AUTOMYNORCAGRAMS

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I have long ruminated over the problem of finding a logological form of composition as challenging and appealing as the palindrome, but in which (unlike the palindrome) any word could be used. The ideas that occurred to me all seemed deficient in one way or another. The logological interest of vocabularyclepts (anagramming the words of one poem into another) is dependent upon the existence of the parent poem from which they are made, and is nonexistent without them. Word-unit palindromes are an attractive possibility, but the composer must be resigned to the fact that "and the" implies "the and", to give but one trivial example of the many unpleasant limitations imposed by this form. As for using anagrammatical techniques for generating poetry ab initio, the logological principle governing such compositions lacks ready visibility, and this, I feel, may often be a definite minus from the point of view of reader appreciation.

In comparing any newly-conceived logological literary form to the palindrome, the challenge, or difficulty factor, should be judged relative to how ambitious an opus -- how long, how intricately constructed and how meaningful -- the composer wishes to create in the new form. In the case of the palindrome, a coherent work of lasting interest several hundred words in length might well represent the limit of what is theoretically possible. If the new form is much less difficult in the absolute sense, but the writer contemplates a production perhaps thousands of words long, the difficulty factor will remain more or less constant relative to the considerably greater magnitude of the work envisioned. The factor of appeal, however, must and will be judged absolutely, to say nothing of subjectively. What gives the palindrome its powerful appeal.is (conceived in static terms) its artistic or mathematical principle of symmetry, or (conceived in dynamic terms) what Paul Remley calls its "outward blossoming process" which starts from a central seed. Appeal is something felt, and individuals are bound to vary in their judgment of just what else, if anything, exerts an appeal comparable to that of the palindrome.

In the November 1970 issue of Word Ways, a Query appeared in which the editor began a story word-chain fashion -- each word beginning with the same letter with which the previous word ended. This story really hooked me, and I would have liked nothing better than to have read the whole of it, had it existed. Though literary word-chains of this type are certainly interesting, one notices that one cannot use the indefinite articles A and AN. Brooding over these chains, I realized that even if every word without exception were usable, the fact

that it allowed only those two-word combinations in which the first
word ends with the letter with which the second begins was too restrict-
ive for the purposes I had in mind.

In 1965 my niece, Jana Blomquist, then about eight or nine years
old, told me about an acronym-like word game her teacher had described
to her by example: STOP - Skid Tires On Pavement. We tinkered with
the idea, coming up with GIRLS - Good, Idealistic Romantic Little
Sweethearts; BOYS - Bad, Obnoxious, Yucky Slobs; BIKE - Best Inven-
tion Known Ever; and (getting fancy) BOUILLABAISSE - Beautiful Or
Ugly Ingredients, Like Lobster And Barracuda, And Including Spices,
Stirred Energetically. It was only after many a blue moon had waxed
and waned that it dawned on me that this logological principle would,
with minor modification, serve to govern the construction of prose or
poetry in such a way that any two-word combination whatever would
have a possible chance of being used. Further, just as the palindrome
is characterized by symmetry, the new logological form resulting from
the application of that slightly altered rule would be characterized by an
ongoing process of self-replication.

But what to name it? Reading through past issues of Word Ways a
few hours ago, I chanced on Dave Silverman's independent discovery of
my niece's word game, in the January 1973 issue. Inspired by his name
of Mynorca, I christened my new logological literary form the
Automynorcagram.

The genuine mynorca defines both the spelling and the meaning sim-
ultaneously of some word which is external to itself; the quasi-mynorca
defines only the spelling of some word likewise external to itself. The
automynorcagram, however, though closely related to those two, is not
other-defining at all, but only self-replicating.

When searching for naturally-occurring mynorcas, quasi or genuine,
one soon finds that quasi-mynorcas spelling words of three or four let-
ters are a dime a dozen; but for five letters and beyond, the scarcity
increases rapidly. Naturally, not all four-letter words are equally
common. HATE, for instance, occurs far more frequently than LOVE:

> The night has a thousand eyes
> In the beginning, God created the Heaven and the Earth

What is this?

> God of our Fathers, known of old

'Tis an antimynorca. However, the following approximates fairly
closely to a genuine mynorca:

> When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes

Aha! What is this?

> Then can I drown an eye unused to flow

For precious friends hid in death's dateless night

Here we have a tiny self-propelling and partially self-replicating logological entity in which the previously encountered word-definition relationship is seen to be absent! -- and it is this entity which, for better or worse, I call a (naturally occurring) automynorcagram. (The purpose of the -gram suffix is to de-emphasize the idea of "definition" by emphasizing the more general idea of "writing", and also to render the word more easily and euphoniously inflected.) By revising Shakespeare ever so slightly, it is possible to lengthen this first found example to "hidd'n in death's dateless night."

It is interesting what curious literary-logological cyborgs one may create by means of the technique of automynorcagrammatical grafting:

> Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
> But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
> How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
> Owen Wainstaf, elfin novelist,
> Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

In composing automynorcagrams, the ever-present need is for synonyms; because, at each point, the meaning the constructor strives to convey must be communicated by a word drawn from just one out of a total of twenty-six categories, that category having been fixed well beforehand:

> Blue lovebirds
> Under evening's large orb
> Vow eternal Byronic imprinting.
>
> Red devils
> Skulking under night's doleful eye
> Rape elfin violets emotionlessly.

This poem does not necessarily end here. If it were infinitely long, the number of letters would be equal to the number of words, the nth letter would always be the same as the initial letter of the nth word, these initials would replicate the entire infinite poem, and this replication would repeat an infinite number of times.

Finite automynorcagrams may be classified according to the "power" to which they attain. In the above, the single word BLUE represents the zero power. The initials of the first four words replicate the zero power, and they therefore constitute the first power. The remainder of the poem, as presented above, strives toward -- but does not fully attain to -- the second power.

The following is the beginning of a short story. I have the story clearly in mind, and this fact is enough to present me with all the problems that the most rabid puzzler could ever yearn for.

"Exquisite, Xavier! Quite unparalleled, I'd say, in

textured esprit !"

Xavier assented vaguely.

"I'm ecstatic! -- really quivering unduly!" I touched Egghead's ugly, nauseous painting. Any Rubens, any lascivious leggy ecdysiast lolling erotically deserved infinitely deeper sanctions.

"Ah yes, I've noticed the effect," Xavier truckled unctuously. "Rarely, Evelyn, do even sensitive poets respond in tune -- "

Xavier's asinine verbiage I endured ruefully, as soiree swingers edged near. . .

Another thing that could be attempted would be to take an already-known story, such as the fairy tale "Goldilocks", and rewrite it auto-mynorcagrammatically. Or, again, one might try to compose "The Automynorcagrammatical Raven". Many beginnings might be considered, since any starting word whatever may be chosen (with the single exception of the indefinite article AN, assuming normal grammatical constraints). One possible opening might be "Midnight in December". The MB in December could correspond to "my books", the D to "dreary" and the C to "chamber". But will the whole composition ever hold up the logological mirror to "The Raven"? Who knows?

A PANGRAMMATIC SCRABBLE

The March 11, 1975 issue of the London Times contained the following item: "Phoebe Winch of Sherborne thinks she may have invented a new game. I fear that she might be right, and that it could prove compulsive. It is to compose something sensible using all the letter tiles supplied with Scrabble and using no other letters. Her own best effort is: 'I am dieting. I eat quince jelly. Lots of ground maize gives variety. I cook rhubarb and soda, weep anew, or put on extra flesh.' Mrs. Winch says she is not satisfied with the result. I expect some of you can do better."