



WILLIAM MURRAY CHENEY

Pamphlet on the Four

Basic Dialects of Pig Latin

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

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Early Southern California Poetry

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Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

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*Pamphlet on the Four Basic
Dialects of Pig Latin*

William Murray Cheney

A Facsimile Edition

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

Archival Images

A short selection from the source record

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William Murray Cheney's draft-registration record.

Editorial Note

This is a facsimile edition. Cheney's narrow pages, tiny type, ornaments, spacing, and visual timing are integral to the work, so the original printing is reproduced page for page rather than reset. The Green-series cover, introduction, biography, archival page, and bibliography are new; the facsimile section itself has not been silently corrected or redesigned.

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Introduction

William Murray Cheney called himself a “typesetter,” but the name barely contains him. He was a Los Angeles printer, miniature-book maker, amateur linguist, satirist, and tireless inventor of playful identities. In 1950 he turned Pig Latin into an elaborate mock-scholarly pamphlet, complete with competing dialects, rules, examples, type ornaments, and a Brigadier Cyclops Stonebone persona. The joke depends on the printed object—its narrow page, tiny type, solemn headings, and typographic timing—so this edition keeps the complete original book as a facsimile instead of resetting it. A Green-series introduction and biography precede the scan; the pamphlet itself is reproduced page for page.

Biography

William Murray Cheney was born in Los Angeles on November 28, 1907, and died there on July 1, 2002. He described himself as a “typesetter,” emphasizing his love of setting metal type over the more finished identity of printer.

Cheney’s work joined commercial printing, private-press experiment, miniature books, satire, invented personae, and linguistic play. His titles include *A Voyage to Trolland* (1933), *Pamphlet on the Four Basic Dialects of Pig Latin* (1950), *Arguments for Inconciseness* (1954), *Types in the Cases of William M. Cheney* (1961), and an *Autobiography of W. M. C.* (1983). He printed under his own name and through mock institutions and aliases, including Brigadier General Cyclops Stonebone.

His Los Angeles network included booksellers Glen Dawson and Jake Zeitlin, librarian and writer Lawrence Clark Powell, the Rounce and Coffin Club, and many printers and collectors. When redevelopment threatened his La Cienega shop, friends helped arrange a place in the gatehouse of UCLA’s William Andrews Clark Memorial Library. Cheney worked there from 1962 to 1974, producing library ephemera alongside commercial and private projects.

Cheney’s miniature books displayed technical control and comic disproportion: a tiny *Big Type Book*, mocked scholarly apparatus, mock-solemn manifestoes, and lovingly excessive colophons. His poems belong to that same field of experiment. Their puns, typographic logic, and

argumentative voices are part of Los Angeles literary history as well as book history.

The William M. Cheney Papers at the Clark Library and the long UCLA oral history *The Natural History of a Los Angeles Typesetter* preserve the fullest record of his work and conversation. They show a maker whose skeptical humor coexisted with serious attention to craft, language, and the social world of books.

Pamphlet on the Four Basic Dialects of Pig Latin

Stage 1 | 1950

The complete original pamphlet follows in facsimile.

Library Home

PAMPHLET

ON THE
FOUR BASIC
DIALECTS
OF

PIG
LATIN

BY
BRIG. GEN.
CYCLOPS STONEBONE
OLD INDIAN FIGHTER



LOS ANGELES:
M C M L

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BY WM. M. CHENEY

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IF THERE had been only a hundred authors in all times together, and three books written by each, their three hundred books brought in and left beside a man in one heap must surely satisfy his urge to collect, and the reading would fill his lifetime. With fifty reading years, more than most men enjoy, he could go at the rate of six books a year, never reperusing old word combinations but, as he lifts another and another volume from his pile, challenged by passages of a fresh sort continually.

But more than enough will not be unappreciated by a man of eager literary appetite, able to surmount a surfeit; for such an appetite can exist, and we may assume that its existence serves some purpose. Suppose that the hundred masters in all their pages did not write a word of one little precursory subject,

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either because they did not wish to acknowledge it, or because they felt that everyone knew it too well already; but suppose that, the masters having completed our literature and died, this little subject, no longer drawn on and so leading to nothing, as a beginning can not exist without an end should not survive, and the rules of its governance should pass into oblivion. Might we not suddenly, some dreadful morning still to come, the very last of us having lost his recollection of the little subject, discover that we can not understand the three hundred great books themselves?

A slight pamphlet is proper to a small thing and no material addition to a heap of books. Such a pamphlet tossed on a heap here and there, in the chance that it will not because of thinness slip to the bottom and remain unseen for fifty years, may be taken up by the man of superior appetite and read in its turn. And now, if it should be argued against me that a hundred times a hundred authors have written, and their books have no such limitation as three to each,

but can scarcely be counted, and our rate of reading must therefore be much faster than I had suggested ; then, I say, there is just so much more that we shall fail to understand, and the little pamphlet becomes more widely applicable.



WE LIVE chiefly in the impressive half of the world, the half of six-foot men and stupendous events, of technological alarms, of new drug stores opening to the pageantry of arc lights, floats, and autographing notables. These concerns of ours, besides making history in due course, can immediately fill thick periodicals and cans of film, or burden the waves of the hard-working air. Minor matters, outside the great drives of existence, must be left to random snapshots, scarcely relevant comments, and an occasional pamphlet. Half the world grows unreal to our perception, and we conceive the people there to be entities of their own kind and not vital in our sense ; leading an existence of no ur-

gency, as elves may or the brownie under the house for whom we leave a saucer of cream and some honey on the basement steps at night ; or as someone we imagined thirty years ago, entering an enchanted wilderness to seek a maiden with a rosy mouth. Cloudedly, and only with disinclination, we bring to mind this unfashionable aspect of life. For we are dynamic and surging, with a good deal of go ; living transitionally and, without much time, continuously reorienting ourselves. Even the ancientest of us, the bones turning to chalk in his long legs as he strides, still changes his course, forever divagates, forsaking his shell and habitation, impelled into new houses of unexpected construction, such as he was not born in and has never lived in before. Old houses lose their ground to speedways where, bald, fat, and ungracious, we momentarily flash by ; and who knows whether riders and cars ever existed before they appear and whether they will exist after they have disappeared, or whether they are only of this instant and for no end but to

speed by at this spot? What we do know is that the world is ours in this same instant: it does not belong to the brownie under the house.



RESPECT FOR grammars and dictionaries in such a world must be naive. The language belongs in these cars; or to people running and eating on the beaches; in the bars, crying and singing: to them and to other people who are using it; not to lexicographers who record it. The freer and wiser we grow, the more strongly we feel this, till finally to our mature understandings it appears self-evident: our language does not belong to any group of bookkeepers, forever entering words that are past accounts, dull credits and debits of somebody else's business. We acquire the property by use; the more use of it the less regard for usage and the greater wonder why usage should ever have been established and recorded. The less we observe somebody else's tyrannically

imposed standards the more intimately we possess the language, until it is almost our very selves. We turn into poets of a sort. This is a fine development and just what we wanted ; but with the drawback, as we shortly discover, that we can no longer talk. Communication has perversely slipped from us just as we thought we had it fastest. And our pure self-expression, expressing nothing and addressed to no one, flaps like an old newspaper in the street, spins and shifts about, and, going nowhere, aimlessly disappears. Abandonment of language must follow, except as some few locutions are saved and pasted down as a hobby by leisured dilettantes.



FOR HIDE-BOUND old fashioned pedantry we must seek where off hand we should least expect to find it : not at teacher's desk, but in paths frequented by those she thwacks with her ruler ; people who, having only just found that they can communicate, place a value on

intelligibility, not yet realizing that it is obsolete, and unable to see any way to communicate but by observance of a common standard. These people are uncompromising purists. Nonsense offends them, if offered as more than a play-pretty. They do not know how to value that utterance direct from the subconscious, coming forth as pure sound without the meddling mediacy of the reason, that our long habit of liberation has achieved for us. Some droll pre-wisdom tells them that a speaker preserves his own individuality by making sense to his listener. They hold that any person is mistaken in presuming his pure originality to be a joy forever: it is a spark followed by terrible darkness. We may be annoyed by their Queen Annism, if we notice them at all, and wish that they would awaken to the 20th century—the second and better half of it. But whether their language is our wilful speech academicised, or whether we in our barytones only mimic incorrectly what we hear from them, a pamphleteer does not have any time to

investigate or the space to report his findings in.

A pamphleteer's business is to get on with his subject. Otherwise he ought not to write a pamphlet on it. Other people's subjects are no affair of his. Besides, in my exaggeration I have lost the proportions of this matter, the small importance of which lies in its application. It is only casually necessary to know Pig Latin. For the hundred or so great books it serves as a gloss, and some clew to their meaning, though giving us no assurance that we shall enjoy them. To current speech it may be found pertinent on some unforeseen occasion, at some odd place, when a rationale of our sentences is requested. But generally, what a loss we sustain on a speedway, at a drugstore, in an unaccustomed house, if, curiously meditating Pig Latin, we are unready to seize in an eagle's gripe the gist of the living language!



THE PIG LATIN language is divided into four dialects, not regionally distributed, but prevailing severally from schoolyard to schoolyard, street to street, as preference or accident has made them current among gangs of boys. Of these dialects the least ingenious and probably the first to be evolved, which we shall call Proto-Pig Latin, or Dialect I, can be understood and spoken with no effort—even by girls, by a boy's mother or teacher. Hence, it is of no value for restricted communication and serves only to amuse those who are without *sprachegefühl*, letting them think they are in on the game. In this dialect the syllable *-gry* is added to a word: *Cangry yougry heargry megry*? Or *-pig* is added: *Canpig youpig*, etc. A shortened form in *-ig* had some currency thirty-five years ago, an *-ig* being suffixed

to all words except those ending in a vowel, l, r, or w, for which -g alone sufficed : *Canig youg speakig thisig dialectig?*—*Nog!* But if we should attempt to list all subvarieties of our four dialects this pamphlet might swell to seventy times its present size.

(May I say in passing that I treat these dialects as current because they were so in my day? If, as some tell me, Pig Latin during the past twenty-five years has died out except for a few scattered speakers in our Highlands and our Hebrides, then the more reason to set it down here in print before I, who remember it, also die out).

Dialect II, General Pig Latin, is known and spoken by greater numbers than the other three dialects together. It is comprehended in South Bend or at Jamaica Pond, in Appalachian valleys or on the slopes of the Cascades, by boys that have never seen or heard of one another. When we ourselves were boys, long ago, we found out that our old grandads already knew this form of speech. It must, therefore, have some

antiquity. Briefly, in Dialect II an initial consonant is transposed to the end of a word and an *a* (phonetically ay as in day) is added, as *oxba* for box; or if the word begins with a vowel the stem suffers no change, but *-a* is simply added, as *oxa* for ox. This dialect, though not a wretched makeshift like Proto-Pig Latin, is easy for the alert to master and, once mastered, can be spoken rapidly.

Dialect III, Platysyllabic or Broad Pig Latin, a sturdy vehicle for those of ponderous thought, tardiloquent, divides all words into their syllables, inserting an *-iv-* (phonetically iv of ivory) after the initial consonant, or consonant group, of each. Stress falls heavily on original parts of the word: *bivox*, box [by-vox'], *givigivantivic*, gigantic [jy-vy'gy-van' ty-vik', long i for distinction being represented by y*]. Syllables opening with a vowel or inaspirate h prefix

*Critics and the booksellers will inquire why I spell these words with i if I am immediately going to indicate their pronunciations by y. There is not yet any fixed scheme of Pig Latin spelling, but I believe the boys would write

iv-: *ivox*, ox [y-voks'], *ivhour*, hour [y-vowr']. The -v- in speaking is carried over, like a French consonant in liaison, to the following vowel. Platysyllabic seems at first attempt more formidable than General Pig Latin; it is unquestionably less rapid, and it takes the keen edge off the tongue. But it has a sense of deliberate though not subtle definition and a monumentalism in long passages that are pleasing to such as are temperamentally disposed toward it.

The most difficult of all Pig Latins to learn and, once learned, the least useful, since it has more limited distribution than any of the others, is Dialect IV, Redundant Pig Latin. In this form of the language an -lf- is inserted after the vowel or diphthong, or vowel plus r, of a syllable; the vowel is then repeated and the syllable is closed with the stem consonant. *Bolfox* is box and *olfox* is ox; *Gilfil-filfil-lalfan*, Gilfillan;

these words with an i if they wrote them, too many y's in succession appearing barbaric. And besides, there are not enough y's in a font of type to do much *printing* with them.

pourlfour, pour, r being inseparable from the vowel; *calfan youlfou spealspeak thilfis tolfongue?*—can you speak this tongue? The Redundant dialect is obviously too advanced for most kids, where words are unfamiliar. *Ilfin-ilfiq-uilfit-ylfy* for iniquity would not register with any kid, though he had sharp ears like a satyr. And since the dialect is his, and parochial as he knows it, it would not be fair to try him with such exotic forms. But *we* may play with them in our pamphlet.



GENERAL PIG LATIN has no force to convey grand turns of phrase. *Anma isa aa oblana animala*—"Man is a noble animal"—is nothing given in these words and, if it could not be heard and read otherwise, had as well never have been written. In its flimsy rhythm, pointless modulation, and final inadequacy, *Erribilista orsma onturbatca ema* only weakly echoes "Terribilis mors conturbat me." This is the overriding notions

of the capital spoken in the accent of the provinces. Poor little languages do not express immensities but only talk about them as well as they can. So, in the wood, a scuttling beast spies a bear and whickers from the leaves. But within its range General Pig Latin has remarkable power to catch a picture and center the point of interest. *Aftera eatinga eiha illswa oura olda oarba entwa eba-indha etha omca-ostpa eapha anda aswa illa*.—One could not say more gracefully and still graphically, "After eating the swill our old boar went behind the compost heap and was ill."

The most unequivocal, most reliable workhorse of them all is Dialect III, the Platysyllabic. It never misses, never loses a letter, giving our words back with an inexorable levelness, as surely as a watch (though a watch is racier) will still keep ticking off the seconds, whether or not the passage of time is our immediate concern. Even remote words, and those phrases that never occur where Pig Latin is spoken, such as that one about "terribilis mors," can

be rendered with an overwhelming thoroughgoingness:—*Tiverr-ivib-ivil-ivis mivors civon-tivurb-ivat mive*. The limitations of such a dialect are of course apparent in its virtues. In this weight of rendition and long dwell on every syllable where are Grecian flexibility, French verve, Irish lilt? Where are passionate emphases, shy silences; tones and overtones and undertones in harmony; fine cadence, or the dying fall that bespeaks the end of a purple passage? How can a boy shout, or how can his voice stick in his throat? And if he have an Oxford accent, what may become of it if he can not omit the greater part of a word?

Redundant Pig Latin, swashing, extravagant, challenging, is free from this depressing monotony. Difficult and far fetched as it is, it is peculiarly appropriate to poetry. *Thelfe splelfen-dourlfour falfalls olfon calfast-lelfel walfalls* is excellent Pig Latin and fair Tennyson for "The splendour falls on castle walls." The student wishing further practice can find much good material to render

throughout our more fashionable poets ; for example, "Learning her Light hath lost, Valour hath slayne her Knight." Or the palindrome is good, "Lewd I did live ; evil did I dwel," which he may sing forward and back till his tongue is perfect.

A polished ease rather than a too strict correctness is perhaps the aim of those who aspire to master Dialect IV. Words that approximate the sense may sometimes please the ear where an attempt at precision yields cacophony and not much meaning. So also—now let us speak of the language of us fat old people—we write words that are found in ordinary dictionaries yet which, as we combine them, seem to be most unlikely and jar the air if we read them aloud. The effort at exact expression may fail, not only because it produces stilted diction, ungracious and hard as it leaves the familiar idiom, but because also it obliterates the thought that was at first to be expressed. There was something or other to be said, once ; and it was lively there in those lost first phrases.



SOFT c's and g's in Dialect II retain their quality after transposition, though their appearance now belies it: *ityca*, city [it' i-say]; *emga*, gem [em' jay]. Ge- preceding a vowel and forming one syllable with it is removed as a group to the end of the word: *Orgegea*, George [orj' jay]. But where a diaeresis occurs between the e and a succeeding vowel the e remains at the beginning of the word: *eometryga*, geometry [e-om' e-tri-jay]. (This is the usual form. Some, who prefer an argot more complex, will make two mutations in the word: *eomga-etrya* [e-om' jay-e-tri' ay]).

Words beginning with a vowel or inaspirate h undergo no beheading: *aa*, a [ay' ay]; *houra*, hour [owr' ay]. (Observe that where *tend* becomes *endia*, attend, suffering less change, becomes *attenda*). But a silent initial preceding a sounded consonant is in modern Pig Latin II transposed to the terminal position to preserve formal appearance, though it of course remains silent: *owkna*, know;

orewha, whore; *ashgna*, gnash. Initial diphthongs receive the same treatment as single vowels: *autumna*, autumn (or among some who syllabify more fully: *auta-umna*). Even diaereses unfortunately must be so treated: *aortaa*, aorta; *AEoliana*, AEolian. Attempts to create forms such as *Olianaea*, *ortaaa*, have met with wonderment and no acceptance. Silent vowels remain silent though thrust to the fore by removal of the preceding consonant: *uiltba*, built [ilt'-bay, not wilt' bay].

Initial consonant combinations are transposed in their order to the terminal position and -a is suffixed: *anchbra*, branch; *ucespra*, spruce; *ichwha*, which. *Prucesa* for spruce or *rowdca* for crowd would be a mere impudence of spelling, sporting with the integrity of sound.

Y consonant, where concealed in an initial u or ew, must be visibly inserted before the suffix -a: *unionya*, union; *eweya*, ewe. The initial u or ew, having lost its iota to the termination, is now pronounced oo: *oon'ion-ya*, *oo'ya*. Why these words must be so treated

becomes apparent when we consider that in English *ewe* is the homophone of *you*; their Pig Latin forms, therefore, must also be homophonous, both being pronounced oo'yay, though one is spelled *eweya*, the other *ouya*. But such u's left bare by the transposing of initial consonants retain their original sound: *Ughha*, Hugh [yoo' hay]; *ulema*, mule [yool' may]; *ewdla*, lewd [yood' lay]. The reason is that iotization resides in the vowel u* and is not formally part of a consonant combination with the preceding letter, as r is with c in *crowd*.

Unlike Platysyllabic, General Pig Latin does not break up every word syllable by syllable. The boys rely on a

*The same observation, unfortunately, argues against detaching this initial sound from the vowel in the words *union* and *ewe* noticed above. Perhaps I should not offer reasons but should confine myself to reporting—a hard discipline to a discursive and generalizing mind. At any rate, I have heard oon'ion-yay often (my grammar school was "Union Ave.," and the dawdling competitor of the Printer of this book has his shoppe, where Pig Latin is spoken, on a Union St.), seldom yoon'iona; but, on the other hand, yool'may always, never ool'may.

speech sense for which a set of rules can not be got into so spare a pamphlet as this is. Understand, for instance, is not grossly left at *understanda*; neither is it too nicely divided to *una-erda-andsta*; but it is produced as *undera-andsta*. Under by itself is usually *undera*, only rarely *una-erda*; but before and behind are often *eba-orefa*, *eba-indha*.

In Dialect III words beginning with a consonant group insert *-iv* after the group: *crivowd*, crowd [kry-vowd']; *spri-vuce*, spruce. An initial silent consonant preceding a sounded consonant is retained in spelling but is of course not to be spoken: *gnivash*, gnash [ny-vash']; *phthivi-sivis*, phthisis [ty-vy' sy-vis'].

In words beginning with iotized u the consonantal element being separated from the vowel must be expressed by *y*: *yivunion*, union; *yivewe*, ewe, which does not differ in sound from *yivou*, you. But mule is *mivule* [my-vyool'], and for argue we may say either *ivar-givue* [y-var' gy-vyoo'] or *ivarg-yivue* [yvarg' yy-voo'].



IT REMAINS only to notice briefly two speech-forms so rarely encountered that I do not think it proper to include them among popular dialects. These are Pig Greek, as we may call it, and a very Low Pig Latin. The first, a simple children's Greek, which imitates the Greek verbal system, prefixes to a syllable its initial plus *-o*: *bobox*, box [boh' box]; *cocan*, can [koh' kan]; *momil-lolion*, million [moh' mil-loh' lion]; *cocan yoyou spospeak*—can you speak, etc. Syllables opening with a vowel simply prefix *o*: *oant*, ant [oh' ant]. A peculiarity of this speech is that the added element receives the stress, in contrast to our standard dialects where stress falls regularly on stem syllables. The very Low Pig Latin will come forth indifferently as *Canaca-can youvooweevoo speaweekpeek thidissadis*, etc. [kan' aka-kan' yoo' voo-ee-voo', etc.]—can you speak this, etc. This jargon, wanting determinate structure, is offensive to the classic kid and is generally fought shy of.

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Book and periodical titles are italicized throughout.

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Colophon

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This facsimile edition was edited by Brian Kim Stefans for The Text-Tech Papers, Los Angeles, in 2026, as part of *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*.

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