KICKSHAWS

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Kickshaws is currently being assembled by a series of guest editors. All contributions should be sent to the editor in Morristown, New Jersey.

Happy New Year (hic!)

I realize that it's a little late to be wishing you Happy New Year, but I've been elephants ever since January 1. Don't look for me in the zoo -- that only means that I've been one-over-the-eight. "I know she's older than nine;" I hear you cry, "whatever is she talking about?" I could say that I was brained, but you know that anyway, and so I'll have to confess that all three curious usages above simply mean I've been hung-over: banjaxed, miffy and newted. These are a sampling of 101 ways to describe the state of intoxication contained in The Boozer's Diary, distributed at holiday time to customers in some British pubs. If one of our British readers could send us a copy, we'd be much obliged, but they might have to do a little imbibing first and of course none of our British readers is ever crapulous.

You Know

Speaking of the new year, it might be a good time right now to go through our stockpile of words and decide which ones are worn out, moth-eaten, and ready for the junk pile in anticipation of a whole new supply to be acquired during 1979. The Society of Unicorn Hunters at Sault Ste. Marie State College have done just that. Polling 2000 like-minded unicorn hunters around the country, they have found that the number one choice for extinction is "you know". Others include "beautiful," "viable alternative," "irregardless," and "irrespective," while "ambiance" and "opt" have been put on probation for a year. I have my own nominees, of course, and I'm sure readers of Word Ways have theirs. My personal choice ("at this point in time") is the ubiquitous "bottom line" which crops up frequently in my circles. At least five years ago my high-school-age daughter used "you know" as an omnibus punctuation mark, as in: Today I went to school you know and had Algebra you know History and English you know. You did?

From Warm to Cold

That's not a weather forecast but my way of introducing a challenge from R. Robinson Rowe. First, I'd like to note with sorrow that
Mr. Rowe died in his sleep on May 4, 1978. Never a prolific contributor of articles, although some readers may remember his "Tudor Nomenclature" in the February 1977 issue, Mr. Rowe was a frequent and cordial correspondent and he will be missed.

In his last letter to Word Ways, Mr. Rowe raised the subject of Word Ladders. A well-known literal recreation, this is a game in which one word is converted to another by changing one letter at a time, there being a legitimate word at each step of the ladder. Typically, the initial and final words are antonyms so that a ladder might go from WARM to COLD by the rungs:

WARM, WARD, WORD, CORD, COLD

Mr. Rowe noted that he had never seen a word ladder which reverses the letters of a given word and set himself the task of finding four-letter and five-letter examples. He actually found two four-letter examples, one of which reverses TRAM, thus:

TRAM, TEAM, TEAT, PEAT, PERT, PART, MART

He also reversed FLOG to GOLF in seven steps, and LOOPs to SPOOL in twelve. Can you? (Answers will be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.) Just to make it a bit more difficult, Mr. Rowe added the condition that in words with an odd number of letters the middle letter must be changed and changed back as in RAT, RUT, RUN, RAN, TAN, TAR.

Can anyone find a reversible six-letter word? Mr. Rowe didn't, and offered no guesstimate as to how possible it might be.

Shave and a Haircut, ...


If you have literary pretensions you might try The Rape of the Lock, or The Razor's Edge. If you like rhymes, how about Hair Fair, Cut Hut or Mop Shop? If you don't think it might drive away business you could try The Clip Joint. Religious? Try Samson & Delilah.

It helps to pick your street address carefully. If you're planning to open on Marsh Lane in Dallas your choice is obvious: The Marsh Hare. Or if sunny California is more your style and you happen to locate on Seville Avenue in Los Angeles, you'll obviously call yourself the Barber of Seville.

If you dig fairy tales you might like Goldilocks or Rapunzel, or in case you think that's too subtle for your customers you could emphasize your business with Hair Clip, Hair Craft, or Hair Ways.
If you think I dreamed up these names, think again. Every one and hundreds more like them is legitimate and culled from telephone books all over the country. Actually, this all started when we saw a shop in Alexandria, Virginia at Thanksgiving called Shylock, and wondered what other curious names could be found. The editor is presently sorting them into types of wordplay, and an article for Word Ways may result. I couldn't miss the chance to scoop him though. His best so far? A real gem: the double pun We Curl Up And Dye.

An Ounce of Prevention

Readers of Word Ways who happen to be Episcopalians may remember the Collect which begins "...we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us ..." As a small child hearing those words I used to wonder what we were being prevented from until I took Latin and learned that the root of prevent is pre-venio, to go before. And how many of those same Episcopalians know that the Sunday before Advent (usually the last Sunday in November) is known as Stirrup Sunday? Nothing to do with horses, but deriving from the opening words of the Collect for that Sunday: "Stir up, we beseech thee ..."

Also as a small child I used to go with my parents to visit friends in Belleville, New Jersey and wonder about the derivation of the name. As far as I knew there were no bell foundries there. Only when I took French did I realize that the name meant "beautiful town" -- which it isn't.

All of this is not meant for a prelude to theological discussion, but as an excuse to talk about foreign languages.

John McClellan of Woodstock, New York writes "I've been mystified for some time by the fact that Mexican merchants when they have to make a sign or brochure in English, do not seek help from any one of the hundreds of literate tourists who would be more than glad to put the sign (or whatever) into decent English. Instead, they turn to Jaime who spent six months in Detroit in 1946 making Ford motor-cars and who, of course, speaks our tongue flawlessly ..." With this he append a example of an advertising card from a silver factory in Tlalquepaque, Mexico, pointing out the "silver handwrought in our factory" and urging the reader "before you buy check our prices".

Tom Pulliam of Somerset, New Jersey wonders why in order to express "in brief" or "in a word" the Spanish employ a word like COMPENDIARIAMENTE.

A clipping from the European edition of Time magazine tells us that the Belgians have joined the French in the attempt to eliminate Americanisms from the language of Belgium. Since that language is French, it would appear that the Belgians are a little late in jumping on the bandwagon since the French Academy began this crusade in 1963. The article does note, however, one marvelous example of a word to be substituted for its English equivalent: "brainstorming" will be replaced by le remue-meninges -- literally, "stirring up the membranes
of the brain."

Finally, Donald Morris, writing in the Houston Post, notes that while English contains many borrowings from French like ABANDON, AUTOMOBILE, BROCHURE, CALORIE, CORSET and DEBRIS whose origins are all but forgotten, there are almost no words of Spanish origin which have made it into English. Restaurant terms like TACO and slang words like MACHO are now acceptable in spoken English, but only HOOSEGOW, he notes, has now perhaps lost its Spanish origins. His explanation for this fact is simple: French is snobbish and Spanish is not. Supercilious writers wanted to show how well-educated they were and the words filtered down because "vocabulary, like many fashions, starts among an affluent elite and is aped by the masses".

### How Square Are You?

Edward Wolpow of Brookline, Massachusetts sent us three challenging problems involving 3-by-3 word squares. Be forewarned that none of them is easy and they get tougher as you proceed. The first is to construct two entirely different 3-by-3 word squares which can be derived from the same set of definitions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Across</th>
<th>Balkan country (abbreviation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part of the name of a former African colony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clothes item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down</td>
<td>Man's name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initials of an eastern university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sports word</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Too easy? Then try this: construct a 3-by-3 puzzle in which each box contains a single word rather than a single letter, thereby creating a "cross-phrase" puzzle:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Across</th>
<th>Modern dance verb (infinitive)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructions to a Mountie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last words before a footrace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down</td>
<td>Three --- --- ---, four ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finish the tennis unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contemporary words of enthusiastic encouragement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, if you're still with us, consider this: create a 3-by-3 puzzle in which a box may contain one or more letters. To show you what we mean, we'll give you an example and then offer you a challenge.

| Across | State banner (New York flag) |
|--------| Eager (earnest) |
|        | Prime number (seventy-one) |
| Down   | Times Square happening (New Year's event) |
Scottish county (Orkney)
Item for path building (flagstone)

Here's the challenge (answers to all problems in Answers and Solutions at the end of the issue):

Across  Certain hit baseballs
Hidden
Vertiginous

Down  European body of water
Adverb meaning "besides" (plural)
Eating utensil

Dictionary Definitions

Everyone knows that a dictionary contains definitions, but whoever bothers to define "dictionary"? Well, I know three eminent people who did, and I offer their definitions here for your delectation:

Neither is a dictionary a bad book to read. There is no cant in it, no excess of explanation, and it is full of suggestion -- the raw material of possible poems and histories (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

A dictionary is merely the universe arranged in alphabetical order (Anatole France)

A dictionary is a malevolent literary device for cramping the growth of a language and making it hard and inelastic (Ambrose Bierce)

All three definitions are lifted from a book called Spelling for the Millions by Edna L. Furness, published in 1977 by Thomas Nelson Inc. A curious mixture of all sorts of information relating to words and their spelling, we'll give you a sampling here.

There are aids to remember the spelling of difficult words:

"Look for a liar in the auxiliary"
"February makes one say Br"
"It's natural to find an ant in currant jelly"

and lists to remember words with identical endings: only two English words end in YZE (paralyze, analyze), or only three words end in MISE (surmise, demise, compromise). (There are others, of course, but all are variants on these basic themes, or highly technical.)

Have you ever been traveling around the countryside and seen a sign "Antiques, Collectables and Junque"? Often it says Collectibles, and you wonder just which spelling is correct. Ms. Furness supplies a rule. If, after you take away the able/ible suffix, what's left is a whole word, it's ABLE. Otherwise, it's IBLE.

And speaking of suffixes, the next time you come across one of
those pesky crossword puzzle clues "Noun ending" with three blocks, consider that Ms. Furness supplies not one or two noun suffixes but 80 of which 39 have three letters. How many can you think of (see Answers and Solutions)?

Finally, quoting Andrew Jackson, Ms. Furness confirms what we have always suspected: "It is a damned poor mind that can think of only one way to spell a word."

**Book List**

When I was a teenager, my friends and I had a list of improbable books with even more improbable authors. Most of them were either scatological or obscene or both, and most of them I no longer remember. One, I recall, was by Mister Completely, and perhaps it's fortunate that the title has now completely faded into the mists of time. But to my juvenile mind they were all hilariously funny.

Perhaps that's why my heart jumped when Virginia Hager of Normal, Illinois sent this list of recommended books for winter reading:

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Playing by the Rules P. Knuckle
Love for Sale R. U. Willing
Bikini Exposures Belle E. Button
Aid to a Bookworm Dick Shunary
Feed-Lot Tales Lotta Bull
Under the Rock Liz Ard
The Final Fall Eileen Dover
Cotton Field Capers E. Z. Pickens
Urban Renewal Guide Dinah Mite
The Bovine's Complaint I. C. Hands
The Useless Crutch Candy Cane
Love's Labor Lost Ms. Carriage
The Missing Sea Treasure Nan Tucket
My Final Fling I. M. Dunn
Where to Go for Lost Articles Helen Hunt
The Search for Gladys Willie Finder
The Disgruntled Lovers Cant E. Lope
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Actually Ms. Hager had a lot more, but that's enough to give you the flavor and you can easily manufacture your own.

**More Books**

The ideal Kickshaws editor is one whose tastes in reading are catholic and who can thus pick up bits and pieces of wordplay from a multitude of sources. I can't lay claim to the catholicity of a Dave Silverman, but I offer two items culled recently from wildly disparate sources. The first, from a novel whose title I have now forgotten, is a quotation attributed to Rabelais (who never wrote in English) which is reminiscent of various compilations of venereal nouns (look that up in your Funk & Wagnalls):

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and seen a sign
and a sign
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...
"...surrounded and environ'd about with the barking of Currs, 
prating of Parrets, squeaking of Wesils, chanting of Swans, 
pioling of Pelicans, gushing of Hogs, mumbling of Rabets, drintling of Turcles, frantling of Peacocks, 
charming of Beagles, yelling of Wolves, hissing of Serpents 
and wailing of Turtles."

The four words you probably won't recognize are Curkling, Pioling, 
Frantling and Drintling. They aren't found in Webster's Third Unabridged Dictionary although in their day they must have been deeply 
evocative of the sounds of these animals. Curkle (to cry as a quail) 
and Frantling (the noise made by peacocks) are still to be found in 
the Oxford Dictionary.

The second item will help to push back the historical genesis of 
wordplay into the far ancient past. In the Interpreter's Bible commentary on the book of Job, comparison is made to a Babylonian work pre-dating the ninth century B.C. Known as the Acrostical Dialogue on Theodicy, it is a poem of 27 stanzas of 11 lines each. Written in cuneiform text, the initial syllables in each stanza are identical. Moreover, the 27 initial syllables read down form an acrostic stating "I, the incantator, worship the god and the king". This must have represented a real tour-de-force and the thought of attempting the same 
feat in English boggles the mind.

Potpourri

Some years ago the Readers Digest reported that a computer analysis reveals that children in grades three to nine see the word MONEY more often than LOVE, WAR more often than PEACE, and CAR more often than FAMILY. I quote this without comment; you can draw your own conclusions.

Margaret Weiss of Los Angeles inquires whether there is a name for words for which there is an apparent negative but no positive form. These words begin with a negative prefix but the root word does not exist: for example, DISHEVELLED, DISCREPANCY, NONCHALANT, and DISGRUNTLED. Who was ever HEVELLED, CHALANT, or GRUNTLED? Can any reader suggest a name?

Roger Hannahs challenges readers to determine the rule used to construct the following word-pair set: O-P, NU-OW, EMU-FOX, RIBS-SKEW, DREAM-ETHER, SPRENG-TRUISM. To difficult, or too easy? Then try this set: ON-NO, MANE-AMEN, ISOLDE-SILOED. This should give you a new twist.

A. Wilansky of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania notes that the word-pair PLATO/PLATEAU is a curious hybrid of a homonym and a heteronym: heteronymic in the first syllable (PLAT has the sounds /plate/ and /plat/), and homonymic in the second (/owe/ has the spellings O and EAU). Can readers find other hybrids of this sort? How about homo­nymic in the first syllable, heteronymic in the second?
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Did you ever know the second half of the famous rebus

If the B mt put:
If the B. putting:

The next two lines, found over the fireplace in Mrs. K's Toll House Tavern in Silver Spring, Maryland, read

Don't put: over a - der
You'd be an * it

Stop!

For my final item I've saved a collection of malapropisms contained in an article from the London Times. Not that I consider this to be the piece de resistance, but because after this I'm sure you'll agree I ought to stop.

Consider the lady with the painful "Ulster", the shrines one can see in Catholic countries dedicated to "St. Mary Mandolin", the police at the scene of the crime who threw an "accordion" around the street, or the priest who was called in to "circumcize" a ghost. Pity the poor woman who was forced to undergo the "Cistercian" method of childbirth or the inmates of our "menthol" hospitals. Rejoice that steps have been taken to "pervert" a dock strike and that your son is always "embossed" in his studies. Regard the deceased king lying in state on his "catapult", or the rainbow containing all the colors of the "rectum".

Enough? I think so.