



THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE

BY CHARLTON LAIRD

The fascinating story of our language told with wit and imagination—a thrilling voyage of discovery through the world of words.



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LANGUAGE

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A Fawcett Premier Book

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Preface

A PREFACE should not dwarf the book, and this one shall not.

The volume is not intended mainly as a text, although it grew in part from my difficulties as a teacher. Language is so entrancing that all sorts of people want to know about it, and yet, except for classroom texts which have limited usefulness outside the classroom, I found difficulty naming a book to which I could gladly refer the curious for a ready answer to anything linguistic. Accordingly I tried to ask myself all the most important questions about language, answering those for which the present state of our scholarship provides answers and guessing at the rest, labeling my guesses for what they are. In the belief that promoting the popular understanding of language is a worthy endeavor, I have tried to write so that a dogged person can understand me and a charitable reader can stay awake. Popularization has necessitated simplification; I hope it has not led me into downright error.

That I am indebted to thousands of students of language, living and dead, goes without saying. However, my greatest debt is to my wife, Helene Laird, who has served as typist, editor, and laboratory canine—when I had a notion, I "tried it on the dog." No one who knows anything of language will suppose that this volume purports to be a contribution to scholarship. A work of this sort should rely on the tested results of scholarship, and where tested results were available, I have tried to employ them.

CHARLTON LAIRD

*University of Nevada
Reno, Nevada
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ADVENTURE WITH WORDS

All the marvel and wonder of our language is here revealed with such color and wit that a subject usually treated with poker-faced pedantry reads like a novel of adventure.

Charlton Laird, scholar, linguist, novelist, traces language from its grunting, cave-man origins, explores its strange developments, and describes with vivid drama its effect on civilization. He boldly challenges the pedants by charging that the traditional teaching of grammar "is a mighty hoax, one of those belly-rumbling impostures which the workaday world can seldom afford."

We can never learn too much about the language we speak every day of our lives. The power of rightly chosen words is greater than we know. **THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE** turns this task into an exciting and enjoyable pastime.

