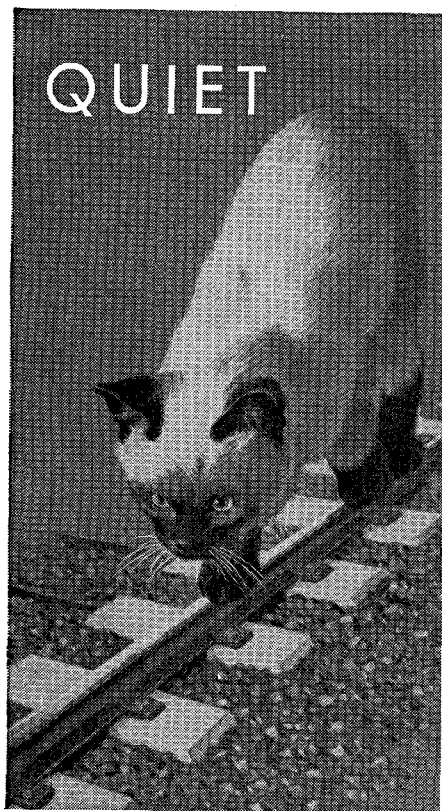


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## THE PHOENIX NEST

Edited by Martin Levin

### Why Why? Why Not Wye?

**D**URING the last year I have been engaging in a spirited campaign aimed at spelling reform. My efforts have not been so extensive as those of such dedicated revolutionists as George Bernard Shaw and Theodore Roosevelt. Shaw was fond of pointing out that if we clung to the old ways, the proper way to spell *fish* would be *ghoti*. The *f* sound is spelled as in *rough*, the *i* as in *women*, and the *sh* as in *nation*. *Ghoti* er cut bait.

Teddy Roosevelt bellowed wantonly for simplified spelling. When Taft succeeded him in the White House, the New York *Sun* observed the departure of T.R. with a one-word editorial: **THRU.**

H. L. Mencken never espoused spelling reform, but he had a great relish for bizarre usages. In one of his books on *The American Language* he called attention to a sentence spoken by a woman in the Ozarks, a sentence Mencken himself sometimes quoted in conversation. This Missouri woman, wife of a hillbilly investment banker and a very proper lady in her community, once addressed her teen-age daughter in public: "Git a rag an' snot that young-un." Don't look at *me*. It's part of authentic American folklore and may one day be set to guitar music.

My own campaign is directed against a single word: *why*. Why should *why* be spelled w-h-y when it is used to indicate a sort of pause, or a moment taken for thought; when its definition is, in fact: er, uh, ah, weh-ull, question mark along here somewhere? As in such a sentence as, "Why, I wouldn't know about that." Or, "Why, I'll try to do it for you if you can wait a few days."

Whywise, why should *why* be spelled w-h-y when it is used as an expletive at the beginning of a sentence, as meaning *lawdy*, *gosh*, *zounds*, *egad*? As in, "Why, bless my soul, here he comes now!" Or "Why, I'll thrash him within an inch of his miserable life!"

Every time I write the word *why* in either of these contexts, I die a little. It goes against the grain. I see the thing from the viewpoint of the reader, of whom I am one of which. To me, when a sentence begins with the word *why*, my razor-sharp mind usually advises me that a question is on the way. All too often it ain't.

### Proverbs and Adverbs

It is my recommendation, then, that the word be spelled *wy*, or *w'y*, or best of all, *wye*. It would read better.

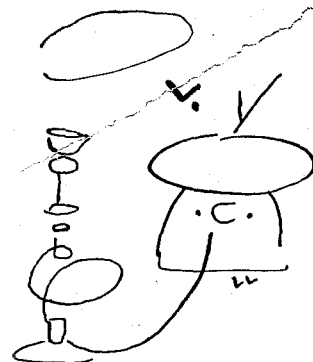
I hope to win this campaign and have my reform accepted by the end of 1964. Next year I'm going after that beggar *mulct*. Just look at it! Ought to be forbidden by law. —H. ALLEN SMITH.

### A Bird in Hand— What's It Worth?

**W**HEN your own backyard is smack-up against the city of Washington, D.C., as ours is, it's pretty hard to keep from wondering what's happening on the other side of the fence, and especially behind the impressive doors of the magnificent mansions along Embassy Row. Yet, in two decades of living almost next door to all these foreign dignitaries, I'd never met any of them to speak of, or to, with the exception of one time when my car locked bumpers with that of a Far Eastern gentleman in a race for the same parking place.

It wasn't until one day over lunch in a Chinese restaurant that I got the courage to do anything about this omission. My fortune cookie produced a slip of paper upon which was written, "Take what you've got and never want more."

I called the Chinese Embassy and asked the young lady who answered



exactly what that meant. Did they really have such a proverb? She replied, between giggles, that the fortune cookie didn't lie; it was indeed an old Chinese proverb, and similar in meaning to our "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." I told her I was so glad that we had something in common and thanked her. She told me to "call any time."

It was then that I decided to find out if the rest of the world had this proverb in common with us. It would be a start, anyway, in neighborly relations.

I had no trouble in my quest at the Spanish Embassy. When I asked for the

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**Wrong turn:** Trust your infallible good luck.

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Spanish version of "A bird, etc.," the bright but highly amused young woman came up immediately with, "*Mas vale pajarito en mano que cien volando.*" Any Spaniard knows that that means "Better to have one in hand than a hundred flying."

On to Nepal. With all they've got to worry about these days, maybe they'd welcome a little cheerful diversion. I was glad I called. Not at first, but later on. I explained my mission to the first woman who answered. She asked "Who is this?" and then, "Whom are you with?" Finally, I managed to convince her that I wasn't some gung-ho ornithologist who was flying high and she turned me over to another woman. In tones ringing on the highest decibels of annoyance, she demanded another full explanation and then deposited the entire problem in the lap of a pleasant, cordial gentleman who *did* sound as though this might be the brightest spot in his day. He told me that Nepal assuredly did have such a proverb, and did I want it in Nepalese? I told him that English would do, and he informed me that in Nepal the prudent folk say, "A blind maternal uncle is better than none at all."

Well, I knew all this international good will was too good to last, because I really came up against it at the French Embassy. The woman to whom I addressed my question about "A bird, etc." was extremely excitable and gave me a verbal blast in rapid-fire French. We parted on questionable terms.

After the French debacle, I turned north to Scandinavia, where tempers are cooler. They are all pretty much in accord and claim that "A bird in the hand is worth two in the woods . . . or on the roof . . . or in the tree." Take your pick.

The folk in Iraq and the Somali Republic, although not exactly Scandinavians, have the same proverb.

A very courteous lady at the German Embassy told me that in Germany they feel that "The sparrow in the hand is better than the pigeon on the roof."

The Japanese say that it would be better not to pursue two rabbits when you already have one in your hand, or you may lose all.

At the Embassy of Ireland, a charming gentleman with one of those O-apostrophe names felt that "sure the great wealth of Irish culture could produce a similar proverb." He took my number and called back the following morning to tell me that in Ireland "A trout in the hand is better than a salmon in the pool."

Next I called Greece. I was jostled upward through the chain of command to a gentleman of cultural substance. In Greece, he told me, they say, "It's better

(Continued on page 24)

SR/February 22, 1964



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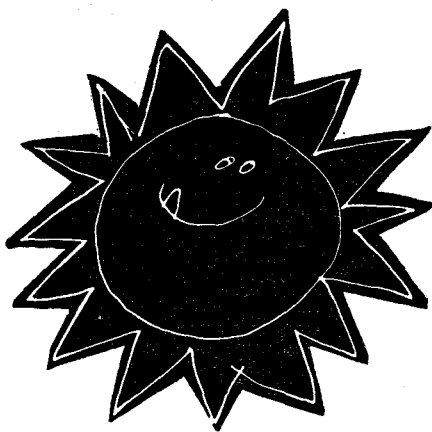


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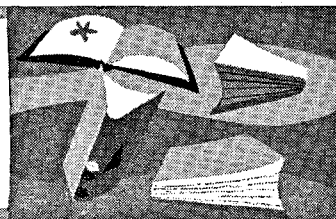
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## Trade Winds



**Glendon Swarthout**, author of *Where the Boys Are*, *They Came to Cordura*, and most recently *The Cadillac Cowboys* (Random House), sat at the speaker's table at the recent Phoenix, Arizona, book-and-author luncheon. But not a single spoonful of tomato aspic was thrown at him by any of the 575 elegantly wrapped ladies there, despite the fact that *The Cadillac Cowboys* virtually cuts Phoenix social life to confetti with its satire.

At the same luncheon, actor-author Sterling Hayden (*Wanderer*, Knopf) rose up and thundered in no uncertain terms that he thought the American-dream materialism represented by the audience and by the Phoenix way of life was equaled only by its passive acceptance of the John Birch syndrome.

**The outspoken authors**, and the fact that the Phoenix audience would tolerate them, were indicative of some significant changes in Arizona manners and morals. Also significant was the fact that the luncheon was sponsored by the Phoenix *Republic*, a paper that until February 2 had among its syndicated columnists only such conservative writers as William Buckley, Jr., and David Lawrence. Now, however, the *Republic* has taken on, among others, James Reston, Art Buchwald, and Walter Lippmann, and has subscribed to the *New York Times* News Service. As Glendon Swarthout says, "February 2nd is the day the cowboy took off his boots."

**That's the way** it is out in Goldwater country these days. Dichotomy and contrast are evident everywhere you look. As we swung through Phoenix's lavish environs, we couldn't help noticing that the swimming pools surrounding Camelback Mountain could, if tilted sufficiently, reflect in their shimmering surfaces a picture of Indian squalor. And at the book-and-author bench, the Barry Goldwater fans could sit, listen to, and even applaud two men whose books had ripped them apart.

**For example**, even though his book is fiction, Mr. Swarthout points out that in Mr. Goldwater's native grounds only 15 per cent of the land is privately owned and that 85 per cent belongs to federal, state, county government—and the Indians. He further points out that Mr. Goldwater's state is more dependent on federal funds than any other state

except Alaska. It accepted almost \$1 billion last year. But it contributes less than half of that in taxes.

**Arizona has not**, however, been unkind to the creative writer. It has, for example, embraced Thornton Wilder and Joseph Wood Krutch. We visited with Mr. Krutch briefly in Tucson, where he pointed out that his ranch-house had suddenly been surrounded by three housing developments.

"I have seen signs," he told us, "that read 'Help Tucson Grow.' I have a scheme ready to change them to read 'Keep Tucson Small.'"

But this is hard to do in a state that skyrocketed Del Webb, a carpenter, to an \$80,000,000 fortune, beginning on the day a supermarket builder picked him to replace a construction foreman. Today Mr. Webb is not only co-owner of the New York Yankees, but is also multiplying retirement colonies, called "Sun Cities," by logarithms. A young lady from Yuma said she saw six cream-colored Lincoln Continentals at a restaurant, each with a label reading: "Del Webb, Inc." When they buy company cars out here, they don't skimp.

**When Mr. Swarthout drove us** around Phoenix, we were able to note a few more of the things that parallel those he so skilfully quotes as fiction in his book: a roadhouse with a sign reading "Steak and Champagne"; a new house under construction in Paradise Valley that will have a heated swimming pool for the servants and kennels for fourteen dogs with, of all things, electronic toilets that will flush automatically when used.

There is an exuberance about Arizona that knocks an Easterner off his feet. And it is becoming more evident every day.

—JOHN G. FULLER.

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With some notable exceptions — whose names survive and are regarded with affection in Ireland today—the successive owners of the soil of Ireland regarded it merely as a source from which to extract as much money as possible. The absentee landlord was common.