



Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English: Colloquialisms, and Catch-Phrases, Solecisms and Catachresis, Nicknames, and Vulgarisms

Eric Partridge

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Wordslinger Eric Partridge intended his dictionary to be a "humble companion" to the *Oxford English Dictionary*--a ribald companion is more like it! In Partridge's domain, a *gentleman's pleasure-garden* has little to do with the horticultural, referring as it does to the *genitalia muliebria*. On the other hand, *play pussy* is a Royal Air Force term meaning "to take advantage of cloud cover," and since the 1970s British forces have called intelligence operatives *secret squirrels*. And so it goes.

There is enough slang, cant ("i.e., language of the underworld"), and expletives here for all takers--there's low, Cockney rhyming, "picturesque Australian similes," society phrases, and even the semiproverbial. Dorothy Wordsworth, of all people, used *a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse*--a phrase "applied to a covert yet comprehensible hint, though often stupidity is implied."

Partridge also reveals low language's less larky side. His book can be a dark record of linguistic prejudice through the ages. Of course, in a slang dictionary, nothing is what it seems. *Elevated* means "drunk"; a *deep-freezer* is "a girl or woman of the prim or keep-off-me type"; and *stage fright* is late-20th-century rhyming slang for "a (glass of) light (ale)." Are you able to descry what the jocular *Seduce my ancient footwear* really means? If not, consider consulting Partridge's masterwork, *as large as life and twice as natural*.

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