

TAILPIECES

ENGLISH ... AS SHE IS SPOKE

HUGHES MULLIGAN

This is our first seminar in obverse English in the current term. Classes please come to order.

Obverse English as you may know, is the splendidly individualised speech form that turns every cliché into a verbal banana peel, so that we end up with a fly in the oatmeal and a monkey wrench in the cookie jar.

From Canada, we begin today a lecture with a really world-class entry that fell twisted and broken from the lips of Mr Bob Thompson, a much-quoted politician: 'If this idea ever catches fire, it will snowball all across the land'.

Mr Thompson's style is reminiscent of Sir Boyle Roche, the logician in the old Irish Parliament, who apologised for missing a committee meeting because of a prior speaking engagement. 'Not being a bird', he told Parliament, 'I can't be in two places at once'. He brought down the House one day with: 'The cup of Ireland's sorrows has been overflowing for centuries and isn't full yet'.

It was Sir Boyle who thundered out the memorable 'Damn posterity, what's posterity ever done for us?'

Or, as a member of the Louisiana House once phrased a similar question: 'What will our future forefathers say?'

Recently I heard of a stern old German nun who made her parochial school third-grades clean off their desks every morning with a damp paper towel. 'First ve vill make dem shpick', she ordained

'unt den ve vill make dem shpan '.

In the glory days of baseball star Yogi Berra, the Yankee dugout was often littered with fractured phrases.

When the loudspeaker announced one day that only 9 000 were in attendance for a game against the last place club, Yogi philosophised: 'If fans don't want to come out and see the games, you can't stop them'.

He is supposed to have said of his favourite steakhouse near Yankee Stadium: 'You'd have to go a long way to find a restaurant this close'.

Charles Laughton once proudly announced in the Gresham Hotel bar that he had come to Dublin to do a one-man show. 'That's grand', said the barman, 'Who's in it?' Touring Ireland this past summer, I heard the story of a grizzled old farmer in County Armagh who was anxiously awaiting his brother's return from America after an absence of 42 years.

'I'm not sure I'll recognise him after all this time', the farmer worried out loud to his cronies at the Crossroads Pub, 'but he'll know me all right'.

'How will he know you?' the publican took the bait.
'Well, I haven't been away'.

Then there was the young Irish missionary, back from his first three-year tour in Africa, making an emotional appeal in his home parish in Tipperary, 'For shoes for the footless children of Swaziland'.

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TWO PILES OF TRIPE TO THE 'ANENT' ADDICTS

A.B. HUGHES

In England there is an annual competition to discover the best example of gibberish or gobbledegook.

The contest is run by the Plain English Campaign in conjunction with the National Consumer Council and the prize for the winner is a parcel of the best Lancashire tripe.

If I were to win this competition by any chance I would welcome the prize and eat it hot with onions and white sauce. It's