Major Minor

John Train's Remarkable Names of Real People (Clarkson Potter, 1977) lists Major Minor, of the U.S. Army. The name is odd enough, but is it particularly rare? I think not; the surname Minor appears a little more often than once in every 10,000 names in Social Security files, and surely there are (or have been in the past 200 years) considerably more than 10,000 majors in the U.S. Army. In fact, restricting attention to West Point graduates before 1959, Minors were in the classes of 1937, 1945 and 1946.

A stranger story surfaced in the New York Times of September 18, 1972 -- it reported a man named Minor W. Major among the guests at a conference of Empire State Presidents. How did he get his name? "Before the Civil War, a young woman named Minor married a young man named Major and became Mrs. Major. He was a Confederate agent and he sank Union shipments on the Mississippi. He had a Yankee uniform for use at certain times, and in those circumstances Minor Major, the Confederate agent, became Major Minor, a Union officer. I'm a great-grandson of the Major who married Miss Minor," Minor W. Major said.

P.G. Wodehouse created a delightful bit of nonsense using these words in Uncle Dynamite (Didier, New York, 1948). In order to gain entrance to a country estate, Lord Ickenham passed himself off as Major Brabazon-Plank, an old school chum. When challenged by Constable Potter, who knew the real Brabazon-Plank quite well, Ickenham quickly shifted ground and claimed to be an elder brother instead:

Potter: He (Bill Oakshott) give me your suitcase to take to the house, and he said 'This here belongs to Major Brabazon-Plank'. Ickenham: Just a slip of the tongue, such as so often occurs. He meant Brabazon-Plank, major. As opposed to my brother, who, being younger than me, is, of course, Brabazon-Plank, minor. I can understand you being confused, and what renders it all the more complex is that as I myself am a mining engineer by profession, anyone who wants to get straight on the Brabazon-Plank situation has got to keep steadily before him the fact that the major
is a minor and the minor a major. I have known strong men to break down on realizing this. So you know my minor, the major, do you? Most interesting. It's a small world, I often say...

Why are you looking like a stuck pig, Bill Oakshott?

Bill came with a start out of what appeared to be a sort of trance. Pongo, who had had so many opportunities of observing (Lord Ickenham) in action, could have told him that a trancelike condition was almost always the result of being associated with this good old man when he was going nicely...

Quickie Puzzles

The following ten students enrolled for a class in number theory. To aid in remembering their names, the professor seated them in a certain order in the classroom. Can you determine the order he used?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don Edwards</th>
<th>Edith Reed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Ives</td>
<td>Leigh Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni Nesbit</td>
<td>Rose Ventnor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Norris</td>
<td>Robert Worden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolf Oursler</td>
<td>Jessi Xander</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In his little book, Puzzling Posers (London, 1952), J. Travers gives the five-by-five letter square reproduced at the right. The puzzle is to imagine a chess king placed on any letter and moved (by king moves) to spell out a familiar motto. Starting at the center T, the solution is TOO MANY COOKS SPOIL THE BROTH. Note that there are just sixteen different letters in this sentence. Is it possible to construct a four-by-four letter square that will do the same job? We assume that S and O may be counted twice in a row to produce the doublings in the motto.

Alphabetical Pie

Several years ago, James Davis of Auburn, Washington sent me the following logological curiosity. Write the letters of the alphabet in a circle, with Z followed by A, and cross out all letters which possess left-right symmetry. The remaining letters, starting with J and moving clockwise, fall into five distinct groups of sizes 3, 1, 4, 1 and 6 -- the first five digits in the representation of pi!

Anagrams

John Donne's poem, "The Anagram", contains the following couplet:

Though all her parts be not in th' ususual place,
She hath yet an anagram of a good face.

Norman Mailer, in his 1973 book about Marilyn Monroe, went out of his way to point out that if the A in Marilyn is used twice, the O in Monroe used just once, and the Y omitted, the remaining letters can be ar-
ranged to spell Norman Mailer. No one can deny that Norman and Marilyn were very close.

Two political anagrams that recently appeared in the Enigma, the official publication of the National Puzzlers' League:

BILLYGATE = LIBYA GELT (by Henry Hook)
RONALD REAGAN = OLD AGE RAN, RAN ... (Harry Hazard)

Andre Breton, the French poet and founder of surrealism, once pointed out that Salvador Dali anagrams to 'avida dollars' (greedy for dollars, in Spanish).

The Wall Street Journal reported on September 6, 1978 that a Florida-based company called Xonex which makes motor oil was being sued by Exxon for using the letters of its name in anagram form. Patrick J. McEnany, president of Xonex, said it never occurred to him that the two names were anagrams until he received a letter from an Exxon attorney; in fact, he thought the letter was a hoax.

Economical Signs

Peer Clahsen, a Swiss artist and toy designer, has a business card reproduced at the right. Words such as THINK are rich enough in shorter words spelled out in the same order to make sensible messages possible. What, in fact, is the most fecund word of this type? Obviously, it depends upon the length of the word and the dictionaries allowed. In the April 22, 1979 Philadelphia Inquirer, Theodore Bernstein quoted Leo G. Staley of Columbus, Ohio as finding ten common words in SCAPEGOAT: scape, cap, cape, ape, peg, ego, go, goat, oat, at. Ralph Beaman added five more: cal, pe and goa from Webster's Third, and scap and eg from Webster's Second; subsequently, he discovered that FIRESTONE was an even better nine-letter choice. In similar vein, Boris Randolph of Los Angeles discovered twenty-two words in MISINFORMATION: Mi, mis, misinform, sin, is, in, inform, information, for, form, forma, formation, ma, mat, a, at, ati, ti, I, ion, on. Puckishly, he noted "The letter M IS IN FORMATION".

I have been in tall buildings in which each men's room was indicated by a large brass M on the door, and each ladies' room by the same fixture installed upside down. Has anyone ever used a similar inversion device next to the buttons of an elevator: up and dn?

Carrollian Wordplay

Most readers of Word Ways are at least moderately familiar with Lewis Carroll's wordplay -- his word-games (Doublets, Mischmasch and Syzygies, all explained in detail in John Fisher's The Magic of Lewis Carroll (Simon and Schuster, 1973)), his anagramming (William Ewart Gladstone = Wilt tear down all images?), and his acrostic poems.
Here are a couple of less well-known examples. In a letter that Lewis Carroll wrote about 1862 to a little girl named Annie Rogers, he said he was enclosing:

A picture, which I hope will
Be one that you will like to
See. If your Mamma should
Desire one like it, I could
Easily get her one.

What is unusual about the above construction?

The following poem by Lewis Carroll turned up in an obscure publication called The Lewis Carroll Circular, Number 2, November 1974:

I often wondered when I cursed,
Often feared where I would be --
Wondered where she'd yield her love,
When I yield, so will she.
I would her will be pitied!
Cursed be love! She pitied me . . .

Why is this poem so remarkable?

Lewis Carroll's real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. He was fond of using pseudonyms on letters and poems that he sent to various periodicals. Once he used the initials R.W.G. Can you see why? Answers to all three problems can be found at the end of this issue.

I think Lewis Carroll would have been intrigued by the following colloquy generated by Roberto J. Pick of Manhattan:

Where are you going?
To the movies.
What are you going to see?
Quo Vadis.
What does that mean?
Where are you going?
To the movies.
What are you going to see? . . .

and so on ad infinitum, with questioner and answerer alternating roles.

And Other Authors . . .

It is widely assumed that Rex Stout based his character of Nero Wolfe on Sherlock Holmes's stout brother, Mycroft, and there has even been speculation by Baker Street Irregulars that Nero was Mycroft's illegitimate son. The critic Leon Edel has noted that Rex means 'king' in Latin, and Nero is the name of a Roman emperor. Both Nero and Wolfe, said Edel, "throw off ripples of evil" and is it a coincidence that Wolfe's assistant is named Goodwin? Did Stout, as his New York Times obituary suggested, derive the name Nero Wolfe from Sherlock Holmes
Someone should pull together all the wordplay in the writings of Poe. In the story "King Pest", a man with the initials H. T. (Hugh Tarpaul-in) gets the best of T. H. (Tim Hurlygurly). In "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains", a man named Bedlo dreams of the death of a man named Oldeb. Poe was fond of such letter reversals, and there are other instances in both his fiction and his poetry.

In Finnegans Wake there are ten great thunderclap words, each 100 letters long except for the last one which has 101 letters. There are ten letters in the name James Joyce, and I suppose the 1001 letters of the thunderclaps may have something to do with the Thousand and One Tales of the Arabian Nights. Is it possible that Joyce's thunderclaps conceal a coded message of some sort? Probably not, but Joyce had an interest in ciphers; J. F. Byrne, an intimate of Joyce's who devised the still-unsolved Chaocipher, was a model for Cranly in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and his Dublin address, 7 Eccles Street, was the home of Leopold and Mollie Bloom in Ulysses. It might be worthwhile for logophiles to investigate the thunderclaps in depth. Years ago, I wrote the ten words in order, each below the earlier one, to make a 10x1000 rectangle (omitting the final letter). The longest word I could find by reading vertically, top down, was NUDES, but I assume this is accidental. There are lots of concealed horizontal words that obviously are not accidental.

F. Scott Fitzgerald also enjoyed wordplay. The italicized purple passages in This Side of Paradise are poems concealed as prose, and I think it is no accident that the novel begins "Amory Blaine."

The Oz books by L. Frank Baum are a happy hunting ground for wordplay enthusiasts because of their many invented names for persons and places and things. For instance, in The Magic of Oz, the all-consonant word PYRZOXGL, if pronounced correctly, enables one to change oneself into any animal desired. I once tried to guess how Baum arrived at this word. Note that the consecutive-letter sequence PQR occupies the first, fifth and third positions of the word, and the consecutive-letter sequence XYZ the sixth, second and fourth positions -- a mirror image. The last two letters do not partake of this symmetry, but GL might stand for GLinda, one of the good witches of Oz. In Ozma of Oz, Princess Lang-widere had a "languid air". The protagonist of The Tin Woodman of Oz is a boy named Woot; did Baum take the initials Tin Woodman Of Oz and move the T from the beginning to the end? It would be easy to write an entire book about Baum's wordplay, not to mention the later Oz books.
written by Ruth Plumly Thompson and others.

Puns, Charades, Riddles

John Allen Paulos, in his book Mathematics and Humor (University of Chicago Press, 1960), says he has a friend who collects answers to the old riddle What's black and white and red all over? Word Ways readers might like to add to his collection:

A wounded nun
An embarrassed zebra
Santa Claus after coming down the chimney
A right-winter's view of an integration march
A skunk with diaper rash

Hundreds of East Indians were meditating on a hillside just at sunrise. Led by their guru, they sat in the lotus position and continually chanted "Morning ... morning ... morning ..." while the sun slowly rose. Some wag in the back broke the rhythm by calling out "Evening". Surprised, the guru looked up and murmured "Someone chanted 'evening!'".

Have you heard about the two Italian brothers, Physio the rapist and Psycho the rapist?

Someone once told me, though I don't believe it, that he saw the door of an office shared by three proctologists: McCann, Hurtz and Howe.

Frank Harary, a well-known mathematician at the University of Michigan, is co-author of a book titled Graphical Enumeration. In the book, he discusses some results by mathematicians Ronald Read and E. M. Wright. A footnote states, however, that Read and Wright are both wrong.

There is a Tinker Street in Woodstock, N.Y. Steve Barr, the author of the three-word poem Womb/Bomb/Tomb, once claimed that a Mr. Evers bought a house on Tinker Street so that he could say he moved there by chance.

Acronymania

P. Howard Lyons of Toronto tells me he is the manager and treasurer of the Association of Creators of Really Original Names Yielding Meaning. The members, he says, are trying to devise an appropriate acronym for their organization, but haven't yet found one. This reminds me of Ruth Eisendrath's remark to me years ago that she was writing a satire on James Stephen's novel The Crock of Gold but couldn't think of a good title for it. And that in turn reminds me of Tom Wicker's May 14, 1978 newspaper column, where, in reply to various feminist proposals for single words that combine he and she, he suggested a one-word contraction for "he or she (or) it".

Floridians tell me that CALIF stands for Come And Live In Florida.
I don't know what Californians think FLA means, but perhaps some Word Ways reader can enlighten me.

Russell Baker, in his newspaper column of April 23, 1977, pointed out that the acronym of Moral Equivalent of War is MEOW.

Solitary and Social Word Games

P. Howard Lyons has devised a form of wordplay that he calls Thing-Things. Can Word Ways readers add to his collection?

- drill drill - a tool for drilling holes in drills
- doctor doctor - a doctor who specializes in treating doctors
- light light - a light bulb that doesn't weigh much
- head head - leader of a junkie ring, or the main washroom on a naval vessel
- pot pot - place to hide marijuana
- file file - a tool for filing files, or a place to keep files
- heavy heavy - a fat villain in a movie

Along similar lines, I'd like to revive the old pastime of thinking of suitable first names for the wives of men in certain professions:

Grace (dancer)  Sophie (upholsterer)
Bridget (engineer) Carlotta (used car salesman)
Rose (florist) Dolly (toy manufacturer)
Hattie (milliner) Ginny (bartender)
Carrie (waiter) Robin (thief)
Ethel (chemist) Faith (preacher)
Patience (doctor) Fanny (chair manufacturer)
Wanda (magician) Iris (ophthalmologist)
Ophelia (chiropractor) Ruby (jeweler)
Sally (comedian)

Of course, this can be played the other way around, with sexes reversed (which leads to the same thing).

John Conway, a famous Cambridge University mathematician, invented the following three word games a few years ago:

1) Monosyllabic talk: All players must speak only in one-syllable words. If anyone uses a word of two or more syllables, other players shout "Bang!". Three bangs and you are out of the game.
2) Polysyllabic talk: This is played the same way as the first game, except that every spoken word must be at least two syllables long.
3) Alternating talk: Players must alternate one-syllable words and words of more than one syllable. Curiously, alternate English sounds much more natural than either monosyllabic or polysyllabic English.
Person and Place Names

Many years ago, in one of my Scientific American columns, I had my numerologist Dr. Irving Joshua Matrix posing as a fake psychiatrist. Matrix explained how the names of people often play a strong unconscious role in shaping their character and life history. I thought I was inventing something new, but it turns out that Carl Jung was way ahead of me. Here is a footnote from page 11 of the Bollingen paperback edition of his book Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle:

We find ourselves in something of a quandary when it comes to making up our minds about the phenomenon which Stekel calls the 'compulsion of the name.'... For instance, Herr Gross (Mr. Grand) suffers from delusions of grandeur, Herr Kleiner (Mr. Small) has an inferiority complex... Herr Feist (Mr. Stout) is the Food Minister, Herr Rosstauener (Mr. Horse-trader) is a lawyer... Herr Freud (joy) champions the pleasure-principle, Herr Adler (eagle) the will-to-power, Herr Jung (young) the idea of rebirth, and so on. Are these the whimsicalities of chance, or the suggestive effects of a name, as Stekel seems to suggest, or are they 'meaningful coincidences'?

It seems to me that Herr Jung's name more obviously symbolizes the "young" enemy of Father Freud. As for the name of psychoanalyst Herr Stekel (Mr. Little-stick), Jung surely overlooked another obvious bit of Freudian symbolism.

In 1966 Richard Nixon complained that the DuBois Club for young blacks had used Communist deception in choosing its name. The club had been named for the black sociologist W. E. DuBois who joined the Communist Party at age 93 and died an expatriate in Ghana. DuBois pronounced his name /DooBoys/ rather than in the French manner; hence the club's name sounded exactly like /The Boys Club/, of which Nixon was then national board chairman. The reader is referred to The New Yorker's "Talk of the Town," March 19, 1966, for the amusing details.

Authors often anagram their names to get pseudonyms. It is not generally known that Alexander Graham Bell adopted a pen name because he suspected that his articles were being accepted by mag-
azines only because of his fame. Wanting them accepted on their merit, he sold several articles to The National Geographic, submitting them under the name of H. A. Largelamb, an anagram of A. Granam Bell. The articles all appeared under Largelamb's byline.

William Remme of Eureka, California has called my attention to two oddities involving Ronald Wilson Reagan. Not only does each name have six letters, yielding the Biblical number of the Beast, 666, but if you add the values of the letters (using the cipher $A = 100$, $B = 101$, $C = 102$, and so on) you get a sum of 1984. I take this to be a certain prediction that Reagan will either be reelected president in 1984, or he won't.

The Newsweek Feature Service in September 1971 distributed an interesting release by Edward Blau on American town names. Blau disclosed that Peculiar, Missouri was named by a postmaster who had been asked to think of a name peculiar to his area. The founders of Odd, West Virginia so named it because they wanted an odd name. Extra Dry Creek, Arkansas was called that because it is even drier than nearby Dry Creek. Wymot, Nebraska was named because no one could see why not. Blau recommended George R. Stewart's American Place Names as the best source for information on such oddities.

Unintended Puns

The following sentence from the third edition of Principles of Mechanics by John L. Synge and R. A. Griffith was sent to me by Phillip Morgan: "Space does not permit us to attempt an axiomatic treatment of the theory of relativity."

Harold Bloom, reviewing Norman Mailer's recent monstrosity Ancient Evenings — the greatest literary experience for me in 1983 was not reading this crazy novel — for the New York Review of Books (April 28, 1983, page 4), had this to say: "In Ancient Evenings he has emancipated himself, and seems to be verging on a new metaphysic, in which heterosexual buggery might be the true norm..."

In the chapter on aesthetics in my Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener, I give two classic instances of unintended puns by famous poets (involving the words raspberry and balls), but I failed to mention the most incredible instance of all. Near the end of the last part of Pippa Passes, Browning writes:

Sing to the bats' sleek sisterhoods
Full compliance with gallantry:
Then owls and bats,
Cows and twats,
Monks and nuns, in a cloister's moods,
Adjourn to the oak-stump pantry!

It is hard to believe, but Browning was so unfamiliar with street slang that when he encountered the word twat in an old book of rhymes called Vanity of Vanities, he assumed it referred to part
of a nun's attire that he could appropriately pair with the cowls of monks! (See the entry on twat in The Century Dictionary.) Even more incredible is the fact that Browning never altered the lines. Is it possible no one told him? I would welcome hearing from any Browning expert who could provide more details about this memorable literary gaffe.

**Intended Dirty Word Play**

As all students of Shakespeare know, the bard was fond of off-color linguistic jokes, the bawdiest of which are not likely to be footnoted even in scholarly editions of Shakespeare's works. Surely the most outrageous example occurs in Act II, Scene V of Twelfth Night. Malvolio is reading a letter from Olivia:

> By my life, this is my lady's hand: these be her very C's, her U's, and her T's; and thus makes she her great P's. Observe how the word and supplies the N, and how the letter P continues the joke. No wonder Lewis Carroll thought that Thomas Bowdler's edition of Shakespeare should be further censored. "I have a dream of Bowdlerising Bowdler," was how he put it in a letter, "i.e. of editing a Shakespeare which shall be absolutely fit for girls."

**Terse Verse and Short Fiction**

In a footnote to C. C. Bombaugh's Oddities and Curiosities of Words and Literature which I edited for Dover, I discussed some of the famous short poems in English. Others include such oldies as "Hired. Tired? Fired!"; "The Bronx? No thonx!"; and "Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker," to which Ogden Nash added the line, "Pot is not." This subject was also explored in the November 1981 Kickshaws, where Jeff Grant quoted a number of three-word poems by Samuel Beckoff.

When William Cole wrote an essay on "One-line Poems and Longer, But Not Much" (New York Times Book Review, Dec. 2, 1973), the review later published (Jan. 13, 1974) a letter from G. Howard Poteet in which he proposed one-letter poems: "Thus my work includes the most evocative of all poetic letters, O. Further, there is the egocentric poem, I, the poem of pleasure, M, the scatological verse, P, the somnambulistic bit of poesy adapted from the comics, Z."

I suggest we take this a step further with the following poem titled "Simplicity": . No one can say my poem doesn't have a point. Of course we can write an even simpler poem, completely pointless, with the title "Ultimate Simplicity." It goes like this:

> For many years there were efforts in American science fiction magazines to write short-short-short-short stories. One of the best was titled "The Shortest Horror Story Ever Written."

> The last man on Earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock on the door.

Ron Smith shortened this one letter by changing knock to lock.
Forrest J. Ackerman holds the record for brevity. In the 1970s he sold the following story to Vertex for $100:

**Cosmic Report Card: Earth**

At a science fiction convention in 1983, which I attended, Ackerman said he has since resold his story four times for the same amount, and that it has been translated into three languages. In case anyone tries to imitate it with other letters, he added, he has all 26 copyrighted.

**Great Doggerel**

Readers of my *Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener* will know of my fondness for poetry so terrible that it is funny. Some of the worst poetry ever published was written by the famous British-American mathematician J. J. Sylvester. As *The Dictionary of American Biography* delicately puts it: "Most of Sylvester's original verse showed more ingenuity than poetic feeling." His privately printed book, *Spring's Debut: A Town Idyll*, is a poem of 113 lines, every line ending with the sound /in/. Another long poem, *Rosalind*, has about 400 lines, all rhyming with /Rosalind/. Here is how Sylvester's successor at Johns Hopkins University described an occasion on which Sylvester recited his poem to a meeting of the Peabody Institute:

The audience quite filled the hall, and expected to find much interest or amusement in listening to this unique experiment in verse. But Professor Sylvester had found it necessary to write a large number of explanatory footnotes, and he announced that in order not to interrupt the poem he would read the footnotes in a body first. Nearly every footnote suggested some additional extempore remark, and the reader was so interested in each one that he was not in the least aware of the flight of time, or of the amusement of the audience. When he had dispatched the last of the notes, he looked up at the clock, and was horrified to find that he had kept the audience an hour and a half before beginning to read the poem they had come to hear. The astonishment on his face was answered by a burst of good-humored laughter from the audience; and then, after begging all his hearers to feel at perfect liberty to leave if they had engagements, he read the Rosalind poem.


When I was a high school student in Tulsa, an English teacher asked everybody in the class to write a poem. A friend who sat next to me produced a poem that I thought such a masterpiece that I have carefully preserved it over the decades. Here it is, word for word, exactly as he wrote it:
Great Smells  
Carl Fritts

A smell is the greatest joy seen.  
A smell that makes a new world serene.  
Of all the smells of my pickin'  
I believe I would rather smell chicken.

The smell of chicken is very fine.  
The smell of chicken makes me feel divine.  
There are smells of cake and pie,  
But the smell of chicken is enjoyed by I.

I smell the smell of aroma of coffee,  
I smell the smell of the deep blue sea;  
The smell of mellon and the smell of meat,  
But the smell of chicken can't be beat.

Mnemonics

Leigh Mercer, the London word play expert who wrote "A Man, A Plan, A Canal -- Panama!" and other fine palindromes, sent me the following bewildering paragraph which he had clipped from a newspaper. The author was one F. E. White:

If you remember how much easier it is to remember what you would rather forget than remember, than remember what you would rather remember than forget, then you can't forget how much more easy it is to forget what you would rather remember than forget what you would rather forget than remember.

I once mastered an ingenious mnemonic system for remembering words and numbers, but I long ago forgot it. One of the country's top experts on mnemonics is the magician Harry Lorayne. Perhaps you have seen him perform his great memory act in person or on television. A magician friend recently told me that he used to forget names, but his memory enormously improved after he read a book on mnemonics by Harvey Lorayne.

Acronyms

In his autobiography (page 150), Gilbert Chesterton tells how he and his friends once named a club in London that they called IDK. Whenever anyone asked what the letters stood for, the reply was always "I don't know." I'm sure many readers of Word Ways have seen the sign WYBADILITY that hangs in bars. If a customer asks what it means, the bartender replies "Will you buy another drink if I tell you?"

Vladimir Nabokov, in his novel Pnin, introduces the phrase motu-weth frisas. Clearly it refers to the six days following Sunday.

Here are some useful acronyms for the most often repeated phrases in speeches by American politicians: Bomfog (brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God), Fisteg (fiscal integrity), Moat (mainstream of American thought), and Goveclop (government close to the people).
When the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan had a big exhibit of pop art, back in the days when pop was the latest art craze, did any newspaper think to headline a story "MOMA shows pop"? Come to think of it, in earlier days when the museum exhibited dada art, MOMA certainly showed dada.

Does the Engineering Information External Inquiries Officer of the BBC, when he answers the telephone, open with "EIEIO"?

In March 1983 the Eastman Kodak company suddenly realized that its newly formed U.S. Equipment Division had the acronym USED. On the assumption that nobody wants to buy used equipment they sensibly renamed it the U.S. Apparatus Division.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority is obviously devoted to the uplift of Boston. And have you heard of IBTA, an organization opposed to topless swim suits? The letters stand for the Itty Bitty Titty Association.

"What is the speediest reply to a boring remark?" writes Stephen Barr. The answer, he says, is OOMPH (Over One Mile Per Hour).

It is well known that NEWS is an acronym of North, East, West, South. So is SNEW. What's snew? Not much. What's new with you? Not well known is the startling fact that ADAM uses the initial letters of the Greek words for north (Arktos), west (Diusis), east (Anatole), and south (Mesembria). And did you know that Adam and Eve were Irish? When they first met, each lifted up the other's fig leaf. "O'Hair!" shouted Adam. Eve replied with "O'Toole!"

Riddles

When I was a boy I invented the following riddle. How did the man with big feet put on his pants? Answer: over his head. To my chagrin, I later discovered that the Reverend Edward Lee Hicks had recorded in his diary: "Heard this evening the last new joke of the author of Alice in Wonderland: He (Dodgson) knows a man whose feet are so large that he has to put on his trousers over his head."

The only other riddle I ever invented, which I believe no one beat me to, is this. Who was our tallest president. Answer: Dwight D. Eiffeltower.

There are hundreds of similar riddles that pun on well-known names. What weighs six tons and sings calypso? Harry Eliphante. What's green and dances? Fred Asparagus. Why is a martini without an olive or lemon twist called a Charles Dickens? No olive or twist.

His father was Japanese and his mother was Jewish. What did he do on December 7? He attacked Pearl Schwartz.

Who speaks softly and carries a big stick? The usual answer is a gay policeman or a pole vaulter, but I thought of a better one: Don Juan.

The bun, someone said long ago, is the lowest form of wheat.
Formula Jokes

In my February 1981 Kickshaws, I quoted five answers to the old riddle "What's black and white and red all over?" published in John Allen Paulos's Mathematics and Humor, and six more were given in the May 1981 Colloquy. Paulos's are from a much longer list given by M. E. Barrick in his paper "The Newspaper Riddle Joke" published on pages 253-57 of the 1974 volume of the Journal of American Folklore.

Has anyone compiled a similar list of answers to "Why did the chicken cross the road?" Here are six from Mary Ann Madden's book Son of Giant Sea Tortoise: because it was there, to get away from Colonel Sanders, because of an alternate-side parking rule, to avoid a street demonstration, because she did not want to get involved. My favorite answer is: to keep its pants up.

Matt Freedman and Paul Hoffman had a book published in 1980 titled How Many Zen Buddhists Does it Take to Screw in a Light Bulb? The book consists entirely of variants on this question. You may not know that the original riddle is very popular in Poland, where it is phrased: How many Americans does it take to screw in a light bulb? The answer is: one.

I'd like to see a similar book on variations of "Waiter, there's a fly in my soup" and "Who was that lady I saw you with last night?" I collect versions of both jokes. Some of the lady-wife variants are based on word play. Who was that lady I saw you out with last night? I wasn't out, I was just dozing. Who was that lady I saw you outwit last night? Magician: who was that lady I sawed with you last night? Who was that ladle I saw you with last night? That was no ladle, that was my knife. Who was that hobo (or strumpet) I saw you with last night? That was no oboe (or trumpet), that was my fife.

Help may be on the way. The editor informs me that Paul Dickson, the author of Words (reviewed in the November 1982 issue of Word Ways), is now planning a book on formula jokes of all types. If it sees the light of day, I'll be the first to buy a copy.

The Integers Revisited

In my February 1981 Kickshaws, I presented a puzzle in which ten students in a class had the integers concealed in their names: dON Edward, roberT WOrden, etc. Cynthia Knight of Chicago, Illinois utilized the same device in an imaginary bit of cocktail-party conversation:

No, never!  
That wouldn't do?  
It might be worth reexamining.  
Or else it's the end of our friendship.  
If I've understood you right, you've read my mind.  
Yes, I X-rayed it.  
That's even worse.  
I'll weigh your remark.
You see confusion in everything.
That ends it!
I feel even worse now.

Plaindromes and Ungrams

Jef Raskin of Cupertino, California is less than enchanted with the contorted syntax and characteristic words found in palindromes, so he has invented the plaindrome. Some examples:

Money-man I, an Adam, not even a doom
Stella, Otis deified Satan and Edna
An item? No, revolt took Natasha
Eggbert, a wry dross needs seating, tea-grams
Droop: an old fan? Needles fone a poor ode

He comments "Having come this far, we have lost all shame, and immediately present Ungrams, which are much like Anagrams, except less so." Two examples:

Richard M. Nixon / Noxious charmer
Brooklyn Bridge / Good ride by lake

This sort of thing could become addictive.

POP-STAR

SIR JEREMY MORSE
London, England

Oh, I hate thee, Hetty Tait.
Thy hoity-toity hat,
    Hate that!
Thy teat-toe tattoo,
    That too!
Thy too too toothy teeth I hate.
    Oh, Hetty Tait!