

præstringere oculos to blindfold, hence, to dazzle the eyes. Johnson has prestiges: 'illusions, impostures, juggling tricks'.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prestige acquired the secondary meaning 'Blinding or dazzling influence; 'magic', glamour; influence or reputation'. Supporting quotations in the OED include this from Fonblanque (1837): 'The prestige of the perfection of the law was unbroken.' and this from Sir William Harcourt (1898): 'People talk sometimes of prestige... I am not very fond of the word. What I understand by prestige is the consideration in which nations or individuals are held by their fellows'. It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that its current sense was fully established. So this from W. Somerset Maugham (1944): 'Though she didn't much care for [modern paintings] she thought quite rightly that they would be a prestige item in their future home.'

Prestidigitation (originally prestigation) is a close relative of prestige, but has not moved socially. It still means sleight of hand or legerdemain. The first use of it noted by OED is dated 1859: the very time when prestige was beginning to shift its meaning. It filled the gap left by its upwardly mobile relative.

And tinsel? It's doubtful flattery. It originally referred to the treatment of fabric, especially satin, 'Made to sparkle or glitter by the interweaving of gold or silver thread' (not bad), but later, applied to 'a cheap imitation in which copper thread was used to obtain the sparkling effect' (not so good). But the traditional Scottish meaning was much worse. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century it meant 'The condition of being 'lost' spiritually; perdition, damnation.' In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as a word in Scottish law it meant forfeiture or deprivation. And in Bell's *Dictionary of Scottish Law* (1838) there appears the entry:

Tinsel of Superiority, is a remedy..for unentered vassals whose superiors are themselves uninfest, and therefore cannot effectually enter them.

Glamour and prestige are examples of that exclusive club which includes obnoxious, panache, tawdry, sanction and mere. They are words whose meanings have shifted over time (that's common enough): these words have changed meaning 180 degrees. Rarer still are words which have two current meanings which are opposite. But enough for now: I will let you figure out what they are.

## POETRY

By Trevor Bailey

### Coincidence evidence: s 98

Jury examples from the Benchbook

- a) To music through Woolworths I wandered,  
To tissues, past bread bins and bowls;  
'Now who is that singer?' I wondered,  
When there on the shelf were loo rolls.
- b) Two old blokes sitting on the train;  
One attacks the crossword puzzle,  
While the other bathes his eyestrain  
Away with a water bottle:  
Only one performs ablutions,  
But both require solutions.
- c) For three mornings straight, at 5.33,  
I've heard the first birdsong so fair;  
What avian wonder allows it to see  
My small kitchen wall clock from there?