



Alphabettter Juice: or, The Joy of Text

Roy Blount Jr.

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Fresh-squeezed Lexicology, with Twists

No man of letters savors the ABC's, or serves them up, like language-loving humorist Roy Blount Jr. His glossary, from *ad hominy* to *zizz*, is hearty, full bodied, and out to please discriminating palates coarse and fine. In 2008, he celebrated the gists, tangs, and energies of letters and their combinations in *Alphabet Juice*, to wide acclaim. Now, *Alphabetter Juice*. Which is *better*.

This book is for anyone—novice wordsmith, sensuous reader, or career grammarian—who loves to get physical with words. What is the universal sign of disgust, *ew*, doing in *beautiful* and *cutie*? Why is *toadless*, but not *frogless*, in the Oxford English Dictionary? How can the U. S. Supreme Court find relevance in *gollywoddles*? Might there be scientific evidence for the sonicky value of *hunch*? And why would someone not bother to spell correctly the very word he is trying to define on Urbandictionary.com?

Digging into how locutions evolve, and work, or fail, Blount draws upon everything from *The Tempest* to *The Wire*. He takes us to Iceland, for salmon-watching with a “girl gillie,” and to Georgian England, where a distinguished etymologist bites off more of a “giantess” than he can chew. Jimmy Stewart appears, in connection with *kludge* and the bombing of Switzerland. Litigation over *supercalifragilisticexpialidocious* leads to a vintage werewolf movie; news of possum-tossing, to *metanarrative*.

As Michael Dirda wrote in *The Washington Post Book World*, “The immensely likeable Blount clearly possesses what was called in the Italian Renaissance ‘sprezzatura,’ that rare and enviable ability to do even the most difficult things without breaking a sweat.” *Alphabetter Juice* is brimming with sprezzatura. Have a taste.

Alphabetter Juice: or, The Joy of Text Details

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Ron says

I love Roy Blount Jr. He is funny and thoughtful. This is a follow up to his "Alphabet Juice". Following the same format, Blount explores words; their meaning, their origins and their use. Some of the best stories Blount tells, I get to pass along to friends. I always get a laugh. Thanks Roy. This is a fun way to get to know and understand the language we all speak differently and a way to be edified and have fun at the same time. Enjoy it.

Kristy Hare says

If you really enjoy words and pronunciation; you will enjoy this book. It's written like a dictionary of many unusual words; some, the author seems to make up. I would not recommend reading this straight through, as, there is a lot of information about each word that needs to be digested.

Zoe Rayner says

Roy Blount Jr definitely makes learning about words fun. It's essentially a dictionary with interesting and unique words. He quite often goes off topic of that word, but it flows well within the definitions/examples. It made me laugh and definitely kept me entertained.

The one drawback is the lack of index, which would be helpful.

Brian says

(2.0) At times entertaining, but lots of Blount primping and proselytizing *sonicky*

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if Blount's primary goal was furthering the cause of getting *sonicky* into OED so he can get a word he coined into the word hall of fame. I see the need for a word with that definition, so it's fine to mention it a time or two, but seemed like every other entry in this book made reference to it.

There were some entertaining entries, but overall I think he picks odd entries, odd stories to tell under entries (that are less than enlightening), and kind of wanders aimlessly at times in an entry and strays far from the original word. As far as I can tell, it was meticulously copyedited, but perhaps not as much for coherence of content?

He also dwells a bit on peeves, which I guess the word obsessed are wont to do. So I can't fault him too much there, though I would've assumed (without having read it) that *Alphabet Juice* would've covered most of his top botherers.

I do question one of his complaints. In the section on "I", he goes after the *Times* for quoting someone as

saying "Ay, ay, ay", saying she probably didn't pronounce them as in *say*, but rather "i-yi-yi". Feel he could've at least considered the Spanish *ayayay* as a possible justification here.

I'm sure there were other entries I was a little disappointed with, but one of the words I was actually looking forward to hearing more about was *touchy* and its relationship to *tetchy*, and whatever happened there. Also thought he missed an opportunity to close out the book with *zyzzyva*, undoubtedly The Last Word in anyone's book (though he says OED ends with *zythum*? I'm surprised that *zyzzyva* isn't in there, but haven't got a copy or a subscription to check myself.

Tim Healy says

If you're interested in language, this is a good book for you. It's an etymology of words that are used and misused regularly. All from the slightly skewed perspective of writer, humorist, and frequent contributor to "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me" on NPR, Roy Blount, Jr. It's a fun book, but won't be everyone's cup of tea.

Nathan Hetrick says

I think this book is witty, entertaining, and droll. However, since I read *Alphabet Juice: 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* earlier this year, I must admit I was a bit anxious to finish its sequel by the time I got to letter "T". I guess two of his books in six months was a bit too much!

Cheryl Gatling says

I fell in love with Roy Blount, Jr while listening to him clown around on *Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me*. This book (and the previous *Alphabet Juice*) has only cemented my admiration for the man who is both more intelligent and goofier than most of the people I know. (Or should that be "have only cemented"? RBJ cares about things like subject-verb agreement.) *Alphabet Juice* is built on the premise that most words are not arbitrarily assigned, but sound like the thing they mean; to use the author's own term, they are "sonicky." Dictionary-like entries explore the derivations and uses of whatever terms strike him as interesting. The sequel, *Alphabetter Juice*, is just the same, only more so. It's as if Blount wrote the first book carefully, not sure how it would be received, and when it proved to be successful, he let loose more in the second. There is plenty here about the derivations of words, but Blount puts in every interesting anecdote and aside that has anything at all to do with word usage. He sticks in funny things he has read just because they are funny. He riffs on "what if" scenarios. And that's the best part of the book. Sure, you learn stuff, but you get to spend time with RBJ being RBJ. And I love him more than ever.

Bill Sleeman says

I wanted to like this book, I really did, but sad to say this is truly a boring and uninspired book. The subtitle while certainly "juicy" or at least a half-way decent pun does little to convey the poor quality of this effort.

You know that a book has failed to catch your attention when the free newspapers that the street people give away on the DC Metro are more engaging than the book you have with you.

There are better books about dictionaries (Winchester's "The Meaning of everything: the story of the Oxford English Dictionary") and funnier books about the meaning of words and language (try Jacob's "The Know-it-all: one man's humble quest to become the smartest person in the world"). In fact, there are funnier and more engaging books by Blount and if you like his style generally I would recommend that you read something else by him and give this book a pass.

Lindig says

As usual, Blount is a delight to read. Here, in this sequel to "Alphabet Juice," he serves up a new helping of words and etymologies and discursions. Naturally, some comments are laugh-out-loud funny. And he gets quite stern when discussing "y'all" or "you-all" and its purported singleness of tense. I, being a fellow southerner, emphatically agree: y'all is plural, now and forever, amen.

Bye, y'all.

ccccurt Heimbuck says

This is one of those wonderful books that frees you from bookmark tyranny. I'd challenge myself to read all sequential entries for a letter but soon the "see: peeve" at the bottom of the page would send me thumbing the pages.

That means I haven't read every single word. I like etymology more than most people I know, but Blount likes it a lot more, and I skipped over some sentences that had PIE in them. But I read enough words twice and three times (often times out loud to my wife) that I can confidently shelve this book on the "read" pile. Soon it will be on the "re-reading" pile as well.

Cade says

This book was a lot of fun to read. I liked Alphabet Juice a little better, but this was very fun to read. If you like words you should pick this book up. Then again, I have spent the last several days fixated on words and how people use them. I almost commented, "Hey, that was a sonicky word." during a conversation.

Danielle says

I won an autographed copy of this book at the American Library Association's annual conference. In this follow-up to Alphabet Juice, Blount, Jr examines language through his own observations on words and phrases as well as research on their pronunciations and origins from a variety of sources. There was a lot of humor integrated into many of the entries, but as there is no narrative arc I found the book a little tedious to read. It's kind of like trying to sit down and read the encyclopedia straight through. Lots of interesting

information, but not necessarily the easiest thing to do.

Khris Sellin says

Who knew reading the dictionary could be so much fun? Blount makes up his own dictionary of his favorite (and not-so-favorite) words and phrases. He brings the same wit and humor that we all know and love from his turns on NPR's "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me."

It's loaded with his brand of political humor too. Here's the entry for the term "first sentence":

"Generally an author takes great pains with the first sentence of his or her book. I know I have never been quite satisfied with any of mine. But then I've never had all the ranks of assistance available to Karl Rove, author of *Courage and Consequence: My Life as a Conservative in the Fight*. Rove acknowledges an editor; a 'close friend and trusted former colleague' who 'also helped craft every chapter and episode'; a line editor; a researcher; seven research assistants under the 'expert guidance' of yet another person, his chief of staff; twenty-two people who read important parts of the manuscript; and ten more people who 'devoured and improved major swatches of this manuscript.'

"An interesting process, devouring and improving, maybe something like free-range chickens turning bugs and scraps into high-quality manure. But never mind that. Here is the opening sentence produced by Rove and his team:

"'On September 11, 2001, I was the first person to tell President George W. Bush that a plane had slammed into an office tower in New York City and was aboard Air Force One as it crisscrossed the country in the hours that followed.'

"The second sentence is nothing to write home about either. But at least it doesn't place an office-tower-hitting plane aboard Air Force One. The president really would have been slow on the uptake if his trusted aide had informed him that such a plane was crisscrossing the country aboard the president's own plane. I hear people saying, 'Oh, you know what he meant.' I'm sorry, but that don't get it in Sentence Writing 101. Much less First-Sentence Writing 101. I have to call him out here. Hey, Karl Rove, you're a writer? Ain't you got no pride? (See humble.) When you think of the people who have sweated blood to write good English sentences, you can feel all right to write a sorry-ass first sentence like that?"

Ah, that was worth the price of the book right there! Hilarious.

Jeff Crompton says

Reviews of Roy Blount's books tend to range pretty widely; readers either love him or find him exasperating. I think this has to do with his love of digression; he'll roam fairly far afield from the subject at hand. I often find his digressions to be the most interesting parts of his writing. As such, I liked this book; in a sense, it's all digression. Blount follows his nose in his examination of English words; his last entry, on *zythum*, devotes more space to *hop* than to the supposed subject of the entry. And that's okay with me. This book is rambling, fascinating and entertaining.

K.M. Weiland says

I wasn't sure what I was getting in this book. Mostly, I bought it just because it was a buck fifty and pushed me over the Free Super Shipper Savings on Amazon. An annotated dictionary about the history of words. As a word nut, that sounded attractive. But it could very easily have ended being super tedious.

Not so. Not so at all. This book is a charmer from start to finish. Folksy, funny, self-indulgent in all the best ways, and downright educative. It's not juicy, so much as chewy - in a salty, lip-smacking, can't-eat-just-one sort of way.
