?

Steven Cushing

Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts  
 stevencushing@alum.mit.edu

On November 13, 1998, the Executive Board of the Idaho School Board Association rejected a resolution on evolution that had been submitted by the New Plymouth School Board. The resolution stipulated that “mankind appearing on the earth, in his [sic] present form, shall not be taught in K–12 public schools to be a result of evolution, where evolution is accepted as fact,” because “leading scientists who promote evolution recognize it as a theory.” To what extent did the resolution have merit and to what extent was it wrong? Does the word *theory* always contrast with *fact* or can you also use it in other ways?

On December 1, 1998, the *New York Times* contained an article by Gina Kolata on the interaction between the genes a fetus obtains from its father and those it obtains from its mother. The on-line version carried this headline: “Mouse Study Fails to Verify Evolutionary Theory.” The print version carried this one: “Mouse Study Fails to Verify an Evolutionary Theory.”

How much difference does the *an* make for the meanings of these two headlines? Does *theory* express one meaning or two here, and does either use contrast with *fact*?

The *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* gives six meanings for the word *theory* (p. 1893), only two of which, (3) and (4), can be construed as contrasting with what the New Plymouth School Board seems to mean by *fact*.

3. originally, a mental viewing; contemplation

4. popularly, a mere hypothesis, conjecture, or guess; as, *my theory is that he never got the letter*

The modifier *popularly* suggests that (4) is unlikely to be the meaning expressed by *theory* in careful scientific writing. It’s definitely not the meaning of those “leading scientists who recognize [evolution] as a theory” cited in the New Plymouth School Board resolution.

However, Kolata was writing for the popular press, and a careful reading suggests that (4) is the meaning of *theory* she intended. This is illustrated by the following sentence from her article: “So biologists were delighted when they thought they had a rare chance to conduct an experimental test of a popular and appealing theory involving a kind of molecular arms race between the sexes.”

The confusion would have been avoided if she had used the word *hypothesis* instead.

*Webster’s* second meaning for *theory* contrasts not with *fact*, but with *practice*: “an idea or mental plan of the way to do something.”

That meaning is illustrated in the following example from a book about a historical forerunner of the contemporary creationist movement: “In theory the chief aim of the Inquisition was the salvation of Christian souls by discovering heresy, promoting recantation, and imposing penance. . . . In practice the Inquisition pursued not only religious goals but also political, social, and economic ends in the name of religion.”

This use of *theory* has no relevance to evolution, unless, perhaps, you adopt a theistic interpretation: “In theory God created man in his own image. In practice He evolved him from primates.”

However, the standard understanding among “leading scientists who promote evolution [and] recognize it as a theory” is neutral as to whether or not anyone is directing it.

What about *Webster’s* other three meanings? How do they relate to *fact*? I can best answer those questions by relating some personal history.

When I was in high school I auditioned to take violin lessons at the New England Conservatory. Upon acceptance, I was informed that, along with violin lessons from a member of the Boston Symphony, I would also be taking classes in something called music theory. It never crossed my mind to ask whether music is a theory or a fact. Since I was also interested in mathematics, I read a lot about that subject beyond what I was taught in school. Eventually, I came across books on something called number theory.



It never crossed my mind to ask whether a number is a theory or a fact. At about the same time, I stumbled across the work of Noam Chomsky, who wrote about what he called linguistic theory. It never crossed my mind to ask whether language is a theory or a fact.

Music theory summarizes the knowledge that we have of the unifying principles that underlie all of music. Number theory incorporates all that we know about the essential properties of numbers. Linguistic theory is intended to encompass those basic grammatical features that all languages might have in common to explain why languages are so easy for children to learn. In other words, a phrase of the form *something theory* means “the growing body of knowledge that we have of how that ‘something’ works.”

As you might expect, that’s exactly what “leading scientists who promote evolution [and] recognize it as a theory” mean by the word *theory* when they refer to evolutionary theory. Depending on the context and on the nuance that a particular speaker or writer intends, any of Webster’s other three meanings of *theory* easily fits the bill:

a systematic statement of principles involved; as, the theory of equations in mathematics

a formulation of apparent relationships or underlying principles of certain observed phenomena which has been verified to some degree; distinguished from hypothesis

that branch of an art or science consisting in a knowledge of its principles and methods rather than in its practice; pure, as opposed to applied, science, etc.

All these meanings work for *theory* when it’s preceded by the word *evolutionary*, and not one of them contrasts with *fact*. In fact, if you study them carefully, it’s easy to see that they almost coincide with what you’d normally mean by *fact*. The phrase *evolutionary theory* means “the growing body of knowledge that we have about evolution,” in any of these three senses of *theory*. The School Board Association was right: the New

Plymouth School Board resolution completely misses the point.

Several months after I first encountered his work, Chomsky published a book entitled *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. In the very first sentence on page 3, he states that his topic will be—yup, you guessed it—syntactic theory! The phrases *theory of syntax* and *syntactic theory* are synonyms; neither of these phrases contrasts with the word *fact*.

Despite confusions such as those in the New Plymouth School Board resolution, the phrase *theory of evolution* has no meaning at all except as a synonym for *evolutionary theory*, just as Webster’s example, *the theory of equations*, is a synonym for *equation theory*. As an exercise, just try to make any sense of the phrases *the theory of music*, *the theory of numbers*, and *the theory of language*, other than *music theory*, *number theory*, and *linguistic theory*, respectively.

What about the phrase *a theory of evolution* and its plural, *theories of evolution*? How do those two phrases fit into the picture?

Contrary to what you might expect from what I have just explained about the theory of evolution and evolutionary theory, the phrases *a theory of evolution* and *an evolutionary theory* are not synonymous. In both phrases the word *theory* expresses meaning (4), but the phrases differ in the relations they express between the word *theory* and the word *evolution*.

The phrase *an evolutionary theory* refers to a hypothesis that some occurrence is the result of evolutionary mechanisms. That’s the kind of theory that Kolata was writing about. However, the phrase *a theory of evolution* refers to a hypothesis as to what the evolutionary mechanisms are. That’s quite a different matter.

Three theories of evolution have been proposed and considered over the past two hundred years or so that would have been credible a century ago, but have not withstood comparison with the evidence that’s been discovered since then.

Lamarck’s theory of evolution states that individual organisms develop new features in



response to what they find in their environments and then pass on those acquired features to their offspring, who repeat the process. If you start off as a wimp, but train very hard in a health club and develop big biceps, your children will have big biceps, too. This is not the place to delve into the science of the matter, but suffice it to say that most biologists today have concluded from the evidence that this does not go on.

Kubrick's theory of evolution, which provided the thematic basis for the movie 2001, states that evolution occurs sporadically through the intercession of a mysterious monolith. Every once in a while, for no apparent reason, that monolith appears on Earth and triggers a massive advance in the capabilities of organisms that live there. Again, suffice it to say that biologists have discovered no evidence for any such monolith and that the evidence that has become available has convinced most of them that this, too, doesn't go on.

The creationist theory of evolution—no, that's not an oxymoron—states that microevolution does occur, but macroevolution doesn't. Substantial changes can occur within a species (micro), but new species cannot emerge from existing species (macro). Different characteristic skin pigmentations can develop as features that distinguish different groups of humans, but humans as a group cannot have emerged from other, non-human primates. Obviously, this theory stands or falls depending on whether evidence of the emergence of new species can be found. Suffice it to say that most biologists are convinced today that lots of it has been found, so, like the other two theories just examined, this one, too, bites the dust.

Three other theories of evolution are currently the subject of lively debate among biologists. These theories differ in what they take to be the primary mechanism of evolution and in what they say about the pace of evolutionary change. As one prominent evolutionist has put it, "the disagreements among scientists about evolution are about how evolution produced what we see in fossil and living organisms, not about if evolution occurred at all."

# LIGHT

## A Quarterly of Light Verse

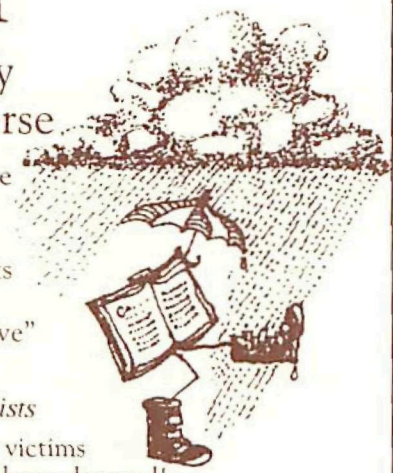
April showers make great reading, in the magazine that regularly prints work by "the best unserious poets alive" (X. J. Kennedy).

### Psychiatrists

How very many victims  
Those vampires have decoyed!  
They put the bite on patients  
And inject them with sang-Freud.

—HENRY GEORGE FISCHER

Subscribe to the journal Reader's Digest called "polished, clever, sophisticated." At Barnes & Noble. In Chicago: Barbara's, B. Dalton, Barnes & Noble. \$18/1 yr, \$30/2 yr, \$28 international. VISA/MC: 1-800-285-4448, or checks to LIGHT, Subscriptions, Box 7500, Chicago IL 60680. [www.litline.org/html/lightquarterly.html](http://www.litline.org/html/lightquarterly.html)



Darwin's theory of evolution states that evolution occurs primarily through natural selection and that evolutionary change occurs gradually over long periods through the accumulation of many small changes. Gould's theory of evolution agrees with Darwin's, that evolution occurs primarily through natural selection, but states that short periods of rapid change punctuate longer periods of stability. These two theories of evolution agree on the mechanism they consider to be primary: changes spread throughout a species, sometimes resulting in a new species, because individuals who have a particular feature produce more offspring than those who lack it. That's what's meant by natural selection. However, they differ on the timing of that mechanism's operation.

Margolis's theory of evolution looks to a different mechanism as the primary agent of evolutionary change, stating that evolution occurs primarily through symbiosis, in which separate organisms merge to form a new, more complex organism. In other words, changes occur when



multiple organisms merge into one. For example, mitochondria may once have existed independently as one-celled organisms before becoming an internal energy source for the human cells they now reside in.

*Webster's* defines *biological evolution* as: "the theory, now generally accepted, that all species of plants and animals developed from earlier forms by hereditary transmission of slight variations in successive generations."

This acknowledges the reality of both micro- and macroevolution, but leaves open the question of where the "slight variations" come from.

Some authors, notably those who call themselves sociobiologists, routinely use the word *evolution* as a synonym for *natural selection*, thereby begging the question of what the mechanisms are. However, like *Webster's*, biologists more generally define *evolution* as meaning "descent with modification," leaving the question of how the modifications occur to be answered by examining the discovered evidence.

Both natural selection and symbiosis are known to be mechanisms through which evolutionary change takes place. Their relative importance and their timing are the issues that are still unresolved. Each of the last three theories described is a theory of evolution. Therefore, each is a candidate for becoming a part of evolutionary theory.

That takes care of *evolutionary theory*, *an evolutionary theory*, *the theory of evolution*, and *a theory of evolution*, as well as their respective plurals. *Evolutionary theory* and *the theory of evolution* don't have plurals, for obvious reasons, so *evolutionary theories* and *theories of evolution* are not ambiguous.

It also takes care of how those phrases relate to *fact*. Just for the record, it's worthwhile noting that *Webster's* gives these two meanings (among others) for *fact*: "a thing that has actually happened or is true; a thing that has been or is" and "something declared to have happened, or to have existed; the assertion of something as existing or done, as, *he depends upon his imagination*

*for his facts; there are many false facts in his report.*"

So even a *fact* might not be a *fact*, in the sense the New Plymouth School Board means it.

In case you haven't figured it out by now, "Mouse Study Fails to Verify an Evolutionary Theory" is the correct headline for Kolata's article. Most likely, the missing *an* in the other headline is either a typo or an oversight. Keep in mind, also, that different genres have different conventions. In headlines an *a* or *an* can be omitted to save space, with the intention that the reader will understand it from the context. For example, in the classic headline, "Man Bites Dog," there are two missing "understood" *a*'s.

That works because it doesn't create a problematic ambiguity. The ambiguity created by the missing *an* in "Mouse Study Fails to Verify Evolutionary Theory" is problematic because of the hugely controversial nature of its subject matter.

[*Steven Cushing's last piece for VERBATIM was All About All, in Spring 1999.*]



## EPISTOLA

In *VERBATIM* vol. XXIV/4, page 27, the author writes: "words that each have completely opposite meanings, like *cleave*, *ravel*, or *sanction*." I have known of several others of this group, none of which I can now remember. Is there a term for words in this group?

James Kottemann

JIMLUDDITE@webtv.net

[*I've heard two terms for this group: contronyms and Janus-words —Ed. (With thanks to Joe Pickett of American Heritage)*]





## CLASSICAL BLATHER

### *It's About Time*

Nick Humez  
 argentarius@juno.com

"Time," an anonymous wag recently observed, "is nature's way of keeping everything from happening at once."<sup>1</sup> It is a rich source of metaphor in many languages including our own, in which it has been variously likened to an inexorable river at flood stage or an angler's gentle brook, a treasure to hoard or fritter away, a thief, a reaper with his scythe or sickle, a bald-headed man with a long forelock.<sup>2</sup> One can have a hot time in the old town tonight, or, in contemplation of a soberer evening, enjoy a "holy time . . . quiet as a nun."<sup>3</sup> Like the weather, time is much talked

end), and of *face time*, as opposed to communications by telephone or e-mail. And when discussing something whose origin is shrouded in the mists of antiquity, we say it has been around since *time immemorial* (which has the specific meaning in British law of "before the accession of Richard I," i.e. predating 1189).<sup>7</sup>

The discourse of our modern world of business is fond of *time lines* and *time frames* (the latter often describing a window of opportunity). The dimensional imagery of the former is an implicit feature of generally accepted accounting procedures (GAAP), since a balance sheet is only meaningful if it is related to a particular accounting period (a month, a quarter, a fiscal year) during which the transactions took place. Nowadays the Western calendar (a word derived from *kalends*, the Roman term for the first day of the month) runs from January through December,

### **"O shepherd, how many cigarettes is it to the next village?"**

of, while very little can be done about it;<sup>4</sup> free as we are to move about in any direction of the other three dimensions, time would appear to be a one-way street where the traffic is continual and there's nary a place to pull over and park.

Our vernacular measures of time can be bodily (a moment expressed as "a twinkling [of an eye]"),<sup>5</sup> functional (the turn-of-the-century Swedish farmhand's *Ökt* or *orka*, "bout of work," a folk metric perhaps equal to about an hour and a half),<sup>6</sup> or some combination of the two (the length of time to smoke a cigarette, whence the band leader's "take five"; according to the late classicist Sterling Dow this folk metric was also in use, at least to midcentury, in rural Greece as a unit of length at a walking pace, as in "O shepherd, how many cigarettes is it to the next village?") We speak of *real time*, distinguishing it both from cybernetic byte-crunching and from perceived time (as in the famous quip about spending two weeks in Philadelphia last week-

but this is a comparatively recent development: as recently as the 18th century, the standard fiscal year in England began in March, with the first of the quarterly rents being due on Lady Day, i.e. March 25, the feast of the Annunciation.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, religious time and secular time have always been an imperfect fit.<sup>9</sup> There were until recently no clocks in Eastern Orthodox churches for the explicit reason that God's time and ordinary workaday time were held to be incommensurate, and the anthropologist Edmund Leach suggests that all societies, including our own, suspend the regular time-line with periods of sacred time set off by special behaviors such as the wearing of false faces and inversions of customary roles (the masks of Mardi Gras and the slaves being served by their masters during the Roman Saturnalia are both in this vein).<sup>10</sup>

For medieval Christian scholars speculating about the hereafter, according to French social scientist Jacques Le Goff, "The central question



was the relation between time on earth and time in the afterlife." It was generally agreed that the psychological perception of time by the deceased undergoing punishment for sin was apt to be greatly attenuated: "Souls being punished in Purgatory felt that they had been there for a long time, but when they appeared to the living they discovered that they [had] died only a short while ago." In an effort to arrive at some quantitative relation by which intercessory prayers and other acts by the living could be calculated to ameliorate the sufferings of the departed, Le Goff writes, "Some authorities went so far as to propose a simple arithmetic proportionality: one day in Purgatory is equivalent to one year on earth."<sup>11</sup>



Could such speculations arise only in an age of ignorance and pre-industrial naïveté? Consider our own anxieties last year as midnight of New Year's Eve loomed closer and closer. In the event, Y2K may have proved to be as damp a squib as was the return of Halley's comet in 1986,<sup>12</sup> but it nevertheless provided a great deal of work (legitimate and fraudulent) for many people, no doubt contributing to the remarkable economic boom of the late '90s. (One perennial business that got a temporary boost was the traffic in time capsules, of which a particularly promising example, complete with Knossos-style labyrinth, is under negotiation as a joint project by the Cooper Union design school in New York City and the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine.)<sup>13</sup>

While the ostensible Y2K problem was simple enough to state—"How will a computer's operating system interact with software whose calendar is designed only to handle double-digit dates?"—the underlying issue arose from how computers are set up to reckon time: not on a linear basis at all, but rather with clocks emitting discrete electronic ticks on the basis of which the machines execute what mathematicians call non-continuous functions. (An example of a continuous-function time display is a Mickey Mouse watch, with the Disney rodent's hands pointing at the hour and minute as they travel around the circular face in a uniform, uninterrupted motion; a noncontinuous-function time display is the sort provided by a digital clock.)

Until the advent of electricity, all clocks were actually noncontinuous-function devices whose output merely *looked* continuous: the hands were driven around the face by a series of gears whose ultimate input was a ratchet wheel escapement powered by weights (like the classic Swiss cuckoo clock) and gravity, or, later, a spring. The tricky part was getting them accurate enough to tell time to within a few minutes a day even if jostled about on the high seas; the crucial breakthrough came from the demand for an accurate way for ships at sea to determine longitude, since it is impossible to get a fix on the stars (called *sidereal reckoning*, from Latin *sidus/sideris*, "star") to determine your position at midnight if you have no way of telling when midnight actually is, and guesswork could be hideously costly in the event of failure: Sir Cloudesley Shovell, thinking himself well to the west of Cornwall, steered his fleet onto the rocks of the Isles of Scilly in 1707, with catastrophic loss of ships and seamen.

As a result, the British Board of Longitude established a prize of twenty thousand pounds to spur research and development, their goal being a clock which would lose no more than 40 seconds on the trip from England to Jamaica (the equivalent of half a degree of longitude in the Caribbean, at normal sailing speed). Seven years



after the Scilly Isles disaster, a carpenter's son named John Harrison met the challenge with his "model #4" clock, which lost less than six seconds during the nine-week voyage.<sup>14</sup>

It would be a trickier business, however, to make a clock which would keep accurate earthly time on a spaceship flight at anything close to the speed of light, owing to the laws of relativity. Indeed, even relatively small extraterrestrial excursions have revealed, on return to earth, the effects of measurable, if small, midflight slowings in astronauts' timepieces. Since the amount of fuel required for a conventional spacecraft to accelerate to a velocity even a tenth of the speed of light would deplete the world's known fossil-fuel reserves many times over, the question of how to overcome the mutual embarrassment of returning from space and finding that one looks younger than one's grandson's wife does not appear to be anything but academic.

More serious in the long run is that fact that time is meaningful only insofar as there exist different energy states in the universe and some way to exploit that difference, in accordance with the Second Law of Thermodynamics. While Phil Dove of the University of Tasmania raises some interesting questions about "backwards-in-time causation" in his forthcoming book on cause and effect,<sup>15</sup> physicists are in general agreement that in the distant future, when everything has sifted out to a uniformly distributed 3-degrees-Kelvin hum, the entropy of the universe will attain its maximum, and everything, including time as we know it, will come to a full stop.<sup>16</sup>

Notes:

1 Though its origin is unknown to me—it's one of those bits of wisecreage that's just out there—my immediate source is my silversmith colleague Douglas French, of Burlington, Vermont.

2 *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* has more than 350 references to time—26 of them from the same biblical passage (Ecclesiastes 1–8 beginning "To every thing there is a season.") The ones cited here are from an 18th-century versification of Psalm 90 by Isaac Watts ("Time, like an ever-rolling stream/Bears all its sons away"), Thoreau's *Walden* ("Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in"), Benjamin Franklin's *Advice to a Young Tradesman*

("Remember that time is money"), and *Poor Richard's Almanac* ("Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time"—echoed, perhaps consciously, by Dame Edith Sitwell's "When last we wandered and squandered time here" in her poem "By the Lake"), the light verse of Leigh Hunt ("Time, you thief, who love to get/Sweets into your list, put that in") and Phyllis McGinley ("Time is the thief you cannot banish"), Shakespeare's 116th sonnet ("Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks/Within his bending sickle's compass come") and the 70th sonnet in Spenser's *Amoretti* ("Tell her the joyous time will not be stayed/Unless she do him by the forelock take").

The images of time as grim reaper and as baldpate with forelock both derive from antiquity: The Greek god Kronos, who had castrated his father, Uranus, with a sickle and was in turn deposed by his son Zeus, had been conflated with *Chronos*, the Greek word for time, and the Romans further assimilated this fusion into their notions of their native Italic god, Saturnus (whose festival, the Saturnalia, fell close to the winter solstice and remains legendary as a time of merriment and role reversal), resulting in the familiar figure of Saturn/Father Time as old man with beard and scythe, which the Renaissance inherited and vigorously promulgated. "Seize time by the forelock" is a phrase variously attributed to Thales or to Pittacus, both of whom lived at Mytelene on the island of Lesbos off the Ionian coast of Asia Minor at the end of the 7th century B.C. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* suggests that the image may have been derived from a famous statue representing Opportunity, by Lysippus. My classicist friend Jane Cates reminds me of a saying attributed to Cato the Elder (234–149 B.C.) that "opportunity has hair in front but is bald behind it" (*Fronte capillata posthaec occasio calva*).

3 The latter is William Wordsworth's preference in "It Is a Beauteous Evening"; the former was the name of a march composed in 1886 by Theodore Augustus Metz, which, ten years later, was furnished with a set of lyrics by Joseph Hayden using the existing title as its refrain. The song became a favorite of Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders during the Spanish-American War, and was accordingly revived as the campaign song during Roosevelt's successful bid for re-election to the presidency in 1904.

4 The familiar observation about the weather is generally attributed, in two variants, to Mark Twain; but a rival candidate is Twain's contemporary, Charles Dudley Warner, who moreover *did* coin the phrase, "Politics makes strange bedfellows," in his 1870 book, *My Summer in a Garden* (republished for libraries by Reprint Services Corp. in 1992).

In French, time and the weather are both indicated by the same etymon: *le temps*. This would seem to be by a series of analogies: first, time as duration; second, time as age or epoch; third, time as season; fourth, time as atmospheric condition (seasonal or unseasonable). It may be no



coincidence that this is the order in which the four senses of *temps* are listed in my edition of the *Petit Larousse* dictionary (published in 1951).

5 E.g. the King James translator of St. Paul in I Cor. 15:51–52 (“Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet”) and the 20th-century Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola in his 1952 novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (Grove Press/Atlantic: New York, 1993). One of the latter’s biggest fans was the poet Dylan Thomas, who claimed to be “utterly bewitched” by Tutuola’s matter-of-fact, myth-haunted prose.

6 See Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren, *Culture Builders* (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1987), p. 18.

7 *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* explains that “the Statute of Westminster in 1275 fixed this reign as the time limit for bringing certain types of action” in a court of law. *Mists of antiquity*, incidentally, appears to have arisen as a misquotation from Giambattista Vico’s *Scienza Nuova* (1725): “In that dark night which shrouds from our eyes the most remote antiquity . . .”

8 This is the origin generally given for the phrase “pony up.” The psalm appointed for March 25 was #119 in the English bible (#118 in the Vulgate), which begins *Legem pone mihi, Domine, viam justificationium tuarum, et exquiram eam semper* (“Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end”). Hence, from the next day being the first business day on which one’s first-quarter obligations were payable, *legem pone* came to be used in a jocular sense for “ready money.” The British fiscal year was changed to January–December only when England finally adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752. For this and the more usual sense of “pony,” see Humez, Humez, and Maguire, *Zero to Lazy Eight: The Romance of Numbers* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1993), pp. 122–23.

9 The Christian liturgical year, for example, has both fixed feasts (such as Lady-Day, Christmas, and the various saints’ days, which always fall on the same dates in the secular solar-based calendar), and movable feasts, such as Easter, which are linked to the lunar cycle, Easter being defined as “the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox.” This year Easter falls on April 23, which is almost as late as it gets: In the past hundred years it has shared this day only twice (in 1905 and in 1916) and been later only once (April 25, 1943). From the movable feast of Easter are in turn calibrated each year’s dates for Shrove Tuesday (Mardi Gras) and Ash Wednesday (marking the end of Epiphany season and the beginning of Lent), as well as Ascension Day and Pentecost.

10 See Leach’s essay “Symbolic Representations of Time—Time and False Noses,” in his *Rethinking*

*Anthropology* (Humanities Press International: London/New York, 1961; reprinted 1996).

11 Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1988), pp. 73–74. With such equations in place it was a short step to Pope Boniface VIII’s establishing at the Roman jubilee of 1300 a system of applying indulgences to shorten the punishments of the dead, a practice whose abuse would figure so prominently in the Lutheran Reformation two centuries later.

12 A disappointment happily more than recompensed by the spectacular visit of comet Hale-Bopp in the spring of 1997.

13 The project is summarized on its website at <http://www.cooper.edu/sphere.html>.

14 For the full story, read Dava Sobel’s *Longitude* (Walker and Co.: New York, 1995).

15 See Dowe, *Causation* (Cambridge University Press: New York, in press).

16 A correction: In a footnote to my previous column (XXV/1) I misspelled the surname of one of my sources, Maplewood (NJ) reference librarian Barbara Laub, and here apologize for that error.



## EPISTOLA

I enjoyed “Chances Are” in the Winter 2000 issue’s *Classical Blather* column. It was generally well-researched, but there was one important inaccuracy. “Luck Be A Lady Tonight” was sung at Nathan Detroit’s floating crap game, but by Sky Masterson, not Nathan Detroit. This led to irony in the movie version, because Nathan, who was present but did not sing it, was played by Frank Sinatra, while Sky, who did sing it, was played by Marlon Brando. Sinatra took sarcastic delight in pointing this out when introducing the song at subsequent concerts, referring to Brando as one of America’s greatest baritones.

Best regards,

Steven Finz

[finz@mail.mcn.org](mailto:finz@mail.mcn.org)







## Antedatings and Supplementary Material for OED from a Correspondent of Browne Willis (1712)

John Considine  
University of Alberta

One of the Bodleian copies of Browne Willis's *History of Buckingham*, now Gough Bucks 3, has three manuscripts tipped into it. They are letters to Andrew Ducarel from Willis himself (January 7, 1750) and the herald John Warburton (January 11, 1751), and one of Willis's survey forms of April 8, 1712, in which he requested local information about Buckinghamshire parishes from their incumbents and others, completed by Richard Redding, Vicar of Stoke Poges, on July 14th, 1712. Redding's responses amount in all to about 1500 words, and the fact that they supplement *OED* in as many as thirteen entries, which follow, suggests the richness of such unpublished texts as sources for studying the lexicon of 18th-century English.

*altar tomb* (antedates 1739): "There are allso buried in the Ch:yard near the porch Nicholas Salter Merchant, and Nicholas his Son . . . each of them under a fair Altar Tomb."

*augmentation* n. sense 10, phrase Augmentation Office (antedates 1884): "The different spellings [of the name of Stoke Poges] may be seen in Cambden, the Monasticon, & in the Augmentation office under the title of St Mary of Southwark, to wch it was aintiently appropriated."

*belfry* n. sense 6 (antedates earliest attributive use [1870]; this particular combination unrecorded): "The vestry is a handsome square Room, lately made at the bottom of the Bell-tower, underneath the Belfry-loft."

*bound* v.1 sense 3 (postdates only example of *bound upon* [1637]; earlier and later examples of *bound on* and *bound with*): "It Bounds upon Farnham Royall on the W. N. & NE."

*brother* (unrecorded as title of inmate of an almshouse; the expression *Brother of the Charterhouse* is still in use): "It [the Hospitall at Stoke Poges] consists of one Mr, (the present Vicar) four poor men called Brethren & two poor Women called Sisters."

*commons* (unrecorded as familiar term for Doctors' Commons): "The farther particulars whereof may be seen in Mr Winwoods Will at the Com[m]ons."

*grotto* n. 4 (antedates earliest attributive use [1782]; this particular combination unrecorded): "There belongs to it a Small park but very delightfull for its Long & shady Grotto walks & fish-ponds well stor'd."

*haut-pew* (unrecorded, but must mean a pew enclosed with a high screen or partition; cf. the reference of 1637 to such pews as "exalted" s.v. *pew* n.1 sense 2a): "The Com[m]union Table is also new rail'd in, & the Chancel Wainscotted about ten feet high, as far as to the lowermost haut-pew to the Altar."

*high-rent* (unrecorded): "Its Revenue is about 50li p[er] ann[um] ariseing out of the High-rents of the Mannor of Michael-Creech."

*iron-water* (unrecorded, but must mean chalybeate water): "There has lately been discover'd a little Spring of Iron water."

*register office* (antedates 1760): "For former patrons & Incumbents, I must refer to the Registers Office."

*ross* n.3 (antedates 1839 and suggests that sense must, like that of *rosland*, include heathy as well as marshy ground): "The higher Ground is for the most part Gravel & Ross . . . the greatest improevmt upon the Ross are Turneps of wch it beares good crops."

*sister* (unrecorded as title of inmate of an almshouse): see above s.v. *brother*.

[John Considine's last piece for *VERBATIM* was Reading the Traces of James Murray in the *OED*, Spring 1999.]





## INTER ALIA

### Fillers

William H. Dougherty  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

For most of us, synchronizing brain and mouth is not easy. It takes time for expression to catch up with thought, as the sound of thunder with the flash of lightning. Unless our speech emanates from a prepared text, as in the case of actors performing, or from formats, as in the case of, say, radio announcers, there will be gaps in speech created by the split-second time lag when expression is lagging behind the thoughts feeding it substance. Nature abhors a vacuum, and humankind is part of nature. So we tend to fill the lag gaps with something that is necessarily as meaningless as *uh* or *er* since it has no thought behind it. These fillers, of which *you know* is the prime example in American English, are akin to expletives such as the obscenities injected into some speakers' talk, but differ in lacking the emotional charge that expletives carry.

Each language has its own peculiarities, which is what makes languages distinct, of course, and so each must have its own stall words, or fillers, although I cannot say for sure because I know nothing about the thousands of the world's tongues. Russian, a rich language, has many full-bodied filler words, like *nu*. Some Poles cram their street speech with *prosze pana*, meaning, where it has meaning, "please," or very literally, "I beg your lordship." Spaniards wear out *vale*, and Mexicans have worn out *andele* to the point of leaving it semantically anemic, if not quite empty. I have heard that speakers of Spanish in Ecuador seem to make *este* ("this") every other word. The French, notoriously meticulous about their *belle langue*, are perhaps not quite so prone to speech static as are speakers of less cherished languages, but even they sometimes use certain expressions, like *alors*, as essentially meaningless fillers.

There are several fillers in current use in American English, each favored by a category of speakers. *Hear* (pronounced "heah") was much used or abused as a filler by folks from the Carolinas and Georgia when I was in school with some of them decades ago. *Like* is favored by American youth today. *Well* and *why*, used to stall at the beginning of a sentence while the speaker gathers thought, are classic fillers, as is *man*, which survived in the West Indies and has spread from that region of catchy speech and song. All three of these classics occur in Shakespeare, which is why I call them classic. But nowadays the most common semantically empty filler is, as mentioned above and as everyone knows, *you know*.

For some reason this *you know*, though almost ubiquitous in the USA, seems particularly to clog the speech of American athletes. I, no athlete, used to suspect that this was because athletes are dumb. After further consideration, however, and taking into account the fact that a successful athlete has to think hard and fast, making split-second decisions, I come to the opposite conclusion that athletes need a means of letting their words catch up to their rapid mental processing because athletes are trained to think extremely quickly. A slow, deliberate thinker, be his or her thoughts ever so deep and productive, has no need to skip along over *you knows* and therefore is much less likely to use the filler than is even the brightest basketball star.

Lacking a staff of computerized whizzes to do etymological research for me, I can only guess when specific fillers came into widespread use. Literature is of little help because writers, whether of fiction, letters, memoirs, articles, or whatever, generally omit meaningless verbal static. Poets from Chaucer, with his *I wot*, on down to modern times are sometimes an exception to this rule because iambic fillers can come in handy to fill out metric lines and at the same time lend a touch of authenticity and make verse dialogue sound less stilted or artificial. Consider, for example, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, act I, scene II,



line 135, where Cassius says, "Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world"

As nearly as I can remember, half a century ago *you know* was not used as a filler so much as today. On the other hand, I have heard a recording of a Will Rogers monologue made more than sixty years ago where the then immensely popular folksy sage-cum-comic-cum-actor liberally sprinkled the monologue with *you knows*. So the often annoying locution has been around for quite a while, although exactly how long—who knows?



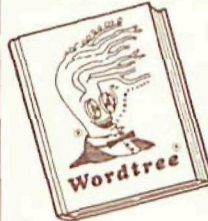
## HORRIBLE DICTU

Mat Coward  
Somerset, Britain

I heard a marketing executive on BBC Radio the other day, explaining the unique selling point of her latest product: "Conveniency," she said, "these days is such a great part of how we live."

From the context, it's reasonable to assume that, if it existed, *conveniency* would mean *convenience*; but clearly, the marketing woman felt that *convenience* was too weak, too everyday a word for her purpose. I think of this phenomenon as "stressification," and notice it often in the idioms of business, officialdom, and semi-officialdom, as well as in speech. It arises in various forms, all of them jarring.

A TV listing in the *Radio Times* warns that a film "contains adult sex scenes". Instead of juvenile sex scenes? Or sex scenes deemed suitable for children? *Adult* here is being used, as it often is, as a euphemism for "sexual"; therefore, viewers are being alerted to the presence of *sexual sex scenes*. This is tautology for the purposes of stressification, as is a report in *Wisden Cricket Monthly* of a tour of the UK by a Los Angeles cricket club "made up of teenagers, ex-former



**CAN YOU PASS THE  
"VOCABULARY TEST"?**

The essence of intellect is vocabulary. But how can you shine with resources structured centuries ago? ("Thesaurus, about 1800. Dictionary, 1604.)

Dr. Henry G. Burger has discovered that any procedural (transitive) verb can be expressed via its two simpler processes: To Explore & Test = to

PROSPECT. To Roam & Prospect = to TOMCAT, etc. His *Wordtree* lets you move up, down, & sidewise—backward towards causes and forward towards effects.

"Brilliant, original, and of great importance," reports *Science and Public Policy!* And that's only a sample of the 50,000 words already showered on The *Wordtree*® by over 85 periodicals.

1/4 million listings fill this computer-organized reference book. (∞) ISBN 0-936312-00-9. USD \$149. If foreign, add \$6. Send a numbered Purchase Order, or prepay, to: The *Wordtree*, 10876 Bradshaw W12, Overland Park, KS 66210-1148, USA. All-hour phone (+1)913-469-1010. Play our vocabulary game on the Internet: [www.wordtree.com](http://www.wordtree.com). Free brochure on solving word problems.

E789-42006©MCMXCIX by the Wordtree.

gang members and homeless men". Presumably, an *ex-former* gang member is not a recidivist, but a model citizen.

Lately, *work colleague* has been replacing *colleague*, although there is as far as I know no usage of *colleague* which does not refer to a person one works with. (Not quite true, in fact: in the [British] Labour Party, years ago, right-wingers would address fellow members as "Colleague," to avoid the then more usual "Comrade".)

Sometimes, stressification employs what Americans might call a "cover your ass" approach, coupling terms together like railway carriages, to ensure that no room remains for doubt. This can result in a seemingly uncontrolled stream of pure babble—a kind of non-coprolalic Tourette's, as in this from a local rag: "He was very proud to have been the first mayor of the town and was able to implement his stamp on the role." When taken to such extremes, meaningless jargon becomes almost poetic, don't you think?

During Mike Tyson's recent visit to Britain, a newspaper informed us that community leaders in Brixton and Moss Side, considering the fighter a poor role model, had asked him to stay away: "Both areas have a sizeable black and Afro-Caribbean population". Are Afro-Caribbeans not black?

Stressification commonly manifests itself in clichés. It is an inviolable rule that every person in public life considers every other person in public life to be "a close personal friend of mine". I suspect that a close personal friend is simply



anyone you've sat next to at more than one official dinner, but in any case, most of us would take it for granted that we enjoy a close and personal relationship with all our friends, by definition, while using *acquaintance* to describe someone who is merely known to us.

The notion of stressification can be stretched slightly to include punctuation. On a packet of shop-bought "Grannies Cake," I found this inducement: "Look out for other delicious Lyons Corner House cakes, we think you will agree they are 'Always a pleasure to eat'." The inverted commas are there, I imagine, for emphasis, but to me they suggest uncertainty—as if the cake-makers are saying, "Don't take this too literally, OK? It's just a turn of phrase."

I've never known precisely what the stressified term *roll-out* means, despite its current ubiquity in corporate-speak, but at least in this example it carries a veneer of relevance, however unintentional: "Marlow Foods intend to roll out the free-range eggs to the rest of their ranges throughout the year 2000." But, hey—*year 2000*? As opposed to what?

*(Please contact me via either of the VERBATIM addresses, to tell me of your own least favourite Horribiles, or to comment on those I've already discussed.)*

## EPISTOLA

Dear Editor:

In the Winter 2000 edition at page 30 in your "Epistolae" section, you published a letter from Naftali Wertheim inquiring as to proofreading. Unfortunately, you have failed to correct an error in Mr. Behling's letter at line four: "I have encountered them for/or many years." Nor do you include a "sic," which you could have borrowed from the next column, "Sic! Sic! Sic!"

Samuel Hankin  
Gainesville, Florida

*[A sic-worthy error, but it is ours, not Mr. Behling's!—Ed.]*

## Classical Swearing: A Vade-Mecum

Barry Baldwin  
Calgary, Alberta

"Man invented curse-words to give form and substance to his malign wishes, and he invented swear-words to back up his vows and establish his veracity."—Burgess Johnson, *The Lost Art of Profanity* (1948)

You are probably not surprised that the Greeks, who supposedly had a word for everything (actually they didn't: no noun for "orgasm," although one supposes they did have them) and the Romans (likewise lacking a term for "suicide," despite all that falling on swords in Shakespeare), with their reputation for plain speaking, did not line up with the American Indians, Japanese, Malaysians, and Polynesians who do not curse, but rather with those many cultures, ours included, that do. As Geoffrey Hughes puts it:

"Swearing is fascinating in its protean diversity and poetic creativity, while being simultaneously shocking in its ugliness and cruelty. It draws upon such powerful and incongruous resonators as religion, sex, madness, excretion, and nationality, upon an extraordinary variety of attitudes including the violent, the shocking, the absurd, and the impossible."

Robert Graves remarks that "the chief strength of the oath in Christian countries is that it is forbidden by authority." The great advantage of polytheism is that it gives you a generous choice of gods to invoke. Thus, Greeks and Romans could swear from the top with "By Zeus," "By Jupiter," or by the god of choice—Apollo, Hermes, Venus, etc.—or with laconic inclusivity "By all the Gods." One character in Plautus's play *Bacchides* gets the best of both maledictory worlds, taking four lines to list fifteen individual deities before capping his inventory with "And all the Other Gods as Well," earning from a bystander the awestruck compliment "Boy, can he swear!" Jupiter, incidentally, slid into



English swearing in 1570 via the euphemism “By Jove.” (Though no Roman ever exclaimed “Jumping Jupiter,” the favourite ejaculation of baseball catcher Flannagan in the movie *It Happens Every Spring*.)

A few of the Twelve Olympians (themselves only allowed to swear by the infernal river Styx) rarely had their names taken in vain: Ares/Mars (odd that the war god should be avoided by such warlike societies), Artemis/Diana and Athene/Minerva (because both were virgins?), Hera/Juno (Mrs. Zeus/Jupiter, also his sister), and Hephaestus/Vulcan, the misshapen god of technology. The Roman scholar Gellius (2nd cent. A.D.) maintains Roman women never swear by Hercules or men by Castor. Perhaps it was inappropriate for the weaker sex to swear by the macho saint of strength? Among men, “By Hercules” was a very mild drawing-room oath: Cicero admitted it to his formal courtroom prose. Castor’s name suited females, since it suggested the Latin for “chaste” (*casta*), but for that very reason it was too sissy for the lads. One oath, *Edepol* (“By Pollux”), was acceptably cross-gender, but even here the sexes tended to go separate ways, women preferring the truncated form *Pol*. This looks like an ancient anticipation of Mencken’s “deaconic swearing” or “bootleg profanity,” equivalent to *golly*, *goshdarn*, *gorblimey*, and *gadzooks*, the hope being that the god will not recognise himself in such substitutes. Perhaps this also applies to the Greek “Go to the Crows” in lieu of “Go to Hell;” a Roman variant, thanks to crucifixion, was “Go Hang On The Cross.”

The Cretans evidently went overboard in blasphemy. An ancient commentator on Plato records that their king, Rhadamanthus, outlawed divine oaths and substituted “By the Dog,” “By the Goose,” and sundry other zoological zappers. The first of these was famously the favourite expostulation of Socrates, occasionally expanded to “By the Dog of Egypt.” Why, we don’t know. This may have helped get him into trouble in 399 B.C.: one charge against him was that he worshipped strange gods. No other ancient is so asso-

ciated with canine cursing. One presumes many had their own private idioms, like the character in Plautus’s *The Little Carthaginian* who invokes the painters Apelles and Zeuxis—like saying “By Picasso” or “By Hockney.”

The comedians Aristophanes and Cratinus confirm the antiquity of “By the Dog” and “By the Goose.” Likewise, “hound” as a curse entered English around the year 1000, “dog” c. 1325, while in all ancient British war films Germans were forever crying *Schweinehund*. As early as Homer, both men and women were routinely abused as “dogs,” and in Petronius’s comic novel *Satyricon* (1st cent. A.D.) a drunken wife apostrophises her husband as “cur.” This provokes him enough to thump her, perhaps an unsurprising reaction. The lexicographer Hesychius says “dog” was slang for “prick.” It was also the lowest throw in Roman dice, so she could additionally have been saying “you zero.” (No sign, though, of any classical anticipation of “dog’s bollocks” for “brilliant,” as in contemporary British slang.) “Goose” doesn’t appear to have any ancient double-entendre, unlike many animals and birds (e.g. “sparrow” = “penis”), though we can’t be quite sure; Shakespeare brought this poultry specimen into *Henry VI, Part 1* (1591) to designate a poked whore.

The same Petronian husband later calls his wife a “viper,” a common soubriquet for whores. Earlier, this husband—it is not the ideal marriage—had flung the missus over a settee, causing her to exclaim *Au Au*, solemnly explained by a Roman grammarian as “the usual cry of a very distressed woman”—pretty tame by our standards.

Petronius is one of very few Roman authors (Plautus and Martial are others) to give us the flavour of Latin as it was spoken by “ordinary” people. This sadly huge gap is only partly filled by the graffiti still visible on the walls of Pompeii. He tends to eschew “four-letter words,” doubtless as unrealistic as their absence from soap operas such as *Coronation Street*, though who knows what secret scatologies may lurk beyond such terminologies as “Flaming Nora,” “Gordon



Bennett,” and “Chuffed to Little Mint Balls”? When a character says “the cold sucks,” he takes refuge in Greek. Given this, such permitted phrases as “piss hot and drink cold,” “not worth your own piss,” “more like a pisspot than a woman,” “like a mouse in a pisspot,” and “he had Jupiter by the balls” must have had little or no shock value.

Another character unleashes a stream of abuse at fellow-guests. Choice examples: “mutton-head,” “fruit,” “fly-by-night vagabond,” “claypot,” “washleather,” “curly-headed onion,” “come-hither man,” “rat,” “puffball.” Many are unique to him. Quite a few connote stupidity. Compare these items from a list of sixty-three in Hughes: “addlepate,” “airhead,” “berk,” “fruitcake,” “pudding-head,” “spaz,” “twit,” “zipalid.” As Hughes says, “no reader would be uncertain by the end that this list related to stupid people, but equally no reader would be familiar with all these terms.” The same no doubt applied to Petronius’s audience.

Ethnic slurs are now officially taboo, though this does not mean they are extinct in spoken conversation. They, too, had their place in ancient civilizations. Greeks dismissed everyone who couldn’t speak their language as idiots who go “Ba-Ba,” hence “barbarian.” Cappadocians were proverbially stupid. Romans dubbed Hellenes “Greeklings.” The Latin equivalent of “Tell it to the Marines” is “Let Apella the Jew believe that.” Horace asks, “You want I should fart in the faces of the circumcised Hebrews?” They didn’t much go in for racism based on colour, though such expressions as “turn black into white” and “scrub an Ethiopian white” hint at its existence. The Elder Pliny mentions a tribe ashamed of their black skins, albeit they painted themselves red, not white. Still, being English, I must give pride of place to St Jerome for his lambasting—amid the solemn context of a biblical commentary—the theologian Pelagius as “You Scottish Porridge-Eater.”

Offensive body language was part and parcel of ancient insult. The commonest Roman gesture

was to wiggle the middle finger at an enemy. This digit was called “the finger of shame.” It may have to do with Greeks on the island of Siphnos, whose supposed predilection for sticking fingers up a partner’s anus produced the verb “to Siphnosize.” To scratch your own head with a single finger connoted effeminacy—both Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great were thus ridiculed. Hughes cannot trace sticking out your tongue further back than Elizabethan times, but it too was a Roman habit. A Roman also invented “mooning,” when one Marcus Servilius exposed his bare bum to a crowd he was haranguing on election day. The Byzantine emperor Andronicus took it a stage further with his public buttock barings and mimed defecations. In Petronius, a slave “not satisfied with cursing” kept lifting up his leg and farting. Breaking wind was considered a good omen, though, in certain religious rites.

You might not expect the (officially, at least) pious Byzantines to have contributed much to the history of swearing. You would be wrong. *Effing* and *blinding* turn up not only in lampoon and satire, but in works of scholarship. This is a trend from which dreary modern academic writing would much benefit. (One lonely example, a letter [Nov. 21, 1985] in the *London Review of Books* in which a Professor Hawkes told a Professor Hough to “piss off,” only whets the appetite. Did Hawkes realise how Byzantine he was being?) Commentators’ marginal notes to the satirist Lucian contain no less than thirty-nine terms of abuse, ranging from “moron” to “boy-buggerer.” The 12th-century scholar Tzetzes writes off an academic rival as “bull-father, moonstruck son of a goat,” and many other things. The favourite Byzantine cursing technique was to build up a dizzyingly long compound of insulting adjectives, a trick inherited from Aristophanes. These often ran for many lines and sentences. St. Symeon Metaphrastes did not blush to dub an enemy “you enema-nurtured shit-eater.” Leo the Philosopher trounced a student as “O stammer-speaking, very stammering, always stammering



mouth”—hard to get away with that in namby-pamby modern pedagogy. Another Leo is, among countless sins, “a fabricator of filthy books, a cheating innkeeper, a sodomiser of strumpets.” Whether they knew it or not, the Antipodean quoted in Bill Hornadge’s *The Australian Slangage* (1980) for his “you rotten, bloody, poofter, commo, mongrel, bastard,” and Kevin Kline to John Cleese in *A Fish Called Wanda*, “you

nations of the innocent ones that produced them. For instance: avoid the noun *intercapedo* (“interval”) because its last four letters spell *pedo* (“fart”); don’t say *illam dicam* (“I should mention her”) because that is pronounced *landicam* (“clitoris”); *bini* (“two each”) will upset Greek speakers since *binein* is their word for “fuck.” Cicero, in his own writings a master of invective without ever using “four-letter words,” adopts an air of

## When Theodore Roosevelt wished to abuse Woodrow Wilson, the best thing he could come up with was “you Byzantine logothete.”

pompous, stuck-up, snot-nosed, English, giant twerp, scumbag, fuck-face, dick-head, arsehole” are being entirely Byzantine. It seems right that, according to the *Penguin Book of Insults* (1981), when Theodore Roosevelt wished to abuse Woodrow Wilson, the best/worst thing he could come up with was “you Byzantine logothete.”

Byzantium extends into the Middle Ages. Over in England, the ritual of competitive insults known as *flyting* was popular from Bede to Shakespeare. Hughes, providing generous examples, traces this to the extempore “skaldic verse” of Old Norse. He could have gone back much further. Flyting was a classical procedure. Horace treats us to some extracts from one such verbal slugfest between two professional comedians on a trip across Italy. They are low on wit, high on taunts at physical defects. Virgil presents one shepherd accusing another of bestiality. He would have been tickled by a recent discussion in the *World Wide Words* electronic newsletter distributed by Michael Quinion (<http://www.quinion.com/words/>) of whether England or Australia gave birth to the expression “sheep-shagger.”

Sensitive readers had better stop here, for I have reached the classical antecedents of some of the classic four-letter words.

The reactions of the sensitive were anticipated by Cicero. Writing to a friend, he discusses with copious examples the linguistic pruderies of Roman Mrs Grundys, hyper-sensitive Stoics who objected not only to “dirty” words but to combi-

sweet reason towards the whole business.

By a convention that we don’t fully understand, the “worst” words were eschewed in Graeco-Roman literature, save stage comedy and satire. They don’t appear in erotic writing—no ancient Henry Miller. For Rome (no equivalent for Greece), we also have the graffiti—ranging from semi-literate scrawl to sophisticated poetic parodies—on the walls of Pompeii, where one bit of scribble provides the best comment on the rest: “I wonder, O Wall, thou stayest in place/Such a weight of bad writing thou hast on thy face.”

The ancients were un-British in not calling each other “wankers.” *Masturbari* and *masturbator* have no direct synonyms, and there is a distinct shortage of expressions comparable to “toss off” or “beat your meat,” though Aristophanes does have the god Dionysus “scratching my chickpea.” But “prick” was a Roman favourite. Catullus calls an enemy “you fucked-up *mentula*” (the basic word) in one poem. In another, he tells how the orator Calvus was heckled by an audience member shouting “you loud-mouthed prick” (*diserte salaputium*). A graffito, complete with a drawing of a penis, dubs Pompey “not a man but a prick” (*sopio*). Another ancient rhy-parologist orders “eat shit, you pricks.” At quite a different semantic level, the emperor Augustus called Horace “cleanest of cocks” in a friendly way, perhaps comparable to amicable British uses of this word. One also expects that the Roman called *Mutto* (Mr. Prick) mentioned in a Cicero



speech had to endure a lot of repetitive jokes on his name.

Penis and testicles go together, not just anatomically. It must have been a godsend for Roman lawyers that *testis* means both “witness” and “testicle”—likewise for wits in general that *anus* is both “bum” and “old woman”—albeit Cicero (notorious for his cutting wit) doesn’t much go in for it: too infantile, perhaps. But he will talk about “Rome having its balls (*coleos*) cut off” in a treatise on oratory. A speaker in Petronius laments “if only we had the balls,” while the contemporary poet Persius groans “if only we had a drop of our fathers’ spunk.”

Natural functions play their part. While Romans didn’t say “piss off” or “piece of piss” (British demotic for an easy task), they had such expressions as “piss in your own child’s bosom” and “shit on your own balls.” Priapus typically goes further: “what a pile of shit your prick is.” Cicero calls the Senate “shit” (*stercus*) and the electorate the “dung-heap (*faex*) of Romulus.” Catullus alliteratively dubs an enemy’s historical writings as “shitty sheets of scrap-paper” (*cacata charta*); Martial dismisses a rival’s poems as “fit for a shit.” In modern English style, the poet Lucilius complains about “piss-poor (*mictilis*) food,” and Martial about a cake that was “pure shit” (*merda*).

Taking a cue from Jeffrey Richards’ (a history don) review of Hughes in the London *Sunday Times*, we may chart various stages in English bad language. Anglo-Saxon swearing had magical connotations; this yielded to blasphemy in the pious Middle Ages. Secular indecency took over in the Renaissance and Reformation. Elizabethans, led by Henry VIII and Good Queen Bess, loved to mock their enemies’ physical oddities. Puritanism compelled new ways to circumlocutory blasphemy. Relative decorum prevailed in the 18th and 19th Centuries, epitomised by Johnson’s omission of most crude words (although *fart* and *piss* were admitted) from his *Dictionary*, and Thomas Bowdler’s sanitised Shakespeare. Robert Graves thought that his predicted decline in swearing might be upset by “a

new shock to our system”—this came in the shape of the ’60s. Today the decline of class distinctions, religion, and sexual taboos has diminished blasphemy and insults based on social status and physiological swearing, leaving racial epithets and references to physical disabilities as the only ones beyond the pale.

While we can say that the bawdy of Aristophanes coincides with the apogee of Athenian democracy and that Plautus in the Roman Republic is less gross than many “decadent” imperial writers, it is impossible to impose these patterns on Greek and Roman swearing, and perhaps they would not even have understood them. Still, Cicero’s aforementioned letter on what is and is not proper in Latin might at least suggest recognition of Taylor’s final point, “profanity is in a bad way,” looking forward to the next shock in the national nervous system. Overall, despite the huge gaps in our knowledge, we are probably as safe in applying to ancient swearing as to modern the remark of Jonathan Swift, himself no mean coprologist: “Oaths are the children of fashion.”

#### *Further Reading:*

Adams, J. N., *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London: Duckworth, 1982).

Echols, E. C., ‘The Art of Classical Swearing,’ *Classical Journal* 46 (1951) 291-7.

Forberg, C., *Manual of Classical Erotology* (1884; repr. New York: Grove Press, 1966).

Graves, R., *The Future of Swearing and Improper Language* (London: Kegan Paul, 1936—originally published in 1927 as *Lars Porsena or The Future of Swearing*).

Henderson, J. J., *The Maculate Muse* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Hughes, G., *Swearing* (Cambridge, Mass. & Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

Richlin, A., *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggressive Language in Roman Humor* (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

[Barry Baldwin’s last piece for VERBATIM was *As the Word Turns*, Winter 2000.]





## Word Tax

Luisa Orza  
Khanh Hoa, Vietnam

I was recently invited to write a Story within a Page for a competition. What's the point? I thought; why say something in so few words, if you could say it in so many? Why go straight to the point, if you can twist and turn for a while with lengthy preambles, deviations, and clever word-pairings, regardless of their essentiality to the plot? Well, I got rid of the margins and so on, did away with paragraphs, and reduced the font to 10; small words that say big things, I suppose

or her own voice; or beat around the proverbial bush. And the other half would have to be abbreviated; it would start raining cats only, because we wouldn't be able to afford the dogs as well; things might at a stretch be topsy, or turvey, but never both. I expect we would do away with articles, prepositions, and conjunctions altogether, and personal pronouns, because of the disproportionately high sums of money it would mean spending on them. Adverbs and adjectives would become glib extravagancies, the playthings of millionaires, while for the rest of us, metaphor, simile, tautology, and synonym would cease to exist. Nuance would leap to the top of the popularity stakes, and the entrepreneurial amongst us

### The *Times*' shortest article ever: "Word Tax! Bugger."

that's what they were looking for. But even so, it was terrible. It was like having a tax on words. Imagine that. Imagine all the complaints you'd get about the politicians squandering the tax-payers' money. What would the papers have to say? Not much probably. The *Times*' shortest article ever: "WORD TAX! Bugger." The *Sun* wouldn't suffer too much; they'd just have even shorter texts to accompany their pictures; Big Tits; Plane Crash; Queen Mother Sick. No change there, really. The people whose job it is to write dictionaries would be (silently) cursing the day they visited their school careers officer. They'd be cursing the school careers officer, let's face it, not just the day. There'd probably be a spate of killings resulting in the invention of a new word: *Careersofficericide*. The levy they'd have to pay on that would cover their prison sentence. And just think about what would happen to the language! People would start using words like *notwithstanding* and *splendiferousness* just to get value for money, envying (how ironic!) speakers of Welsh or German whose average word contains twenty-seven syllables. Half the language would become obsolete; there'd be no more raving lunatics; nobody would love the sound of his

would start giving courses in the grammar of body language, or taking 10-day meditation retreats involving a vow of silence. Relax in the peaceful countryside and save money! Tax rebates would cancel themselves out owing to the additional vocabulary required to demand and issue them. Silent movies would relive their heyday, and there would be mimed parliamentary debates on whether hyphenated words count as one word or two. It would be no joke, or rather there wouldn't be any jokes, that's for sure. Nor poetry, stories, novels or songs. History would belong to a foregone age—something that used to happen to other people, but doesn't any more. Murder trials would be reduced to a game of charades: So, Mr. X, go ahead and act out your movements of the evening of January the 25th? That's after Mr. X had placed his right hand on the Bible and nodded to tell the truth, the . . . well, let's just leave it at that, shall we? The jury would adjourn to discuss their verdict: one knock for guilty, two for not. Still, there would be some consolation inasmuch as most drawers-up of legal documents would go bankrupt. On the other hand, claimants of unemployment benefits would have spent their allowance on the compilation of their claim



forms. Manners and politeisms would inevitably be done away with, and anyone who bothered with as lengthy a prefix as “would you be so kind as to” in front of “pass me the salt” would be immediately labeled a braggart or spendthrift. There would be word-tax riots, in which students storm the streets of London without any slogans or demands, because they’d already used up their student loans on filling out their matriculation forms. Still, the riot police would be happy—having all sorts of other means of expression at their disposal. Society would be rocked. Speakers Corner in Hyde Park would have to be renamed Mime’s Corner. The rich would have the last word. Mad! Absolute madness. That’s what it would come down to. That’s what it was coming down to, and there I was practically condoning such an outlandish suggestion by submitting myself to the task. Not that I got very far with it; didn’t even introduce a single character. As for a plot, or anything vaguely resembling a beginning, middle and end, well it got a bit late for all those really. Punchy opening lines followed by tangled webs for my protagonist to weave through then wrap it all up or tie the dangly bits together at the end, leaving the reader relieved, satisfied, smug, or surprised. Or perhaps not. Perhaps he would have been a hapless cad who made a complete blunder of resolution, while our poor reader clenched his or her teeth in frustration. Well, I’ll never know now. I could have done it, if I’d had a bigger page. But that way, it was all just too taxing.

[Luisa Orza teaches English in Vietnam. This story won the Knight’s Own Prize for a story contained within a page—a slightly larger page than ours.]

## SIC! SIC! SIC!

Two teen-aged girls preceded me into a supermarket just long enough for me to overhear one of the girls say to the other: “When we went to that party last year we had so much fun it wasn’t even funny.” [Submitted by Erik Nappa, Brick, New Jersey.]

## A Name Defamed

I hate computer type that turns  
The honorable name of Burns  
Into a thing that ill becomes  
Scotland’s foremost poet—*Bums*.

This is a thing that’s worse than queer,  
Confusing what is front and rear,  
As it does too with *stern* and *stem*,  
Another muddle to condemn.

Although, except for Burns, I am  
Not moved to give a *darn* or *dam*.

—Henry George Fischer

## EPISTOLA

I would be very grateful if you would consider placing the following announcement in the next edition of VERBATIM:

The Website of the Linguasphere Observatory <http://www.linguasphere.org>. An independent research network, the Linguasphere Observatory is devoted to the classification of the world’s languages and dialects, language mapping, the study and promotion of multilingualism/bilingualism, and the exploration of our global linguistic environment. The website contains extracts from the *Linguasphere Register of the World’s Languages and Speech Communities*—the first comprehensive and transnational classification of the languages and dialects of the world. The purpose is not only to provide a free information service, but also to provide a forum for the gathering and collation of new and revised data on the world’s languages and dialects.

With many thanks,

Barbara Kahana

Website Editor—Linguasphere Observatory

Hebron, Wales





## OBITER DICTA

### *An Amendment to the OED's Definition of "Catchpenny"*

Brian J. Hanley  
Assistant Professor of English, USAF Academy

*Catchpenny* denotes a book of negligible intellectual or aesthetic worth created strictly to make money. As its earliest recorded usage would have us believe, a *catchpenny* is designed to appeal to the poorly educated or undemanding book buyer—the sort of consumer, in other words, who expects the book trade to provide not vessels of wisdom or knowledge but cheap titillation, patently implausible adventure narratives, carelessly assembled rehashes or compilations of well-known material, and so on. Glance at the titles in the fiction section of most airport bookstores and you will see the successors to the 18th-century *catchpenny*. The *Oxford English Dictionary's* earliest citation for the adjective *catchpenny* comes from a 1759 entry in the *Critical Review* by Oliver Goldsmith; the *OED's* earliest citation of the noun *catchpenny* is taken from a 1760 issue of the *London Magazine*.<sup>1</sup> In fact, both the adjectival and nominal forms of *catchpenny* were created or at least given legitimacy by contributors to the *Monthly Review*, who began employing the term as early as November 1749. In February 1750, John Ward acknowledges the popularity of the neologism when he asserts that *A Dissertation Upon Earthquakes* appears to be “one of those hasty productions commonly denominated catch-penny pieces.”<sup>2</sup>

By the mid-1750s, *catch-penny* had become a term familiar to readers of the *Monthly Review*. *A midnight ramble; or, the adventures of two noble females: being a true and impartial account of their late excursion through the streets of London and Westminster*, for instance, is described in the October 1754 issue of the *Monthly* as “a low, ill-written tale, bearing the usual marks of a catch-penny job.” The

*Pharmacopoeia Meadiana* is similarly dismissed in the May 1756 number of the *Monthly*. “Could the compiler, together with the prescriptions, have conveyed the learned prescriber’s discernment, it might have been of service to the public,” the reviewer declares, “but since he has not presumed to go so far, we must look upon this publication as a mere catchpenny.”<sup>3</sup>

The neologism *catchpenny* can be said to reflect both the immense cultural importance of the *Monthly Review*, which inaugurated a revolution in literary criticism when it began publication in May 1749, and the turbulence of the rapidly maturing literary marketplace which had called the *Monthly* into existence.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the English book trade had been retailing frivolity, inanity, and low voluptuousness right up until the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1694. Certainly many of the works listed in Robert Clavell’s *A Catalogue of Books Printed in England Since the Dreadful Fire of London in 1666 to the End of Michaelmas Term, 1695*, for example, can be rightly characterized as “catch-pennies.”<sup>5</sup> In Clavell’s catalogue, for instance, we find a number of books exhibiting the rather crass and shopworn “Art of” approach—*of Money-catching; of making Love; of Wheedling*. Another popular format is the published epistle on a scandalous subject: *Seven Love Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier; Confessions of a New-married Couple*. What makes the neologism *catchpenny* significant is that it exemplifies the necessity of a new critical vocabulary capable of describing what contemporaries thought of as the unprecedented coarseness and vulgarity of the book trade at mid-century, previous pejorative terms such as the adjective *Grub Street* being no longer appropriate, as a glance at its definition in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) demonstrates, thanks to the burgeoning demand for print material and authors.<sup>6</sup> Scarcely less important is that *catchpenny* is invented—or at least given validity—not by the scholarly community but by anonymous reviewers, a circumstance which illustrates nicely the immediate and



enduring influence of the *Monthly Review* (1749-1845), the *Critical Review* (1756-1817), their contemporary imitators, and their modern-day successors.

Notes:

1 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1989).

2 *Monthly Review*, ii. 25, 324.

3 *Monthly Review*, xi. 309; xiv. 491.

4 For further information, see Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth Century Literary Careers* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996); Antonia Forster, *Index to Book Reviews in England: 1749-1774* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1990); Alvin Kernan, *Printing Technology, Samuel Johnson, and Letters* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986).

5 Robert Clavell, *A Catalogue of Books Printed in England Since the Dreadful Fire of London in 1666 to the End of Michaelmas Term, 1695*, ed. D. F. Foxon (Farnborough: Gregg Press, Ltd., 1965); also see Leslie Shepard, *The History of Street Literature: The Story of Broadside Ballads, Chapbooks, Proclamations, News-sheets, Election bills, Tracts, Pamphlets, Cocks, Catchpennies and other Ephemera*. (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973).

6 For a discussion of the evolution of the term *Grub Street*, see Pat Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London: Methuen, 1972).

[Brian Hanley is an assistant professor of English at the United States Air Force Academy; he is also associate editor of *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*. Hanley holds advanced degrees from Oxford University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Hanley's book, *Samuel Johnson as Book Reviewer*, is being published by the University of Delaware Press.]



## Bottom, Thou Art Translated

Adrian Room  
Lincolnshire

The Russians, even in Soviet times, have long worshipped at the shrine of English and American literature, from Shakespeare to Shaw, Chaucer to Chesterton, Sterne to Steinbeck, and Russian translations of the classics and moderns are still readily available. But each translator has faced a particular hurdle—how best to render the names of the characters?

At first sight, the answer seems relatively straightforward. Names that are obviously meaningful, such as Carroll's White Knight and Dickens' Artful Dodger, are translated. Names that are not, such as Shakespeare's Ophelia and Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby, are transliterated. These four names thus appear respectively in Russian as *Bely Rytsar'*, *Lovky Plut*, *Ofeliya* and *Dzhey Getsbi*.

Sometimes a translation takes hold that deviates somewhat from the original. Thus Carroll's Mad Hatter can be *Shlyapnik* ("Hatter"), *Bolvanshchik* ("Blockmaker"), or simply *Shlyapa* ("Hat"). Of these, *Bolvanshchik* is probably the best, since it suggests the dual sense of *bolvan*: on the one hand, "block for shaping hats", on the other, "blockhead". Conversely, a Russian translated name can evoke the wrong associations for an English speaker. The Dormouse is known as *Sonya*, which sounds like a trendy teenager, but is in fact simply the Russian word for the animal (related to *son*, "sleep").

In certain cases a name demands a half-translation, half-transliteration. Thus Mark Twain's Injun Joe is *Indeyets Dzho*, while Stevenson's Long John Silver is *Dolgovyazy Dzhon Sil'ver*, the first word literally meaning "long-necked" rather than "long-legged", as one might expect. The dichotomy between translation and transliteration is neatly exemplified by Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday, respectively rendered as *Robinzon Kruzo* and *Pyatnitsa* (no "Man").



So far so good. But there are many names with a transparent meaning where a decision has to be made—to translate or not to translate? An English reader can readily see the sense behind the names of Shakespeare’s Andrew Aguecheek and Toby Belch, yet these are transliterated as forename and surname, so that one respectively has *Endryu Egyuchik* and *Tobi Belch*. On the other hand, names such as those of Bottom and his gang in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are clearly words rather than names, so can be readily translated. Bottom is thus *Osnova* (literally “Base”), while Quince, Snug, Flute, Snout and Starveling come over nicely as *Pigva*, *Milyaga*, *Dudka*, *Rylo* and *Zamorysh*. Any possible pun on Bottom’s name and “ass” (he dons an ass’s head, after all) is absent from the Russian name, which is, however, faithful to Shakespeare’s intention, since Bottom is a weaver, and his Dame refers to a “bottom of thread,” otherwise the core of a skein.

Legendary or pantomime characters may or may not have their names translated. Robin Hood is traditionally known in Russian as *Robin Gud*, the latter word (coincidentally and aptly suggesting English “good”) having Russian *g* for English initial *h*, as often happens. (Hider is thus *Gitler* and Hamlet *Gamlet*.) Robin Goodfellow, on the other hand, has a semi-translatable name, *Dobry Maly Robin*, literally “Good Fellow Robin”. Goldilocks is *Zlatovlaska* and Cinderella *Zolushka*. Snow White is *Belosnezhka*, but J.M. Barrie’s Peter Pan transliterates as *Piter Pen*. However, Tinkerbelle sounds mellifluously as *Din’-Din’*, while Captain Hook translates alliteratively as *kapitan Kryuk*. In the world of children’s literature one should not overlook A.A. Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh, whose Russian counterpart is *Vinni-Pukh*. This name is subtler than it seems, although perhaps not intentionally, since although *Pukh* transliterates “Pooh” it also happens to be the Russian word for “swansdown”, and the little boy Christopher Robin Milne named his teddy bear after a bear in a zoo (Winnie) and a swan that he fed every morning and that he called “Pooh”.

Russians are also aficionados of the English nursery rhyme, and now that the basic principle of rendering characters’ names has been considered, readers may like to try their eye at identifying the following, which as an aid to interpretation are in English alphabetical order: *malyshka Bo-Pip*, *stary korol’Kol*, *Dzhek i Dzhill*, *malysh Dzhek Khorner*, *malyutka miss Maffet*, *malysh Tommi Taker*. A key may be welcome, however, in order to crack *Shaltay-Boltay*, aka Humpty Dumpty, whose name does not refer to his shape but approximates to “Chatterbox.”

These examples perhaps suffice to give an insight into one aspect of the art of the literary translator, and although all the names quoted are those of characters, it might be appropriate to finish with a plangent placename—Barrie’s Never-Never Land, which Russians know as *Gdetotam*, literally “Somewhere-There”.

Note: Renderings are taken from D. I. Yermolovich, *The English-Russian Who’s Who in Fact and Fiction*, Moscow, 1993. Russian masculine adjectival endings properly transliterated *-yy* (*-yyj*) or *-iy* (*-ij*) are here simplified to *-y*. An apostrophe conventionally represents the “soft sign”.

[Adrian Room is a noted onomastician.]



## SIC! SIC! SIC!

This trick, described on p. 28 of C.C. Benison’s *Death at Buckingham Palace*, has to be one of the best of the decade: the protagonist runs into the Royal Apartments “to find the Queen draped atop the supine figure of a man in tailcoat and trousers who was lying facedown on the rug.” [Doing a little supine firing perhaps. Submitted by Donald K. Henry, Mill Valley, California.]





## INTER ALIA

### *Have You Read Marx?*

Sid Brittin

Middlesex, England

Two academic nudists were sunbathing. One asked "Have you read Marx?" and the other replied "Yes, I think it's the wicker chairs." This is a pun which is obvious to the reader. It needs to be spoken aloud to a friend, loved one, or even a spouse to be fully appreciated.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a pun as "the humorous use of a word to suggest different meanings". Originally it derived from pound—"to pound words, beat them into new senses". An example of such pounding: A man told his psychiatrist that he had a recurring dream every night in which he appeared as a teepee, then as a wigwam. The diagnosis was "Obviously you are two tense."

The *Collins Dictionary* suggests that "pun" derives from the 17th century Italian word *puntiglio* meaning "point of detail, wordplay." It gives an example by Thomas Hood (1799-1845) from "Faithless Nelly Gray":

*Ben Battle was a soldier bold  
And used to war's alarms;  
But a cannon-ball took off his legs,  
So he laid down his arms.*

To be effective, most puns must be spoken, so diffusing the tyranny of the written word. Thus "Walking through a field, he stooped to pick a buttercup," makes easy reading but the punch line "funny place to find a buttock!" is better said.

Exceptions to the spoken pun rule those puns that appear on shop fronts to entice (or bemuse) customers. In the hairdressing trade, for example, fast disappearing is the plain, uninteresting, (except perhaps to Mrs. Fred) "Fred the Barber." We now find in Yellow Pages the following: *United Hairlines—The Clip Joint—Hair To-day, Gone Tomorrow—Fringe Benefits—Making Waves—Curl Up & Dye* and many more. When I

was in America I was impressed by some of the names which restaurants and delicatessens used to attract diners, such as *Lock, Stock & Bagel—Lettuce Entertain You—The Tower of Pizza*, and strangely but intriguingly—3.14159.

Obviously, these are only puns in a concrete context, unlike puns that require a story, or at least a setup. Unlike the spoken story, these puns derive their punniness (or deliver their punishment) by virtue of the structure to which they are attached.

There are other physical contexts for puns, besides shops and restaurants. My wife, when she is shopping, is armed with a piece of paper from a pad we bought from a music store in the States. It is headed *Chopin Liszt* and the store where it was purchased also had a notice on the door which advised "Gone to Lunch—Bach at 1:00 p.m.—Offenback at 2:00 p.m."

Punsters need a retentive, inventive mind to promote and spread their messages—everything from the news that Samson suffered from flat feet—at least he had problems with fallen arches. Remember, atheism is a non-prophet organisation but puns are just a slay on words, just as gossip is a sense of rumour. We must all heed the cry—"PRESERVE THE PUN!"

[*Sid Brittin took early retirement in 1991 after working for 36 years for Lloyds Bank (now Lloyds/TSB) where he became a Senior Manager. He writes regular features for the Thames Guardian, a quarterly magazine which covers topical and historical stories about England's greatest river.*]

ACROSS 1. WAR OF NERVES (anag.) 8. VANESSA (anag.)  
9. CONCEAL (substitute c for g) 10. COLONELS (hom.)  
11. IS + SUEB 13. IND(ONES)IAN 14. SKIMP 16.  
LAPSE 18. ALTERNATOR (anag.) 21. ICARUS (anag.)  
22. UN(B)EATEN 24. NULLITY (hid. rev.) 25.  
CRACKLES 26. WISENHEIMER (anag.) Down 1. W +  
ANGLED 2. R(ESON)ANT (nose rev.) 3.  
FLAWLESS 17 4. BEACH 5. VANISH (2 defs.) 6.  
SP(EL)UNK 7. ULTRAMARINES (anag.) 8. VACC +  
INATIONS 12. TABERNACLE (anag.) 15. INTERCOM  
(hid.) 17. SWALLOW (2 defs.) 19. TAIT(L)ER  
20. DUTIES (anag.) 23. MYMN (hom.)



## BIBLIOGRAPHIA.

*Japan Style Sheet: The SWET Guide for Writers, Editors and Translators* Tokyo, Japan Stone Bridge Press 80 pp. US\$11.05/UK £8.99

The first problem that anyone faces when writing on Japan is how to transliterate Japanese words. For lack of one concise reference book, inexperienced writers on Japan often borrow spellings from other publications, or they simply write Japanese words in English as they have heard them, not knowing which is the standard way—or even if a standard exists.

This haphazard way of transliterating Japanese words in English often causes problems in scholarly writings, because inconsistent spellings of Japanese words make cross-referencing difficult. The existing rules, such as they are, for editing Japanese words seem indefinite and contradictory.

Other problems that fact-checkers or even the experienced writer on Japan frequently encounter are the names and dates of historical eras. Traditionally, era names in Japan are changed when a new emperor ascends to the throne. To compound the confusion, at the enthronement of a new ruler, the year is recounted from one. A translator is forever having to search for a western date that corresponds to a Japanese year mentioned in the original draft.

To solve these problems and others like them, a person saddled with the responsibility of writing knowledgeably and confidently on Japan must turn to stacks of field-specific texts or reference books to find the answer to his or her question. If one is experienced, these are only minor set-backs and irritations, but not serious problems. If one is a non-specialist, searching through volumes of information for one simple answer is usually a formidable, time-consuming and nerve-racking task. When and if one ever finds the answer to a stylistic problem, it contradicts what rules one had generally followed to begin with.

Those days are gone, for the Society of Writers, Editors and Translators has put together an excellent, concise and comprehensive 'how-to-write-about-Japan' style manual. This well-

organized handbook will prove to be a valuable source of information to both the novice writer and the 'old Japan-hand.'

The *Japan Style Sheet* gives concrete rules for the essential elements that are important to any serious writing on Japan. For example, writers will find definitive information on the proper way to Romanize Japanese words, rules for hyphenation and how to handle plurals. The *Japan Style Sheet* also includes an abundance of helpful notes that will assist the inexperienced writer in making stylistic decisions.

Although this book targets the non-specialist, experienced translators or writers will most certainly enjoy having handy access to the conversion charts of units of measure and reference lists on the names of eras and a genealogical history of the emperors of Japan. I found the appendices of "Units of Measures" and "Imperial Reigns and Historical Eras" extremely useful because they saved me so much time and because I was always confident that my conversion was correct.

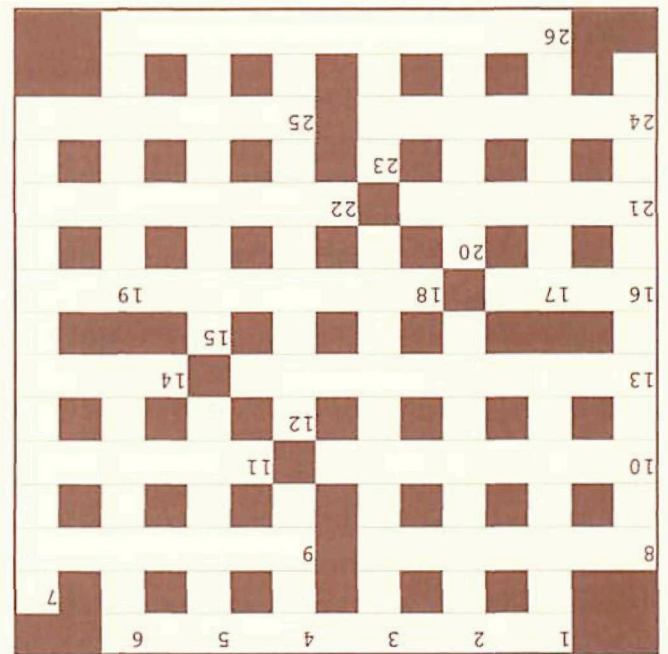
Editors working on publications about Japan will be able to make decisions on style with confidence and consistency. The *Japan Style Sheet* provides comprehensive information on the systems of Romanization, long vowels, the use of macrons, hyphens and apostrophes. This book also lays down the rules for the handling of Anglicized Japanese words, and personal and place names. In addition, fact-checkers can find an endless supply of information from other professionals in the writing and translating business through the Internet resources listed in the appendix. This book also provides further references where they can get answers to questions ranging from statistics to Japanese-English legal terms.

Though intended for non-specialist writers on Japan, professional writers and editors will also benefit by having this handy tool close by. This book is a must for all writers involved in publishing on Japan, whether they are new to the subject or experienced. I know that my copy will be front and center on my desk.

*Christopher Girsch*  
*Japanese-English Technical Translator*  
*Yamanashi, Japan*

- Across**
1. Revolutionary fervor wanes in psychological battle (3,2,6)
  8. Redgrave saves an awful . . . (7)
  9. . . cover set, after change of heart (7)
  10. Army officers' centers audited (8)
  11. Publisher is plaintiff (6)
  13. Southeast Asian aces captured by Southwest Asian (10)
  14. Pocket some unreported revenues from unfinished stint (4)
  16. Church feature uncovered sin (4)
  18. Realtor Nat Hurt is a dynamo (10)
  21. A cur is lost, the victim of waxwings? (6)
  22. Head of Bucknell sports not consumed with having a perfect record (8)
  24. Nothing is kept in money till underneath counter (7)
  25. Shriill laughter crackles without hint of refinement (7)
  26. Wee Irishmen beat up smart-aleck (11)
- Down**
1. Through scheming, accomplished bit of work, then went fishing (7)
  2. Reechoing overblown speech describing bouquet of wine from the south (8)
  3. Unruly packs fly without a hitch (10)
  4. Every tanning venue goes topless (4)
  5. Disappear like a boxy truck? (6)
  6. Possessed by spirit, two from elderhostel explore caves (7)
  7. Certain blues material runs wild (12)
  8. Travels on holiday, taking 100 popular measures to prevent disease (12)
  12. A celebrant prepared place of worship (10)
  15. Announcement system featured in teleprinter commercials (8)
  17. Fall for small bird (7)
  19. So absorbed by shred of gossip (7)
  20. Poorly suited for job responsibilities (6)
  23. A song of praise that Guy broadcast (4)

- Dr. P. A. Pomfrit
- Verbal Analogies**
1. Pirate : Jenny :: Surabaya : ? (6)
  2. Strong wind : Gale :: Lady's personal maid : ? (7)
  3. Wheel covering : tyre :: Cowshed : ? (4)
  4. Universal solvent : Alkalest :: Alleged material of philosopher's stone : ? (6)
  5. Change : Mutation :: Simultaneous oxidation and reduction : ? (11)
  6. Laissez-faire : King Log :: Active oppression : ? (4, 5)
  7. Gilbert : Elllice :: Kiribati : ? (6)
  8. Land of the Rising Sun : Japan :: Land of the Free : ? (8)
  9. Empty hand : karate :: Gentle skill : ? (2-5)
  10. Society of Friends : Quakers :: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society : ? (8,9)
  11. Boulder : Sisyphus :: Fiery wheel : ? (5)
  12. Gyroscope : Foucault :: Steam Hammer : ? (7)
  13. Babyface : Nelson :: Scarface : ? (6)
  14. David : Jesse :: Hannibal : ? (8)
  15. Liver : Prometheus :: Liver : ? (6)
  16. Milliners : Fraunch :: Masseurs : ? (6)
  17. Noon : Antemeridian :: Dawn : ? (9)



Compiled by Bob Stigger

**Anglo-American Crossword**  
No. 84