

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.

Country and Western Song Titles

Riding in my car one day, listening to the local Country and Western station, I did a double take. Did I really hear the following line?

"I may be gone from your heart,
But you can't get my lovin' off the sheets."

A minute later, the confirmation came, as the line was repeated, this time in harmony. While more catchy than most, this song has stiff competition from these other greats, all of which at one time or another have made the C&W charts:

I'm Gonna Have a Wino to Decorate Our Home
This Ain't Tennessee and He Ain't You
Let's Do Something Cheap and Superficial
Roloids, Doan's Pills, and Preparation H
You're the Reason God Made Oklahoma

More than in any other genre, Country and Western song writers (ab)use parentheses in their titles. Some sample chart favorites:

She Got the Goldmine (I Got the Shaft)
Life Sucks (And Then You Die)
Jesus on the Radio (Daddy on the Phone)
When You're Ugly Like This (You Just Naturally Got To Be Cool)
If I Say I Love You (Consider Me Drunk)

Local Boston Rock Groups

Rock and Roll also has its share of intriguing names, but rather than adorning songs, they are attached to the groups themselves. Perhaps the most exotic group names sprung into existence in the late 60s during psychedelia's heyday. While I mourn the passing of groups such as the Strawberry Alarm Clock, the 80s spawned a new set of evocatively named groups. Choosing merely from local Boston bands we find:

The Archbishop's Enema Fetish
The Big Zucchini Washboard Bandits
Class-I-f-yed

The Hopelessly Obscure
 d-strbd
 Jane's Parents
 Nihilistic Dogs
 Zodio Doze
 Les Miserables Brass Band

Movie Titles

Another facet of pop culture which provides pleasure for the eager nomophile is grade B movies. Who can forget such mediocre classics as:

Metango, Fungus of Terror
 Hard Rock Zombies ("They Returned From the Dead to Rock 'n Roll")
 I Dismember Mama
 Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things
 Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter
 Please Don't Eat the Babies

And the creme de la creme:

The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies

Children's Books

Even children's books have been affected by the pop trend toward eye-catching names. Where once we saw titles such as Little House on the Prairie and I Want to be a Dairy Farmer, the shelves of bookstores are now cluttered with titles such as:

The Snarkout Boys and the Avocado of Death
 The One in the Middle is the Green Kangaroo
 Freddie and the Baseball Team from Mars
 The Cat Ate My Gymsuit
 Norman Schnurman, Average Person
 The Hoboken Chicken Emergency
 Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day
 Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs

Trade Names

So far, we have concerned ourselves with names which have referents in the real world. In almost all cases, the title of a song refers to something in the song; most books have titles which can be understood by the time you reach the last page. There is another category of names, however, which by legal definition cannot describe their objects: trade names. Except for the use of the name of the company or the name of the applicant for registration, a trade name must be either "an invented word or words" or "a word or words having no direct reference to the character or quality of the goods and not being, according to its ordinary signification, a geographical name or a surname."

Given that trade names must be invented or irrelevant, it is

frequently impossible to guess their origins. Happily, Adrian Room has helped to eliminate this problem with his Dictionary of Trade Name Origins (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982). This illustrated dictionary gives the stories behind over 700 everyday trade names. Since the book is British, many of the names will be unknown to Americans, but enough of them are internationally famous to provide interesting reading.

Room explains that Contac, the decongestant capsule, derives from "continuous action", since the product's "time capsules" are effective over a number of hours.

Formica may seem to suggest some connection with ants or formic acid, but the word was in fact devised in 1913 by two young American scientists, Herb Fader and Dan O'Connor, who were instrumental in discovering a natural resin substitute for mica as an insulation material for electrical wiring. The two men founded the Formica Corporation in the same year.

The name Frisbee is said to be derived from that of the Frisbie Bakery, in Bridgeport, Connecticut, whose pie-tins could be thrown. The Frisbee was invented by a Los Angeles building inspector, one Fred Morrison, who had based his discs on the bakery's pie-tins, but had changed the spelling to avoid legal problems.

Ivory soap was created in 1879 when, by accident, a workman in Procter & Gamble's plant at Cincinnati let a machine introduce minute bubbles of air into a batch of soap - thus producing a soap that floated. The new soap, dead white in color, proved very popular, but remained without a name until the company's senior partner, Harley Procter, heard a sermon in church in which was quoted a line from Psalm 45: "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad."

The name Pepsi Cola was devised in 1898 by Caleb D. Bradham, a drugstore manager in New Bern, North Carolina. His new elixir was patterned after Coca-Cola and was intended to relieve dyspepsia - hence the name.

To close, here's a trade name that might have been, but which was beaten out by the much more prosaic Nylon: Duparooth, from Du Pont pulls a rabbit out of a hat.

Proverbs and Idiotisms

In 1893, Mark Twain introduced the first American edition of The New Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese and English, by Pedro Carolino, published by James R. Osgood and Company, Boston. In 1969, Dover issued an abridged republication of this wonderful book under the title English As She Is Spoke. This book, compiled by a man who clearly lacked even the rudiments of knowledge of our language, has justifiably become a classic. From its inspirational dedication

We expect then, who the little book (for the care what we wrote him, and for her typographical correction) that he may be worth

the acceptation of the studious persons, and especially of the Youth, at which we dedicate him particularly.

through such "Familiar Phrases" as

Exculpate me by your brother.

Dress your hairs.

It nurst to retouch its.

And ending with "Idiotisms and Proverbs"

To eat of the cow mad.

Nothing some money, nothing of Swiss.

To craunch the marmoset.

this book presents a world of English unsurpassed in richness.

English As She Is Spoke has been famous since its original debut before a startled world. Beside it on my bookshelf sits a similarly fascinating book, which so far has escaped notoriety: A Collection of Proverbs in Tamil With Their Translation in English by P. Percival, published by the American Mission Press in Jaffna, 1843. Percival unfortunately has an excellent command of English; nevertheless, enough is lost in the translation that the book provides many epiphanies. Some examples are:

Even water will afford three opportunities for escape.

The devil dances with a staff of the castor oil tree.

As water to the beetle leaf, and tumeric to the harlot.

A wrung out poison cloth.

Is not a span of rope to be had? It were preferable to the relationship of those who have married two sisters.

It is said that the confectionary of Nalli was good.

Both of the above books can be returned to again and again, giving pleasure throughout a lifetime. For, as the Tamilians have it, "time passes away but sayings remain."

Looking for Welsh Whales

It started quite innocently: in a letter packed with British travel hints, the editor asked "On your bookstore peregrinations, could you inquire for .. Lancelot Hogben's Whales for the Welsh: A Tale of War and Peace With Notes for Those Who Teach or Preach (London: Rap & Carroll, 1967), which is out of print? I tried without success in 1983, but you will be hitting different bookstores, or at least the same ones at different times."

I welcomed the challenge; quests like these help give a form to vacations, and make them more fun for me. (I had already agreed to two others, an obscure Ringo Starr album and six British travel Scrabble sets.) On a daytrip to Cambridge, I visited five or six bookstores and one postcard store. At one of the bookstores, an antiquarian one, I asked the owner if he had Whales for the Welsh. He asked me what category the book was in. I had my first forebodings of doom. "Category?" I heard myself mumbling, "Uh..." I had the sickening realization that I had no idea what the book was about. I knew there was something special about

it, but had not the foggiest recollection as to what it was. "Perhaps it's about Wales," the owner suggested, trying to be helpful. I thought about the title and the editor's tastes. "I doubt it." "Preaching, perhaps? The clergy?" I thought about the editor some more. "That seems unlikely." "Do you know anything about the book?" "Well, it has something strange about it having to do with words." I didn't get the book.

I met with a similar lack of success at the other used bookstores. One of them, after hearing that I was looking for a book but had no idea what it was about, suggested that I check to see if it was in print. He directed me to the local new bookstore who could look it up for me. I was eager to see a computerized book search in England, so I went. Alas, as I was to learn well, England's bookstores are aggressively not computerized; modern technology is characterized by the microfiche reader. Still, the saleslady was very pleasant. Although unable to find Whales for the Welsh in the fiche files, she did discover Mathematics for the Millions by the same author. I briefly asked myself if the world could possibly support two Lancelot Hogbens. The mind boggled. No, it must be the same man. I knew that the editor was a statistician; could Whales be a math book? Possibly, but I was sure that he had intimated that this was a logological quest. In any case, I resolved to check the math sections of future bookstores.

Future bookstores included highly-recommended ones like Lilies, the book mansion near Aylesbury that the editor had visited the year before; Blackwell's in Oxford, famous for having the largest single room of books in any bookstore; and the legendary Foyle's in London. Knowing the reputation of the latter as the largest bookstore in the world, I warmed up with a few used bookstores in the Cambridge Circus area and then broke for lunch to restore my energy. But I wasn't prepared for Foyle's. For the first time in my life, I felt like crying in a bookstore. Foyle's consists of at least four adjacent buildings mashed together. There are five floors and no order. Books are everywhere. They're jammed into corners, piled on top of bookcases, stacked on tables. On the ground floor, one small part of Foyle's is devoted to carrying every title in the Penguin line. Just when you think you've finished a room, you walk behind a bookcase and find the door to another. Wordsworth, the bookstore in Boston where I work, has a humor section, but Foyle's has a humor room. Foyle's reserves sections for topics like hydrology or welding - imagine, four bookcases on welding! The computer science room was so large that I refused to enter it. After an hour and a half of aimless panic, I settled down to do a strictly limited set of topics thoroughly: reference, rock music, and humor. I spent an enjoyable four and one-half hours going through these rooms, and left the store at closing time, exhausted and about two hundred dollars poorer. For all I knew, Foyle's had Whales, but I wasn't going to find it in my lifetime.

After dinner nearby, I headed for the tube stop. I was feeling

refreshed by then, so when I passed a half-price bookstore a block later, I couldn't resist. A sign said "Bargain basement: All books 50p or less." Why not? The basement consisted of a large long room, dimly lit by a naked overhead bulb. It was now 8:30, and no one else had ventured down there. The walls were covered with bookcases, and the center of the room had tables piled high with books. As I had suspected, most of it was garbage, and the dinginess of the light was depressing. I ended my tour at the humor section, and was on the point of leaving.

There, amid the flotsam, lay ten copies of Whales for the Welsh. Alone in the basement, I stood staring; then I picked up all ten copies and waltzed around the room, mumbling incoherently to myself. After a minute of this, I put nine of the copies down and opened the other. I quickly skimmed the back of the dust jacket. "Children's book for adults .. newspaper's readers .." And there it was, in italics, no less: "And all in words of one syllable!" So that was what the editor had wanted! Mindful of my load of books from Foyle's, I bought only four copies at 25p apiece. I knew the editor would be delighted, but mine was the greater pleasure - the joy of the chase, and of success when least expected. Viva serendipity!

My Word!

In 1956, the radio program "My Word!" was devised by Tony Shryane and Edward J. Mason. For years afterwards, British men and women were subjected to pseudo-literary quizzes in which the contestants, instead of treating the subject with the usual reverence, were encouraged to indulge in what Robert Frost called "perhapsing around".

For one of the questions on the first show, the two male contestants, Frank Muir and Denis Norden, were each given a quotation and asked to explain when, where, and by whom the phrase was first used. Both men's answers were so amusing that this round became a permanent part of the show and, as the years rolled by, the short explanations grew longer, wilder, and more wide-ranging, while the puns at the end - apart from giving pleasure to those listeners who guessed them before they were reached - became less important and more desperate.

The quotations, accompanying explanations and final outrageous puns were collected and issued in four separate books. Then, in 1983, Methuen incorporated all four into a volume called The Complete and Utter "My Word!" Collection. This book is quite possibly the funniest that I have ever read; put this Kickshaws down for a minute, call and have your local bookstore order the collection from England, and rest assured that in several weeks you will be laughing so hard that breathing will be difficult.

In the meantime, here is a brief quiz based on several of the stories' last lines. Your task is to determine the original common quotation from which Muir or Norden has wrenched these transliterations. To make it easier, none of these involve British pronuncia-

tions. For extra credit, you are invited to recreate the associated explanation.

The massive men need wives of quiet respiration.
 Burghers count beach-users.
 One man's meat is a doberman's paws on.
 I'm cleaning off a white grease mess.
 This creation is Tibet, or part of Ella.
 The butter-patter feller is D's Grecian.
 Arrows .. Sees Harrow .. Ciceros.
 This Tarzan strips for heifer.
 There's Manet. Asleep. 'Twixt the carp and the Leap.
 Alonzo, fondle our pear tree.

Unusual Trigraphs

Several times in my life, I have been asked "What common English word contains the three letters SPB?" The most recent time this occurred, it set me thinking about unusual trigraphs. With the aid of a computer program written by Bernie Cosell, I was able to discover all of the trigraphs which appeared exactly once in the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary. From this list, I have chosen my favorites and present them to you as a quiz. For each trigraph, try to determine a common, unhyphenated, uncapitalized, solid English word in which the trigraph appears:

AFY	BPO	EIP	HSH	OAB	RTG	UEM
AOT	CEG	GEV	IjI	PEV	SPB	UHA

Grammatical Purism

While few people would feel that driving a car gives them the expertise required to criticize its engine design, the claim is often made that speaking English gives one an intuitive understanding of grammar. Pop grammarians, such as Edwin Newman, William Safire, Philip Howard, and John Simon, all of whom lack even a small degree of formal linguistic training, feel free to utter weekly pronouncements on present-day language abuse. Perhaps this is not too surprising, since most English teachers share this lack of knowledge.

Dennis E. Baron, in his book Grammar and Good Taste - Reforming the American Language (Yale University Press, 1982), points out that language reform in America is nothing new. He traces the development and attitudes of grammar experts, books, educators, and special movements in the United States since the 18th century, especially movements for a Federal English, spelling reform, and the establishment of an American Academy to regulate our language.

From a historical perspective, a look at the work of contemporary critics reveals that little has changed in the area of language commentary. Perhaps the book's most useful contribution is the giving of hundreds of examples demonstrating that one generation's barbarisms are the next generation's Standard English. To demonstrate this, I have constructed several sentences replete with grammatical errors decried in the nineteenth century. Before I discuss

their "flaws", you might try to discover for yourself what grammar books 100 years ago might have found fault with. Herewith, the sentences:

Every once in a while, one reads a lengthy editorial in a journal such as Time Magazine in which the author claims that kidnappers should be executed.

Hopefully, the author is mistaken that leniency in this regard will jeopardize the safety of children.

A scientist has been laboring over the preface to his manual on laboratory technique.

Well, what's wrong? I presume that many of you jumped on poor "hopefully", although this usage is unambiguous, extremely common, and uniquely satisfies a need. It is worth noting, also, that the German cognate for "hopefully" is used, grammatically, in exactly the same sentence position, and that "thankfully", while grammatically equivalent in English, may appear without disparagement at the beginning of a sentence.

The other complaints about the above sentences are from the same source as the "hopefully" criticisms - canonized individual prejudice. The errors:

Incorrect

Correct

every once in a while
lengthy
editorial
journal

once in every little while
long
leader
periodical
(a journal comes out daily)

executed
the author is mistaken
leniency
jeopardize
scientist
laboring
preface
manual

put to death
the author mistakes
lenity
jeopard
scientist
labouring
foreword
handbook

For the "arguments" behind these corrections, consult the book, but suffice it to say that each of the rules appeared in at least one published book in the 19th century.

For a lagnaippe, here are several other grammatical errors with which to form your own sentences:

Incorrect

Correct

ice cream
photographer
telegram
a new pair of shoes
Is Mr. Smith in?
dad
The book is being written
piano legs

iced cream
photgraphist
telegrapheme
a pair of new shoes
Is Mr. Smith within?
papa
The book is writing
piano limbs

and finally, of course:

the English language

the American language

Fun Facts to Know and Tell

Count Dracula's first name is Voivode.

"Flatware" is defined as both "dishes that are flat or shallow" and "table knives, forks, spoons, and other eating or serving utensils". What is the term for articles that have volume and significant depth, such as cups, bowls, and pots? Why, "hollow ware".

Webster's Second has the following etymology for "nifty": [said by Bret Harte to be from magnificat.].

Webster's Third defines "ultramontane" as: a. one who lives north of the Alps, and b. one who lives south of the Alps.

Webster's Ninth Collegiate defines "unnihexium" as "the chemical element of atomic number 106 - see ELEMENT table". Unfortunately, E entries get printed before U entries, and unnihexium was discovered after the E entries were printed, so the element table only goes up to "unnipentium".

Boston's contribution to long tautonyms: the Union Square Union Square bus which runs from Union Square in Somerville to Union Square in Allston. An Oak Square Oak Square bus also exists.

"Capnopea" is defined as "a mild and pleasant sexual excitation experienced by some men upon breathing the air of a room scented with the cigarette smoke of a beautiful woman".

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Peg Primak for her patient aid in transcribing this Kickshaws column.

THE GAMES MAGAZINE BIG BOOK OF GAMES

Issued by Workman Publishing in 1984 for \$9.95, this 192-page paperback contains the best of the games and puzzles appearing in Games Magazine since its inception. Word Ways readers will probably find Chapter 3, Wordplay and Other Verbal Acrostics, of greatest interest. A sampling: Equation Analysis Test (12 = S. of the Z.), Picture Palindromes (race car, Navy van, trapeze part), Odd Couples (book and Groucho ----), Expand Your Vocabulary (--OPENS--, --MEOW--), Rhyme and Reason ("Letter rate can sever" translates to "Better late than never"), Wacky Wordies, Cryptoquips, and Rebus Cartoons. Chapter 6 will also be of interest, containing many crossword puzzle variations.