MY FIFTEEN MINUTES OF FAME

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In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes (Andy Warhol, 1968)

Not world-famous, and for less than ten minutes...but on December 12 2010 I saw myself portrayed by a professional actor to an audience of 35 on an off-Broadway (Jersey City) stage. The 90-minute one-act play, "Logomaniacs" by Paul Fleischman, consisted of short sketches of 26 wordplay notables, one for each letter of the alphabet, from Walter Abish who wrote *Alphabetical Africa* ("Ages ago, Alex, Allan and Alva arrived at Antibes...") to Ludwig Zamenhof, the creator of Esperanto, including Howard Chace who invented Anguish Languish ("Ladle Rat Rotten Hut"), Ignatius Donnelly who insisted that Francis Bacon was the author of Shakespeare's plays, Georges Perec who wrote both the E-less novel *La Disparation* and its E-full counterpart *Les Revenentes*, Colonel Robert McCormick of the Chicago Tribune who advocated spelling reform, and Arthur Wynne who constructed the first crossword in 1913.

To economize, Fleischman used only four actors to represent the 26 characters, necessitating rapid between-scenes costume changes. They had an extremely challenging task, that of making an arcane subject such as wordplay palatable to a general audience. Fleischman solved it by mounting a fast-moving production with melodramatic moments (characters were introduced by a circus barker cracking a whip), illustrated by examples projected on a screen behind the actors, and accompanied by appropriate music from Sousa to easy listening. It was particularly difficult for him to choose audience-friendly examples of the hard-core logology in *Making the Alphabet Dance* for my sthick. He settled on Letter Shifts (p 173-76) such as *add* to *bee, ice* to *keg, fusion* to *layout*, augmented by Isograms (p 49-50) illustrated by real people such as Melvin Schwarzkopf, Scrambled Alphabets (p 179-80) to maximize (or minimize) the number of four-letter Pocket Dictionary words in alphabetic order (*abet, bevy. chin,* etc.), and Special Transpositions (p 136) such as personal names (*Gary Gray, Eric Rice, Ronald Arnold*). In a preliminary version of the play, he included Self-Enumerating Sentences (p 224-26), from the pedestrian "This sentence has five words" to Lee Sallows's remarkable construction of a sentence specifying the number of a's, b's, c's etc. in it.

To smooth the narrative flow, Fleischman introduced related word people in adjacent letters, such as Perec followed by Queneau (fellow Oulipian who created *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems)* or Wynne followed by Ximenes (pen name of a famous British cryptic crossword constructor). For E, he was confronted with the necessity of identifying logologists with surnames beginning with F and G. Apparently he consulted the *Making the Alphabet Dance* index to look for suitable tidbits associated with Darryl Francis and Jeff Grant—not an easy task, as both of them are associated with relatively hard-to-present concepts such as three-dimensional word cubes, non-crashing word sets and tautonymic ten-squares. Francis was represented by the fact that *iaos* is the only four-letter isogram in the Merriam-Webster unabridged having letters in alphabetic order in a certain scrambled alphabet, and Grant was introduced with his list of last-names-anagrams-of-first extracted from the New Zealand Electoral rolls. However, neither one was represented by an on-stage actor, the only two letters of the alphabet thus ignored!