PUNC LIB CHARADES

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Most charades involve respacing the letters, creating new words, as in therapist: the rapist. In contrast the following group do not change the words or spacing, only the punctuation. I call them Punc Lib charades. Like punk kids in the old sense, liberated punics break out of their cages and run freely among the words wreaking havoc, totally altering if not reversing the meaning. The lowly comma in particular wreaks to high heaven. For example, an Oz oldie turns “Eats roots and leaves.” into “Eats, roots and leaves.” (roots = has sex). This one re-emerged in a cleaner version as the title of a recent popular punctuation grammar book. (I shan’t name it as I don’t recommend it; after the cute title I expected a more lively read.)

This game has featured in Word Ways previously, most recently in Kickshaws (Feb 06-52) where I cited these three examples, first two oldies from my childhood then an original:

> What’s that in the road ahead? What’s that in the road, a head?
(This one isn’t pure punc lib: it respaces one word.)

> Where do you think it’ll get you in the end? Where do you think it’ll get you, in the end? (ouch)

> What is this world coming to? What? Is this world coming to? I dearly hope so!

I leave to your easy imagination what the original was in many of the following and give only the modified form. The first three are other oldies. The rest I believe are new. The first one is from Games magazine and is the best of those quoted in an earlier Word Ways article on this topic for which I’ve unfortunately lost the reference. Can anyone remind us of it?

Woman—without her, man is nothing.

A Benny Hill classic:
Half the world doesn’t know how; the other half lives.

Roger McGough puncts up a headline:
CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT. UNEMPLOYMENT. (FIGURES.)

It staggers, the imagination.

I can’t stand, being drunk.

You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it. Drink?
Horny cowboy passes the bottle.

Drop the comma and this exhortation to boys becomes an exhortation to girls.
Don’t masturbate, boys! (No hard feelings, please.)

He who can does; he who cannot teaches.
He who can ‘does’ he who cannot. “Teaches!”
I don’t think. (We’re in Kansas, Toto!)  
I shouldn’t tease Kansas. They repealed that embarrassing Creationism rule.

Speaking of the devil, one thin comma is all that separates the opposing views of Creationists and Atheists: Life isn’t here from chance action, by God!

Here an ostrich anagram supports a pair of pun charmades.

Supports!  
( UP, SPORTS! )

Supports?  
( UP SPORTS! )

Espy LA, cop an apocalypse. Espy LA cop—an apocalypse!  
This one, for Rodney King, is also a palindrome. It’s from up/dn, WW monograph #5.

This one needs an anagram, a charade (also from up/dn) and a gnome to set it up.

Hamburgers? Ah, BM urgers? (Ha! MB urgers!)  
“A BM† a day keeps the MB away.”

† BM doesn’t mean Big Mac; means shit.  
(“BM” doesn’t mean Big Mac means shit!)

“HELP!” is on the way. (Message sent, not necessarily received.)  
This one is used in the illustration for Echo Haiku in another article in this issue.

Earth life was up and running, well before we arrived on the scene.  
Earth life was up and running well, before we arrived on the scene.