"IS THAT A PUN IN YOUR POCKET, OR...?"

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To publicize my two wordplay books, which were published in the early 1990s, I prepared a talk that I delivered in such exotic places as Paris and Jersey City. (Really!)

In that presentation, I advocated the view that puns, despite their reputation as a "low" form of humor, are in fact a sophisticated and cerebral art form. In skilled hands, they can be surprisingly rarefied and literate, calling upon one's knowledge, education, and reasoning skills. In order to "get" the double meaning of a pun that turns upon a literary or historical allusion, the reference must be understood.

The examples that follow are my own creations. At least, I *think* they're original, for one can never be absolutely certain that a Franciscan monk in 1585 didn't come up with that great quip about the Microsoft Windows interface. Some appeared in magazine competitions, letters to the editor in newspapers, and other places where finer puns are found.

If you're not 100 percent satisfied with this collection, just remember the words of Harry Winston: "They can't all be gems!"

Costumers for last year's *Planet of the Apes* remake: **Apparel of Monkeys**

Podiatrist malpractice: **Callous neglect**

Cleopatra's autobiography: *I, of the Needle*

V.I.P. seating at the Roman Coliseum: **Caesarean Section**

Innovation that made pop-up Kleenex possible: **Connective tissue**

Queen Victoria's riposte to a sycophantic court painter: **"We are not a muse"**

Japanese restaurant with 1920s decor: **Sashimi Like My Sister Kate**

Slogan of the cryogenic immortality movement: **"If this be freezin', make the most of it!"**

Camille relocated to Little Italy: **They made her a cougher; she couldn't refuse**

The complete book of natural pain relief: *Endorphins of the Storm*

Why the toaster always seems too small: **Procrustean bread**

Mr. Coffee returns from Soviet Russia: **"I have seen the future and it perks"**

Recipe for an O. Henry cocktail: **A Manhattan, add saccharin, serve with a twist**

Museum of Modern Art announces major Warhol exhibition: **Kitschy coup!**

Now things become even more erudite and challenging. The following specimens exemplify one of my favorite categories: the *bilingual* pun, which turns on a foreign word or phrase. As a matter of fairness, all expressions thus employed have achieved some degree of currency among English speakers.

Impenetrable abstract art movement: ***Idiots' avant***

Venerable French film journal champions American Western movies: ***Yippie yi-yo Cahiers***!

The Blob, 1958 horror movie, gets Gallic remake: ***Chacun a son goo***

Another revival of Cyrano de Bergerac: ***Plus ça change, plus c'est la même nose***

Gossipy novel of bohemian early 20th century art world: ***Roman à Klee***

Venue for logicians' convention: **A site for sorites**

Peppy cheer for rent-a-car sales force: **Ra ra Avis**

Remembrance of Halloweens past: ***Nostalgie de la "boo!"***

Snail mail: ***S-cargo***

Literary Onomastics

Robert Fleissner has written several short Word Ways articles on literary topics over the years: wordplay in Shakespearean titles (Aug 1990), the meaning of Scrooge's "Humbug!" (Nov 1990), marry-merry-Mary wordplay in "As You Like It" (Aug 1992), the origin of Nancy Drew (May 1994), and the linguistic similarity of Copperfield and Caufield (Nov 1994). One can deduce from these that Fleissner's onomastic interests are wide-ranging, and this supposition is verified by his latest book, *Names, Titles and Characters by Literary Writers: Shakespeare, 19th- and 20th-Century Authors* (Mellen Press, 2001). In it, he delves deeply into biographical, historical, literary and philosophical reasons why an author may have selected a given name. He writes with authority, illuminating the speculations of other scholars with his own meticulously-reasoned conclusions.

The 221-page hardcover (ISBN 0-7734-7524-9), sells for a pricey $89.95, probably because Mellen expects to place most books in the hands of the small community of scholars specializing in literary onomastics.