

Book Reviews

- American Talk: Where Our Words Came From.* By J. L. Dillard. New York: Random House, 1976. Pp. xxi + 187. Price \$7.95.
- I Hear America Talking: An Illustrated Treasury of American Words and Phrases.* By Stuart Berg Flexner. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1976. Pp. x + 488. Price \$18.95.

Some actions seem to be inevitable. Bicentennial escapades aside, the appearance of two volumes on the same subject, with almost the same title, written by two outstanding philologists and linguists calls for some commentary slightly outside the ordinary. The two have little else in common, for one is an alphabetical discussion of “typically American words and expressions in their historical context,” while the other is a narrative “of a continuing effort to determine the origins and influences on the language spoken in the United States of America.” Both are serious.

Flexner comes first, not in importance, but because I believe his attempt to be more ambitious is more in keeping with lexicographical “principles,” despite the too obvious coffee-table format. Flexner, as American Name Society members know, was Associate Editor of the *Random House Dictionary* and rewrote, as contrasted with re-edited, Wentworth’s *Dictionary of American Slang*. An experienced hand, he baled large (about 150) segments of American fetish names, slogans, phrases, and expressions into an amalgam of Americana that, with some judicious selecting and cutting, compares with those books attributed to H. L. Mencken, who had a perfect secretary. Flexner surely had no such efficient clarifier. He did his own work. Whereas Mencken’s tomes were literally unformed compilations that eventually took some years from the scholarly productivity of, to me, the greater Raven McDavid to reduce to meaningfulness, Flexner strikes to the core with his ability to extract what is truly the “words” that moved citizens of the United States to action, whether that action was moral or not.

The first entry is *Abolition* and the last is *Yes and No*. Restricting myself to only onomastic entries, or at least those that can truly qualify

as such, I mention *Uncle Tom*, *Alibi Ike*, *America and the United States*, *Babbitts*, *The King James Bible*, *Billy the Kid*, *Nat Love*, *Oreo* (for the black who is white on the inside), *Lizzie Borden*, *The Dust Bowl*, and literally hundreds of names within the 150 headings. Each is traced on historical principles to the first time recorded and then discussed through subsequent usages and meaning changes. Literally, the book can be sampled, dipped into, and read from cover to cover. Although little that is new can be found, it is the cooking that finesses. No book like this one exists, and the illustrations have a way of making it more *OK*.

Dillard covers pretty much the same language span as does Flexner, except that his format is narrative and much less lexical. The direction of the work, however, is etymological rather than historical, as we find in Flexner, who indeed uses etymology for historical purposes. Dillard has a definite thesis: he believes, and is certainly correct in doing so, that language-contact in the United States has had great influences "on the vocabulary and phraseology of American English." Further, this contact among languages (French, Spanish, Indian, English, and others) was "of basic importance in separating American English from British."

Despite informative interest in such "Americanisms" as *persimmon*, *dope sheet*, *crawfish*, *poorboy*, *bulldozer*, I am concerned with the onomastic ingredients. The pickings are small but important, for they also contribute to the thesis. *New Deal* has its separate entry in Flexner's *Talking*, but Dillard gives the origin of the phrase that has become a "name," and then follows it into *Square Deal*, *Fair Deal*, including the cynical *Big Deal*, behind-the-scene expression for all the *Deals*. All come from the "good-ole-boys'-game of poker." It has been said that if you put two Americans together with a pack of cards a poker game will begin in purported fun and end in a fight. Violence and poker go "hand in hand."

Other names that deserve notice if not comment are *Hoe Joe Whiskey*, *valley tan* (without capitals), *Zilth-Nut-to* (smoking material of willow bark mixed with tobacco), *Navy Plug*, *Star Navy* ("Chew Stary Navy and spit ham gravy"), *Day's Work*, *Brown Mule*, *Red Man*, and even *Dulcissimus* (referred to by Captain Frederick Marryat in 1837). No one has collected the names of different brands of snuff, but Dillard lists *Garrett's Snuff*, *Honest Snuff*, and *Red Rooster Snuff*. Medical quackery produced such names as *Original Mamaluke Lini-ment*, *Pink Pills for Pale People*, and many other that few of us can remember now. Only *Old Gold* and *Lucky Strike* are noted for cigarettes, probably because they allude to earlier American aspirations and

discoveries, but more could be added now to show current fads and "lifestyle" attitudes. The section, "Advertisers and Politicians," alludes to the sociological and psychological influences of automobile names, nicknames of football teams (should they be nicknames?), state slogans (*Land of Sunshine*, *Boomer State*, and on to about 50 more), and "soft drinks."

These two books, so obviously planned for publication in 1976, lead further than their Bicentennial intentions and take their place alongside other studies of "American English." Something common here and also among other such texts is the continuous astonishment expressed by journalists, professors, and such, at the way English is used in the United States. The underlying and unstated thesis is that this brand of English is inferior to "English English," supposedly that spoken in England. I am sure that the authors do not consciously intend such, although they are attitudinally working in the tradition of H. L. Mencken, who stimulated a host of followers to take a supercilious and often sarcastic stance in regard to the language(s) spoken in the United States. We have learned much from them and should learn better. Both Dillard and Flexner are aware of this ambiguity and irony, and both are capable of setting the record straight.

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Finding Our Fathers, A Guidebook to Jewish Genealogy. By Dan Rottenberg. New York: Random House, 201 East Fiftieth Street, New York, N.Y. 10022, 1977. Pp. xiv, 402. Price \$12.95.

This is a brilliant, authoritative guidebook to Jewish genealogy, but the reason it is reviewed in *Names* is because almost two-thirds of the book (227 pages) is allocated to an alphabetical list of about 8,000 Jewish family names.

Here important information for many of the names is given, such as corrupt spellings, place of origin, date of origin, meaning, and relationship to other Jewish surnames. Bits of genealogical information are frequently included. Then the author often notes the reference book (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, etc.) where an article on some famous man with the surname is included. This comprehensive list of Jewish family names is helpful to the student of onomastics in

deciding whether a particular surname is Jewish and in learning the place of origin. Since most of the Jews in the world were late in acquiring hereditary family names, many of their problems in genealogical research are different from those of Gentiles.

Other important information about Jewish names may be found in the first third of the book which is mostly step-by-step instruction to the seeker after ancestral facts both in this country and across the water. Although the emphasis is on the needs of the Jewish searcher, much will also aid the Gentile genealogist. For them this is a thorough collection of sources, clues, techniques and hints in the search for ancestors. A most helpful bibliography completes the work.

Elsdon C. Smith

A Glossary of Faulkner's South. By Calvin S. Brown. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976. Pp. vii + 241. Price \$12.50.

This glossary covers only those works by William Faulkner that have a Southern setting and is concerned only with "dialect" words that need explanation to illuminate Faulkner's meanings to those who purportedly have no understanding of a northern Mississippi vocabulary or the varieties of English used there, whether spoken by Gavin Stevens, Ph. D. (Heidelberg), or Flem Snopes, or those in between.

Perhaps because of my familiarity with the vocabulary of the area, I find that most of the entries are typical and can be found in other parts of the United States. Although the explanations are ample and sometimes excessive (*barn, color, magnolia, shotgun, and wagon*, to cite the more obvious examples), they really add nothing new to interpretation of Faulkner's works. Any Faulknerian scholar should have no difficulty with the vocabulary and syntax in the works, and it is indeed doubtful that a reader with some understanding of American English would be more than momentarily distracted by such terms as *fofch, flying squirrel, footlog, ford* (a separate entry should have been for *Ford*, a type of car, but the two are noted together, giving the impression that one is derived from the other), *livery*, and most of the others.

The onomastic importance, besides the names of flora and fauna, is the listing of the place-names and real names (as distinguished from fictional ones) that occur throughout Faulkner's region and creative work. Faulkner, as do all great novelists, pinpoints time and place with

reality, usually by naming persons and places that have historical and current authenticity. Fictions can then become immediate, cut into the mythos of time and place, and, in a critical sense, become universal. Things with proper names, difficult sometimes to differentiate, can also become important. For example, I doubt that anyone under age 80 would know that *Agnes Mabel Becky* refers to the "most popular contraceptive early in the century," and came three in a box. *Brunswick stew*, however, is fairly well known and is listed, according to Mathews, *Dictionary of Americanisms*, as early as 1856. Compson's Creek is fictitious, but Brown identifies it as Burney's Branch in the geographical context.

The Appendix does have significance, but is not original, for it depends on earlier articles by Brown himself, G. T. Buckley, and Thomas L. McHaney. Problems with "Faulkner's geography and topography" have existed ever since critics and reviewers noticed that there are resemblances between the fictional Yoknapatawpha County and the existing Lafayette County, and between Jefferson and the college town Oxford, which is also the county seat. The discussion is technical, with the conclusion being that "there are resemblances" but that creativity has no exactness.

This addendum to glossaries of Faulkner's names and "odd" vocabulary is acceptable and is now necessary for completeness of a library's collection of Faulkneriana. The best glossary for onomastic purposes is still Harry Runyan, *A Faulkner Glossary* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1964), and there occurs some discussion of the names in Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), and in individual articles published in such journals as *Names*, *Bucknell Review*, and *Mississippi Quarterly*. Runyan's work, unfortunately, is a mere glossary, with only the names and where they occur. No discussion of their meaning or origin appears.

Since it is almost an ordinary occurrence now that publishing costs have practically obliterated an editor's chances of correcting final proofs, errors sprout. This is not the place to add them, but Brown does list Gavin Steven instead of Gavin Stevens (p. 11). He places the Battle of Shiloh in northeastern Mississippi instead of where it did happen, at Shiloh Church on the west bank of the Tennessee River, across the river from Savannah, Tennessee (p. 206). His statement that every "Southern county seat has a Confederate monument" (p. 58) is just not true. His entry for *'coon* (p. 58) has the mark of the pedant and the linguistically uninformed, with the use of the ' as a perfect indicator of oneupsnobbery. Information that the *oo* in *Coop* is "pronounced like the *oo* in

took” is gratuitous, since it first makes no difference and second both have different and the same pronunciations depending on the dialect region, sometimes even within it. Other quibbles can be made, but they achieve subjectivity and probably say more about the reviewer than the editor.

Scaled, the glossary has its good points, mostly because it brings together odds and ends of information that would require research in several sources. Also, for an informed Midland South native, it is a source of argumentative delight.

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GALE RESEARCH REPRINTS AND ORIGINALS: XIX

This survey of reprints and originals by Gale Research Company, Book Tower, Detroit, Michigan 48226, is the nineteenth in the series of notices giving prominence to books of interest to readers of *Names*. Titles and bibliographical information appear below:

Alkire, Leland G., Jr., *Periodical Title Abbreviations*, 2nd ed. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1977. Pp. x + 436. \$32.

Crowley, Ellen T., ed. *New Acronyms, Initialisms, and Abbreviations: 1976 Supplement, Fifth Edition*. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1976. Pp. xv + 108. \$35/both supplements, 1967 and 1977, the latter ready in late 1977.

Leonard, John William, editor-in-chief. *Woman's Who's Who of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Women of the United States and Canada, 1914-1915*. New York: The American Commonwealth Co., 1915. Republished, Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1976. Pp. iv + 21-961. \$42.50.

In an age of heightened consciousness of the rights of those humans who have, in the flux of interchangeability throughout “recorded time,” been repressed, persecuted, and externally power controlled, it is perhaps fitting that the achievements of women, one of the oppressed groups, be recognized. Irony aside, attempts have been made in the United States, probably the only country in this universe—world, if you wish—in which laws have been established to protect the rights of everyone, the honoring of which is often left to those in power at a particular moment.

Since some have declared that "the 1970's are indeed the decade of the women," the appearance of the 1915 compilation of a biographical dictionary of "contemporary women" is especially welcome, whatever the eventual "age of the 1970's" may mean in historical terms. The male editor was ably assisted by an editorial advisory board consisting of ten women, whose occupations were limited to two: (1) presidents of women's clubs and (2) librarians. To say that very little has changed in the past 60-odd years is to state simply the obvious.

According to the editor's preface, the volume includes "brief personal sketches of 9644 women, of whom 6303 are or have been married, and 3341 maidens." The married women are listed under their married names, which makes for difficulty in finding some of the names, although the "maiden name" is noted in the biographical entry. In general, the occupations listed for the ones chosen for inclusion in the volume are restricted to what were considered to be the epitome of women's work at the time: library duties, religious leadership (but not ministerial), hospital volunteers (not unheard of now), reformers (many in the suffrage movement), authors, and a sprinkling of teachers.

For a reason that I cannot find, 20 pages were omitted from the published version. These may have included the survey of suffrage views held by the women who responded to a questionnaire by Leonard. Apparently, the comments were too militant to warrant publication. The "educational and business announcements" that appeared in the original were omitted in the Gale Research republication. The book, however, is a valuable historical addition to the growing amount of literature now available concerning the activities and accomplishments of women before the 1970's.

The *1976 Supplement to Acronyms* "contains 12,618 newly coined or newly found terms" to add to the more than 130,000 contained in the Fifth Edition. These, in turn, will be cumulated in the new 1977 supplement, which supposedly will add another 10,000 new items. The verbal and communication explosion of the use of acronyms, initialisms, and abbreviations has been commented on before, but the trend continues unabated and is popular among all segments of the operating world, including business, education, and services. With the surge toward efficiency, we find abbreviations becoming more and more faddish, so much so that editors, ones who should know better, typically abbreviate words ostensibly to save space and time but do nothing more than irritate readers who expect better. This is not the place to psychologize about the ferocity and tenacity of those who scramble initials, create acronyms, and abbreviate for the sake of

whatever. Doubtless, some trees may be saved, some ink not spilled, and a bit of photographic equipment unused. The saving, however, is negligible, if that. The need then is great for a dictionary of this sort, nay, almost a necessity, for sometimes, if not always, efficiency is least efficient in the aggregate, that is, the long run, and a "pony" is helpful for deciphering unsystematical shorthand.

Some examples of the *au courant* probably need attention or at least noting: the X (strike in bowling), not a new one but overlooked in earlier editions, as is X, still not listed, for those who sometimes need a symbol for a signature; ABC (Anybody But Carter); XMT (exempt), which may qualify as an acronym; LP (lollipop power), some kind of an organization; CE (coarse erection); JUBU (Journalistutbildningsutredningen); JMPR (jumper); ND (not done), much needed; NORM (Norman), not needed; RIRIG (Reduced-Excitation Inertial Reference Integrating Gryo; and, to be brief, D (Dull). Some for light contemplating are TURNBLKE, USCOMSUBGRUEAST-LANT, VCOFGWSS, MCPATH, F, EZ, MEDSQUEAST, and RIM.

The second edition of *Periodical Title Abbreviations* contains about 20,000 entries, twice the number of the first, meaning that this is essentially a new publication, another necessity for those who try to decipher SI (*Sports Illustrated*) and SN (*Sporting News*), neither listed here. *Names* is listed as NA, but no one has been caught abbreviating it that way. *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin*, listed as Tenn Folk S, has always been *TFSB*, even in *MLA* bibliographies. *CE* in the community represents *College English*, but here it is Co Engl. *PADS* is listed as Proceedings of the American Dialect Society rather than *Publication of the American Dialect Society*, its name since seemingly time immemorial, although only a few decades. Despite some unintentional error-sprinkling and some intentional guessing by the compilers, the work is valuable, for where else would anyone find that *TM* is an abbreviation for *Time*, *NWK* for *Newsweek*, and *NZZytPI* for *Naukovi Zapyski Zytomyrs'Koho Derzavnoho Pedahobichnoho Instytutu?*

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