

A COLLAÇON ON "COLLAÇON"

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Mellen and I were exploring the depths of logology one day, when she suddenly stopped short, and uttered a single word, "collacon."

" 'Collacon?' My dear Mellen --- ?"

"That," she replied, "is your challenge!"

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Exhibit One

The first shred of evidence appeared quickly. Although Webster's and OED (along with many other well-known lexicons) make no mention of Mellen's collacon, Funk & Wagnalls is less discerning:

collacon, n. A collection of prose quotations from eminent authors: nonce-word.

However, F&W has no etymology other than the disheartening "nonce-word."

Exhibit Two

After an exhaustive (and exhausting) literature search, a somewhat obscure title was uncovered, published in 1971 by Donald W. Krummel:

A Librarian's Collacon; an Anthology of Quotations and Aphorisms Reflecting the Moral Philosophy of the Library Profession.

In his "Foreword" Krummel states that he has:

... devised a format built around quotations - aphorisms, extracts, summaries, tempting samplers, and other such "laconics." (An assemblage of them, to use the term employed by one Edward Parsons Day, is a "collacon.")

Exhibit Three

Having once learned of Day's existence, there was no difficulty in locating Day's work, published in 1884:

Day's Collacon: an Encyclopædia of Prose Quotations; Consisting of Beautiful Thoughts, Choice Extracts, and Sayings, of the Most Eminent Writers of All Nations, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time, Together with a Comprehensive Biographical Index of Authors, and an Alphabetical List of Subjects Quoted.

Day, in his "Preface," discloses that:

Some years ago, it was /my/ good fortune to meet MR. JAMES ELLIS, who had prepared a volume for publication, under the title of "LACONIA; OR GEMS OF LITERATURE, ORIGINAL AND SELECTED." This production contained so many quotations that were adapted to this work, that an arrangement was at once entered into by which the manuscript was secured, and the author himself engaged to assist in completing the COLLA-
CON.

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"So, Mellen, I must presume that Day himself constructed the word collacon, with inspiration from Ellis' title-word. (Further, there is little doubt that F&W must have acquired their "nonce-word" from Day.)

"Laconia, meaning 'brief speeches' (or simply, 'quotations'), derives from the same origin as laconic -- i. e., Lákōn, the Spartan renowned for brevity of speech. To create his own noun, Day used the simplest form of the word, lacon. Krummel implies this formation in his 'Foreword' when he places 'laconics' and 'collacon' in quotations.

"To further indicate the nature of his work, Day added the Latin prefix com-, which (as an archaic form of the preposition cum, 'with') is found in compounds with the meaning 'together, in combination or union.' Com- is assimilated to col- before l (as in collation), preserving us all from the atrocity of comlacon."

Mellen was smiling. "And what challenge do you offer me?"

"That, my dear Mellen, is quite another matter! . . ."