

Eloquent profanity

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 09 May 1998

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Gordon Brain — 09 May 1998, 16:35

Michael,

As promised, here are my comments on your draft booklet LS-2, Languages Of The Long Sun Whorl, V0, for what they're worth. Some of the Cant is fairly obvious to anyone in Britain as it's still in common use over here (e.g. shag, snaffle, twig, sprats) but others are more obscure and quite a few still have me stumped! I'll keep trying though, and let you know if I manage to figure out any others.

Ag'in - from the context (III, 103) I'd say this was 'again' (not 'arguing'). I think this and 'Sojer', (from the same sentence) aren't really Cant, they're just describing Captain Dace's (and others') pronunciation of these words.

(doesn't make a) bad bit's difference - 'Makes no difference'. From bit as in small coin worth 12.5 cents (i.e. one eighth of a dollar - related to 'piece of eight' = old Spanish dollar ?), survives in phrase 'two bit ...' meaning cheap, not worth much. Bad bit = counterfeit small coin, so worth even less.

Beat the hoof - meaning 'beat it, 'hoofed it', ran, departed, made a sharp exit.

Beggar's root - expensive addictive drug according to text, probably so called because it's addiction is financially ruinous, reducing users to the status of beggars in order to finance their habit.

Bet the basket - bet the lot, bet your bottom dollar. (Cf. fisc below - Latin fiscus = rush basket, purse, treasury).

Boilin' - hot, i.e. stolen.

Treat him brick and he treats you stone = like for like, deal fairly with him and he'll deal fairly with you.

Crank - "(Naut.) liable to capsize; weak, shaky." (Concise Oxford Dictionary).

Cull, Cully - a man, especially a foolish one

Cully bird - bird which can talk like a man?

Done for = killed (similar to the meaning you gave for 'Do for')

Fisc -public treasury (of ancient Rome) (Concise Oxford Dictionary)

Flash cull, flash buck - streetwise, aware individual - someone who's 'on the ball'.

Flipper - hand

Flue – "smoke duct in chimney, channel for conveying heat, esp hot air passage in wall, tube for heating water ..." (COD) seems more appropriate source for a slang term for 'anus' than the sources you quote.

Fly – "(sl.) knowing, wide awake" (COD), aware.

Froggies = Hoppies, the Civil Guard

Gipon (III, 118) – [not in LS-2, v0] – "a tunic, frequently worn under the hauberk" (SOED)

Hoppies – I had originally thought this might be something to do with 'hoplites', but probably not, given the frog allusion in the text.

Hornbuss – fellate?

Hornbussing – fellatio?

Lay – a job (esp. criminal job, e.g. a robbery)

Queering a lay (II, 204)– spoiling a job

Queer lay (III, 286) – a job gone wrong

Setting this lay up – arranging this job

That's your lay, not mine (I, 309)– that's your job not mine

Nicker – talk, blab, squeal — (as in horses nickering?)

Plate to me, bait to you – 'Bait' can also mean 'food' (still used this way in N.E. England), hence "I'll get the plate, you get the food on it", we'll both profit. Of course there is also the meaning of material to lure, which is equally valid in the context here – thus a deliberate play on words by Auk.

Quill – pure quill = the best

Quits – "we're quits" = we're even (NOT we're done).

Rollin' him over to hoppy – turning him in to the Guards.

Scut – a rabbit's tail

Send sprats to Scylla – sacrifice children to Scylla

Shag up = f**k up

Shaggy = f**king (general purpose expletive)

Snaffle = take, steal

Sprats – kids, children

Solve – "to loosen, to break" (SOED), hence break into, burgle, rob ?

Stir it - move

Twig - to notice, realise

Twigged – noticed

Whin – furze or gorse, also applied to other prickly or thorny shrubs (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary) – hence slang for sword or blade?

Finally, a nice little quote I found:

"Tis no Disparagement to understand the Canting Terms: It may chance to save your Throat from being cut, or, (at least) your Pocket from being Pick'd."

Elisha Coles (1676)

All the best,

Gordon

m.driussi — 12 May 1998, 02:31 · follows Gordon Brain

Brain,

Thanks for the feedback on LS-2!

We're on the lookout for as much textual confirmation (entries in slang dictionaries, like Partridge's) as possible, but we also need the "sense of" which I left out in the majority of entries (war between laziness and ignorance).

(Then again, I can't believe I didn't find "Crank" in my =own= OED; that's why many eyes is better than one.)

"Done for," right. I suppose we should say, "see `Do for'"? Arrange main entries by infinitive form.

How to organize all the LAY material?

Hornbuss, Hornbussing, Hornboy . . . all very interesting when we much later (in the fourth book) learn that the narrator's name is . . . Horn. Makes ya wonder.

=mantis=