# PERSONAL ANAGRAMS

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The appeal in constructing anagrams lies in the balance between the extreme confinement of working with a fixed set of letters and the tremendous room for exploration afforded by all the permutations of those letters. If I were required to write a poem, without any restrictions on the form or content, my brain would quickly enter a state of paralysis; for without constraints on the assignment, the possibilities are infinite – and overwhelming. But give me a rich set of letters that I can sift and sort; suddenly words fall out, then phrases, then themes. From the methodical juxtaposition of alphabetic units emerges a kind of strange rhythm, a weird coherence, an odd message bordering on comprehensibility. Each line contains exactly the same set of letters, yet there is no algorithm for constructing the final product. This is the boundary between discovery and creation.

Potential anagrams loiter inside many names and phrases. The challenge is not to find just one derelict anagram, but to find them all. Be thorough. Cover the whole territory. As my brother say, "Comb it with a fine tooth". Then, for the sake of organization, assemble all the anagrams line by line and behold the transubstantiation of letters into poetry.

Since the publication in the August 1992 **Word Ways** of my anagrammatical "paean" to Thomas Baer, I have not received a single insulting letter or bomb threat. I interpret this as license to submit a selection of my other works to the public, with no apologies to my friends, whose names have been shamelessly dissected without permission.

I begin with a short work written about six years ago for my girl-friend. Incredibly, she married me anyway.

Carolyn Lubow:          You'll own crab.
No callow ruby!         O blow any curl!
Unlowly carob!          Only a curl? Bow
You call, brown,        Ably, our clown,
Cool, burly, wan.       Carolyn Lubow.
Ban curly wool;

The following was inspired several years ago by the event at Chernobyl. It illustrates the structure I have adopted in some of my verses. The title appears as the first line in almost all the stanzas. The first few anagrams set the tone, and the last one is the pithy punch-line. In between, they range from strange to ridiculous, not unlike actual poetry.

Nuclear power –
Unclear power.
Now – clear, pure!
Now – cruel rape.

Nuclear power –
Prune core law,
Ere crawl upon
Raw rope, uncle.

Nuclear power –
No clue? Pre-war
Creep run AWOL.

Nuclear power –
Pale, worn cure.
A clue: pre-worn.

Nuclear power –
Our plane crew
Open cruel war.

Nuclear power –
Pure clown era!
Crown ape rule!

Nuclear power –
Clear up new, or
We plan cure, or
Warn: OPEC rule.

New clear pour –
Un-repel a crow,
Un-crow a leper.
We lure no carp,
We rule no crap.
Up one, crawler!
Clean up, rower!

Nuclear power –
Weep, Carol, run!
We're upon Carl.
Re-warn couple.

Nuclear power –
We err; no culpa.

Anagrams can be quite unfriendly and inaccurate in the most inappropriate circumstances. Nevertheless, Truth must be utterly disregarded in the pursuit of Art.

Diane Grayson,
A noisy danger!
Dr. Inane Yoga's
Rage annoys Di.
Dig any reason?
Yes – in a dragon.

A daring yes? No,
Read No, saying,
"Rosy in an aged
Garden". I say no,
Diane Grayson.

I work at the Polar Science Center, and some of my colleagues spend long periods in the field. During the Coordinated Eastern ARctic EXperiment (CEAREX) in the fall of 1988, the ship Polar-bjorn steamed north from Spitsbergen and purposely embedded itself in the pack ice. While the ship drifted with the ice for the next several months, its scientists performed experiments on the surrounding frozen sea surface. I sent this note to my friend on the ship. The last line was a big hit.

Michael Steele:
All-time cheese!
i.e., call me these:
Meat, cheese. I'll
Eat leech slime!
Chisel eel meat!
Theme: seal, lice.
These lame lice.
All mice seethe.

See lithe camel?
See the clam lie?
See all the mice?
Them all see ice.
Meet a chill; see
Me, all ice sheet.
Sleet each mile!
Hell met: sea ice!

I wrote this next one for another person who was on the same ship, but of course it turned out completely different.

Seelye Martin:
Smart eye line.
Lean, trim eyes
Alert mine. Yes,
Mine are style.

Seelye Martin:
Same tiny leer.
Me leer? Nay, it's
My eerie slant.

Seelye Martin:
Eyes melt rain.
My rain, Steele!

Seelye Martin:
Nearly semite?
My ten ears lie!
Sea men lie. Try
A timely sneer.

Seelye Martin:
I seem lean? Try
Ramin. Let eyes
See manly rite:
I mean try EELS.
Ten year slime!

Seelye Martin
Nearly ties me.
Near, yet miles.
See my latrine?
Any lime trees?
Nyet, lame sire.

Seeyle Martin:
Seem real tiny?
I'm real teensy?
Entire measly
Realm tiny? See:
Man yet relies.

Seelye Martin:
Meet sin early.
Yes, Iran, let me!
It merely sane.

This next one was written in 1989, as my fellow residents of Seattle were becoming acutely aware of the influx of Southern Californians into the Pacific Northwest. The last line can be paraphrased, **collect dirt.**

Los Angeles,
All ego-ness!

L.A., neé Gloss,
Sees no gall.
All see song.

Los Angeles,
Go lean; Less
Gallons - see?
Sell one gas.
Less gone, L.A.

Los Angeles,
Angels lose.
Lessen goal.

L.A. sees long
Legal noses.
Go sane - sell
Long leases.

Sale on legs!
Long as eels,
Lone as legs
On a legless
Lass; one leg,
A leg, no less.
One less gal.
(A leg lesson.)

Los Angeles:
Glean loess.

This recent piece, for my aunt's 60th birthday, contains a fair amount of grammatically-correct gibberish, but I just couldn't shut off the spigot once the anagrams started flowing.

Mary Fieldman:
A firm lady, men.
Mild, many fear?
A mild fray, men!

I'm a damn flyer,
My mind - a flare!
Nary dim flame,
Mad manly fire.

Mary Fieldman,
Friendly mama,
Farmly maiden.
My fad? Ran mile.
My realm, a find.
My friend, Alma.
My animal, Fred.

Admire my flan!
If my darn meal
Fail, Mary, mend
My frail end, ma.
Fry me, and mail
Me dry fan mail.
And if my realm,
Mainly framed,
Fan my real dim
Flare? I damn my
Dry flan! Mime a
Darn elf! My aim:
Fry a damn lime.

Life, dry Amman,
Madly in frame.
Many firm deal;
Alarm, my fiend!
I fled Myanmar.
Idea – FMLN Army.
Field man–army?
I'd arm many elf,
Man, myriad elf.

In my farm deal,
Many farm deli.
Many idle farm?
My farm laden. I
farm denim, lay
Mild Maya fern,
And my farm lie
Firm yam–laden.
My eland farm, I
Made film yarn.
Ye farm land, I'm
Firm. Eland may
Fly amid ramen.

Mary find male:
I led my man far,
Damn far, Emily.
My lair fed Man,
My lair – mad fen!
A man–fly mired?
Fly, man! Mad ire
Delay firm man,
If mad man rely.

My flair, named
Manfred Milya,
Flared my main
Flame, drain my
Main flame dry.
I damn that flare!
My rain flamed!

Darn me, family.
My arm fail, Den.
Mend, frail Amy,
My arm and life.

Mary Fieldman,
Drama film yen,
Mad film yearn!
My film, Andrea?
Many dear film.
Red Mayan film?
Film any dream.

Mary Fieldman,
My final dream:
Damn me fairly.

The final selection is undoubtedly the best. Every pair of lines rhymes, and the verses are even and coherent. This was written four years ago, just before Erika's marriage. The answer to the question in the last line is "Yes", as she has now demonstrated.

Erika Francis Dade,
A redneck is afraid!
I desire a frank cad,
Fiercer, as akin Dad.

I ask if Dade can err,
If, craned, ask I dare.
A dread risk: fiancé,
Raised in dark café!

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A safe race? I'd drink.     I'd skid, careen afar,
A dear farce! I'd sink.     If kids neared a car.
And dare I risk face?       Kids, I care and fear;
I drank, I raced safe.      And if kids, a career?
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Well, I could continue to dredge up more anagrams from the filing cabinet in the crawl space under my house, but I think that's enough to give a flavor (or after-taste) of the genre. Perhaps the reader who is inspired to concoct verses such as these would accept a few suggestions. Sorry, here they are anyway:

A  Choose a name or phrase with about 8 to 16 letters containing lots of vowels
B  Select the most difficult letter in the phrase (e.g., J or Z) and construct a word using that letter
C  Write down the remaining letters; try to combine them into words
D  Repeat steps B–C ten thousand times
E  Go to bed
F  In the morning, identify the best anagrams and order them into stanzas; this will suggest ideas for other anagrams that are needed to improve the verse
G  Repeat steps B–F fourteen times

In two weeks, you will have something worth storing in a filing cabinet.

One final note: I have never used a computer to construct anagrams. That would take away the fun, and anyway I wouldn't want to share authorship with a silicon-based unit.

### METAPUNCTUATION

*Lewis Burke Frumkes's new book, issued in paperback as part of Dell Publishing's Intrepid Linguist Library for $5.99, is based on the observation that written language is seriously deficient in markers that indicate the state of mind of the author, or, more importantly, those of his fictional characters. One must make do with only two, the exclamation point denoting increased intensity, and the question-mark denoting incomprehension or curiosity. Frumkes rectifies this by introducing more than one hundred new symbols representing various emotional states like fear, love, exultation, sarcasm, hate and sadness, as well as warnings to the reader that the next paragraph is profound, boring, or mystical. (By making adverbial descriptors such as "he said lightly" superfluous, he would put Tom Swifties out of business.) Although the book is written tongue-in-cheek – who could effectively memorize and use so many new symbols? – there is a kernel of value here. Perhaps English would benefit from the judicious introduction of a few such guides for the reader. Most of the author's examples are one-liners; I would welcome an example which shows the full panoply of his innovations, such as an annotated Hamlet soliloquy or a Sherlock Holmes dialogue.*