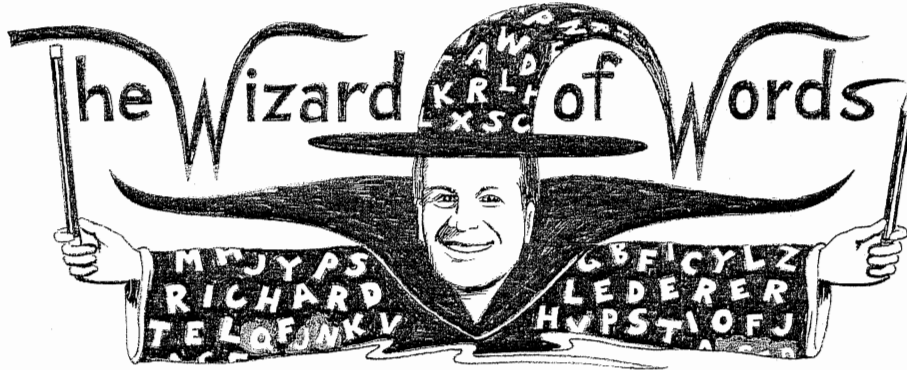


## KICKSHAWS

### A UNI-VERSE OF LANGUAGE, PART 2

In the opening Kickshaw, Rich Lederer continues displaying a selection of his wordplay poems accompanied by comments on language. It begins with a drawing I made of Rich for a wonderful but sadly short lived magazine for younger people called “Time Machine.” Rich wrote a column for it titled “The Wizard of Words,” and I illustrated it. Allow me to introduce the Venerable Wizard Himself. Rich, it’s time for you to come out from behind the curtain of wordplay. You have the stage of words and the podium of poetry.



“Our spelling “system” can be just as bedeviling as our grammar. Linguists Otto Jespersen and Mario Pei have branded English orthography as a “pseudohistorical and antieducational abomination” that is “the world’s most awesome mess.” The chasm that stretches between how words are spelled and how they actually sound is best illustrated by the letter combination *-ough*:

#### Tough Stough

1

The wind was rough.  
The cold was grougk.  
She kept her hands  
Inside her mough.

2

And even though  
She loved the snough,  
The weather was  
A heartless fough.

3

It chilled her through.  
Her lips turned blough.  
The frigid flakes  
They blough and flough.

4

They shook each bough,  
And she saw hough  
The animals froze --  
Each cough and sough.

5

While at their trough,  
Just drinking brough,  
Were frozen fast  
Each slough and mough.

6

It made her hiccough --  
Worse than a sticcough.  
She drank hot cocoa  
For an instant piccough.

Some words just can't buy a vowel – not an *a* or an *e* or an *i* or an *o* or a *u*. With tongue firmly planted in cheek, some call these words that have had a vowel removal “abstemious” words, a facetious label since *abstemious* (along with *facetious*) contains every major vowel, and in sequence.

In the poem you're about to read you'll find a heavenly three-syllable word that eschews the major vowels -- *syzygy*, which means “the nearly straight-line configuration of three celestial bodies.”

### A Sonnet to Abstemious Words

Once did a *shy* but *spry* gypsy  
Spy a *pygmy*, who made him feel *tipsy*.  
Her form, like a *lynx*, *sylph*, and *nymph*,  
Made all his dry glands feel quite *lymph*.

He felt so in *synch* with her *rhythm*  
That he hoped she'd *fly* to the *sky* with him.  
No *sly myth* would he try on her;  
Preferring to *ply* her with *myrrh*.

When apart, he would *fry* and then *cry*,  
Grow a *cyst* and a *sty* in his eye.  
That's why they would *tryst* at the *gym*,  
By a *crypt*, where he'd write a *wry hymn*.

Her he loved to the *nth* degree,  
Like a heavenly *syzygy*.

A capitonym is a word that changes meaning and pronunciation when it is capitalized, as illustrated in the next two quatrains:

### Job's Job

In *August*, an *august* patriarch,  
Was *reading* an ad in *Reading*, Mass.  
Long-suffering *Job* secured a *job*  
To *polish* piles of *Polish* brass.

### Herb's Herbs

An *herb* store owner, name of *Herb*,  
Moved to *rainier* Mt. *Rainier*,  
It would have been so *nice* in *Nice*,  
And even *tangier* in *Tangier*.

As you read the following poem, note the unusual pattern of the end-rhymes:

Listen, readers, toward me bow.  
Be friendly; do not draw the bow.  
Please don't try to start a row.  
Sit peacefully, all in a row.  
Don't squeal like a big, fat sow.  
Do not the seeds of discord sow.

Even though each couplet ends with the same word, the rhymes occur on every other line. That's because, although etymologically unrelated, *bow*, *row*, and *sow* each possess two different pronunciations and spellings. These rare and accidental pairings are called heteronyms:

### A Hymn to Heteronyms

Please come through the *entrance* of this little poem.  
I guarantee it will *entrance* you.  
The *content* will certainly make you *content* ,  
And the knowledge gained sure will enhance you.

A boy *moped* around when his parents refused  
For him a new *moped* to buy.  
The *incense* he burned did *incense* him to go  
On a *tear* with a *tear* in his eye.

He *ragged* on his parents, felt they ran him *ragged*.  
His just *deserts* they never gave.  
He imagined them out on some *deserts* so dry,  
Where for water they'd search and they'd rave.

At *present* he just won't *present* or *converse*  
On the *converse* of each high-flown theory  
Of circles and *axes* in math class; he has  
Many *axes* to grind, isn't cheery.

He tried to play baseball, but often *skied* out,  
So when the snows came, he just *skied*.  
He then broke a leg *putting* on his ski boots,  
And his *putting* in golf was in need.

He once held the *lead* in a cross-country race,  
'Til his legs started feeling like *lead*  
And when the pain *peaked*, he looked kind of *peaked*.  
His *liver* felt *liver*, then dead.

A *number* of times he felt *number*, all *wound*  
Up, like one with a *wound*, not a wand.  
His new TV *console* just couldn't *console*  
Or *slough* off a *slough* of despond.

The *rugged* boy paced 'round his shaggy *rugged* room,  
And he spent the whole *evening* till dawn  
*Evening* out the crosswinds of his hate.  
Now my anecdote *winds* on and on.

He thought: “*Does* the prancing of so many *does*  
Explain why down *dove* the white *dove*,  
Or why *pussy* cat has a *pussy* old sore  
And *bass* sing in *bass* notes of their love?”

*Do* they always sing, “*Do re mi*” and stare, *agape*,  
At eros, *agape*, each *minute*?  
Their love's not *minute*; there's an *overage* of love.  
Even *overage* fish are quite in it.

These bass fish have never been in short *supply*  
As they *supply* spawn without waiting.  
With their love fluids bubbling, abundant, *secretive*,  
There's many a *secretive* mating.

## A NEEDED NEW WORD?

*Word Ways*' regular wordplay contributor Don Hauptman reports:

Recently, I bought an iPhone. Friends teased me, deeming it an extravagance, especially because I work at home and rarely use my cell phone.

But the device is so technologically advanced and fascinating that the enjoyment factor alone justified the price. I wondered if this phenomenon could be quantified. I concluded that my purchase had quickly paid off in *funits*—that is, units of fun.

Like *brunch*, this is a blend or “portmanteau word.” I was certain that someone must already have thought of it. But an online search failed to turn up a single match for *funit* in this sense. I did, however, find numerous links for *funit* as an ancient computer programming term—an abbreviation for Fortran Unit Testing.

My neologism implies something important: a concrete measure of happiness. The problem is how to do the calculations, but I will leave that challenge to the experimental psychologists. One can imagine a scale of 1 to 100, with ice cream at, say, 75, and sex at 98.

The word might one day prove useful in everyday conversation: “If we see a movie tonight, we’d get only 46 funits, so maybe we should. . . .”

Finally, we must consider the matter of pronunciation. *Funit* could plausibly rhyme either with *unit* or *fun*. As the coiner, I shall exercise my prerogative and decree that the latter is the proper way to pronounce this potentially valuable new word. Now get out there and earn the right to those funits!

## **FREEEE FALL**

Jeff Grant comments on the previous issue: “I am about halfway through 'Word Ways' so far. It is great having stuff by Ross, and Dave Silverman - a blast from the past. Dave died just a few months after my first WW contribution in August 1977.

“In the latest Colloquy Jerry may have been a little hasty in discouraging Timo Jokitalo's use of FREEEE for someone just released from prison. Major dictionaries like the OED include words like FRILLLESS and BOSSSHIP without hyphens, and the OED also has SEEER (umlaut on third E) as 'one who sees' (as distinct from a fortune-telling 'seer'). The following citation appears on the Internet: 'Why should the seeing have to come from the **seer** rather than from the **seeee**?' [www.wiw.org, Re: David Brin short story] By analogy, it should be possible to have a **freer** and a **freeee** (one who is freed).

“On the subject of misheard song lyrics, the Billy Ocean hit 'When The Going Gets Tough, The Tough Get Going' includes the refrain 'Going gets tough' which sounds very much like 'Go an' get stuffed'. I heard it in a supermarket once and did a double take.” [My biggest supermarket double take came when I saw one of the local Hy-Vee Stores selling bags of sliced-up fish in a plastic bag with the handwritten label “cod pieces” on it.—DM]

## **SCRABBLE TALES, SCRABBLE TILES**

Three volunteer workers were playing Scrabble at Uptown Bill's, the coffee house where I work. One of them, an attractive, well-built woman age 19, had to leave, and she asked me to take her place in the game. She got up and went to get her coat from a nearby chair. I looked at her Scrabble tiles and said, "Wow, you've really got a nice rack." In the middle of the word “rack,” I caught the double meaning. In fact, everyone within hearing distance caught that one, and a hearty laugh echoed through town. In case you're not familiar with the slang, a “rack” is a woman's breasts.

And another piece of humor related to that fine, sometimes bawdy, alphabetic game: I found a Scrabble tile lying on the floor at Uptown Bill's. I picked it up. I said to the woman sitting at the nearby table, "Dorothy, do you want to see what my ex looks like?" She looked puzzled, and then said, "Sure." So I tossed the tile on the table. Yes, it was my X.

I have a sport coat covered with almost 1,000 Scrabble tiles. When I give poetry readings, I wear the coat and my alphabet hat. A couple of years ago I gave a reading at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis as “Dr. Alphabet.” The audience consisted mainly of children up to 10 years old and their parents. During the reading, my gestures caused a tile to fall off the jacket and land on the floor next to the podium. After the reading, a little girl, probably 5 years old, came up on stage and said in a barely audible voice, “Dr. Alphabet, this letter fell off your coat.” I said, “You can keep it as a souvenir if you’d like.” She was delighted, and seven or eight other young kids were watching enviously. I said to them, “If you kids want a letter, come on over and pull one off my coat, whichever letter you want.” They jumped to the stage, politely formed a line, and plucked their favorite letters off.

If you have a Scrabble Tile Tale, please send it to Kickshaws. Jeff Grant and I and most other Word Ways readers would like to hear them.

### **ROSS’S SPOONERGRAM**

Ross Eckler discovered “a spoonergram almost as good as Shiloh Pitt [to Piloh Shitt]: Osama bin Laden to Obama sin-laden.”

### **STOCK MARKET CONDITIONS**

“With the current state of the economy I have been spending more time reading the financial section of the newspaper, paying special attention to the stock market,” Bill Brandt notes. “In doing so I have observed some interesting stock activity.”

- + Hosiery stocks have experienced a long run
- + Girdle stocks are riding high
- + Furnace stocks are heating up
- + Pants stocks have split
- + Watch stocks are winding down
- + Balloon stocks are rising
- + Locomotive stocks are loosing their steam
- + Automobile stocks are accelerating
- + Airline stocks are no longer flying high
- + Orange juice stocks are being squeezed
- + Banana stocks are losing appeal
- + Baseball bat stocks are a big hit
- + The demand for reducing salon stocks is thinning
- + Milking machine stocks are an utter disaster
- + Fishhook stocks have not really caught on
- + Many people got stuck with the safety pin stocks
- + Telescope stocks are looking up
- + Elevator stocks have been moving up and down
- + Waste management stocks are down in the dumps
- + Rubber band stocks are stretched thin

- + Tire stocks are flat
- + Kettle drum stocks are booming
- + Flower grower stocks are looking rosy
- + Rubber ball stocks have bounced back
- + Computer stocks appears to be crashing
- + Raison, date, and nut stocks are mixed
- + Exercise machine stocks have gotten stronger
- + The days for the calendar stocks are numbered
- + Nothing is stirring with the soup stocks
- + Photograph stocks are moving in a positive direction

## **WORD ORDER**

“Did you know that the phrase ‘word order’ has a number of hidden secrets?” Susan Thorpe asks. “Firstly, it is a ladder phrase: WOR DOR DER (see *Ladder Words* WW2002279) Also: the 2 words are straddled by a choice of Miami sequences: WORD ORDER WORD ORDER Also: the 2 words are straddled by a tautonymic sequence: WORD ORDER Also: the letters on either side of the tautonymic sequence (W and ER respectively) both equate to 23 when they are designated their numerical positions in the alphabet. It follows that the numerical value of each word = 60. Thus WORD ORDER is a numerical tautonym.

## **INTERLOCKING LADDERS**

“These phrases/sentences are made of 2 or more short word ladders which interlock,” Susan writes. “The changed letters are underlined.

*2 interlocking ladders*

In the ifrst example, the 2 ladders are, respectively, CUTE CUTS CATS and SHE THE TOE

CUTE, SHE CUTS THE CAT’S TOE (nail, I hope)

THE CAT’S TOE CUTS ZOE (the cat had its revenge!)

SHE CUTS THE NUTS

SO SAD, JO HAD NO DAD

GAD, I’M SAD IF DAD IS MAD IN PAD (prison cell)

*3 interlocking ladders*

SHE TOO LENT THE TOY TENT

SHE NOW SENT THE LOW RENT

*4 interlocking ladders*

BILLY’S DATE HEARS BELL, MILLY’S LATE - FEARS HELL!

## **A HIDDEN WORD LADDER**

To top everything off, Susan constructed a phrase that contains a 7 step ladder:

FUNNY FINAL FAN FARE FOR FIRE-FIGHTERS

## **WHEN WORDS DON'T FAIL US**

Frank Ruben suggests a change to a pair of words in Ray Love's "When Word's Fail Us" in the last Kickshaws. In it, Ray said, "There is pepper spray but no salt spray." Frank points out that "anyone who has ever stood in the bow of a boat, at the end of a pier, or atop a seawall during rough weather has felt salt spray. The line could be changed to 'There are peppercorns but no saltcorns' or perhaps 'There are peppermills but no saltmills.'" Readers would be amazed at Frank's large deletion pyramid. It's on the his website, The Contest Center, along with a lot of other wordplay at <http://www.contestcen.com/glitter.htm>. A must-see for word lovers.

## **TWO RECENT OFF-THE-CUFF PUNS BY MORRY MARKOWITZ**

1. A fellow named Nando owns a restaurant on the same block in NYC where I usually stay when I visit the city. He came here from Iran probably about 20+ years ago, but when asked he refers to himself as "Persian," possibly being mindful of the reflexive distaste for anything Iranian these days (and counting on most Americans' ignorance of the connection). Having thought of the pun-chline first, I "reverse engineered" a conversation with him that would set it up. Told him I hadn't seen him around for some time and was getting worried about him. That it was a good thing he'd finally showed up that day when I happened to see him on the sidewalk because I'd been on the verge of reporting him to the Missing Persians Bureau.

2. The super of the bldg I stay at when visiting NYC was repainting the metal garbage bins outside the front of the bldg. He had a cigarette dangling from his lips as he wielded his paintbrush. I told him he was fortunate that he wasn't doing the job somewhere out west while smoking that way, because he could be arrested for it. He asked why and I told him it's illegal to smoke while painting in that region of the country because it risks starting a brush fire.

## **BAIT AND REBATE**

Morry gives this commentary on the tax rebate. Note that some people, such as the very poor, did not get a rebate.

The federal government is sending each and every one of us a \$600 rebate.

If we spend that money at Wal-Mart, the money will go to China.

If we spend it on gasoline it will go to the Arabs.

If we purchase a computer it will go to India.

If we purchase fruit and vegetables it will go to Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala.

If we purchase a good car it will go to Japan.

If we purchase useless crap it will go to Taiwan.

And none of it will help the American economy. The only way to keep that money here at home is to buy prostitutes, weed, beer, and tattoos, since these are the only products still produced in the USA.

Thank you for your help & please support the US.



## A CINEMATIC COINCIDENCE

Morty found a nice pair of anagrams that are related in other ways: “Don't think I ever mentioned this to you -- nothing stupendous, but moderately interesting:

The letters of the word **American** can be rearranged to spell Cinerama.  
The letters of the word **Mexican** can be rearranged to spell Cinemax.

## MORRIE'S FRIEND DON HAUPTMAN PROVIDES THE FOLLOWING POSTSCRIPT....

In 1977, famed composer/conductor André Previn decided, for some reason, to host a TV talk show. The format might best be described as cerebral conversation in the Charlie Rose mode. A few Internet links suggest that I was watching a rebroadcast of a BBC program.

The show evidently didn't last long, and the only guest I remember Previn interviewing was Stephen Sondheim, the equally distinguished musical theater composer and lyricist. At one point, Sondheim mentioned that when he first saw the word *Cinerama*, he realized that it can be anagrammed to *American*.

Previn's jaw seemed to drop. After a beat, he said (I'm quoting from memory): “You know, if my life depended on it, I would never have been able to figure that out!”

Sondheim's brilliant lyrics are extraordinarily clever and intricate, so it's not surprising that he's a fan of language games and wordplay. Indeed, he was once a collector of antique board games and he constructed word puzzles, such as Double-Crostics, for publication. Yet Previn, intelligent and accomplished and creative, was totally flummoxed by this simple example.

This story proves a truism once again: Some people are obsessed and passionate about recreational linguistics ... and some are not. Is there any *Word Ways* reader who hasn't had a similar experience?

## RAY, GENE, AND THE WASHINGTON POST WORD CONTESTS

”Here is a correspondence I had with the guy who occasionally sends me the latest Washington Post word contest - he lives in that area,” Ray Love explains. “I thought this contest was fun so I came up with some of my own. Maybe it would make a nice Kickshaw and your readers could send in some of their brainchildren.”

”Ray,” Gene writes, “here's another Washington Post word contest. The rules are to supply a new meaning for a common English word, starting with A through H this week. Here are the ones the paper printed that I like:”

Airstrip: A dance in which you pretend to take your clothes off.

Auburn: An injury common among clumsy people with the Midas Touch.

Bondsman: A steroid dealer.  
Borehole: A person who manages to be dull and offensive simultaneously.  
Bumbling: Butt cheek piercings.  
Chattel: The company that makes Sweat Shop Barbie.  
Colorfast: To wear all black during Lent.  
Coping saw: "Look on the sunny side of life."  
Decadent: The new wrinkle that appears on your face every ten years.  
Footstool: Dog doo-doo stuck on your shoe.  
Fulcrum: The big meal of the day for a supermodel.  
Grapple: To try to figure out all the features on your iPhone.

"Gene, thanks for sending them. I was inspired to try my hand at it so here are 20 of my own. However, only about half of these would I sign my name to, and I don't know which half that would be. It's all subjective anyway."

Algorithm: What a Democrat has when he dances around an issue.  
Adultery: What follows puberty.  
Antiknock: A catchword used in doorbell ads.  
Bicentennial: The birthday celebration for a 200-year-old buffalo.  
Broadband: A group of female musicians.  
Castanet: What fishermen do to snare many fish at one time.  
Centigrade: Acing a test.  
Chastity belt: What holds up the pants of Cher's daughter.  
Cowcatcher: A lariat.  
Crapshooter: Someone with diarrhea.  
Double date: April 3, 1998 and September 13, 2004.  
Drillmaster: The highest level a dentist can attain.  
Equip: Web site where the joke-of-the-day is found.  
Fireplace: Area in front of the boss's desk.  
Fumigator: An angry crocodile.  
Headwaiter: Someone standing in line to use the bathroom.  
Insinuate: What God told Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.  
Pen pal: Cell mate.  
Rehearsal: Practicing putting a deceased person into the limo.  
Trumpet: A dog belonging to the Donald."

## **A NEW JENNING**

The clerihew was named after Edmund Clerihew Bentley. A few years ago, I made up a verse form called the jennings, named after David Jennings Patrick Morice. It debuted with much fanfare in Kickshaws, and all the workers in the Poetry Wing of the Word Ways Building paused to listen to the first three jennings over the intercom. After that day, there were no more jennings to be had. Or heard. It's a difficult form. Basically, it's a six-line poem with an AABAAB rhyme scheme and a 2-2-3-2-2-3 anapestic rhythm. Lines 1, 2, 4, and 5 use the same proper name, but not always in the same way.

For instance, Abraham Lincoln, Lincoln Cent, Lincoln Nebraska, and Lincoln car were in one of the first jennings. And here you will find the fourth jennings.

Pluto

The puppy named Pluto  
Was gazing at Pluto,  
The planet without any heat.  
The underworld Pluto  
Was gazing at Pluto  
The Pup, whom he wanted to eat.

**FOR PETER READING, AUTHOR OF  
“THE PRISON CELL AND BARREL MYSTERY”**

Louis Phillips came up with his own kind of Jennings spin-off.

Peter Reading reading Peter  
Grimes in Reading, Pa.  
Sd “I’d rather be at The Blue Peter reading  
In Reading, England,  
Or hearing Laurence J. Peter reading Peter  
Pan in Reading, Ma.

**WAL-MART WINE**

This bit of news came from Ove Michaelsen: “Wal-Mart announced that sometime in 2008 it will begin offering customers a new discount item: Wal-Mart's own brand of wine. The world's largest retail chain is rumored to be teaming up with Ernest & Julio Gallo Winery of California to produce the spirits at an affordable price in the \$2 to \$5 range. Wine connoisseurs may not be inclined to put a bottle of the Wal-Mart brand into their shopping carts, but, ‘There is a market for inexpensive wine,’ said Kathy Micken, professor of marketing at the University of Arkansas, Bentonville. ‘However, branding will be very important.’ Customer surveys were conducted to determine the most attractive name for the Wal-Mart wine brand. The top surveyed names in order of popularity were

10. Chateau Traileur Parc
9. White Trashfindel
8. Big Red Gulp
7. World Championship Riesling
6. NASCARbernet
5. Chef Boyardeaux
4. Peanut Noir
3. I Can't Believe it's not Vinegar

2. Grape Expectations  
1. Nasti Spumante

The beauty of Wal-Mart wine is that it can be served with either white meat (Possum) or red meat (Squirrel).

P.S. Don't bother writing back. I know possum is not a white meat.  
(I prefer armadillo--possum on the halfshell.)”

**RHYMING THE UNRHYMEABLE**

Ove Michaelsen brings up a classic wordplay question and provides several colorful answers: "To my knowledge, there is no common word in English that rhymes with MONTH; but it was found that the obscure word grunth, an alternate spelling of "granth," rhymes perfectly in one of its pronunciations. In *Words at Play* (1998) and the revised editions: the *Word Play Almanac* (2002) and *Never Odd or Even—Palindromes, Anagrams & Other Tricks Words Can Do* (2005-06), resorting to proper nouns, I provided rhymes for the words ORANGE, PURPLE, and SILVER. BLORENGE is the name of a 1,833-foot hill—one of seven in the vicinity of Abergavenny, Wales. The name Henry Honeychurch GORRINGE was found by George F. Hubbard, of New York City (cited in Paul Dickson's *Names*). HIRPLE is a British word meaning "to limp"; CURPLE means hindquarters or buttocks, especially of a horse; CHILVER (British dialect) means "ewe lamb" or "ewe mutton." It is also a surname, as is WILVER, which was also the given name (forename) of baseball's Dornell ("Willie") Stargell (1940-2001).

NO RHYMES FOR ORANGE, PURPLE, SILVER, AND MONTH?

In spite of what might have been heard,  
That claim is just lame and absurd.  
For a whole month I dreamt  
By my thousandth attempt,  
'stead of none, I found one for each word.

(I could have written an alternate to this:

"In spite of what might have been written,  
There are claims of some names in Great Britain...")

In honor of these discoveries, I present this two-part limerick.

There once was a dunce known as Orange,  
Who got his toe caught in a door hinge.  
Said he, turning purple,  
Proceeding to hirple,  
"I bet I won't get back to Blorenge."

I resolved the story with a verse using the other difficult rhyme.

A passerby named Mr. Wilver,  
Who traded his horse for a chilver,  
Offered Orange the lamb,  
But he mounted a ram  
And rode home yelling, "Oh, Hiyo Silver!"

Other near-rhymes for "orange" include sporange, (pronounced "spe-RANJ" [short for sporangium]), more range, and far range.—"Stubborn Rhymes," O.V. (as "Ove")  
Michaelsen, Word Ways, May 2001, revised in July 2008

In grammar school, just passing time,  
I wrote this hackneyed double rhyme.

"This purple bird is dumb an' lazy,  
And his chirp'll drive one crazy."

### **MISHEARD BEATLES TUNES**

Ove sent another hilarious collection of misheard songs, as follows:

"The Beatles deserve a special category here because of their volume of songs and number of mishearings. "When I'm Sixty-Four" was heard by at least a few as "when I'm six-feet four"; and "Lady Madonna" was interpreted in a book by Gavin Edwards as "Knee-Deep In Donuts." (McCartney wrote the melody to "When I'm Sixty-Four" at age 16 in 1958, and was 25 when he recorded it in 1967.)

Columnist Jon Carroll, of the San Francisco Chronicle, passed along this mondegreen of "Michelle," by the daughter of Kathy Strawhorn.

"Michelle, Ma Bell,  
Sunday monkey won't play piano song,  
Play piano song."

(Sont des mots très bien ensemble,  
Très bien ensemble)

In the 1960s, many of us listened to the "Fab Four" on scratchy LPs and 45s, and few of us paid close attention to their lyrics (Apparently, neither did the band, early on. Remember their cover tune "Boys?" [When I talk about boys, don't you know I mean BOYS!]), which were often barely audible on many sound systems. Some of us heard "She's got a ticket to ride" as "She's got a chicken to ride" or "She's got a tic(k) in her eye (but she don't care)." Another mishearing was of "She's a 'big' teaser" in their song "Day Tripper." In "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," many heard "The girl with kaleidoscope eyes" as "the girl with colitis goes by." Other mishearings included "All I did was have my head on wrong" (All I do is hang my head and moan) in "Tell Me Why"; "Baby, you're a Ritz Man, too" (Baby, you're a rich man, too), and "if she's

beside me, I know I'll need Medicare" (never care) in what their producer George Martin once considered his favorite of theirs: "Here, There, and Everywhere."

#### AN IMPOSSIBLE IMPRESSION

"Who can do a glass onion?" [Lookin' through a glass onion] (John Lennon in the Beatles "Glass Onion")

#### RUNNING AFOWL

"Gimme a chicken or an aeroplane" [Give me a ticket for an aeorplane] from "The Letter" by the Box Tops—altered version of a mishearing by R. K. Jolliffe; "Jon Carroll," April 14, 1997

"Move over, baby, whole lotta chicken goin' on!" [... whole lotta shakin' goin' on]—"Whole Lotta Shaken' Goin' On" by Jerry Lee Lewis

"She's got a chicken to ride, but she don't care." [She's got a ticket to ride, but she don't care.]—"Ticket to Ride" by The Beatles

#### ALTERNATE LYRICS IN PERFORMANCE

Ray Stevens recorded a live version of "Everything Is Beautiful," putting the words "length" and "color" in the wrong places: "We don't care about the color (length) of his hair, or the length (color) of his skin." In a live performance, musician Donovan (Leitch) replaced the word "hair" with "teeth" in his classic song "Colours" ("Yellow is the color of my true love's hair in the mornin', when we rise").

While strolling through Central Park in New York, I overheard a young man mixing the Louis Armstrong standard "Wonderful World" with a Beatles tune: "I see sky of blue, sea of green, in my yellow submarine, and I think to myself, "What a wonderful world..." (Thinking to myself is my favorite way.)

#### OTHER SONG TRIVIA

Songwriters who have been known to at least occasionally write melodies before the lyrics (Paul Simon, Cat Stevens, and Billy Joel composed that way, as a rule), often use "dummy words" in the earliest drafts. For example, it's well known that the original lyrics to McCartney's 1965 song "Yesterday" were "Scrambled egg(s) [oh, my baby, how I love your legs...]," and the in 1965, the entire melody of the song was in his mental ear when he woke from a dream. In one interview, McCartney stated that John Lennon came up with the word and title, "Yesterday." McCartney's story of how that song was born has varied slightly. "Yesterday," recorded by more than 2,000 artists and played at least six million times, was recently said to have been unconsciously influenced by the Nat King Cole recording "Answer Me." Musicologist Spencer Leigh, in a BBC interview, claimed that McCartney didn't exactly plagiarize the tune recorded by Cole, but used similar

lyrics in at least one portion of it. "Yesterday" begins with the lines: "Yesterday, all my troubles seem so far away / Now I need a place to hide away..." The song that Cole sang, "Answer Me," contains the lines: "Yesterday, I believed that love was here to stay / Won't you tell me where I've gone to stray..." (Around the time that "Yesterday" was released, McCartney, under the alias Bernard Webb, submitted his penned song "Woman" to Peter and Gordon. It became a U.S. hit in early January 1966.)

Other Beatles trivia that many might not have noticed: in their 1966 song "Paperback Writer," the backup vocalists (John Lennon and George Harrison) were singing "Frere Jacques," and in their 1968 song "Lady Madonna," all the days of the week are mentioned but Saturday.

Barry Manilow did not compose "I Write the Songs"; its writer was Bruce Johnston. Willie Nelson confessed in a live recording (with Johnny Cash) that his country classic "Crazy" was originally titled "Stupid." (Imagine hearing "... I'm clueless—a dufus for being so blue...")

The a cappella gospel group The blind Boys of Alabama perform a moving rendition of "Amazing Grace" to the tune of the most familiar version of "House of the Rising Sun." It can also be sung to the theme from "Gilligan's Island," as could the "Marine Corps" theme and some poems by Emily Dickenson, but using Dickenson's words would be a stretch, and wouldn't be recommended by a respectable person, nor would "Amazing Grace" to "Gilligan's Island."

"If you think a good tune comes easily, try writing one by Paul Simon." —O.M.

The acoustic/bluegrass group Nickel Creek had (briefly) played under two other names in their evolution: the Itty Bitty Dirt Band and the Seldom Clean (a reference to the Seldom Scene)."

## **FILLING THE ALPHABETIC GAPS**

Jeremy Morse "whiled away some empty moments on a recent trip to the States. In particular I tried to fill in the alphabetic gaps in Ove Michaelsen's list of anagrammed word-pairs and came up with the following lame list:

Jane's jeans  
Kate's steak  
Xylic cylix  
Ysolde yhodels  
Zeno's zones

## UNIQUE WORDS

I am a big fan of words that do things no other words do, and I'm happy to hear of a new one discovered by Jeremy Morse. They are the incredible words. They show English in its most perfect form. Borgmann said "All words are interesting," but the truly interesting words are those few that are unique in a major, surprising way. For example, AMBIDEXTROUS is unique. The six letters in the left half of the word appear in the left half of the alphabet; and the six letters in the right half of the word appear in the right half of the alphabet, which makes it alphabetically ambidextrous. TWENTYNINE is the only number name that, when spelled using capital letters, has the same number of lines as the number it refers to—29. SOFTEN contains all the initial letters of all the counting numbers from ONE to however high you want to go, and it separates into S OF TEN, which suggests SYSTEM OF TEN, the decimal system. On the other hand, CABARET used to be unique, but Susan Thorpe and I have an article elsewhere in this issue that brings it down a couple of notches. It's still an amazing word, but CABINET is equally amazing. Uniqueness isn't necessarily permanent. There are probably fewer than 200 unique words that have been found, and probably fewer than 2000 that ever will be found. Thus I am pleased to see that Jeremy has found a great addition to this elite list of words. He asks, "what's unique about the word FETCHING? Answer: it's the only word whose alpha-numeric expression uses all ten digits from zero to nine once each—6520389147!" The unique words are out there. See if you can fetch some.

## RIDING THE WILD LIMERICK

In reference to Limerickshaws, Jeremy Morse replies, "What a splendid celebration of the limerick in Word Ways. I would add the following.

1. A perfect example of the form which predates Lear is the nursery rhyme

Hickory, Dickory, Dock,  
The Mouse ran up the clock.  
The clock struck one,  
The mouse ran down,  
Hickory, Dickory, Dock.

2. An early example of word-play occurs in the last line of

There was a young lady of Ryde,  
Who ate some sour apples and died;  
The apples fermented  
Inside the lamented  
And made cider inside 'er inside.

3. A convincing example in blank verse, in which names of insects do duty for rhyme, is



There was a young man of St. Bees  
 Who went and got stung by a wasp;  
 When they said, "Does it hurt?"  
 He replied, "No, it doesn't;  
 It's lucky it wasn't a hornet."

4. I made similar use of anagrams—note the internal rhyme in line 4—in

There was an old gambler of Edgware  
 Who lost every penny he wagered;  
 Regardless of danger,  
 He ranged through the garden  
 And bet on the numbers of ragweed.

### ACROSTIC EQUATIONS

Anil has been making more alphabetic discoveries in the garden of numbers. As he describes his new work, "Your elelegant TEN = Twenty + Eighty – Ninety in WW 96-179 is perhaps best left unpolluted by more forced examples. But nooo, I couldn't restrain myself from offering a variously flawed set of 0-20. ONE is nearest to perfect, flawed only by using itself in its own definition. No other numbers are spelled solely with letters that begin everyday number names. But mixing initials with Roman numerals (including R = 80) and sometimes using powers allows acrostic equations for 0, 5-7, 9, 11, 15-17 and 19. Adding and then subtracting back the same number is a further weakness of 11 and 16-19. For the others (2-4, 8, 12-14, 18 and 20) extreme liberties were invoked, viz., allowing some letters either to stand for most anything or else to be ignored altogether, thus trivializing the problem so much that you may wish to omit these. [My problem is my computer. I can't get it to do certain mathematical symbols, such as superscript, radical, etc. Some of these will have to be left out for that reason only. In my copying of the work below, I used a slash to indicate division and an x to indicate multiplication. Anil used a traditional division sign and a raised dot multiplication sign.—DM]

#### Using all letters in order

ZERO = Zilch x Eight x R x One  
 ONE = (One)(Nine-Eight)  
 TWO = Three Without One  
 FOUR = Five – One [Unless + R]  
 SIX = Seventeen – I – X  
 SEVEN = (Six – Eight – V)(Eight – Nine)  
 EIGHT = (Eleven – I) Good Helpings – Two)  
 NINE = Nineteen – I + Nine – Eighteen  
 TEN = Twenty + Eighty – Ninety [Morice 96-179]  
 ELEVEN = (Eighty + L – Eighty / V – Eight + Nine

TWELVE = (Two-hundred Without Eight)/(L – V + Eight)  
 FOURTEEN = (Fifteen – One [Unless Ramified]\Ten + Eight – Eight – Nine)  
 SEVENTEEN = SEVEN as above times TEEN as in 16  
 EIGHTEEN = Eight x O Golden Hamsters + Two + Eight)(-Eight + Nine)  
 NINETEEN = NINE as above times TEEN as in 16  
 TWENTY = Thirteen With Eight + Nine – Ten, Yes?

## WHO GIVES A GRUNT?

Anil has a very good question, an obvious one that I never really considered, a general question about a specific phenomenon. He wonders, “Why are some words not in the dictionary? For example, the ubiquitous yes/no grunts “U-HUH” and “UH-UH” and the common comic book onomatopoeias “POW! BAP! BAM!” are not in any of my dictionaries. But neither I nor my local library has OED or Web 2 or 3. Are they in any of these? Is there a chapter in a book somewhere—or in Word Ways—that satisfactorily Discusses this issue? DO dictionaries have the right (or power) to obliterate a used word? (And why do we only use used words anyhow? Can’t we afford new ones?)

The grunts are especially interesting. I once suspected they might be common to all languages. (They are readily recognized but not widely used in Australia.) I was about to speculate that, since yes and no are arguably the most fundamental of all concepts, these two might be the oldest surviving “words” in all of human language! Stereotypic caveman grunts. Then I finally did find them, in “The Facts on File Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins,” by Robert Hendrickson (Revised Edition, 1997, Facts on File Inc.: New York (EWPO); my paperback book club edition is called QPB EWPO). I learned to my disappointment but amusement that, instead of being my fancied caveman first words, they are pure Americanisms dating back to “at least the 1830s” according to S.B. Flexner, citing Englishman F. Marryat from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

EWPO and presumably the cited authors spell the yes word “UH-HUH”. I feel the first H is unnecessary and, since it’s not in the dictionary (or is it?) I take the liberty of spelling it “U-HUH”. A labored but more phonetically accurate spelling of the pair is “U(n)-HU(n)H” and “U(n)-HU(n)H” [or “U(n)-HU(n)” and “U(n)H-U(n)”, where “-U(n)”- means an unvoiced nasal U, reflecting the very nasal sound of these grunts in actual use—as far as my hearing of them goes. If you will allow any of my spellings, all three pairs, un-hunh unh-unh, un-hun unh-un, and u-huh uh-uh, constitute neat charade-antigrams and two are also tautonym pairs. If spelt without punctuation (unhunh, unhun, or uhuh), they could also mischievously be called contronyms (single words with two opposite meanings)

[In a somewhat related way, I heard long ago that the letter **o** is the oldest written letter in the alphabet, the **ah** as in FATHER is the oldest spoken sound, and the word MAMA is the only word that has been found in every language. One would think, as Anil said above, that the grunts would be very old. Even though they are “pure Americanisms,” they could also have been used in prehistoric times, with no etymological reason for the coincidence.—DM]

## THE ELEMENTIAD

In this micro-epic, the first line of each couplet ends with the name of a chemical element, and the second line ends with a word or phrase that rhymes or nearly rhymes or barely rhymes with it. So far there are five parts featuring two main characters and a small supporting cast. This is only the first half of the poem, and it has 63 of the 118 elements in the order in which they appear in the Periodic Table. I haven't yet begun the second half, but it appears that the ending will be full of nuns, starting with 112 and 113, ununbium (a nun: be 'em) and ununtrium (a nun: tree 'em). Now let's see how the more familiar traditional elements work poetically.

### *Part I: SMITHY AND ME*

I was building a fortress of hydrogen  
Getting a little bit high on gin!—

When I noticed my neighbor used helium  
To put on his turrets. "How really dim,"

I said to him, "Man, you need lithium  
To seal it strongly, but Smithy, am

I stupid for using beryllium?"  
He said, "No, not stupid, just silly, dumb."

Then Smithy brought over some boron  
And chuckled, "Try this, you big moron,

And cool yourself off with some carbon  
But not in the nude. Put some garb on."

I was hot and was wearing pure nitrogen  
By day, and by dusk I'd drink White Roe Gin.

When I worked, I'd breathe fresh air, pure oxygen.  
At night, though, I'd pet my pet rocks again.

Last night I mixed gin and fluorine  
And spill some to keep the floor clean.

Today the sun shined like bright neon.  
The moon was out, too. I could see on

My porch sat a bottle of sodium.  
I drank some, then got on my podium.

I ranted about how magnesium  
Made people become rather sleazy, um...

I ranted about how aluminum  
Would cause eggs to lose their albumen. Hmm.

Then I climbed down and offered some silicon  
To Smithy, who grumbled, "The thrill is gone."

*Part II: THE PIRATE QUEEN*

Today Smithy asked, "What is phosphorous?"  
I said, "It's a fish in the Bosphorous

Where pirates now trade it for sulphur,  
But that's just a scam, so don't fall for

Their beautiful leader, Chlorine.  
The infamous young pirate queen.

She'll buy you a scotch spiked with argon.  
You'll drink, and she'll wink, 'Where's the bar gone?'

And she'll shout, 'Sir, you reek of potassium.'  
You'll pass out. She'll leave with her classy chum.

You've tippled a bit too much calcium,  
And the pirate queen slept with your pals. See 'em?

When the pirate queen chugs rum and scandium,  
She'll say: 'Yo! Ho! Ho! You're a randy bum.'

She'll pull out her sword of titanium  
And part your hair down to your branium!

And what will you say to Vanadium,  
Her sister, who'll ask, 'You're Canadium?'

"I'd tell her," said Smithy, "I'm Chromium,  
Like Romeo, living in Rome, I am.

I was born in the city of Manganese.  
My legs pealed like bells when I rang my knees."

*PART III: LORD BYRON*

“I learned all I know smelting iron,  
And it smelt pretty bad,” said Lord Byron.

George Gordon (his real name) sniffed cobalt.  
When he died, his insurance claimed, “No fault.”

He was penniless, yet had a nickel  
To buy an ice cream flavored pickle.

His dad was a bobby, a “copper,”  
But Byron was quite a show stopper.

He stopped at a wet pile of zinc  
To drink since it looked like a sink.

It was tainted with poisonous gallium  
He slurped it all up, then said, “Golly, I’m

Dizzy, just like a Germanium.  
I think that I’m going insanium.

It doesn’t taste much like sweet arsenic,  
Is it deadly? I’m seeing bright stars and sick

Visions and views of Selenium,  
The town I was born in. So lean I am

A bromide, or maybe bromine,  
I’m performing my death, a show scene.

I feel like I’m flying to Krypton  
Like Superman. Oops! I just tripped on—”

Alas! Byron died of Rubidium,  
A flu that became a rude idiom.

To Byron! A cup of sad strontium  
I’ll drink to his wife, who was hauntin’ him.

And I’ll splash a glass of glad yttrium  
On his mistress, my lover, who’s sweet ‘n’ slim.

#### *Part IV: SMITHY’S LAW*

When Smithy gave cubic zirconium  
To Sally, she laughed: “It’s a phony whim.”

Then Smithy: "Let's go to Niobium  
In Africa, where you buy opium

And diamonds and even molybdenum."  
Then Sally: "You're wearing old glib denim."

He said, "Well, I'm not a technetium.  
I can't fly a plane. Oh, heck, bet I am.

I once met the great Babe Ruthenium  
Who told me to tell the truth. Any. Come!

I saw the Colossus of Rhodium.  
I think that you, too, ought to go to him."

But Sally said, "Eat your palladium,  
And then let's go join the parade. Ahem."

I pulled out a ring of pure silver  
And said, "Marry me, divorce Wilbur,

Your husband. You know he's a cadmium."  
"You're right," she said, "that's why I'm bad to him.

He took a slow boat to East Indium  
And now he sells tea on a windy whim."

Then Sally left Smithy for tin!  
It's Smithy's Law: "I never win."

*Part V: HIS DINNER WITH URI*

When Smithy tried selling antimony,  
His friends said, "He's turning anti-money."

I told them he'd found some tellurium,  
And that's why he couldn't sell Uri ham.

When Smithy gave Uri fresh iodine,  
He drank it without getting high on wine.

Yet Uri gave Smithy some xenon,  
Or so he said, but I could see none.

Then Smithy tried chomping on caesium

While Uri was chewing some greasy gum.

I laughed because Uri drank barium,  
But Smithy said, "Who's gonna bury him?"

I cried because Uri drank lanthanum,  
But Smithy said, "Let's put a lance in him."

"Now, Smithy," I said, "have some cerium.  
The two of us might have to carry him."

We noticed his praseodymium  
Was quivering. "Praise the ode. Dim, I am

Lost till I find neodymium,"  
He said, "Ah, I found me. Oh, dim I am?"

His strength was becoming promethium  
As he tried very hard to throw me the, um,

The money to buy fresh samarium,  
But Uri was no Good Samaritum.

He decided to move to Europium  
And to live all his life a Utopium.