

LEXICOGRAPHERS' LIB

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Samuel Johnson, compiler of the first dictionary of the English language, included in it his definition of the word *lexicographer*, "a harmless drudge."

For over two hundred years now, lexicographers have been laboring under this unfortunate image. Who knows how much harm it has probably done? The poor souls have probably had every ounce of self-respect taken from them, along with their confidence in social situations, such as picking up members of the opposite sex in singles bars. Every other group is striving for pride and respect, in fact demanding it; how about lexicographers?

They are probably suffering from stifled creative impulses as well. I feel sympathy for these unfortunate gentlemen (gentlewomen? gentlepersons?) and urge them to rebel against their role as mere copyists and recorders. Why not create a few words on your own and slip them into the next big fat dictionary of the English language? Who would know the difference? (Can't you see me stroking my horned head, lashing my arrow-pointed tail, and dancing around with glee on my cloven hooves?)

Just to get your linguistic juices flowing, let me throw out a few hastily-concocted creations of my own. The first word fills a real, domestic need:

1. NEOFIGHT: neo (new) + fight, noun. Literally, a "new fight," but usually used in the sense of a resumption after a break or stop in a fight. "My little boys hardly finish one fight before they begin a neofight."

The next word had its inspirational roots in a cocktail party I recently attended:

2. POSTHUMOROUS: post (after) + humor (Latin, moisture, fluid. Originally referring to the body humors or fluids. later shifted to levity only), adjective. After humorous; adjective describing old, stale anecdotes and jokes.

That which can be overwhelmed can surely be underwhelmed. Anyone whelmed by that statement?

3. UNDERWHELMED: under + whelm (from Anglo-Saxon for turn), verb or adjective. Similar to "not impressed" but more emphatically negative. "The food at the new restaurant left me underwhelmed."

There's a place for this next word -- I'm sure there is.

4. SARDINIC: sardine (a type of small fish) + ic, adjectival form deriving from like. Literally, having the quality of a sardine, or, figuratively, by extension. A more genteel-sounding term when the vulgar "fishy" is not appropriate, as in "The whole affair began to seem sardinic when he emptied the cash register into a paper bag."

Lord, how we need this next word with the development of our new free-form, fragmented society!

5. POLYAMOROUS: poly (many) + amor (from Latin amare, to love) adjective. Descriptive of a person who indulges a wide range of affections for and with the opposite sex whether within or without marriage. This makes it more general in meaning than polyandry or polygamy which are limited as to gender and marital status. Polyamorous is also free of moral judgment, unlike the word promiscuous, and free of commercial commentary, unlike the word prostitute. It also is more descriptive of the total relationship, not being limited to sexual or marital status. "Elizabeth Taylor is a polyamorous woman."

This next one I give as a free offering to the women's movement (don't bother to thank me):

6. PHYSICISTESSES: physi (Greek for nature) + cist (suffix meaning "one who studies") + ess (suffix indicating feminine form of noun) + es (suffix indicating plural of a noun). noun, plural. More than one woman physicist.

Lexicographers, arise! The revolution is at hand! Cast off your appendices! You have nothing to lose but your jobs and your credibility!

CREATIVE CRUCIVERBALISTS

This is the title of a 259-page paperback by Helene Hovanec, published in 1988 by William Morrow (Quill) for \$10.95. Starting with a capsule history of the development of the cross-puzzle during the 1910s and 1920s, the book features mini-biographies of some thirty noted present-day crossword constructors, together with a sample puzzle by each for the reader to solve. Numerous examples show how the clueing of cross-words has evolved from dull dictionary definitions to clever and puzzling wordplay:

*First to take a ribbing (Adam)
Mobile home (abbr.) (Ala.)
Cab cutter? (hacksaw)
Pop star (nova)*

The mysteries of cryptic crosswords are briefly explained, and the development of the modern-day crossword tournament is sketched.