

VILLAGE VIEW

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Among the flood of catalogs advertising post-Christmas sales, the flood that followed the deluge of pre-Christmas catalogs, came one from Hammacher Schlemmer, one of New York's most prestigious specialty stores.

It's been a good number of years since I've placed even a token order with Hammacher Schlemmer, but I'm still receiving sales catalogs from them. Never say die. If the truth were told, I'd say I usually enjoy reading the offers found within those pages. It helps me appreciate the non-value of the many things I neither need nor want as well as the importance to my present life-style of those few I already have.

Who needs or wants an Electramatic Bed, twin-size, regularly selling for \$899.50 but now on sale for \$729.50, for example? Although its back raises slowly, gradually, to any upright position at the press of a button, and although another button raises the knee section and foot position, and you have an infinite choice of angles and positions, if I'm that sick I'll go into a hospital.

Any bed I'd pay that much money for would be one I expected to spend the rest of my life in, 24 hours a day.

Or take something much less expensive, like a DeLuxe Log Carrier, leather-lined and with saddle-stitched handle and edges. It's marked down from \$19.95 to \$17.95. I can live without it.

Still, I like to read the catalog and imagine (actually, I don't have to imagine because I've known some) what sort of people indulge their conspicuous consumption complexes with purchases of this sort.

Directed, as many Hammacher Schlemmer advertisements are, to appeal to acquisitive members of our society's more affluent segment, descriptions in preceding catalogs have often been entertaining to read; in some cases they've been educational. It's mind-broadening to learn you can purchase on sale for \$99.95 either a "high-shine chrome or electro-gold-plated telephone, ready to use, complete with

four-prong plug to fit any phone jack," or that a "digital counter adjustable jump rope that records the number of jumps" is sale-priced at \$8, down from \$10.

It was with considerable consternation, therefore, that I learned that a newspaper log roller "helps reduce ecology, in addition to reducing trash, saving fuel and atmosphere." The notion that any "metal fireplace accessory" (as it is called) might help reduce ecology came as a distinct shock to me.

According to my Webster's, ecology is a branch of biology dealing with the mutual relations between organisms and their environment. I doubt very much that any kind of fireplace accessory, metal or otherwise, can (or should) be capable of reducing a scientific subject.

Having spotted this oddity, I attempted to imagine what mental processes the copywriter and the proof-reader had exercised in permitting that description to go into print. I also read other sales pitches with greater attention to detail than usual.

While most of the copy was written in easily-understood English, a few other passages gave me pause, such as the recommendation to "convert your fireplace or Franklin Stove into an efficient, circulating room heater." If 'twere me, I'd prefer my room heater stay in one place, thanks just the same.

Then there's the De Luxe Portable Air Cleaner; after two introductory sentences, you're advised, "In addition 3 pre-filters take care of airborne particles and a charcoal filter for odors." Can these pre-filters take care of a charcoal filter for odors?

Was anyone editing the work of the copy-writer who stated, "No need for two or more instruments or electricity needed?" Or the promise made of an iron that would "press without strain, fatigue, easily, quickly"? Who wants to press without easily and quickly?

How about this one for selling a Fone-A-Lert: "produces shrill, piercing, intermittent audible, signal synchronized to the ringing of your phone." Any sound that's shrill and piercing is nearly always audible. Wouldn't "produces shrill, piercing intermittent signal, synchronized..." have better served? Note the shift in commas.

There's a Non-Slip Bath Tub-Mat for slip-proof safety and air-cushioned comfort for children, elders or young adults. And the rest of us? Many people are none of these, but we bathe regularly and are as apt to slip in a tub as anyone else.

Boot Shapers doubtless prolong the life of boots. It's good to know there's "no harmful heat needed to remove wet and moisture" when you use these in your boots. Wet and moisture? There's a difference?

Particularly fascinating is the 8-Way Contour Thermal Heat Massager. According to the catalog, "Lying on the stomach it can provide relief from tight chest and stomach muscles and even ankles and feet." Whose ankles and feet on whose stomach?

Perhaps the most glaring example of misuse of the English language is the comment in referring to a Silver-Plated Cruet Set. "Each are set in a silver-plated holder." That's what it says. It could as easily have read, "Each is set..." or "These are set..." but, please, not "Each are..." If we can say "each are", then we can say "he are" or "it are". Each **must** refer to only one; that's what "each" means.

By now you've concluded I'm a pedantic nit-picker. Perhaps. If hating to read copy that reveals the writer is under-educated and poorly trained in his craft makes me a pedant and a nit-picker, then I'm guilty.

My mental picture of the person who produced this copy has changed from my initial impression that he or she didn't know the meaning of the word "ecology" (and, therefore, shouldn't have used the word in the first place) to one of dismay that someone unfamiliar with basic English is being paid to write about products offered for sale by one of New York City's finer stores. That person's ignorance and lack of educational background destroys the image Hammacher Schlemmer has spent years (since 1848 its logo attests) to establish and millions in advertising dollars to maintain.

When this column appears in print, I intend to clip and mail it to the advertising department at Hammacher Schlemmer. It may mean a copy-writer or two will lose their jobs. That's not my goal. My goal is to do whatever small thing I can to ensure the retention of the English language as a viable form of communication and to point up the fact that our written words set the standards for our speech.

Unless we can say and write what we mean, and unless we know what we mean when we speak and write, we've no business being in the profession. When we don't express ourselves clearly and correctly, how can those who read what we write or hear what we say.