



## Secret Language: Codes, Tricks, Spies, Thieves, and Symbols

By Barry J. Blake

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With revelations on every page, and sample codes and puzzles for the reader to crack, *Secret Language* will entertain everyone with an urge to know more about the most arcane and curious uses of language. From backmasking to the Enigma Machine, from magic words to literary symbols, here is a lively, engaging tour of languages that hide their meanings from all but a chosen few. Blake explains the difference between ciphers and codes and shows how secret messages have been written--and broken--for almost two thousand years. He explores the history and uses of the slang and argot of schools and trades, tracing the stories of centuries-old cants such as those used by sailors and criminals--among them polari, the mix of Italian, Yiddish, and slang once spoken among strolling players and circus folk and most recently adopted by the gay community. He examines the sacred languages of ancient cults and religions, uncovers the workings of onomancy, spells, and gematria, considers the obliqueness of allusion and parody, and celebrates the absurdities of euphemism and jargon.

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"Intriguing. It is good to have a book that gives you something to ponder without being ponderous itself. And it can be recommended in particular to anyone disposed to find language itself, as such, a source of pleasure."--InsideHigherEd.com

"Covers a lot of ground. Reminds us that the rehearsal of that moment when concealing becomes revealing is a powerful resource-one might even reserve the word divine for it."--TheNation.com

#### About the Author

**Barry J. Blake** is Emeritus Professor of Linguistics at La Trobe University. His books include *Playing with Words* and *All About Language*.

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