

EDITORIAL

The editor can think of no easy, subtle way of approaching the subject of this editorial. Perhaps the best thing to do would be to re-state James Thurber's idea that the English language is in need of the ministrations of highly trained technicians whom he would call "psychosemanticists"—therapeuticians who would "specialize in the havoc wrought by verbal artillery on the fortress of reason. Their job will be to cope with the psychic trauma caused by linguistic meaninglessness, to prevent the language from degenerating into gibberish, and to save the sanity of persons threatened by the onset of polysyllabic monstrosities."*

For some time now the word "disinsection" has been hovering around, and although it has bitten several authors, an effort has been made to keep it from alighting on our pages. If we allow "disinsection" we would have to allow "insection" and we would soon be reading that a pool was insected with mosquitoes, or perhaps more simply, just plain culicised, and our poor pets and domestic animals would be described as "fleaed" and "ticked" as well as "loused."

Even worse, take the word "arborvirus," which also attempted, more recently, to crawl between our pages. As everyone knows, an "arbor" is a framework where one ties grapes. Or, just as commonly, it refers to trees, and we have arbor days or tree-planting days all over the country. In medical terminology it has long been an accepted part of such terms as "arborization" meaning a branching, like the branches of a tree. So what is an "arborvirus"?—obviously it must be a pathogen

affecting trees—perhaps a mosaic of some kind. But no—and here is where we need the psychosemanticist—we are told that it is made up of *ar* for arthropod and *bor* for borne, and that it is to be used to designate *arthropod-borne* viruses!

It is true that on this basis we could simplify our language considerably, but to be consistent we would have to go all the way. The yellow fever virus, for instance, would be not only an arborvirus, but also a "culiborvirus," or more specifically an "aeaeoborvirus."

And referring to the pathogens borne by *Anopheles* species, we could call them "anoborpaths"—at least until the proctologists got wind of it and objected, just as do the arborists and arboriculturists to the expropriation of the perfectly good word "arbor" from an entirely different universe of discourse.

We could go on, but to quote Thurber again, we have already arrived at "the onset of utter meaninglessness." We are not opposed to evolution or change in the language. For example, although we held out a long time against substituting "attractant" for "attractant," we finally capitulated. No dictionary that we have contains the word "attractant," but on the other hand, virtually no author that we have contains the word "attractant," or seems to know that it exists. And, after all, "attractant" seems like a perfectly reasonable word, it is not confusing, it can have but one meaning, and frequent use has removed from it the stigma of illegitimacy.

But respectable words such as "arthropod" and "borne" should be kept decently separated, and not forced into such an intimate relationship that the result is a bastard.

* From *Alarms and Diversions* by James Thurber.