THE POET'S CORNER

From time to time, Word Ways receives a variety of short poems related to recreational linguistics, some original, others previously published. As poetic output cannot be easily predicted, these will be presented on an irregular basis.

In a word game often seen in newspapers, the reader is presented with a relatively long word and asked to form as many different words as possible out of subsets of the letters. A somewhat more challenging variation requires him to use the letters in the order in which they appear in the original word. Charles Suhor of Tallahassee, Florida has used the latter technique to compose a Poemutation, a form of concrete poetry in which the visual and semantic possibilities of the first line generate the rest of the poem. In the following (slightly abridged) version of a Poemutation, the letters in the second and succeeding lines are entirely drawn from the letter stockpile of the first line:

McLuhan: The MEDIUM is the MESSAGE

is the AGE, i.e., the S-SAGE,

is it

M a

M a D ?

D ?

M a

D ?

D ?

MEDIUM the AGE

EDUIM the AGE

EDUIM the AGE

M a

D I

D I

M a

D I

D I

n ?

Note that only four words (dead, death, did, in) had to be carried over to two lines. Not a very profound message, but a clever bit of word-juggling.
Although it is probably impossible to top Willard Espy's "A Plurality of Singular Verse" in the May issue, Ralph Beaman of Boothwyn, Pennsylvania had a go at it:

Each member of the royal corps  
His metal gardebras did wear;  
In battle, gardebras they wore;  
The king wished corps, not corpses, there.

To be precise, his precis was  
Or were in patois vices;  
The patois is or are faux pas,  
Which is or are what he precises.

S in the middle, pronounced at the end  
Is a strange riddle some can't comprehend;  
There are a few, I give some clues,  
Billet-doux to billets-doux;  
Now you see it's done with ease,  
Fleur-de-lis to fleurs-de-lis;  
Still more there be, I do not cease,  
Grand prix to grands prix.  
(If you want still more, try esprit de corps;  
Webster's doesn't show it, but you and I know it.)

Walter Shedlofsky of St. Louis, Missouri offers "The Eternal Enigma", an Anachuttle verse in which the initial letters of the lines spell out a phrase which is anagrammed three times -- by the initial letters of the third, fourth and fifth words:

Grieve stricken shadow soul, ever in your niche, repent the  
Insane journeys, the travail void now in despair -- calm.  
Admit disturbed rue remains excuse for life's brutal fake;  
Negate promised ambition, as regret for futile break.  
Thwarted puppet, naively nod lost dreams for vernal tale,  
Ribald disaster grinds, grim anguish seeks Your care -- balm.  
Endless mystery, eerie enigma, stark eternal veil,  
Vindicate crass verve, eager thrusts short though life's parade;  
Explain cryptic end, venture import to life's charade.  
Last stronghold, impavidly I now rest in Your bare palm;  
Suffer surcease, lave lonely gored soul with Your rich nepenthe.

Finally, for a complete change of pace Mary Buckley of Commerce, Texas has composed several limericks all based on the abbreviations of titles:

Uncle Jonathan (some call him Mr.)  
Was carried away by a twr.  
Once found by his Mrs.  
She drowned him with krs.  
Though his nose had a rose-colored blr.
Harlan Sanders, Kentucky's own Col.,
Will fill you with pleasure intol.
By the lb. or the oz.,
On his chicken you poz.
And then sing his praises etol.

Of philosophy Jack was a Dr.,
All exams he did carefully prr.
Though a graduate maiden
Did most of his gradin'
(Alone in his office he rr.)

When his Chancellor made like a St.,
King Henry the Eighth found it qt.
With consorts galore,
He wanted no More --
So Holbein had no one to pt.

Dr. Graham, the talkative Rev.,
Holds crusades which seemingly nev.
In tent or TV
'Tis easy to see
Of religion, he chooses the clev.

I CRAV'D CHATTER

A fascinating tidbit surfaced in the September 2, 1974 issue of Time magazine. In a review of the book Cavett by Dick Cavett and Christopher Porterfield, we are told that the future TV talk-show host dazzled his Yale classmates with his ability to make instant anagrams out of any name they mentioned: Alec Guinness = genuine class, Oscar Wilde = O lad I screw. What does the rather enigmatic title mean? It's almost impossible to anagram Dick Cavett, but if one changes his name to the more formal RICHARD CAVETT the remarkably apposite anagram of the title emerges. Purists may quibble about cra'v'd, but it is found in an OED citation of the seventeenth century. (Wouldn't it make a fine epitaph carv'd on his headstone?)