

The Declaration of Independents



A Figure of Speech: The Linguistic Family Tree

By Al Past

For nearly thirty years I taught college English in south Texas, where Spanish is a continual and delightful presence. Every semester I would ask my students if they knew what the parent language of Spanish was. Usually there would be one or two who'd know or guess correctly. "Latin?" they'd whisper. "Right!" I would say, then add, "What's the parent language of French, Italian, and Portuguese?" Often I'd have to supply that answer: Latin, again. I'd draw a "family tree" on the board, showing Latin at the top, branching downward into all the modern Romance languages. I might even point out the way Roman civilization spread over Europe and then declined, leaving Latin speakers pretty much on their own and their languages slowly changing into what we now call French, Spanish and Portuguese.

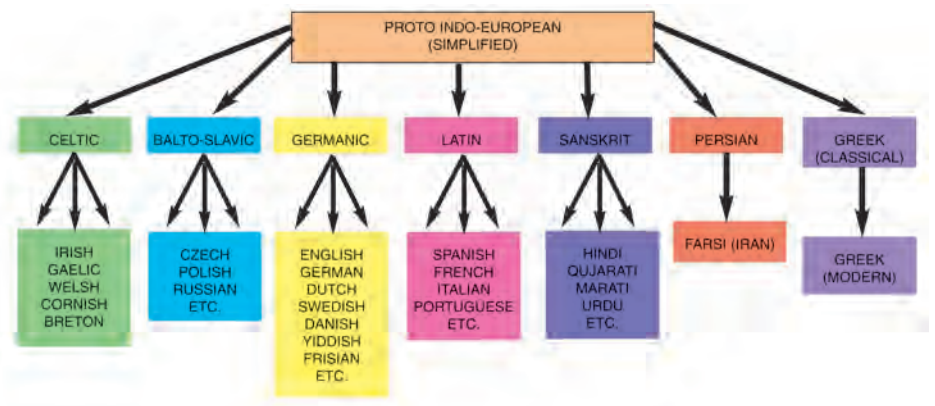
Then I'd ask: "What's the parent language of English?" I don't think anyone ever knew that, though once a sharp girl ventured "Beowulf's language?" That's a great guess, but actually Beowulf's language, which we now call Anglo-Saxon or Early English, was not the parent but the beginning of modern English. The actual answer, to simplify a bit, was Germanic. Like Latin speakers, tribes of Germanic speakers spread themselves across wide areas, and over time speech in different areas ultimately became different languages: modern German, Dutch, English, Frisian (English's closest "living" relative), and others. By the time I finished my diagram the Germanic family looked like the tree of the Romance languages.

Then I'd spring the kicker. "Where did Latin and Germanic come from?" No one ever knew that. I'd dramatically draw a line connecting Latin with Germanic. "Proto Indo-European!" I'd declare triumphantly. Skipping over two semesters of historical linguistics, I'd simply tell them that P.I.E., as we call it, was spoken roughly 5,000 years ago by tribes living north of the Caspian Sea, where Asia meets Europe (hence the name "Indo-European"). Probably for a variety of reasons—drought, famine, warfare, wanderlust—groups of these folks headed for the hills over the millennia. Some of the first to leave ended up in India, and their version of P.I.E. became Sanskrit. Another early group went in the same direction but stopped in what is now Iran and Afghanistan. Their language became Persian. Still another group went to what is now Greece and ended up speaking, yes ... Greek! Others went north and west, yielding Germanic, Scandinavian, Celtic, and Slavic languages.

Spanish, French, Italian, etc., under Latin. At this point no one would get too dizzy if I added Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian under Scandinavian, Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati under Sanskrit, Farsi under Persian, Gaelic, Cornish, and Welsh under Celtic, and Russian, Polish, and Czech under Slavic. It all made sense.

Then I'd ask this question: "Tell me, what do you call two people who have the same grandparents but different parents?" It might take fifteen seconds before someone would shout "Cousins!" "Bingo!" I'd say. "Right! Now look at this diagram. Look at English and Spanish. This is a sort of family tree, and each has different 'parents' but the same 'grandparent.' So what is the relation between English and Spanish?" "They're cousins!" someone would say.

And that was the whole point of that day's class. If time permitted, we might go on to talk about how Spanish and English, besides being



The author's "family tree" of language.

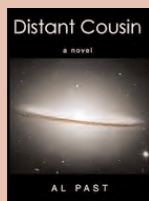
By this time the board was nearly full, with P.I.E. spreading into eight to ten sub-families. Two of these had already been broken down into another generation, with English, German, etc., under Germanic, and

related over time, borrow words from each other on a daily basis, becoming even more intertwined. Or I could show how the verb structure of modern Farsi (in Iran) is not terribly different from Spanish.

I sometimes asked if they knew which P.I.E. tribe went to India thousands of years ago, didn't like it, and wandered back, ending up in Europe and now even in the United States. The answer? The Gypsies. Their language, Roma, is an Indo-European language. Sometimes I'd show them a few of the other language families of the world: Semitic (Arabic, Hebrew), Asian, African, American Indian, and so forth. I might even have time to show them how boundary areas, like those between France and Spain and Italy, had blended dialects: Provençal, Catalan, Langedoc, and so forth.

The final point was to grab the college desk dictionary I always carried to class and open it to the entry for "Indo-European Languages." In every college desk dictionary I've ever seen there is a chart of the family of Indo-European languages. At first, it looks like a confusing jumble of bizarre language names. But once you understand that it's really just a family tree, it all becomes clear. ■

Al Past is the author of the Distant Cousin trilogy, in which a young woman speaking an extinct Indo-European language lands on Earth. Visit distantcousin.net for more information.



My Search For Mozart—And His Wife

by Juliet Waldron

I first learned about Mozart when I was very young, because my mother was a big opera fan. In the fifties, that meant Wagner, Verdi and Puccini, but, occasionally, there would be Mozart's *Magic Flute* or *Marriage of Figaro* on the Metropolitan Opera's radio broadcast. All I really knew about Mozart was that he had been a child prodigy, and that he had died young and penniless.

After seeing the movie *Amadeus* I walked out of the theater on fire, in the grip of obsession. I couldn't rest until I found out how much of that screenplay had been based in truth.

As I began my research, I hardly slept, immersing myself in Mozart's works and world in order to uncover the truth. But I couldn't imagine choosing to place myself inside Mozart's head—he was a genius! The closest person, however, the first to share his joys and sorrows, would have been his wife, Constanze.

The plots of Mozart's comic operas gave me real insights into 18th century ideas about love, marriage, sex and social class. I also read biographies. This was the early 1980s, before the Internet made searching easy, and many sources had not remained in print. I wrote to secondhand bookstores all over the country and was a regular at the State Library.



Constanze Mozart.

I soon realized that Mozart's biographers had no love for Constanze. They either belittled her as someone who abandoned him when the going got rough, or they dismissed her as a silly young woman from an insignificant family (the Webers) who'd married a genius she was ill prepared to handle. I immediately doubted the "insignificant" designation, at least in terms of the Weber family's musicianship. Constanze's two older sisters became famous prima donnas,

performing the most demanding vocal music of the day—some of it written specifically for their voices by their brilliant brother-in-law.

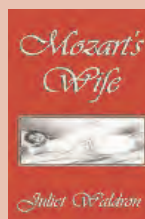
When I purchased a copy of *The Mozart Family Letters*, I thought I had struck gold. This was, after all, a primary source! I quickly discovered the letters were full of blacked out names and passages, and that Constanze herself had been the censor. Other letters appeared to be missing.

I also learned that this "Dearest Best Beloved Little Wife" (as Mozart addressed her in his letters) had never bothered to mark his grave, although many friends, including Joseph Haydn, begged her to do so. Moreover, she took her young sons to musical friends who lived in Prague and left them there. At that juncture, Constanze appeared less than sympathetic.

On the other hand, for years she did nothing but market and mythologize Mozart, collect debts he'd been owed and organize memorial concerts. She strove to have her husband's works published so that his music would survive. She was also responsible for the founding of the Cathedral Music Association and Mozarteum, later to become the Mozarteum University Salzburg.

Finally, I felt I could almost see her: a capable, strong-minded woman, a force in her own right. After a dizzy romance and a precipitous marriage—with six children born in nine years, life-threatening illnesses, and a chronic lack of money—through it all, her love for her husband had survived. ■

Juliet Waldron is the author of Mozart's Wife, a 2000 Frankfort nominee. Another of her books, Genesee, won the 2003 Epic Award for best historical novel. Additional information can be found at www.julietwaldron.com.



Norse By Northwest: An Analysis of Viking Literature

by Stuart W. Mirsky

When I was a boy, I loved adventure tales and even dreamed of writing them. As I grew older I never lost my taste for them, but other things got in the way and I eventually gave up my plans for a writing career.

Still, at a certain point—I was reading James Clavell's *Shogun*, I think, and enjoying it immensely—I thought, why can't I do that? But what to write about? I didn't just want to write *Shogun* redux.

Eventually, I stumbled upon Hope Muntz' *The Golden Warrior* in a small bookshop. This was the story of the great tug-of-war for the English throne between Harold and William which culminated in the Battle of Hastings in 1066 (disastrous for Harold). The book was written in a spare sort of prose that evoked the voice of the old Norse world sagas.

Both Harold and William, of course, were descended (more or less) from Vikings, and their milieu was as Scandinavian as it was Anglo-Saxon or French.

The Golden Warrior, a truly remarkable novel, at once reawakened my passion for the Norse mythos, itself tied irretrievably to my childhood love of high adventure. And so I determined to write an adventure tale set in the Norse world. But where to start? I hungrily devoured every Norse saga in English translation I could lay hands on (often multiple translations of the same saga) and greedily absorbed both the sagaman's "voice" and the Norse ethos in which these works were set.

At the same time, I found myself reading other adventure tales, mostly of the nineteenth century variety (though not excluding some more modern entries), to better understand the motifs and dynamics which drove their plots. I read Scott's



Viking sculpture by Robert P. O'Brien.

Ivanhoe and *The Talisman*, Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, Eiji Yoshikawa's *Musashi*, Henryk Sienkiewicz's *With Fire and Sword*, Robert Graves' *Hercules*, *My Shipmate*, and a great many more besides.

What I was seeking was the common thread, the tone and plot points that characterized the mighty adventures of old. Not only had H. Rider Haggard given us *King Solomon's Mines* (I read it, of course), but also *Eric Brighteyes*, Haggard's own homage to the Norse world. Roughly a generation later, E. R. Eddison (of *Worm Ouroboros fame*) gave us *Styrbiorn the Strong* (a flawed work but certainly one of the most beautifully wrought pseudo-sagas ever).

The greatest adventures, I realized, often found their truest home in the cradle of the saga world—and for good reason. What moves us more, after all, than the dark, doom-laden heroism of the sagas' greatest adventurers, from Gunnar of Hlidarend, who meets his end because he is too stubborn to walk away from his own land for even three years, to King Olaf Trygvesson who disappears beneath the waves when a mighty sea battle goes against him, the echo of his best archer's snapped bow string still resounding grimly in his ears—and ours? And what of Kjartan Olafsson, brought low by his own

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BOOK REVIEW

The following book review is by Juliet Waldron, author of *Mozart's Wife*.

To Truckee's Trail by Celia Hayes

We've all seen plenty of wagon train stories on TV and at the movies. *To Truckee's Trail* will carry you back to "those thrilling days of yesteryear," but not in Hollywood fashion. Unlike television, this story is candid about the loss, hardship and privation that an overland journey to California in the mid-1840s entailed.

The book is a fictionalized account of the real-life wagon train identified by historians as the Townsend Party. At the time of their journey, the "trail" out west was not well-known, and the greatest challenge was crossing the mountains before the snows came.

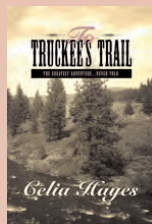
The expedition's doctor carries the story. He is uniquely positioned to interact with all the members of the party—at their best and at their worst. Although the book starts slowly, because so many characters must

be introduced, the excitement begins as soon as they hit the trail.

The emigrants set off in the spring, fording rivers and encountering Indians and buffalo as they make their way over a pristinely beautiful prairie landscape. At first, their difficulties are mostly with each other. When they reach the desert, however, their primary antagonist becomes Nature, and this continues as they race to cross the trackless mountains before winter traps them. As this journey actually took place a few years before the Donner Party, the reader knows quite well (better, perhaps, than did those long ago emigrants) what the risks were.

During the arduous journey, a society in miniature must be established, and not everyone wants to follow the rules. There are quarrels and illnesses, as well as Indians and deserts, floods and storms, and at the end, those death-trap mountain snows to endure.

The author's feel for period dialogue and sensibility never fails her, and her attention to detail is incredible. I found her portraits of the oxen and mules to be as genuine and moving as those of the human characters. If you're a fan of adventure, or if you're a lover of Westerns, you'll certainly enjoy *To Truckee's Trail*.



successes and the jealous lover who had lost him to another? Or Skarp-Hedin Njalsson whose bitterness at his own failure to win renown makes him so sour that he must goad his father's enemies beyond endurance, leading to the fateful burning of the Njalssons and their kin? Or the mighty Kari Solmandarsson, Skarp-Hedin's own brother-in-law who will not accept a settlement with the killers of his kin but pursues them relentlessly though this takes him to the ends of the earth, including Rome and Byzantium itself?

The Vikings of old had a bad rap among their enemies but, like the pirates of the Caribbean, their exotic world, violent and often cutthroat ways and unique sense of honor (at least as literature remembers them), lend a certain nobility to their memory. In their own literature, the Vikings are three-dimensional human beings with mixed motives and a sense of honor and justice, just like all the rest of mankind, and it is precisely this that makes them grist for the adventurer's mill. ■

Stuart W. Mirsky is the author of *The King of Vinland's Saga*. In 2000, Mirsky was coordinator for New York City's part in the international sailing event, *VikingSail 2000*, which brought a fleet of Viking ship replicas into New York Harbor for three days of sailing and celebration in honor of the Norse explorations of North America.



Broken Trails: Can The Western Genre Be Saved?

by Michael S. Katz

The Western genre is still alive and kicking, right? When the AMC mini-series *Broken Trail* won three Emmys, Robert Duvall said that the Western is here to stay. Why, then, doesn't every moviegoer feel the same way?

And why aren't there more Westerns on the bookshelves? Zane Grey, Max

Brand and Louis L'Amour made Western fiction great, but isn't there anything else available?

The 1940s and '50s were the glory days for the Western. They ruled the Silver Screen and made American icons out of John Wayne, Roy Rogers, and others. Television Westerns were everywhere, including *Rawhide*, *Gunsmoke*, *The Rifleman*, *Have Gun Will Travel*. They portrayed the West as a wonderful land of opportunity, where it was easy to tell the good guys from the bad guys.

The 1960s and '70s brought a period of darker Western films, especially the so-called "Spaghetti" Westerns filmed by Italian crews. Westerns had become morality plays that reflected changing social mores in the real world, and the West was portrayed as a menacing place, a land of fear and brutality.

The 1980s saw Western films almost drop off the map completely. Can anyone remember any critically acclaimed Westerns from, say, 1980 to 2000? Most people would be hard-pressed to even remember Kevin Costner's *Dances With Wolves* in 1990 and Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* in 1992.

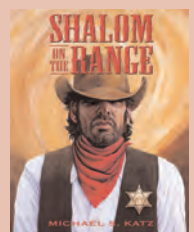
In the last few years we did have some excellent movies, like actor-director Costner's *Open Range* (\$58 million U.S. box office), and the Emmy-winning *Broken Trail*. We had HBO's *Deadwood*, which only lasted three seasons but received a fair amount of acclaim. Russell Crowe and Christian Bale probably surprised a lot of people by agreeing to star in the remake of *3:10 To Yuma*, but the movie has done well for itself (over \$53 million U.S. box office). Conversely, Brad Pitt's star power couldn't lift *The Assassination of Jesse James By the Coward Robert Ford* out of art-film status, so don't expect a flood of copycat films.

As for Western literature, the Western Writers of America has a decent-sized membership roster, but you'd be hard-pressed to find a lot of their work in your local bookstore. Sure, L'Amour, Grey, and Brand created some wonderful stories, but they were written for older times. Today's writers know how to craft a story to please today's audience; the reading public just needs to give them a chance. A safe place to start would be books by Spur Award winners like Johnny D. Boggs, Loren D. Estleman, Elmer Kelton, or Tony Hillerman, all of whom are prolific authors.

One area of salvation for Western literature, believe it or not, has been comic books. On the shelves these days you can find, among others, *Jonah Hex* written by Jimmy Palmiotti and Justin Grey, *The Lone Ranger* by Brett Matthews, *Desperadoes* and *Graveslinger* by Jeff Mariotte. All of these writers are doing their part to bring the Western into the 21st century, and all of these projects are worth a look.

So do your part to support your local Western, because time is running out. Somebody needs to save the Western before it rides off into the sunset forever. ■

Michael S. Katz is the author of *Shalom On The Range*, a comedy-adventure set in the Old West. Information on this book and others can be found on the website, www.strider-nolanmedia.com.



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