

# OPUNTIA

## 311

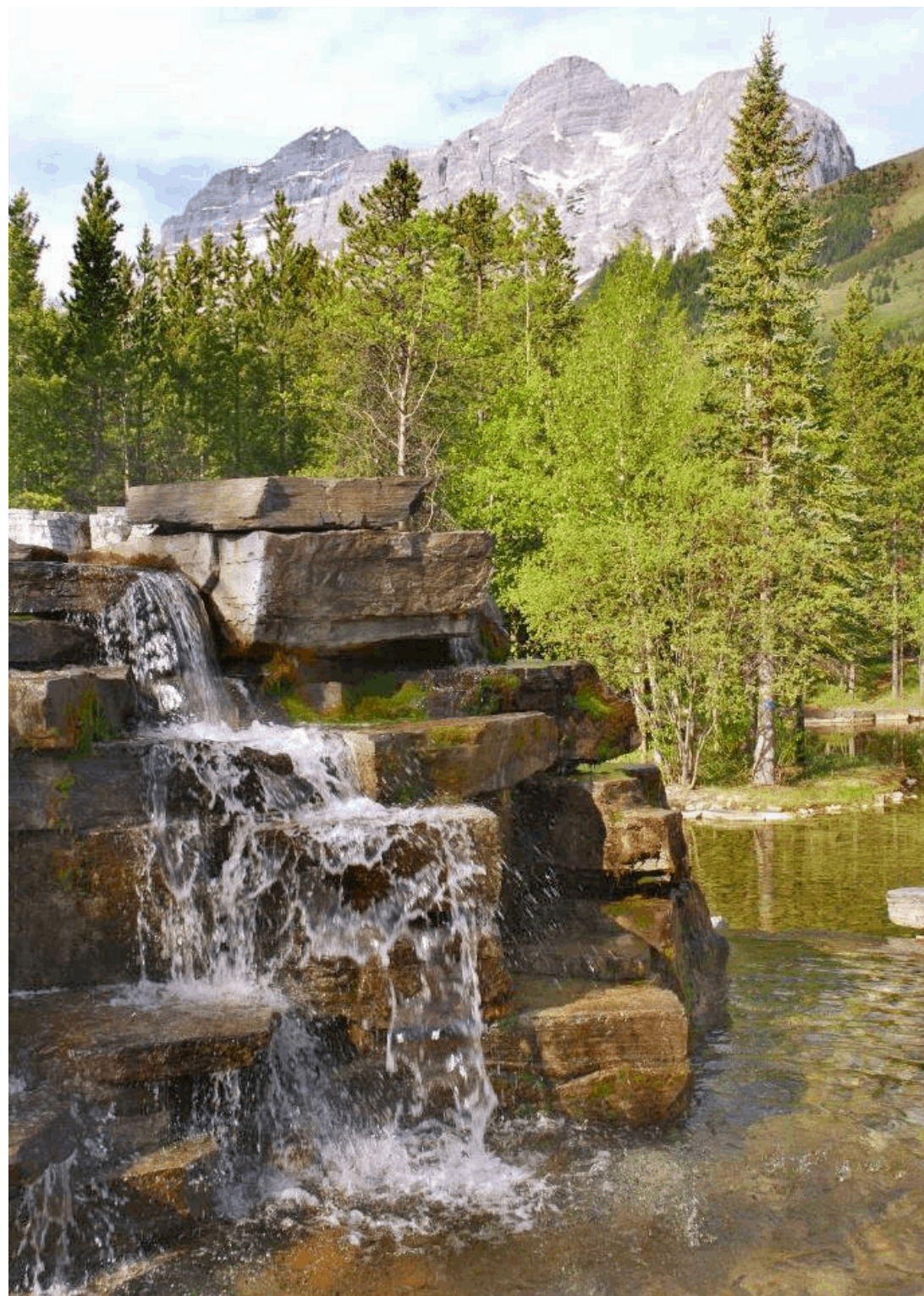
Mid-June 2015

**Opuntia** is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. My e-mail address is: [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com) When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

### ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY: KANANASKIS

photos by Dale Speirs

I drove out on June 1<sup>st</sup> to the Kananaskis provincial park, which runs along the east side of Banff National Park. The view at right was taken at Kananaskis Village. It is the only settlement in the valley, with four hotels, a post office, a general store, and a wilderness outfitters. The mountain in the background is Mount Kidd, named after a pioneer homesteader.



Kananaskis River, where it funnels through the Widow Maker slabs. There are no prizes for guessing how the rocks got their name.

During spring floods, the rocks are almost completely submerged. This spring has been dry so far, and the river level is quite low.



I crawled out onto the slabs to get this close-up.



Looking south at Wedge Mountain from the Kananaskis Village promenade. The Kananaskis River meanders in the foreground on the floodplain.



*Clematis occidentalis* blooming on the banks of the Kananaskis River.

Alberta had a warm spring and the wildflowers are blooming early.



Ribbon Creek, just downstream from the village.



## THE EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGES

by Dale Speirs

I am a monolingual anglophone, beyond a few words in Suomalais (my mother spoke Finnish to her elders but never taught it to us kids), some botanical Latin from university, and what in Canada is referred to as breakfast cereal French (all food packages have to be bilingual). However I am interested in how languages originated and evolved.

Language is the one thing that separates us from all other animals. There are many species which can communicate in the here and now with alarm calls, mating songs, or summons to their young. Only humans can write down information to reach generations as yet unborn. We can read books written centuries ago by authors long since gone to the grave. No other species can communicate beyond its herd to its unborn descendants. Over the years I've accumulated a few books about language evolution and before I put them in a Little Free Library here are my reviews of them.

### Origins.

Before written languages, there were of course spoken languages but they leave no direct record. Some things can be surmised, the most obvious method being to compare vocabularies and grammars. Languages with similarities are related, and by following the patterns of word origins, an evolutionary tree of languages has been built up.

But how did speech originate in the beginning? Sir Richard Paget considers this in his book *BABEL, OR THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF HUMAN SPEECH* (1930). He suggests that hand signals and pantomime were the first step in communication. Many hand signals are universal among all cultures and eras. Humans trying to communicate without a common language will point to themselves for "me", to the other person for "you", and sweep their arm around for "here".

Paget notes that humans acting unselfconsciously will move their tongues in their mouths when gesturing. Add in grunts or expelled air with certain gestures and specific sounds are made. The tongue automatically moves to a certain position against the palate, lips, or teeth, which changes the sound. Speech was a killer app in the dawn of human evolution, as it enabled communication while out of sight with others. Animals do the same but only for generalized concepts

such as alarm calls, calling their young or the rest of the herd to gather round, or mating calls. Humans are the only ones who can be specific, such as “Bob! Move to the right and pick up that two-by-four plank lying on the ground”.

Primitive speech concentrates on actions, which are most important to humans fighting, hunting, or scavenging. Nouns are specific to each individual object, and general nouns came later. It is a curiosity that the most primitive languages have the most complicated rules of grammar and word inflections, but as languages evolve, they tend to shed complicated rules and begin to slur their words. Sound shifts are common in the evolution of languages, as “p” becomes “f”, “t” becomes “th”, and “k” becomes “h”. For the future of languages, the trend to simplified grammar will continue and schoolmarm will in vain try to regulate the use of words.

Paget suggests languages should be controlled by academies of scholars, a lost cause if ever there was one. He is one of many in a long line of pundits who feel the urge to regulate for the common good whether the public likes it or not. He writes: *“I can see no alternative but that there should, eventually, be a censorship of words, and that the printing or use in public of such improper words should be forbidden.”* It is to laugh, and if I may borrow from George Orwell, it is doubleplus ungood.

**Germanic.**

AN INFORMAL HISTORY OF THE GERMAN LANGUAGE (1976 revised edition) by W.B. Lockwood is a very readable book that does not require knowledge of German. There are some pages of technical grammar but these can be skipped over. He begins with a discussion of the origins of the Germanic languages, which grew not as a ladder with each language another rung up the steps but as a field of shrubs, cross-pollinating with each other and then spreading branches.

Don’t confuse Germanic with German. The former is a family of closely related languages and dialects, and the latter is a specific language in that group. There was no single source of the Germanic languages. As the Roman Empire declined and fell apart, the tribes of Scandinavia and northern Europe began migrating back and forth. There were dialects that constantly blended and separated, sprouting up here as a new language, dying out there when overrun by invaders. The point to understand is that language evolution was messy, changing frequently in time and space, often over relatively small areas.

There are three groups of Germanic languages, East, North, and West. The East Germanic languages are all extinct. They were spoken by tribes in eastern Europe during the days of the Roman Empire but only fragments have survived. Its best known member is Gothic, not because it was the most important, but because sections of a Gothic bible dated 350 AD were discovered, giving the best translation, although incomplete.

North Germanic languages are the Scandinavian languages of Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Faroese (spoken on some Danish islands north of Scotland), and Icelandic. Old Norse is now extinct but many books and documents written in it survived, so it is relatively well understood.

The West Germanic languages are Low German, High German, Dutch, English, and Frisian. English was originally a Germanic dialect called Anglo-Saxon, but after William the Conqueror it was heavily mixed with Norman French and evolved away from the other Germanic languages to the point of mutual incomprehension.

The Germanic languages are classified as Indo-European languages. Their birth process is impossible to establish because the root languages evolved before literacy reached them. The oldest written records of the Germanic languages were all created long after the languages were born. A standard practice of linguists is to compare vocabularies and grammars of languages in the hopes of teasing out threads of evolution, but such methods have large margins of error.

Illiterate languages changed very fast from one generation to the next. It is the written word that helps stabilize a language and slows down changes. Lockwood gets in one cute little dig: *“We are led to suppose that German was then a more melodious language than it is today.”* High German, spoken in central and southern Germany, and Low German of the north, are terms based on the geography of those areas, the mountains and the coastal lowlands.

The two languages each had many dialects because in the centuries before good roads most people spent their entire lives within a day’s walk of their village. Educated people who traveled extensively, such as clergy and nobility, spoke more uniformly over a wider area using different dialects that were superimposed over the village dialects. The German of the upper classes was Dichtersprache, which faded away in the 1300s as social changes occurred and cities became large. A new variation called Kanzleideutsch took over among the ruling classes for official documents and correspondence.

Low German began to decline after the Hanseatic League of the Baltic Sea fell apart. High German, especially in official documents, began to predominate in the late 1500s. There were still lots of dialects. With Martin Luther and the advent of the Protestant Reformation, the written language began to standardize, as most Germans were reading Luther's translation of the Bible. His version of the language is analogous to the King James Bible in English. Both are still read today but readers are conscious of how archaic the language is compared to modern times. A new translation of the German Bible was made in 1926 by Hermann Menge which brought the language up to date, in much the same way that anglophone Christians now commonly read modern translations instead of King James.

The advent of printing in 1445 triggered standardization of written German as publishers sought popular books in the vernacular that could be sold widely. Martin Luther's impact was tremendous, more than any man since. During the early 1500s, one-third of all German books in print were written by him. He published a complete translation of the Bible in 1534 which sold in uncouthed hundreds of thousands. Even the Catholic Germans were influenced, and over the decades Luther's vocabulary and grammar altered his enemies' writing.

Today, standard spoken German, called Umgangssprache, is based on High German, with some differences in vocabulary and accent. The differences are like the English spoken by Scots compared to Texans compared to Australians. Lockwood writes: *"The difference between the ordinary conversational styles heard in Berlin and Munich is probably as great as between London and New York; the difference between Berlin and Vienna is certainly greater."* Part of the problem is that Germany as a unified nation under a single government has only existed since 1918, and Berlin did not begin to dominate until several decades later. This compares to Britain, where London has dominated for centuries, and likewise for France and Paris.

Germans from different dialects can understand each other but there are occasional surprises in catch phrases, just as in English. "Er wird hochgehen" to a Berliner means that he will go up a ladder or hill, but to a Viennese it means he'll be caught by the police. In English, an example I met with years ago was when a friend visiting from London told a woman that he would like to knock her up tomorrow. What he meant was that he would like to visit her. I had to take him aside and explain that in Canada the phrase means a woman who become pregnant, with the implication that it was accidental or against her will.

The advent of mass communications in the 1900s has done much to reduce variation in the common German language, first with national newspapers and then even more so with radio and television where people can hear the words. Low German is still heard in northern Germany but continues to decline, often being thought of as boorish and low class.

Lockwood discusses a wide variety of German enclaves that existed in many countries, particularly Slavic nations. Each enclave spoke their own dialect, often with words borrowed from local non-Germanic languages. In Europe, all of the enclaves were wiped out after 1945 as nations deported German-speaking peoples to Germany. Interestingly, the only major German-speaking enclave still in existence is in eastern Pennsylvania, where a dialect called "Pennsylvania Dutch" is common.

Dutch is a variation of Deutsche. Both names mean "the people". It is not a matter that one language evolved from the other but rather they, along with Flemish, evolved side by side. They influenced each other and were in turn influenced by Latin as the Romans spread north. After the Spanish were evicted from the Netherlands and the Dutch Republic was proclaimed in 1588, the language standardized on the Holland dialect. Their Germanic counterparts in what is now Belgium were dominated first by the Spanish and then by the French. Flemish was set adrift and was in danger of extinction until it was made a legal language in 1932.

The dialects form a continuum. The Dutch and Germans adjacent to their mutual border both speak the Saxon dialect and can converse with each other easily. The Dutchman speaking Saxon, however, will read newspapers and books in standard Dutch, while the German he is chatting with reads in High German. Modern Germans may refer to Dutch as a dialect of German but this is chauvinism; the two evolved independently. This emphasizes that spoken language is a different thing than written language. It can be said that most people are bilingual without knowing it because they read differently than they speak. If an anglophone newspaper was written in phonetic Scots, a Texan would have great difficulty reading it, but while the two speak differently, they both read the same written English language.

By the end of the Middle Ages, there were three literary languages in that area of northern Europe; High German, Low German, and Dutch. The Hollanders kept their language instead of being swamped by Low German because the Netherlands were very prosperous and capitalistic, while the Germans were split

up into a multitude of principalities and kingdoms stagnating economically. It wasn't until 1870 that Germany as a nation began to take shape, and not until 1918 that it was solidly fused together. The Dutch Republic was more united and thus able to hold off being swamped by the Germans. In modern times since WW2, the German language has begun to affect Dutch, after Germany became the new economic superpower of Europe (and still is).

The Frisians were a tribe that settled on a thin slice of the north coast of Europe and adjacent islands from Holland to Germany to Denmark. At one time it was thought that English was derived from their language but that view is now disputed. The Frisians did not migrate about the way that other Germanic tribes did. They managed to develop a number of dialects but in the modern era the language is steadily being overwhelmed by the Dutch, High German, and Danish languages. It is an endangered language.

A remarkable offshoot of the Germanic languages is Afrikaans. The first European settlers in South Africa were from South Holland, who settled around Capetown and later spread into the interior. The Dutch settlers were slaveholders. Their slaves were bought from many different tribes speaking as many different languages. As was common in numerous places around the world where many cultures mixed into one, a pidgin evolved, based on the overlord's language but incorporating borrowed words and simplifying the grammar considerably. (It might be fairly said that English is a pidgin language that developed from the Norman Conquest.) The children and grandchildren born in the colony grew up speaking the pidgin Dutch. As the Boers spread out from Capetown, so did the pidgin, which became known as Afrikaans. The victory of the British over the Boers imposed English on top, but when South Africa became an independent and segregated republic, Afrikaans rose to the top again. The fall of the white supremacists will inevitably send Afrikaans into decline while English becomes triumphant.

Another pidgin language that developed from German was Yiddish, which spread around the world with the Jewish diaspora but has declined since WW2. The majority of the Jews the Nazis murdered were Yiddish speaking, and in the Americas and Down Under the younger generation assimilated, particularly since Israel decided on Hebrew as its official language. Yiddish began around the year 1000 AD when Jewish settlers came to Germany. Because the Jews migrated back and forth across Europe, often involuntarily during pogroms, Yiddish developed many dialects, some of them quite distinct. Since so many Jews lived in Slavic areas, and since Hebrew was still the theological language,

Yiddish is a three-way fusion. The one thing that sets Yiddish apart from all other Germanic languages is that it is written in the Hebrew alphabet. While Israel turned its back on Yiddish, the language is not entirely dead, and there are still some people speaking and writing in it.

And so ends Lockwood's book. I found it very readable and interesting. His grammatical analysis of the languages was beyond me so I skipped a few pages in each chapter, but the book was nonetheless quite understandable. Well recommended.

### **English As She Is Spoke By The English.**

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH WORDS (1934) by Bernard Groom is a history of the English language in England. That may seem redundant, but of course the English language has spread over the world and has many centres of evolution. Before the Romans arrived, Britain was a Celtic domain. When the Roman Empire fell, the legions withdrew and left the natives to the mercies of others. In the middle 400s AD, the Anglo-Saxons on the north coast of Germany took advantage and invaded Britain. For the next five centuries, the language of Britain south of the Forth was Anglo-Saxon. It was only preserved in poetry and Christian writings, so the day-to-day language is lost, but about 20,000 words of it are known. Most of the short expressive words in English come from Anglo-Saxon.

Even before the Norman Conquest, Anglo-Saxon was changing somewhat as the Danes and Norsemen invaded and words from their languages were introduced. If William of Normandy had tripped and drowned getting off the boat in 1066, the course of history would have changed in many ways, one of which would be that Anglo-Saxon would have continued as a distinct language in England. Today it probably would be very close to German. But of course William had a very good innings, as a result of which the Norman French language became the official language for all government proceedings, court records, and alongside Latin in churches.

Over time though, the two languages mixed. By 1150, Anglo-Saxon was beginning to recover its influence as the succeeding generations of Normans became British. By 1500, the two had thoroughly mixed into Middle English. There were many dialects but the East Midlands dialect became the ancestor of today's Standard English. When two or more languages merge, as seen many times with pidgins, grammar is the first casualty. The complicated rules about

inflections and so forth are tossed by the people, and the same thing happened in Middle English. Another trend is that the new language absorbed and continues to this day to absorb words from many languages. The new words may have their definitions altered to provide subtle variations in meaning.

The East Midlands dialect triumphed because it included London, Cambridge, and Oxford. Anybody who was anyone spoke it in the King’s court. The first printers spoke it, so perforce it became the standard for texts. That doesn’t mean all the other dialects disappeared, only that they were local and seldom spoken more than a day’s travel beyond their centre. The advent of printing standardized the language of the people as it did in other countries. Centuries later when radio broadcasting began the decline in spoken dialects accelerated. Just as Luther’s Bible standardized written German, so it was that Tindale’s Bible standardized written English.

The greatest number of new words introduced into English came from poets, peaking in the 1600s. Spenser, Milton, and Shakespeare in particular introduced huge numbers of words. The reason for this was that poets are forced by metre and rhyme to find words that fit exactly, with the right number of syllables, the correct shade of meaning, and the cadence with which they are recited. The poets borrowed words from other languages or other dialects of English to make a line scan properly. Shakespeare did not hesitate to use a noun as a verb or vice versa. After the political events of the 1660s, the introduction of new words declined sharply although it never ceased. The Victorian poets seldom introduced new words.

Another method of word creation in English is to compound two or more words. Some are obvious, such as blackbird, snowstorm, or headstrong. Some are more subtle to today’s world, such as doff, from “do off”, and don, from “do on”. Words commonly change their meanings over time. A wench was originally just a maid, now it means a comely young woman. If you were nice in the 1600s, you were foolish or wanton. In the 1940s, someone who was gay was happy and nothing more. Not all new words succeed though. If you use the word “groovy”, you are certainly dating yourself from the Sixties. Interestingly enough, “groovy” originated during the jazz era; the hippies who used it unknowingly got it from their grandfathers.

A sea change in English occurred with the Scientific Revolution, when Latin and Greek suddenly became important sources of new words. In the late 1800s and 1900s, many new words were created in English by combining Latin and

Greek root words. It wasn’t just English, as languages around the world accepted scientific words in order to communicate between nations. “Telephone” is found in many variations around the world in languages that would not have accepted “far speaking”. All biologists use Latin binomials for species names, and mathematical symbols are mostly Greek letters.

Samuel Johnson, who published the first great dictionary of English in 1755, fulminated against too rapid language change. He acknowledged though, that nothing could stop it, but proper written English could slow it down and thin out words that did not deserve to survive. The same problem exists today. People who object to “access” being used as a verb will then go on to talk of how they will weed their garden. English does not stand still anymore than other languages.

### **English As She Is Spoke By Americans.**

THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE (1937) by H.L. Mencken is a very thick and definitive book about the evolution of American English. Up until the 1776 Revolution, scholars and pundits in the colonies discouraged the use of Americanisms in the English language, contending that Americans should speak the pure English of the home islands. Setting aside the fact that even then there was no such thing as pure English in England, the mood in the USA changed after the Revolution.

By the early 1800s, it was recognized that the USA would soon become the largest anglophone community in the world. Americans began advocating some sort of academy to take control of what they were already calling the American language. While it never came to pass, and wouldn’t have succeeded anyway, the first step was taken when Noah Webster’s AMERICAN DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE was published in 1828.

There was a lot of slagging back and forth between American and English authors, the former who had pride in their newborn country and the latter, who resented the intrusion of so many American words into British English. It took a while for the American publishing industry to develop, and for many decades in the 1800s the books sold in American stores were imported from Britain.

For more than a century, American and British reviewers in the better magazines feuded about Americanisms. To our modern eyes, most of it was much ado about nothing. British pundits objected to what was, in their time,

slang such as “right away”, “dry goods”, “crowd” (as a mob), “candidacy”, “protested”, “transportation”, “sidewalk”, “fall” (in the sense of autumn), “rubberneck”, “holdup”, “shack”, “bandwagon”, “bunco”, “live-wire”, and “scab” (as a strike breaker).

Mencken noted that by his era (the 1930s) most of the fuss had died down. Today the academics on both sides of the Atlantic are the pedantic ones, while the general public ignores them. The greater population of the USA gradually won out on economic grounds as American books and films flooded into Britain. There are more Americans today than all the other anglophone countries put together.

Mencken does not spare his fellow countrymen: *“In the American colleges and high schools there is no faculty so weak as the English faculty. It is the common catch-all for aspirants to the birch who are too lazy or too feeble in intelligence to acquire any sort of exact knowledge, and the professional incompetence of its typical ornament is matched only by his hollow cocksureness.”*

Leaving the two streams of the English language behind, Mencken turns next to the characteristics of American English. It is generally uniform throughout the country, setting aside regional accents such as Texan or Brooklyn. It also tends to simplifying grammar, syntax, and phonetics. Even more so than British English, it absorbs new words and phrases from other languages, creates new compound words, and converts nouns to verbs and vice versa.

In the first half of the 1800s, American dialects and word-coining was rampant. It wasn’t until about 1850 or so that books written by Americans for Americans began to appear in large enough quantities that the USA could be said to have its own literature. Written literature helps to stabilize the spoken language.

One major difference between Europe and North America was the presence of aboriginal tribes in the latter. The earliest Americanisms were words adopted from the native languages, such as “raccoon”, “moose”, “skunk”, “toboggan”, “squaw”, and countless other nouns or objects. Many more are direct translations into English, such as “medicine man”, “to bury the hatchet”, and “warpath”.

The American language also picked up many new words from the earliest settlers. The New Amsterdam Dutch supplied “boss”, “Yankee”, “bush”, and “Santa Claus” to name a few. British immigrants contributed many words that

changed their meaning in America. In England, “corn” meant any kind of grain but in both Canada and the USA it was narrowed to what the rest of the world calls “maize” (scientific name *Zea mays*). Lumber in England was unneeded furniture and other items stored in a spare room or attic, but in the New World it became cut timber, commonly stored in a yard before use.

Spanish did not contribute much to American English in the 1600s because there was little contact between the two sides. Once the Americans crossed the Mississippi River and came into contact with Mexicans, a flood of Spanish words entered the American language. Many of them were exact but most were modified slightly. The farmers took in “ranch”, “stampede”, “corral”, “canyon”, “tornado”, “patio”, and “alfalfa”. The gold rushes introduced “bonanza”, “eldorado”, and “vigilante”. “vamoose” came from the Spanish phrase “let’s go”, and “hoosegow” as a jail was an exact phonetic translation of the Mexican pronunciation of the word “juzgado” (to be sentenced to prison).

German immigrants flooded into the USA during the middle 1800s. They contributed, directly or with some modification, words such as “beer garden”, “wiener” and “frankfurter” for the same food item, “wagon”, “hamburger”, and “kindergarten”. The German word “bummler” became “bum” (as a lazy person) and “bummer” (as in “no good”).

The Irish added few words to the written American language, although their accents and blarney became a vaudeville cliché. Chinese immigrants added “chop suey” (slops), “kowtow”, “flop”, and “yen” (as in a strong desire for something). The wide variety of immigrants all brought at least a few words to the American language.

After the Civil War, American educators initiated a new surge in schoolmarmism, the idea that the English language should be closely regulated by a multitude of rules. They waged war, unsuccessfully, on clipped nouns, such as “phone” for “telephone” or “ad” for “advertisement”. Suffixes were widely used for new words, such as -ette (diminutive), -dom (group or affiliation), -ster (individuals of a type), -ist (occupation or hobby), and -itis (disease or affliction) to name but a few.

Newspaper copy editors and rewrite desks had tremendous influence on their readership. The editors had to jam news into headlines with short and catchy words. Such headline terminology dates from the Spanish-American War in the newspapers of Pulitzer and Hearst. “blast” replaced “explosion” and “envoy”

replaced “ambassador”. The word “probe” was seldom used anywhere in the American language until it became a substitute for “investigation”.

American terms began to infiltrate British English in large numbers during the middle 1850s, such as “talented”, “lengthy”, and “belittle”. In the 1930s, “radio” was denounced by British educators, yet the equal neologism “wireless” was accepted, in what seems to be a case of Not Invented Here. From World War One onward, and especially when talkies came into use, American movies flooded Britain with new words. Many supposedly new words actually originated in Britain centuries ago and were preserved by American colonists while they died out in Britain. They then returned to Britain in modern times as Americanisms. Not a few pedantic lecturers in Britain were embarrassed when they denounced such words as barbarianisms, only to have it pointed out to them that the words were used by Chaucer or Shakespeare.

Mencken points out that despite the flow of neologisms, there are still many differences between the two English languages. Americans (and Canadians, I might add) live in apartments, while Brits live in flats. Americans eat candy and Brits eat sweets. Americans walk on sidewalks, which the British call pavement, which in North America means the asphalt road. A public school in Britain is a private school (or prep school) in the USA.

Studies of pronunciation for the printed journals or archives were hampered until recently by the problem of transcribing sounds. Linguists trying to record spoken sounds invented new alphabets with anywhere from 125 to 390 letters. The modern system of transcription uses 50 letters. The advent of the phonograph record was a giant leap forward in the study of languages. The oscillograph made it possible to analyze spoken sounds and music objectively.

The rise of broadcast radio was the giant leveler in spoken English in both North America and Britain. This touched off disputes in both countries as to whose accent should dominate. In the USA, the speech of the Middle West became the received pronunciation. (In Canada, it was the southern Ontario pronunciation that took over because that’s where the national networks are headquartered, notwithstanding dialects such as Newfie or Maritimes.)

Mencken discusses the difference in vowels between Britain and the USA. The greatest variation is in the letter “a”, which took just about every possible pronunciation on both sides of the Atlantic. Americans generally preserve consonants and pronounce them, compared to the English who are more likely

to slur or omit consonants. Isolated populations of Americans in the Appalachia or the Ozarks preserved the accents of the pioneers from Britain, and actually speak closer to 1700s English than the British English do today.

Spelling in the USA was no more uniform than in England until 1755, when Samuel Johnson’s great dictionary standardized the written language. Just before the Revolution, Benjamin Franklin tried to reform American spelling. His scheme was never accepted, partly because it required six new letters. Noah Webster finally succeeded in setting the American standard when he published his first dictionary in 1806. Thereafter he was acknowledged by the general public as the authority on the American language. The many editions of his dictionary sold tens of millions of copies by the middle 1800s.

Following standardization there arose a simplified spelling movement, to pronounce words phonetically. The movement made some minor headway but proponents could never agree on a common spelling. Part of the problem was regional accents and dialects. Whose pronunciation is to be used? Harvard and the Boston Brahmins? Noo Yawk City wid dem Brooklyn accents? Texas and Oklahoma whar y’all hear it done spoken proper?

Another problem was that simplified spellings were not pronounced the same way by different people. “ruf” could be a roof, or it could be a rough time. George Bernard Shaw went to town on this with “ghoti”, pronounced “fish”.

More because of the printing press than anything else, accent marks such as the umlaut and grave were dropped when foreign words entered the American language. Newspapers seldom had linotype mats for accent marks. Without the marks, many imported words changed their pronunciation.

Proper names of immigrants have undergone tremendous changes in North America. Their names may be converted to phonetic spellings, translated into English, or abandoned completely and replaced by an English name with no prejudice attached to it. Serbs named Ogrin became O’Green, Cerne became Black, and Mr. Underwood may have originally been Podlesnik.

Quite often immigrants give up the struggle to keep their original name because of constant mis-spellings. Tomaszewski becomes Thompson, Filipowicz becomes Phillips, and Siminowicz becomes Simmons. The fastest transformations are the deletion of accent marks, and names translated from other alphabets such as Cyrillic or Hebrew (Yiddish names). Names may also

be clipped. Short names such as Gallo or Lopez usually survive, but someone named Pietroluongo almost certainly will decide life is easier as Pietro or Peters.

To avoid prejudice, Jews very commonly changed their names after arriving in the USA. Jacob became Jack, and any number of Rosen- type names became Rose, so much so that Rose itself became a stereotypical Jewish name. Samuel Gelbfisch is better known to posterity as the movie magnate Samuel Goldwyn. Not all Jews changed their names of course, especially in later years when prejudice moderated somewhat or if they lived in places such as New York City. Isaac Asimov had a long and much-honoured career as an science fiction author of international repute, despite having an obviously Jewish name. He wrote in his autobiography that some Jewish writers he knew weren't as strong-minded as him and anglicized their names to get on better with editors and movie executives.

Slang comes and goes at the speed of light, and very few such words survive for long. Nonetheless, many words condemned by one generation as barbarianisms are accepted by their grandchildren. Slang words will survive if there is a good use for them. Words such as “shoofly”, “clam-jamphrie”, and “puckerstopple” are gone from daily conversation but “lousy”, “grub” (as food), “good night”, and “booze” still exist in the American language. Criminal cant is often considered slang but actually evolved as a code to prevent police and citizens from understanding them.

Mencken concludes with a look at the future of English. The British Empire spread it around the world and made it the universal language of commerce and science. Every foreign language borrowed words from it. The simplified grammar of English helped it spread, and its vocabulary, while rich and diversified, is also economical in writing sentences.

Mencken cites a study by Dr. Walter Kirkconnell, who counted the number of syllables in forty translations of the Gospel of Mark. The English version had 29,000 syllables, and the average for other Germanic languages was 32,650. Slavic languages averaged 36,500, Romance languages 40,200, and the Sanskrit group 43,100.

As the British Empire declined, the strengthening economic activity worldwide by Americans spread their version over the planet. Today the American language is the dominant form of English worldwide.

**Poetry And Language.**

Before the era of mechanical and electronic recordings, the pronunciation of words was a tough field of study for philology and linguistics. One cannot rely on current pronunciations for a guide, since they change from one generation to the next. The capital of England was once pronounced Lunnon though spelled London, and in our time Wednesday is pronounced Wensday but was originally Wodensday. Canada was originally Kanata, and the capital city of Ottawa is now Oddawa more often than not among Canadians.

There are two methods of determining how words were spoken centuries ago. Firstly, back then the spelling of words had not been fixed and were usually spelled phonetically. There may have been twenty spellings for a word but by studying those variations one can get a good idea as to what the consensus was. Another good method is studying poetry. Rhymes which today don't seem to rhyme probably did back then. Comparing how words were matched in couplets with other words gives an idea of how they were pronounced.

THAMYRIS: IS THERE A FUTURE FOR POETRY? (1925) by R.C. Trevelyan considers the evolution of poetry over time. Today poetry is almost entirely read, but in ancient times it was spoken or intoned, with gestures and dancing to reinforce the meaning. It was performed, not read silently.

The reciters commonly stressed words in a rhythmic pattern, not by the accent marks that would be used if read aloud like prose, but to get the equivalent of a drumbeat or bass rhythm pounding along with the words. Lines were stretched or compressed to maintain the rhythm. Syllables were slurred or added to make a line parse properly when intoned, even if the line was satisfactory as text. Words read as prose are monotonous, and the earliest reciters knew enough to vary them.

Trevelyan notes that most people reciting poems instinctively fall into a chanting mode. He writes: “*The commonest fault of bad speakers of verse on the stage is to emphasize individual words by raising the pitch, so destroying the music that is proper to verse, and incidently the rhythm too.*”

This is why I never go to author readings at science fiction conventions. Few if any authors know how to recite. They simply read the text as text. Their idea of intoning is to raise their voice to indicate action or tempestuous emotion.

The greatest change in poetry is that it is now seldom recited but almost always read as text. Nevermind the open-mike nights or poetry slams; those are staged by people who only listen to themselves and applaud the others with polite clapping just as the others did to them. Countless chapbooks of poetry are produced from academic or non-profit presses, reviewed once, and never re-read.

Trevelyan, writing in 1925 almost a century ago, said: *“Let us also honestly admit the truth that poetry has ceased to be a great popular and social art.”* Nothing has changed since his time.



A poet who wants his lyrics to reach the masses will set them to music and start a rock-and-roll band. John Lennon wrote some poetry that few people read save for rabid fans of the Beatles, but even the stuffiest Boomer can recognize or recite lyrics from his songs.

**And Now The Test.**

I hope you were paying attention, because some of this is on the final exam. I took these two photos below in the same skyscraper in downtown Calgary. Which sign is grammatically correct?



## WORLD WIDE PARTY ON JUNE 21

Founded by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21 every year. 2015 will be the 21st year of the WWP.

At 21h00 local time on June 21, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of the Papernet around the world. It is important to have it exactly at 21h00 your time. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. Rescheduling it to a club meeting or more convenient time negates the idea of a wave of celebration by SF fans and zinesters circling the globe. At 21h00, face to the east and salute those who have already celebrated. Then face north, then south, and toast those in your time zone who are celebrating as you do. Finally, face west and raise a glass to those who will celebrate WWP in the next hour.

Raise a glass, publish a one-shot, have a party, or do a mail art project for the WWP. Let me know how you celebrated the day.

## WHEN WORDS COLLIDE 2015

Calgary's annual readercon When Words Collide returns on the weekend of August 14 to 16, 2015, at a new and bigger location, the Delta Calgary South Hotel on Southland Drive SE, just east of Macleod Trail. There have been SF conventions at this hotel in previous years, and the building is a good venue. More details at: [www.whenwordscollide.org](http://www.whenwordscollide.org)

This is a literary convention designed to cross genres, with author Guests of Honour from fantasy, science, fiction, mystery, romance, and young adults. The convention has become very popular with literary agents, editors, and publishers, who take rooms for pitch sessions and private negotiations.

The panels are mostly literary but there is a strong science track. The dealer bourse is almost entirely small-press publishers and a couple of book dealers. The convention Website has some selected podcasts from previous years available as free mp3s at: <http://whenwordscollide.libsyn.com>

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com)]

FROM: Lloyd Penney  
Etobicoke, Ontario

2015-06-04

OPUNTIA 307: While I very much enjoyed the original TWILIGHT ZONE, I didn't care much for the original OUTER LIMITS. However, I really liked the newer OUTER LIMITS episodes, many of which were shot around the Vancouver area. When Yvonne and I were in Vancouver as Fan guests at VCon, the producers of THE OUTER LIMITS were having their prop sale. We were wishing to suddenly go out there and see what they were selling.

[I have a book about the original OUTER LIMITS which is a detailed history on an episode-by-episode basis about how the shows were scripted. Budget problems were bad enough but it was constant interference from network executives that caused major problems for the series.]

My previous letter; hobbyology is a good enough term. Examining these hobbies and why we just can't seem to get along. It is SF fandom, and many more interests, too.

I have to ask. Now that you've had your provincial election, and the Conservatives' iron grip on the province has finally been broken by the NDP, what do you think is next? Ontario's had an NDP government before; the party seems to do a better job when it is in opposition.

[Unfortunately it looks like Rachel Notley will do to Alberta what Bob Rae and his NDPers did to Ontario back when. Notley is acting as if she had a mandate from the people when in fact the two right-wing parties split the vote and allowed the NDP (labour-socialist) to come up the middle. She is going to raise the minimum wage to \$15/hour. Goodbye to youth employment. Why hire an untrained kid who will waste time texting his girlfriend when you can get an experienced retiree for the same cost. Fast-food outlets will just add \$1 to the price of a hamburger and stores will raise their prices, and the so-called living wage becomes a Red Queen's Race. Carbon taxes will slash Alberta's revenues, since the government depends on the oil patch for much of its income. Rent

controls have never worked anywhere else but she is talking about them, in which case, goodbye to low-cost suites and hello to key money. Notley has never worked in private industry and never had to meet a payroll, so she doesn't understand that eventually she will run out of other people's money.]

OPUNTIA 308: [Re: Calgary manhole covers] Every so often, I see a manhole cover that says Teleport, and pictures of these show up on Facebook. I guess they're disappointed that the covers don't actually work. I see Allstream covers, too, and they are a telecom. Our e-mail address was @allstream.net before they got rid of us, saying that they were going all-business, and disposing of their residential services.

OPUNTIA 309: I haven't gotten my hands on any more L.B. Greenwood Holmes pastiches, but what I did read was quite enjoyable. I hope future generations never forget Holmes, but I also hope they won't abuse him until he no longer resembles Conan Doyle's creation.

[Too late for that. Most pastiches over the last few decades seem to be based entirely on Sherlock Holmes movies, not the actual books.]

I know you don't participate, but the Aurora Award nominations have been released for this year, and both Yvonne and I are nominated, me for letters like this one, and Yvonne for the e-newsletter she sends around for local fannish pubnights. We are hopeful, and because the CanVention is in Toronto this year, we might even have the equivalent of home field advantage. Fingers are crossed.

[OPUNTIA won the Aurora Award in 2005 when Calgary was hosting CanVention, so I presume I had home field advantage. This year, 2015, it wasn't even nominated.]

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

[If you wonder why I use "et al" (meaning "and others", from Latin) in citing the literature, it is because very few papers are published anymore by one or two authors. As an example, the item below had 64 co-authors with Allentoft.]

Allentoft, M.E., et al (2015) **Population genomics of Bronze Age Eurasia.** NATURE 522:167-183

Authors' abstract: "*The Bronze Age of Eurasia (around 3000–1000 BC) was a period of major cultural changes. However, there is debate about whether these changes resulted from the circulation of ideas or from human migrations, potentially also facilitating the spread of languages and certain phenotypic traits. We investigated this by using new, improved methods to sequence low-coverage genomes from 101 ancient humans from across Eurasia. We show that the Bronze Age was a highly dynamic period involving large-scale population migrations and replacements, responsible for shaping major parts of present-day demographic structure in both Europe and Asia. Our findings are consistent with the hypothesized spread of Indo-European languages during the Early Bronze Age. We also demonstrate that light skin pigmentation in Europeans was already present at high frequency in the Bronze Age, but not lactose tolerance, indicating a more recent onset of positive selection on lactose tolerance than previously thought.*"

Munoz, S.E., et al (2015) **Cahokia's emergence and decline coincided with shifts of flood frequency on the Mississippi River.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 112:6319–6324

Authors' abstract: "*Here we establish the timing of major flood events of the central Mississippi River over the last 1,800 y, using floodwater sediments deposited in two floodplain lakes. Shifts in the frequency of high magnitude floods are mediated by moisture availability over midcontinental North America and correspond to the emergence and decline of Cahokia, a major late prehistoric settlement in the Mississippi River floodplain. The absence of large floods from A.D. 600 to A.D. 1200 facilitated agricultural intensification, population growth, and settlement expansion across the floodplain that are associated with the emergence of Cahokia as a regional center around A.D. 1050. The return of large floods after A.D. 1200, driven by waning*

*midcontinental aridity, marks the onset of sociopolitical reorganization and depopulation that culminate in the abandonment of Cahokia and the surrounding region by A.D. 1350. Shifts in the frequency and magnitude of flooding may be an underappreciated but critical factor in the formation and dissolution of social complexity in early agricultural societies."*

**Bakshy, E., et al (2015) Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook. SCIENCE 348:1130-1132**

*Authors' abstract: "Exposure to news, opinion, and civic information increasingly occurs through social media. How do these online networks influence exposure to perspectives that cut across ideological lines? Using deidentified data, we examined how 10.1 million U.S. Facebook users interact with socially shared news. We directly measured ideological homophily in friend networks and examined the extent to which heterogeneous friends could potentially expose individuals to cross-cutting content. We then quantified the extent to which individuals encounter comparatively more or less diverse content while interacting via Facebook's algorithmically ranked News Feed and further studied users' choices to click through to ideologically discordant content. Compared with algorithmic ranking, individuals' choices played a stronger role in limiting exposure to cross-cutting content. ..."*

*"This changing environment has led to speculation around the creation of "echo chambers" (in which individuals are exposed only to information from like-minded individuals) and "filter bubbles" (in which content is selected by algorithms according to a viewer's previous behaviors), which are devoid of attitude-challenging content. ..."*

*"Despite the differences in what individuals consume across ideological lines, our work suggests that individuals are exposed to more cross-cutting discourse in social media than they would be under the digital reality envisioned by some. Rather than people browsing only ideologically aligned news sources or opting out of hard news altogether, our work shows that social media expose individuals to at least some ideologically crosscutting viewpoints. Of course, we do not pass judgment on the normative value of crosscutting exposure. Although normative scholars often argue that exposure to a diverse "marketplace of ideas" is key to a healthy democracy, a number of studies have found that exposure to cross-cutting viewpoints is associated with lower levels of political participation. Regardless, our work suggests that the power to*

*expose oneself to perspectives from the other side in social media lies first and foremost with individuals."*

**Mareka, P.E. and W. Moore (2015) Discovery of a glowing millipede in California and the gradual evolution of bioluminescence in Diplopoda. PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 112:6419–6424**

*Authors' abstract: "The rediscovery of the Californian millipede *Xystocheir bistipita* surprisingly reveals that the species is bioluminescent. Using molecular phylogenetics, we show that *X. bistipita* is the evolutionary sister group of *Motyxia*, the only genus of New World bioluminescent millipedes. We demonstrate that bioluminescence originated in the group's most recent common ancestor and evolved by gradual, directional change through diversification. Because bioluminescence in *Motyxia* has been experimentally demonstrated to be aposematic, forewarning of the animal's cyanide-based toxins, these results are contrary to aposematic theory and empirical evidence that a warning pattern cannot evolve gradually in unpalatable prey. However, gradual evolution of a warning pattern is plausible if faint light emission served another function and was co-opted as an aposematic signal later in the diversification of the genus. Luminescence in *Motyxia* stem-group taxa may have initially evolved to cope with reactive oxygen stress triggered by a hot, dry environment and was repurposed for aposematism by high-elevation crown-group taxa colonizing new habitats with varying levels of predation."*