KICKSHAWS

DAVID L. SILVERMAN

Few present-day subscribers of Word Ways remember Dave Silverman, the first Kickshaws editor from May 1969 through November 1975. He was a mathematician at Hughes Aircraft before forming a small consulting company (Research Consultants Unlimited) which operated from his house in West Los Angeles. A cheerleader for Word Ways (“It would be lovely if we could make a success of Word Ways on our own. And I believe we can do it”), he had tons of raw material: “...given time to write [my Kickshaws ideas] up, I could easily fill the next three years of WW...the backlog of K material I have is staggering...if I took 3 days vacation & pulled all the phones out of their jacks, I could retire to my home office, where I can’t hear the doorbell when my tape deck is playing, & get off 80 pages of unpadded K contribs...if I add my own stuff, more than 800 pages. I have boxes and legal size letter file boxes crammed full of notes on K”. (But he did have one fault exasperating to an editor: he could not deliver Kickshaws on time. Apparently he worked best under pressure: “I like to feel the tug of life—without it I feel a human being is nowhere”). Alas, most of this corpus never saw the light of day: he tragically died on Feb 18 1978 at the relatively young age of 48, reportedly the consequence of a nervous breakdown. Here is a sample of his Kickshaws.

Meaning and Origin

A kickshaw is defined either in a neutral manner as “a bauble, trifle, or knickknack” or more flatteringly as “a fancy tidbit; a delicacy.” The purpose of this feature is to satisfy both definitions by presenting linguistic items of light weight and vast diversity, designed to appeal to the tastes of all recreational linguists.

The word is of recent origin (from the point of view of the etymologists), having been introduced into American speech in colonial times as a Yankee corruption of the French phrase quelque chose, meaning “something”. Once kickshaws became part of our language, it was natural to treat it as a plural form and to coin kickshaw as the singular form—an example of a back-formation. Another such example is the word pea. The plural peas (earlier pease) was originally singular in meaning, though plural in sound. Since sounds almost always triumphs over sight in the evolution of language, pea was formed from peas rather than vice versa.

Ghoti Revisited

Most readers will recall George Bernard Shaw’s clever example of the hopeless disparity between English spelling and pronunciation. By his lights, GHOTI should be pronounced “fish” using the F sound in laugh, the I sound in women, and the SH sound in nation. Using the same principle how would you pronounce NOST LIEUT TOLON? (Hint: the words from which the sounds are extracted are all military.) Answer; using the O sound in provost marshal, the LEF sound in lieutenant (British version), and the UR sound in colonel, the correct pronunciation is “no left turn”. Using gunwale, boatswain, and colonel again, one can derive “Hello, Zen Master” from HWALEOST, TSWAIN MASTOLO, but for brevity I like FORECAST, pronounced “folks” a la forecastle.
Crash

In the game of Crash, two players each covertly write down a five-letter word. (Some sophisticates who don’t mind dragging the game out interminably use six or even seven-letter words.) The players then fire simultaneous salvos at each other. A salvo is a group of five five-letter words selected in an attempt to detect your opponent’s word. He must write after each word in the salvo the number of crashes it makes with his secret word. A crash is the occurrence of the same letter in the same position. Thus if the secret word is REGAL, then LARGE makes no crashes with it, while BEGIN scores two crashes (in 2nd and 3rd positions).

Suppose in a game of Crash your first salvo of STRAW, HOLLY, TEPID, MINUS, and COURT draws five zeros. On your second salvo, each of your five words draws one crash: BRING, GLOVE, SHEIK, TRUCE, and FLIES. The winner of the game is the first player whose salvo contains his opponent’s word. Can you guarantee you will have his word in your next salvo?

Crash Variants

Ross Eckler proposes a variant of Crash in which the target word is not fixed but may be modified throughout the game to conform with the scores allotted to opponent’s salvos. If a player errs in scoring his opponent’s shots in such a way as to leave no legal target word, he will lose if challenged. This seems to us an even more exciting game than Crash. Let’s call it Wild Crash.

We propose another variant called Uncrash. Alternately, each player adds a five-letter word from the agreed-upon dictionary that crashes with no word already in this list. First player stymied loses.

The Printer's Paradox

A printer has a block of 100 spaces, each of which can be filled with any of 27 different type symbols: the 26 letters of the alphabet (upper case) and a null for spacing purposes. The number of intelligible messages that can be printed under these restrictions is staggeringly large, but obviously finite, since the number of ways of filling 100 spaces with any of 27 symbols is the 100th power of 27.

Among these messages there are some which characterize or define positive integers, sometimes in any of several ways. For instance, 7 is characterized by SEVEN, FIVE PLUS TWO, THE SQUARE ROOT OF FORTY NINE, THE NUMBER OF DAYS IN A WEEK, and many other ways the reader can think of. Most of the possible messages are nonsense. Most of those that are not nonsense do not refer to integers. It follows, of course, that the number of integers that can be characterized in no more than 100 spaces is also finite, and that being true, there must be a largest one. Think about that largest integer for a moment. It will be very large indeed—certainly larger than the 100th power of 27, since there will be many integers less than that number which are incapable of characterization. Call the largest characterizable integer M. Now consider the message ONE MORE THAN THE LARGEST NUMBER THAT CAN BE CHARACTERIZED IN ONE HUNDRED SPACES OR FEWER. That message characterizes M+1, requiring only 89 spaces. We are left with the contradiction that M is the largest characterizable integer, but that M+1 is also characterizable. I have never seen a resolution of this paradox.
A Challenge

Readers are hereby challenged to concoct a logical, intelligible and grammatical sentence beginning with the words “If I was the President…”

Reply: I received 22 solutions, the drollest of which was Murray Pearce’s “If I was the President, and Mrs. If I was the First Lady.” But my favorite was offered by Elizabeth Byrnes of Philadelphia: “If I was the President for four years, how come the Electoral College never notified me of the fact?”

Mad British Ship Names

The English have shown magnificent taste in naming their men-of-war. Some of the names have been so dramatic that had they been displayed on ensigns in the language of their naval enemies, I have no doubt one lone Britisher could have kept an entire task force at bay. Examples: Indomitable, Intrepid, Indefatigable, Victorious, Valiant, Invincible, Redoubtable, Formidable, Dauntles, Repulse, Excalibur, Vigilant, Relentless, Avenger, Adamant, and Resolute. Some of these fine names must have been worth twenty extra guns at least.

If Mad Magazine decided to lampoon the Royal Navy, it would probably start with the names of the ships. HMS Unfathomable would, of course, be a ship of shallow draught. The Mad Flotilla would surely include Repulsive, Insufferable, Abominable, Indubitable, Unmentionable (and her sister ships Unspeakable and Ineffable), Impeccable, Insensible, Innocuous, Incorrigible, Intemperate and Inebriated.

Ambiguity

In response to Art Seidenbaum’s article “The Trouble With Students” in West Magazine, Rich Goren of Hollywood wrote the following letter to the editor: “...Mr. Seidenbaum says about Santa Cruz University, ‘I counted girls going barefoot to classes; about one in every four.’ Does he mean that one out of every four girls goes barefoot to class, or that barefoot girls go to one out of every four classes, or that girls choose to go to one out of every four classes barefoot, or that one of every four students at Santa Cruz is a barefoot girl, or that the girls at Santa Cruz have four legs?” I can think of two more plausible interpretations and have no doubt that our readers will find many more.

Telephomnemonics

It’s an old trick to use a 7-letter word as a device for remembering a telephone number. For numbers containing 1 or 0 this is impossible, as it is, indeed for most numbers which contain only digits from 2 to 9; generally, one must use a suggestive letter and number combination or even a nonsense word. Few of us are fortunate enough to have an organic chemist friend with the telephone number SNowden 59637; if we had, we could ring him up simply by dialing POLYMER. It was pointed out in Time recently (and about five years ago in The Realist) that the number for Dial-a-Prayer is HOllywood 33266 so that if one forgets the number, he can get his minute sermon any time of the day by dialing GODDAMN. I wonder what the number is for Dial-a-Curse.

What’s more interesting is the telephone number that admits two different decipherments—we could call them dual telephomnemonics. A girl used SWINGER to dial her jet-set boyfriend. A family of midgets, mutual friends of both, took over the man’s house (and telephone) when he
jetted out of town for good. Now, whenever she wants to call her diminutive friends, she dials (you guessed it) PYGMIES. Two more pairs: AMOUNTS CONTOUR and ASTRIDE CRUSHED. Of course, it's simple to find pairs like BOATING COATING, but not quite so easy to find non-crashing pairs. Care to try?

**Amphisbaenics**

These are backward rhymes such as SCRAM - MARX. Edmund Wilson, who may have invented them, uses them in his poem “The Pickerel Pond: A Double Pastoral” which begins

The lake lies with never a ripple
A lymph to lave sores from a leper
The sand white as salt in an air
That has filtered and tamed every ray;

Below limpid water, those lissome
Scrolleries scribbled by mussels
The floating dropped feathers of gulls;
A leech like a lengthening slug

That shrinks at a touch, ink and orange;
A child's wrecked Rio Janeiro,
One fortress of which flies a reed
The cleft and quick prints of a deer...

and winds its fantastical way through another 67 stanzas. The poem can be found in Wilson's *Night Thoughts* (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy), a curious collection of anagrams, limericks, clerihews, and whimsical excursions that should be on every logophile's bookshelf.

**Metternich's Great Admirer**

Clever Peter Viereck'll
Seem a bit more of a miracle
If he'll hold himself in a particle
And refrain from sending us offprints of his every godblessed article.

Edmund Wilson may not be the most scurrilous clerihewer, but I know of none scurrilouser.

**Challenge**

I came across an unusual two-word formation in Webster's Third. Translated by one-to-one encipherment into its numerical equivalent, it reads 1 2 3 1 2 1 1 4 3 2 4. I sent the latter to Walt Penney, who solved it with the aid of John Ferguson. He remarked in deadpan style “I don’t think there’s another solution.” I’m sure there isn’t and will send a copy of Webster’s Third to anyone who finds more than the one known solution. See if you can find that first. How do you know the one you find is the same as mine? No problem; I’ll publish all solutions contributed an issue or two hence. Good hunting.

**Reply:** In the August issue I challenged the readers to find what I hoped was a unique two-word entry in Webster's Third. Copies of same were promised all readers who found alternate solutions. From Mary J. Youngquist of Rochester, N.Y., thus: “Regarding your challenge...the
solution is Loblolly Boy. But the pattern is not unique. Have you never heard of Dab Daddy Bay? Or the Women's Lib Mothers' Holiday—Madmammy Day? And there is a type of extremely selective dog-breeder known as a Pugpuppy Guy.” Well, all right, Mary (but how did you miss Fagaff’s Gas?). When your alternate solutions appear in Webster’s Fourth, you can be sure you’ll get your Komplimentary Kickshaws Kopy.

Shaggy Doggerel

Leigh Mercer of London has sent a pair of poems for this department, the first an original, the second from a 1960 competition held by Punch. On reading it you should be able to describe the nature of the competition.

On A Purveyor of Chocolate

A merchant who traded in cocoa
Much admired that strange style called rococo.
You’ll be happy to learn
That the name of his firm
Is to be The Rococo Cocoa Co.

More Beer, Poor Fool!

When days drag long (dull word, dull deed),
This mere half pint won’t meet your need.
When luck runs skew (sunk bond—lost pool),
This lone half pint won’t help, poor fool.
When shot your bolt, when lost your race,
This bare half pint can’t help our case.
Come fill your mugs; soak care away.
Each pint will make this life less grey.

Myt correspondent report that in the Mensa Bulletin of April 1969 appeared the following by K.F. Ross of New York City (shall we call it Spoonerhyme?):

Ill wit. Will it die out? I doubt

Very clever, I thought. I’ll have a shot at this new verse form. The following lines were written by an Eskimo pilot flying a polar bear pelt to his beloved:

By air I bear hoar fur for her

Reply: Murray Pearce composed the following Spoonerhyme on the critical comment following Tom Thumb’s vocal recital:

Some things Thumb sings seem dumb, deem some

Word Association

In my opinion, standard word association tests are not specific enough to enable the tester to make valid conclusions about the testee. There should be two words for each association. A cigar could connote Groucho Marx, and a paintbrush could connote Grandma Moses, but how about a

Now for your rating. Adam and/or Eve: normal. No association at all: normal. Isaac Newton (falling apple and fig newton): hi, fellow weirdo. Isaac Newton plus Adam and/or Eve: same as previous rating. An association other than Adam and/or Eve or Isaac Newton: hoo boy!

He Laughs Best...

I was tossing around the names of various wars in which both the opponents appear: Spanish-American, Franco-Prussian, Sino-English, Russo-Japanese, Arab-Israeli, Judeo-Roman, Anglo-Norman, and Greco-Roman. Is it a quirk of historians or merely a coincidence that the opponent named first was always the loser? It would appear that a country about to embark on war would do well to see that the war is named before the fighting starts, with the enemy named first!

Onomatopoetic License or the Apian Way

The songbird that goes “tweet-tweet” for us trills “cui-cui” for a Frenchman. That’s possible; animal language does vary with geography. But I often wonder what intricate design causes German train whistles to go “töf-töf” instead of “toot-toot”. And when it comes to describing the sound of the stimulated heart, the language barrier widens to an uncrossable chasm. Where our hearts go “pit-a-pat” or “pitter-patter” Japanese hearts go “doki-doki”, and somehow, their rendition of a temporary palpitation seems more faithful than ours.

“My heart leaps up when I behold / Exquisite Genevieve Bujold”

And it does it with a Japanese accent. But to return to the topic of animal language, consider the bizarre experiment entomologists performed by way of further confirmation of Von Frisch’s generally accepted theory that bees communicate the location of food sources to each other by means of a “dance”. Foragers returning to the hive after discovering a new nectar supply perform a series of gyrations, and from the general tempo of the dance, the frequency of changes in the direction of rotation, and perhaps from other cues, their hive-mates are able to determine with good accuracy the distance of the food source from the hive and its azimuth with respect to the sun. A few years ago, researchers noticed that a French and an Italian strain of the same species of bee had rather different directional dances. A group of the French workers were color-marked and after a motor trip across the Alps were introduced into the Italian hive. Their visas, of course, were in order, i.e. they had been thoroughly steeped in the odor of the foreign hive. The outcome was as expected: the French bees consistently misinterpreted the Italian dances (all in about the same way) and vice versa. Can you visualize the scene? If not, allow me to limn it for you.

Scene: a hive outside of Turin. A Lyonnaise bee, played by Simone Signoret, is confronted by an Italian bee, played by Anna Magnani. (For French and Italian dialects write your nearest Swiss embassy).

Italian Bee (noticing French Bee’s empty pouches and standing with middle legs akimbo): What’s the matter, stupid? Can’t you understand Apish? I danced “two kilometers southwest” not “three kilometers east”.
French Bee: Don't tell me your troubles, sister; I've seen better Apish danced by Swiss-Germans, and now that I think of it, they weren't even bees—they were wasps. Next time you come back from a forage, how about just drawing me a map?

Italian Bee: Izzatso? I suppose that Kzotska you and your friends perform is Apish. Listen, why don't you and those busy-bodies that brought you here go back where you came from? You've been nothing but bad news since they first smuggled you in.

French Bee: Oh, go curdle some mozzarella.

The pitch rises to fever, the Italians rise en masse and eject their French cousins, the entomologists retire in disorder, the dramatist fortifies himself with a pair of stingers, and the publisher breaks out in hives.

The Epithet Game

Going from the sublime to the ridiculous, let's revive the game of the forties known as Epithets or Hinky Pinkies. I'll give a brief phrase (e.g. "ill-natured taxi driver" or "Dracula and Frankenstein") and you translate it into a rhyming adjective-noun combination (e.g. "crabby cabby" or "gruesome twosome"). Before we start, that reminds me of something: who played Frankenstein in the American film version? No, you're wrong. Colin Clive played him. Boris Karloff played Frankenstein's monster. File that away in your trivia cabinet and try these epithets:

Ardent employee
Unimaginative surface decoration
A cactus that goes out of its way to needle you
A world of igneous rock
Boisterous policy meeting

Dismal chorus
Childish wall painting
Brackish nut confection
Fanatic slave
Fruitful interval of time

One Man's Opinion

For an entire week, Monday May 7th through Saturday May 12th, one of our most admired editorial journalists subjected us, the readers of Word Ways, to a relentless barrage of castigation and ridicule. His point was that playing with the language is not an intelligent, adult pursuit, and being the writer that he is, his rapier as smooth and sharp as that of any other man who scribbled for a living, he made a very convincing case. By some strange quirk of psychology, I've found that the more fanatic the logophile, the more inclined he is to acknowledge the justness of the denunciation. It must be the quality of the writing. Had he attacked the custom of eating as skillfully as he attacked wordplay in his six-day tirade, I probably would have nodded in perfect agreement without, however, changing my eating habits in the slightest.

On Monday he began innocuously with a blast at the picture-poem. Valentine poems shaped like hearts, the epistles of Paul printed minutely in their entirety on the (resumed) likeness of the Apostle, that sort of thing. Tuesday he castigated lipogrammatists and rebus-makers. Still nothing to make a Journal of Recreational Logology reader blush, but the signs were ominous. Sure enough, on Wednesday he struck with vigor at us anagrammarians, pausing only to direct some scorn at the acrostic and the bouts rimes. On Thursday, warming to his sermon, he deftly exposed puns and punsters to his merciless sarcasm. Friday he began his summation against linguistic horseplay, including doggerel rhymes, and Saturday concluded it with a Perelmanesque fantasy in which all of these objectionable examples of False Wit assume corporeal form and cavort about fatuously until they are dispelled by the embodiment of True Wit.
I don’t mind telling you I was shaken after reading these six editorials. The writer has always been a particular favorite of mine. How fine it would be to make one’s points so compactly and cogently. And what a subtle, underplayed humor! Many writers can evoke the appreciative grin in their readers, but he gets belly-laughs without the slightest strain. Methought perhaps I was demeaning myself with my logomaniacal pursuits and should take up a new hobby such as clam breeding or linoleum laying. I mentioned the articles to a logophiliac friend. His reply reassured me: “What did the guy recommend as a better way of getting your kicks? Writing dirty knock-knock jokes?” Suddenly I recalled the occasional sanctimonious streak that marred this fine journalist’s writings. If it pleases you to read the Philadelphia telephone directory three hours every evening, does that give me license to publicly denounce you?

I read these tirades some ten years ago. They were written in 1711 by Joseph Addison (The Spectator, numbers 58 through 63). If you don’t own The Spectator, I urge you to buy or borrow a copy if only to read the anti-logophiliac articles. They are very funny:

Monday: I have heard that there is now an eminent Writing-Master...who has transcribed all the Old Testament in a full-bottomed Periwig; and if the Fashion should introduce the thick Kind of Wigs which were in Vogue some few Years ago, he promises to add two or three supernumerary Locks that shall contain all the Apocrypha.

Tuesday (of the Odyssey of Tryphiodorus, who shunned a different letter of the Greek alphabet in each of the 24 books in his translation): ...if the work...had been now extant...what a perpetual Fund would it have been of obsolete Words and Phrases, unusual Barbarisms and Rusticities, absurd Spellings and complicated Dialects? I make no Question but it would have been looked upon as one of the most valuable Treasuries of the Greek Tongue.

Wednesday (on anagramming): I have heard of a Gentleman who, when this Kind of Wit was in Fashion, endeavored to gain his Mistress’s Heart by it. She was one of the finest Women of her Age, and known by the name of the Lady Mary Boon. The Lover not being able to make anything of Mary, by certain Liberties...converted it into Moll and after having shut himself up for a half a Year, with indefatigable Industry produced an Anagram. Upon the presenting it to his Mistress, who was a little vexed in her Heart to see herself degraded into Moll Boon, she told him, to his infinite Surprize, that he had mistaken her Sirname, for that it was not Boon but Bohun.

Thursday (on the painstaking classification of puns): I remember a Country School-Master of my acquaintance told me once, that he had been in Company with a Gentleman whom he looked upon to be the greatest Paragrammatist among the Moderns. Upon Enquiry, I found my learned Friend had dined that day with Mr Swan, the famous punster; and desiring him to give me some Account of Mr Swan’s Conversation, he told me that he generally talked in the Ploce, but that in his humble Opinion he shined most in the Antaclasis.

Clifton Fadiman wrote a fine essay, “Small Excellencies: A Dissertation on Pull Any 11 mb r Can Play. Avon, 1957) that Addison might not have regarded highly but you will.

Addison was joshing, of course, when he wrote about the swain who spent six months producing an anagram of MOLL BOON. Nothing could come of those letters (could it?), so assume that he was working with LADY MOLL BOON. Ross Eckler has come up with a couple of possibilities which Lady Bohun would surely have rejected, even had her lover spelled her name correctly. Can you find one?
Lady Moll Boon

Readers were encouraged to seek the anagram that might lurk in these unpromising letters, and seven of them took a crack at it. Everybody got MOLDY BALLOON and there were a few others equally unacceptable by unromantics such as Murray Pearce and Ross Eckler. Can’t you just see that lovesick youth zapping his inamorata with OLD LOONY LAMB? No, gentle Kickshavians, the truth has been revealed to me in the form of a yellowed copy of The Spectator, published over 250 years ago. The original lady of the anagram was none other than Lady Margaret Styme, daughter of the fourth Earl of Beastleigh-on-Severn. Most of the edition was burned by Addison and Steele in order to modify the Earl, who had threatened them with a suit for invasion of primacy (he was, at that time, a bishop, or perhaps it was an ape; the records are not clear on this point). All book collections bore the amended fictitious name, but the swain of Addison’s parable was not confronted with the impossible letters LADY MOLL BOON. His six months were, in point of fact, spent on a different collection of letters. MARGARET he found too challenging, so he later changed it to PEGGY and still later to MEG. And he couldn’t spell his way out of a muslin purse; his anagram, according to report, was based on the words LADY MEG STEARNE. Lord (Styrne) only knows what his anagram was, but after six months of work it must have been a lulu!

Double-Duty Words: Where Do You Come From, What Do You Do?

For some four centuries the English have been helping themselves freely to foreign words (among other valuables) and in so doing have enriched themselves and their language. America has followed the lead of the mother country, and as a result of the interaction among English-speaking peoples, it is not chauvinistic to speculate that from the viewpoint of expressive capability English is the richest (terrestrial) language.

As a byproduct of our tendency to appropriate words from other languages, we have a large store of words that denote both occupation and nationality. Chanteuse is not an example of what I have in mind. Though lifted bodily from French, it would apply no less aptly to Lena Horne than to Edith Piaf. Likewise with gendarme or cicerone (a not-necessarily-Italian guide). But a dragoman is an interpreter from one of the Arabic-speaking countries. And if one woman writes amah on an employment application in London or New York and another writes ayah, then both are nursemaids, the first Chinese, the second East Indian. We might correctly call an amah a nanny, but it wouldn’t do to call an English nursemaid an amah. A few other examples of double-duty words:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Word</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lascar</td>
<td>sailor</td>
<td>East Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kanaka</td>
<td>sailor</td>
<td>Polynesian</td>
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<tr>
<td>gaucho</td>
<td>cowboy</td>
<td>Argentine</td>
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<td>vaquero</td>
<td>cowboy</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
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<td>muzhik</td>
<td>collective farmer</td>
<td>Russian</td>
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<tr>
<td>kibbutznik</td>
<td>collective farmer</td>
<td>Israeli</td>
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Kulak (a wealthy Russian peasant) is a triple-duty word. Where are you from? What do you do? And how’s business?
Wordbotchery

In his alternate capacity as bird-watcher, Word Botcher swears to this incident: he had brought his portable tape recorder to the San Diego Zoo in order to supplement his library of bird chatter, but was sidetracked in the simian section by the Capuchin monkey cage, where he observed the monkeys staring in perfect silence at the human spectators for several minutes at a time. Suddenly and without apparent stimulus one of the older males would gabble rapidly at his fifty-odd cage mates. After he finished, all the others would immediately gabble back, for all the world like the chorus in a Greek play or like a congregation doing responsive reading. Then a minute or two of silence followed by a similar exchange. After another five minutes or so a different monkey would take the pulpit and the responsive reading would again take place in two or three cycles. This was better than bird calls, and Word Botcher turned on his recorder, almost immediately coming to the end of a tape cassette and finding to his discomfiture that he had no empties. After a short mental debate in which he rejected the thought of erasing 45 minutes of mynah screeches and toucan shrieks, he left the zoo and began cruising along for a place to buy blank cassettes. The first one he came to had a lettered sign from which the first letter had been lost. It read APE RECORDERS.

On another occasion Word Botcher saw the following double feature advertised on the marquee of a theater in Marina Del Ray: THE SKIN GAME and DELIVERACNE. Items like this are not liable to escape Botcher's attention, since he is always on the lookout for them. Generally a modest man, Botcher has one point of vanity: he boasts that he has never seen a restaurant menu in which he could not spot an error. If he doesn’t quickly find a misspelling, he’ll find a run-on such as “Al aKing” or “Tornados of Beef”, a real boner. As for common short-order-house errors such as “Hamburger Steak in Smothered Onions” (isn’t it the steak that is smothered?), he disdains to use them on the theory, confirmed by years of experience, that any eatery capable of that sort of howler is bound to have spelling errors in its menu.

Doubting his blanket premise, we wagered him the price of a dinner for four at one of Hollywood's poshest restaurants, that he would find their menu error-free. Throughout the meal he studied the menu the way a lawyer studies a merger agreement, and by the time dessert arrived his expression was so downcast that we couldn’t refrain from ordering a round of Courvoisier at his expense. But it turned out, like the rest of the tab, to be at ours instead, for during the end cup of coffee he found a missing circumflex. Ordinarily this would not counted, but unfortunately for us, all the other entrees requiring diacritics had received them, so he won fairly on the ground of consistency.

Since then, we’ve become a menu-vetter too, and we have concluded that the next time you look at a menu (provided it is not for a state occasion at Buckingham Palace—and even then it is suspect), if you fail to find a mistake, you’re not trying hard enough.

College Metonymy and Class One Diseases

We wonder why it is that Poughkeepsie, a singularly-uninteresting city in New York, with little to boast of except for the highly-regarded women’s college, Vassar, is not used, for that very reason, as a synonym for Vassar, in the same way as Ann Arbor is used to denote the University of Michigan. Economy is not the criterion, since Ithaca is sometimes used metonymously for Cornell, but never South Bend for Notre Dame. Why again do Boulder, Berkeley, and Chapel Hill represent the universities of Colorado, California and North Carolina, while Austin, Albuquerque and Reno fail to represent the universities of Texas, New Mexico and Nevada? Athens is the University of Georgia; why isn’t Durham equivalent to Duke? And when West
Point is the Military Academy, and Annapolis is the Naval Academy, shouldn't Colorado Springs be the Air Force Academy?

The questions are, of course, rhetorical. Inconsistent as our language is, we'd have it no other way, for if it were consistent, we couldn't play the disease game with you. This trivial makethink is based on an old parlor game in which the victims are required to find the subtle basis for an unusual dichotomy. The British monthly magazine Games & Puzzles features this sort of game regularly. One of the marvelous expansions of the underlying concept of dichotomies was realized in the early 1960s in Robert Abbott's card game, Eleusis. Back to the diseases. In Class I appear plague, mange, hives, mumps, measles, croup, gout, bends, crabs, colic, grippe, flu, whooping cough, shingles, and chicken pox. Class II diseases include yaws, scurvy, dropsy, malaria, beriberi, athlete's foot, pellagra, diphtheria, cancer, rabies, pleurisy, catarrh, leprosy, dysentery, and rickets. You'll note that both classes contain plural (as opposed to pleural) diseases, both contain childhood diseases, adult diseases, and diseases of vitamin deprivation. The basis for the dichotomy is linguistic. Another clue: we can think of no other Class I diseases at the moment. Virtually all diseases are Class II.

More Class I Diseases

We could think of only fifteen [Class I diseases in the previous Kickshaws], but Philip Cohen found an epidemic of additional examples. In his first response, Phil added chills, creeps, jumps, shakes (a colloquial form of certain Class II diseases such as palsy or St. Vitus' Dance), jimjams, screaming meemies, and uglies (one of the few diseases one takes pills to acquire rather than to cure). Note that the colloquial versions of several Class II diseases are Class I (influenza and the flu, delirium tremens and the DTs, gonorrhea and the clap, syphilis and the syph). Phil sent a second list in which he collated Class I synonyms for various diseases. There are at least four Class I terms for nausea, and no fewer than 25 for delirium tremens. Diarrhea has at least nine Class I versions at latest count. Phil adds rheumatiz, collywobbles, blahs, and nubs.

We recall two more on which we were briefed by the US Air Force in 1953 before being transferred from Lowry Air Force Base to the budding installation at Cape Canaveral, Florida. We were alerted to a persistent and spreading body fungus prevalent on the Florida east coast and harder to get rid of even than the dreaded fungus that attacks swimmers in that area and takes up lodgings in the middle ear. The Class II name of the fungus we do not recall, but we'll never forget the Class I equivalent: the creeping crud. But if you find that name ominous, consider the Class I sobriquet of an incredibly disgusting male venereal disease which the US armed forces found to be a problem in the early fifties. Class II name: lymphogranuloma venereum. Class I name: the grut. Talk about ominous.

We must add, while we're on the subject, that Class I diseases are by no means confined to human maladies; they can cause epizootics as well as epidemics. For instance, the blind staggers is an equine disease. But we're much more intrigued by another Class I equine disease that a veterinarian told us about: the hacks. It is an inflammation of the serous membrane of the lungs, identified by the coarse, grating quality of the whinny. Fortuitous that it's the hacks and not the hack—we can define it as a plural pleural horse condition manifested by a hoarse condition.
Mystery Story

Benjamin L. Schwartz of McLean, Virginia sent us this poser. A businessman returned to his office one afternoon and found the memo “Phone back Mr. Wryquick” on his desk. Knowing nobody of that name, he questioned his secretary, who told him the caller had told her that her employer knew the caller’s telephone number. Next day the businessman’s attorney, Dawcy, Esq., arrived in a snit (rented from Avis) and asked his client why he hadn’t returned his yesterday call. After a few questions directed to his secretary and his attorney, the businessman cleared up the mystery. Can you do likewise, given that neither the secretary nor the attorney was very bright?

This is much too tough to expect anyone to solve, so prepare yourself. When the secretary asked Dawcy, Esq. to spell his name for her, he said “D as in double-u, A as in are, W as in why, C as in cue, Y as in you, E as in eye, S as in sea, Q as in quay.”

613 Chai-Koos – One For Each Mitzvah

A haiku is a three-line non-rhyming poetic form consisting of exactly seventeen syllables arranged in a 5-7-5 format. It often evokes images of nature, beauty, love and human frailty through its creative use of words. A chai-koo is a whimsical haiku with a Jewish theme: the peculiar idiosyncrasies, distinctive speech patterns foibles and mishegas of the chosen people:

Mystery of life - / how can the tiny herring / swim in thick cream sauce?
Just thirteen candles, / so many bar mitzvah guests. / Whom shall we offend?
The one-time waiter / who has become a mohel / still depends on tips

Written by Steven Kahan, a Word Ways contributor, this 182-page book can be ordered for $15 by emailing him at skalpha1@aol.com or phoning 718-468-1080.