THE LIFE OF RILEY

WALTER FRETLAW

England’s palindromic town of New Bybwen is one of the great tourist attractions for wordsmiths, logologists, recreational linguists and lay fellows of the Order of Saint Aldhelm. Most visitors eventually wind up at the town’s celebrated watering hole, the Drab & Bard, hoping to catch the eye of its prettiest serving wench, Elsie Isle. One such visitor was a Bostonian of Irish extraction known only by his surname of Riley. To be accepted by the natives one has to feature in some form of palindrome and the following anecdotes concern Riley’s New Bybwenization.

The Deception Mr. Andrew E.R.D. Narm the landlord of the Drab & Bard and has a large poster advertising “tinned long pig” on a wall of his saloon bar. Innocents presume it to be cannibal luncheon meat whereas it is merely Merry Andrew’s excuse to pose the question “Who can can who?” This word-ordered palindromic question is a lirt (a deception or trick) and the landlord prides himself on his ability to give quick-witted retorts to the replies of those who fall for his jape. Naturally, the transatlantic visitor fell for it and the barroom regulars joined in the laughter of ‘mine host’ as he exclaimed “YE LIRT, RILEY!”

The Tulip Tree Dr. A. Noel Leonard, the director of Oozle Zoo, takes great pride in his North American tulip tree, the liriodendron, which grows near the main entrance to New Bybwen’s famed zoological garden, and Riley happened by just as the good doctor was having an argument about Scrabble with a fellow townsman. Soon it developed into a brawl which had the Bostonian accidentally becoming embroiled and being knocked against the doctor’s tulip tree. Most of what the director said has long been forgotten but his concluding remarks have since passed into local folklore: “...NOR D, NED. OI, RILEY, YE LIRIODENDRON!”

The Tail of the Hood Riley also featured in adventures which are far too tedious to recall but concerned such as lire (flesh, muscle, brawn), lirk (a fold of the skin), lirp (a snap of the fingers) and, so it is alleged, lirot. (This word lurks in some computer spelling checks, but means nothing to civilized folk who disdain those engines of the devil!) Perhaps Riley’s most curious adventure concerns the liripoop, the long tail of a graduate’s hood in historical times. It is alleged that he encountered the ghost of a scholar who suffered from flatulence but who attempted to explain away his offensive stench by blaming it upon the malodorous dye used to colour his headgear. When the American accused him of breaking ghastly wind, the shade replied “POOP? I, RILEY? YE LIRIPOOP!”

The Bird revealed to me in one of the tulip tops in the liriodendron and so the tale takes the name of the tree which most is to do with such matters. May, for instance, find a place in the words RUB MANY LIT WHAT I.
The great tourist visitors and lay actually wind up hoping to catch a visitor was a of Riley. To be of palindrome lution.

of the Drab & on a wall of luncheon meat the question "Who is a lirt (a ability to give his jape. into a brawl director said since passed RON!"

no zoo, takes liriodendron, which logical garden, being an argument brawled and being the director said since passed RON!"

which are far muscle, brawn), and, so it is ing checks, but of the devil!) poop, the long alleged that he flatulence but blaming it upon the American said "POOP? I,

THE OXFORD HATCHETTE FRENCH DICTIONARY

Word Ways does not normally review foreign-language dictionaries. However, an exception must be made for this handsome 1950-page volume, published in 1996 by Oxford University Press for $25. Possibly the first interlingual dictionary to take full advantage of modern lexicographic techniques, it employed a computer-based collection of citations to determine which meanings of a word are most commonly used in French and English. Editors then carefully matched by hand appropriate French words or phrases to each different meaning, a by-no-means-straightforward task: for instance, French uses different terms for "as a precautionary measure", "as a preventive measure" and "as a temporary measure". The dictionary user is assisted by lexical usage quotes (information about similar word classes such as colors, French place names, numbers, etc.) and basic information on functional words (you, be, that, against, etc.). Would that other languages had such a comprehensive and scholarly vade mecum!