

Logological Poetry

AN EDITORIAL

It was Dmitri Borgmann who put the word "logology" into circulation. Before *Language on Vacation*, his first book, was published, he wrote to me: "I don't believe the word 'logology' has ever appeared in a book devoted to words or puzzles. I dug it out of the unabridged Oxford while searching for a suitable name for my activity." He then gave the following information:

None of the unabridged Funk and Wagnall's contain LOGOLOGY.

Webster's Second and Third Editions do not contain LOGOLOGY.

Webster's First Edition gives it as a synonym for "philology," which is something else.

The Century Dictionary and The New Century Dictionary do not contain the word.

The Century Dictionary Supplement (2 volumes, 1909), defines it as the doctrine of the Logos (in theology).

The unabridged Oxford gives two definitions: (1) The doctrine of the Logos (only as the title of two books in the 18th century); and (2) The science of words (rare—illustrated by two quotations, both from magazines dated 1820 and 1878). Mr. Borgmann was looking for a word which was not already claimed as the sole property of any other type of word expert.

The commonly used term "word play" has about it an objectionably trifling aura. Not much sense of doing things with a vengeance exudes from its weak semantic fabric. Probably the half-forgotten word, "logology," had dwelt long enough in limbo awaiting a new cause to serve.

Several years ago I wished to acquire a list of all known word transpositions. Unfortunately, this information was scattered to the four winds, and I could not imagine anywhere where it might have been gathered. There were one or two small anagram dictionaries which gave many of the simpler transpositions, but the unabridged, all-embracing, exhaustive tome of transpositions did not exist. Where, if anywhere, was such a comprehensive collection of transpositions to be sought? Certainly not from a linguist, philologist, etymologist, semanticist, information

theorist, orthographer, grammarian, or phonetician, for one might expect this information to be of little importance to them, and as to the lexicographers of the anagram dictionaries—well, they had told all they knew. Even the word puzzlists most adept at finding transpositions would have knowledge of only a portion of them. No one of them could be expected to have located all the widely strewn, haphazardly hidden haystacks of printed potpourri, and found all those needles of knowledge in them. None of them could reasonably be expected to be data collectors of such literally Darwinian stature.

As it turned out, the information I wished to procure was indeed gathered someplace, though in but one place, in only one place, and in *absolutely* only one place in the world. It was sent to me by a logologist, self-designated as such, who had burned the midnight oil through the nights, the fortnights, the moons and the years perusing plethoras of quaint and curious volumes of forgotten lore. This unique scholar had not only gathered the one species, the transpositions, but myriads of other logological creatures, plucking them from their natural habitats in little known books and less remembered periodicals, and puzzle corners of local newspapers indigenous to distant corners of place and time. I had my first intimation of what logology consisted of when I received that veritable avalanche of transpositions from Mr. Borgmann.

I remember wondering whether the charm of words as possessed by logology plus the charm of words as possessed by poetry could not be made to interpenetrate, whether logology and poetry might not be able to pool their gold and seize that charm. Since then, I have dipped into the archives and I know this is no new idea. In fact, two researchers, hiding behind the pseudonyms "The Owl and the Pussycat" advanced, in their senility, the absurd thesis, concerning the magical charm of words, that a concerted logology and poetry could simply seize it in fee simple. Everybody laughed because it was such a stupid idea. But be warned, at this point, not to misread history. It was the means, not the end, that caused the titters. Since then much younger minds have devised much better strategies. For example, although logology and poetry cannot seize it in fee simple, for what compelling reason could they not seize it in fee fi fo fund, and so thenceforth own that charm, lock, stock and barrel?

Some writing is meant strictly for the communication of ideas. In this kind of writing the words are self-effacing servants. They function only as the carriers of the ideas which alone surface into the light of attention, as witness most prose. On the other hand, poetry is clearly a form of literary art in which the words, as such, are not kept behind the scenes at all. They are urged into the full light of attention, there to vie with the ideas they carry, and to angle to steal the show from them as objects of interest in themselves. However, in traditional prosody this preoccupation with words in themselves is almost exclusively phonetical—onomatopoeia, alliteration, meter, rhyme, scansion and the rest; and this, together with the primal importance of figurative language, is the gist of what is dwelt on. As far as words in themselves are concerned, it is assumed that for the purposes of poetry language may, like a musical instrument, be played phonetically, as in rhyming, but not orthographically, as in anagramming, nor semantically if this means punning and kindred legerdemain.

Logological poetry may be defined as a form of literary art in which the attention and interest are concentrated with a much fuller intensity than is the case in ordinary poetry upon every aspect of the words themselves, and in which all semantic, phonetic, orthographic and other resources of words are totally subject to artistic exploitation. In logological poetry, the original difference which immemorially distinguished poetry from workaday prose may, upon occasion, be pushed to the ultimate. Seen from this perspective, logological poetry is a fine art. May it attract practitioners! May it germinate and grow.

Come hither all you litterateurs and men of letters, henceforth leaving all your other vain delights, and if you will but deign to listen, I will try to elucidate for you, with all my sophistry—and subterfuge—mine own philosophical bent concerning some orthographic forms of poetry which are, indeed, matters of letters. Come hither all you literary epicures and logological gourmets; taste of these quaint, first primitive offerings, also savor the madness in the method that produced them, and may your own future efforts militate to mitigate the circumstance that so seldom are effusions in this rare medium well done.

Probably the most orthographically interesting poetic form is the palindrome. It has challenged and fascinated many people. An intelligible palindrome, when read backwards, manifests more than a neatness. It seems to have a veritable intelligence of its own. The palindrome is authored by two quite different, quite mutually alien powers which are often at odds; and the poet, as one of these, strives sometimes desperately, always strenuously, to play at least equal fiddle. He may elect to use a word only if he is willing to commit himself to the use of some entirely different word, or narrow choice of words—words presented to him by the co-author, English Spelling. The necessity of resolving diverse and antagonistic ideas into harmonies breeds a regimentation of the words that escalates and de-escalates between martial law and total tyranny. This weird collaboration cannot but mark the palindrome with an aura of inevitability.

Palindromic poems have a credibility or incredibility very similar to the apparent facts of the mind-body riddle. Philosophers are forever asking: how is it possible for the Mind, which appears to have no similarity, in its principles, laws, structure—indeed, in any way at all—to the Thing the physicists are so feverishly studying—how is it possible for the mind to inhabit this utterly dissimilar thing—this “matter”—to accommodate itself to its irrelevant and obstructive ways, and to even become one with it for a time? A like question could be asked about palindromes, for here the letters are orthographical atoms analogous to the physical atoms of our bodies, out of which the “body” of the palindrome is assembled, and throughout which sprawls its “soul,” or meaning, just as if no home more comfortable or well-suited to its needs could possibly be devised. But these letters obey a law of symmetry, and, except that it is a simple single law, and a known law, it is entirely analogous to the laws of physical atoms: it is a law irrelevant to, obstructive to, and unrelated to the entirely different laws of grammar, logic, drama and dreaming which govern those utterly different, quasi-living mental things called meanings; and it is a law which is indifferent to the collective elan or compulsion of those meanings to orchestrate themselves into unity with the orthographic atoms—to be an embodied soul.

It mistakenly appears that I alone have just sung the praises of palindromes in sweet, brief melody. I must correct this impression, and assign proper credit where credit is due, before I become the sole recipient of your bouquets. The truth is, I have been assisted, here in my study, by two ravens, both with operatic training, but both with colds equally as bad as mine. I apologize that we must now desist, due to hacking coughs all the way around, and attend instead to another and gloomier view of palindromes which will make no such stringent demands on our musicianship.

The palindrome suffers from the defect that the vocabulary available to it is severely limited. The same applies to charades—those duplex compositions in which each of two parts utilize the same letters in the same order. (In lipograms the vocabulary is decimated, though in such curious ways. Anagrams can employ only such words as can be formed from the letters of the base. Although the pangram can use any word, it is overwhelmingly biased toward the minority of words containing the least frequent letters.) A most desirable innovation would be a form of composition as neat and appealing, as difficult and challenging as the palindrome, but in which any word would have as much chance to be used as any other. If only someone could find such a dragon, we could all try to slay it.

Palindromes and charades dovetail nicely to yield the elegant stanza that Edwin Fitzpatrick used in his renowned translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, of which I quote from memory the twelfth and most celebrated quatrain:

In the jungle heart pristine, a funny book,
Where oysters grow in streams of Sunny Brook,
With your bright eyes to fill my vacuous bower
And sew in silk, and milk and honey cook.

Of the following palindromes and charades, those marked with an asterisk have been reprinted from Dmitri Borgmann's book, *Language on Vacation*, with the kind permission of the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons. All the others—couplet-length palindromes, palindromic quatrains, charade couplets and one quatrain in phonetic charades—are from the fantasque oriental dancing song, *Fling Thong*, from *O Tongue in Cheek*. Do you remember when that opera made its debut? Lo, 'twas a gala night! Eugene Ionesco was guest conductor. Elite people and picas were present. Yet the genius of the composer triumphed. The overture was Heavenly, so Heavenly! In the opening scene the hero was in a Heavenly dream. The audience was so transported to that High Estate that they could not fail to know their fallen world for what it was when they were in short order thrust back into it. There was an abrupt, terrifying, horrible change in the music; the hero's slumbers were shattered, and he found himself nailed to a cross. It was a rood awakening. Then Caruso danced and Nijinski sang, and the sense of loss and abjection was so terrible it beggared belief. Everything went banal and slushguttly, and the audience was less transfixed than impaled. There followed a dramatization of a hopelessly misguided struggle to rise out of the fallen state, but even in the last act in which *Fling Thong* occurred, the Paradise of the beginning was never regained. The music became more intricate and scientific, but, like psychiatry, the last act was sick. The grand finale, ailing from the prime foundation, affirmed to no one that they

were the recipients of a Divine Promise that there would be another Spring. The final love duet, "O Tongue in Cheek, Thy Name is Insincerity," was a negative consummation so devoutly to be avoided that the opera was never given again. Although the curtain was rung down amid monstrous, cacophonous applause, no encores were asked for. Everybody filed out of the opera house in an agony of diminishment, with the hero's last and noblest sentiments still insulting their injured ears:

The sleet and snow did rage and blow
That cold December day,
Though the Son was hot as a fox's box
And the Heir was dry as hay.
Why did you rat your hair, my love?
I loved it the other way.

Following the quotations, two word-and-phrase lists are given as aids to those who wish to work on palindromes and/or charades.

Nora, by my llano,
I to mellific Ida toss drowsy astral age roses.
Ava, put up a vase so regal.
(Art says words Sotadic I fill emotionally, my baron.)

To id: If I, an emoter, cannot fight or fall,
Or, frustrated, I bay and do sit—'tis odd.
Nay! Abide, tart surf! Roll a froth gift on nacre to me—
Naif idiot.

Eras bolster aback Cuba.
Eyes nettle forensic ire to sere drums, Sam—
Mass-murder esoteric is.
(Nero felt tense? Yea, buck cabaret slobs are!)*

Rail at natal bosh, aloof gibbons! *
Snob-bird named "Red Rose of Mine Desire!"
Rise, denim foes! Order—demand ribbons,
Snob—big fool! Ah, so blatant a liar! *

Play carols on rebec, inspired osteopath. Gino,
Tonight a poet's ode rips Nice, Bern, Oslo, racy Alp.

Flamingo pale, scenting a latent shark
Flaming opalescent in gala tents—hark! *

No, uncle-and-auntless be, as ties deny our end.
No unclean, dauntless beasties den you rend.*

Elapse, Time—relative gate to my agony.
By no gay motet age vital eremites pale.

"Torero, with cayenne I (Sir Apostle) fire volts—ah,
"Hast lover?" . . . (I felt so Parisienne—yacht I wore . . . rot!)

O fly, rich Eros—dogtrot, ski, orbit eras put in swart
Of lyric heros. Dog Trotski or bite Rasputin's wart.

Forgo thick ale. "I do's" cope softest—opaled, sob-lade;
For gothic kaleidoscopes oft estop aled-so blade.

Loop, dip, mild natal fay, by a water.
Fret away by a flat and limpid pool.

Ramona is reposed under ruffles, as I and Edna;
And Edna is a self-furred nude so Persian, Omar.

Yal No spy lacks urbanity! Gnaw, toot not
On too twangy tin a brusks calypso! Nay!

Hal! Thou tragedy ingrate, dwell on—superb old stag—in gloom.
Hath outrage, dying, rated well? On super-bold staging loom!*

Moody spigot dew, sag assured. Roar, zero-tide!
Editor Ezra, order us sagas wed to gipsy doom.*

Forbear, Sandra, rest. Cry, stallion, or bray in gloom,
For bears and rarest crystal lion, orb raying, loom.

Moo, lost elk—O orbs amid wonders awed. Was it a bat?
I saw dew as red, now dim as brooklet so loom.

Coo, lisp, or to a mate urban joyously come, Dian.
Cool, I sport. O amateur banjo, you sly comedian,
No sail had dahlias on, tra la—Roman air, allude to Ned.
Denote, dull Arian, a moral art—no sail had dahlias on.

Flu galled an illiterate elf. Reed-snug maiden woos.
So owned I am! (Gnus, deer, fleet are—till in a dell, a gulf.)
Flow, alas, solo cosmic. A lily motif use.
Sufi, to my Lilac I'm so colossal a wolf.

Hiss, caress pursuit, or astound, O roc—O cobra.
His scares spur suitor as to undo rococo bra.*
A harem must nag eleemosynary tramps. A live
Evil asp martyr any some elegant summer? Aha!

Hips! and, allegro! Man cedes. I reach ego's tab.
Hip, sandal, leg, romance, desire, ache—go stab
Barcarole's summer. Aha, royal penalties abed
Debase it—lane-play or a harem, mussel or a crab.

Barb a rainbow, ersatz one, soft a-booming age.
Barbara in bowers at zones of taboo ingage.
Egad, loon Sahib, Barbara naps again—
I a-gasp! An Arab rabbi has no old age.*

Infant, as queen or mouse ye sin (estimably thereto, as Ted's will).
In fantasque enormous eyes I nest. I'm a blythe retoasted swill.

Lid off a daffodil I doff adays (at scenic idol-embargos),
So grab (melodic in ecstasy) a daffodil. I doff a daffodil.*

War bled Paris till a veranda birdie
Warbled. (Par I still aver, and a birdie.) *

"I'd revel—bong! Illicit song!" Aida signals.
(Slang is a diagnostic ill, ignoble Verdi.) *

Emdee, her art so melts a chassé legato of
Foot ageless. Ah, castle most rare, heed me.
Ye knave, negate snide Slavic ire to see us sign it 'Love.'
Revolting issue! Esoteric, I valed in—set a Genevan key.*

Nostril flare for erotic ova, hag, Ah so.
O shag a havoc! I (torero feral) flirt, son.
Now revolts Olympus, ogre volcano.
On a clover go sup, my lost lover won.

Forsooth, Ingrid, dance. I sat alone late,
For soothing riddance is a talon elate.
Etamine dragon, Nimrod rehems Eva's dimity.
My Timid saves me her dorm. In no garden I mate.

Spa elan aids racy Alph-jar.
Rajah, play cars. Diana leaps!
Speed, panel-bib Noel car! I'm on Devil Star!
Rats lived no miracle on bible-nap deeps!

Without familiarity with the opera, many of these passages from *Fling Thong* could easily be given a completely erroneous interpretation. It should be remembered that the villain of "O Tongue in Cheek" had found a very cheap way to manufacture morphine. The drug became available by the box-car load, and was pushed under the trade name of Devil Star.

She pried and pecked, for I know Rose read lips.
By morning, dazed, a choir hears no white lies.
Her pride was piqued for aye. No rose-red lips
In mourning days acquire. Here Snow White lies.

Clan, galling us—to and fro, music and art
Clang all in gusto, and from us I can dart.
Trap-edified afore, wolfed is yawning Io-cave.
Eva, coin-in-wayside flower, O fade if I depart.

Moor, garb music sidereal—lived urban.
Nab rude villa ere disc is umbra, groom.
Mood-gal, spur a famine fatal. I attach turban.
Nab Ruth, cattail at a fen. I'm afar up slag-doom.

De-lifed Eros' halo dims. I won, foam-god.
 Dogma-of-Nowism idol—ah, sore defiled,
 Deliver won eras to grasp! Oh sibyl, laud!
 Dually bishops' argots are now reviled.

Fled as aye, fond light-rimmed aid,
 Diadem-mirth, gild no fey (a sad elf).
 Flow-dolce, song of bard—nor after
 Fret far on drab fog (nose-cold wolf).

E lapse, song. Upset, at sea, I long. A Melody, a meow—
 Woe may dole magnolia estates pugnoses pale.
 Elated is debased Oberon. So that solid, naive vow
 Wove viand I lost! Ah, to snore bodes a bedside tale.*

The promised phrase-list has been drastically curtailed for lack of space. This is a short but useful list of palindromically potent expressions.

affiliable—bailiff
 mossily—lissom
 erotomania—in a motor
 bilateral—claret alibi
 revenue Idaho—oh adieu never
 Valhalla—Allah
 la dolce vita—amative clod
 ceremony—no mere
 prevail—I aver
 soil of tropic—portfolios
 promulgate—a glum orphan
 smut-arts busy—my substratum
 to predict—cider pot
 ticklish—silk
 Ishtar—wrath
 on a tip act—capitano
 assimilable—Bali Miss
 Lord, Signora's—sarong is droll
 jadedness—ended a joy
 no leg Allah's See—sees shall age
 stark rabid—I bark "Rats!"
 kidnap—and
 I voyage—gay Ovid
 obstruct—Curt's boy

O desirable—Melba, rise, do
 libretti—bitter bile
 ululating—Nita, Lulu
 mikado—akimbo
 Alec intrepid—I, pert, nice lass
 buckle—elk cub
 if, in gambols—slob magnific
 no smug snirk—rims gums on
 vendetta—ratted never
 drowsy oboe—boy's word
 miasmas—Sam's aim
 deflower if—fire wolfed
 arena for—profane
 I snigger—egg inside
 had I pert Nina—intrepid
 to render us safe—assured Nero
 drowsy metal—late my sword
 dahlias—assail Hades
 smirch sad pals—slapdash crimson
 castrate—art sacred
 repartee—beetrap
 ruffle—elf fur
 Oslo dignitary—rating idols
 goldenrod—adorned logs
 cite operas—are poetic