



PUNS and THEIR KIN

Walter Redfern

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Stimulating, challenging, engaging, dauntingly well informed and wide-ranging, Professor Redfern's revised book on puns offers massive returns both to the specialist researcher and the interested general reader. Taking his examples back to ancient literatures, but drawing especially on English, American and French cultures (popular and high), he defies the way in which the pun has so often been denigrated as a poor relation within the family of humorous modes, and his sparkling and inventive prose fully justifies that approach. Every page offers original examples amid material from his sources, tellingly examined but without the dogmatic imposition of a preconceived (and therefore, perhaps, inadequate) theory.

That exclusion, criticised by earlier reviewers, perceptibly enhances the chapters he presents, which cover, among other matters, the psychology and psychopathology of word-play, the history of punning (particularly enlightening on the English 18th and 19th centuries, though Hugo, Flaubert and others also figure strongly), how punning links with etymology, anagram, neologism and rhetorical tropes such as metaphor, irony, litotes and syllepsis, the commercialisation of puns in the advertising industry and their exploitation by the press, and an intriguing extension of wordplay into the visual as developed in film and TV, as well as by artists like Arcimboldo and Duchamp.

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