



## MISS THISTLEBOTTOM'S HOBGOBLINS\*

### The Careful Writer's Guide to the Taboos, Bugbears and Outmoded Rules of English Usage

By: Theodore M. Bernstein

Most people look back fondly at their early school years and wonder whatever became of their childhood mentors. But when Theodore Bernstein was contacted by his grade school English teacher, Miss Thistlebottom, he took the opportunity to show her that her rigid teaching of antiquated rules regarding English usage and those like her have left most people feeling bound up in a writer's straightjacket.

Bernstein isn't an English usage anarchist. But when "...everybody goes out into the world with a flat rule: Don't split infinitives...for those whom writing is an art or a necessity (and the two are not mutually exclusive), the rule is too confining; it's like telling a driver, 'Never go more than forty miles an hour.'"

Is there ever a time when it's okay to split an infinitive? There certainly are times when going over forty miles an hour is okay...even a necessity...

In four letters to his old teacher, Bernstein addresses *Witchcraft in Words* (Can there be more than two alternatives?); *Syntax Scarecrows* (Can something grow smaller?); *Imps of Idioms* (Is it head over heels or heels over head?) and *Spooks of Style* (Can you end a sentence in a preposition?) and forces Miss Thistlebottom to face the error of her ways.

*"As in so many other endeavors in life, in the use of English an avoidance of extremes is the way to achievement and excellence."* --Theodore M. Bernstein

MISS THISTLEBOTTOM'S HOBGOBLINS is an indispensable reference guide for anyone serious about writing. The scores and scores of entries in this book are witty, intelligent and have plenty of illustrative back-up to help break you free in your written communications. Read through Bernstein's manifesto and cast off the hobgoblin induced inhibitions that lack validity and cramp your writing style. Split an infinitive—end a sentence in a preposition—use a word in a new way—you'll never write the same way again.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **THEODORE M. BERNSTEIN** was a man of his words. If you were lucky enough to read his column in the New York Times, have him as your journalism professor at Columbia University, worked with him when he was editorial director at Times Books, read any of his numerous books on English usage or happened to run across his grocery list—you knew his writing communicated exactly what he wanted you to know in a clear, concise manner. His most noted book is *The Careful Writer*.

*\*\*"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblins of little minds."*

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

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