KICKSHAWS

MARTIN GARDNER
Hendersonville, North Carolina

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

Person and Place Names

Many years ago, in one of my Scientific American columns, I had my numerologist Dr. Irving Joshua Matrix posing as a fake psychiatrist. Matrix explained how the names of people often play a strong unconscious role in shaping their character and life history. I thought I was inventing something new, but it turns out that Carl Jung was way ahead of me. Here is a footnote from page 11 of the Bollingen paperback edition of his book Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle:

> We find ourselves in something of a quandary when it comes to making up our minds about the phenomenon which Stekel calls the 'compulsion of the name.'... For instance, Herr Gross (Mr. Grand) suffers from delusions of grandeur, Herr Kleiner (Mr. Small) has an inferiority complex... Herr Feist (Mr. Stout) is the Food Minister, Herr Rosstaucner (Mr. Horse-trader) is a lawyer... Herr Freud (joy) champions the pleasure-principle, Herr Adler (eagle) the will-to-power, Herr Jung (young) the idea of rebirth, and so on. Are these the whimsicalities of chance, or the suggestive effects of a name, as Stekel seems to suggest, or are they 'meaningful coincidences'?

It seems to me that Herr Jung's name more obviously symbolizes the "young" enemy of Father Freud. As for the name of psychoanalyst Herr Stekel (Mr. Little-stick), Jung surely overlooked another obvious bit of Freudian symbolism.

In 1966 Richard Nixon complained that the DuBois Club for young blacks had used Communist deception in choosing its name. The club had been named for the black sociologist W. E. DuBois who joined the Communist Party at age 93 and died an expatriate in Ghana. DuBois pronounced his name /DooBoys/ rather than in the French manner; hence the club's name sounded exactly like /The Boys Club/, of which Nixon was then national board chairman. The reader is referred to The New Yorker's "Talk of the Town," March 19, 1966, for the amusing details.

Authors often anagram their names to get pseudonyms. It is not generally known that Alexander Graham Bell adopted a pen name because he suspected that his articles were being accepted by mag-

azines only because of his fame. Wanting them accepted on their merit, he sold several articles to The National Geographic, submitting them under the name of H. A. Largelamb, an anagram of A. Graham Bell. The articles all appeared under Largelamb's byline.

William Remme of Eureka, California has called my attention to two oddities involving Ronald Wilson Reagan. Not only does each name have six letters, yielding the Biblical number of the Beast, 666, but if you add the values of the letters (using the cipher A = 100, B = 101, C = 102, and so on) you get a sum of 1984. I take this to be a certain prediction that Reagan will either be reelected president in 1984, or he won't.

The Newsweek Feature Service in September 1971 distributed an interesting release by Edward Blau on American town names. Blau disclosed that Peculiar, Missouri was named by a postmaster who had been asked to think of a name peculiar to his area. The founders of Odd, West Virginia so named it because they wanted an odd name. Extra Dry Creek, Arkansas was called that because it is even drier than nearby Dry Creek. Wynot, Nebraska was named because no one could see why not. Blau recommended George R. Stewart's _American Place Names_ as the best source for information on such oddities.

Unintended Puns

The following sentence from the third edition of _Principles of Mechanics_ by John L. Synge and R. A. Griffith was sent to me by Phillip Morgan: "Space does not permit us to attempt an axiomatic treatment of the theory of relativity."

Harold Bloom, reviewing Norman Mailer's recent monstrosity _Ancient Evenings_ -- the greatest literary experience for me in 1983 was not reading this crazy novel -- for the New York Review of Books (April 28, 1983, page 4), had this to say: "In _Ancient Evenings_ he has emancipated himself, and seems to be verging on a new metaphysic, in which heterosexual buggery might be the true norm..."

In the chapter on aesthetics in my _Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener_, I give two classic instances of unintended puns by famous poets (involving the words **raspberry** and **balls**), but I failed to mention the most incredible instance of all. Near the end of the last part of Pippa Passes, Browning writes:

> Sing to the bats' sleek sisterhoods
> Full compliance with gallantry:
> Then owls and bats,
> Cowls and twats,
> Monks and nuns, in a cloister's moods,
> Adjourn to the oak-stump pantry!

It is hard to believe, but Browning was so unfamiliar with street slang that when he encountered the word **twat** in an old book of rhymes called _Vanity of Vanities_, he assumed it referred to part

of a nun's attire that he could appropriately pair with the cowls of monks! (See the entry on **twat** in The Century Dictionary.) Even more incredible is the fact that Browning never altered the lines. Is it possible no one told him? I would welco;me hearing from any Browning expert who could provide more details about this memorable literary gaffe.

Intented Dirty Word Play

As all students of Shakespeare know, the bard was fond of off-color linguistic jokes, the bawdiest of which are not likely to be footnoted even in scholarly editions of Shakespeare's works. Surely the most outrageous example occurs in Act II, Scene V of Twelfth Night. Malvolio is reading a letter from Olivia:

> By my life, this is my lady's hand: these be her very C's, her U's, and her T's; and thus makes she her great P's.

Observe how the word and supplies the N, and how the letter P continues the joke. No wonder Lewis Carroll thought that Thomas Bowlder's edition of Shakespeare should be further censored. "I have a dream of Bowlderising Bowlder," was how he put it in a letter, "i.e. of editing a Shakespeare which shall be absolutely fit for girls."

Terse Verse and Short Fiction

In a footnote to C. C. Bombaugh's Oddities and Curiosities of Words and Literature which I edited for Dover, I discussed some of the famous short poems in English. Others include such oldies as "Hired. Tired? Fired!"; "The Bronx? No thonx!"; and "Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker," to which Ogden Nash added the line, "Pot is not." This subject was also explored in the November 1981 Kickshaws, where Jeff Grant quoted a number of three-word poems by Samuel Beckoff.

When William Cole wrote an essay on "One-line Poems and Longer, But Not Much" (New York Times Book Review, Dec. 2, 1973), the review later published (Jan. 13, 1974) a letter from G. Howard Poteet in which he proposed one-letter poems: "Thus my work includes the most evocative of all poetic letters, O. Further, there is the egocentric poem, I, the poem of pleasure, M, the scatalogical verse, P, the somnabulistic bit of poesy adapted from the comics, Z."

I suggest we take this a step further with the following poem titled "Simplicity": . No one can say my poem doesn't have a point. Of course we can write an even simpler poem, completely pointless, with the title "Ultimate Simplicity." It goes like this:

For many years there were efforts in American science fiction magazines to write short-short-short-short stories. One of the best was titled "The Shortest Horror Story Ever Written."

> The last man on Earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock on the door.

Ron Smith shortened this one letter by changing **knock** to **lock**.

Forrest J. Ackerman holds the record for brevity. In the 1970s he sold the following story to Vertex for $100:

Cosmic Report Card: Earth

F

At a science fiction convention in 1983, which I attended, Ackerman said he has since resold his story four times for the same amount, and that it has been translated into three languages. In case anyone tries to imitate it with other letters, he added, he has all 26 copyrighted.

Great Doggerel

Readers of my Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener will know of my fondness for poetry so terrible that it is funny. Some of the worst poetry ever published was written by the famous British-American mathematician J. J. Sylvester. As The Dictionary of American Biography delicately puts it: "Most of Sylvester's original verse showed more ingenuity than poetic feeling." His privately printed book, Spring's Debut: A Town Idyll, is a poem of 113 lines, every line ending with the sound /in/. Another long poem, Rosalind, has about 400 lines, all rhyming with /Rosalind/. Here is how Sylvester's successor at Johns Hopkins University described an occasion on which Sylvester recited his poem to a meeting of the Peabody Institute:

> The audience quite filled the hall, and expected to find much interest or amusement in listening to this unique experiment in verse. But Professor Sylvester had found it necessary to write a large number of explanatory footnotes, and he announced that in order not to interrupt the poem he would read the footnotes in a body first. Nearly every footnote suggested some additional extempore remark, and the reader was so interested in each one that he was not in the least aware of the flight of time, or of the amusement of the audience. When he had dispatched the last of the notes, he looked up at the clock, and was horrified to find that he had kept the audience an hour and a half before beginning to read the poem they had come to hear. The astonishment on his face was answered by a burst of good-humored laughter from the audience; and then, after begging all his hearers to feel at perfect liberty to leave if they had engagements, he read the Rosalind poem.

Sylvester explained his idiosyncratic views on poetic structure in a little book called The Laws of Verse, published in 1870.

When I was a high school student in Tulsa, an English teacher asked everybody in the class to write a poem. A friend who sat next to me produced a poem that I thought such a masterpiece that I have carefully preserved it over the decades. Here it is, word for word, exactly as he wrote it:

Great Smells
Carl Fritts

A smell is the greatest joy seen.
A smell that makes a new world serene.
Of all the smells of my pickin'
I believe I would rather smell chicken.

The smell of chicken is very fine.
The smell of chicken makes me feel divine.
There are smells of cake and pie,
But the smell of chicken is enjoyed by I.

I smell the smell of aroma of coffee,
I smell the smell of the deep blue sea;
The smell of mellon and the smell of meat,
But the smell of chicken can't be beat.

Mnemonics

Leigh Mercer, the London word play expert who wrote "A Man, A Plan, A Canal -- Panama!" and other fine palindromes, sent me the following bewildering paragraph which he had clipped from a newspaper. The author was one F. E. White:

> If you remember how much easier it is to remember what you would rather forget than remember, than remember what you would rather remember than forget, then you can't forget how much more easy it is to forget what you would rather remember than forget what you would rather forget than remember.

I once mastered an ingenious mnemonic system for remembering words and numbers, but I long ago forgot it. One of the country's top experts on mnemonics is the magician Harry Lorayne. Perhaps you have seen him perform his great memory act in person or on television. A magician friend recently told me that he used to forget names, but his memory enormously improved after he read a book on mnemonics by Harvey Lorayne.

Acronyms

In his autobiography (page 150), Gilbert Chesterton tells how he and his friends once formed a club in Lo;ndon that they called IDK. Whenever anyone asked what the letters stood for, the reply was always "I don' know." I'm sure many readers of **Word Ways** have seen the sign WYBADIITY that hangs in bars. If a customer asks what it means, the bartender replies "Will you buy another drink if I tell you?"

Vladimir Nabokov, in his novel Pnin, introduces the phrase motuweth frisas. Clearly it refers to the six days following Sunday.

Here are some useful acronyms for the most often repeated phrases in speeches by American politicians: Bomfog (brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God), Fisteg (fiscal integrity), Moat (mainstream of American thought), and Goveclop (government close to the people).

When the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan had a big exhibit of pop art, back in the days when pop was the latest art craze, did any newspaper think to headline a story "MOMA shows pop"? Come to think of it, in earlier days when the museum exhibited dada art, MOMA certainly showed dada.

Does the Engineering Information External Inquiries Officer of the BBC, when he answers the telephone, open with "EIEIO"?

In March 1983 the Eastman Kodak company suddenly realized that its newly formed U.S. Equipment Division had the acronym USED. On the assumption that nobody wants to buy used equipment they sensibly renamed it the U.S. Apparatus Division.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority is obviously devoted to the uplift of Boston. And have you heard of IBTA, an organization opposed to topless swim suits? The letters stand for the Itty Bitty Titty Association.

"What is the speediest reply to a boring remark?" writes Stephen Barr. The answer, he says, is OOMPH (Over One Mile Per Hour).

It is well known that NEWS is an acronym of North, East, West, South. So is SNEW. What's snew? Not much. What's new with you? Not well known is the startling fact that ADAM uses the initial letters of the Greek words for north (Arktos), west (Dusis), east (Anatole), and south (Mesembria). And did you know that Adam and Eve were Irish? When they first met, each lifted up the other's fig leaf. "O'Hair!" shouted Adam. Eve replied with "O'Toole!"

Riddles

When I was a boy I invented the following riddle. How did the man with big feet put on his pants? Answer: over his head. To my chagrin, I later discovered that the Reverend Edward Lee Hicks had recorded in his diary: "Heard this evening the last new joke of the author of Alice in Wonderland: He (Dodgson) knows a man whose feet are so large that he has to put on his trousers over his head."

The only other riddle I ever invented, which I believe no one beat me to, is this. Who was our tallest president. Answer: Dwight D. Eiffeltower.

There are hundreds of similar riddles that pun on well-known names. What weighs six tons and sings calypso? Harry Eliphante. What's green and dances? Fred Asparagus. Why is a martini without an olive or lemon twist called a Charles Dickens? No olive or twist.

His father was Japanese and his mother was Jewish. What did he do on December 7? He attacked Pearl Schwartz.

Who speaks softly and carries a big stick? The usual answer is a gay policeman or a pole vaulter, but I thought of a better one: Don Juan.

The bun, someone said long ago, is the lowest form of wheat.

Formula Jokes

In my February 1981 Kickshaws, I quoted five answers to the old riddle "What's black and white and red all over?" published in John Allen Paulos's Mathematics and Humor, and six more were given in the May 1981 Colloquy. Paulos's are from a much longer list given by M. E. Barrick in his paper "The Newspaper Riddle Joke" published on pages 253-57 of the 1974 volume of the Journal of American Folklore.

Has anyone compiled a similar list of answers to "Why did the chicken cross the road?" Here are six from Mary Ann Madden's book Son of Giant Sea Tortoise: because it was there, to get away from Colonel Sanders, because of an alternate-side parking rule, to avoid a street demonstration, because she did not want to get involved. My favorite answer is: to keep its pants up.

Matt Freedman and Paul Hoffman had a book published in 1980 titled How Many Zen Buddhists Does it Take to Screw in a Light Bulb? The book consists entirely of variants on this question. You may not know that the original riddle is very popular in Poland, where it is phrased: How many Americans does it take to screw in a light bulb? The answer is: one.

I'd like to see a similar book on variations of "Waiter, there's a fly in my soup" and "Who was that lady I saw you with last night?" I collect versions of both jokes. Some of the lady-wife variants are based on word play. Who was that lady I saw you out with last night? I wasn't out, I was just dozing. Who was that lady I saw you outwit last night? Magician: who was that lady I sawed with you last night? Who was that ladle I saw you with last night? That was no ladle, that was my knife. Who was that hobo (or strumpet) I saw you with last night? That was no oboe (or trumpet), that was my fife.

Help may be on the way. The editor informs me that Paul Dickson, the author of Words (reviewed in the November 1982 issue of **Word Ways**), is now planning a book on formula jokes of all types. If it sees the light of day, I'll be the first to buy a copy.

The Integers Revisited

In my February 1981 Kickshaws, I presented a puzzle in which ten students in a class had the integers concealed in their names: dON Edwards, roberT WOrden, etc. Cynthia Knight of Chicago, Illinois utilized the same device in an imaginary bit of cocktail-party conversation:

No, never!
That wouldn't do?
It might be worth reexamining.
Or else it's the end of our friendship.
If I've understood you right, you've read my mind.
Yes, I X-rayed it.
That's even worse.
I'll weigh your remark.

You see confusion in everything.
That ends it!
I feel even worse now.

Plaindromes and Ungrams

Jef Raskin of Cupertino, California is less than enchanted with the contorted syntax and characteristic words found in palindromes, so he has invented the plaindrome. Some examples:

Money-man I, an Adam, not even a doom
Stella, Otis deified Satan and Edna
An item? No, revolt took Natasha
Eggbert, a wry dross needs seating, tea-grams
Droop: an old fan? Needles fone a poor ode

He comments "Having come this far, we have lost all shame, and immediately present Ungrams, which are much like Anagrams, except less so." Two examples:

Richard M. Nixon / Noxious charmer
Brooklyn Bridge / Good ride by lake

This sort of thing could become addictive.

DICTIONARY OF CRYPTIC CROSSWORDS

Cryptic crosswords are hard to master because the neophyte must simultaneously learn the several wordplay techniques used (double definitions, hidden words, homophones, reversals, word chains, containers, fragments, anagrams) and the specialized vocabulary. There exist innumerable synonyms for the various instructions (Room gives over 500 for "anagram" in an appendix), and many words are conventionally abbreviated in the answer word (as Dorothy = DOT, loop = O, short weekend = SAT, young lady = DEB). Adrian Room has provided help in finding instructions and abbreviations in a book with the title given above, published by Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1983 for $16.95. Each word has its abbreviation or instruction given, and Room provides a cryptic clue using that word for the reader to try; answers and further discussion are given in the second half of the book.