

## I CUE THE ALPHABET

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- A is for apatite, often blue-green;  
B for bizarre, where no goods can be seen.  
C is for candied, which hardly is frank;  
D for dessert, but don't run from your rank.

These four lines, and 'E is for earwig, keep it out of your hair; / F -- but I leave you to take it from there --' appear on the jacket of my book Word Games for Play and Power. Pondering the copy Eric Partridge gave me of his Comic Alphabets, I thought 'Frankly, however, that doesn't seem fair' and completed the verses, with annotations.

- E is for earwig: if you're balding, it's vain.  
F, the ruined folly exposed to the heir  
I fain would admire, but then I would feign.  
G is a horse, which may be the French chair --  
On one, Gilbert says, a General sat;

Chair is French for 'flesh' (in France, many butchers sell only horse flesh. In Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Pirates of Penzance", the Major-General declares: 'In short, when I've a smattering of elemental strategy / You'll say a better Major-General has never sat a gee'.)

- H: When I'm hoarse, hear me sing the G flat!  
I say Ay, ay sir. Don't give her the eye,  
J is the walker the jane passes by  
(His rhyme listing gives snap Lord Byron the lie.)

J. Walker wrote a Rhyming Dictionary which Lord Byron, for all his vaunted spontaneous composition, owned and used.

- K-nine, consider: a bite, by my tooth!  
Sir Kay in the kitchen: no knave, in good sooth.

Tennyson tells of Sir Kay's kitchen work at King Arthur's court.

- L's not for Christmas, French play of our youth.

Noel, of course, is the French word for 'Christmas'.

- M for the man whose mien shows he is mean;

N for the neigh bore, observed, not obscene  
(Bisect a word, fore thoughts teeter between).

Bisect a word: fore, because they come first; then bisect, for the thoughts come, therefore you bisect. And four thoughts: (1) he's a bore; (2) he's near (nigh), a neighbor, the basic word; (3) he's not only disagreeable, he's disagreeing (nay, nay); (4) he talks like a horse.

O for an ode! It should promptly be paid;  
P for the poet whose goateed but stayed.

Goateed, but also goat teed (tugged) but stayed (staid).

Q for the stalls where they're murdering Shakespeare.  
R you sure the rumgudgeon's a roue that takes beer?  
S is the so and sow bringing the litter.

So and sow: Chinese poetry has many "pivot-words" that have one meaning with what precedes them, another with what follows.

T is the cosy young cute baby-sitter;  
Tee on the golf course perhaps would be fitter;  
Teetotalers might declare any drink bitter.

Tea cosy, as well as cozy young cute baby-sitter.

U, do you know the euphemious ewe  
V- hement still in the vernal dawn dew?  
Without much ado her soft pelt is due, too.  
W for a guinea, said Jonathan Swift;  
X- ray his Greek gamble and you'll get the drift:  
He once won by punning the alphabet's shift.

Jonathan Swift once wagered that he could play on the word guinea with every letter of the Greek alphabet -- and won!

Y is the reason you ought to grow wise;  
Z 'neath your gaze hits the peak of all skies ...  
Pardon, it seems not enough has been said:  
Alpha-Omega, soup to nuts, A to Zed.  
Zedekiah tried treason, and soon he was dead.  
Ampersand is as endless as tropic sea shore;  
Flag me down, I am happy to waver no more.

The school of General Semantics maintains that ampersand (&) should be understood at the end of every sentence (its journal is named ETC).