

# KICKSHAWS

Readers are encouraged to send their favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Kickshaws editor.

## THE SILENCE OF THE LAM(B)S

Susan Thorpe demonstrates in the following poem (published in a slightly different version in the Telegraph, Dec 9 1995) that every letter of the alphabet can be silenced:

Our silent game is all above boArd,  
 It's really quite suBtle and fun.  
 Just look at those bulging musCles  
 On my lover, my hanDsome one.  
 Now "E" is well out of linE,  
 As is "F" in NeuFchatel.  
 And I'm long since resiGned to the fact  
 That catarrH makes me feel unwell.  
 Am I in busIness?  
 Has mariJuana got a "J"?  
 Have taLk and Knife  
 Got an "L" and a "K"?  
 Can Mnemonics help to amuse us  
 When the autumN winds blow,  
 And peOple go in their droves  
 To the latest rerun of Psycho?  
 The card game called cinQ-cents  
 Isn't my metieR, dear me no!  
 Even the eminent viScount  
 Prefers his hauTboy (that's oboe).  
 Is the "U" in plaqUe any use?  
 And is it "V" or "F" in fiVepeuce?  
 The note I Write (billet-douX),  
 Does it make any sort of sense?  
 Our alphabetical quest's almost over,  
 So we say a praYer, a thank you.  
 Having offered our letters of silence,  
 We depart for our next rendeZvous.

"HE THAT IS MY FRIEND INDEED..."

"I don't know whether this sort of thing has been done before," Susan writes. "It involves making a sentence in which every word contains a given bigram, in this case HE."

HEATHER HEARN, THE HEALTHY MATHEMATICS TEACHER, FINISHED HER CHEESE SANDWICHES, BATHED, WASHED HER CLOTHES, HELPED HER MOTHER, THELMA, HEAP THE CHEAP DISHWASHER, CHECKED THE WEATHER OVERHEAD, SHED HER HEAVY SHEEPSKIN; THEN, WHEN TOGETHER THEY REACHED THE CHECKOUT, SHE THEREWITH CHEERFULLY CASHED HER BUTCHER FATHER'S CHEQUES.

#### TALES FROM NEW BYBWEN

Alan Smithee is the pseudonym of the Director's Guild based in Hollywood, Directors who wish to disassociate themselves from a released movie adopt that pseudonym in the film's credits. "The Girl from New Bybwen" (1992), written by Ben Pewtery, is Smithee's classic. SAE, being an obsolete form of both "say" and "so", is very confusing to New Bybwen visitors, especially if they are attempting to say something along the lines of "The old so-and-so gave his say-so". Despairing of Pewtery's authentic dialect script, Smithee took his leading lady for a break in New Bybwen's Ooze Zoo. Sadly, one of the lions ate Doris Day, so Smithee had to double Rock Hudson as the male and female leads. (As a soprano, Miss Hudson was a failure.) When her will was published, Miss Day had left all her thoughts to the celebrated film director. Smithee's secretary was quoted in the Semi Times as saying SAE, DID DORIS DEED SIR ODD IDEAS!

The HC (House of Commons) regularly attempts to bring the mediaeval municipal authority of New Bybwen within its purview by imposing exclusive cesses (taxes) on such local items as the town's ubach (Christmas batch of bread). It usually despatches the Inland Revenue officer known to the townsfolk as the fister (as he is inclined to break wind at the slightest provocation) to pursue its policy. The local baker attempts to keep confidential all data concerning the New Bybwen ubach. Sadly, this year victory went to the windbreaker, reported by the Semi Times under the heading HC ABUSES SECRETS IF FISTER CESSSES UBACH.

For most of her young working life in New Bybwen, Stella Ballets had held two jobs. By day, she acquired catering qualification but come twilight (or grisping, as it is still known locally) she would gnip (bite) the bullet of adventure by posing in the nude for the town's leading artist, Elbert Treble. Eventually, she combined both skills on appointment as the manageress of the new dining hall at New Bybwen's nudist colony, Era Bare. It was planned to have a high-profile official opening by a fully-dressed Leo Frick, Earl of Mercia. The leading nobleman of this midlands region and former English kingdom had been persuaded to perform the ceremony by his equestrienne wife, Godiva, a founder member of the town's Academy of Nature. But, the Countess of Mercia overlooked the fact that her spouse was a man for whom the modern proverb "A closed mouth gathers no foot" is essential counselling. No sooner had the peer cut the ribbon than he demanded of the overworked Stella a bite of supper. The statuesque caterer retorted icily "GNIP, SIR? GRISPING!"

Carlos Menem was the 1998 recipient of the New Bybwen Statesman of the Year award--following in the footsteps of such as Lon Nol and U Nu--and took as the theme of his speech the life of Argentina's most celebrated First Lady, Eva Peron, laying great stress on her not being a rep (person of low character). The president concluded emotionally with "NO REP! AVE EVA PERON!"

New Bybwen is not the only town in the ancient English kingdom of Mercia to retain Middle English spellings in its culture. Another borough in this region of England's midlands is Much Offa Muchness, which lies close to the border with Wales and commemorates in its name Mercia's greatest king, Offa, the constructor of the celebrated ditch, Offa's Dyke. Though the majority of tourists to Much are ladies of more conventional sexual tastes on a pilgrimage to the defensive line of the kingdom, one recent male visitor was the Director of New Bybwen's Ooze Zoo, Dr. A. Noel Leonard. Doctor Leonard was seeking a missing aardwolf cub which was rumoured to be living on pigswitt on an os (a geological term for a ridge) beyond Much. Unlike the rest of Britain, which calls refuse, switt, dregs or pigswitt DRAFF, Muchmen prefer the Middle English spelling DRAAF. This appealed to the Director when he reported his capture of the animal by laying a bait of liquified pigswitt. The whole episode was reported in the Semi Times under the heading SON OF AARDWOLF SEES FLOW DRAAF ON OS.

#### RANDOM QUESTIONS FROM BEN PEWTERY

Does SADIE produce odd IDEAS?

Does CELIA confuse ALICE?

And ELISE confuse ELSIE?

Is a GAMINE an ENIGMA variation?

Is a Mad HATTER a THREAT?

Does a troubled SERBIA produce RABIES?

Is ANDREW liable to WANDER? Does a WARDEN? Can they be WARNED?

Does the alphome AAFIRS put one's AFFAIRS in order?

Does a THING do a NIGHT shift?

#### HOW'S THAT AGAIN?

Peter Newby reports that the British TV words-and-numbers contest, Countdown, intersperses its contest challenges with lighthearted comment and, sometimes, intelligence tests. Recently a star guest, magician Geoffrey Durham, posed a Martin Gardner spatial puzzle. Afterwards the wordsman offered the following comment "There are three kinds of people: those who can count--and those who can't!"

#### POE'S CRYPT

Finally, Peter suggests this section as a "dumping ground for one-liners and similar items from your readers who send something that doesn't justify an individual kickshaw yet is sufficient to warrant a mention." He starts the ball rolling:

QUEAN. Is it a working title (B. Pewtery)  
 A man, a plan, a hat: Ah! anal panama (A. Smithee)  
 Maine is a pain, but Florida is horrider (Darby Belsire)

#### A REAL-LIFE SPOONERGRAM

Barbara Arnstein of Whitestone NY writes "I was in the supermarket when the cashier was being replaced by the one on the next shift, taking away with her the drawer of cash and coins. As I was waiting I said 'Is this the changing of the guard?' and she replied 'No, it's the guarding of the change.'"

#### WORDPLAY FROM DOWN UNDER

Jeff Grant reports "If you place the six animals BADGER, BRUMBY, COYOTE, JACKAL, JAGUAR and MONKEY in a column in the correct order, a seventh animal can be read diagonally from upper left to lower right." When he set this puzzle for competition at the Norfolk Island Scrabble Festival in 1998, one player came up with an alternate solution featuring a two-legged "animal" on the diagonal. Can you find both?

While archiving at the Hastings, New Zealand library, he ran across an early 1900s photo of a Hastings street in which the sign TOMBS & GRUBB UNDERTAKERS is clearly visible. If this is genuine, it ought to take the grand prize for appropriate names! Alas, he hasn't yet been able to independently confirm this firm's existence.

#### HOMETOWN POEM

Although I live in Iowa City, I grew up in a different town. Each line of this verse is an anagram of its name. Can you figure out where I'm from?

I, satin soul,  
 I toil as sun.  
 A soul's in it.  
 A soil I stun.

#### WORD-STEPPING ON THE LINE

Word-stepping is the process of moving through a text by counting the letters in the current word, moving that number of words in reading direction to reach a new word, and then repeating the process till reaching or passing the last word. For example, the word THUS in the next sentence has four letters. Thus going to the right four steps takes you to the word RIGHT with five letters. Going five more steps in reading direction takes you to TO. Two steps from TO is, predictably, the word WORD. Four steps from WORD is LETTERS. Seven steps from LETTERS is DIRECTION. Continuously moving on, ten steps from DIRECTION leads to PREDICTABLY. Eleven more inevitable steps from PREDICTABLY is STEPS. Five steps from STEPS, however, is CONTINUOUSLY. Twelve from CONTINUOUSLY is obviously INEVITABLE. Ten from

INEVITABLE is HOWEVER. Seven more irreversible steps from HOWEVER is OBVIOUSLY. Nine from OBVIOUSLY is IRREVERSIBLE. Twelve additional steps take you to ADDITIONAL. Ten from ADDITIONAL leads surprisingly to the word SURPRISINGLY. Eleven from SURPRISINGLY leads to the conclusion, unless you take ten steps for the letters in CONCLUSION...

### LAMB CHOPS

In the last Word Ways, Rex Gooch looked for the longest words that can be typed on the top row of a typewriter, and he found a lot of them! The Mary's Lamb takeoff below uses only the letters typed with the left hand. Can a top-row Lamb be typed?

#### Eva's Ewe

Eva caged a wee, wee ewe,  
 Fat tresses wet as grass.  
 As Eva raced afar, ewe traced  
 As far! Ewe was as crass.

Ewe started after Eva's feet,  
 Faced Eva at fact cave.  
 Tads tagged, tads teased, tads raved at ewe;  
 Tads saw sweet treats ewe gave.

### MARY'S SPELLED-OUT LAMB

Jim Puder: "Your clever article on the interestingness of spelled-out number names reminds me that lexicographers have also provided us with spelled-out names for the consonant letters (but not, apparently, for the vowels). Scattered around in Webster's Second, for instance, may be found this spelled-out English alphabet: A, bee, cee, dee, E, ef, gee, aitch, I, jay, kay, el, em, en, O, pee, cue, ar, ess, tee, U, vee, double-U, ex, wy, zee. When these letter names (with the exception of the non-phonetic double-U which is hopelessly awkward) are substituted for regular letters in written text, the result is an archaic-looking lingo which, to me, suggests pidgin Anglo-Saxon:

Emaarwy aitchadee a eliteeteeele elaembee,  
 Iteeess efeleeceee waess waitchiteee aess essenow;  
 Aendee eveearwyaitcheare teeaitchatee Emaarwy weentee  
 Teeaitche elaembee waess essuare teeo geeo.

I call this spelled-letter writing, for lack of a better term."

### PUDER'S NATURAL HISTORY LESSON

So this ai (three-toed sloth) and this unau (two-toed sloth) are a hot item, being unaware, poor near-sighted creatures, that their romance is doomed by a digit difference. Then one day while they're holding claws the penny suddenly drops for the ai, who exclaims:

"Yo, yo-yo! You an unau?? Oy! And, Edna, I an ai! ... Top drawer!  
A reward pot! I, an ai, and, Edna, you an unau! Oy, oy, oy, oy ..."

#### A STATELY MIXTURE

##### Viva United States of America

Monk? Hmm ... jivin', man!  
Honk, known champ--damn!  
Calmly twirl, mystic vox,  
And dancing skyward, waltz.

According to Mike Keith this quatrain "celebrates the distinctly American genius Thelonius Monk". But what is unique about it? The 100 letters in the quatrain and its title can be rearranged to form the 50 two-letter abbreviations of the states.

#### THE STAR-CROSSED CRUSADERS

Clint Jackson Baker of Bloomington IN sent in the following acrostic poem for your delectation:

Zounds!--young xanthous warriors,  
Vaguely understanding  
Theologically  
Sounder reprimanding.  
Quiet priests overtly  
Nudge, mandate, lament  
"Kill! jihad is here  
Good fellows--"  
Epitaph: Don't come back again.

#### AEIOU-CRONYM

I wrote to Mike Morton that a dictionary of acronyms lists AEIOU which stands for (1) Austriae Est Imperare Orbi Universo, or (2) Alles Erdreich Ist Oesterreich Unterthan. The translation given for both is "to Austria is the whole world subject". Mike replied "and they'll disemvowel anyone who says different."

Mike comments "I heard that the U.S. House voted to allow THE TEN COMMANDMENTS to be posted in schools" and offers the following ten anagrams in reply:

Cannot mend them METS  
Condemn them, test man  
Madmen, not TNT scheme  
Men! men! that'd cost men  
Sent the damn comment

Damn, men contest them!  
Ed McMahon sent me TNT  
Men condemn math test  
Most men needn't match  
Needn't scent mammoth

## O V. MICHELSEN'S REJECTION LETTER REFUSAL

Dear Professor -----

Thank you for your letter of March 18. After careful consideration I regret to inform you that I am unable to accept your refusal to offer me an assistant professor position in your department.

This year I have been particularly fortunate in receiving an unusually large number of rejection letters. With such a varied and promising field of candidates, it is impossible for me to accept all refusals.

Despite ----- University's outstanding qualifications and previous experience in rejecting applicants, I find that your rejection does not meet my needs at this time. Therefore I will assume the position of assistant professor in your department this August. I look forward to seeing you then.

Best of luck in rejecting future applicants.

## DALTON'S DELIGHTS

Oren Dalton of El Paso TX is a collector of language oddities mostly related to word-meanings, which he notices while reading. The best of these get classified and stored in his computer, an electronic version of the old-fashioned commonplace book. Some examples:

- Words With Unique Syntax: it's with an apostrophe is a contraction for 'it is', and its without an apostrophe is the possessive form (belongs to it). But all other words use an apostrophe for both purposes: the cat's going to the vet, the cat's collar is loose.
- Adding Y does not always convert a noun to its adjective: army isn't characteristic of an arm, irony doesn't relate to iron, handy does not require a hand, a bus is not necessarily busy
- Changing Word-Order Changes Meaning: 'this is foul play' is not the same as 'this play is foul', 'his black eyes' is different from 'black his eyes'.
- Multiple Adjectives Can Be Ambiguous: are black pearl fishermen black or merely fishers of black pearls? A red apple woman is likely to be a purveyor of red apples (not green ones), but a brown apple woman is likely to have a suntan.
- Word Pronunciation Depends on Context: a bee is stingy but a miser is stingy, a fencer's a lunger but a TB patient's a lunger, a silo's a tower but a garage truck's a tower, 5280 is a number but a hypodermic needle is a number.
- Antonyms With No Change of Meaning: spending power = buying power, delete the undesired documents = delete the desired documents.
- Charade Words:
  - Away back, I was sent to find
  - A way back, to the same old grind.
  - A way, Bill, I had been told,
  - A waybill to silver and gold.

## PLAY IT AGAIN, JAY

Poppa's in the joint agin  
 Fer cuttin' one o' Momma's min (American)

I gone an' lost muh birthday pen  
 That's three bocks down the drain agen (Canadian)

Favver's bugged orf to Spyne  
 Avoidin' Mum an' the ryne agyne (British)

## AN ANAGRAM QUIZ

Bill Webster of Carefree AZ sends along the following anagram quiz in which the first column gives the clue, the second the starting letter, and the third an anagram of the answer.

1. Sells SUVs	D	leadership
2. Seaside	S	shoer
3. Need batteries	P	plenties
4. Lively	S	riptides
5. Disagreeer	D	stupider
6. Sub weapons	T	doorstep
7. Reply	R	ponders
8. Refigure	R	trounce
9. Organ	H	earth
10. Garment	C	escort
11. Reslice	R	truce
12. Urchin	G	enigma
13. Three-sided	T	relating
14. Medicine	M	decimation
15. Scales peaks	M	enumeration
16. Deteriorating	E	negroid

## ON CONVERTING PLURALS INTO SINGULARS WITH AN ESS

In *An Almanac of Words at Play* (Jan 5), Willard Espy wrote the following clever verse:

"My s's grow s's, alas!" cried a lass.  
 "My handles turn handless, my bras turn to brass.  
 A girl who cares deeply is quick to caress;  
 She dreams of the posses whose love she'd possess;  
 An as with an s is an ass, and no less  
 When asses add s's, those asses assess.  
 Add s's to mas and they worship at mass;  
 Add s's to pas, and the pas make a pass."

Bill Webster mined the *Official Scrabble Players Dictionary* (including a few shorter ones from *Official Scrabble Words*) for all such words:



abness, abyss, amass, amiss, ass, assess  
 bass, bibless, boss, brass, buss  
 camass, careless, carless, cosiness, coss  
 discuss, doss, duress  
 ess  
 footless  
 gaminess, garbles  
 handless, hiss, hominess, hurtless  
 inkless  
 kavass, kermess, kindless, koumiss, koumyss  
 lass, lowness  
 marquess, mass, mess, miss, morass, moss, muss  
 needless, nerviness  
 ogress  
 pass, piss, possess, princess, pross, puss  
 restless, rumpless, rustless  
 saltiness  
 tackless, tailless, tass, treadless, tress  
 wattles, windless, wiss  
 zebrass

#### A CALL FOR HELP

Peter Newby is justly proud of his trio of beautiful Barton granddaughters--Emmaline, Zoe and Sally. Whilst Emmaline's pet name of Emme makes her a natural for palindromes and Grandpa produced EOZON? NO, O ZOE! for the middle sister, he has had to admit failure to place the baby granddaughter within a satisfactory statement. Even utilizing the archaic speech of New Bybwen for YLL AS SALLY and indulging in pure Mercian fantasy for DRIB, LA VINYL LASS, IS SALLY (NIVAL BIRD), to say nothing of employing CHLOROPHYLL in a cheater's sentence, the ancient one is still a poor third to Sally's pet bunny rabbits and her favourite pop group. Can any reader help a broken wordsmith?

#### SUPERCALIFRAGILISTICEXPIALIDOCIOUS

An August 1994 Kickshaw reported the following parody of this Mary Poppins nonsense-word on a sign at a Republican political rally for Quayle: SUPERFRANTICDEMOCRATICCLINTONLEGISLATION. A new Internet version has now surfaced. Mahatma Gandhi walked barefoot most of the time which produced an impressive set of calluses. He ate very little, which made him frail, and with his odd diet, he suffered from bad breath, making him a SUPER-CALLUSED FRAGILE MYSTIC PLAGUED WITH HALITOSIS. Can anyone create a phrase more faithful to the original? The editor suggests SUPER-CALLUSED FRAGILE MYSTIC, SEX-FREE YET PRECOCIOUS, but perhaps a total reconstruction is needed, not necessarily related to Gandhi.