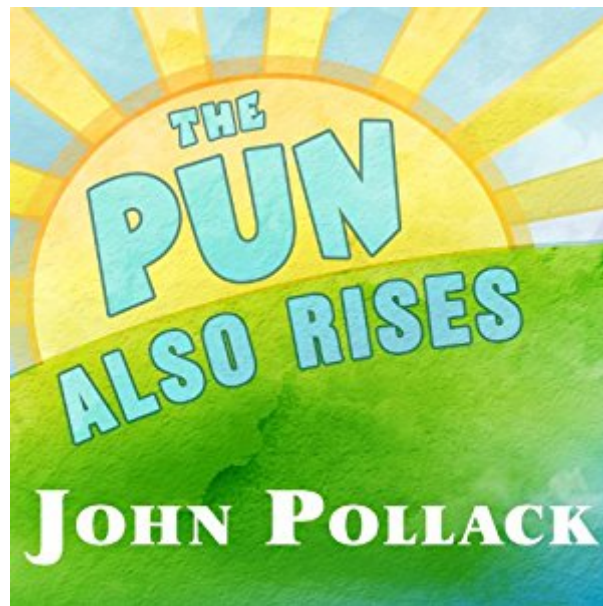


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# The Pun Also Rises: How The Humble Pun Revolutionized Language, Changed History, And Made Wordplay More Than Some Antics



## Synopsis

The pun is commonly dismissed as the lowest form of wit, and punsters are often unpopular for their obsessive wordplay. But such attitudes are relatively recent developments. In *The Pun Also Rises*, John Pollack - a former World Pun Champion and presidential speechwriter for Bill Clinton - explains why such wordplay is significant: It both revolutionized language and played a pivotal role in making the modern world possible. Skillfully weaving together stories and evidence from history, brain science, pop culture, literature, anthropology, and humor, *The Pun Also Rises* is an authoritative yet playful exploration of a practice that is common, in one form or another, to virtually every language on earth. At once entertaining and educational, this engaging book answers fundamental questions: Just what is a pun, and why do people make them? How did punning impact the development of human language, and how did that drive creativity and progress? And why, after centuries of decline, does the pun still matter?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is not merely another fly-by-night volume listing a series of groaners, but the story of how puns came to be immersed in every plane of our lives - from classic literature to gourmet ice cream flavors. John Pollack pilots through a fast-paced lesson in the evolution of verbal communication, shooting down those nay-sayers who would claim that puns are the lowest form of humor. Lovers of language will cruise through this book with pleasure. The author maneuvers skillfully through history, displaying his maverick skills with wordplay. A jester to the end, he leaves us with stingers at the

turn of every page. Simultaneously a skilled professional in repartee and a scholar of the intricacies of language, John proves why he has earned the title of Top Pun.

I read "The Pun Also Rises" and truly enjoyed it. Pollack has certainly done his research and he presents his ideas cogently and entertainingly...his intelligent book treats its often maligned subject with the respect and wit it deserves. If you have any interest in puns, words, and humor, this is the book to read. And, as one who also read the author's excellent "Cork Boat," I can say that he has certainly "groan" as a writer.

I read John Pollack's book about his part in the design and assembly of a cork boat in America, and the unexpected transport of the boat to Portugal where he, his family, and friends sailed it down a partially tamed river. That captivating story was largely about the people involved and their relationships, travails, and courage. I didn't know what to expect from him in a book about puns. Pages and pages of funny stuff? No, this is not a book of puns, it is about puns. The introduction to the book was about his personal experience in managing to gain entry into a punning contest and unexpectedly winning it. I like puns, but before I read the book I classified puns into two categories: true works of art and boring nonsense. In the introduction I learned a little about what would be allowed in a punning contest and now I feel a little more tolerant towards all types of puns. The book delves into the history, psychology, and science of punning. There are puns throughout, but they're part of the writing and not blatant attempts at punnery. You have to pay attention to find them all. The book could have fallen into the genre of "the paper clip and how it saved the world" but it is an enjoyable speculation of how the pun may be part of what makes us human, how it may have helped to shape our language, and what the latest science of the brain has to say about this. I preordered the book and when it shipped, I got an email that said that in keeping with Amazon's price protection policy, I was getting a 14 cent reduction in the price. So not only did I get a very enjoyable book about puns, but it made cents too!

This book isn't simply about puns. It's about language, history, and culture, and it's filled with fascinating material about everything from the way our brain processes the sound of words to the origins of the alphabet. The tone might be funny and conversational, but Pollack has a lot of interesting things to say (and he says it all economically; the book is a brief, approachable read, not some ten-pound volume you're going to get bogged down in for months). The bottom line: If you're looking for a fun book to give anyone who lingers over the meanings of words, loves Scrabble, or

can't resist a good pun, this is it.

If you are looking for a quotable compendium of great puns you will probably be disappointed. 'The Pun..' has some clever word plays, but it positions itself more on following the origin, history, semantics and social influence of puns. John Pollack, ex speech writer of Bill Clinton and 'Pun-off World Championship' winner, does intersperse some clever examples throughout, however. Some of the most elegant puns ever made are not really bi-directional word plays ('The Dermatologist made a rash decision'; 'Archaeologist's career ends in ruin's) but often complex interplay of multiple languages or multiple domains, or even portraying completely diametric pair of meanings, perhaps in fear of a stiff authority. Sir Francis Drake messaged a single Spanish word to Queen Elizabeth after defeating Spanish Armada - 'Cantharides'. It means 'the Spanish fly'. Samuel Johnson did not like puns much. In fact, he actively advocated against the word play type. Still, hearing a Mr. Vowell was to be hanged he could not help uttering 'It is very clear it is neither U or I' to his companion. Puns make the language semantic flexible. It puts a mild challenge to the rigid rules of language conformity. That, per author, is the crux (or, crooks ;-)) of pun. To paraphrase, a pun is a rope connecting deep disjoint canyons in our mind. From ancient culture, politics, language development for kids, build mnemonic, articulate dissent in a totalitarian regime, to advertising and product placement (Sunmaid Resin) -- puns are an integral part of language. Perhaps, puns are one of the few abstract components that still differentiates humans from an advancing deluge of Artificial Intelligence. The day a computer could understand the tone of 'Stephen Hawking's latest book on anti-gravity is difficult to put down' or 'Immanuel doesn't pun. He Kant' -- singularity would surely be breached.

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