KICKSHAWS

DAVE MORICE
Iowa City, Iowa

~ ONEWORD INTERVIEW WITH JOYCE HOLLAND

(During the first half of the 1970s, as I've mentioned before in Kickshaws, I carried out a literary hoax. I wrote concrete poems and minimal poems under the name "Joyce Holland." My girlfriend Pat Casteel appeared as Joyce Holland to give poetry readings and to meet other poets. The hoax reached its peak with an appearance on NBC-TV's "Tomorrow" show with Tom Snyder. The interview below took place on the U of Iowa's radio station WSUI. The radio announcer was in on the hoax. He interviewed Joyce, Pat played the role of Joyce, and I played the role of the call-in person. The script follows.)

WSUI Interviewer
Iowa City, 1975

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am pleased to welcome you to WSUI's 4-part series "Interview with a Hoax." Each program will focus on a person who became another person in order to fool people. Tonight's guest is Joyce Holland, a literary hoax from Iowa City. Miss Holland writes poetry in a variety of non-traditional forms—concrete poetry, including verbal, visual, and vocal work. She is especially interested in minimal poems.

Miss Holland, you don't exist, is that correct?
   Yes.
Do you like non-existence.
   No.
If you could exist, what would you call yourself.
   Me.
Aside from poetry, do you have any hobbies? Collect anything?
   Yes.
What kind of things do you collect? Coins? Stamps?
   Words.
Very interesting. Do you keep them in an album?
   Yes.
Approximately how many words do you have in your collection.
   One.
Okay, there are rare coins from ancient countries. Is yours a rare word from an ancient county?
Yes.
Could you share it with us?
Yes.
Then what is that wonderful word?
It.
But that's a common English word. Did I hear you wrong?
Yes.
Okay, I'll be more careful this time. What is the word in your collection?
It.
Ah, yes. It. Not the word you said before which sounded exactly like It.
No.
What ancient language does It come from?
It.
Is It a dead language?
Deceased.
I'm sorry to hear that. How many years ago was it a live written language?
Million.
Really? I thought written language began just a few thousand years ago. Are you sure it was a million?
Positive.
Where is the proof of that?
Here.
This is just a sheet of college-ruled paper with the number 1,000,000 written on it plus the word It underneath. It looks like you signed it with a ball-point pen. Does that prove that you know the language?
Yes.
How do I know that you're not making this all up to hoax me?
Why?
You're a hoaxer. You enjoy fooling people. It's your vocation in life. It's what you live for, even if you are non-existent. That's why you'd hoax me.
Never.
Alright, for the sake of argument, I'll assume it's the truth. How many words are in that language?
One.
And that word must be It. Is that right?
No.
What is the only word in that language?
It.
I must've pronounced It wrong. If the language called It has only one word, It, is it really a language?
Yes.
What kind of a language?
Minimal.
Did they create books of any sort?
One
What was the name of that book?
It. How did they form their sentences? Surely they didn't simply use the same word over and over, like "It it it it," did they?
   Yes.
Very interesting. A million-year-old language that has only one word uses that word over and over to make a sentence. Does the meaning change depending on how long the sentence is?
   No.
Hmm. Then how does the language work?
   Sound.
Is it pronounced differently when it is used in different contexts?
   No.
Does the word change volume to change meaning?
   No.
Then the meaning must change depending on the position of It in the sentence.
   No.
That must be the most useless language ever devised.
   No.
What good is a language that has no meaning?
   Truth.
Are you implying that a speaker in this one-word language would only be able to tell the truth?
   Yes.
Is there a language in which the speaker can only tell a lie?
   Yes.
What is that language called?
   It.
But that's the same as the first It language. Is there a way to tell which language a speaker is using?
   Ask.
Wouldn't the answers be exactly the same?
   Yes.
Did they write poetry in both languages?
   Yes.
How does a person translate a poem in the first It language to a poem in the second It language?
   Copy.
But if they simply copy a poem from the first It language to the second, aren't both versions the same.
   No.
Does the poem in the first It language lose something in translation to the second It language?
   Yes.
What does it lose?
   Truth.
If you translate from the second It language to the first, do you lose anything in translation?
    Falsehood.
So if a scribe wrote anything in the first It language, then it would always be true.
    Yes.
And if a scribe wrote anything in the second It language, then it would always be false.
    Yes.
Then why didn’t the people who used the second It language stop using the word and instead use the first It language. Both groups would always know the truth. Or did the speakers of both languages think that their own language told the truth, and the other language told lies?
    Yes.
So how do you know that the first It language was true? Translating either way resulted in an opposite meaning. Doesn’t that prove that truth is in the mind of the speaker or writer?
    No.
Why not? If you believe your It language is true, then you also believe the other language is false. The strangest thing of all is that the original and the translation, as you pointed out, look and sound exactly the same.
    Yes.
You said you have a collection of words from It. Since there is only one word, then you’ve got the complete collection. How do you know that you really have the word from the first It language, the one of truth, and not the word from the second It language, the one of lies?
    Smell.
There’s a difference in the way the words smell?
    Yes.
How does a word smell in the first It language?
    True.
And from the second It language?
    False.
Did they have smelling bees?
    Maybe.
I’m just making a joke, Ms. Holland. So you’re telling me that there are two million-year old languages.
    Three.
There’s a third language that dates back that far?
    Yes.
What is that language called?
    It.
Ms. Holland, I don’t think there could be three languages that all use the same, single word, and no others. You said one is the language of truth, and the other is that of falsehood. What is the third the language of?
    Beauty.
Can you translate the language of beauty into the one of truth?
No.
Can you translate into the one of falsehood?
   No.
So the third language can't be translated into either of the other two. Is that correct?
   Right.
That would imply that beauty can't be truth.
   True.
That would also imply that beauty can't be falsehood.
   False.
So beauty must be false?
   No.
Beauty must be true?
   No.
Then what can beauty be?
   Both.
And all three of these words are pronounced and written exactly the same. How could those ancient people communicate?
   Carefully.
Carefully? There can't be much care needed when you only have one word. Let's imagine I saw you on the street in this million-year old land, and I wanted to greet you. How would I say hello?
   It.
How would I know whether that implied truth, falsehood, or beauty?
   Listen.
Listen to what? There's no difference in those words, is there?
   Yes.
Excuse me a second, Ms. Holland. We have a caller. Hello, sir, what would you like to ask our guest this afternoon?
   Is there a fourth It language?
Excellent question. Ms. Holland...
   Yes.
   What is that the language of, ma'am?
   Love.
   Does the word It mean "Love."
   Yes.
   Does It translate into the It language of truth?
   No.
   How about the It language of falsehood?
   No.
   Then It must translate into the It language of beauty. Does it?
   Yes.
Sir, thank you for your provocative questions. Ms. Holland, that raises an excellent point. The It language of truth and the one of falsehood can translate into each other, and the one of beauty and the one of love can, too, but truth and falsehood can't translate into beauty and love. Am I correct?
Yes.
Does this mean that beauty and love have nothing to do with truth and falsehood.
Yes.
Then people who are in love over their beauty don't necessarily tell truths or lies when they translate their feelings.
Yes.
They couldn't communicate very well. What happened to those people?
   Extinction.
Of course. Since they couldn't tell truths or lies, they wouldn't be able to share their love with the other groups, and they wouldn't procreate. Which It language is your favorite? The It language of...
   Love.
Is there a fifth It language?
   No.
Okay, tell me one of the words, and let me see if I can guess which It language you're using.
   It.
That must be the language of falsehood. Is that right?
   Yes.
Try one of the other It languages.
   It.
Is that the language of truth?
   Beauty.
Let me try something a little different. I'm going to say a longer sentence. Can you interpret?
   Maybe.
It it it it it it it it. What does that mean?
   It.
Oh, we're just about out of time. Ladies and gentlemen, our speaker today was Joyce Holland, a concrete poet and expert on ancient minimal languages. Thank you, Ms Holland, for a most interesting discussion.
   It.
It? Oh, I understand! You mean goodbye. It to you too.

~ LIGHTGHT VERSE

"lightght" is a misspelled word, or maybe it's a poem. In fact, it is perhaps the most controversial poem in the English language. Aram Saroyan, the man who wrote "lightght," created minimal poetry in the 1960s. Most of his minimal poems are only one word long. Sometimes the poem is spelled correctly (according to the dictionary), and sometimes it isn't.
“Lighght” According to Wikipedia

“One of Aram Saroyan’s most famous poems was simply the unconventionally spelled word “lighght” in the center of a blank page. This poem was selected by George Plimpton to be featured in The American Literary Anthology and, like all poems in the volume, received a $500 cash award from the National Endowment for the Arts, then just five years old. The NEA was created in the same year the poem was written, 1965. Many conservatives, such as Representative William Scherle and Senator Jesse Helms, objected at the per-word amount of the award, complaining that the word was not a real poem and was not even spelled correctly. This was the NEA’s first major controversy; 25 years after it was written, Ronald Reagan was still making pejorative allusions to “lighght.”

69 “Lighght” Translations

Recently I translated “lighght” into 68 foreign languages plus Pig Latin. Each translation mimics the structure of Saroyan’s original. Just as removing one of the two occurrences of “gh” from “lighght” gives you the word “light,” so does the German “lichcht” return to “licht”, German for “light.” This works in a similar way with all the translations. Some words are shorter (the Latin “lux” becomes “lulux”), and some are longer (the French “lumière” becomes “lumiëière”). Never before have so many translations of a poem appeared in a single publication.

~ DELETION SET

Anil came upon this unusual DELETION SET:

plump 1. lump 2. pump 3. plum

“This one is remarkable in that three different deletions each produce a cognate of the primary word. (Lump and plum are plump shaped, and plump ca. means pumped up.) All three are etymologically unrelated as well, except that plum may have influenced the modern sense of the adjective. None of the three involve rearrangements. Words that remain words without rearrangement whichever letter is deleted are dubbed CHARITABLE WORDS by David Silverman (Eckler, Making the Alphabet Dance, p.88). The longest examples are pleats and chains, but none of their deletions is a cognate. Allowing rearrangements (transdeletions), Borgmann in Language on Vacation gives two examples of longer words (creations and angriest) that yield a word after deleting each letter. Creations had two cognates, enactors and reaction, while angriest had at least a weak cognate for six of its eight letters (stinger, nastier, nagster, staring, tearing, searing). I have begun collecting unrearranged deletions that yield unrelated cognates. Those so far:
grange–range
grim face–grimace
moist–mist
nascent–ascent
ramble/r–amble/r
Shades–Hades
spear–spar
and the antonyms
belief–belie
open–pen (open up–pen up)
play–ply
stray–stay.

HELP WANTED ON BIRTHDAY CARD

Mike Morton's in an interesting dilemma: "My brother was born in 1961, a rare invertible year. I want to write a higgledy-piggledy about this for his 50th birthday. While "invertible birth year" is the correct meter, I also need a single six-syllable word for one line to meet hig-pig rules.

The closest I can find are:
• polysymmetrical (which it ain't, but I could make that point)
• axisymmetrical (ditto)
• hemisymmetrical (ditto)
• symmetricality (which may not be a word, but best I can do so far)

Anything better you can think of?

MINE:
Thai thy thigh--

those are three words that do a little trick. Each word beghis with "TH" but pronounced differently, and each word ends with an "I" sound, but spelled differently. Howard Bergerson figured that out.. At lunch today, I wrote a limerick for Mary Jo and her friend, and it uses those three words. We were at a Thai restaurant.

WHAT'S FOR LUNCH?

(by me, I sent it sent to Ove; I wrote it in a Thai restaurant, with MJ there)

The restaurant served spicy Thai.
We ate and drank lunch, my and thy!
It didn't seem rude
To eat in the nude
Till I spilled some hot soup on your thigh.
Esperanto is a constructed international language. Klingon is the alien language used in the science-fiction series *Star Trek*. Pig Latin is a child’s code language.

Pidgin – an auxiliary language that has developed from the need of speakers of two different languages to communicate and is primarily a simplified form of one of the languages

Creole – a pidgin that has become the native language of a speech community

Pig Latin – a jargon that is made by the systematic mutilation of English

Pig Latin -- A version of language formed from English by transferring the initial consonant or consonant cluster of each word to the end of the word...

Creole

xLunspzo (flor) is a cipher language based on Julius Caesar’s military code.
xUryuomoco (louja) is an alien language from the webcomic *El Goonish Shive*.
xPennsylvania German (lessen)
"Light" and "Lighght"
In 115 Different Languages

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Xhosa       layita       layita
Yoruba      imólë        imólólë
Zulu        isibane      isibanane

* A poem with this spelling appears in more than one language.
** This poem derives from an artificial language.

He's a linguist named Martin Schwartz.
The guy knows his stuff!

I think he'd be delighted.
Martin's a great fellow.

Ove

--- On Fri, 3/1/13, Dave Morice <drabc1946@gmail.com> wrote:

From: Dave Morice <drabc1946@gmail.com>
Subject: Re: Fw: Dave Morice, translighhting and sloppy seconds
To: "O.V. Michaelsen (Ove Oteness)" <wordplayauthor@yahoo.com>
Date: Friday, March 1, 2013, 11:38 PM

On 2/24/2013 2:15 PM, O.V. Michaelsen (Ove Oteness) wrote:
From a friend, Martin Schwartz:

--- On Sun, 2/24/13, martz@berkeley.edu <martz@berkeley.edu> wrote:

From: martz@berkeley.edu <martz@berkeley.edu>
Subject: Dave Morice, translighhting and sloppy seconds
To: wordplayauthor@yahoo.com
Date: Sunday, February 24, 2013, 12:00 PM

Ove,
Thanks for the below.
Here are some scholia for you and Mr. Morice:

1) One may contact the luluminous angel behind the lighght: <Fifi@lux>.

2) The Albanian word on which Mr. Morice's translative reduplication is based I see now to explain the name Drita, the Albanian-American "mob wife" of the otherwise odious TV program Mob Wives.

3) The Azerbaijani translation offers a floral end of the lightght:
At least in Azerbaijani poetry (as also in Ottoman Turkish poetry), gül = flower.
4) Had Mr. Morice used Aram Saroyan’s father’s father’s native language, West Armenian, 
luys (lüys) 'light' would yield luyuys (lüyüys) 'lightght', pronounced like what lightght would be in Ove’s native Norwegian, lyys, as per Mr. Morice’s translation.

5) Had Mr. Morice used Hebrew (Aram Saroyan’s mother WAS Jewish), reduplicated Hebrew OR 'light' would yield OROR, presenting one with French aurore. If one extended that to aurore, it would provide extra effulgence.

Many, many years ago I translated Catullus’

litus ut longe resonante Eoa tanditur unda

(where the vowels of rEsOnAnTe [whose last e is elided with the next e- of Eoa, which is an adjective of the Greek word for ‘dawn’], get EchOed As EOa, an effect I tried to mimic using the Latin word for "dawn":

"where the far-roaring waves smash Aurora’s shore"

M

I brought a pair of earplugs with me to Mike Daisy’s performance. I’m glad I did. Not just because he’s a loudmouth, which he is, but because he lacks a sense of humor, too. His long lambasting of Disneyworld was the most boring thing I’ve heard of since I saw the weather report earlier in the day. At least the weather report was shorter. Two hours is a lot of time to waste listening to such an inane speaker. He was embarrassing. He used the word fuck as if he was the first and funniest to do so. George Carlin, the master comedian, used fuck a lot, and it was funny. Mike Daisy used it too much, and it was pitiful. I was happy to see his performance for only one reason: I now know I don’t ever want to see him again. What a waste of time and money!
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~ LETTERS FROM THE ALPHABET

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A is the alpha but not the omega of the alphabet. It leads the arrangement of words in the dictionary. It announces the absolute arrival of alphabetic order, which is also alphabetic ardor to those whose art is a literary apple in the arbor of knowledge. In the beginning was the letter, the actual letter, and the letter was A, the first letter of all.

B is the bad luck letter. It was born in second place between A and C. Its best moment was in the line, "To be or not to be." Its shape can betray its luck: Cutting off B's vertical line and moving it slightly to the left of the two curved lines changes B to 13, the unlucky number. B is the first letter of baker's dozen, which signifies 13. So B it.

C is the copyright letter. Writers, artists, musicians, playwrights, filmmakers, and other creative people protect their work with the letter C in a circle (©). If a work isn't copyrighted, it could be copied wrongly by someone else claiming to be its creator, and the copycat could cop the creation, cash in on it, check the cash, cash the check, and cop out. C copies right.

D is the dead letter. Most verbs in the past tensely end in D, which also ends the word end. This may seem like a dirty deed, but it enables the present to dissipate so the future can develop its destiny. If it weren't for D, dozens of doors
would never open, and decades of doorknobs would never turn. The world would dream darkly of delight, as the light of dreaming darkly died.

**E** is the everywhere letter. It's in the eyes and the ears of every writer, every reader, every speaker, and every listener. It eases its way into printed text more than every other letter. It is even spoken or written in most of the letter names. Pronounced alone, six letters have a short E sound (F, L, M, N, S, X); and eight have a long E sound (B, C, D, E, G, P, T, V, Z). E, which is used in the spelling of even, exists in three letter names that don’t have an E sound (*cue, double-U, wye*). Eighteen letters use E, and eight exclude it. E is excellent!

**F** is the forbidden fruit in language’s Garden of Eden. Although it is frequently found at the front of favorable words, there is one four-letter word that few can forget, a few find filthy, and a few find funny. Its four letters are filled with a fortune of meanings, fair or foul, featured in its own dictionary. This friend or foe is, of course, the famous F-word.

**G** is the going letter. It appears at the ending of verbs that are continuing doing what they are doing. G is always finishing—*ing*, which is seeming to make the beginning unending. G completes the spelling of writing and drawing and dreaming and waking and working and playing and seeing and saying and walking and running and talking and being. G is going with the flowing.

**H** is the Houdini of the alphabet. In England, the H is not always uttered, but in the U.S. It's spoken without hesitation. Its name is Aitch. Even with its first four letters removed, the H keeps its shape and sound. No hero can hear the howl of H, when H is hurled from heaven to hell. It's the magician's hat with a hare in its hair, for the H is quicker than the I.

**I** is the identity letter, the first-person singular pronoun. Ironically, I is inevitably considered the shortest word in English because I imitates a fine thin line. I's initial modesty is impeded by capital egotism: English is the only language whose first-person singular pronoun is in upper case. If this implies that "I" is number one, that's exactly what it is—the Roman numeral equal to 1.

**J** is the jester of the alphabet. It looks just like an I trying to be a U or vice versa, but it juts out somewhere between them—I to J to U. As justice would have it, J is 1 step in the alphabet to the right of I and 11 steps to the left of U. A joker?
Perhaps. But J is a jewel, to: In lower case, J is the only consonant with a dot above it. It’s neighbor, I, is the only vowel with a dot. From upper case to lower case, J tosses a gem of a dot to j. From jester to justice, from joker to jewel, J is a joyful, jolly juggler.

K is the kiloletter, the letter most frequently used in the field of computer technology to represent a number—1000. It is also used in science, commerce, etc. K stands for kilo, but most people simply say K. When it comes before N in a word, it’s as silent as the night. Yet K is the key that turns night into knight, the keepsake that keeps for the sake of the key.

L is the good luck letter. If it is viewed upside-down, it turns into the good luck number 7. Its luck makes it a letter to love, a love letter, too. In lower case, it is a single, lonely line that looks like the upper-case I or the number 1. In upper case, the two lines of L link in a love that only lines know. Their love is limitless, leading to their linear offspring, the lower-case l.

M is the master letter. It stands majestically like a mountain among the more mundane letters. It meditates like a maharish at a meal, making an mmmmmmm sound at the marvelous meat. It is the highest Roman numeral letter, meaning one thousand. M times M multiplies to a million. It is more. It is most. It is more than most. Yet it makes more of less, too, by beginning all minus numbers.

N is the neophyte negative letter. It is the first letter of the last half of the alphabet. Rotating it 90° in either direction gives Z, which ends the entire alphabet. N nests nebulously in the nexus of M, nodding like a needle needing a haystack. N begins more negative words than any other letter—naught, nil, nix, no, none, nope, never, nothingness.

O is the oldest printed letter still in use today. O, like the wheel it resembles, has traversed the ages. O, out of all the letters in early alphabets, left other, less durable letters by the wayside. O is the letter of poetry: O! the romantic passion it suggests. O is also the letter of mathematics: the oldest letter, O represents zero, the newest Arabic numeral. O is also the only letter that looks like the mouth that opens to speak its name. We owe it a standing ovation.

P is the philosopher’s stone of the alphabet. It begins all poetry, prose, and painting. It is the point of all pens, pencils, and paintbrushes. It praises the process of creativity and prizes the progress of the imagination. It puts the pi in
pie and the Poe in Poetry. It permutes the poorest lead of the soul into the purest
gold of art. It perches between the two circular letters, O and Q.

Q is the quirky letter. It’s an O with a tail, a Q-tip obsessed with the letter U. It
almost always requires that U come right after it. Quite ironically, and quaintly, Q
and U are separated from each other in the alphabet by three other letters—R, S,
and T. Question: What quakes, quivers, and quits without U in a queue behind it?
(N.B.: Dropping the last four letters of queue leaves Q, so different to view, so
similar to quote).

R is the ruler of the alphabet. It begins every race or ride, but placed at the end
it’s a racer or a rider. It races through a particular route, but placed at the start it
reroutes the race or reraces the route. When it sees a vision, it makes a revision.
When it has a view, it’s a viewer; and when it reviews what it’s viewed, it’s a
reviewer. R rules.

S is the snake’s letter. It’s shaped like a snake rising up to strike, and it sounds
like a snake suddenly spitting. Slyly it slithers at the end of most plural nouns and
most singular present tense verbs. Softly it hisses with a soft series of S’s or
sharply buzzes with a zipping of Z’s. And then it slinks secretly into slippery
silence.

T is the truth letter. T sits at the table of logic and tastes the truth, the whole
truth, and nothing but the truth. T takes time to touch the truisms whose thoughts
are timeless. Full of fakeries, fantasies, and fooleries, F is free to feel the
fantasies of falsehood, but T is never tempted to tell tall tales. T was taught to
totally trust the truth.

U is the utilitarian letter. It satisfies Q’s urgent need to be followed by U. Unlike
Q, however, U is utterly utopian, useful to use with most other letters. Sometimes
U sheds its decorative letters Y and O and becomes U, the real U, as in I LUV U,
appearing in everything from advertising to poetry. Although U has never been
deﬁned as YOU in any dictionary, it has been used as YOU to unite with I, the
ideal pronoun. Together, U and I uniquely unify each other’s universe.

V is the vanishing vowel. In modern usage, it represents a consonant most of
the time. It used to be a vowel, too, viewed as a valuable, venerable variable to
U. It still replaces U in certain contexts in order to suggest olden times—for
instance, on monuments and medals. Award medals from the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair have “ST. LOUIS UNIVERSAL EXPLOSION” on them. But V is no longer the U it was. Once in vogue as a vowel, it’s vague now.

W is the weird letter. It’s the only letter whose name is pronounced with three syllables; every other letter name is pronounced with only one syllable. Its print name, “double-U,” has more than twice as many letters as any other number name has, but it doesn’t have W, the very letter it names! W doesn’t look like a double U; it looks like a double V. W is a letter that raises questions about its own identity. It begins five basic question words (who, what, when, where, and why), and ends a sixth (how).

X is the X-ed out letter. It begins fewer words and names than any other letter. Ironically, people who are unable to write are told to “make an X” for their names. In that respect, every name can be spelled “X.” Equally ironic is the fact that X has more meanings than any other letter: it can be a kiss, a Roman numeral, a cross, a tic-tac-toe mark, a moving rating, an unknown quantity, a multiplication sign, a strike in bowling, a mysterious person, or a type of radiation.

Y is the yin letter; Y is the yang letter. It can be a consonant or vowel. It looks like a fork, and speaks with a forked tongue. Y appears in more all-vowel words than any other—aye, ay-ay, eye, oy, you, yea, yoyo. It’s the only letter that has a homophone that questions its own duplicity (why). In the plural it has a homophone that answers its own question (wise).

Z is the zenith of the alphabet. It comes last in the established order of letters, and yet it has more names than any other—ezed, ezod, izzard, zed, zee. Only zed (in British English) and zee (in American English) are in general use today. As the 26th letter, Z brings closure: Nothing comes after it. Zero. Zip. Zilch. Zot.