John McClellan
Woodstock, New York

My wife and I were on a plane high over the Atlantic en route to England. We occupied aisle seats, and next to us was a young English lad, obviously returning home with his parents (in the row behind us) after a visit to the United States. On the boy's lap was a comic book -- I've forgotten the title -- and an English dictionary was at his side. A Latin dictionary lay on the floor. He had a puzzled expression on his face and it seemed as though he might be close to tears for his chin trembled ever so slightly. After observing him for a while out of the corner of my eye I leaned towards him and asked if something was troubling him. Silently, he pointed to the comic book open on his lap, and to a fearsome drawing of some beings undoubtedly from outer space. The caption of the drawing, hand-lettered, and frighteningly large, was S-P-P-L-E-E-C-H!

"I've looked in all my dictionaries," he told me bravely, "but I can't find what it means; and Pater -- my Father, I mean -- doesn't like me to ask unnecessary questions." I glanced to the seat behind me where Pater sat with closed eyes and a copy of Creasy's Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World open (at "Waterloo"?) on his lap.

"I promise not to tell him I helped -- Boy Scout's Honor."

"Oh, thanks awfully!" said my new friend warmly. I then began to explain SPPLEECH as best I might. I told him that it could not be found in the usual dictionaries because it was a new word, made up at the spur of the moment by the artist; that it was an interjection, and possibly onomatopoetic, and that the etymology of such words was usually unknown. I told him, too, that artists and authors often had to use such words because space was not available for lengthy explanations. His eager face showed that I may have left him behind at some point, but I continued, "So you see, your dictionaries won't help you at all. Best to just look at the picture and draw your own conclusions about the word. The SPPLEECH is coming from the ray-gun those fellows are using -- only a ray-gun could make such a noise, don't you agree?" He agreed with me and took up his reading again. I could see that he was getting ahead much more easily now, and was glad. Pater had opened his eyes, and Mater continued to look out at the fluffy cloud cover below us. By tacit agreement the subject of comic book coinages was dropped and we did not take it up again. At Croyden he said, "Good-bye" politely, and disappeared into the crowd. I did not see him again.

However, our brief conversation had given me pause, and I deter-
route to Eng-
lish lad, and us) after a
side. A Latin
his face and
trembled
he corner of
oubIing him.
-- doesn't
at behind me
'reen Deci-
d possi.
bally unknown.
Continued,
just look
ed. The
only
agreed with
getting ahead
yes, and
us. By tacit
and we did
sently, and dis-

minded then and there to devote some time on my return home to an 
exploration of some of our current comic book coinages which lie in wait 
for the enthusiasts of other lands. Our effort in this direction follows:
that we can claim no definitiveness is obvious. The neologisms of to-
day are the archeologisms of tomorrow -- a fancy way of saying that
the former become old hat very soon.

Grammatically, our words may be considered Interjections, deriv-
ing, mostly, from nouns and verbs; or they may be purely onomatopoeto-
ic sounds of no recognizable provenance. One grammarian defines an 
Interjection as an outcry expressing pain, surprise, etc., and he fur-
ther states, 'In general, Interjections belong to the oldest forms of 
speech and represent the most primitive type of sentence -- they are
not words but sentences. Sentences are older than words.'

The foregoing definition which concerns itself mostly with human 
sounds must be enlarged in our case to include the sounds of inanimate 
objects. In comic books, OWTCH and MMM are clearly human-pro-
duced, but BLONK and BWAIE are not. BZZZ, RATT-A-SHATTLE and
the puzzling HOOOOWWWOO are clearly onomatopoetic, and such words
as THWACK, CHINGLE and SKRITCH are, too. KLANG (the noise of
church bells) and RAT-A-TAT-TAT (a knocking), are obviously verb-
derived interjections, as, too, is SHADDAP.

However, some coinages are harder to classify -- they must fend
for themselves in the no-man's-land of the un-derived, awaiting the
scholar who will finally award them a satisfactory category. Such
phrases as BONG SWAR and PYOINNGG, the solecisms (or, perhaps,
provincialisms) THUH (the) and TUH (to), NERTS, and some others
are not easily classified. None of them are man-produced 'outcries'
as OH, AH, etc.

It is not unusual for an idea to precede the symbol for it, and such is
the case with many of the coinages considered here. Just as the discov-
ery of Square Root by the Greeks, and Zero by the Arabs came before
the invention of the symbols for them -- the square root sign and the 0
-- so more recently has the discovery of the Ray-Gun preceded the creation
of the comic book signs PWOOOSH and PWAK for its action and/or
noise. And although volcanos have erupted since the beginni.
gen, it is only recently that anyone has thought it worthwhile to make words
(POOF and PTUI) descriptive of their activities. In this respect our
modern comic book artists are prime innovators in their ability to as-
sign recognizable symbols to our newer ideas.

The limited space in which these men must work, and the restrictions
it imposes, should also be noted. The sentence "The happy fellow jing-
led his new-found wealth in his pocket" must be shortened, and the
word CHINGLE substituted. Verbiage is a luxury which cannot be af-
forded when the same idea may be presented as tellingly with a single
word.
In passing, we may say that from the standpoint of Phonetics certain interesting conclusions may be drawn from our coinages, although it is not our intention to go into the subject deeply. For instance, the two High Front Vowels transcribed phonetically as (i:) and (i) -- the sounds of 'queen' and 'it', respectively, are often associated in the comics with speed, lightness, or fear. EEEEK, phonetically (i:k), is commonly, but not always, used in the connotation of a woman and a mouse. The diphthong (ai) -- the I of Eng. 'child' -- is formed more towards the back of the mouth, and heard in YIPE. It is a more 'open' sound, pronounced with the tongue in a slightly lower position than the preceding (i:). The (ae) of Eng. 'father' and the (o) and (ö:) of Eng. 'John' and 'talk' is formed with the tongue in a still more lowered and retracted position and used for sounds connected with heavy objects in flight or making forceful contact -- such as WHUMP, ZOT, SKRUNNCH, and many others. In general, the more closed High Vowels have less 'carrying' quality, while the Back, more open Vowels are of a more sonorous character. The former are properly associated with short-lived, staccato 'circumstances', while the latter express heavier, more resonant ones. But an extended treatment of the vowels and consonants used in the comics would make our paper over-long and is better left to other more competent persons.

We have limited ourselves here to comic books in English, despite the great popularity in the United States of certain French and Latin-American strips and books. Space does not permit the inclusion of so much material, nor have we found it necessary to include words which may be readily found in the usual dictionaries. MUMBLE, MUTTER, CLANK and a number of others will present no problem to foreigners with their bilingual word-books handy. We are concerned more with the WHOOPs, CHUGs, UHUMs, etc., which will elude even the most diligent of word-enthusiasts, be his word library ever so large.

I could not consider this introduction complete without grateful acknowledgement to my grandson, Thor, who gave me access to his large collection of comic books. These are most precious to him; ancient scrolls could hardly be guarded with more loving care. Thor is eleven.

Editor's note: Two articles in the Winter 1979 issue of Maledicta, "You Have Only Your Asterisk" by Laurence Urdang, and "Dingbatted Maledicta: Symbolic Euphemisms" by editor Reinhold Aman, nicely complement John McClellan's survey of comic book coinages. Dingbats are not only women such as Archie Bunker's wife Edith (in the former TV series "All In The Family"), but various typographical symbols (%) $ @ & ! ?% ) used by artists to denote curses or obscene words. Aman urges readers to send him any dingbat examples they encounter in their reading, especially ones in foreign languages (331 South Greenfield Avenue, Waukesha, WI 53186).
ethics certain.

Although it is the two

ated in the

g more more 'open'

ion than the

more lowered

ets, and High Vow-

High Vowels

ly associated

p of the vowels

ver-long and

ish, despite

and Latin-

ition of so

r words which

MUTTER,

more with the

ost dili-

grateful ac-

to his large

: ancient

or is eleven.

aped Male-

ely comple-

ngs are

ner TV

mbols (%©$#@

Aman

enter in their

reenfield Ave.

A SHORT GLOSSARY OF COMIC BOOK COINAGES

Sources (immediately following the word listed)

ac - Andy Capp, bb - Beetle Bailey, bh - Broom-Hilda, bl - Blondie,

bs - Brenda Starr, ca - Cathie, do - Doonesbury, g - Garth,

iggs - Grimm's Ghost Stories, h - Hart, ha - Hagar, ih - Incredible

Hulk, ju - Jumble Puzzle, k - Kooky, kk - Krazy Kat, ll - Little Lulu,

loa - Little Orphan Annie, m - Margie, mc - Marvel Comics,

mn - Mickey Mouse, p - Peanuts, pp - Pink Panther, rf - Robot

Fighters, rk - Rip Kirby, s - Shoe, sf - Science Fiction, sm - Spider

Man, sw - Spider Woman, tgs - True Ghost Stories, wi - West Indian

Comic, ww - Wonder Woman, wwp - Woody Woodpecker, wwt - Weird

War Tales

Abbreviations

aug - augmentative, cf - compare, Eng - English, Fr - French,

ono - onomatopoeia, ooo - of obscure origin, qv - which see,

v infr - see below, v supr - see above, var - variant

AAH h Unbelieving astonishment. A prehistoric noise (also AAAR-

BRGH).

AAAA h A noise of great annoyance (cf RRRR, GGGG, HHHH).

AAGH ha Sudden surprise and fear.

AAAH kk Deep sorrow.

AARGH ac A nightmare noise.


AH-CHOO h A sneeze.

AH HA kk Light of understanding suddenly breaks.

AHPPFOO kk A sneeze (cf AH-CHOO, v supr).

AIEEE wi Woman being pinched.

ARF loa A dog-noise.

ARGH sf A fear-noise.

AROOM ggs Sound of a bulldozer.

BAA ha A sheep-noise (ono; cf HONK, GRR).

BALLOOM rk Noise of striking.

BAM ha A drawbridge being let down.

BANG wi A door being broken down.

BASHOW wi Woman hitting an insulter with a saucepan.

BIMP h An apple falling.

BLAM bl Bursting a blown-up paper bag (cf KA-BLAM).

BLANT ha (sometimes BLAT) Sound of a horn.

BLONK kk A hitting noise, as when a brick strikes someone (also

BOOP, BOOM, and BOMM).

BOO 11 A ghost-noise.

BOOF ac A noise made in falling.

BONG ha A clock striking.

BONG SWAR kk Good-night (from Fr).

BOP ac Taking a tumble.

BONK p Head hitting ground.

ha Rock striking a Viking helmet.

h Any hitting noise (cf BOINK)
BRAT-TAT mc Burp-gun.
BRRR bl An alarm-clock.
B TAM lh Hitting and penetrating a brick wall.
BUFF wi A blow to the jaw.
BWAIE wi A gun going off.
BZZZ kk A whispering.

CHINGLE wi Noise of money in pocket (cf JINGLE).
CHUG ww Noise of a train.
CLANG rf Metal hitting ground.
CLANK bh Same as above.
CLOMP ww Sound of heavy animals walking.
CLUMP tgs Noise of falling downstairs.
CRAK ha Crackling knuckles.
CRRRZZ sf 000

EEE h A noise of fear, as when a lady sees a mouse.
wi Same as above.
E EEEKKK k Aug form of the above; extreme fear.
EEK ac Surprised disbelief; fear.
EEP bh Noise of fear and surprise (cf the milder WHOOPS).

FAZZZAK sf A science-fiction explosion (see FZZAM).
FLUMP h A heavy object hits the ground.
FOO-EH h A derisive sound (oooh).
FOOM h A volcano noise; an eruption.
me Noise of blasting.
FOM FOM sf Ray-gun discharges (cf PWOK).
FWIP sm Noise of a line being thrown (cf WHIP).
FWISSSHH sw 'Living flame erupted from her fingers'.
FWOOOSH mc Another ray-gun sound.
FZZAM sf Var of FAZZZAK (v supr).

GAAGG tgs Terrorised.
GARUF m A dog (ono) (cf HONK, BAA).
GAWRSH mm Interjection of surprise (probably from GOSH).
GGG h Similar to AAA (qv).
GLANG kk A dinner bell (ono) (also GLENG, GLONG and GLUNG).
GLOOMP h On swallowing a stone.
GLURB mm An underwater sound (cf BLOOB, COOB).
GNISH h A variant of GRONK (qv).
GNUFF h Same as above.
GONK bh A thrown object scores a hit.
GROG h Similar to GRONK (v infr).
GRONK h A prehistoric animal noise.
GR ac An angry sound, similar to GARUF, but human-produced.
GRROWWLL mm A sound of growling (probably aug of GRR).

HALP ww Var of HELP; a solecism.
HAR HAR lh Var of HA HA, a laugh.
HAW HAW kk Same as above, but more vulgar, perhaps derisive.
HEE HEE p A chuckle, sometimes derisive.
HIC ac A hiccough noise (ono).
HONK ha A goose noise (cf BAA).
HOOOOOWWWOO ggs A whimpering of hounds.
HRMPF sh Noise preceding sleep.
HUD (or HUT) sm A signal in football from the quarterback to the center to set the ball in motion (ooo) (cf Army slang HUT, the cadence in marching).
HUH? ww What?
HUH-HUH kk A snicker.
HUM p 'Now, let me think...'
KA-BLAM do Noise of thrown objects.
KA-BLAST pp An explosion.
KABLOWIE h Running into someone.
KA-VOOM ww An explosion.
KAZANGO h Something crashes through a tree.
KERTHawan sm A Spider Man noise (ooo).
KIK-KLICK wi Loading a magazine into a gun (ono).
KLANGE kk Church bells (ono).
KLENK kk Noise of sabres struck together.
KLOPPP kk Noise of wooden shoes (ono).
KLUNK kk Brick hitting ground.
ac Falling on head, or running into something.
KOFF (or KAFF) pp A cough (ono).
KRRUMPP mc Noise of destruction.
KWA mc Indeterminate noise (ooo).
KWONK kk Akin to BOPP and BLONK (qv).
M-M-M kk Sounds of cognition - 'Now, I wonder...' (also HM-M).
MMM ac Same as above.
g Mumbling sound of a gagged person.
MRMF sh Sound of thinking.
NERTS mc Derisive interjection (ooo) (probably from NUTS).
NOK li (ono) (probably from KNOCK).
OH-H kk Sorrowful interjection.
OH-OHH ac Fearful surprise.
OMIGOSH mm Contraction of OH MY GOSH; generally, surprise -- pleased or otherwise.
OOF m Sound of a dog.
ih Hitting a wall.
ww Someone being hit.
OUCH mm Interjection of pain.
OWTCH kk Aug var of OUCH: 'pinned' in a duel.
OWW ac Pain (var of OUCH).
OWWCH g Same as above.
PEEEP kk A bee-noise (also PFAA, PFUF with same meaning).
PFUI kk A snort of disdain.
PING kk Two balls hitting together (perhaps from PING PONG).
PLOOSH sm ooo
PLOP? Probably a var of FLOP.
PLUNK h A dropped coin.
POOF h Noise associated with volcanos.
POW kk The sudden landing of a brick.
mc A destructive noise.
PTUI h Satellite hitting volcano.
PWOOK mc A ray-gun noise.
PYOINNGG sm A tremendous blow (perhaps from Fr POING, a fist).

RAFF m A dog noise.
RAT A TAT-TAT ac A knock (ono).
RATTA-SHATTLE wi A gate being shaken, to get attention.
ROWF m Same as RAFF above.
RRRR h A sound of great annoyance (cf AAAA).
RUFF m (ono) (Probably akin to RAFF, above).

SCRURCH wi Small car taking off, over fast.
SHADDUP ac A solecism on a vulgarism: keep still (from SHUT UP).
SHOO kk To 'scat' a cat (see SKAT v infr).
SHOOIE h A prehistoric animal noise.
SHWOOSH kk A noise to make something disappear.
SKAT kk To 'scat' a cat (see SHOO v supr).
SKATCH ii Violin noise of an amateur.
SKNKL or SKNXX bl A sleep noise; snoring.
SKRITCH II A violin noise (see SKATCH).
SKRATCH II Same as above.
SKRUNNCH ih Noise of penetrating a wall.
SKWAA kk A motorcycle siren.
SLURP ha An eating noise.
SMAKK kk A kiss.
SNOOK h Prehistoric animal noise.
SPLAM ih Running head-on into a monster.
SPLAT ha Foot hitting a puddle (also SPLAAT).
SPLINGE h, wi Contents of a frying-pan dumped on someone.
SQQOZ bh A squeeze by a vulture.
STOK! SVAM! sm A fight.
SWAK sw ooo
SWOOSH kk Someone getting squirted, or otherwise wetted.

TATA TAAA kk Happy humming.
TCH ac A click of the tongue meaning 'Too bad!', or 'You really shouldn't have done that!' (a very primitive interjection).
THOOMP pp (ono) (Perhaps from THUMP, to slap or beat).

THRAAKK ih Noise of demolition.
THRAM mc A destructive noise (sometimes THRAMM).
THUH mm Var spelling of THE.

THUM sm ooo
THUNK wwt Sound of an arrow piercing a tank.
THWACK sh A noise of hitting.

THWAK ha Noise of knives being thrown into a wooden door.
THWIPPP sm Noise of Spider Man's web being hurled.

TRUND h ooo

TUH mm, wi Var spelling of TO.

TWANG ha Sound of a bow-string (ono).
UGHHH ac  Disgusted noise.
UHUM kk  Cogitative interjection meaning 'Now, let me think...'
UNGH wi  Violent monosyllable.
UH wi  I, or a.

VOOF ha  A dog noise (also VOFF).
VOOM mc  An indeterminate noise (ooo).

WA-AH ac  Crying.
WAH ac  Tears, anger.
WAH ll  Crying.
WAR kk  Same as above.
WHAM h  Noise of laundry being beaten on a stone, in a stream.
WHANG h  A hitting noise.
WHAP h  Similar to above.
WHOO bb  Noise of an owl.
WHOOF bl  Noise of speedy departure.
WHOOPS bh  (cf EEP).
WHUMP sm,h  a hit; falling after ski jump.
ww  Train hitting end of line.
WOOF m  A dog noise (cf ROWF, RAFF, OOF).
WONK s  When one falls asleep and head hits table.
WOW do  Noise of surprise.
WWOWF bs  An enraged animal, biting.
WUH wi  Where (var spelling).
WUN wi  One (var spelling).

YAAAAY ll  A joyous noise.
YAK wi  A noise of much talk (also YAKKIT Y).
YAP m  A dog noise.
YEOO W bl  Noise of hurt.
YEOOUCH bh  Same as above.
YI loo  Surprise and fear at a brandished scimitar.
YIP m  A dog noise.
YIPES sf  Noise of fear.
YIPPEE ww  A joyous noise.
YOFF ha  Another dog sound.
YYYNNNHHH tgs  An eerie sound (ooo).

ZAK h  Hitting a ball.
ZAM kk  Kicking something, as a bucket.
ZANG h  Noise of an anteater catching a clam.
ZANGO h  Neanderthal love-making sound.
ZAP ha  A war-noise.
  h  A Neanderthal slap.
  bh  A bewitching sound.
ZAZ kk  Sound of something being thrown.
ZIP h  An armadillo rolling into a ball.
  kk  A projectile like a brick or boomerang in flight.
A MAIL AUCTION OF WORD BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

Palmer Peterson's extensive library of old dictionaries, puzzle magazines and other National Puzzlers' League material was willed to Murray Pearce, 410 Avenue B West, Bismarck, North Dakota 58501. He now offers at auction that part of this collection which duplicates his own, with all proceeds to be donated to the National Puzzlers' League. Those wishing to participate should write to him for a full three-page listing (send a self-addressed stamped legal-sized envelope). Bids will be accepted until October 1, 1980. If more than one person bids on a particular item, all such bidders will be notified of the high bid to date and will be given a chance to make one additional bid if they desire. A sample of the material available:

- Eastern Enigma and Enigma issues dating back to 1899, with a nearly complete run (missing one issue, December 1969) from 1931 to date
- Word Ways, complete through February 1979 (45 issues)
- A Key to Puzzledom, 1906
- Webster's New International Dictionary, first and second editions
- Levine's Pattern Word List, Volume 1 (2-letter through 9-letter words)
- Berrey and Van Den Bark, The American Thesaurus of Slang, 1947
- The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia, 1904
- Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary, 1950
- Frederick Webb Hodge, Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico, 1912