

KICKSHAWS

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Kickshaws is currently being assembled by a series of guest editors. All contributions should be sent to the editor in Morristown, New Jersey.

So Close To Perfection

Logology is rewarding, but also cruel. Let me show you what I mean.

Looking at a prefix list for HAEM- in Webster's Second, I noticed the word HAEMATOSPECTAROPHOTOMETERS (pluralization mine). With Jeff Grant's pair and trio isogram article in the August 1982 *Word Ways* in the back of my mind, I realized that this word looked hopeful. What could I lose? Cautiously, I crossed off the appearances of each letter: HH..AA..EE..EE..MM..TT..TT..RR..OO..OO..SS... and....one C. Aaaaargh!

A Literary Sampling

Logology is everywhere. Here are two examples I recently noted in literature.

The first is from the 1922 English mystery, The Red Redmaynes (reprinted by Dover, 1982):

'Acrostics are a habit of mind,' he said. 'You grow to think acrostically and be up to all the tricks of the trade. You soon get wise to the way that people think who make them; and then you'll find they all think alike and all try to hoodwink you along the same lines. If you tempt me on to acrostics, you'll soon wish you had not.'

Mark pointed to the puzzle.

'Try that,' he said. 'I can't make head or tail of it; yet I dare say you'll thrash it out if you've got the acrostic mind.'

Mr. Ganns cast his eye over the puzzle. It ran thus:

When to the North you go,
The folk shall greet you so.

1. Upright and Light and Source of Light.
2. And Source of Light, reversed, are plain.
3. A term of scorn comes into sight
And Source of Light, reversed again.

The American regarded the problem for a minute in silence,

then smiled and handed the paper back to Brendon.

'Quite neat in its little conventional way,' he said. 'It's on the regular English pattern. Our acrostics are a trifle smarter, but all run into one form. The great acrostic writer isn't born. If acrostics were as big a thing as chess, then we should have masters who would produce masterpieces.'

'But this one - d'you see it?'

'Milk for babes, Mark.'

I invite the reader to try and find the answer to this acrostic for himself. It can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue. Back to the story:

'There are two ways with acrostics,' continued Peter full of animation, 'the first is to make lights so difficult that they turn your hair grey till you've got them, the second - just traps perhaps three perfectly sound answers to the same light, but the second just a shade sounder than the first, and the third a shade sounder than either of the others.'

'Who makes acrostics like that?'

'Nobody. Life's too short; but if I devoted a year to a perfect acrostic, you bet your life it would take my fellow creatures a year to guess it. The same with cryptography, which we've both run up against, no doubt, in course of business. Cyphers are mostly crude; but I've often thought what a right down beauty it might be possible to make, given a little pains. The detective story writers make very good ones sometimes; but then the smart man, who wipes everybody's eyes, always gets 'em - by pulling down just the right book from the villain's library. My cypher won't depend on books.'

The second excerpt is from Paul F. Boller Jr.'s Presidential Campaigns (Oxford University Press, New York, 1984):

The Great Embargo was one of the main issues of the 1808 campaign ... There was some heavy-handed humor about it. 'The act ought to be called the "Dambargo",' cried one Federalist. 'Our President,' exclaimed another, 'delights in the measure because the name hides so well his secret wishes. Read it backwards, and you have the phrase "O-grab-me." Divide into syllables and read backward, and you have the Jeffersonian injunction, "Go bar 'em." Transpose the seven letters of the word, and you will have what the embargo will soon produce, "mob-rage."'

Southern Misinterpretations

Last year, when Gary Hart was campaigning in the Tennessee primary, he agreed to a local interview. One question that the interviewer posed to Senator Hart was, "Is it true you wuh once known as Hotpants?"

Believing the question was in reference to his reputation as a

ladies' man, the Senator grudgingly replied, "Sort of."

The poor Senator didn't realize that "Hotpants" was just the interviewer's way of saying "Hartpence"!

On the same note, my father told me of a Virginia woman who he thought was talking about her "paramour." It took him some time to realize she was innocently talking about her "power mower."

OED Curiosa

Under the entry *dodecasyllable*, the OED says that Joseph Worcester's *A Universal Critical Dictionary of the English Language* (1846) defines the word as "a word having twelve syllables". However, there are no citations in the OED having this meaning for *dodecasyllable*. Are such citations possible? I know of only two 19th-century words with twelve syllables, *antidisestablishmentarianism* and *floccinaucinihilipilification*.

David Shulman, nonpareil logologist, has pointed out a strange typographical error in the second volume of the OED Supplement. At the top of page 389, the catchword *ISTRAIN* should be *ISTRIAN*. Could this have been a hidden joke by the compositor for the word "eyestrain"?

Shihi-pihi

David Shulman also called my attention to the word *shihi-pihi* in Nathan Ausubel's *A Treasury of Jewish Humor* (Garden City, New York, 1951). In the glossary, it is defined as a colloquialism for "a mere nothing". It is also listed by Leo Rosten in one of his books on Yiddishisms, citing it as an acrostic for "Saturday today, Passover today" and explaining that it is used in Yiddish as an excuse for procrastination (if not on Saturday, then on Passover, i.e. never). Neither source gives the acrostic in full from the Hebrew, which is "Shabos haom, Pesach haom". The Hebrew letters are shin, heth, pe, heth, whence *shihi-pihi*.

Toward a New Onomastic World

There appears to be a new movement on the globe in which logologists should rejoice. I refer to the movement away from dry hum-drum names of countries to more interesting ones. A recent example is Upper Volta, which changed its name to the evocative Burkina Faso. What a wonderful name! (Burkina Faso's capital city has an equally pleasing name, Ouagadougou.)

Another example of onomastic charm can be found off the coast of India. In 1972, the country of Ceylon changed its name to Sri Lanka, meaning "beautiful island". It seems a fitting name for a country that contains Mullattivu, Anuradhapura, Kuchchaveli, and Akkaraipattu.

In Africa, aside from Burkina Faso, much name-changing has been going on, such as Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. However, African name-changes usually follow coups or other upheavals. Can't the

world find a more peaceful way to eliminate dull names?

Thoughts on Music

Although the world may be slowly comprehending the beauties of logology, today's musical industry surely isn't. I have found only two recent examples of wordplay in rock music:

- * An English rock singer is using the pseudonym of Limahl, a transposal of his surname, Hamill.
- * The now defunct group Genesis wrote a song called ABACAB. The name came from the melody of the song: A,B,A,C,A,B.

Can anyone add to this short list?

A Short Mnemonic

In my high school biology class, all ears perked up eagerly when we came to the topic of sexual reproduction. In it we learned the five stages of development: Zygote, Blastula, Gastrula, Embryo and Fetus. Such a short list hardly merited a mnemonic aid, but some felt it necessary and composed Zebra Butts Go Everywhere Fast. Though it served the purpose, I found it rather dull. Privately, I remembered the stages with Zbigniew Brzezinski Goosed Ella Fitzgerald.

Silent to Sounded

Rich Lederer sent the editor a list of eight silent letters that are pronounced when a suffix is added to the base word:

B bomb-bombard	I fruit-fruition
C muscle-muscular	N condemn-condemnation
E line-linear	P receipt-recipient
G resign-resignation	U circuit-circuitous

Can readers find additions? The example for P is a bit weak, but it will have to do until someone finds a replacement.

A Circle of Tears

Word Ways readers are familiar with word ladders as a means of getting around (better-batter-banter-banner...). Similar ladders can be constructed using synonyms as the steps, as demonstrated by Dmitri Borgmann in Beyond Language (Scribner's, 1967) who succeeded (Problem 39) in transforming BEAUTIFUL into UGLY (beautiful-gorgeous-grand-stately-lordly-proud-insolent-insulting-offensive-ugly) and BLACK into WHITE (black-dark-obscure-hidden-concealed-snug-comfortable-easy-simple-pure-white). Synonym ladders can be made logologically more interesting by insisting upon a homonymic or heteronymic change at each step as well. Here is a four-step ladder which actually forms a circle (homonymic changes indicated with a *, heteronymic ones with #): one who TEARS*# is a RIVER; a RIVER# is a FLOWER; one kind of FLOWER# is a ROSE; ROWS* are TIERS.