SHERLOCKIANA

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Word Puzzles selected from "Victorian Engimas and Sherlockian Puzzles" by the author.

Charades

Charades are one the most popular word puzzles and have been in print for nearly 300 years. This type of puzzle is only tangentially related to the party game of the same name; both break a message down into consecutive parts. In a charade a word (or phrase) is broken down into a sequence of consecutive non-overlapping parts, and each part is clued separately.

Originally charades where based on straightforward decompositions, like butter + fly = butterfly. In 1797 the *Encyclopedia Britannica* wrote:

> The exercise of charades, if not greatly constructive, is at least innocent and amusing. At all events, as it has made its way into every fashionable circle, ... it will be scarcely deemed unworthy of attention. [However] the silliness indeed of most that have appeared in the papers under this title, are not only destitute of all pleasantry in the stating, but are formed in general of words utterly unfit for the purpose. They have therefore been treated with the contempt they deserved.

But breaking words in less obvious ways is more entertaining, like fat + her = father, especially with clever cluing. Victorian examples would often use phonetics elements, but we will not. Originally the parts were clued separately, one at a time, in the following style.

> My first part will, for those who died,
> Describe that which is putrified
>
> My second is a simple word,
> A pronoun Mrs Hudson heard.
>
> My third's an act Holmes did perform,
> His straight left 'gainst a foe most warm
>
> The fourth's another simple word,
> A word for Sherlock you inferred
>
> My whole? Avoid it, if you please,
> Lest you contract a rare disease.

Over time, the presentation has been shortened with all the parts integrated into one verse. We use the place-holders ALL, COMPLETE, TOTAL, etc for the whole word. Here are some additional examples.

> The butler's said to know his Greek.
>   (His FIRST I've seen him write and speak.)
> He read the TOTAL incantation,
>   So as to rise above his station.
> Now he's seen in the smallest room,
>   That is his SECOND and his tomb.

"We need to catch this Oberstein,
    Who signs his secret ads COMPLETE.
We'll get him back to England, yet,
    And nab him when he lands-Toot sweet!"

"Shall we meet him at water's edge
    And grab him at the FIRST, my boss?"
"Such trash! Such SECOND! Not at all!
    We'll lure him into Charing Cross."

The beast was caged; his SECOND there,
    Deep in the dark and FIRST morass.
But if it's loose and roams the land,
    And you're in ALL-your ass is grass.

A POEM

J. JAMES MANCUSO
Niskayuna, New York

THE MONTH OF SILVER ORANGES

I knew a boy with a terrible lisp
Who mi*th*pronoun*th*ed word*th* more than on*th*.
Though some called him will-o-the-wisp,
At least he could rhyme words with month.

His mother was most overbearing
And really we'd all had our fill of 'er.
Her presence was dark and unwanted,
Like a tarnish on very fine silver.

They lived up in Southern New Hampshire.
Was it Troy or Fitzwilliam or Rindge?
Near Rhododendron State Park
Where blossoms were pink, red and orange.