In the fifth century B.C., Empedocles of Acracas, the Greek philosopher, proclaimed that the universe is composed of four primal elements: fire, air, water, and earth. While not, perhaps, the most scientific descriptive cosmology, this doctrine nevertheless dominated Western philosophical thought for twenty-one hundred years and is today still favorably regarded by born-again astrologists. But it did not fully satisfy Aristotle, who, writing a century later, explained that while these four material elements could define all earthly substances, a fifth immaterial element must define all heavenly phenomena. He called this element pempt{ousia, or FIFTH BEING.

Nearly two millennia later, the medieval philosophers, busy transmuting lead into gold and discovering the elixir of life, sought to translate this expression into Latin. But Latin has no present participle meaning BEING. Fortunately, Cicero had long ago solved this problem by taking the existing Latin infinitive esse—an almost exact counterpart to einaï, the Greek infinitive governing ousia—and extrapolating from it the hypothetical Latin present participle base essent- to create the neologism essentia, which corresponds to the Greek ousia. Some fifteen hundred years later, the medieval philosophers prefaced this word with the Latin quinta, FIFTH, an ordinal number equivalent to the Greek pempt{, thereby establishing the medieval Latin phrase quinta essentia; and these two words eventually coalesced and passed into English as QUIN-TESSENCE. In this linguistic process, the medieval philosophers had unearthed, seemingly without knowing it, a means of transmuting the lead of a dead language into the gold elixir of living discourse.

Philologically, this occurrence in which the Greek pempt{ousia was translated, element by element, into the Latin quinta essentia is known as a loan translation or calque, a word derived from the French calque, meaning 'an imitation or tracing' (one language is imitating or tracing the elements of another language into its own elements). The French calque, in turn, is fashioned from the French verb calquer 'to trace or copy,' which is derived from the Italian verb calcare 'to tread or trample,' and ultimately, for our purposes, the Latin noun calx 'heel,' as that part of the foot that does the trampling. As such, calques may very well be the philosopher's stone of discourse, the elixir or mother's milk of living language, an archeology of knowledge, transmuting the violent trampling of translation into the intercourse of loan.
Much can be discovered in this archeology. The ancient Romans, as well as the ancient Greeks, have provided English with a potpourri of picturesque calques. Even at the very dawn of Roman culture, as a Tiberine she-wolf (Acca Larentia?) suckled Romulus and Remus, some inhabitant of the Italic peninsula may have looked up to the sky one moonless night and fancied that faintly luminous band of stars overarching the heavens to be a road or way of milk, or via lactea, a phrase which was translated into Middle English as melky waye (Chaucer) and thence MILKY WAY, ultimately passing into Modern English where it became a candy bar. Or instead, I would tender, the Romans may have partially translated their via lactea from Eratosthenes' kyklos galaxias 'circle of milk,' from which we derive our GALAXY, now a generic term for the Milky Way, though formerly our specific term; and kyklos galaxias may further be the source of what would then prove to be our obsolete English calque, LACTEOUS CIRCLE. In any case, the Latin lac is cognate with the Greek gala and the English MILK, all three words having evolved from a common prehistoric Indo-European base mel- 'to stroke, to rub off, to milk,' whence we derive such modern terms as LACTOSE, LACTEAL, GALACTOSE, MILCH, MILCHING, and LETTUCE.

But the Romans and Greeks are by no means our sole legators of calques. In 1891, Friedrich Nietzsche completed Also sprach Zarathustra in which he elaborated upon his conception of the Ubermensch, that rationally superior person who spurns conventional Christian "herd morality" and transmutes himself, like a triumphant alchemist, so as to fully realize human potential and creative mastery. Yet in a further transmutation, Nietzsche's Ubermensch is popularly misconceived as a man of extraordinary physical strength with a juggernaut-like "will to power" over others. And to culminate the misconception, twelve years after Zarathustra George Bernard Shaw, in attempting to popularize and recast Nietzsche's philosophy, took the task of translating Ubermensch into English. But, evidently, he did not find the native rendering of OVERMAN or BEYONDMAN sufficently mellifluous and instead translated the first element über into its Latin equivalent, creating for his new play and all posterity that immortal, hybrid calque...SUPERMAN!

Faster than a speeding bullet!
More powerful than a locomotive!
Able to leap tall buildings at a single bound!
Look! Up in the sky!
It's a bird!
It's a plane!
It's Ubermensch!

Yes, it's Ubermensch, strange visitor from another philosophaster. Yet anyone who has ever had the pleasure of listening to that scholarly radio serial of the 1940s featuring Bud Collyer or of watching that intellectual television series of the 1950s starring George Reeves (not to be confused with that interloper of later, Christopher Reeve, of no relation) could not help but be struck by the discrepancy between the relatively tame words of this announcer and the preternatural, quasi-omnipotent feats that this star character could (and did) perform. TV commentators do little more these days raise tremendous -- all of which is relatively into something hyperbolic.

But few can period of time generally assimilate the atoms of the Jews, scapegoat, which was raying away the... But

SCAPEGOAT among of those words: das's-bluh, a William Tyndale calque of the Hebrew or Ar ha-godesh, itself a calque of which, etymologically -- whence English place, or thing.

A more con- derived from the Old Testament, which, etymologically it itself a calque of the Hebrew or Ar ha-godesh, has been sug...
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SCEAPEGOAT actually encompasses two calques and is an example of those words which I call doublecalques (with "double" pronounced 
bluh, as in the French manner). SCEAPEGOAT was coined by
William Tyndale for his 1530 translation of the Pentateuch as a
calque of the Late Latin (Vulgate) caper emissarius 'emissary goat,
itsl a calque of the Hebrew 'azazel, the name of a desert demon
which, etymologically, was understood as 'azazel 'goat that leaves'
-- whence EMISSARY GOAT, whence SCEAPEGOAT, whence any person,
place, or thing who bears the blame for others.

A more complex doublecalque is HOLY GHOST. This phrase is de-
vised from the Middle English halig gost, which itself is derived from the Old English halig gast -- elements which can be traced,
respectively, to the Indo-European kaiio- 'whole, uninjured' and
gheis-, an uncertain element expressing awe or fright. However,
in ancient Hebrew, a Hamito-Semitic language, ruah ha-godesh meant
HOLY SPIRIT, a phrase which was later translated into the Greek
pneuma hagion and thence the Latin spiritus sanctus. But not un-
til the Roman missionaries brought spiritus sanctus to the British
Isles in the latter half of the first millennium, did the English
combine halig with gost to form a coherent phrase. Thus, while
halig gast is a doublecalque of spiritus sanctus and pneuma hagion,
and spiritus sanctus is a doublecalque of pneuma hagion and ruah
ha-godesh, I christen HOLY GHOST a multiple doublecalque. (It
has been suggested that HOLY GHOST be called a triplecalque; how-
ever, such a neologism would needlessly compound the terminology.)

But the goat...shall be presented alive before the
LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him
go for a scapegoat into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:10).

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ever, such a neologism would needlessly compound the terminology.)
In contemplating multiple doublecalques, we must not overlook parallel doublecalques. GROUNDHOG, for example, is in all probability a calque of the Dutch aardvark, which dissects into aarde 'ground, earth' and vark 'hog, pig.' But, interestingly, a second calque representing an entirely different animal, the South African anteater (Orycteropus afer), is also translated from these same Dutch elements, though in this context it is reconstructed from its alternative English counterparts, EARTH and PIG. So GROUNDHOG and EARTH PIG are parallel doublecalques of the Dutch aardvark, which not incidentally yields, through its seventeenth-century off-spring language, Afrikaans, our more learned term for the earth-pig anteater, AARDVARK.

But few calques have the vainglory of being doublecalques. In fact, a substantial number of them can hardly be called calques at all. X-RAY, for example, is a partial rendering of Wilhelm Roentgen's X-strahl, in which the German Strahl translates into the English RAY, but the X, being an international algebraic symbol for the unknown, remains unchanged. ANTINOVEL, likewise, is an incomplete translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's antiroman (though the French term was used at least as early as 1627 by Charles Sorel) in which the French roman is rendered by the English NOVEL, but the anti remains unchanged. Such words, then, in which at least one major element is not translated from the original I designate as demicalques. And certain of these words, for example TALL OIL, which is a demicalque of the German Tallöl, which itself is a demi-calque of the Swedish tallolja are, in fact, doubledemicalques.

But an even more intriguing class of calques — my favorite — is that in which at least one major element is mistranslated from the original. I call these calques catachresticalques from the Greek-derived rhetorical term catachresis, which means, in part, an incorrect use of a word, either from a misinterpretation of its etymology or a folk etymology.

SCAPEGOAT, as we have seen, is an example of a doublecalque, but it is also a catachresticalque insofar as the Late Latin caper emissarius (of which SCAPEGOAT is Tyndale's English translation) is, in fact, a mistranslation of the Hebrew proper name 'azazel. And the Greek tragos apopompaios 'goat sent out' of the Septuagint is also a catachresticalque of 'azazel. So SCAPEGOAT and tragos apopompaios are, in reality, parallel doublecatachresticalques of the Hebrew 'azazel.

But there are more colorful catachresticalques reaching into the English language. At about the time the Hebrews were completing the Torah, the Greeks were coining the phrase ourion oon 'wind egg' to refer to certain eggs which do not hatch, presumably because they are conceived by the wind. Subsequently, this phrase was translated into Latin as ovum urinum, with the same meaning. But somewhere along the way, the Latin urinum 'wind' became confused with the Latin urinae 'urine.' So what began, etymologically, in Greek as a wind egg was transmuted, in Latin, into a urine egg. Moreover, in Old English the word for urine was adeila, which contracted to adel in Middle English; and the old English word for egg became pronounced in Middle English again, as a...
not overlook all possibilities into aardvark, a second south African groundhog (groundhogs sometimes call themselves aardvarks). In his $6.95 paperback, Family Words (Addison-Wesley, 1988), Paul Dickson explores a linguistic byway that has attracted little previous attention: words coined within a family group and only used among its members. He claims "it is all but impossible to find a family that does not have at least one family word," suggesting that the corpus of such words may well exceed unabridged dictionaries in size (even assuming many inadvertent duplications among the 50 million families in this country). By quizzing friends and relatives, and appealing for examples on radio talk shows, Dickson has collected more than three thousand, of which perhaps one-third appear in this book.

These examples give the zany flavor of what he has found:

- TOAD CLOTH a dishrag that has gotten too wet to use
- OLD MAIDS unpopped kernels of popcorn
- HOMESTEAD to stop your car and wait for a parking spot to be created
- FLINKUS an unidentifiable object left in the garage by the former owner of your house
- CLUNK-WAA a child falling out of bed in the middle of the night
- SNICK a droplet of saliva expelled while talking
- HA-HAS eyeglasses (from the sound made when you breathe on them for cleaning)
- GHOST POO white styrofoam packing pieces
- OIK the webbed space between two fingers

If you don't find this book delightful, you are really hard to please.