

THE GREAT DOG MYSTERY

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Former Kickshaws editor Dave Silverman alluded to the Great Dog Mystery in several letters to the editor from 1972 to 1975:

May 6 1972: An item for a future K that I've been intending to write up for 3 years: The Great Dog Mystery.

Jun 1972: I'll have to postpone the Great Dog Mystery till I have time to do it up right.

Oct 18 1972: I've had visions for months of cleaning things away to the point where I could write a page of Kickshaws every night...and contribute separate pieces—4 new games for Logomachy and "The Great Dog Mystery".

Nov 20 1975: This [a Kickshaws sabbatical] would also give me the opportunity to present other items in longer, article form. One of these that I've never had the time to polish up for presentation is The Great Dog Mystery.

Dave died Feb 15 1978 without ever revealing what he had in mind, and all attempts to examine his notes and papers were unsuccessful. Presumably the mystery related to some linguistic aspect of dogdom—but what sort of doggy wordplay did he have in mind?

The most plausible candidate is the multifarious ways in which different languages spell out the sound of a barking dog. This topic was in the air in the mid 1970s—the July 1974 *Journal of Irreproducible Results* featured an article "A Guide to Correct Barking Abroad", and the Feb 1975 issue of *Word Ways* contained an article "Hark the Bark" by Maxey Brooke. (This topic was revisited by Joshua Nash in "Onomatopoeia and Language Perception" in the Aug 2001 issue.) Dave's interest in this sort of linguistic wordplay was exemplified by a Kickshaw in which he mentioned different ways of representing bird sounds and the beating of the human heart (doki-doki in Japanese). Had Dave forgotten the Brooke article when he wrote me in November 1975, or did he still plan on a fuller exploration of this topic?

A search of Google under "Dog Mystery" generated tens of thousands of hits, most referring to mystery stories in which dogs play some part in the solution. The most prolific author is Susan Conant, who has written at least 17 such books (*A New Leash on Death*, *The Barker Street Regulars*, *Creature Discomforts*, *Evil Breeding*, *Ruffly Speaking*), many available on Amazon. On eBay one vendor requested bids on Dog Mystery bags containing unspecified items.