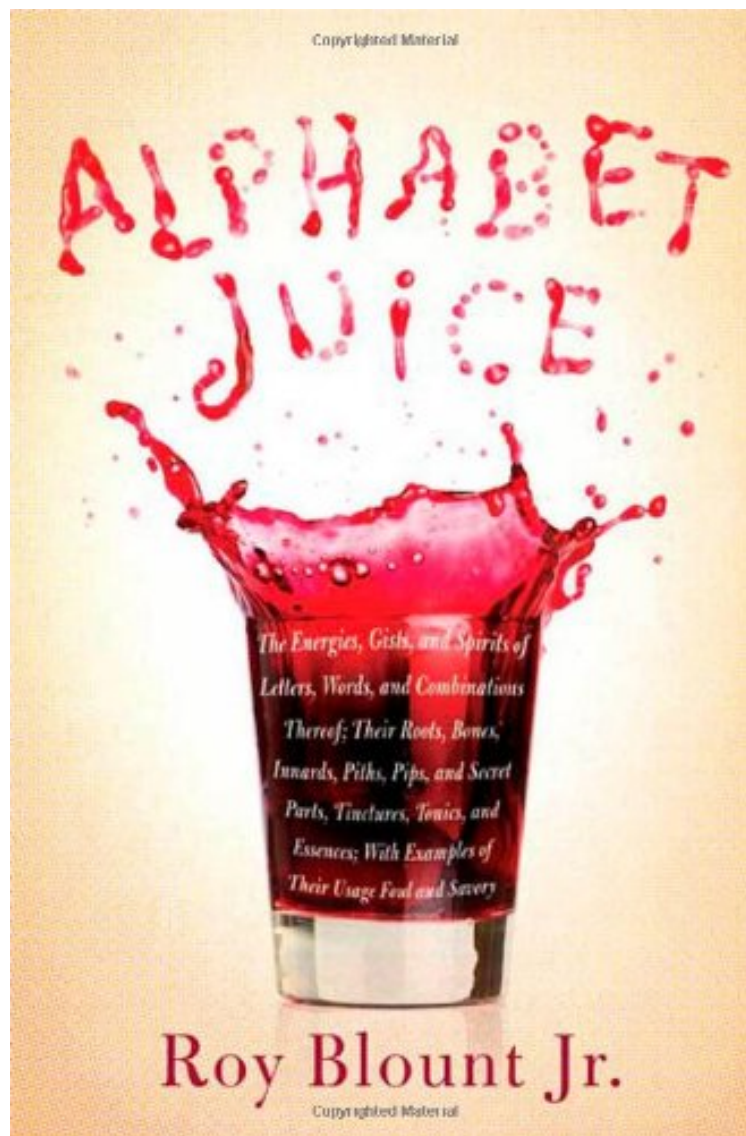


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Roy Blount Jr.

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before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Alphabet Juice: The Energies, Gists, and Spirits of Letters, Words, and Combinations Thereof; Their Roots, Bones, Innards, Piths, Pips, and Secret ... With Examples of Their Usage Foul and Savory*:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. *alphabet cornucopia* By L. Pearl I must have at least a half dozen books on language, with titles like *The Word Museum*, *Words and Phrases Origins*, *Word Play* and *Words at Play*. But somehow I've never quite had the urge to dig into them. Then I saw a thumbnail review of *Alphabet Juice* in the NY Times book review. Something in the review (or perhaps the name of the book) grabbed me. Jotting down examples I could share with my book group I came up with 14 separate right-on comments. The first one, in the Introduction, before tackling each letter of the alphabet, was this: "I do hope you realize that every time you use disinterested to mean uninterested an angel dies..." and then there was the Kinky Friedman quote: "Never try to climb a fence leaning toward you or kiss a woman leaning away from you." As others have pointed out this is not a book to be read over a weekend. However, I found it perfect for my several weekly rides on Metro, Washington's subway. If you love words and take this in small doses I'm sure you'll find at least as many favorite quotes and references as I did.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *An idiosyncratic examination of "usage foul and savory"* By Robert Morris Normally, when I encounter a book whose subtitle consists of 32 words, I am reluctant to read it but that was not true of *Alphabet Juice* because I have read most of Roy Blount Jr.'s 20 previously published books and many of his articles. Accompanying Blount on any of his literary escapades always suggests to me what it would be like to be part of an exploration group co-led by Huckleberry Finn, Lewis Carroll, and Bill Bryson. That was especially true as I began to read *Alphabet Juice* in which Blount delivers everything promised in the book's 32-word subtitle. The material is organized within the framework of the alphabet as he wanders through hundreds of words and phrases, sharing his thoughts about them and anything he associates with them. True to form, in what presumably is his introduction, he immediately discusses the relationship between a word and its meaning, cites Steven Pinker's observation that pigs go "oink oink" in English and "chrjo chrjo" in Russian, adds his own observation that baby chicks go "peep peep" in English and "piyo piyo" in Japanese, and shifts his attention to various mispronunciations of other words. With regard to the book's title, Blount explains that "*Alphabet Juice* is my glossographia. Juice as in au jus, juju, power, electricity. (Loose words and clauses left lying around are like loose live wires - they'll short-circuit, burn out, disempower your lights.)" Then he shifts his attention to "a woman walking down the street wearing some highly low-cut shorts," adds a "Note" about the use of boldface and explains abbreviations of reference books frequently used before entering A, the first of 26 stops during his journey of exploration throughout a world inhabited by "the energies, gists, and spirits of letters, words, and combinations thereof; their roots, bones, innards, piths, pips, and secret parts, tinctures, tonics, and essences; with examples, of their usage foul and savory." Here is Dallas, we have a Farmer's Market near downtown at which some of the merchants offer slices of fresh fruit as samples. In the same spirit, I now offer a few brief excerpts from Blount's book to suggest the thrust of his thinking and the "flavor" of his writing style. Examples of figures of speech "which so far as I know have not yet been used in literature" (Page 100): "I feel like a hog starin' at a wristwatch." "She ran home so fast you could play dice on the tail of her coat." "Tea so strong you could trot a mouse on it." "Quiet as a mosquito doing push-ups on a lemon meringue pie." "He looked like he'd been sortin' wildcats." "Quick as a hiccup." "If you had never seen the word [onomatopoeia] before, you wouldn't suspect, from the sound of it, that it means what it means. Nor would you from its etymology: it comes from the Greek for 'coining names,' not from the Greek for 'sounding like it means.' And if I were the commissioner of spelling I would drop the o after the p: this word looks plenty Greek enough without clinging to a poe pronounced pee." (Page 221) "Here's a word [qualm], like terrific, from which much of the force has been leached, by usage influenced by sound. According to Chambers [i.e. the Chambers Dictionary of Etymology], qualm comes from the Old High German for 'death and destruction,' then the Middle English for 'pestilence, plague.' It has come to mean no more than a sudden uneasiness, perhaps a bit of nausea, or just, by extension into abstract, a misgiving. That's what it sounds like it ought to mean." (Page 244) With regard to the split infinitive, "There was a time, in the nineteenth century, when persnickety grammarians categorically deplored putting anything between the to and the verb. These days, no one condemns 'to boldly go where none have gone before,' whose rhythm is catchy, or 'The bishop has resolved to painstakingly separate the men from the boys.' But it is wise to rigorously keep an eye on the infinitive as a unit." (Page 281) The word zafti means "plump in a good way; with a well-rounded figure; full-bodiedly curvy. But it comes from the Yiddish zaftik, juicy, succulent. Same root, way back, as in sap, the juice in a tree." (Page 361) I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and highly recommend it and Blount's previously published *Long Time Leaving: Dispatches from Up South* and *About Three Bricks Shy: And The Load Filled Up* as well as Pinker's *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature* and *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*, John McWhorter's *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold Story of English*, and Henry Hitchings' *The Secret Life of Words: How English Became English*. A careful reading of these books will provide an excellent preparation for Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. *juice it up* By Marlin C. Huiras An interesting compilation, with Blount's own take and

opinions (sometimes) on his selected words and phrases, and an expansion on each letter of the alphabet. It's certainly not a novel, but is OK as a bathroom reader or casual pick-up. For word freaks it's another book for their library, and the takes and origins and etymology Blount pursues are interesting and sometimes intriguing. Certainly not an instructional or style book, but fun and informative if you like words, phrases, applications, exceptions, and down-to-earth commentary on usage. Blount hopes the reader will page through the self-contained cross-references he uses to help know the yesses and no's (yeas and nays?) of sentence parts, like commas, dashes, colons, stuff like that. His intention is to take some of the unnecessary fluff out of word-use and sense, and he does that pretty well. Remove the pompous. Pretty cool.

Ali G: How many words does you know? Noam Chomsky: Normally, humans, by maturity, have tens of thousands of them. Ali G: What is some of 'em? Da Ali G Show

From Publishers Weekly Starred . Blount (Long Time Leaving) is a contributing editor to the Atlantic Monthly, a regular panelist on NPR's Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me! quiz show and a usage consultant to the American Heritage Dictionary. He displays his pleasure in words with his subtitle The Energies, Gists, and Spirits of Letters, Words, and Combinations Thereof; Their Roots, Bones, Innards, Piths, Pips, and Secret Parts, Tinctures, Tonics, and Essences; with Examples of Their Usage Foul and Savory as he dishes up an alphabetical array of verbal reverberations, weasel words and linguistic acrobatics from aardvark to zoology (Pronounced zo-ology. Not zoo-ology. Look at the letters. Count the o's). Along the way, he compares dictionaries, slings slang, digs for roots, posts ripostes and dotes on anecdotes. The format is nearly identical to Roy Copperud's still valuable but out-of-print A Dictionary of Usage and Style (1964). Blount's book is equally instructive and scholarly, but is also injected with a full dose of word play on steroids. Quotes, quips, euphemisms, rhymes and rhythms, literary references (Lo-lee-ta) and puns: The lowest form of wit, it used to be said, but that was before Ann Coulter. Throughout, the usage advice is sage and also fun, since the writer's own wild wit, while bent and Blount, is razor sharp. (Oct. 21) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist Ever since Lynn Truss Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation took the 2004 best-seller lists by storm, publishers have been casting about for their next dark-horse language book. Farrar may have found it in Blount's latest title. Much more garrulous than Truss, a shameless name-dropper, and a purveyor of endless anecdotes always casting himself in the starring role, Blount is supremely entertaining here and more than matches Truss' spirited tone. Laid out in AZ dictionary format, the book ranges from the pointed critique of conjunction dysfunction to the hilarious diatribe under tump, which finds Blount spending weeks looking for his own name in the new edition of American Heritage Dictionary. Feeling that he is long overdue to be cited for word usage, Blount envies Hunter Thompson for booger, Jimmy Breslin for boozehound, and William Safire for hoohah. He is, however, willing to concede snob to Tom Wolfe. Although some entries are only tangentially connected to his ostensible subject (see TV, on being on), many others provide Blount with ample opportunity to wax eloquent on the joys of language; his perfect parsing of the allure of the phrase wonky exegeses will elicit smiles from fellow language lovers. A knowledgeable handbook that is also chock-full of funny, colorful opinions on marriage, movies, and Monet. --Joanne Wilkinson Alphabet Juice is pure Roy Blount Jr. amusing, bemusing, and smart as hell. Fortune