KICKSHAWS

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Stamford, Connecticut

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

Three Questions

Kickshaws is going to have a lot of puzzles and word games this month, and here is a three-part puzzle to start. Can you identify the unusual property these five eight-letter words have in common? (All answers are found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.) MUTIVITY
With a little vertical thinking, and reflection, the answer will be evident. That is because the words are composed of the eleven letters A, H, I, M, O, T, U, V, W, X and Y that share a unique characteristic in the regular printed English alphabet.

If you know the property, you are ready for question two: The name of what famous Indian (in eight letters) might be added to the above list?

And question three (getting harder): Can you name a common hyphenated twelve-letter word, found in most dictionaries, that exhibits this property?

Rapping About the 1960s

Sitting back and taking a fresh look at the vocabulary of the 1960s counterculture, you may be surprised (as I am) at the charm and expressiveness of the words that decade spawned. Take uptight and turn-on, for example, meaning "tense" and "something exciting." How much stronger these modern words are than their old English synonyms. Hangup, another strong and useful word, in just a short time has vaulted into accepted speech. Its new meaning, a psychological block, is not obvious from its parts -- a pretty conceit the word must have been for the person who thought of it.

My favorite 1960s word, mind-blowing, sprang, as so many of them did, from the drug subculture. Originally applied to psychedelic tripping (there's another innovative word), it came to describe anything exciting. It reminds me of colorful words of former days, like pitch.
kettled (puzzled) and flagfallen (unemployed), which Susan Sperling celebrated in her recent book Poplollies and Bellibones.

Which goes to show that even if we don’t use words as well as we used to, at least we can still make them.

When It Rains, It Drizzles

Two word-fancying friends of mine, Doug and Janis Heller, have proposed a game called "Mangled Cliches." The rules are simple: One person gives the other (or a group if more than two are playing) a cliche that is as we say a near-miss. The other player or players must think of a situation in which the mangled form of the phrase is not only the logical, but indeed the clever thing to say.

For example, take the title of this piece. One can imagine a baseball pitcher with a sore arm preparing to take the mound for an important game. The day is cold and wet as a mist falls to the ground. If the sky would clear, the pitcher would be much more comfortable; if the mist turned to a pour, the game would be called off. But as the rain gently continues, the pitcher looks at his coach and remarks, "When it rains, it drizzles."

Before you play the game, let me caution you that your answers should not turn on puns; furthermore, the best stories are those that are the most believable. You will find the game challenging. I think Alexander Woollcott and his friends would have enjoyed it.

Lipograms

While on the subject of games, here is an original one suitable for a gathering of the word-wise. Have a list of questions prepared in advance in which the answers would normally use words that contain the letter E. Divide your gaming group into two teams and fire away. Players must respond to your questions with alacrity and wit and without the letter E.

Sample questions and replies: How many players are on a regular basketball team? Not "five", but "a handful". In what state do Faith and Ross Eckler live? "New Jersey" is taboo. Instead, "This pair who publish Word Ways inhabit part of country that Atlantic City is in."

On a scale of one to five, I give myself three points for these answers — maybe less, because it took me a while to think of them. The emcee should award the teams points (arbitrarily, but with judgment) for speed and quality of their answers. Generally the more specific a response, and the more naturally it flows, the better. Abbreviations are frowned upon. Lastly, those who use the unwanted letter lose one point for their team each time they slip.

Ready to test yourself? After responding lipogrammatically to these four questions, compare your answers with mine in Answers and Solutions.
The Gentle Art of Punning

Sydney Smith, English writer, philosopher, and satirist of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, had some unkind words on the practice of punning. In a treatise on wit he wrote:

"I have very little to say about puns; they are in very bad repute, and so they ought to be. The wit of language is so miserably inferior to the wit of ideas, that it is very deservedly driven out of good company. Sometimes, indeed, a pun makes its appearance which seems for a moment to redeem its species; but we must not be deceived by them: it is a radically bad race of wit. By unremitting persecution, it has at last been got under, and driven into cloisters, -- from whence it must never again be suffered to emerge into the light of the world."

Sydney Smith's hope for the future of puns has not, I am happy to say, been realized. Rightfully not, too, because there are good puns and there are bad. Did you ever stop to consider what it is that separates those that make us smile from those that make us groan?

One quality of a good pun, I think, is naturalness -- the seeming spontaneity of the double entendre. The writer or speaker must not reach for it, or alter his train of thought to present it; it should be, in retrospect, the obvious thing to say. A classic case is Richard Sheridan who, being dunned by a tailor to pay at least the interest on a bill, responded that it was neither his interest to pay the principal, nor his principle to pay the interest. That's a good pun.

The other quality of a good pun, I think, is timing. Spend too long dredging it up and any humor it might have had will have been lost. Better to leave the late pun unspoken.

Say you do pull off a natural, well-timed zinger, and nobody notices -- what should you do then? Resist the temptation to repeat it! Save yourself for other times and smarter company.

May all your puns be blessed with smiles.

Curious Puzzle

A Cyril Pearson, puzzle editor for the London Evening Standard at the turn of the century, is responsible for the following poser.

Upon the shutters of a barber's shop the legend on the next page was painted in bold letters. One evening about 8:30, when it was blowing great guns, quite a crowd gathered round the window, and seemed to be enjoying some excellent joke. What was amusing them when the shutter blew open?
NO. 1
JOHN MARSHALL
IN ATTENDANCE
FROM 8 A.M. DAILY
BARBER AND
HAIR CUTTER
THE BALD CRY ALOUD
FOR HIS CREAMS
AS DISPLAYED IN THIS WINDOW
WHICH MAKE HAIR GLISTEN
Closes AFTER 8 P.M.

Cryptically Speaking

David Silverman called the cryptic crossword puzzle "unbelievably entertaining," and I think he would have applauded the rapid rise of its popularity in America during the past few years.

A little-known fact is that the American cryptic is almost as old as its British father, having appeared weekly in The Nation since February 20, 1943. The founder of The Nation's puzzle, Jack Barrett, was a veteran crossword constructor going back to 1924 with the New York Evening Journal. While in England, to which he had moved in 1926, he had created a weekly crossword competition for the London News of the World, and had helped set up the Times daily puzzle in 1930.

His initial contribution to The Nation in 1943 was tame by any standard: although a regular British-style diagram was used, with nearly half the letters unchecked, all the unchecked letters were filled in for the solver -- not, perhaps, such a bad idea for encouraging beginners. The hints were soon dropped, of course. The clues, while not always square-dealing in the modern sense, were clever.

For four years until his tragic death by drowning in 1947, Jack Barrett created puzzles for a devoted band of solvers in The Nation. He will be remembered as a puzzle genius, and as the father of the American cryptic crossword.

And Literally So

Perhaps the prettiest and most ingenious type of clue in cryptic crosswords is that which uses the same words to express both the definition and subsidiary indication of the answer. Although not necessarily easy to solve, this type of clue is one of the most readily grasped by the beginner. It was a favorite of Derrick S. Macnutt ("Ximenes"), the famed British crossword setter, who rather cryptically christened it "&lit." (meaning "and literally so").

Every proper cryptic clue, as you may know, contains two parts: 1) a definition or direct reference to the answer; and 2) a subsidiary description of the answer either through wordplay (anagram, homophone, reversal, whatever) or simply another meaning. The beauty of the "&lit." clue is that the parts are not written side by side, as is usually the case in a double definition clue, but the answer is expressed in words.

In a typical example of such a clue, the cryptic wordplay is usually a part of the clue. The clue might read:

a) A "killer"

The anagram of the word "killer" is "rill". So the clue, which also happens to be the cryptic wordplay, can be read as:

"&lit." rill killer

b)_loung

The anagram of "loung" is "ngoul". So the clue, which is the anagram, is:

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usually the case, but together, with all the words in the clue doing
double duty. Read the whole clue once to get the direct indication of
the answer; read it all the way through again to get a literal play on
words.

In a valuable book by Alec Robins, Crosswords (Hodder & Stoughton,
paperback, $4.95 -- highly recommended), we find the following ex-
ample of an "& lit." clue. The 7 in parentheses tells you the number
of letters in the answer.

a) Angered, terribly! (7)

The word "terribly" suggests making a terrible presentation (or
anagram) of ANGERED. Shuffle the letters and you get ENRAGED,
which answers both the superficial and the literal meaning of the full
cue. The exclamation point, incidentally, is often used to indicate an
"& lit." Another example from Alec Robins:

b) One who’s thrustful about nothing! (7)

The answer, LOUNGER, is LUNGER ("one who’s thrustful")
around O ("nothing"). The full clue is also a good description of a
LOUNGER. Now try these ten, some of which are not so difficult,
and others of which are:

c) Center of Galileo’s universe! (3)
d) Trains categorized to a T! (7)
e) I’m a leader of Mohammedans! (4)
f) A purge revolutionized it! (6)
g) Insane Roman, at heart! (4)
h) Coach! (5)
i) What's tea passed round in? (5)
j) Odd image seen around head of road! (6)
k) Note extremely lowered spirits here! (8)
l) Bra sets, perhaps! (7)

(Composers: Doug Heller, c and h; W.S., d, g, and j; Derrick
Macnutt ("Ximenes"), e and i; Donald Manley ("Duck"), f;
"Caudillo", k; Jack Luzzatto, 1.)

Acrostical Challenge

Here is a novel, if mindless way to while away an hour. I asked
myself the other day, "What is the longest word you can find spelled
in order by the initial letters of any series of consecutive paragraphs
in any book on your shelf?"

The hunt was on as I flipped through pages of classics and non-
classics alike. Owing to the popularity of the words who/what/where/
when, it/is/in, and the/that/there at the beginning of paragraphs, the
three-letter WIT was the most recurring meaningful acrostic. Four-
letter repeats included SHOD, WHIP, CHAT, and TINY. My best find
for thirty minutes’ search was the five-letter TIGHT in the middle of a
Dorothy Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey story.

If you better that, will you let the editor know? And a word of caution: the game is addictive.

Language and Interlock

The English language is remarkably suited for the crossing of words in squares, diamonds, and other shapes, but not as remarkably, I think, as the Italian language.

Look at the crossword grids below, clipped from the popular Italian puzzle weekly Domenica Quiz. Their wide-open patterns make American puzzles look childish by comparison. What is the secret of the Italians' success? Part of it, I believe, is their vocabulary, 45 percent of which is composed of the letters E, A, I, and O. By comparison, the English language's four commonest letters, E, T, O, and A, make up only 38 percent of its words (Gaines, Elementary Cryptanalysis). Italian, in addition, has more regular letter patterns than English. No wonder the words cross.

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You'll notice one defect in Italian crosswords; their bottom and right-hand edges are invariably a hodgepodge of short words and abbreviations. This is because of another peculiarity of language -- practically all Italian words end in their four commonest vowels. Consonants in the last row and column of crosswords give Italian constructors headaches.

If we would have trouble filling their crossword diagrams, they at least would have more problems filling ours.
Pig Latin Refresher Course

Once upon a time Kickshaws presented an assortment of English words that sound like new words when spoken in Pig Latin. "Lout", "plunder" and "rex", for example, become "outlay", "underplay" and "x-ray". (Move the initial consonant or consonants to the rear of the English word and add the sound of a long A.)

In order to make the above-mentioned list more complete, I would like to suggest the following, which you may discover from the clues:

a) English word, "select by sifting"; Pig Latin sounds like a US Senator.

b) English word, "banana, symbolically"; Pig Latin sounds like a leading lady of the 1930s and 1940s.

"Roots" for Word Ways

Before I finish I would like to present a few word curiosities from the first book in the world (as far as I know) devoted entirely to recreational linguistics, Les Bigratures et Touches du Seigneur des Accords (The Designs and Strokes of the Lord of Harmony), by Etienne Tabourot.

I came across the book in 1973 while on a summer research grant to study the history of puzzles at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. I spent an afternoon with it in the Rare Book Room, taking notes which I have saved. The volume, first published in Paris in 1582, went through numerous editions; the Library of Congress copy is dated 1616.

Several of the twenty-two chapters in the book are devoted to rebus, historical and current, with sixteen examples in circular woodcuts. One peculiar but pretty one I copied involves a lifeless abbe in the middle of a meadow, with an exposed bottom from which is growing a flower. This unlikely scene sets up the following homophonic French and Latin sentences, which I translate:

\[
\text{Abbe mort en pr\'e au cul lis,} \\
\text{(Dead abbe in the meadow with a bottom lily,)}
\]

\[
\text{Habe mortem prae oculis.} \\
\text{(Have death in front of your eyes.)}
\]

A simpler, if more grammatically strained rebus is this from a broken lover ("un amoureux cass\'e"):

\[
\text{G. a. c. o. b. i. a. i.} \\
\text{(Have already obeyed her enough.)}
\]
One more rebus, a classic:

d pour
G a mes a a
p tenter

It is deciphered "G grand a petit, d sur p, pour sur tenter mes a petits", which in everyday French is:

J'ai grand appetit de souper pour sustenter mes appetits.
(I have a great appetite for eating so to sustain my desires.)

Spoonerisms, evidently, did not originate with the Rev. William A. Spooner, but were a popular game earlier with the French. Some examples of these, which Les Bigarrures calls antistrophes:

Taster la grace -- Gaster la trace.
(Feel thanks -- Damage the mark.)

Elle fit son pris -- Elle pris son fils.
(She makes her prize -- She values her son.)

Un sinistre masle a un pigne sale -- Un ministre sale a un signe parle.
(A sinister man has a dirty pine cone -- A dirty minister has a spoken sign.)

Finally, a curious Latin couplet in which each word shares its end with the corresponding word in the other line:

Qu an di tri mul pa
os guis rus sti cedine vit.
H san mi Chri dul la

The foregoing products of logological ingenuity are only a taste of the full material. Les Bigarrures contains four extensive chapters on punning, eighteen pages of anagrams, and chapters on palindromes, retrogrades (sentences which make new sentences when the words are read in reverse order), chronograms, paranoemes (alliterations), acrostics, echo verse, verse leonins (poems in which the middles of each line are rhymed), vers couppez (poems in which each line can be split, with the halves making sense separately or together), monosyllabic verse, rhopalics, and more.

Perhaps some scholar with better French than mine will investigate further.