

Of ships and snarks and sealing-wax, and presidents and things

N. David Mermin is a professor of physics in New York State, who has written about low-temperature physics and the foundations of quantum theory. He is not, so far as I know, especially interested in linguistics, language teaching, or the other matters that concern readers of *ET*, yet he must be included among language enthusiasts.

Lewis Carroll was a mathematician who gave a great deal to the English language and its literature. Edward Lear, a painter, did the same, in a tradition of 'nonsense' writing often assumed to be particularly English and eccentric.

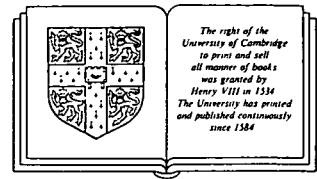
Recently I asked Cambridge University Press to let me see a copy of David Mermin's latest book, entitled *Boojums All The Way Through*. The title intrigued me, because it blended a phrase from a tale of turtles told about the philosopher William James and the name of a Carrollian snark. The book is a collection of papers on physics, the quantum theory, relativity, and mathematics: not a place where boojums usually gambol. The first paper, however, was called 'E pluribus boojum', a phrase that combines the motto of the USA with another (or the same) snark. It is reproduced here almost in toto, with Professor Mermin's blessing. We would both welcome readers' responses.

Another departure concerns an appendix to Sylvia Chalker's review of a new grammar book from Collins. Many people, I suspect, would welcome an easy-to-consult glossary of contemporary English grammatical terms, as provided at the start of *Collins COBUILD English Grammar*. I have, with permission, reproduced it in its six-page entirety in this issue. Again, we would be interested in readers' comments.

Elsewhere in *ET* 24 articles range from the syntax of the US President, through English in Malaysia and Newfoundland, by way of heteronyms, eco-greenery, and *gaijin*, to the latest etymorphs, bilingual poetry, Aboriginal terms like *cuz* and *half-father*, and such neologisms as *steamulated* and *publicophobia*. Mermin's boojum is in good company.

Tom McArthur

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English Today (ISSN 0266-0784) is a quarterly. ISBN 0 521 39910 6

UNITED KINGDOM:

Publisher: Cambridge University Press, Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2RU. Telephone (0223) 312393

Subscriptions: the current annual subscription price for four issues for libraries and institutions is £34 in UK, £37 elsewhere; £17 for individuals; £13 for students and the retired; airmail £8 per year extra. Apply to Paul Driver.

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USA AND CANADA:

Publisher: Cambridge University Press, 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011. Telephone (212) 924 3900.

Subscriptions: the current annual subscription price in USA and Canada for libraries and institutions is \$59; \$27 for individuals; \$20 for students and the retired; Copies are air-freighted to New York to arrive with minimum delay. Apply to Janet DeSandre.

Promotion: write to Harry Florentine at the above address.

Advertising Sales: write to Michelle Alumkal at the above address.

Second class postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: send address changes in USA and Canada to *English Today*, Cambridge University Press, 110 Midland Avenue, Port Chester, New York, NY 10573.

Letters to the Editor: write to Dr Tom McArthur, Editor, *English Today*, 22-23 Ventress Farm Court, Cherry Hinton Road, Cambridge CB1 4HD, UK.

Typeset by Goodfellow & Egan. Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge