

Watching one's big Ps and Qs

The April '92 issue (p.58) has a letter from Humphrey Evans, 'Hitting the Big Time', that contains a common misuse of *Big Muddy*. The silt-laden *Missouri* River is the *Big Muddy*. The Mississippi river, from its beginnings in northwestern Minnesota to St. Louis, Missouri is clear. It is only after the Missouri River joins and blends with it here that the Mississippi becomes muddy, but even then it is not referred to as *Big Muddy*. Its sobriquet is *Ole Man River*. *Big D* refers to Dallas, Texas, unless the context, as in Mr. Evans' letter, indicates otherwise. No one in the office has heard Los Angeles referred to as the *Big Orange* (Florida might take umbrage and Texas might revolt, both of them being large citrus producers).

Jacquelyn S. Goodwin,
Omnigraphics, Inc.,
Old Saybrook, Connecticut,
U.S.A.

Hyperglossia?

Dear Ed/Editor/Sir/Tom/Tom McArthur/Mr McArthur/English Today: I have used/employed all the above/abovementioned names/titles/epithets purposefully. They are examples to demonstrate that English is not merely diglossic or even triglossic as proposed/suggested/put forward (in *ET*28, Oct 91) by Alan S. Kaye, Professor of Linguistics, Arabic and Hebrew and

Readers' letters are welcomed. *ET* policy is to publish as representative and informative a selection as possible in each issue. Such correspondence, however, may be subjected to editorial adaptation in order to make the most effective use of both the letters and the space available.

Director of the Phonetics Research Laboratory at California State University, Fullerton (biographic-note description)/ Professor Alan S. Kaye (possible introduction at a conference)/ Professor Kaye! (as a student might call to attract his attention) /Prof. (as a less formal student might address him)/Alan (as his wife and friends perhaps call him)/Daddy (as, for all I know, his children might put it; or 'Dad', 'Pop(s)', Pappy, Father, Pater?); no, English, every bit as much as Arabic, is polyglossic.

Frederick George Robinson/
F.G. Robinson/
Fred Robinson/Fred,
Glasgow, Scotland

'Official' PC

I noted from your editorial in the January 92 issue that you are collecting 'PC' usages. Just in case you haven't come across it yet, there's a new book out about that remarkable phenomenon. (Well, yes, I realize there are lots of books about it.) This is one that I bought a few weeks ago in California and am enjoying immensely. It's *The Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook* by Henry Beard and Christopher Cerf, Villard Books, New York, N.Y. 10022, c. 1992. It's a very tongue-in-cheek approach (bookstores sell it in their 'humor' section), but nevertheless is 'scholarly' enough to include hundreds of footnotes of its sources.

It warns that we are 'in danger of being written off as hopelessly ableist. Ageist. Ethnocentric or Eurocentric. Hegemonic. Heterosexist, logocentric, lookist, patriarchal, or phallogocentric. Racist, sexist, sizeist, or speciesist. Or - worse still! - all of the above.' To be a wife is to be a 'domestic incarceration sur-

vivor' and to be dead is to be 'terminally inconvenienced'.

I enjoy *English Today* very much. Thanks and best wishes for future success!

Karen Kreibohm,
Berlin, Germany

For who the cap fits

If the Editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* was rapped over the knuckles for the headline 'To he who may conserve' (*ET*29, Jan 92, p. 34), maybe the Editor of the *Daily Telegraph* will have something to say about the enclosed?

Adrian Room,
Stamford, Lincolnshire, England

Editor: We could not fit in the wide lead-in which Mr Room enclosed with his letter. However, it runs: 'Yachting/With the start of the British Steel around-the-world race only five months away, *Michael Calvin* reports that what might have seemed a good idea at the time is becoming a chilling reality for he and his fellow volunteers.'

Unfair comment, unfair revision

Before accusing Fowler of inconsistency (in 'Fowler and fouler?'),

One across

Ali may be a great man,
Ali may be a fizzle.
Whatever Ali has been,
Whatever Ali is'll
Matter little and, in truth,
Nothing that he does'll
Change the way he's needed to
Complete a crossword puzzle.

Alma Denny,
New York

ET30, Apr 92), your contributor Thirunarayanan Sriraman should have checked his facts. After quoting Fowler as condemning the use of a singular verb with 'one of', Sriraman asserts that on page 476 of his *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* Fowler himself employs it in the passage 'Prestige is one of the few words that has had an experience . . .'

Finding it hard to believe that Fowler could have been guilty of such shoddy writing, I went to my library, and this is what I found. The shoddy passage quoted by Sriraman does not appear at all in the original 1926 edition. It was inserted in the revised edition of 1965 by its editor Sir Ernest Gowers.

It is monstrously unfair to

Fowler to accuse him of inconsistency because of the slipshod work of the man who, thirty-two years after Fowler's death, took it upon himself to revise (some would say bowdlerise) his dictionary.

Alec Bristow,
Eye, Suffolk, England

CROSSWORD

ET31 CrossworLd Solution

1	B	A	C	K	3	S	T	4	A	G	5	E	6	A	D	7	D	E	8	R
	L		O		L		R		S		N		E		O					
9	I	R	O	N	I	N	G	10	C	H	A	P	E	A	U					
	N		L		D		O		A		L		P		T					
11	D	I	A	L	E	C	T	O	L	O	G	I	S	T						
	S		N						I		E		E		12	V				
13	P	A	T	O	14	I	S	15	S	E	A	S	C	A	P	E				
	O		M		16	W			R		I				R					
17	T	H	E	S	P	I	A	N	18	J	A	R	20	G	O	N				
	S		C		E		T							E		A				
		21	C	H	A	R	A	C	T	22	E	R	23	I	S	T	I	C		
24	C		O		F		H			A		S		W		U				
25	A	N	I	S	E	E	D			26	R	E	S	P	E	L	L			
	N		N		C		O			N		U		L		A				
27	T	I	G	H	T		28	G	O	S	P	E	L	L	E	R				

ET30 CrossworLd winners

The winners of the paperback *Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, edited by Ian Ousby, the prize for our April 1992 crossword, are:

Professor John Edwards, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada
Mrs Maria Fonseca Parker, Valladolid, Spain
E.M. Race, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, England
Mrs R. Zimmer, Eye, Suffolk, England
David L. Seymour, London, England



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done for me recently?'" (George Bush, *defending his accomplishments as president* (from 'Overheard', *Newsweek*, 13 Jul 92)

The viropause

[Dr Malcolm] Carruthers believes that men can suffer a 'viropause', due to the failure of the body's naturally occurring testosterone to reach the parts it used to, which corresponds to the female menopause. Viropausal men, he claims, can suffer the same symptoms as

menopausal women: depression, hot flushes, lack of energy and sex drive, night sweats, and circulatory problems. (From Sean Langan, 'Male menopause? Take a pill', *The Sunday Times*, 28 June 92)

Secondary virginity

How should schools teach sex education? There is the wrath-of-heaven (or points south) approach, there is the silent treatment; in some precincts, there is even full disclosure. Now

come jingles. *Don't be a louse, wait for your spouse! . . . Do the right thing, wait for the ring! . . . Pet your dog, not your date!* These are the pro-abstinence messages of the junior-high school textbook, 'Sex Respect', used in 1,600 school districts nationwide . . . The workbooks are arresting. They include concepts such as 'secondary virginity,' which calls for sexually active teens to abstain from future premarital relations. (From 'A Battle Over Teaching Sex Ed', *Newsweek*, 1 Jul 91)