

RONALD REAGAN AND THE FATEFUL L

HARRY B. PARTRIDGE
Manhattan Beach, California

The 1980 presidential race was going to be close, they said -- too close to call. To obtain a logological view of the outcome, I paid a visit in September to my friend Dr. H. K. Wombat, an ologist in everything having to do with words and tongues. The diminutive authority received me in his study, the Marsupium, seated behind a wide desk piled high with Pauly-Wissowa, Du Cange and other arcane volumes. His tiny, sharp eyes belied the bluntness of his face. I knew that he had no mental fur except upon his chin.

"I divine why you are here," he began. "Four years ago, I gave you the winner of the Carter-Ford race with what you termed a Delphic reply, 'The drover will cross the shallows', but if you ask me who will win the Reagan-Carter race . . ." He paused, and I hastily interposed, "Yes, I interpreted that rightly as Carter will cross Ford . . ."

Not unmindful of the fateful interaction between presidents and tape recorders, I surreptitiously switched on the machine concealed in my pocket. Dr. Wombat seemed unaware of my action as he launched into his subject with a faraway look in his eye.

The roster of American presidents constitutes a unique population among which I have noted many fascinating logological oddities, which in turn pose certain questions. To begin with, what effect do certain letters have in presidential names? Take Q, the rarest -- John Quincy Adams, the only president with a name containing a Q, is famous for being the son of a president, and for being a president whose election was decided in the House of Representatives. If you conclude from this that Q-letter presidents must be sons of presidents, you may be right; but if you think that Q-letter presidents are the only ones whose elections are settled in the House you will be wrong: remember Rutherford B. Hayes. The effect of the letter X is ambiguous: James Knox Polk witnessed the admission of Texas to the United States and the successful conclusion of the Mexican war, but Richard Milhous Nixon was scarred by Watergate and the unsuccessful conclusion of the Viet Nam war. However, the effect of the letter Z is dire: the only two presidents to have this letter, Zachary Taylor and John Fitzgerald Kennedy, died in office. And Y is even worse if it comes at the end of a surname: Kennedy and McKinley, the only two, were assassinated.

"Balderdash!" I exploded. "Next, you'll be telling me that any president with the tetragram ABRA in his name is doomed -- since both

ABRAHAM Lincoln and James ABRAHAM Garfield both had it, but no one else." I watched his nasal hair twitching with amusement; apparently this coincidence had not occurred to him. In a calmer tone, I remonstrated "But you've wandered far off the subject -- what about your prediction on the 1980 election?"

I could, of course, again say something Delphic like 'The ray-gun will blast the teamster' ... Yes, it's clear that Reagan will be president, because of his name and the circumstances of his opponent's campaign. There are many similarities between the campaigns of 1980 and 1912. In 1912 TEDDY Roosevelt challenged an incumbent president of his own party; in 1980 TEDDY Kennedy did the same. In 1912 the opponent of the incumbent president and the successful candidate was Thomas Woodrow WILSON; in 1980 the opponent of the incumbent president is Ronald WILSON Reagan. Another parallel is that Wilson and Reagan have identical first and last initials -- WW and RR -- if one uses the names everyone knows them by. With all this going for him, how can Reagan lose?

But, observe that Reagan has what I term the fateful L: the penultimate letter of one of his names, Ronald, is L. Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, Franklin D. Roosevelt and John Fitzgerald Kennedy also had the fateful L, and all died while in office. Gerald Ford had it, too, but he survived two assassination attempts because his birth name was Leslie Lynch King, Jr. Theodore Roosevelt had the fateful L, but he was saved from the others' fate by God, because the THEO in Theodore means 'God'.

Actually, the unfortunate Kennedy was triply cursed by logology. Not only did he have the surname ending with Y and the fateful L, but he also had what I call the 'misplaced son'. No, I don't mean he had any illegitimate son, but I refer to the FITZ in Fitzgerald which means 'son of' in Norman French. A presidential name ending in SON, such as Jackson, Johnson, Jefferson, Harrison, Madison, Wilson and the altered spelling Nixon, appears to be neutral in a logological sense, but a SON transported to the beginning of a name is invariably fatal. The only other example is that of William McKinley, where MC also means 'son of', in Gaelic.

So what is Reagan's fate as president? I have noted that he has the fateful L, but his vice president, George Bush, will save him from the effects thereof. Why so? Bush is a monosyllabic name. There have been six monosyllabic presidents in American history -- in order, Polk, Pierce, Grant, Hayes, Taft and Ford. They have a very significant linkage: the surname of each monosyllabic president has exactly one letter in common with the surname of the following monosyllabic president. Thus, we have Polk linked by P to Pierce linked by R to Grant linked by A to Taft linked by F to Ford. But note that there is no link between Ford and Bush; argal, as Shakespeare would say, Bush will never become president. If Reagan is to expire in office, Bush will either have to cease to be vice president or predecease him.