

Another Word A Day

Reviewed by Sheila Allison

***Another word a day: An all-new romp through some of the most unusual and intriguing words in English* by Anu Garg**

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Do you want to hear a good definition of the untranslatable word *chutzpah*? Well, here's one that *TFP* readers can clutch to their editorial breasts. It comes from the great Jewish storyteller Isaac Bashevis Singer. When he was a child his parents took him on frequent visits to the home of a Jewish writer named Joseph Kowalski, and on one of these visits young Singer came across a book with the following title: *Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, Edited, Enlarged, and Improved by Joseph Kowalski*.

That's *chutzpah*, and that story, contributed by Jacob Gammelgaard of Copenhagen, also exemplifies the charm of *Another Word a Day*, the second book by Anu Garg, founder of wordsmith.org, the site that brings A Word A Day to over 600,000 people in over 200 countries.

In the book, as on the website, each selected word is accompanied by its phonetic pronunciation, definition, etymology and a usage example. There are also short introductory bits by Garg and boxed anecdotes from his far-flung correspondents, like Mr Gammelgaard.

Garg's selected words in *Another Word a Day* are grouped into 52 four-page chapters, with the groupings arrived at according to Garg's own curious way of contemplating and examining words rather than following any scholarly method—and we are the better off for it. Some chapter titles, for example, are: 'Words about books and writing', 'Words that have changed meaning with time', 'Fishy words', 'Words related to movies', 'Metallic words used as metaphors' and 'Words to describe your opponents'.

There is not a hint of didacticism in Garg's style. His is a gentle voice, inviting the reader to share his fascination with and affection for words. Garg is, in fact, a computer science engineer from rural India who didn't begin to speak English until he was in the sixth grade. He moved to the United States for his university studies and began wordsmith.org in 1994 when he was a graduate student. He now lives in Seattle with his wife and small daughter, whose own adventures with language are referred to occasionally in the book.

The structure of the book couldn't be friendlier. There's an Index of Words, and the contents pages also list the words that are featured in each chapter. The paperback edition is a dream to handle—lightweight and it bends beautifully, better than reading a laptop in bed.

Did you know Germans sometimes refer to laptops as Schlepptops? Love it. And what about 'dasypygal' (da-si-PYE-gul)? It means having hairy buttocks, from the Greek *dasy-* (hairy, dense) + *pyge* (buttocks). It's in the chapter, 'Words to describe your opponents'. Good one, Anu.