Shoreline has:

Thesaurus of Slang   R 427 L672
A Back-Alley Glossary
Of the English Language

By Michiko Kakutani

To Ambrose Bierce, slang was "the grunts of the human hog (Pigmarium interdubia)." To S. I. Hayakawa, it was "the poetry of everyday life." Now, thanks to the heroic 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 rhaid daily speech and an irrevocable 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-K) is to be published in the spring of 1996, and the final volume (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 as 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 African Americans 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 in television shows, movies and commercials.

There's "beam up" from "Star Trek," of course, and "bppy" from "Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In." "Ba-belasious" (meaning a "tasty babe") was coined in a Wayne's World skit, "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 has popularized in Kansas City during the 1984 Presidential campaign. "Deep throat," of course, comes from the 1972 pornographic film of the same name.

A 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), "burner" (circa 1965) and "freak out" (circa 1965).

The San Francisco columnist Herb Caen, Mr. Lighter tells us, created the word "beatnik" in 1958 by substituting "beat!" (from Beat Generation) in the name of the Russian playwright "Ivanov." Other words and phrases that sound thoroughly contemporary actually date back many years. While "bimbofette" first surfaced on television in the mid-1920's, "bingo" (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 soda fountain 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 "outstandingly skilled," can be traced to the 1850's. According to Mr. Lighter, slang often works to give standard English words eccentric meanings or spin, as in musicians' use of the word "eat" to mean "a performer or avid devotee of jazz or swing music."

Other familiar words with new and in some cases novel meanings include: "alalfa," "apple," "bananna," "discuss," "chimes" and "enchiladas.

Some words, as this volume demonstrates, seem especially conducive of word variation and extrapolation. You can "blow your stack," "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 "bag out" or get "bag-eyed" on "bag juice" and wind up in the "bughouse.

The word with the most variations by far, however, is a certain vulgarism immortalized in these pages as 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 incredible potentials of language, and the rowdy, colorful and just plain amusing virtues of slang. After all, how boring to simply order "coffee" at a restaurant, when you can ask the waiter for some "black water" or a cup of "boiler water." Now you can pay with a dollar bill, where you can just as easily hand over a "dead president" or a "fogged up dollar."

Whatever you do though, be sure to take a gander at this book, it's one bad volume, a real groover. In short, it's truly cathartic.

Random House
Historical Dictionary of American Slang
Volume I: A-G

Edited by J. E. Lighter
1,006 pages. Random House, 86th.
IN REHEARSAL WITH
Cybill Shepherd

A Chance to Sing
Is Hardly Moonlighting

Cybill Shepherd singing in Atlantic City.

By ALEX WITCHET

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 "Last Picture Show" in 1971, she had confidence to spare: the previous year she had been on the cover of People. And there wasn't an adolescent girl who didn't yearn to look like her."

"More recently she's been known for"
SITTING UP WITH THE DEAD
A Storied Journey Through the American South.

By Hal Crowther

A
MERICANS 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 affec-
tionate last rites to that which we failed to love enough. In a culture where young and old feed their hunger for narrative from an electronic trash heap of television, it’s hard to imagine a hu-
man 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.

Third, 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 seeks for insight may be nothing but fox fire. Petro, a writer who lives in Northampton, Mass., takes her first misstep when she decides that there are immeasurable 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 deciper the South — assuming it’s a puz-
le — by tapping 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 amased by Columbus, but Columbus discovered America. The South is not amused to be redis-
covered by Pamela Petro, intrepid explorer, cul-
tural missionary to Darkest Dixie. She is, ar-
guably, 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 in-
cludes a long footnote to explain that for moun-
taineers “holier” is a geographic term. Candid to a fault, she acknowledges that her abiding im-
as 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 charming, she is the most clueless outlander to write about the South since V. S. Naipaul in “A Turn in the South.”

But “Sitting Up With the Dead” was not aimed at the Southern reader. Since no Southern revises the seemingly naive, 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 Vir-
ginia, “down there” was a genteel anatomical euphemism.

But “Sitting Up With the Dead” was not aimed at the Southern reader. Since no Southern revises the seemingly naive, 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 Vir-
ginia, “down there” was a genteel anatomical euphemism.

That a native might take for granted. Her physical descriptions of the motley tribe of story-
tellers are deft, even droll. But as she says, “a few hundred years or more have granted me such personality as living, cursing, dancing, spitting, smoking, eating, drinking human beings.”

Stories from the oral tradition need to be heard to be appreciated like Carolina’s seven-foot Ray Hicks need to be seen to be believed. Even a qualifed 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 leop-
ard or Carlos Castaneda in search of Don Juan, she assumed an added burden. Is this a life-alter-
ing obsession or just a book contract? I’d assign her pilgrimage more existential weight if I didn’t know, from her own experiences, that it was in-
spired by friends at a party in 1976.

Petro’s rental-car odyssey covered a dozen states and several thousand miles of interstate and back roads, venturing on a tighter schedule than any motivated Yankee since Gen-
eral 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 vi-
cious poltergeist, is a display of almost criminal opu-
licity. Still, we sympathize when she suffers pesti-
ential heat and biblical thunderstorms, chiggers and hangovers, motel cockroaches so huge she sleeps in her car, food starting to the fastiduous palate (“a nightmaight chicken salad plate: a grisly mix of canned pears, bone and grease swamped by mayonnaise topped by a mara-
 schino cherry”). Lost repeatedly, frustrated by maps and closeleaf and traffic cops, betrayed by her tape recorder, this New England intellec-
tual 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 ap-
pearance fee — actually told her the Jack tale she came for.

T
HE epic quest was something of a ship-

wreck. Petro might have cut her losses by turning her book into a comic adven-
ture, a Hollywood road movie: “The Perils of Pamela.” Then I wouldn’t need to dis-
parage her banal conclusion that race is the com-
mon wound beneath all Southern narrative. In the Appalachians, where the best stories are pre-
served, slaves were even scarcer than Confede-
rate patriots. To a mountain people, 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 un-
wraps his dark secrets for any rank stranger with a tape recorder.

Never tell the South you understand it better than it understands itself. Like Brex Rabbit, it may outfuzz our storytellers. Petro has a penchant for using found materials. One of them is already convulsing audiences with the story of puckly Pamela, chiggers and all. 

HAL CROWTHER’S most recent book is “Cathedralsof Kudzu: A Personal Landscape of the South.”

A Yankee pursues the oral literature of the South.
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 Laminic 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. Elizabeth’s 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

Dr. William Minor, murderer with a sharp intellect.
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 brazen!" - Steve Rumsy, ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION

"Hilarious. A marvel of ensemble acting." - Carlos Salado, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

"'Slums' is an anomaly. It's funny without being insulting, sensitive without being sappy, insightful without being earnest." - Calvin Wilson, EAGLE VICTORIAN

"Alan Arkin, one of our greatest comic actors." -

"The laughs and charm make 'Slums' a rare thing." - Amy Sebin, USA TODAY

"A '70s 'Clueless.'" - INTERVIEW MAGAZINE

"SNAKE EYES IS STYLISH AND ENTERTAININGLY FEVERISH!"

"'Snake Eyes' is a high-energy thriller! The opening is worth the price of admission!" - Jack Niedt, SALT LAKE

"Igor Orlovich 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 Brunelli, THE STAR-LEDGER

"'Snake Eyes' is the classiest, flashiest, most exhilarating suspense twist ever! Since 'face-off'!" - Bob Goulios, 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 move 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 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. Greetley). 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 crossword puzzles) but was first drawn to his subject by a mention of Minor in “Chasing the Sun,” a book about lexicography by Jonathan 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 all 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 Scrip- torium 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).

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

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 capped 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 ...”
O STOP CHILD ABUSE IS NOW IN ALL OUR HANDS.
That All-English Dictionary Adds an All-American Coach

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
France and Britain Create Panel To Improve Safety of Concorde's

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 Concorde 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 reach an amicable compensation agreement with families of the victims.

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.
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 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. “In 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 advantages of being young, 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 wond erment 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 Fifth Town area of Long Island, dreaming of astrophysics. His grandfather sold butterflies to collectors; his parents manufactured instruments, 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. After a job in marketing at Alfred A. Knopf 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 of the O.E.D., 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 had been the earliest 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 “foot” 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 1984 and 1997. Then in 1989, when he learned that the O.E.D. would be opening a North American office, he applied for the job of principal editor.

“I 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.
"You've never seen a halftime like this."
-Peter Travers, ROLLING STONE

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www.thereplacements.com Moviefone.com

THE NEW YORK TIMES, A.O. Scott
"SPACE COWBOYS' IS ONE OF THE BEST ENTERTAINMENTS THIS SUMMER."
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, Joe Morgenstern
"PLENTY TO ENJOY. FOUR INTENSELY LIKEABLE HEROES ADD UP TO SOME OF THE RIGHTEST STUFF AROUND."

NEWSWEEK, David Ansen
"VERY LIKEABLE ENTERTAINMENT. THESE FOUR STARS KNOW HOW TO GET THE JOB DONE."

TIME MAGAZINE, Richard Corliss
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NEW YORK POST, Lou Lumenick
"THE SUMMER'S MOST DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE. TERRIFIC SPECIAL EFFECTS."

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-ANDREW JENNER, THE WEEKLY

"AT LONG LAST A SUMMER SPECTACULAR THAT DELIVERS."
-NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, YOU'LL LOVE THIS.
The Blab of the Pave

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

THE CITY IN SLANG

New York Life and Popular Speech

By Irving Lewis Allen


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 became the doormen city. The Edwardian era, as 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 policemen, policemen, songwriters and street kids — "boohold," "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 distilla-
tion 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 consos-

nants or in the addition of "er" to words, like "brokker" for breakfast, while its American counter-

part concots 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 hatched the most eloquent about metropolitan life.

Mencken admired the "linguistic exuberance" and the "excess of word-making energy" of idiom-

atic American English. He said it related to standard

language as "a manager is 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 hear. Mr. Allen has written a "book on words about the city" that makes a pro-

vocative cultural history. Like Whitman, who is the

patron saint of the volume and whose words open each chapter, Mr. Allen is "through Mannahatta's streets. . .walking, these things gathering."

As a social scientist, he charts an ordnary 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 lexicogra-

phers, from the venerable Eric Partridge and the

Oxford English Dictionary to the remarkable

George Washington Mastsell, 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 "the "fleche," which dates from the 1840's, and "rush hour," from the 1890's; new compounds like "cityscape" (1850) and "skyline" (1890); and exotic Victorian cadences like "hanky-ponky" and "boozy-pokey," the name for a penny dab of ice cream, which may or may not have derived from the exclamation "O che pecus!" ("Oh, how little!") — uttered in surprise by Italian children upon getting a dipping of discontinued size from the pushcart vendors.

These words give name to the physical city — "the Tenderloin," "Little Africa," "Hell's Kitchen," "Millionaire's Row," "Pin Alley" and "the Great White Way" — and to its public places: the "div," the "bobhouse," the turn-of-the-century "rug joint" and "lobster palace," and the "greasy

spoon" of the 1920's. They believably label a prodigious cast of popular characters — the "smart

Aleck," probably named for a notorious thief of the 1840's; the social-climbing "Shady;" the "cliff

sweller," the "gold digger" and the "batter-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 lan-

guage of change, and they are laden with information and insights. Behind the early construct "bright lights" lies the fact of the illumina-
tion 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 1890's, "bread-

line" from the 1890's and "man about town" from 1900 also resound with meaning without requiring any explanation beyond their dates. Canny, 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 1890's describes and also prescribes the segrega-
tion of the social classes. "We make words, but to an extent words also make us," the "social reali-
ties," the author notes in his preface.

"The City in Slang" is dense with words and thick with facts, and it is full of reflections. Ulti-
mately, it is a book about reading New York; as the author says, it is "a time-walk through the histori-
cal 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 neighbor-

hoods 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 America, I would appreciate receiving letters, manuscripts, personal papers, reminiscences or other materials.

THOMAS A. MARZIK

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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.

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 a substantial monograph on a man whose star has never been quite as bright as Picasso's or Braque's, 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 uneventful. Like many of his generation, he was born in 1887 in Paris and died in 1927, a year before Picasso. Two years later, in 1968, 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 life of 1911-12 and the unforgettable portraits of his mother, of Picasso and of the art critic Maurice Raynal. These are works with which Gris had taken apart and reconstructed the appearances of things, then reassembled them with a provocative urgency. In his drawings, on the other hand, with their unusually satisfying sculptural quality, he seems never to have lost his original touch, producing one of his most incisive pencil portraits — of his dealer and good ally, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler — in 1921.

Although Cubism itself became rapidly notorious (its significance was even debated in the Chambers des Députés), Gris never achieved anything like the renown of Picasso or Braque. Having struggled to make his 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, contributes an essay on Gris's interest in music and theater, and Christian Derouet, a curator at the Musée National 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 together-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 fit 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 relatively new, reformed opinion (in Aime Césaire's phrase) the "demon of logic" — the artist who reinterpreted the discoveries of Braque and Picasso in the light of a refined, rigorous intellectual. Accordingly, Mr. Green suggests that there is a great deal more subjectivity and contra-diction in Gris's art than commentators have previously allowed. If his premises too daring or too speculative for all but experts, it is regularly leavened by references to parallel developments in literature, linguistics and the arts. How the way he 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 "classic" French art against the "barous" 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 through. The too many facets of Gris's art begin to muddy what had been clear and spirited, introducing the dread sense that the wood may soon be no longer be seen for the tree. The main complaint is not the feverish love of all the famous artists — the two parts of the article are ably supplemented by articles of the same kind elsewhere — more the fact that the observer is interrupted by the disjointedness of the text and the unskilled writing of all the sections. It is unfortunate enough that the little Spanish quoted is massaged and the French frequently incorrect, but the host of minor slips in the English, from "insistance" and "inate" to "non-sequitors" and "syberric," turns the attentive reader into a proofreader of gruelling length.

There is no doubt, even so, that by the time the essays give way to the illustrations, the mind has been thoroughly prepared 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 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

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

WORD WATCH

The Stories Behind the Words of Our Lives.
By Anne H. Soukhanov.

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 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-collagel office ritual called “going post-al,” 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 “anticipoiment” 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 nosing.
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

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 been the case, I didn’t know what to do.”
article, the N* asterisk 3245, is reported. It is the heaviest nuclear
ion, has extraordinary stability, and exists for one ten-sextillionth of
a second. Any explanation of that
which finds itself compelled to invent entities so preposterously absurd
ast 3245 in order to keep up the pretense of being an adequate
ion has gone so far astray as to be beyond any hope of correction. A
must be made, based on quite different premises.

true, the scientists responsible for this news release have tipped us
a fact that they themselves regard the new particle as nothing more
joke, by labeling it N* asterisk 3245. Particles intended to be taken
ame names such as electron, neutron, hyperon, and lepton.
ning process degenerates into monstrousities like N* asterisk 3245,
to call a halt to the farce, for that is what it is.
ists and mathematicians discuss things and tell us things, but what
reponds to no known reality, for the reality to which it is ostensibly
must forever remain beyond their grasp. That is why their research
the category of pure word games.
verage crossword puzzle solver amuses himself with a comparatively
word game. The reader of this book has chosen more challenging
word and thought with which to divert himself. The scientist and
atician play yet more difficult word-and-thought games. Each one,
way, is passing the time between birth and death in the manner
his temperament. One game or another—whichever one is
cally really matters, as long as it brings happiness to the player.
it is the impact of our findings on the philosophical quest for truth?
als, discouraged by these revelations, become agnostics, holding
knowledge is unattainable. More venturesome souls seek out the oldest
own to mankind: PANTEISM. In the pantheistic view, the conscious
individual is mysteriously capable of merging with the Cosmic
absorbing infinite wisdom instantly.
hat as it may, we have succeeded in showing that puzzle-solving at
advanced scientific research are exercises of equal importance (or
e, 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 compre-
ensive bibliography of this nature has previously appeared. The pioneer undertak-
ing that follows embraces not only books and pamphlets about word puzzles
word curiosities, but also synonyms, synonyms lists, books of literary oddities,
specialized dictionaries abounding in fantastic words, publications devoted to
context puzzles, and sundry curiosities.

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
uthor, 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.

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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).