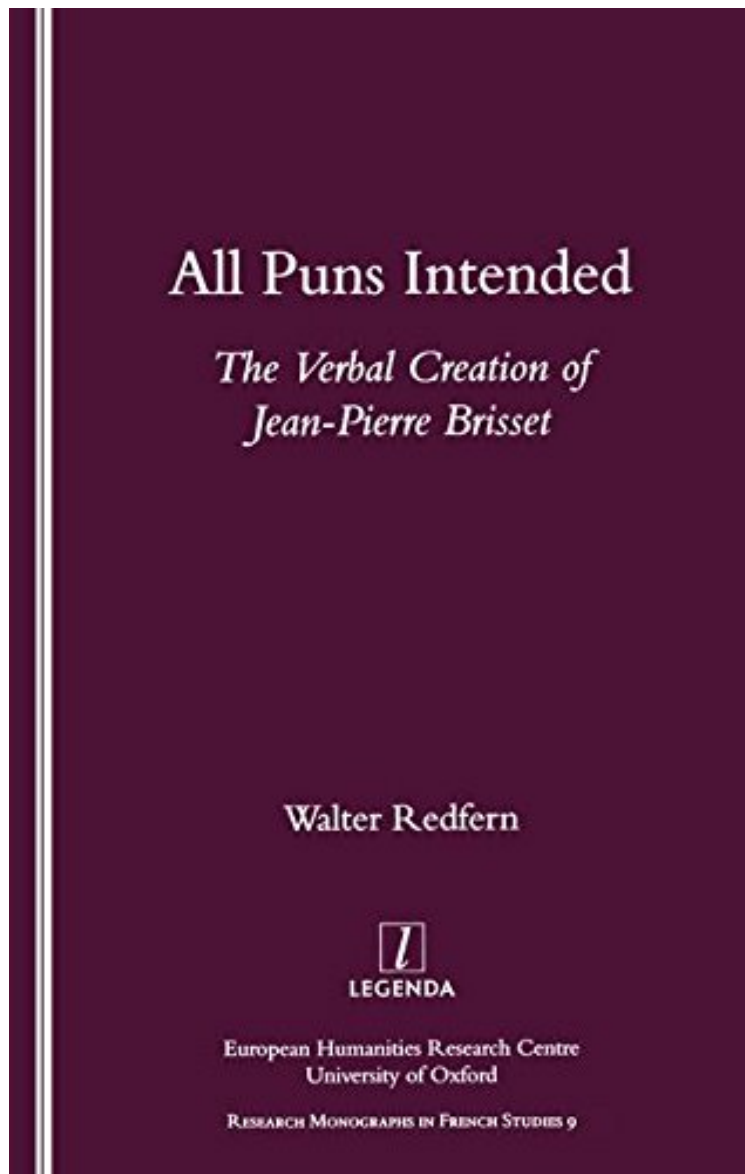


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All Puns Intended: The Verbal Creation of Jean-Pierre Brisset (Research Monographs in French Studies)

Walter D. Redfern
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Nineteenth-century France spawned numerous 'fous littéraires', one of the most fascinating being Jean-Pierre Brisset (1837-1919). An individualist par excellence, he dismantled the existing French tongue, reshaping it to suit his own grandiose purpose, which was that of explaining the development of human beings from frogs and of their language from croaks. Continuous and ubiquitous punning was a unique feature of his writing. In this study, Walter Redfern examines such themes as the nature of literary madness, the phenomenon of deadpan humour, the role of analogy, and the place of institutional religion in Brisset's inventive rewriting of the Creation.

Brisset had been a good soldier, and he was a model railwayman: there was no hint during the working day of the oddity of what he was up to after hours... The fact that frogs turned out to speak what was easily recognizable as French seems at no point to have fazed Brisset, and since the original human language has willy-nilly to be universal, all other known languages must be capable of being derived from French, which was pleasing news for a Frenchman. (John Sturrock *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 January, 2002, 41) What indeed can one make of this autodidact who mused about etymology without mastering Latin and about human origins without reading Darwin? Brisset can readily be dismissed as arrogant, Gallocentric, sex-obsessed or simply unreadable. Yet Redfern finds in his work a splendid proof of the instability of language, and also a fine pretext for learned digressions about puns and myths and free associations and what Ponge called 'amphibiguité'... The main pleasure given by this book actually comes from Redfern's own style, which is intelligent, energetic, quirky and never too self-indulgent. (Peter Low *New Zealand Journal of French Studies*, 24/2, 2003, 51-2) Redfern's treatment is interesting and wide-ranging, but interesting because it is wide-ranging. (Stephen F. Noreiko *French Studies*, LVII.2, 2003, 255-6) Walter Redfern ... a particulièrement raison de s'appuyer sur les travaux les plus sérieux de ces dernières années pour situer enfin la place de Brisset et l'impact de ses ouvrages parmi les créateurs littéraires de la fin du XIXe et de la première moitié du XXe siècle. ... Un bonne bibliographie sert d'appui à cette monographie intelligemment projetée. (Jacques-Philippe Saint-Gérand *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, November 3, 2004, 732) About the Author Walter Redfern is Professor of French at the University of Reading.