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Thesaurus of Slang

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BOOKS OF THE TIMES

A Back-Alley Glossary Of the English Language

By MICHIKO KAKUTANI

To Ambrose Bierce, slang was "the grunt of the human hog (*Pignoramus intolerabilis*)." To S. I. Hayakawa, it was "the poetry of everyday life." Now, thanks to the herculean efforts of J. E. Lighter, a research associate in the English department of the University of Tennessee, American slang has its very own dictionary, a historical dictionary that stands as both a glossary of our ribald daily speech and an irreverent index of our nation's cultural evolution.

Although it's frustrating that only a portion of this dictionary is now available — the second volume (H-R) is to be published in the spring of 1996, and the final volume (S-Z) is scheduled for the spring of 1997 — researchers and browsers alike will find Mr. Lighter's first volume as deliciously readable as it is informative.

As Mr. Lighter points out in a succinct, eminently useful introduction, slang tends to flourish in subcultures that may employ a particular vocabulary as a sign of status, solidarity or inclusion: among, for instance, students, cowboys, drug users, athletes, musicians and ethnic groups. Black English and jazz slang, says Mr. Lighter, spread with the great northward migration of black Southerners during the 1930's, and military slang proliferated in the wake of the two world wars. In the last several decades, the dissemination of slang has accelerated rapidly along with the communications explosion. Indeed, many of the more recent entries in this volume seem to have originated with television shows, movies and commercials.

There's "beam up" from "Star Trek," of course, and "bippy" from "Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In." "Babelicious" (meaning "a tasty babe") was coined in a Wayne's World skit on "Saturday Night Live"; "Club Fed" (meaning a Federal prison) seems to have had its debut on "Miami Vice." "Where's the beef?" originated with a Wendy's hamburger ad and was popularized by Walter Mondale during the 1984 Presidential campaign. "Deep throat," of course, comes from the 1973 pornography film of the same name.

The war in Vietnam popularized words like "grunt," "zap" and "waste" (meaning to kill), while the counterculture gave us "acid test" (coined by Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters around 1965), "bummer" (circa 1966) and "freak out" (circa 1966). The San Francisco columnist Herb Caen, Mr. Lighter tells us, created the word "beatnik" in 1958 by

Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang

Volume I: A-G

Edited by J. E. Lighter

1,006 pages. Random House. \$50.

substituting "beat" (from Beat Generation) in the name of the Russian spaceship "Sputnik."

Other words and phrases that sound thoroughly contemporary actually date back many years. While "bimbette" first surfaced on television in the mid-1980's, "bimbo" (meaning "a stupid, inconsequential or contemptible fellow") was used as far back as 1918. "Easy rider" predates both motorcycles and Dennis Hopper; in 1914, it meant "a man who is supported by a woman, especially a prostitute." "Drugstore cowboy" dates to 1923, when it meant "an idle young man who lounges at or near a drugstore soda fountain, especially for the purpose of socializing with young women." "Groovy" was first used in 1937 to mean "in the groove; splendid; delightfully exciting." And "bad," meaning good or "formidably skilled," can be traced to the 1850's.

Indeed, slang often works by giving standard English words eccentric new meanings or spin, as in musicians' use of the word "cat" to mean a "performer or avid devotee of jazz

A slang dictionary, where proper is far away from the point.

or swing music." Other familiar words with new and in some cases obscene slang meanings include "air-condition," "alfalfa," "apple," "banana," "biscuit," "chimes" and "enchilada."

Some words, as this volume demonstrates, seem especially conducive to variation and extrapolation. You can "blow a fuse," "blow your lid," "blow your mind," "blow the whistle,"

"blow off steam" or simply have a "blow out." You can visit the "Big Apple" or the "Big Ditch," buy some "Big Blue" stock on the "Big Board," act like a "big cheese" or suffer the "big chill." You can also "bug out" or get "bug-eyed" on "bug juice" and wind up in the "bughouse."

The word with the most variations by far, however, is a certain vulgarity unprintable in these pages. It is used as a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, interjection and intensifier, and its variations fill a full 12 pages in this dictionary, attesting not only to the word's enduring popularity, but also to the infinite flexibility of the English language.

The "Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang" again and again impresses upon the reader the invigorating possibilities of language, and the rowdy, colorful and just plain amusing virtues of slang. After all, how boring to simply order coffee in a restaurant, when you can ask the waiter for some "black water" or a cup of "boiler acid." How insipid to pay with a dollar bill, when you can just as easily hand over a "dead president" or a "frogskin." Whatever you do, though, be sure to take a gander at this book: it's one bad volume, a real groove. In short, it's truly catbird.

ANGELS IN THE OUTFIELD



Dean Williams/Walt Disney Pictures

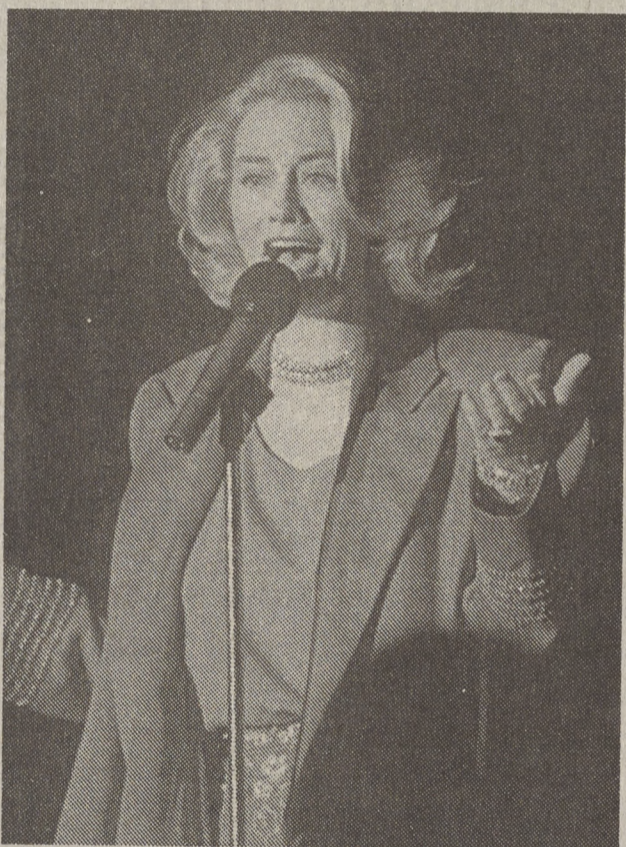
Gordon-Levitt, left, Danny
Milton Davis Jr.

Dear; screenplay by
Wells and Holly
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IN REHEARSAL WITH

Cybill Shepherd

A Chance to Sing Is Hardly Moonlighting



David Fields for The New York Times

Cybill Shepherd singing in Atlantic City.

By ALEX WITCHEL

Special to The New York Times

ATLANTIC CITY — Cybill Shepherd is here to star in Merv Griffin's Sixth Annual Fourth of July Coconut Ballroom Revue. And proud of it.

In fact, she can do an entire stand-up routine about her voice, her singing career, recording career, anything having to do with music, starting with her biggest flop film, Peter Bogdanovich's "At Long Last Love," to her album "Cybill Does Cole Porter," which raised the inevitable question, What did Cole Porter ever do to her?

"I've had three record companies go bankrupt after I did albums with them," Ms. Shepherd says during rehearsal. "I guess it's really a tribute to psychotherapy that I'm still singing."

'What Some Guys Will Do'

"My whole life I was asked to sing. My parents would pressure me to do it, and then they would look disappointed."

"Frank Sinatra heard one of my albums and sent a telegram to the producers saying, 'What some guys will do for a broad!'"

She laughs. "I do have a talent for singing, and I love to do it." She will open her cabaret act at Rainbow and Stars in New York on July 19 for three weeks. "Singing gives me a chance to be vulnerable and open, which I can't be in my acting roles," she says. "In 1959 I remember watching Miss America — I was 9 — and I was home alone and got all dressed up in my mother's clothes and danced around the house singing to it. But I always thought I wasn't good enough. And still, the hardest part of singing for me is wanting to be better."

By the time Ms. Shepherd made her film debut in "The Last Picture Show" in 1971, she had confidence to sing. The previous year she had been on the cover of eight issues of Glamour, and there wasn't an adolescent girl who didn't yearn to look like her.

More recently she's been known for

Fancy foot

FILM REVIEW

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Into the Brier Patch

A Yankee pursues the oral literature of the South.

SITTING UP WITH THE DEAD

A Storied Journey Through the American South.
By Pamela Petro.

Illustrated. 414 pp. New York:
Arcade Publishing. \$25.95.

By Hal Crowther

AMERICANS never turn sentimental about something of real value — wilderness, wild animals, small towns, baseball, mountain music, our privacy — until the way we live and do business has pressed it to the edge of extinction. Then we administer affectionate last rites to that which we failed to love enough. In a culture where young and old feed their hunger for narrative from the electronic trash heap of television, it's hard to imagine a human resource more precious or endangered than America's storytellers, legitimate heirs to an oral tradition that was ancient when history was born. It's hard to withhold applause from a book that takes up the lost cause and the soon-to-be-lost art of folk tales.

Hard, but not impossible. Pamela Petro's "Sitting Up With the Dead" is an odd book that strays from the marked trail of its author's best intentions and lures her, like many a folk tale protagonist, into a dark swamp where the light she takes for insight may be nothing but fox fire.

Petro, a writer who lives in Northampton, Mass., takes her first misstep when she decides that the stories she covets are inseparable from the identity and the history of the South. It may be true that the Southern states can claim the best surviving storytellers, or the most. But it was a mischievous voice that told Petro she could decipher the South — assuming it's a puzzle — by taping storytellers and running their tales through her personal software.

The South was never such an easy study. Our problem with "Sitting Up With the Dead" is what I call the Columbus problem. Indians were not amused by the notion that Columbus discovered America. The South is not amused to be rediscovered by Pamela Petro, intrepid explorer, cultural missionary to Darkest Dixie. She is, arguably, the most clueless outlander to write about the South since V. S. Naipaul in "A Turn in the South" — but she's no V. S. Naipaul.

This is, after all, a Yankee who "came of age in Britain," had never heard of a pimento cheese sandwich or a hush puppy, and who includes a long footnote to explain that for mountaineers "holler" is a geographic term. Candid to a fault, she acknowledges that her abiding images of the South were dominated by bleeding civil rights marchers and snarling police dogs, and that "Mississippi" is a blood-chilling word. At her most charmingly naïve, Petro confesses that the code in her circle for the menacing Southland was the phrase "down there." To my late mother-in-law, a native of Tidewater Virginia, "down there" was a genteel anatomical euphemism.

But "Sitting Up With the Dead" was not aimed at the Southern reader. Since no Southern reviewer will praise it, I feel obliged to cite virtues that another reader might stress. Petro is a fluent writer with considerable powers of description. In my favorite passages, she responds poetically to spooky or awe-inspiring landscape

Hal Crowther's most recent book is "Cathedrals of Kudzu: A Personal Landscape of the South."

that a native might take for granted. Her physical descriptions of the motley tribe of storytellers are deft, even droll. But as she says, "a few hundred pages don't have nearly as much personality as living, cussing, dancing, spitting, smoking, eating, drinking human beings."

Stories from the oral tradition need to be heard to be appreciated. Storytellers like North Carolina's seven-foot Ray Hicks need to be seen to be believed. Even a qualified native folklorist — they abound on Southern campuses — might have rated this project unpromising. When Petro embraced the genre of the personal quest, like Peter Matthiessen on the trail of the snow leopard or Carlos Castaneda in search of Don Juan, she assumed an added burden. Is this a life-altering obsession or just a book contract? I'd assign her pilgrimage more existential weight if I didn't know, from her acknowledgments, that it was inspired by friends at a party in 1998.

Petro's rental-car odyssey covered a dozen states and several thousand miles of interstate and back roads, more of the South on a tighter schedule than any motivated Yankee since General Sherman. But though she passed within a mile of my house and quotes several of my friends — though a prized pencil portrait of the giant Ray Hicks hangs over the table in our kitchen — there was no point in this book where I felt that Petro and I were on the same page. Page 348, where she deduces the Mind of the South from the ravings of Tennessee's Bell Witch, a vicious poltergeist, is a display of almost criminal opacity.

Still, we sympathize when she suffers pestilential heat and biblical thunderstorms, chiggers and hangovers, motel cockroaches so huge she sleeps in her car, food startling to the fastidious palate ("a nightmarish chicken salad plate: a grisly mix of canned pears, bone and gristle swamped by mayonnaise . . . topped by a maraschino cherry"). Lost repeatedly, frustrated by maps and cloverleaves and traffic cops, betrayed by her tape recorder, this New England intellectual turns out to be an endearing screw-up. Sly storytellers mesmerized her with small talk and never delivered the goods. The great Ray Hicks on his mountain was as hard to track as the snow leopard, and he never — in spite of a \$100 appearance fee — actually told her the Jack tale she came for.

THE epic quest was something of a shipwreck. Petro might have cut her losses by turning her book into a comic adventure, a Hollywood road movie: "The Perils of Pamela." Then I wouldn't need to disparage her banal conclusion that race is the common wound beneath all Southern narrative. In the Appalachians, where the best stories are preserved, slaves were even scarcer than Confederate patriots. To a mountaineer, The War was a deadly nuisance and race was not life's central reality, as it must have been in Charleston, but a remote abstraction indeed. The Southerner yields to no one when it comes to denial, a gift that shielded him and damaged him too. But he's no innocent savage who lives an unexamined life on the thin ice of unexamined history, who unwraps his darkest secrets for any rank stranger with a tape recorder.

Never tell the South you understand it better than it understands itself. Like Brer Rabbit, it may outfox and outlast you. Our storytellers have a penchant for using found materials. One of them is already convulsing audiences with the story of plucky Pamela, chiggers and all. □

Paperback Best Sellers

FICTION	Weeks On List	This Week	NONFICTION	Weeks On List
A BEND IN THE ROAD , by Nicholas Sparks. (Warner, \$7.99.) A widower and his son's second-grade teacher discover that they are linked by a secret.	4	1	SEABISCUIT , by Laura Hillenbrand. (Ballantine, \$15.) A biography of the horse whose career culminated in a 1938 match race with War Admiral.	18
HEMLOCK BAY , by Catherine Coulter. (Jove, \$7.99.) An F.B.I. agent is looking into the kidnapping of two teenage boys when his sister ends up in a suspicious car crash.	4	2	IT'S NOT ABOUT THE BIKE , by Lance Armstrong with Sally Jenkins. (Berkley, \$13.) A memoir by the Tour de France champion and cancer survivor.	24
DIVINE SECRETS OF THE YA-YA SISTERHOOD , by Rebecca Wells. (Perennial/HarperCollins, \$14; HarperTorch, \$7.99.) The experiences of three generations of Southern women.	80	3	NICKEL AND DIMED , by Barbara Ehrenreich. (Metropolitan/Owl/Holt, \$13.) What it was like to become a member of the working poor.	14
CORDINA'S ROYAL FAMILY , by Nora Roberts. (Silhouette, \$14.95.) Three stories of palace intrigue and romance set in a Mediterranean kingdom.	5	4	FOUNDING BROTHERS , by Joseph J. Ellis. (Vintage, \$14.) A historian's study of the intertwined lives of the nation's founders.	26
THE BACHELOR , by Carly Phillips. (Warner, \$5.99.) A foreign correspondent whose mother desperately wants him to get married pines for his one true love.	2	5	FAST FOOD NATION , by Eric Schlosser. (Perennial/HarperCollins, \$13.95.) A survey of "the dark side of the all-American meal."	29
THE WOMAN NEXT DOOR , by Barbara Delinsky. (Pocket Books, \$7.99.) The lives of three married couples in suburban Connecticut are turned upside down by the arrival of an attractive young widow.	5	6	A CHILD CALLED "IT," by Dave Pelzer. (Health Communications, \$9.95.) The autobiography of a man who survived his mother's abuse. (†)	217
DEAD SLEEP , by Greg Iles. (Signet, \$7.99.) A photojournalist, at the urging of the F.B.I., struggles to resolve the mystery of her sister's disappearance.	3	7	GHOST SOLDIERS , by Hampton Sides. (Anchor, \$14.95.) The story of a United States Army plan to rescue prisoners of war in the Philippines in 1945.	12
THE FORGOTTEN , by Faye Kellerman. (Avon, \$7.99.) Peter Decker and Rina Lazarus investigate the murder of a rich kid who had been charged with vandalizing their synagogue.	3	8	THE BOTANY OF DESIRE , by Michael Pollan. (Random House, \$13.95.) How the angiosperms (the flowering plants) have prospered by seducing other creatures, including humans.	8
EMPIRE FALLS , by Richard Russo. (Vintage, \$14.95.) Life in a Maine industrial town where the prospects are few.	13	9	THE DARWIN AWARDS , by Wendy Northcutt. (Plume, \$10.) Commemorating those people whose spectacularly stupid behavior served to "improve our gene pool" by removing them from it.	12
FACE THE FIRE , by Nora Roberts. (Jove, \$7.99.) Sam Logan tries to win back Mia Devlin; the conclusion to the "Three Sisters Island" trilogy.	9	10	THE TIPPING POINT , by Malcolm Gladwell. (Back Bay/Little, Brown, \$14.95.) A journalist's study of social epidemics, otherwise known as fads.	15
WHISPER OF EVIL , by Kay Hooper. (Bantam, \$7.50.) In a small town called Silence, a woman must summon up her psychic abilities to defeat a killer.	5	11*	THE LOST BOY , by Dave Pelzer. (Health Communications, \$10.95.) The author of "A Child Called 'It'" recalls his life in foster homes. (†)	162
THE JURY , by Steve Martini. (Jove, \$7.99.) The lawyer-sleuth Paul Madriani represents a medical researcher who has been charged with murder.	5	12	THE IDIOT GIRLS' ACTION-ADVENTURE CLUB , by Laurie Notaro. (Villard, \$12.95.) Comic essays by a newspaper columnist in Phoenix.	3
ROMANCING MISTER BRIDGERTON , by Julia Quinn. (Avon, \$6.99.) In the early 19th century, an Englishwoman falls for her best friend's brother.	4	13	A MAN NAMED DAVE , by Dave Pelzer. (Plume, \$11.) The concluding volume of a memoir that began with "A Child Called 'It'" and "The Lost Boy." (†)	75
SUZANNE'S DIARY FOR NICHOLAS , by James Paterson. (Warner, \$12.95.) A woman who thinks she has found the perfect man discovers he has disappeared, leaving behind someone else's journal.	10	14	ME TALK PRETTY ONE DAY , by David Sedaris. (Back Bay/Little, Brown, \$14.95.) Autobiographical comic essays by the author of "Naked."	48
LONG TIME NO SEE , by Susan Isaacs. (HarperTorch, \$7.99.) Judith Singer, the heroine of "Compromising Positions," entangles herself in the investigation of a homicide on Long Island.	2	15	THE PIANO SHOP ON THE LEFT BANK , by Thad Carhart. (Random House, \$13.95.) An American expatriate in Paris rediscovers his love of music.	3
		16*	A BEAUTIFUL MIND , by Sylvia Nasar. (Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, \$16.) The life of John Nash, the mathematician who suffered from schizophrenia.	29

Advice, How-To and Miscellaneous

Hardcover	Paperback			
GET WITH THE PROGRAM! by Bob Greene. (Simon & Schuster, \$24.) A regimen for losing weight and keeping it off. (†)	10	1	DR. ATKINS' NEW DIET REVOLUTION , by Robert C. Atkins. (Quill, \$13.95; Avon, \$7.99.) Ways to lose weight and achieve a healthy body. (†)	270
SELF MATTERS , by Phillip C. McGraw. (Simon & Schuster Source, \$25.) How to reclaim one's authentic identity. (†)	36	2	RICH DAD, POOR DAD , by Robert T. Kiyosaki with Sharon L. Lechter. (Warner, \$15.95.) Teaching one's children how to get rich and stay rich.	105
SYLVIA BROWNE'S BOOK OF DREAMS , by Sylvia Browne with Lindsay Harrison. (Dutton, \$25.95.) Understanding the subconscious and "the other side."	1	3	WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING , by Heidi Murkoff, Arlene Eisenberg and Sandee Hathaway. (Workman, \$13.95.) For parents-to-be. (†)	95
BODY FOR LIFE , by Bill Phillips with Michael O'Orso. (HarperCollins, \$26.) Ways to improve one's body and one's life. (†)	134	4	LIFE STRATEGIES , by Phillip C. McGraw. (Hyperion, \$11.95.) Advice on how to find what matters in your life and what to do about it. (†)	75
CONQUER THE CRASH , by Robert R. Prechter Jr. (Wiley, \$27.95.) How to "survive and prosper in a deflationary depression."	1	5	THE FOUR AGREEMENTS , by Don Miguel Ruiz. (Amber-Allen, \$12.95.) A code of conduct based on personal freedom. (†)	93

gs reflect sales, for the week ended July 27, at almost 4,000 bookstores plus wholesalers serving 60,000 other retailers (gift shops, department stores, newsstands, supermarkets), statistically weighted to represent all such outlets nationwide. An asterisk (*) indicates that sales are barely distinguishable from those of the book above. A dagger (†) indicates that some bookstores report receiving bulk orders. ed rankings are available at The New York Times on the Web: nytimes.com/books.

The Strange Case of the Madman With a Quotation for Every Word

By MEL GUSSOW

In 1879 when Prof. James Murray began the challenging assignment of editing the first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, a project of unprecedented historical and cultural importance, the call went out for volunteers to supply quotations to illustrate definitions. The most prolific and faithful correspondent, represented by more than 10,000 entries, was Dr. William C. Minor, a surgeon residing in Crowthorne in the English countryside in Berkshire.

Murray, who had not yet met Minor, assumed that he was a "practicing medical man of literary tastes with a good deal of leisure." To his astonishment, he turned out to be a patient in the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum.

The strange story of the interwoven lives of Murray and Minor is the subject of Simon Winchester's new book, "The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder,

Insanity and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary." In 1872, in a moment of insanity, Dr. Minor, an American and a veteran of the Civil War, had killed a man in London and been sentenced to Broadmoor. He remained there under guard for the next 37 years, until he was transferred to St. Elizabeths Hospital for the criminally insane in Washington. Even after Murray realized Minor's true situation, he still regarded him as his most reliable source, a madman whose words were very much to be trusted.

Mr. Winchester artfully parallels the story of the two extraordinary men, the eccentric professor and a murderer with the sharp intellect. Minor's photograph appears on the jacket of the book; with his long beard and gentle eyes, he somewhat resembles portraits of Claude Monet. In fact, he also looks like Murray. The two are twinned in appearance as well as in their dedication to codifying the English language.

In the book, Mr. Winchester enriches his story with a

Continued on Page B9



Minor Family Archives/Harper Collins

Dr. William Minor, murderer with a sharp intellect.



Courtesy of Yale University Press

James Murray, Oxford English Dictionary editor.



"If you're tired of the big-budget summer blockbusters, 'Slums of Beverly Hills' is for you." -Jeffrey Lyons, NBC-TV

"Writer/director Tamara Jenkins' blend of eccentricity and emotional expansiveness make 'Slums of Beverly Hills' the filmgoer's address of choice." -Jay Carr, THE BOSTON GLOBE

"Vivid, original and very funny. A sexual freshness that's bracing." -Steve Murray, ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION

"Hilarious. A marvel of ensemble acting."

-Ruthie Stain, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

"'Slums' is an anomaly. It's funny without being insulting, sensitive without being sappy, insightful without being earnest."

-Calvin Wilson, BALTIMORE SUN

"Alan Arkin, one of our greatest



"The laughs and charm make 'Slums' a rare thing."

-Andy Seiler, USA TODAY

"A '70's 'Clueless.'"

INTERVIEW MAGAZINE

A TOUR-DE-FORGE.

Kenneth Turfan, LOS ANGELES TIMES

"'SNAKE EYES' IS STYLISH AND ENTERTAININGLY FEVERISH!"

Jay Carr, BOSTON GLOBE

"'SNAKE EYES' IS A HIGH-ENERGY THRILLER! THE OPENING IS WORTH THE PRICE OF ADMISSION!"
-Jack Matthews, NEWSDAY

"BRIAN DE PALMA ROLLS A WINNING 'SNAKE EYES' WITH CAGE AND SINISE! CAGE IS SUPER-HEATED AND SINISE IS DEADLY COOL. 'Snake Eyes' tickles the brain



"DE PALMA MANAGES TO MAKE THE NOW-YOU-SEE-IT-NOW-YOU-DON'T GAMES ELECTRIFYING!"
-Peter Rainer, NEW TIMES

★★★★★
"'SNAKE EYES' IS THE CLASSIEST, FLASHIEST, MOST EXHILARATING SUSPENSE TWISTER SINCE 'FACE/OFF!'"
-Bob Campbell, THE STAR-LEDGER

"JUICY PERFORMANCES AND EVEN MORE

Strange Case of a Madman And a Legacy of Quotations

Continued From Page B1

selection of intricate definitions and also offers a brief and cogent history of dictionaries. Parenthetically, he ponders such matters as the fact that in Shakespeare's time there were no English dictionaries. Therefore, the playwright "could not look things up" but still knew the meaning of esoteric words. How, he wonders, did Shakespeare know what an elephant was? The Oxford English Dictionary (known as the O.E.D.), which eventually took 70 years to complete, was to transform the lexicographic landscape and to become, in Mr. Winchester's estimation, a literary masterpiece.

"The Professor and the Madman," recently published by HarperCollins, is a kind of philological detective story. It is already a best seller in England and has been sold to Mel Gibson's company for a movie to be directed by Luc Besson.

The success of the book has caught Mr. Winchester by surprise. For almost 30 years, he has been a globe-trotting journalist, reporting for several English newspapers while also writing a dozen books inspired by his travels. His last was about the Yangtze River. In common with the others, it received respectful reviews but had a limited readership. One book sold only 11 copies.

This time, the runaway is the book, not the author, although old habits die slowly. The day the book reached the top of the best-seller list in England, Mr. Winchester was on an ice floe in northern Canada (researching a new book about the Arctic explorer, Adolphus W. Greeley). Soon after being interviewed in New York, he was on the Manchurian-Siberian border for an article he was writing for National Geographic.

In contrast to his other books, for "The Professor and the Madman" Mr. Winchester stayed home — in England and the United States. (He now lives in Wassaic, N.Y.) Basically, it was a matter of historical research, although in good reportorial fashion there was a measure of investigative journalism.

Mr. Winchester has always had an interest in words (and in doing crosswords) but was first drawn to his subject by a mention of Minor in "Chasing the Sun," a book about lexicography by Jonathon Green. Although Minor's role in the O.E.D. was known to others in the profession, no

one had yet been permitted to look at the files on him at Broadmoor.

After persuading officials at the asylum to cooperate, Mr. Winchester asked his publisher, Henry Holt, for a six-month postponement on his next book. He had planned to buy a small cargo ship and sail around the world to write a history of tramp steamers. The publisher insisted he fulfill his contract or pay back his advance. When HarperCollins was taken with the idea of the O.E.D. book, he paid his debt and unpacked his bags.

With the help of several thousand pages in the Broadmoor files, many of them written in Minor's own meticulous handwriting, he was able to paint a full picture of the patient's daily life, how, with the approval of the governor of the asylum, he surrounded himself with books, turning his two cells into an extensive private library. From these volumes, he extracted quotations for definitions and mailed them to Murray at Oxford. As Mr. Winchester says in the book, "Before long the gentle shower of paper had turned into a raging blizzard, one that was to howl up from Crowthorne unceasingly for al-

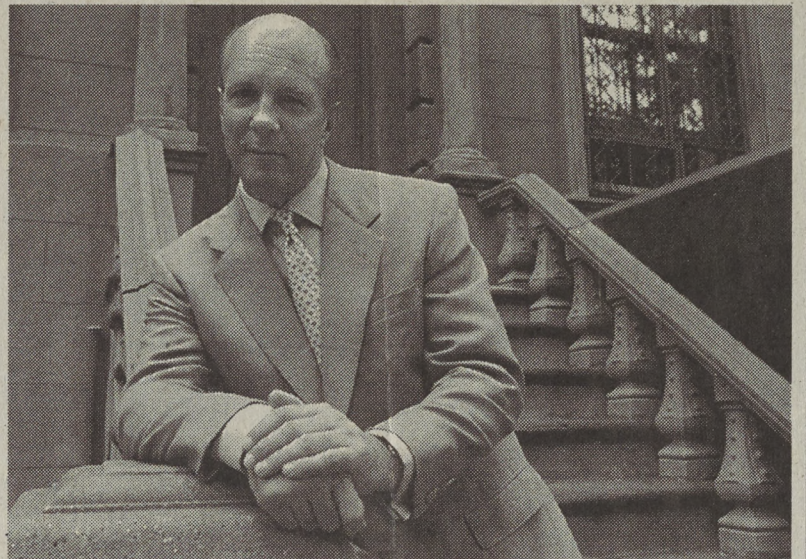
An author who's used to obscurity has a best seller.

most all of the next 20 years."

Trying to explain such productivity, Mr. Winchester said, "Minor concentrated very hard, and some synapse in his brain presumably fired in such a way as to eliminate his symptoms of schizophrenia."

To all outward appearances, he remained a dignified, solitary figure. He sought penance for his crime by apologizing to the widow of the man he had killed, and he gave her and her children money. She visited him at Broadmoor, at his request bringing books to add to his collection. There is a suggestion in the book that they may have had an affair. Mr. Winchester is unsure, although Minor was, he said, "a man of prodigious sexual energy: sex and words were the two most important things in his life." He said that he had no doubt "that if a film gets made" the two will have had a romance.

When Mr. Winchester tried to see



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Simon Winchester, author of "The Professor and the Madman."

the files at St. Elizabeths, where Minor was confined in his later years, he was rebuffed. But because the hospital had once been a Federal institution, he managed to get access to the files on the Internet, one of several modern resources he used. He has an edition of the O.E.D., but found it quicker to look up Minor's quotations on a CD-ROM.

His most valuable discovery was a descendant of Minor who had a box of family papers in an attic in Connecticut. Among the papers was a letter from Murray in which he told the true story of how he found out that Minor was a madman. On a visit to England, the librarian of Harvard College thanked Murray for being so kind to "our poor Dr. Minor." "Poor Dr. Minor?" Murray said. "What can you possibly mean?"

By the time the two met, he was well aware of Minor's past, and that fact did not alter their relationship. Murray described him as "a fine Christian gentleman, the same as myself."

Information about Murray was much easier to obtain. His story has been well documented in a biography written by his granddaughter, K. M. Elisabeth Murray. Murray's house in Oxford is now owned by the anthropologist Desmond Morris, who has placed a plaque in his garden saying that this was site of the Scriptorium where the O.E.D. was edited. Murray is Mr. Winchester's hero, an autodidact of great erudition and a limitless facility for languages.

In contrast, Mr. Winchester speaks no languages other than English, depending on interpreters when he travels. He has been to both poles (and prefers the Arctic because there are people there).

Speaking like a newly retired explorer, he said: "It's a rootless life, being at home everywhere and at home nowhere. I think the idea of settling down and writing books about strange episodes in history, which somehow illuminate something rather greater, would be a nice way to spend a life, if I can wean myself from travel."

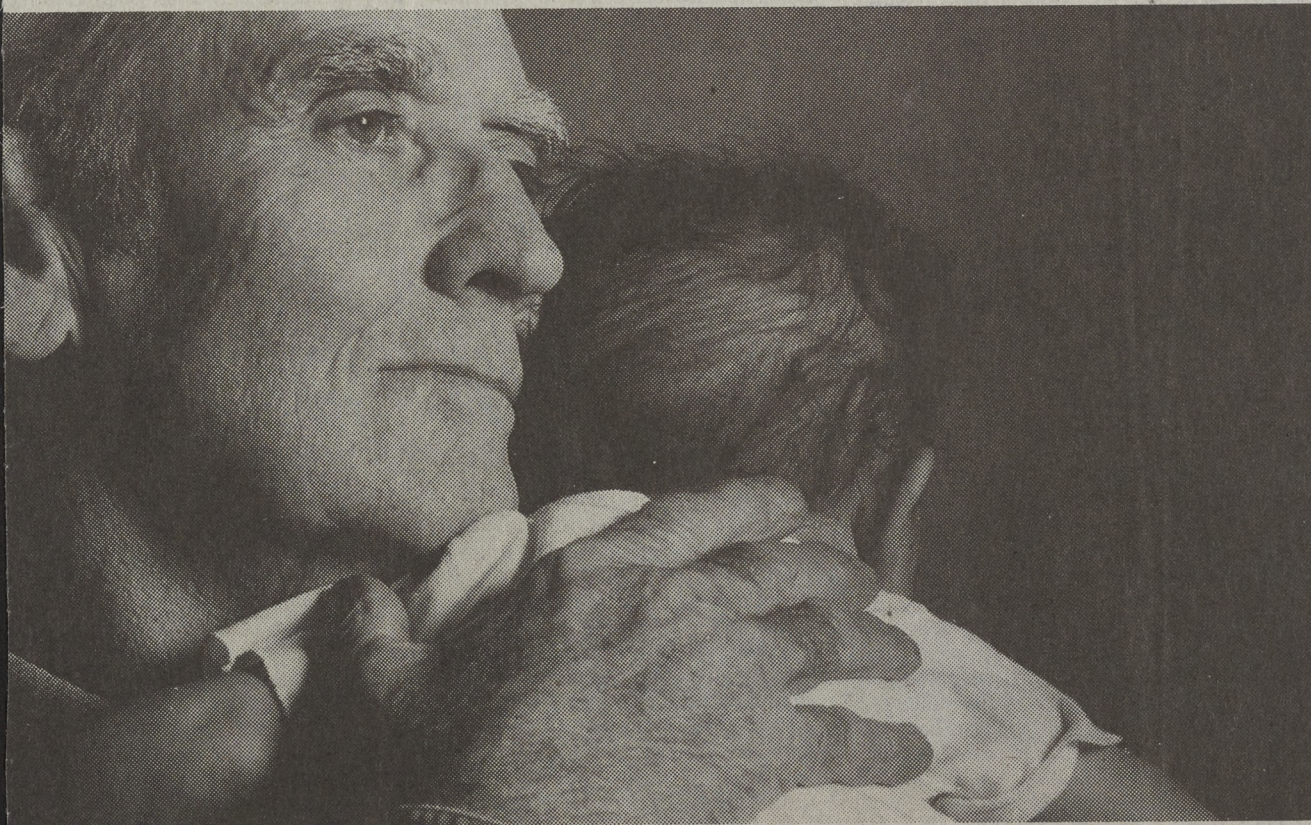
When Mr. Winchester finished his book, his American publisher wanted to call it "Mad for Words," a title that made him wince. "It sounds like a game show," he said. "Now it's 'Mad for Words,' and our guest tonight is William C. Minor!" In England, the book has the title he favors, "The Surgeon of Crowthorne."

Even after all the research, questions remain about Minor. Most of all, Mr. Winchester wonders what drove him insane, perhaps that traumatic moment in the Civil War when he was ordered to brand a deserter with a letter D on his face. The author said that one of the ironies of the story is that Minor probably would not have had the time to work on the O.E.D. had he not been confined in an institution. He added, "And if this had been even 20 years later, he would have been given the kind of drugs that would probably have sapped his will to do it."

Eventually, Minor was released from St. Elizabeths and was sent to a hospital for the elderly insane in Hartford. He died in obscurity in 1920. There were no obituaries. If there had been one, said Mr. Winchester, it should have begun, "Dr. William C. Minor, murderer and lunatic, who redeemed himself mightily by making one of the greatest of all contributions to the English language..."

THE NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1998

TO STOP CHILD ABUSE IS NOW IN ALL OUR HANDS.



That All-English Dictionary Adds an All-American Coach

NYT

Aug. 19, 2000

By JANNY SCOTT

When the Oxford English Dictionary decided to open a North American office this year to document the evolution of American English from the thick of it, it engaged a young American lexicographer with impeccable credentials who also happened to be the author of a 288-page book on a certain unmentionable word.

Jesse Sheidlower, known far beyond the anonymous world of dictionary-making as an energetic and accessible expert on neologisms and slang, now sits ensconced in a building in Old Saybrook, Conn., which the O.E.D. shares with a hearing-aid company and a dentist, and toils over how best to define terms like "McMansion," "chowhound" and "jiggy."

(As in "gettin' jiggy wit' it.")

Mr. Sheidlower works mostly alone, but invariably attired in a suit,

a formal man with a visceral distaste for casual Friday and other evidence of shifting standards of appropriate dress. He has nevertheless spent his career tracking with equanimity the ceaseless mutation of the American language, often into zones that its stuffer defenders have scorned.

Nothing contradictory in that, he said recently.

"You can be interested in slang or dialect or things that people call ungrammatical but still think that there is a formal way of speech," said Mr. Sheidlower, who has something impish about him that is reminiscent of a young Michael Palin. "Our entire conversation has been conducted in a relatively formal standard English despite the fact that I know a lot of words that will make people's hair crawl.

"Because that is what we do as intelligent adults in the sort of conversation we're having now: we use standard English. In the same way, I think it's terrific that they're making suits out there that don't have any —" he paused, executing the rhetorical equivalent of a grimace "— sleeves, or whatever. But that's not what humans do." Humans wear suits with sleeves.

In lexicography, Mr. Sheidlower is an unusually public figure. In addition to having written "The F-Word" (Random House, 1995), he was the project editor of "The Random House Dictionary of American Slang," the originator of a "Word of the Day" feature on the Internet (<http://www.randomhouse.com>) and the author of "Jesse's Word of the Day: From Abacinate to Yonic"

Continued on Page A19

Explosion Hit Sub, Russia Now Confirms

The commander of Russia's Northern Fleet acknowledged that a terrible internal explosion devastated the nuclear submarine Kursk before it went down last Saturday, confirming Western intelligence reports of huge underwater explosions.

The report came as the Russian navy finally docked a rescue vehicle on the wrecked submarine after numerous unsuccessful attempts. But rescuers said they found the area around a rear hatch so damaged that they were unable to make a watertight connection and enter the sub.

Russian military officials said they would keep trying, and there remained the possibility that a British submersible, which is arrive tonight, might succeed with a more flexible docking mechanism.

Article, Page A6.

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the inspiration of my youth has, like all the treasures of youth, quietly slipped away." He did not say, "The years that remain are too few."

An article in Circuits on Thursday about RTMark, an online group that seeks to undermine corporations, misstated the given name of a college student who sent it money. He is

Ms. Young, not an episode of her television series.

An art review in Weekend yesterday about the exhibition "Drawings 2000" at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in Manhattan misstated the address. It is at 515 West 24th Street, not 34th Street.

France and Britain Create Panel To Improve Safety of Concordes

By JOHN TAGLIABUE

PARIS, Aug. 18 — British and French aviation regulators formed a committee today to examine ways to return the Concorde to service "in safe conditions" that would protect it against the flaws behind last month's crash near Paris.

It was the first indication since the crash on July 25 that killed 113 people that France and Britain, whose flag carriers alone fly the needle-nosed Concorde, are eager to return it to service. British aviation authorities, following their French counterparts, this week ordered the supersonic plane grounded, effectively ruling it unfit to fly.

Following a meeting of French and British aviation officials in London, a statement said both sides "share the same determination to find a solution that will put the Concorde in service in safe conditions." French officials have said they believe that a tire blowout sent chunks of rubber through a fuel tank, causing it to burst into flames as the plane sped toward takeoff.

The statement by the French transportation ministry said French and British experts would jointly monitor the inquiry into the causes of the crash and cooperate in proposing modifications by the Concorde's builders to prevent burst tires from causing fire. Aviation experts say that a final decision on whether to return the Concorde to service would probably hinge on the cost of modifications necessary to make it airworthy. The companies that built the Concorde are now part of BAE Systems, formerly British Aerospace,

and the European Aeronautics, Defense and Space Company, a recent merger of French, German and Spanish aerospace groups.

Burst tires have been a problem for the Concorde since the plane entered service in 1976. Though the Concordes flown by British Airways were modified to correct the problem, those of Air France were not. That issue could prove crucial if efforts by Air France and its insurers to reach an amicable compensation agreement with families of the victims fail. Most victims were German tourists flying to New York to board a cruise ship. But they also included an American, Christopher Behrens, a retired promotion executive for Air France.

Gérard Samet, a French lawyer representing the family of one German passenger, said a class action suit was being considered, though any civil court action would have to await "the outcome of the inquiry, and the establishment of a chain of responsibility."

Jean-Michel Ricquel, a spokesman for Réunion Aérienne, of British, French and Italian insurers that is the Concorde's main insurer, said compensation discussions had proceeded until now "in an amicable fashion."

But a lawyer for other German families, Christof Wellens, said today that if the talks failed, the group was preparing a class action suit, possibly before a United States court. Courts in the United States tend to make higher awards than those in Europe.

The O.E.D. Decides It's Finally Time to Learn American English

Continued From Page A1

(Random House, 1998). He has written about language for periodicals ranging from *The Atlantic Monthly* to *Dictionaries*, the journal of the Dictionary Society of North America. He has served as the resident linguist on National Public Radio's "Weekend Edition." He has written scholarly articles on such matters as the principles for the inclusion of new words in college dictionaries and the expression "Not!" (It antedates "Wayne's World" by a long shot. Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Edmund Wilson used it.)

"There is a kind of pixie-ish quality about Jesse, with his white shirt and bow tie in which he tells you things that he finds slightly embarrassing but he's sort of forced to tell you because it's all about words," said Richard W. Bailey, the vice president of the Dictionary Society of North America and a professor of English at the University of Michigan. "It's as if every word had a closet and in that closet there are often skeletons. And Jesse has been there."

Asked over lunch to describe a word whose definition had been giving him trouble, Mr. Sheidlower recounted the difficulty he was having defining the phrase "bitch-slap." Connotationally, it means to slap a person; specifically, it is to slap a person as a pimp would slap a prostitute. But, he said, one cannot use a simile in a definition.

Pursuing such entries as 'whack' (meaning to kill) and 'blunt' (meaning, of course, a marijuana cigar).

Can you bitch-slap a person anywhere or only in the face? he had wondered. With an open hand or the back of the hand? Can you bitch-slap a man or only a woman? Is it to hurt a person? No, it is to show social dominance. "So all of these things have to be taken into account," Mr. Sheidlower said. "And figuring out that this is what is going on takes thought and discussion."

Among colleagues, Mr. Sheidlower's age has been a subject of curiosity.

"One of the mysteries, of course, is how old he is," said Mr. Bailey, who has known Mr. Sheidlower for 10 years but does not know the answer. "I think there is a lot of wonderment and speculation about this, because he's been doing this work forever yet he looks as if he's 30. More people have said to me, 'How old is Jesse?'"

Thirty-two.

Mr. Sheidlower grew up in the Five Towns area of Long Island, dreaming of astrophysics. His grandfather sold butterflies to collectors; his parents manufactured ant farms, rock tumblers and other science and nature toys. Intending to study science, Mr. Sheidlower went to the University of Chicago. Then he switched to classics and English.

After graduating, he spent a year at Trinity College, Cambridge, studying early English in the department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic. He got a job in marketing at Alfred A. Knopf in Manhattan in 1991. Six months later, when a friend left the reference department at Random House, Mr. Sheidlower took his job and began his career in lexicography.

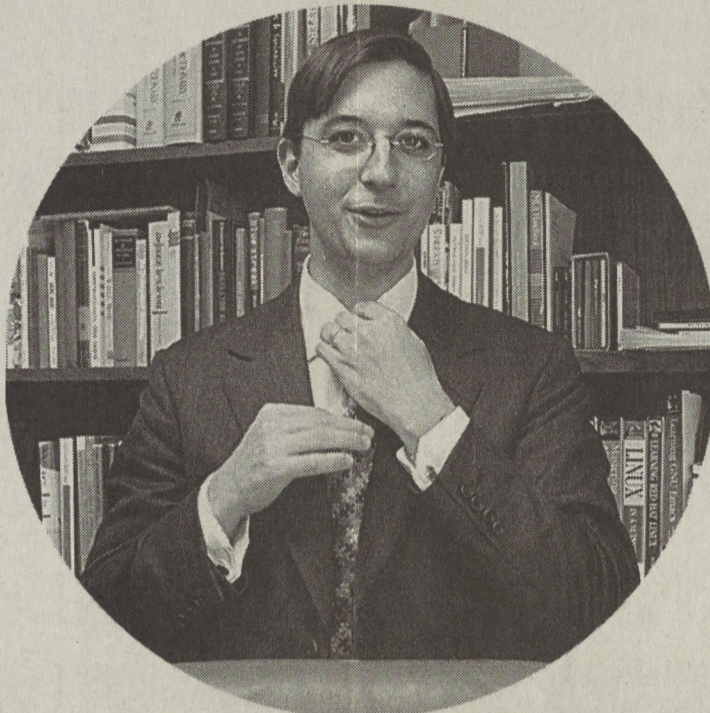
The year before, while still at Cambridge, he had found what is known in lexicography as an important antedating — the use of a word in a particular sense years before what was thought to have been the earliest



COMPUTER LANGUAGES



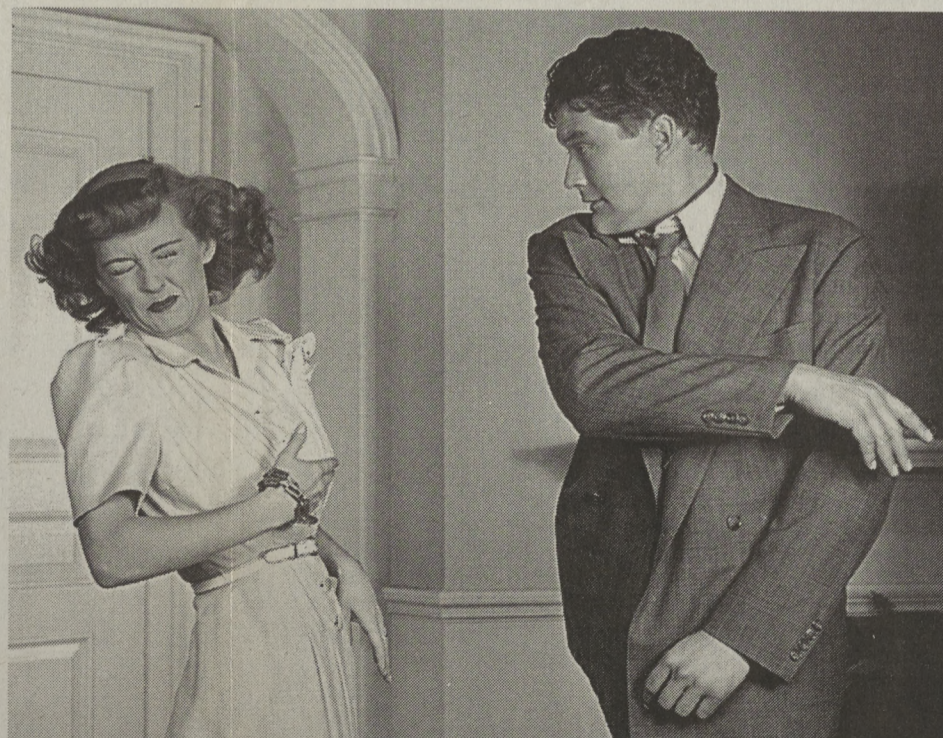
LEWIS AND CLARK



Chris Maynard for The New York Times

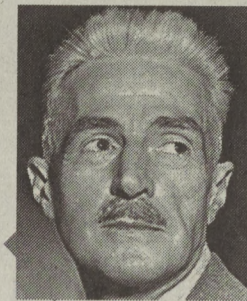


'THE SOPRANOS'



Photofest/Dennis Morgan and Bette Davis in "In This Our Life"

Jesse Sheidlower, the principal American editor of the Oxford English Dictionary, surrounded by some of the sources he draws upon for his work.



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From the script for 'Clueless' to a magazine on massage, the search for cool new words goes on.

enough to supervise the O.E.D.'s stable of North American readers.

Since starting last spring, Mr. Sheidlower has been making an effort to include vocabulary traditionally neglected by the O.E.D., which has a reputation for covering literary language at the expense of what Mr. Sheidlower calls "other registers." In his own reading and what he assigns, he has been mining sources ranging from the script for "Clueless" to a magazine about massage.

Recent readings for the O.E.D.: "Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung," by the 1970's rock critic Lester Bangs; a collection of previously unpublished stories by Dashiell Hammett; "The New New Thing: A Silicon Valley Story," by Michael Lewis; and the complete scripts from the first season of "The Sopranos." ("This is really good stuff!" Mr. Sheidlower exclaimed.)

One of his readers, a Minnesota stevedore who specializes in historical reading, has been scouring the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition. A lawyer in Texas specializes in black folklore and late-19th- and early-20th-century Texas folklore. Others can be found reading all sorts of publications — *Wooden Boat*, *The Jewish Bakers' Voice*, magazines about model railroads and aromatherapy, regional daily newspapers.

Mr. Sheidlower not only manages the reading program and reviews existing O.E.D. entries for American content but also drafts entries for the O.E.D.'s new electronic third edition. As a rule of thumb, the dictionary requires at least five examples of a word or usage from three different printed sources over about three years before it considers drafting an entry.

In recent months, Mr. Sheidlower has worked on entries for "whack," meaning to kill; "blunt," meaning a cigar stuffed with marijuana; "Juneteenth," the African-American holiday; "Perl," the computer language; and "porn," referring not to pornography but to any source of obsessive, voyeuristic interest, like magazines about expensive houses (shelter porn) or food pictures (gastro porn).

He is tracking the use of "so" as an adverbial intensifier meaning "extremely," but in cases that do not normally take comparison, as in "so 1995" or "We are so out-of-here."

He also serves as an invaluable scout on the front lines of American usage for the dictionary's six other top editors, all of whom are back in Oxford.

After the editors decided against including "master of the universe" in the third edition on the grounds that it had little currency independent of Tom Wolfe, Mr. Sheidlower convinced them otherwise. He challenged an intended definition of "mailbox," which in England means simply a box for sending out letters but in America means both that and a box in which letters are received.

"It wasn't clear," Mr. Sheidlower recalled. "They were mashed together and they needed to be disambiguated."

Disambiguated? a visitor asked. That's a word?

"Yes," Mr. Sheidlower said without a second's hesitation. "Mostly used in computational lexicography. But it's a word."

usage. The word was "tool," meaning to drive along a road. He found it in a letter written by Lord Byron in 1819, 13 years before the earliest example cited in the O.E.D.

The example had gone unnoticed, Mr. Sheidlower said, because Byron had used it punningly, in a sexual sense, and a fastidious editor had euphemized it to "fool" in an early edition of Byron's letters. Mr. Sheidlower sent it to the O.E.D. and joined the dictionary's force of mostly volunteer readers, who comb publications for material and ship in their gleanings.

At Random House one day, Mr. Sheidlower's boss happened to mention the slang dictionary project, languishing in a drawer because the project editor had died. Mr. Sheidlower took it on, and the first two volumes came out in 1994 and 1997. Then in 1999, when he learned that the O.E.D. would be opening a North American office, he applied for the job of principal editor.

"He had a background in historical and modern lexicography, which is quite unusual," said John Simpson, the chief editor of the O.E.D., who hired him. He knew the history of English, Mr. Simpson continued, and the dictionary's distinctive style. He knew his way around computers, and was young and enthusiastic and personable

What kind of slap is this? That may be a question for the Oxford English Dictionary.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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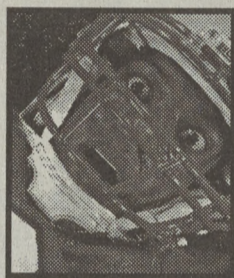
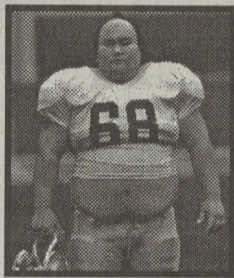


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THE NEW YORK TIMES, A. O. Scott

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"TWO THUMBS UP!"

TIME MAGAZINE, Richard Corliss

"SPACE COWBOYS' BLENDS TENSION AND EMOTION, COMPUTER WIZARDRY AND DRAMATIC SKILL IN A VIGOROUS CLIMAX — AND THE MOST IMPRESSIVE, HAUNTING FINAL SHOT OF THE MOVIE YEAR."

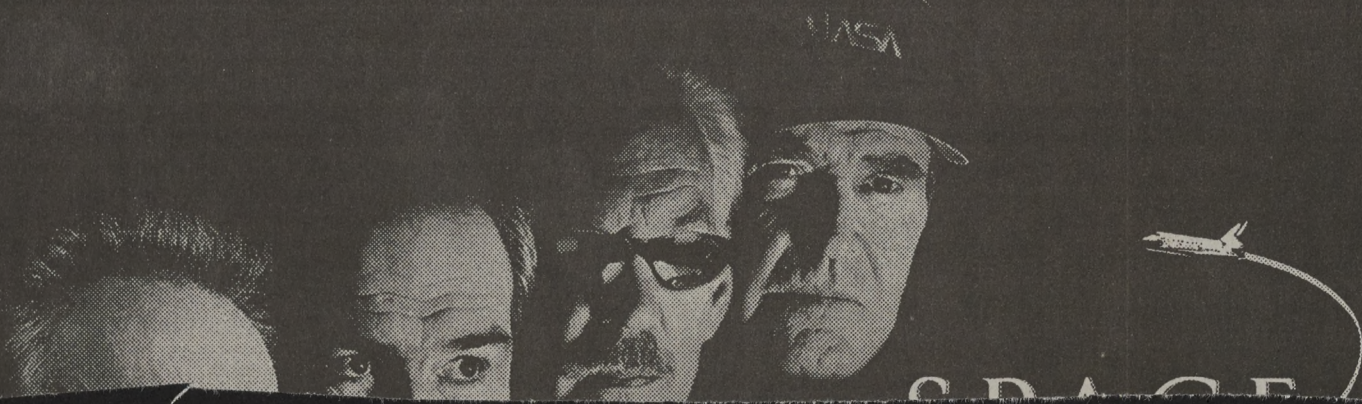
NEW YORK POST, Lou Lumenick

"THE SUMMER'S MOST DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE. TERRIFIC SPECIAL EFFECTS."

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Stephen Farber, MOVIELINE



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CRAIG FERGUSON

SAVING GRACE



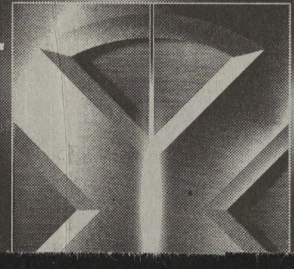
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'The Blab of the Pave'

The New York City version of English, as dissected by a linguist.

NYTBR

THE CITY IN SLANG

6/13/93

New York Life and Popular Speech.

By Irving Lewis Allen.

Illustrated. 307 pp. New York: Oxford University Press. \$25.

By Elizabeth Hawes

FROM the mid-19th century to the mid-20th, thousands of oddments of language were coined on the streets of New York to describe life in the city. Naming the burgeoning social world ascribed meaning to it. To linguists, this historical accumulation of slang is a "lexical field" or a folk model of reality. To urban enthusiasts, it offers an intimate chronicle of the most boisterous era in New York history. This was the age when New York grew up, when the walkers' city that Edith Wharton likened to an English cathedral town became a vast and hard world metropolis, when traditional agrarian ways yielded to industrialization and old-fashioned republican citizens became a sophisticated urban population.

Slang is by nature urban; it is "the blab of the pave" as Walt Whitman celebrated it, the informal language of reporters, policemen, songwriters and street kids — "hooligan," "plug ugly," "hooker" and "taxi." Like the city, it becomes richer with diversity.

Technically, slang, a word that cropped up in the 18th century, can be distinguished from cant, the idiom of criminal and low life, and argot, the jargon of professional and social classes. But in practice, slang embraces all of these modes and is, by that fact, a cross-cultural, multi-ethnic distillation of voices. American slang, which diverged from British slang after independence, has its own special provenance. As H. L. Mencken concluded in his scholarly study "The American Language," English slang seems to reside in doubling consonants or in the addition of "-er" to words, like "brekker" for breakfast, while its American counterpart concocts phrases like "lounge lizard" and "rubberneck." With the possible exception of the French, Americans have produced more slang than any other people and have put it to heavier daily use. And of all Americans, New Yorkers have waxed the most eloquent about metropolitan life.

Mencken admired the "linguistic exuberance" and the "excess of word-making energy" of idiomatic American English. He said it related to standard language as dancing related to music. "But there is also something else," he continued. "The best slang is not only ingenious and amusing; it also embodies a kind of social criticism."

• • •
In "The City in Slang: New York Life and Popular Speech," Irving Lewis Allen, a professor of sociology at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, has taken Mencken to heart. Mr. Allen has written a "book on words about the city" that makes a provocative cultural history. Like Whitman, who is the patron saint of the volume and whose words open each chapter, Mr. Allen is "through Mannhatta's streets . . . walking, these things gathering."

As a social scientist, he charts an orderly course, investigating and annotating city streets, tall buildings, transportation systems, night life and social classes, effectively deconstructing the city into its parts and people in order to mine its language. He consults a wide variety of lexicographers, from the venerable Eric Partridge and the Oxford English Dictionary to the remarkable

Elizabeth Hawes is the author of "New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City (1869-1930)."

George Washington Matsell, the police chief and slang collector who published his "Vocabulum: Or, the Rogue's Lexicon" in 1859, and A. Pember, the author of "The Mysteries and Miseries of the Great Metropolis" (1874).

Mr. Allen also forages in the literature of the period and uses as his collaborators a host of short-story writers, many of them long forgotten, and city novelists like William Dean Howells, Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser — the new realists. His finds include simple phrases like "free lunch," which dates from the 1840's, and "rush hour," from the 1890's; new compounds like "cityscape" (1850) and "skyline" (1896); and exotic Victorian cadences like "honky-tonk" and "hokey-pokey," the name for a penny dab of ice cream, which may or may not have derived from the exclamation "O che poco!" ("Oh, how little!") — "uttered in surprise by Italian children upon getting a dip of disappointing size from the pushcart vendor."

These words give name to the physical city — "the Tenderloin," "Little Africa," "Hell's Kitchen," "Millionaire's Row," "Tin Pan Alley" and "the Great White Way" — and to its public places: the "dive," the "flophouse," the turn-of-the-century "rug joint" and "lobster palace," and the "greasy spoon" of the 1920's. They also indelibly label a prodigious cast of popular characters — the "smart Aleck," probably named for a notorious thief of the 1840's; the social-climbing "Shoddy," the "cliff dweller," the "gold digger" and the "butter-and-egg man," a big spender of the 1920's.

ALL of these words, which are only a modest sampling from this work, express a language of change, and they are laden with information and insights. Behind the early construct "bright lights" lies the fact of the illumination of Broadway by gaslight in 1823. (It was with electric lights in 1900 that the street became the Great White Way.) The phrases "traffic jam" from the 1840's, "working girl" from the 1860's, "breadline" from the 1890's and "man about town" from 1900 also resound with meaning without requiring any explication beyond their datelines. Cannily, they frame experience, project attitudes and direct perception.

The term "wicked city," coined in the pandemonium after the Civil War, rings out like a warning. The conversion of the noun "slum" to a verb in the 1880's describes and also prescribes the segregation of the social classes. "We make words, but to an extent words also make us and our social realities," the author notes in his preface.

"The City in Slang" is dense with words and thick with facts, and it is full of reflections. Ultimately, it is a book about reading New York; as the author says, it is "a time-walk through the historical city of the mind." It concludes on a note of sadness, for an era of monumental city-building has now given way to an era of suburbanization, of "white flight," "mall rats" and gentrified neighborhoods identified in the 1980's as "pink." With the metropolitan center in decline, slang has "lost its fancy for the hurly-burly." Nostalgia for urban frontier days is inevitable, but language has its continuum. Where there were "short hairs" and "soap locks," there are now "skinheads" and "greasers"; "recyclers" are contemporary "rag pickers." But the "sticks" are still the sticks. □

Author's Query

For a study of Jan Masaryk, the former Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia, and his relations with the United States and with Americans, I would appreciate receiving letters, manuscripts, personal papers, reminiscences or other material.

THOMAS D. MARZIK
Department of History
St. Joseph's University
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All the Color Was on the Canvas

In Picasso's shadow, Juan Gris quietly created Cubist masterpieces.

JUAN GRIS

By Christopher Green with contributions by Christian Derouet and Karin von Maur. Illustrated. 311 pp. New Haven: Whitechapel Art Gallery/Yale University Press. \$50.

By Michael Peppiatt

THIS elegantly produced volume was brought out to coincide with last year's exhibition of Juan Gris's paintings and drawings at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, for which it served as a catalogue. A major show and an authoritative monograph clearly suggest that it is time for a reassessment of Gris's art and life, which have always been overshadowed by Picasso's and may appear in retrospect never to have received their due.

One immediate reason for this seeming neglect is that Gris's life was not only short but rather colorless, particularly in a period that took its tone from personalities as brilliant as Max Jacob, Guillaume Apollinaire, Gertrude Stein and Jean Cocteau. Gris was 19 years old when he arrived in Paris from his native Madrid. Two years later, in 1908, he moved into the ramshackle studio building in Montmartre known as the Bateau-Lavoir, where Picasso was a neighbor. Gris had made his way this far as a caricaturist for the satirical magazines then much in vogue; but he had always intended to be an artist, and in 1912 he made a spectacular debut, adopting Cubism, the most challenging idiom of his time, and rapidly making a decisive contribution to it.

Over the following half-dozen years, as has been generally accepted, Gris produced his most original works; these include some of the absolute masterpieces of Cubism, such as the great still lifes of 1911-12 and the unforgettable portraits of his mother, of Picasso and of the art critic Maurice Raynal. Thereafter his paintings, although unfailingly elegant, grew weaker and more decorative, until little remained of the audacity and imaginative control with which Gris had taken apart the appearances of things, then reassembled them with a provocative urgency. In his drawings, on the other hand, with their unusually satisfying sculptural volumes, Gris seems never to have lost his original touch, producing one of his most incisive pencil portraits — of his dealer and great ally, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler — in 1921.

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Although Cubism itself became rapidly notorious (its significance was even debated in the *Chambre des Députés*), Gris never achieved anything like the renown of Picasso or Braque. Having struggled to make a living through World War I, he settled with his companion, Charlotte Herpin (known as Josette), into a modest routine of concentrated work interrupted by bouts of ill health that led to his death in 1927, at the age of 40. A courteous, unassuming man by all accounts, Gris clearly lived to paint, leaving few traces outside the biography inscribed in his work. Only the occasional detail — a brief affair, a flair for doing the latest dances — indicates a life outside the service of art.

"Juan Gris" contains seven essays by Christopher Green, a professor of art history at the Courtauld Institute in London and the author of *"Cubism and Its Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916-1928."* (In addition, Karin von Maur, chief curator at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart,

Michael Peppiatt is writing a book on the life and art of the English painter Francis Bacon.

contributes an essay on Gris's interest in music and theater, and Christian Derouet, a curator at the Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne in Paris, writes on Gris's correspondence with the art dealer Léonce Rosenberg.) Rather than follow a conventional chronology, Mr. Green has chosen to approach the artist from a number of different angles, weaving to-and-fro in time and concentrating not only on the work itself, and its artistic, literary and philosophical context, but also on the social and political temper of the times.

Based no doubt on the assumption that, like a good Cubist painting, all the various viewpoints will lock into a coherent whole, this approach works well at the beginning. We dispense with the often tiresome linear accounts of first steps and early influences, plunging *in medias res* with a discussion of how the artist's reputation has evolved and who has contributed most tellingly to it. Mr. Green writes with admirable clarity even in the intricate analyses of individual paintings, and he communicates his enthusiasm for Gris very effectively.

Mr. Green's main contention is that we live with received opinions about Gris as (in Apollinaire's phrase) the "demon of logic" — the artist who reinterpreted the discoveries of Braque and Picasso in the light of his more ordered, rigorous intellect. Accordingly, Mr. Green suggests that there is a great deal more subjectivity and contradiction in Gris's art than commentators have previously allowed. If the argument becomes too dense or too speculative for all but experts, it is regularly leavened by references to parallel developments in literature, linguistics and philosophy. On the way it takes in Gris's relationship with his two dealers, Rosenberg and Kahnweiler, whose writings on Gris (as Mr. Green acknowledges) have played a dominant role in shaping critical reaction to the artist. Mr. Green also touches on the way Gris responded to the postwar "call to order" (a movement to defend "classical" French culture against the "barbarous" values of Germany), and he reinterprets at length the artist's reputation as a Platonist.

BY the fourth or fifth essay, the drawbacks of Mr. Green's "cubistic" approach begin to show. Too many details about too many facets of Gris's art begin to muddle what had been clear and spirited, introducing the dread sense that the wood may soon no longer be seen for the trees. The main thrust of the argument is lost in an abundance of asides, some of them of debatable relevance, such as the extensive account of the part played by French women in World War I. Attention is also disrupted by the number of misspellings: It is unfortunate enough that the little Spanish quoted is massacred and the French frequently incorrect; but the host of minor slips in the English, from "insistance" and "inate" to "non-sequitors" and "syberitic," turns the attentive reader into a proof-reader *malgré lui*.

There is no doubt, even so, that by the time the essays give way to the illustrations, the mind has been thoroughly briefed to reconsider the whole development of Gris's art — and that is a measure of Mr. Green's scholarly persuasiveness. But however well prepared the mind, the eye does not necessarily follow. A heightened awareness of all the stages through which Gris passed and all the knowledge, from esoteric to technical, that he absorbed does nothing to make the later work look less uninspired. The early work, however, has clearly stood the test of time, and Mr. Green's account of the intellectual forces that shaped it refines our appreciation of this small body of outstanding pictures. Gris's magnificent portraits of Picasso, Raynal and Kahnweiler, for instance, still haunt us at the end of a century to which the artist helped give such a spectacularly inventive start. □

Lexicographer at Play

NY TBR, June 18, '95

A language columnist's guide to the new verbal landscape.

WORD WATCH

*The Stories Behind
the Words of Our Lives.
By Anne H. Soukhanov.
429 pp. New York:
Henry Holt & Company. \$25.*

By Margalit Fox

IF you want to chart the course of social change, just look to language. Where the verbal landscape of the 1980's was shaped by the excesses of the newly rich — who dwelt in “imeldific” style in “tract mansions” and were beset by a special brand of ennui known as “affluenza” — 1990's discourse has seen the rise of the “squeegee kid” and the “zero-parent” child, who may suffer instead from impaired “emotional literacy.”

These pungent coinages are among the more than 350 words and phrases discussed by the lexicographer Anne H. Soukhanov in her engaging book, “Word

Margalit Fox, a former language editor at Dover Publications, writes frequently about culture.

Watch.” The entries here, from “WASP Rot Syndrome” to “schmooseoisie” to “Xenomouse,” are culled from Ms. Soukhanov's column in *The Atlantic Monthly*, which she inaugurated in 1986.

Language, Ms. Soukhanov emphasizes, “is a reflection of the will, the interests, the conflicting ideas and . . . the obsessions of its users,” and present-day American English, she shows, is no exception. Ms. Soukhanov has painstakingly gathered and glossed recent linguistic contributions from the ever-evolving realms of technology (which has given embattled couples “Divorceware” for home-computer use), politics (a field still rife with “grassy knollism”) and business (where “bright-collar,” “gold-collar” and “open-collar” workers have joined the ranks of the pink, white and blue). She also turns an acquisitive ear to medicine (ailments include “casino feet,” “pizza-cutter's palsy” and the veterinary malady “jogger's paw”) and to athletics (with such entrancing pastimes as “black-water rafting” and “mudwalking”).

A veritable linguistic Zabar's, “Word Watch” is ideally sampled

in small bites. Side by side with the gloom-and-doomisms of modern life (“anxious class,” “agita”) one finds more jocular items like the increasingly popular “full Cleveland” (a contemporary incarnation of the Sansabelted babbitt of yore) and “floral bondage” (a method of safeguarding plants against theft). It is a mark of how quickly new expressions are integrated into the linguistic mainstream that a few entries — “crash and burn,” “white-bread” and “glass ceiling” — now seem too commonplace to be included. However, Ms. Soukhanov has kept abreast of the new and not-very-collegial office ritual called “going postal,” characterized by “sudden, explosive workplace violence.”

Visible just beneath the entries are tantalizing glimpses of the lexicographer's craft: scouring periodicals for fresh coinages, poring over competing dictionaries in search of elusive etymologies and hounding writers and scholars in the service of “anticipointment” or “ear candy” or plain old “duh.” The fruits of Ms. Soukhanov's labors presented here make — to coin a phrase — an enticing lexicatessen, ripe for ocular noshing. □

Politically Imprudent

In his memoir, Lowell Weicker will bash anyone — even himself.

MAVERICK

A Life in Politics.

By Lowell P. Weicker Jr.
with Barry Sussman.

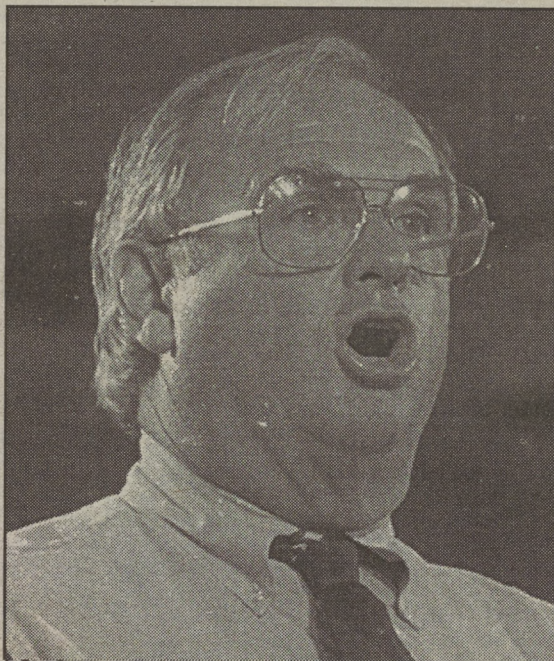
Illustrated. 232 pp. Boston:
Little, Brown & Company.
\$22.95.

By Jeff Greenfield

WITH “Maverick” Lowell Weicker has found a perfect title for his political memoir. Originally used to describe unbranded cattle, the word now defines a politician who wears no label, who marches to a distinctly different drummer and who generally drives members of his own party to apoplexy.

For 18 years in the United States Senate, from 1970 to 1988, the Republican Lowell Weicker gave his fellow Republicans fits. As a member of the Senate Watergate Committee, he was crying “cover-up!” from the beginning. He was also instrumental in exposing Richard Nixon’s scheme to evade taxes by wildly inflating the value of his Vice-Presidential papers. (“There are some,” Mr. Weicker reminds us proudly, “who believe that it was Nixon’s tax debacle more than anything else that led to the drive in Congress to impeach him.”)

During Ronald Reagan’s eight years, Mr. Weicker regarded this most popular of all Republicans with ill-concealed contempt. “Reagan was entitled to lead, and he certainly knew how to do that,” he writes of Mr. Reagan’s 1980 victory. “But the mandate claims were a crock. He took actions totally out of line with what Americans, including many of his voters, wanted.” Mr. Weicker gleefully



STEVE MILLER

Lowell P. Weicker Jr., then a United States Senator, addressing the Connecticut Republican Convention in Hartford, July 1986.

road that has been traveled many times before. In fact, the most startling part of Mr. Weicker’s account is when he recalls meeting with a member of the Republican National Committee from California, who tells him, in Mr. Weicker’s words, that “many people in California Republican politics considered Nixon a chronic gutter fighter. If that had

BEYOND LANGUAGE

Dmitri Borgmann

icle, the N ASTERISK 3245, is reported. It is the heaviest nuclear own, has extraordinary stability, and exists for one ten-sextillionth of falls in the class of "nucleon resonances" and is described as a mass energy.

now, and we know, that the *real* world does not consist of entities time of one ten-sextillionth of a second. Any explanation of that h finds itself compelled to invent entities so preposterously absurd TERISK 3245 in order to keep up the pretense of being an adequate a, has gone so far astray as to be beyond any hope of correction. A must be made, based on quite different premises.

course, the scientists responsible for this news release have tipped us fact that they themselves regard the new particle as nothing more joke, by labeling it N ASTERISK 3245. Particles intended to be taken re given names such as ELECTRON, NEUTRON, HYPERON, and LEPTON. naming process degenerates into monstrosities like N ASTERISK 3245, o call a halt to the farce, for that is what it is.

tists and mathematicians discuss things and tell us things, but what orresponds to no known reality, for the reality to which it is ostensi-d must forever remain beyond their grasp. That is why their research the category of pure word games.

average crossword puzzle solver amuses himself with a comparatively of word game. The reader of this book has chosen more challenging word and thought with which to divert himself. The scientist and natician play yet more difficult word-and-thought games. Each one, way, is passing the time between birth and death in the manner l to his temperament. One game or another game—which one is esn't really matter, as long as it brings happiness to the player.

it is the impact of our findings on the philosophical quest for truth? ividuals, discouraged by these revelations, become agnostics, holding knowledge is unattainable. More venturesome souls seek out the oldest own to mankind: PANTHEISM. In the pantheistic view, the conscious- individual is mystically capable of merging with the Cosmic Con-absorbing infinite wisdom instantly.

hat as it may, we have succeeded in showing that puzzle-solving ac- advanced scientific research are exercises of equal importance (or nce, depending on one's standpoint). Truly may it be said that, in *Beyond Language*, we have reached out *beyond language*, toward

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Strictly speaking, it is impossible to append a bibliography to *Beyond Language*, since no work resembling it is known to exist.

In a broader sense, however, there is an imperative need for publishing a list of books constituting what might be called a "word lover's library": books of particular interest to those who pursue language recreationally. No comprehensive bibliography of this nature has previously appeared. The pioneer undertaking that follows embraces not only books and pamphlets about word puzzles and word curiosities, but also synonymicons, word lists, books of literary oddities, specialized dictionaries abounding in fantastic words, publications devoted to contest puzzles, and sundry curiosa.

Some of the works listed—those by Hare, Hodgkin, and Mencken, for instance—themselves include extensive bibliographies relating to specific topics. The interested reader is advised to consult these additional listings.

The entries below are generally alphabetized by the surname of the author, compiler, or editor; where a publication does not give this information, it has been alphabetized by title.

If some pertinent books are omitted, blame it on ignorance; if others have been included without adequate justification, attribute it to subjectivity. In any event, a bibliography can never be complete, for completeness, like perfection, is an infinitely distant goal.

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We have made the circuit from the magic and mystery of words to their romance, in 150 steps, without mentioning any of the periodicals, past or present, devoted partly or wholly to recreational linguistics. Fourteen of the most important ones are listed below. Those publications now out of print are indicated by an asterisk.

- *ARDMORE PUZZLER, THE. Published by Edwin Smith ("Remardo") in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, from 1899 to circa 1915, at varying frequencies (weekly, daily, semi-monthly, and monthly).
- CONTEST MAGAZINE. Published monthly by A. D. Freese & Sons, Inc., Upland, Indiana.
- CRYPTOGRAM, THE. Published bimonthly by The American Cryptogram Association. Editor: Robert A. Hammell, West Collingswood, New Jersey.
- *EASTERN ENIGMA, THE. Published monthly by the Eastern Puzzlers' League, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and in other Pennsylvania towns, from 1883 to January, 1920.
- ENIGMA, THE. Published monthly by the National Puzzlers' League, primarily in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in Centre Hall, Pennsylvania, and in Greenfield, Massachusetts, from February, 1920 onward.
- *INSIDE THE ACD. Published monthly by Harper & Brothers, New York, in the 1950's, in connection with *The American College Dictionary*.
- NAMES. Published quarterly by the American Name Society (Editor: Professor Kelsie B. Harder, State University College, Potsdam, New York).
- NEWS OF CONTESTS. Published at irregular intervals (several times annually) by Contest Research Company of Brooklyn, New York.
- NOTES AND QUERIES. A publication issued weekly by various English publishers, since 1849. Currently published by the Oxford University Press in London; full current title, *Notes and Queries for Readers and Writers, Collectors and Librarians*.
- ONOMASTIC. Published at irregular intervals (once or twice a year) in the form of a series of pamphlets (Editor: Professor J. B. Rudnycky of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada).

- PRIZEWINNER (formerly, *What's Cooking in Contests*). Published monthly by Robert Spence Publications, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.
- *RECREATIONAL MATHEMATICS MAGAZINE. Published bimonthly at first, later irregularly, by Joseph S. Madachy, first at Idaho Falls, Idaho, later at Kent, Ohio, from February, 1961 to February, 1964.
- *WORDS. Issued weekly by Temple G. Porter of Washington, D.C., through the facilities of English Language Services, Inc., from December, 1964 to December, 1965.
- WORD STUDY. Published monthly by the G. & C. Merriam Company of Springfield, Massachusetts, in connection with its dictionaries.

The author will welcome contributions to the foregoing bibliography from knowledgeable readers.

slang misunderstanding: during our London sabbatical, we mentioned to Mary Wintersgill that we'd crossed paths the night before w/ mutual friend Bill, explaining (we thought) that we'd seen (the play) "Willie Rough." She said, Oh, that's too bad. Puzzled, we said no, the play was excellent, and Bill thought so too. She paused and then laughed, to explain she thought we'd seen Bill (Willie) drunk (rough).