Anagrams and Mutations

XAVIER BALILINKINOFF

An anagram's interest can be considerably enhanced if its background is known. The background of the several anagrams on VIOLETS is a case in point. We quote here, with the kind permission of Charles Scribner's Sons, from the book, Dialogues in Limbo, by the late Professor George Santayana. Santayana tells a story, which has been compared to Plato's parable of the cave, about the child, Autologos—the Self-spoken, Divine Creative Word.

Once upon a time, so the story runs, the whole world was a garden in which a tender fair-haired child, whose name was Autologos, played and babbled alone. There was, indeed, an old woman who tended the garden, a goddess in disguise; but she lived in a cave and came out only at night when the child was asleep, for like the bat and the astronomer she could see better in the dark. She had a sharp pruning-hook on a very long pole, with which she silently pruned every tree and shrub in the garden, even the highest branches, cutting off the dead twigs and shaking down the yellow leaves in showers; and often, muttering surly words to herself which were not intelligible, she would cut off some flower or some bud as well, so that when the child awoke he missed them and could not imagine what had become of them. Now the child in his play gave names to everything that he liked or disliked; and the rose he called Beauty, and the jasmin Pleasure, and the hyacinth Sweetness, and the violet Sadness, and the thistle Pain, and the olive Merit, and the laurel Triumph, and the vine Inspiration. He was highly pleased with all these names, and they made those flowers and plants so much more interesting to him, that he thought those names were their souls. But one day, having pricked himself with the thorns of a rose, he changed her name to Love; and this caused him to wonder why he had given those particular names to everything rather than quite different names; and the child began to feel older. As he sat brooding on this question, for he had stopped playing, a man in a black gown came into the garden who was a botanist, and said: "It matters little what names you give to flowers because they already have scientific names which indicate their true genera and species; the rose is only a rose, and is neither Beauty nor Love; and so with all the other flowers. They are flowers and plants merely, and they
have no souls." Hearing this the child began to cry, very much to the botanist's annoyance, for being a busy man he disliked emotion. "After all," he added, "those names of yours will do no harm, and you may go on using them if you please: for they are prettier than those which truly describe the flowers, and much shorter; and if the word soul is particularly precious to you, you may even say that plants and flowers have souls: only, if you wish to be a man and not always a child, you must understand that the soul of each flower is only a name for its way of life, indicating how it spreads its petals in the morning and perhaps closes them at night, as you do your eyes. You must never suppose, because the flower has a soul, that this soul does anything but what you find the flower actually doing." But the child was not comforted, and when the wind had dried his tears, he answered: "If I cannot give beautiful names to the plants and flowers which shall be really their souls, and if I cannot tell myself true tales about them, I will not play in the garden any more. You may have it all to yourself and botanize in it, but I hate you."

And the child went to sleep that night quite flushed and angry. Then, as silently as the creeping moonlight, the old woman came out of her cave and went directly to the place where the child was sleeping, and with a great stroke of her pruning-knife cut off his head; and she took him into her cave and buried him under the leaves which had fallen on that same night, which were many. When the botanist returned in the morning and found the child gone he was much perplexed. "To whom," said he to himself, "shall I now teach botany? There is nobody now to care for flowers, for I am only a professor, and if I can't teach anybody the right names for flowers, of what use are flowers to me?" This thought oppressed the poor man so much that he entirely collapsed, and as he was rather wizened to begin with, he was soon reduced to a few stiff tendons and bones, like the ribs of a dry leaf; and even these shreds soon crumbled, and he evaporated altogether. Only his black gown remained to delight the ragpicker. But the goddess in guise of that old woman went on pruning the garden, and it seemed to make no difference in her habits that the child and the botanist were dead.

I think we may surmise that the true name of this goddess must have been Dikē, the same that the wise Democritus was calling Punishment; and the botanist's name must have been Nomos, whom he was calling Agreement; and of course the child Autologos was that innocent illusion which was the theme of his whole discourse.

Several years ago I found that VIOLETS could be anagrammed to IT'S LOVE. I communicated this to Dmitri Borgmann who replied in a letter that VIOLETS could also be rearranged to I'VE LOST. In the tale told above by Santayana, the violet is identified with sadness. "It's love I've lost," certainly expresses sadness, and thus the word "violets" yields a twofold anagram too marvelous for words. The question arose: Has this anagram ever been found before? It was in the very extensive files of Eric Bodin, of Norfolk, Virginia (an anagrammatist better known for several decades as Viking), that an answer to this was found. The file-card gave the subject of the anagram, the anagram, the composer (in this case, a
The Labyrinth, May 1, 1887.

Mr. Borgmann also found three other arrangements of VIOLETS which he ordered into a sentence (to be found in his book, *Language on Vacation*, published by Charles Scribner's Sons): "Evil sot, it's love I've lost: Violet's love 'tis!" I prefer a different flower arrangement—this diminutive poem:

VIOLETS
It's love
I've lost
To Evil's
Vile sot.
Violet's
Love 'tis.

In some circles, such as The National Puzzlers League, the traditional name for any rearrangement of the letters of an expression which produces a new expression not related in meaning to the original, is "mutation." Mutations, however, have an interest all their own, as a study of this small collection will show.

**MUTATION**

ATOM, UNIT

INTEGRITY

WATERCRESS

TALE, UNIT

TINY TIGER

WA R S

TRIC ES

MILK, RICE

BABYLONIA

SECRET WARS

ATOMIC

ARDENT

UNREFORMED

ATOMIC

TAN, RED

FOUR RED MEN

C

TUNABLE

INELUCTABLENESS

R I

T

TAN, BLUE

NINE BLUE CASTLES

N

ACTION

FORTUNE

PALINDROMES:

WHITE + RED

PINK

TAN, LION

LION'S IMP

BEZIQUE

PINDAR'S MOLE

VOICE.

EVE.

LOVE.

VIOLETS

LIT.}

The very letter file-

The

pseudonym), the publication, and the date as follows: VIOLET, love it. Sub Rosa.

Mutated to numbers, the two words are mutual reversals in two ways.