

whoever knows the hiding place is identical with Ralph. To say that there is no God but Allah is to affirm, of whatever Gods there be, that Each, or He, is identical with Allah.

Idiotisms

Our word *idiom* is used to refer to a linguistic singularity: to a turn of phrase whose mode of use is not evident from broader regularities of the language nor from the use of its component words in other contexts. The word is also used, like *idiome* and *idioma* in Romance languages, to refer to a whole language or dialect. The first sense, linguistic singularity, gets a distinctive word in French: *idiotisme*. The beginner in French who copes with such idioms as *j'ai beau faire*, or learns that *le bel âge* is youth while *un bel âge* is old age, is apt to find the word *idiotisme* wryly appropriate.

Granted, the connotation of idiocy is fortuitous; idiosyncrasy is the soberer model. In Greek the word *idiot* itself bore no devastating connotation; an *idiotes* was just a layman, a man in the street, a population unit, whose distinctive trait was the want of distinctive traits. Through Latin and later languages the word gradually acquired its harshness by the grim process of EUPHEMISM, *q.v.*

What are commonly called idioms in the first sense, or idiotisms, exceed the bounds of my solemn definition at the beginning of this piece. A turn of phrase is sometimes so designated when it just reflects a point of view different from our own. In an opera we hear "*fin che non giunga il Re*," and our first irresponsible guess is perhaps "in order that the King not come." We are startled by the simple translation: "until the King comes." Why the *non*? It all falls into place if we reflect that the period of time *until* the King comes extends precisely to the end (*fin*) of the period during which the King does *not* come. Anglophones think positively of what goes on up to the King's arrival. Donizetti and his compatriots think negatively

of the King-free period and of when it ends. Both come to the same thing.

Another example in much the same spirit is likewise from song, this time Mexican: "*ya no puede caminar*." Literally, "al-ready he cannot get around"; freely, "he can't get around any more." To the Hispanophone he is *already* in the state of *not* getting around; to us he is *no longer* in the state of *getting* around. Both come to the same thing and are equally straightforward. But each might be put down by the other speaker as impen-etrably idiotistic.

Impredicativity

It went without saying that you have specified a class beyond peradventure when you have clearly stated what is required for membership in it. So it went until Russell launched the twentieth century with his Paradox, which showed that there had to be exceptions to the rule (see PARADOXES).

In exchanges with Henri Poincaré in those early years, Russell attributed the paradox tentatively to what he called a vicious-circle fallacy. The "fallacy" consisted in specifying a class by a membership condition that makes reference directly or indirectly to a range of classes one of which is the very class that is being specified. For instance the membership condition behind Russell's Paradox is non-self-membership: *x* not a member of *x*. The paradox comes of letting the *x* of the membership condition be, among other things, the very class that is being defined by the membership condition. Russell and Poincaré came to call such a membership condition *impredicative*, and disqualified it as a means of specifying a class. The paradoxes of set theory, Russell's and others, were thus dis-mantled.

'Vicious-circle fallacy', however, is unduly harsh language. To specify a class, or whatever, is not to create it. In specifying something there is in general nothing wrong with appealing to