

DROMES, PHONES AND GRAPHS

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Early in September in this year of quadrennial madness, I had written to Dr. H.K. Wombat at his retreat in the Alpujarras in Spain for his prediction of the outcome of the Reagan-Mondale contest. Weeks elapsed without an answer, and I supposed that the worthy marsupial had either gone walkabout or was again engaged in the matters of international intrigue which had taken him to Spain in the first place.

It was, therefore, with some surprise that answering the telephone one bright October day I hear a low and wheezy marsupial voice. It explained to me that I had made a mistake in placing a block of four beautiful commemorative flower stamps on the letter to him, for they had excited the admiration of Don Fadrique, the postmaster of Trevez, the village nearest Dr. W's retreat, an ancient Morrish castle on a mountain top with a spectacular view both of Mulhacen, the highest peak in Spain, and the blue waters of the Mediterranean off the coast of Granada, even to the Africk shore. Had excited the admiration, that is, not only of Don Fadrique, but of his daughter Doña Elvira, who sequestered the missive to make a beautiful silk embroidery copy of the stamps. Her task accomplished, the letter had finally been placed in the Wombat's hands, ur-r-r a-a-ah paws. This explained his call and the following is the content thereof.

"As you know, dear boy," said my friend, accompanied by snorts and smacks which apparently signified his ingestion of some Spanish delicacy, "I correctly predicted the outcome of the last two presidential elections on which you consulted me. The present one is, I must say, laughably easy to call. Look at Mondale - his nickname is Fritz. One might say he is on the fritz - that is, kaput, broken, busted, haywire, and so on. Then take the nickname Gerry of his running mate: who was the last Gerry in presidential politics? Why, Gerry Ford, of course, whose birth name was Leslie Lynch King, Jr., and who was never elected, but appointed. Then again, Geraldine Zaccaro's, or rather Ferraro's, middle name is Anne, the palindrome of which is Enna; and any crossworder knows that Enna is the place in Sicily where Proserpine entered the underworld. What stronger onomastic indications of lack of success can one have?"

Not only did my friend palindromize the name Anne, he palindromed the name Geraldine. "Pronounced, not spelled, backward,"

he observed, "the name Geraldine is 'Needle Reg' - and there is no Reginald in the presidential race."

Of course, the Wombat's use of the neologism **palinphone** led to a discussion of it and its congeners which I summarize below.

The word **palindrome** means merely 'running backwards.' It has, indeed, been arrogated by the demi-cognoscenti to words that have the same spelling backwards as forwards. Strictly speaking, however, such words should be called **palingraphs**. Even more strictly speaking, to be sure, they should be called **homopalingraphs**. Words like GNAT, for instance, which when spelled backwards give a different word from the forward-spelled one are **heteropalingraphs**. On the other hand, a word like GNAWED, which when pronounced backwards becomes DAWN, is a **palinphone** - in this instance a **heteropalindrome** because the two words differ. CHURCH, JUDGE and NOON are examples of **homopalindromes** because they are pronounced the same backwards or forwards. NOON has the distinction of being both a homopalingraph and a homopalindrome. TOOL, on the other hand, is both a heteropalingraph and a heteropalindrome.

These principles grasped, let us proceed to the following statements, which may be debated as to detail, but are fundamental as to principle. The phonemes - defined by Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary as those "members of the set of the smallest units of speech that serve to distinguish one utterance from another in a language or dialect" - of American English are listed below. Webster's definition is rather ethmoid, to be sure, and the phoneme, the only really interesting concept in modern linguistics, is not a modern concept at all. Here they are:

24 Consonants: P pan, T top, K cat, B boy, D dog, G ghost, CH church, J judge, F fat, V van, TH mouth, TH then, S see, Z zoo, ZH leisure, M man, N no, NG singing, L loot, R ran, W wit, Y yes, H house

12 Vowels: A pat, AH pot, E pet, EY pate, I pit, O pawed, OW poke, U put, UW poohed, UH putt, ER pert

4 Diphthongs: three falling AY eye, AW loud, OY boy, and one rising YUW feud

Yes, dear friends and gentle scholars, I know I have glossed over certain other phonemic features such as open transition, pitch, stress, etc.; I have left unresolved whether WI quit and WU wood are rising diphthongs or combinations of two phonemes; and so on and so forth. But this is a game - isn't it?

There was at one time a performer billing himself as Dr. Backwards who could immediately give you back backwards any utterance you might throw at him. He was murdered in Georgia a few years ago. There also exists at the University of Minnesota a professor of philosophy, Hight Levine or some variant of that name, who still flourishes and possesses Dr. Backwards's talent in even greater and purer degree than did the late doctor himself. Profes-

sor Levine always separates words into phonemes. Take the word GOES, phonetically G+OW+Z. Professor Levine would give it back as Z+OW+G (the name of the pretender to the Albanian throne), not Z+WO+G, although the lone O in English is really a diphthong like all English long vowels (except AH father), i.e., a pure vocalic element plus an off-glide.

In modern literature we have Sergei, a character in Yuri Trifonov's Another Life, of whom reviewer Elaine Kendall says in the Los Angeles Times: "...Sergei.. witty, charming and playful when we first meet him .. has the knack of being able to say words backwards, an amusing gift with which he wins Olga's heart. When he abandons that frivolous pastime, we know that reality has finally caught up with him and destroyed his ebullient spirit." A comment on wordsters' priorities?

The furry phascolome, ebullient spirit untouched by reality that he is, suggested that I indite a homopalinphonic phantasy, neither sesquipedalian nor dealing with a sesquiped alien, but strict reality, to illustrate the principle he elucidated. Now, what phantasy could be more tantalizing than one dealing with the beautiful TV star Joan Collins, she of the dewy eyes and flashing thighs, or is it flashing eyes and dewy thighs? No matter. Here is a caption from under a photo in the Los Angeles Herald Examiner: "Look into my eyes .. Joan Collins and Mercedes Benz heir Muck Flick engage in some eye-to-eye dancing at Club A. It was their second consecutive night at the club." The phantasy begins ...

COME, SCAIRT - EEKS! - O' SKI TRACKS, MUCK?

There was no third consecutive night because at the very time the photog caught the pair fair (or, fair pair) Joan was saying, "COME JULY I LUGE, MUCK." To this Muck Flick, fearing to lose a moment of his partner's time, exclaimed (the word 'ejaculated', alas, has been ruined by the sexual revolution), "I KNOW FEAR. GRIEF! OH, NIGH." A reporter lurking in the background collars (or lapels) Muck as he leaves the floor and asks the reason for his stricken look. Muck repeats Joan's statement and adds, staring the scribe in the eye, "NOSER, THEN O' JULY I LUGE A NETHER ZONE." Joan, for her part, is importuned by Murray the Flack to make a statement about Muck Flick. "He looks lovesick," observes Murray. To which Joan replied, "SICK? AYE, MUR', FLICK'LL KILL F'R MY KISS!"

A few hours pass; Joan, her suite, and the Mercedes Benz heir male are on the plane used for Mercedes Benz air mail, winging their way to Bariloche. On debarking, Joan calls to Muck and her dog Herbie, "MUCKY BOY, 'OIBIE, COME," mimicking a Cockney accent. Muck eyes his sled, saying "JEWEL OF A LUGE." Then the Mercedes Benz mucky-muck donned his mukluks and - alas - ran amuck, came a cropper, and sought the services of a leech. "COD-DLE FLICK, SKILLFUL DOC!" sobbed Joan to the resort physician, a queer fish of an Austrian psychiatrist known locally as DOCTOR WOEPF, PERVERT COD, who, after palpating Muck's lesion ad-

ded to the trauma with "OH! NO MALE BUTT! SCROTUM TORQUE'S TA BLAME! OH, NO!" Whereupon she of the dewy/flashing thighs/eyes screamed "OH, WOE, NO!" "JOAN! OH, WOE!" squealed the Mercedes Benz heir in eyre. Alas, to see the dream of love end like a muck flick. Thus the local reporters were unable to chronicle any LEWD DUEL in the lodge at Bariloche, but Joan nevertheless fell in love with the place and, when asked what she would like to do, replied "RETIRE RIGHT 'ERE!"

If the story had so demanded, the last three words could have been interpreted variously as RETIE 'ER RIGHT EAR, RETIE 'ER WRY TIER, RETIRE WRY TEAR or RETIRE RYE TIER - such is the plasticity of palinphones. A more skillful palinphonist might have worked in the words EMERGED GERM Y and GOD DAMN MAD DOG, the latter both a homopalingraph and homopalinphone, as well as MAID, DO RIGHT. SEW HER GLOVE, VULGAR HOST. AYE, RUDE DAME. But you, dear readers, take those phonemes and that palinphone concept and outdo T' SURF FIRST, THIRD EARTH, SIXTH'S KISS, EIGHTH TAE (toe) or TENTH NET. Better yet, give us a prehensile tale or gripping story!

Editor's Note: Dr. Backwards, Professor Levine and Sergei had better look to their laurels. Martin Gardner reports that the October 3, 1984 Johnny Carson show featured a young man named David Fuhrer who can instantly pronounce backward all the words of any sentence given to him. He takes the words in forward order, pronouncing each one the way it is spelled. Johnny Carson tested him with sentences picked at random from Emily Post's etiquette book; he passed with flying colors. In response to a question, he rattled off backwards the seven dirtiest words in English, which broke Johnny up. Asked if he found his last name embarrassing, he said he didn't mind because he thought of himself as Divad Rerhuf.

QUERY

*John F. Schilke, 184 Harding Boulevard, Oregon City OR 97045 requests **Word Ways** readers' help in identifying a word which he ran across many years ago, meaning "a person who, having looked something up in the dictionary, compulsively reads the facing page." This should be a very useful descriptor of many **Word Ways** readers!*

NAB ĆODE FIG HIJACK LIMN OPAQUE REST MAUVE WAXY FEZ is a 42-letter alphabetic word chain based on the Pocket Webster Dictionary; similarly, HAZY OX WAVE OUT SIR QUIP ON MILK JIG HOG FED CUB A is a 40-letter reverse alphabetic word chain based on this source. Can either chain be shortened? What are the corresponding minimum chains based on the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary?