

TRIPLETS: AN ADDED DIMENSION

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When I introduced the concept of Triplets in Pears Word Games the emphasis was upon witty word transformations such as turning WATER into WINE as featured in the February 1991 Kickshaws. In addition I demonstrated the dramatic shapes one could achieve such as that illustrated alongside which builds up from a valid single-letter word to the largest word possible and returns to a different single-letter word without repeating any word. Yet a third type was featured which is of no consequence to this discussion but all three had the factors in common of being single-word transformations without any restriction upon the number of intermediate stages. Though Kickshaws gave examples in a horizontal plane, I envisaged the concept as a vertical construction having a consequent beauty of form. Now, I would like to take the whole process a stage further by bringing to your attention Triplets-In-Parallel.

A	
AN	
RAN	
RAIN	
TRAIN	
STRAIN	
ESTRAIN	
RESTRAIN	
RESTRAINS	
RESTAINS	
RESTAIN	
RETAIN	
RETIN	
REIN	
RIN	
IN	
I	
LOG	CABIN
CLOG	CAIN
COG	AIN
CO	IN
O	I
IO	IO
I	O
HI	HO
HIT	HOE
WHIT	HOSE
WHITE	HOUSE

To the basic rules that all transformations must be to genuine words and no word may be repeated in an individual column, Triplets-In-Parallel has the additional discipline that all columns must be equal in height. Thus, the illustrated example of going from LOG CABIN to WHITE HOUSE necessitated the elongation of the first column (a 'trip' of LOG to CLOG rather than LOG to LO) to ensure that the beauty of presentation occurs with parallel conclusion. But, in creating Triplets-In-Parallel, I discovered that the original statement (LOG CABIN) must be in mathematical harmony with the conclusion (WHITE HOUSE) otherwise the whole construction is impossible. The discovery I term 'the law of harmonious statement' and will illustrate with the example of the old conundrum HOW MANY BEANS MAKE FIVE.

In this particular transformation, the columns headed by words of an even number of letters (MANY, MAKE, FIVE) conclude with like words (PLUS, PLUS, FOUR). Similarly, the words of an odd number (HOW, BEANS) progress to the harmony of a likeness (ONE, NIL). Equally harmonious would be a conclusion to the question which read FOUR AND FOUR MINUS THREE. In this case all the odd-numbered words have become even and all the even-numbered words

have become odd. Total harmony. But, attempts to reach an equally logical and satisfactory parallel conclusion with statements such as TWO PLUS TWO PLUS ONE or SIX MINUS THREE PLUS TWO will meet with failure as one is attempting to break the inviolate pattern of odd/even alternation of words in an insertion-deletion chain.

HOW	MANY	BEANS	MAKE	FIVE
SHOW	MAN	BEAN	MAE	FIE
SOW	AN	BAN	AE	FE
SO	A	AN	E	E
O	AU	A	SE	OE
ON	U	AI	USE	O
TON	US	AIL	US	OR
TONE	PUS	NAIL	PUS	OUR
ONE	PLUS	NIL	PLUS	FOUR

A harmonious statement, therefore, is a conclusion which (in odd/even terms) exactly mirrors the opening phrase or is the complete opposite. Should, for example, you wish to answer the question WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN then you need a conclusion which is in harmony. I SAID THE SPARROW will never work as COCK to THE goes from one mathematical category to another, whereas the remainder (WHO to I, KILLED to SAID, ROBIN to SPARROW) are as they originated, be it odd or even. An apt solution, proposed by the editor, is THAT SPARROW DID IT as WHO to THAT, KILLED to SPARROW, COCK to THE and ROBIN to IT all go from one category to another.

Having decided upon your conclusion to the opening statement, the next point to consider is the column height and I am indebted to the editor for this following rule. One can determine the theoretical minimum by taking the words of maximum change after taking account of the longest set of common letters appearing in the same order, and counting the remaining letters in both words. This gives the number of steps needed. For example, KILLED and SPARROW have no letters in common, so that it will require 13 steps to go from one to the other. By contrast, WHO to THAT requires 5 steps (H is common to both), COCK to DID, 7 steps; and ROBIN to IT, 5 steps (I being common). The Sage of Morristown added the comment that "Because lengthening generally makes the connection task easier, one can find (probably) relatively common words joining these pairs, leaving the OED rarities for only the critical transformation of KILLED to SPARROW." This proved to be the case as the change from one to the other involved the obsolete spelling form of KILLE (KILL) and the obsolete form of SPARW and SPAROW (both SPARROWA) in the minimal change KILLED-KILLE-KILL-ILL-IL-I-AI-A-AR-PAR-SPAR-SPARW-SPAROW-SPARROW whilst the others can be artificially lengthened in many ways to effect a 13-stage transformation.

Whilst the great dictionaries of record will be needed from time to time for transforming an especially difficult word, it is the smallest (and cheapest) of all reference works which will prove to be your most valued aid in this art. The reason is simple. The key to transformation lies in the pivotal value of the single-letter word

and the two-letter words which link to it. If one ignores the fact that each letter can be treated as the name of that letter (so has an intrinsic validity), one must seek genuine single-letter words. Fortunately, all the vowels and the Y come into this category. A, I and the poetic exclamation O are the three obvious ones and the only ones recognized by the American Cryptogram Association for its puzzles set in the English language. Two of the remainder are mentioned in this quote from The Oxford Guide to Word Games: '... and even U (as in 'U and non-U') is acceptable...[and] as for place names, Ross Eckler has discovered a town called Y in Michigan.' [Editor's note: actually, Dmitri Borgmann should get the credit.] To these, I can add my own discovery of a river in Scotland named E which completes a full set of the most versatile of all the single-letter words. These six words not only combine with each other to produce a profusion of genuine two-letter words but they also combine with virtually the remainder of the alphabet in similar valid fashion. The authority for this statement is the supplement of two-letter words for the games player found in the 1991 edition of the Oxford Minidictionary. This supplement is so extensive that it even contains words not found in its parent work, the magnificent OED!

LIVE	NOT	ON	EVIL	This final example makes a parable
LIE	NO	ONE	VIL	of sorts by transforming one well-known
LE	O	DONE	VI	palindrome into another, and the OED
E	AO	DOE	I	was consulted merely to confirm the
EN	A	OE	IN	guesses that VIL and INNE were obso-
ENS	HA	E	INN	lete forms and that the verb to INN
DENS	HAD	EA	INNE	exists. Incidentally, VI is one of the
DENIS	AD	ENA	INNED	words in the minidictionary not given
DENNIS	AND	EDNA	SINNED	in the OED. The minimal columns are
				the first and the last and it was these

which determined the overall size of the composition.

For me, one of the delights of this particular form of wordsmithery is that it is we pencil-and-paper practitioners as opposed to the computer buffs who will dominate creative output. But, I've been wrong before. It will be interesting to see.