

# MANUAL D'ENIGMISTICA

JESUS LLADO  
Barcelona, Spain

*Editor's Note: The following is a translation of the introduction to Marius Serra's 1991 paperback on the history of wordplay, published in the Catalan language.*

My obsession for playing with words was ignited nearly ten years ago, with the discovery of a palindrome in a Julio Cortázar tale. Since then, I have devoted myself to accumulating historical material relating to word games, as well as to creating new ones. Undeniably, an inherent element of such an obsession is the opportunity offered to the writer to master language and manipulate it in new ways.

A fortunate invitation to contribute a weekly article on logology to the "Book Supplement" of *Avui* [a newspaper in the Catalan language, with the fourth-largest circulation of Barcelona newspapers], permitted me to place my material in a more systematic form. The first direct consequence of this work is the book "Manual D'Enigmistica". Although not a comprehensive exposition of wordplay, the book clarifies the often-confused nomenclature using example from the Catalan, Spanish, Italian, English and French languages, and introduces literary applications of many less-well-known word games.

We define **enigmistics** [slightly more general than English **logology**] as a creative technique that involves the aesthetic practice, or the art, of playing with conventionally-encoded symbols [most commonly, the letters of the alphabet]. It is desirable to emphasize the general sense of this name, as it most appropriately designates the infinite varieties of word games, sounds, images, and logical concepts that have been developed. There are two common denominators of enigmistics: first, the recreational spirit that defines the game concept, and second, the dual [yin-yang] of how games are perceived, implicitly conveying the binary principle of mystery/discovery. Any cultural phenomenon that contains a significant percentage of these two motifs enters into the domain of enigmistics.

In this manual we have basically limited ourselves to literary enigmistics, which is based on oral language; however, we assert that the term can include a more diverse range of phenomena. Apart from literary enigmistics one can speak of graphic enigmistics (related to the image-world and systematized by mathematicians in geometrical games), arithmetical enigmistics (known as numerology), and logical enigmistics (related to paradoxes and the analysis of logical systems). Generally speaking, games which are

not strictly related to language form a highly-developed parallel discipline called recreational mathematics. In many cases, the recreational strategies derived from this have been used to create board games. From this important commercial sector we note the registered trademark Scrabble because of its direct link with language.

The entries of "Manual D'Enigmística" correspond to most of the traditional word games, although we have also introduced contemporary concepts. Literary enigmistics can be divided into three broad categories:

1. Classical Enigmistics, in parallel with rhetoric, includes the first word games of which we have any knowledge. Of Greek or Semitic origin, these word games make recreational use of various rhetorical mechanisms. Each entry contains many famous examples which have fascinated writers of all eras. These enigmas, propagated by Latin examples from other languages, are merely adaptations of the Graeco-Latin tradition.

2. Modern Enigmistics, which assimilates and uses tradition to generate new approaches to wordplay, is essentially based on the Italian language. Most of the new proposed terminology is based on nomenclature from enigmistic treatises published in Italian from the beginning of this century; their game-mechanisms are perfectly adaptable to Catalan (and, by extension, to all Romance languages).

3. Finally, we consider the spread of crossword puzzles throughout the Anglo-Saxon world and their subsequent international diffusion, to mark the beginning of Contemporary Enigmistics. The presence - in fact, the extraordinary popularity - of crossword-type games has generated a new dynamic strongly influenced by the marketplace.

One of the basic problems of word games is the varied nomenclature. Semantic interference between different kinds of word games constantly occurs. In the 115 entries of this manual, we have tried to adhere to the most well-known nomenclature, without resorting to excessive repetition. The names of word games are usually extravagant in nature, evoking a curious fascination which unfortunately creates semantic displacements [misconceptions] with respect to their application. During the Middle Ages, for example, any word games which did not fit into established pigeon-holes were called **logogriphs** [a sort of miscellaneous category].

An analogous effect occurred with respect to such general nomenclature as **cryptogram** (which defined any obscure game) or **enigma** (a term that conveys a sense of the unknown). The appropriation of proper names such as Sotades, Spooner or Malaprop to designate the word games that they inspired also leads to unnecessary repetitiveness of nomenclature. However, the inherent complexity of literary enigmas works against excessive simplification of naming.

Because systematic studies of the various phenomena of Enigmistics are infrequent - with the exception of modern Italian studies - various word games are termed **literary curiosities** when studied

in non-linguistic disciplines. Thus, for example, scholars of the Hebrew Cabala were expert in anagrams, and specialists of the Baroque period possessed considerable knowledge of the poetic applications of acrostics. Furthermore, classical rhetoric and the study of metrics are directly connected with Enigmistics. There exists a formalist literary tradition, based on oral language as a generator of narrative, which repeatedly resorts to [Michael Foucault's] so-called **tropological space** (as contrasted with the **anthropological space** of realist literature), in order to open new avenues for literary expression. Recently, ad-writers have become quite skilled in the use of enigmistic techniques. Theoreticians have even started to systematize the relationship between publicity and classical rhetoric.

It is appropriate that this manual be structured like a dictionary. The multitude of interrelations between the entries allows one to read them in any order; a relevant bibliography follows each entry. The most important word games have extensive [essay-style] entries, intended to augment the sparse Catalan literature of wordplay. Other entries, more circumstantial in nature [briefer and more factual], speak to the desire to establish the specific vocabulary of Enigmistics. There are also occasional excursions into the non-literary varieties of Enigmistics, mentioned previously.

The manual concludes with a glossary, an onomastic index and an index of the most fascinating stories of logological history. The literary orientation of many entries in the manual is the result of our explicit aim to present Enigmistics as a technique that can be profitably used by writers, poets, and other literary practitioners.