NUMERICAL PALINDROMES: PART 1

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At first sight, RESEDACEAE (the plant family to which the mignonette belongs) is not a palindrome. But it is--in disguise! When its ten letters are split into two equal groups of five letters each, and the letters assigned the values A=1, B=2, ... RESED- totals 51 whilst -ACEAE totals 15. RESEDACEAE can thus be written 51.15 which is a numerical palindrome. The Romanian anatomist and surgeon, Dumitru GEROTA (12.33.21) and that useful garden tool, the WIDGER (32.11.23), are also numerical palindromes, but ones in which the word has been split into three equal groups of letters. Thus, assigning A=1, B=2, ... a numerical palindrome can be defined as a word which, when split into n groups each having the same number of letters, and the letter values of each group totalled, provides a number series whose digits read the same backwards as forwards. Here, however, I concentrate exclusively on splitting words (and phrases) into two groups (n=2) each of which consists of two digits.

As a genre, numerical palindromes have largely escaped the attention of Word Ways although EMBOLISM (35.53) was mentioned as such in "All Words Are Interesting" by Pamela Brang in the August 1977 issue. The current item seeks to redress this situation, not least because their counterparts, the numerical tautonyms--words such as MICROPHONE (58.58)--have long since received extensive coverage; see Leslie Card's "Six-Letter Numerical Tautonyms" in the November 1970 Word Ways, and "Eight-Letter Numerical Tautonyms" in the August 1971 issue. Incidentally, some words can lay claim to being both numerical palindromes and numerical tautonyms. These include CHEF (11.11), RACIAL (22.22), SAMPLE (33.33), CUTEST (44.44), SOURLY (55.55), INTERLOPER (66.66), GYNO-PLASTY (77.77), STEPMOTHERLY (88.88) and TRANSVERSARIUM (99.99).

GAMBIA (21.12), HISPANIA (52.25) and COPENHAGEN (53.35) are all palindromic locations. SAMANTHA (34.43), FERNANDO (43.34), APPLETON (45.54) and CONRAD (32.23) are palindromic names. So is PANDORA, but only when she is in her Box-possessive mood: PANDORA'S (35.53). Descartes had palindromic aspirations too. He said "I think, therefore I am". But he wasn't. Short of an E, he could only contribute towards DESECRATES (36.63), his andagram!

Numerical palindromes boast a sequence of superlatives. BARN-, BUFF-FOAM-, FOGG-, MANG-, PECK-, SCAL-, SEDG- and TACK- each accommo-date -IEST (53) to make (35.53). Similarly, the -OLOGY (74) set ACTIN-, FEMIN-, MONAD- and REACT- ea ch make (47.74).

The double letter delights KUUANT (53.35) and PUDDEE (41.14), the UOIEA-word UNOCCIDENTAL (65.56) and UN-AMERICAN (54.45) are all numerical palindromes. So is the plant DECABELONE (15.51), one of the few words whose first five letters are ABCDE (DEBACLE is another). REACTS and its transposal CATERS not only share the same letters but also the same palindrome. But they cleverly use different combinations of letters (REA,CAT and CTS,ERS) as the basis of their common palindrome (24,42).

The synonyms KID (24) and BOY (42) are, appropriately, numerically-palindromic synonyms as well. And they nicely serve to bridge the gap between numerically-palindromic words and phrases, for there is no reason why a search for numerical palindromes should be confined to single words. In these phrases, the two equal-length words form the two numerical halves of the palindrome:

CARD VOTE 26.62	OLD AGE 31.13	PEACH MELBA 33.33
DARK BOGS 34.43	HIND WING 35.53	NEW ERA 42.24
PALM LEAF 42.24	BOOK FAIR 43.34	DROP GOAL 53.35
WING FLAP 53.35	LOVE SEAT 54.45	MUSIC PAPER 65.56
CROWN HEADS 73.37	MUMMY CLOTH 85.58	

By way of contrast, the two words in each of these phrases are of different lengths and the junction of the two numerical halves lies within one of the words:

BACK G¦ARDEN 24.42	BAGGAG¦E AGENT 25.52	NEW¦S AD 42.24
CONY B¦URROW 59.95	SERVI¦CE HAT 73.37	PRIZE W¦INNERS 97.79

The words below have been selected from a list of 726, prepared with the mininum of computer assistance and the maximum of eyestrain! Together with 11.11, 22.22 ... to 99.99 (see above), they cover the 99 palindromic numbers from 0110 to 9999. The words ascribed to a particular number are of different lengths. A few numbers defied my attempts to find a word. In these cases, I have substituted a two-word coined phrase where possible. Ten numbers remain wordless: 0770, 0880, 0990, 2002, 3003, 4004, 5005, 7007, 8008 and 9009.

Unless specified otherwise, all words can be found in one or more of Webster's Second, Webster's Third, the Oxford English Dictionary, The Complete Word Game Dictionary (Tom Pulliam and Gorton Carruth, 1984), A Dictionary of Flowering Plants and Ferns (J.C. Willis, 1966), Nomenclator Zoologicus (Zoological Society of London), and Stedman's Medical Dictionary (25th edition).

0110 aj [Dictionary of Jamaican English (1967)]
0220 aaas ?
0330 bask
0440 acus
0550 baboot
0660 Abba four [a pop group]

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1001   ja
1221   kail, hackia, bedabble
1331   laze, befold
1441   maut, heaven, deadlock
1551   hafnyl, jacamars, Decabelone
1661   cherry, diabolos [Gk]
1771   decently
1881   dabbed powder [coined phrase]
1991   bald Suzy [coined phrase]
2112   epic, braced
2332   horn, emetic, barbered
2442   sews. hoarse. bracelet
2552   pizz ?, deploy, legalize, declaiming
2662   grayly, gamester, bandalette
2772   celebrator, academicisms
2882   bragozzo, haematosis
2992   carbethoxy
3113   opal, bonded, gem-faced
3223   wire, salami, radiance
3443   sory, matter, enclosed, bidentalia
3553   parrot, shaggily, abbeystede, deep-damasked
3663   poetry, conducts, bandoliers
3773   desirous, allegorize
3883   Christys, filibuster, backcrossing
3993   fasciaplasty, haberdasheress
4114   tuck, simiad
4224   single, five-leaf, beholdable
4334   twos, buttie ?, impeding, leaf-shaped
4554   fruity, colonize, ethicalism, reaffirmance
4664   tincture, affronting, faciolingual
4774   geotropy, actinology, affrightedly
4884   eucaryotes, acidophilous
4994   heliotropy, bacteriopexy
5115   novcic, fullface, Cassiaceae
5225   sulpha, formicid
5335   muslin, Copenhagen
5445   stover, operates, elliptical, meclofenamic
5665   plug-ugly, equalizing, Judaeophobes
5775   panzooty, Artocarpus, alexandrites
5885   phenotypes, acrognostics, coffee-roasting
5995   dichotomists, achromatocytic ?
6006   toy cab [coined phrase]
6116   tutche, thoracic
6226   wurmal, Spiraeas, overbidded
6336   syssel, tetrapod, antisavage, gentle-handed
6446   pewterer, proclaimer, Gondwanaland
6556   propenyl, patisserie, unoccidental
6776   overgently, circumlocute, mammogenically
6886   brushworks, noncausality
6996   bilipurpurin, antidepressant
7117   tusk ache [coined word]  what the elephant got?
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7227   sultanic, stillehede
7337   stumbler, unmetallic, Schisandraceae
7447   routines, equivocacy, pinnatilobed
7557   oustitis, mutilative, Lophiomyidae
7667   starringly, levocardiogram
7887   mispursuit, counterstamp, chroaximetrics
7997   homomorphous, anthraquinones
8118   huzzahed, Hypericaceae
8228   smoothable, Amaryllidaceae
8338   systemas, nostomania, Tarsipedinae
8448   frustrated, conveyancing, molengraaffite
8558   nonswimmer, Monocystidae, hemorrhagenics
8668   zymography, butterscotch, compassionated
8778   synonymize, eventuations, allotriodontia
8998   preposterous, circumvoluting
9119   fusty-faced [coined word]
9229   wispy hedge [coined phrase]
9339   prospicience, vasculocardiac
9449   transvesical, superangelical
9559   synovially, hysteroceles
9669   dysoxidizing, Microtrachelus
9779   sixty-fours, Ostariophyseae
9889   sponsorships, trigonometries

A word can also be split into two equal-length groups of letters to form a six-digit, rather than a four-digit, palindrome. For example, UNINTERMITTENT (101,101) can be found in Webster's Second. These words, together with words split into a number of groups other than two, will be covered by Rex Gooch in the sequel.