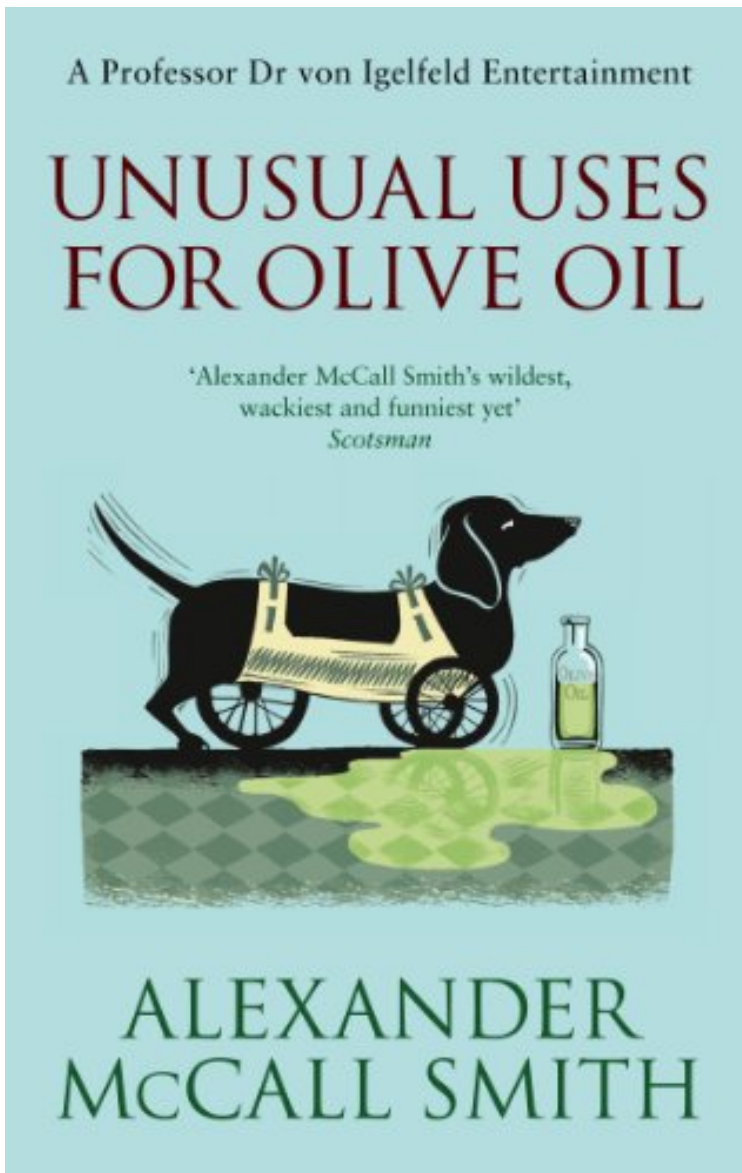


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# Unusual Uses For Olive Oil: A Von Igelfeld Novel (von Igelfeld Entertainments Book 4) (English Edition)



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurLife is so unfair, and it sends many things to try Professor Dr Moritz-Maria von Igelfeld, author of Portuguese Irregular Verbs and pillar of the Institute of Romance Philology in the proud Bavarian city of Regensburg. There is the undeserved rise of his rival (and owner of a one-legged

dachshund), Detlev Amadeus Unterholzer; the interminable ramblings of the librarian, Herr Huber; and the condescension of his colleagues with regard to his unmarried state. But when his friend Ophelia Prinzel takes it upon herself to match-make, and duly produces a cheerful heiress with her own Schloss, it appears that the professor's true worth is about to be recognised. Maddening, idiotic and hugely entertaining, von Igelfeld is an inspired comic creation.

Chapter 1. Surprising? Astonishing? No, it was more than that, far more it was shocking, quite nakedly schrecklich. Professor Dr Dr (honoris causa) (mult.) Moritz-Maria von Igelfeld, author of that definitive, twelve-hundred page scholarly work, Portuguese Irregular Verbs, was cautious in his choice of words, but there were times when one really had no alternative but to resort to a strong term such as shocking. And this, he thought, was one such occasion. It was ganz, erstaunlich shocking. The news in question was conveyed in the pages of a journal that normally did little to disturb anybody's equanimity. The editors of the sedate, indeed thoroughly fusty, dusty, crusty Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie, a quarterly journal of linguistic affairs, would have been surprised to hear of any reader so much as raising an eyebrow over its contents. And certainly they would have been astonished to see one of their better-known readers, such as Professor von Igelfeld, sitting up in his chair and actually changing colour, reddening in his case, as he studied the small item tucked away in the news section of the review. It was not even the lead news item, but was at the bottom of the page, a mere paragraph, reporting on the announcement of the shortlist for a recently endowed academic prize. This prize, set up with funds left by a Munich industrialist of bookish tastes, was for the most distinguished work of scholarship an article or a full-length monograph on the subject of the heritage and structure of the Romance languages. What could possibly be controversial about that? It was not the fact that the prize had been established that shocked von Igelfeld, rather it was the composition of the shortlist. There were three names there, all known to him, one very much so. As far as Professor J. G. K. L. Singh was concerned, von Igelfeld had no objection at all to his heading the list. Over the years he had had various dealings with Professor Singh, exchanging letters at regular intervals, and he had become quite fond of him. Certainly he did not agree with the rather unkind nickname that some scholars had given the celebrated Indian philologist the Great Bore of Chandigarh indeed, von Igelfeld did not agree with nicknames at all, thinking them puerile and unhelpful. His own name, which meant hedgehog-field in German, had resulted in his sometimes being the butt of schoolboyish references, masquerading as humour, but of course he had always risen above such nonsense.

It was true that Professor Singh was perhaps a little on the tedious side indeed, he might well have been quite incontrovertibly so but that was no excuse for calling him the Great Bore of Chandigarh. The British ridiculous people! and the Americans were the worst, he had noticed, when it came to this sort of thing, with the British being by a long chalk the more serious offenders. They saw humour where absolutely none existed, and it seemed to matter little how elevated they were their jokes often being at the same time unintelligible and silly. Professor Thomas Simpson of Oxford, for example, a major figure in the study of vowel shifts, had referred to Professor Singh by this sobriquet and had remained silent in the face of von Igelfeld's protest that perhaps not everyone found Professor Singh boring. And he was no longer at Chandigarh anyway, von Igelfeld pointed out, which made the nickname out of date. He has been translated to Delhi, von Igelfeld said. So the reference to Chandigarh is potentially misleading. You must be careful not to mislead, Herr Professor Dr Simpson. This comment had been made in the coffee break at the annual World Philology Congress in Paris, and later that day, as the delegates were enjoying a glass of wine prior to the conference dinner, von Igelfeld had overheard Professor Simpson saying to a group of Australian delegates, I'm not sure if the Hedgehog gets it half the time. He had moved away, and the flippant English professor had been quite unaware that his remark had been intercepted by its victim. A few minutes later, though, he found himself standing next to Professor Simpson at the board on which the table placements had been posted. Von Igelfeld was relieved to find that he was sitting nowhere near the condescending Oxonian, and he had turned to him with the remark, You will be happy, I think, to find that you are not sitting next to a hedgehog. They can be prickly (prickelnd), you know. It was a devastating shaft of wit, but it brought forth no response from its target, who appeared not to have heard. What did you say, von Igelfeld? he asked. Von Igelfeld hesitated. It was difficult to serve a dish of revenge twice within the same minute. I said that hedgehogs can be prickelnd if you sit next to them. Professor Simpson looked at him with amusement. I would never sit on a hedgehog if I were you, he remarked airily. Not very comfortable, as surely you, of all people, should know! But my dear chap, you must excuse me. I'm at the top table, you see, and I must get up there before the rank and file clutter the place up. If he rather welcomed the inclusion of Professor J. G. K. L. Singh's name on the list, he did not feel that way about the next name, which was that of Professor

Antonio Capobianco of the University of Parma. He knew Capobianco slightly, and found his work slender and unconvincing. Two years ago the Parmese had written a book on the subjunctive in seventeenth-century

Italian, a book that von Igelfeld had reviewed in polite but unambiguously dismissive terms in the *Zeitschrift*, almost, but not quite, describing it as scholarly ephemera. He would certainly not have chosen Capobianco had he been a judge, but at the same time he could understand that there might have been political reasons for including him on the list. It was nice to put Italians on lists they so appreciated it; Italians, von Igelfeld was convinced, had a profound need to be loved by others and consequently were always reassured to see their names appear on any list. He had even heard that they tended to get upset if they were left off negative lists such as those that ranked the most corrupt countries in the world. But we lead the world in corruption, one Italian prime minister had been said to complain. How can they put us below Mali? So there could be little doubt but that Capobianco would be very pleased to see himself on this shortlist and would presumably make every effort to bribe the judges to decide in his favour or, if he did not, some of his friends and relatives could be expected to do so on his behalf. But he would never win. But then there was the third name, and that was where enthusiasm and mild irritation were succeeded by outrage. Professor Dr Detlev-Amadeus Unterholzer, the journal announced, had been nominated on the basis of his work on Portuguese verbs work which enjoyed a considerable reputation not only in Germany but throughout the world. His research has put Regensburgs Institute of Romance Philology on the map, the journal concluded, and deservedly so. This makes him a very strong candidate for the award of this prize. It was difficult to know where to begin. Unterholzer had been von Igelfelds colleague for a considerable time. Their relationship was not a simple one, as there had been a number of issues over the years none of them von Igelfelds fault, of course because of which the friendship between them, if one could call it that, had been strained. Most notably there had been the incident of Unterholzers dog, the unfortunate dachshund, Walter, or Dr Walter Unterholzer, as the Librarian, Herr Huber, had so wittily called him. This dog had lost three of his legs in circumstances for which Unterholzer blamed von Igelfeld, and the poor animal was now obliged to get about on a prosthetic appliance involving three small wheels. Walter had, some years previously, disgraced himself by coming across and eating a small collection of bones. These bones had not been intended for consumption by dogs, rather they were sacred relics of particular interest to the Coptic church, being the bones or some of them of the late Bishop of Myra, none other than St Nicholas. Thereafter, Walter had become an object of veneration within the Coptic church as he had consumed holy relics and was therefore, in a sense, a reliquary, even if an ambulant one. He had enjoyed a brief period of veneration in a church, occupying a small gilded kennel before which pilgrims would kneel. Unfortunately, many pilgrims expressed surprise at the barking sounds which emerged from this kennelreliquary, and so in the end Walter was restored to his original owners, the Unterholzers. Von Igelfelds responsibility for Walters unfortunate injury had led to ill-feeling, but even putting that casus belli aside, there had also been numerous occasions on which Unterholzer had sought to obtain some advantage over von Igelfeld. Some of these were minor and could be forgiven but others were of such a serious nature as to remain a stumbling block in the way of normal relations. One thing was clear, though that von Igelfeld was the better scholar. Unterholzer had written his own book on Portuguese subjunctives years ago, a minor insubstantial book, which had concentrated only on a few modal verbs. Certainly that work was not fit to be mentioned in the same breath as Portuguese Irregular Verbs, and indeed never was, at least by von Igelfeld, who always made sure that he left a gap, a silence, between any uttering of the names of his own book and Unterholzers. It was the glaring disparity between their respective contributions to Romance philology that made this announcement so hurtful. If anybodys work had put Regensburg on the map, it was his, von Igelfelds, that had done so. A few people abroad might have heard of Unterholzer, von Igelfeld conceded, but they would not necessarily know him for his work. They might have seen him at conferences, perhaps, where they surely would have noticed, and perhaps even discussed, Unterholzers rather vulgar nose; not the nose of a scholar, thought von Igelfeld. Or they might have come across a reference to Unterholzers book while looking for something more substantial, such as Portuguese Irregular Verbs itself. But they would certainly not have bothered to sit down and read Unterholzers observations on modal verbs. So why, then, had Unterholzer been shortlisted for what was, after all, a rather generous prize of fifty thousand euros? As von Igelfeld was thinking of this outrage, he was joined in the coffee room by the Institutes librarian, Herr Huber. Anything interesting in the *Zeitschrift*? asked the Librarian. I havent read the latest issue yet. Its on my desk, of course, but Ive been terribly busy over the last few days, what with my aunt not being quite as well as she might be, poor soul. The Librarian lost no opportunity to mention his aunt, a resident of a nursing home on the outer fringes of

the city. This aunt, who enjoyed bad health, was the subject of long monologues by the Librarian, who laboured under the impression that his work colleagues were interested in endless details of her complaints and afflictions. No, she has not been all that well, mused the Librarian, quite forgetting the question he had just put to von Igelfeld. She has blood pressure, you know. I did tell you that, didnt I? Yes, I think I must have. Shes had it for a long time. Everybody has blood pressure, Herr Huber, said von Igelfeld cuttingly. If one did not, then ones blood would simply stay where it was, rather than going round the body. Your aunt would not last long without blood pressure, I can assure you. Nor would you, for that matter. This last remark was an aside, but even as he uttered it, von Igelfeld wondered whether the Librarian had, in fact, much blood pressure. There were some people who gave the impression of having a great deal of blood coursing through their veins robust and ruddy people who moved decisively and energetically. Then there were those who were pallid, and slow in their movements; people through whose veins the blood must move sluggishly, at best, with only the pressure expected of a half-inflated bicycle tyre. The Librarian belonged in that group, von Igelfeld thought. Herr Huber laughed. Oh, I know that. I meant to say that she has the wrong sort of blood pressure. Its either too high, or too low. I cant remember which. And there is one sort of pill for high blood pressure and another for low. You have to be terribly careful, you know. If you took the pill for high blood pressure and your blood pressure was really too low, then Im not sure what would happen. Heaven forbid that anything like that should happen to my aunt, of course! Indeed, said von Igelfeld. That would be a most unfortunate occurrence. Of course, these days pills are made in different colours and shapes, the Librarian went on. One of the nurses said that most pills used to be white, which could lead to bad mistakes in their administration. Now they are different colours and have markings on them. He paused to take a sip of his coffee. She my aunt, that is used to have a large red pill that she had to take before she was settled for the night. Sometimes I was there when they gave it to her. She called it my red pill and I once asked her, What is that pill for, Aunt? and she said, I am not sure. It is my red pill and I have been taking it for a long time. Perhaps it is meant to turn me red. Von Igelfeld stared glassy-eyed at the Librarian. And did she turn red, Herr Huber? The Librarian laughed. No, thats the funny thing. She took that red pill for years, always saying that it was intended to turn her red, and I thought she was just joking. Then when I said to the doctor, I see that you have prescribed a pill to turn my aunt red! he answered, Thats right. Von Igelfeld said nothing. And the funny thing, continued the Librarian, was that the red pill was for anaemia. It was iron, you see. And if she had not taken it, she would have appeared very pale. So the pill really was intended to turn her red. Von Igelfeld pursed his lips. Your aunts affairs are of great interest, Herr Huber, he said. But will you forgive me if I return to the question you asked me when you came in? You asked me whether there was anything of interest in the Zeitschrift. I would like to answer that question now, if I may. *Revue de presse* "Delightfully silly.... [von Igelfeld is a literary Mr. Magoo." --The Washington Post "Filled with comic characters, all academics of a particularly stripe. . . . McCall Smith has the same gift that John Mortimer has in making boring conversations hilarious the atmosphere in the Institute of Romance Philologys coffee room is very like the one-upmanship and backbiting in Horace Rumpoles chambers. Academia can be a hoot, and this series proves it." --Booklist "Professor von Igelfeld is a comic gem. . . . McCall Smith skewers the pomposity of academic pretension with an irresistible, deadpan insouciance." --BlogCritics Acclaim for the Portuguese Irregular Verbs series "A comedic jewel... [At the Villa of Reduced Circumstances] attains a level of sublime nonsense reminiscent of Woody Allen's Bananas." --The New York Times In the halls of academe, a setting fraught with ego-driven battles for power and prestige [McCall Smith] has rendered yet another one-of-a-kind character: the bumbling but brilliant Dr. Mortiz-Maria von Igelfeld . . . [a] deftly rendered trilogy [with] endearingly eccentric characters. Chicago Sun-Times