Some Neglected Ways of Words

BEN ROGERS

Words have ways which are so numerous (according to some mystics) that they are transinfinite (greater than Aleph N). Only a few of these ways are wayworn, while some other ones are only wayward, and still others of them are never even noticed by the wayside, by the way. It is a profound understatement to say that the world will sleep forever through the aeons with never the utleast awareness of most of these ways, even as some of the dearest and most wanted children shall never be born. Five ways of words, newly wandered upon by this wayfarer, appear to be virgin. If, perchance, they are not, it is a matter of little consequence, and, as a gentleman, I have asked very few questions.

The curtain rises on way the first. Because the alphabet has twenty-six letters plus an assigned order, it is obvious that words can be regarded as numbers written to base twenty-six, where A = 0, B = 1, C = 2, ..., Z = 25. In the table of whole numbers beginning with zero and tending to infinity, written to base, scale or radix twenty-six, all the words of the English language and of other languages using the same alphabet, except those words beginning with A (apart from A itself) will appear. The fact that words starting with A start with an insignificant digit is just one of life’s little tragedies. There are unfortunates in every crowd, and any word that wanted to be a number in this system that didn’t get to start with something other than an A is one of the unfortunates.

It is further obvious that there must be many words which are sums of other words, differences of other words, products, quotients, powers and roots of other words, factors of other words, primitive roots of other words—why go on? If any young logological Alexander is pining for a world to conquer, it lies before him.

If the one hundred thousand decimal digits of pi (or e) obtained in recent years were converted by computer to the scale of twenty-six, what words would be found spelled out in the jumble of letters? If you find out, let me know—will you? In the meantime, one oddity I will pass on to you. The twentieth Mersenne prime is $2^{2423} - 1$; the prime exponent, 4423, when represented in base twenty-six, is GOD.

The second way of words which I commend to your attention has the charm of looking much less like work. It consists of a property that some words have, which may be described as "total alphabetical disorder." Examples will show what is
SOME NEGLECTED WAYS OF WORDS

mean. Let the letters of a word be arranged in alphabetical order and placed beneath the word, thus:

PALINDROMES
ADEILMNOPRS

In this test word, three letters, I, O and S, are in their proper alphabetical positions, so that when the word’s letters are arranged alphabetically these letters keep their same positions. (This idea was suggested by “the fixed point theorem” of topology.)

Leigh Mercer, our English colleague, stated in a recent letter: “There are three English villages with 13-letter names, no letter repeated: Buslingthorpe, Buckfastleigh, and Rumboltswhyke.”

BEGHILNOPRSTU  ABCDEFGHIKLU  RUMBOLTSWHYKE
BUSLINGTHORPE  BUCKFASTLEIGH  BEHKLMOSTDWY

The third village name possesses total alphabetical disorder. An example of a patterned word (word having repeated letters) exhibiting total alphabetical disorder is DESIRABLE.

Number three: Dr. Solomon W. Golomb, in his article, “The Periodic Table of the Alphabet” (Word Ways. Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 134-135), has, in his role of logological Dmitri Mendeleev, been anticipated Gregor Mendel-wise by one John W. Campbell who discovered, or encountered years ago, and reported the same in Astounding Science Fiction Magazine, the first of the heavier letters belonging in row 6 of Dr. Golomb’s periodic table. It is certainly radioactive, as I know of someone who once heard about it on the radio, and it is obviously unstable, since it has a habit of disappearing every now and then from the sum-total fund of human knowledge, leaving behind it no decay product other than an ignorant splutter. It is technically designated “The Digital-Labial Consonant,” and is formed by holding the forefinger horizontally in front of the lips and moving it up and down rapidly, allowing the said finger to brush the lips at both phases of each vibration, and is used mostly in pronouncing the word, “indubitably.”

Number four takes us far from those brave vibrations each way free, into the realm of whole logolinguistic compositions. It has to do with sea-changed poems—a matter which Gorki and Miller discuss in another article in this issue. The concept of sea-changed poems considered here predates that of Gorki and Miller, and in its own quaint way it is already quite obsolete; it seems that even the concept of seachanging has been sea-changed.

I asked Mr. J. A. Lindon, the multiply talented, polylingual poet-mathematician of Addlestone, Weybridge, Surrey, England, what he thought of the idea of anagramming poems, line by line, working only with the letters of each line presented in alphabetical order, with no knowledge of title, author, or subject of the original poem. This was Mr. Lindon’s first reaction:

“I think your idea of a volume of re-created poems hardly likely to produce good results. One poem, perhaps, but not a whole lot. It would be like some eastern potentate collecting all the pretty pairs of identical girl twins in his realm and then exhibiting them, one as before, the other cut and mangled, turned inside out.
horrible examples of some new not plastic but spastic-contrastic-drastic-anticlastic surgery. The logical end to trying to make reasonable sense, emulate a given rhyme-scheme, scansion and so on, would surely be to rediscover the original poem—a lot of trouble for nothing! Anything less would merely indicate a stopping at some halfway point, an obvious leaving of the thing in an unsatisfactory state. But I don’t want to be churlish. Send me your alphabetangled poem, but let me try it first with a short poem with short lines first at least. I suggest you don’t supply rhyme-scheme and meter. I will enclose one for you. But I don’t guarantee a quick solution ah ahem solution; my eyes make all such fiddling work a misery and a headache.”

Mr. Lindon was thinking in terms of the anagram as standing in appositive relation to the original; but in some crowds anagramming merely means permuting the letters to form new expressions of any kind, and it was in this less educated sense that I had intended the term. It is true that to try to re-create the original poem would be a distressingly useless enterprise. What I had in mind was rather to magically transform all those beautiful oriental girls into frogs, stars, dumplings, cathedrals, and banjo picks.

I present the poem Mr. Lindon sent as a problem for you to solve. The Editor of WORD WAYS will be most interested in seeing your solutions, and will present the best of these for the delectation of all in future issues of the journal.

Alphabetangled Poem No. 1, from J.A.L.

AA E GG H M O RR SS TT
AA EDD EE GGGG HH LL MM NN O RRR SS TT Y
AAA DD EE FF II LL NN OO SS TTT W

AAAA C EEE FF HH II LL MM NN O P RRR S W
AA CC DD II LL NN O R T U W Y
AAAA CC DDD EE HH I LLL NN O R S W YY
AA B DD EEE HHHH LL O RR SS TT W
(AA DD EE II LL M T V)
(A not very familiar name)

The alphabetangled poem I sent Mr. Lindon was Shakespeare’s song, “Full fathom five thy father lies,” quoted in full in the Gorki-Miller article in this issue. Mr. Lindon anagrammed it line by line twice over. (Since line 8 was too short, I presented the tangle to him with lines 7 and 8 lumped together.) These productions (of which, at the time of writing, Mr. Lindon said, “Oh, what twaddle!”) are, twaddle or not, historically the first of their kind. Mr. Lindon became—without the least suspecting it—the first man to sea-change (of all poems!) this poem “anagrammatically” (I willy nilly use the term in the less educated, less restrictive sense) into something sufficiently rich and necessarily strange. I am inordinately fascinated by the very existence of these two poems, and even if sea-nymphs rang
their knell, I would toot their horn; I think they are funny—and they show what dark tricks of destiny are involved in the sea-changing of all things—even a poem.

B.R.'s Alphabetical Poem No. 1
(Two ah schem solutions)

I

If my faithful lover left the ash,
I'd be a mere saloon for cash.

He was a street-sleeper. He—hairy soot!
That of night, hidden, foam-hot,
Suffered enough as bath-cat,
Standing, choir-singer, on the mat,
Hungry, horn-honking dismally—pledges sin:
"Ah, be the nag who'll drink more gin!"

II

Fat hive, filly! Muffle that horse!
0 scholar! Bees for a maiden!

They swap, I see, The least rare horse.
Hot thing, doff hat, hot maiden!

Butch a gee and stuff a horse—
Sing, ghost! Cart thinner maiden!

Lad digging nymph, no shrunken silly horse—
Bank not he'll grow higher, maiden!

This was Mr. Lindon's second reaction: "I think giving such a puzzle to the readers of Word Ways is an excellent idea, and the Editor will be able to print some of their attempts. I suggest that (unless unlikely to be known) author shouldn't be given—it makes it too easy to identify the original; and perhaps this also applies to title. Further, that whole poems needn't be chosen; extracts, if reasonably self-contained, are quite satisfactory for the purpose and give more scope for a good choice."

Possibly someone can suggest an elegant and appropriate new name for our fifth new way of words, which consists of the rearrangement of the words of a poem to make a new poem, analogous to the rearranging of letters, or anagramming. A 478-word vocabulary-cleft poem is given here as a puzzle. All the words of the original poem are arranged here in a single alphabetical order. The number of stanzas, the number of lines in each stanza, and the number of words in each line are the same as in the original poem. To create a poem using these words and only these words is undoubtedly a formidable problem. But should some bardic tiger burning bright rise mightily to this challenge, twin poems having a poignant logological interest quite absent from either of the poems as taken alone could well result. Luck be with you, and if you have some successes—or even some interesting failures—send the good word to the Editor.

THE JOURNAL OF RECREATIONAL LINGUISTICS
SOME NEGLECTED WAYS OF WORDS

Vocabularyclept Poem No. 1

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are are as aspirations away away bakes bark battle
be be be before before being beings bland blast blazed
blow bread build burnt but but by
came can can candle candle cannot charred chimney clean coal-oil
cost comforted come couch crude crystal darkness days death
determination did
die done doubt downward driving dusk dusk eat eaves elbow eternity
excellled except
exists failing falling falls fate fate fed feel felt
few filled fly first flies floss found for for forgiven
forever-receding from
future gloaming glow go gods goes gone grates grow hand
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WORD WAYS
SOME NEGLECTED WAYS OF WORDS

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** RHYMING ANIMALS **

The most common kind of mouse is known as a HOUSE MOUSE. There is a
breed of horses peculiar to northern Europe, a specimen of which is called a
NORSE HORSE. These are two examples of rhyming animals that have made
the dictionary.

On the figurative side, other rhyming animals culled from the pages of dic­
tionaries include the FAT CAT, the FOGDOG, and the CULTURE VUL­
TURE.

Can readers help us expand our as yet meagre collection of rhyming animals?

** FOR TYPISTS **

Seldom has adequate tribute been paid to the anonymous individuals who
turn their talents to devising sentences using all 26 letters of the alphabet,
sentences suitable for typing practice. A few ingenious samples follow:
(1) The sixty-five quickly jumping dogs and foxes were just shot by the crazy
maniac.
(2) We quickly chased the zebras to a quiet drinking place just near my five
bundles of flax.
(3) Sixty young school chums jeopardized their lives by fighting zealously in a
quaint market warehouse.
(4) The zeal of the brave boys quickly won praise from the exact old judge
who wanted to give them an award.
Here, indeed, is food for the deepest thought!

THE JOURNAL OF RECREATIONAL LINGUISTICS