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Book Review

Medical Meanings*

As a House Officer, I took care of a young woman who had experienced intestinal obstruction following intussusception. She asked me what had been found at surgery. I told her, and she replied, "That's not a Greek word." Embarrassed by my ignorance, I sought its origin. I found that intussusception stems "from the Latin *intus*—within, and *suscipere*—to pick, to take up or to receive; named by John Hunter, it denotes the condition wherein a proximal segment of bowel is taken up into the succeeding segment, thus causing obstruction."

Thus does Dr. William Haubrich, eminent gastroenterologist, raconteur, and word-lover describe intussusception along with over one thousand other medical words in his remarkable glossary of word origins, *Medical Meanings: A Glossary of Word Origins*. From "abdomen," out of the Latin *abdere*, to "zygomatic," from the Greek *zygon*, Haubrich enlivens medical words with an elegant style well infused with wit and insight. By reading this book, one receives a liberal education, for the text teems with interesting etymological anecdotes, as two examples will serve to illustrate.

Malady is an Anglicization of the French *maladie*, an illness. This word, in turn, is derived from the Latin adverb *male*, meaning badly. Haubrich then recalls a tale attributed to Mary, Queen of Scots. It seemed that whenever Mary fell ill, her French courtiers would cry, *Marie est malade* (Mary is sick). Often her illness was treated with a dish of preserved fruit whose name became "Mary's *maladie*," soon shortened by use to "marmalade." Despite this colorful origin of marmalade and its relationship to *maladie*, Haubrich finds the story apocryphal, pointing out that marmalade has a Portuguese origin (*marmalada*, a quince jam). To start with

malady and to end with marmalade in a book on medical word origins surely speaks to the catholic taste of the author.

Here is another example for the lovers of cola drinks. *Coca* is said to arise from the Spanish spelling of the Peruvian Indian name *cuca*, a shrub of the Andes. Alternatively, *coca* may derive from the Aymara *kkoka*, of similar meaning. We then learn about cocaine, originally a three-syllable word reduced to two syllables in its secondary derivatives, procaine, lidocaine, ad eratum. Haubrich then tells us of Coca-cola, coconut (not cocoanut), cocoa, and finally ends with theobromia (lit. a food of the gods).

If these two samples fail to send you promptly to your bookstore, my paraphrase is faulty. An alumnus of Henry Ford Hospital, Haubrich has catalogued the origins of words we use daily in our care of patients. An etymologic understanding of these medical words and their concise use is a joy. *Medical Meanings* offers us the opportunity to further enrich our familiarity with many words whose origins we may have forgotten or never known.

My congratulations to Bill Haubrich. His book deserves wide acknowledgment and distribution. To the reader, I suggest you buy *Medical Meanings*. You want to be *au courant* with the origins of carbuncle, ptomaine, and "the Spanish pox," don't you?

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*Haubrich WS. Medical meanings: A glossary of word origins. San Diego: Harcourt-Brace Jovanovich, 1984.