RUSSIAN PALINDROMES

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The following article by V. Khromov, entitled Palindromes: Sound Play, or a Regular Case of Sound Distribution, originally appeared in the Nauka i Zhizn of 1970 (No. 9). Various amplifications of the material in the article for the benefit of the American reader appear in brackets.

Some years ago we had published an article discussing -- in a rather detailed manner -- palindromes, i.e., words and phrases which could be read the same backward as forward (see "Nauka i Zhizn, No. 7/1967). We presented then to our readers a poem Lesnoi pereverten' [Forest palindrome] by Semyon Kirsanov [Soviet poet, born in 1906], written as a palindrome. Here we present another poem which was composed as an imitation of that Kirsanov's poem. It can be named Cornyi pereverten' [Mountain palindrome], as it was inspired by the author's travel to the Caucasus Mountains and his fishing in small mountain rivers flowing into the Black Sea.

Ya oko pokoya.
Ya, shur, u ruch'ya
Idchu kudshi
1 kloch'ya cholki,
1 chuby zybudi.
Tishine teni shit".
Koster pret sok,
Tish' rushit i shur'hit.
Kin' paluk, suk, lapnik --
Terpko sok pret, --
Vodyanogo ogon' yadov.
No govorim: mirov ogon',
Ogon' -- ideya edinogo.
Diven mne vid:
Elka, skala k sakle,
A k portu tropka.
A zor'ka, kak roza.
A set' u utesa.
Nam utro -- gor tuman.
A kaby rybaki
A te seti ...
Udit' idy.
A leska tak sel'a --
Kryuk yurk.
Another short ironical poem is about Tit [a Russian masculine first name] who was a hobbyist of wordplay.

Tit red' chertit
(Mozhet red' chertezhom.)
Bukv kub,
Konus i risunok
Rezat' na figurki, krugi - fantazer.
Titushka tak shutit.
Tsezar'! Bog! Obrazets!

The name Tit is itself a palindrome; it is possible to find a suitable last name for him, e.g., Vodorodov. By the way, there exist some rather often encountered last names which are palindromes, such as Nilin, Anisina. There are even some palindromic pen-names: Volyrk - Krylov, Volinad - Danilov. The poem Odichaly [Wild] attributed to a Decembrist [Decembrists were the members of a secret democratic society who tried in December 1825 without success to establish a democratic form of government in Russia] Gavrila Batenkov [1793 - 1863], was signed by the cryptogram o-e-a in accordance with reverse order of vowels in his last name. Delvig [Russian poet, 1798 - 1831] signed his prose by the pen-name Vigel; he changed the order of syllables in his last name (compare zuboskal - Skalozub). [Skalozub is the last name of a colonel, a character from the famous Griboedov's (1795 - 1829) play "Gore ot uma" (Trouble from wit), whereas zuboskal means scoffer.]

Our first article was about complete palindromes only, and we had not considered any phrases with mirror symmetry of certain sound arrangement. Yuri Olesha [Soviet writer, 1899 - 1960] had mentioned palindrome indications even in such a well-known line from the poem Evgenii Onegin [by A. Pushkin, a great Russian poet (1799 - 1837)]: "Evroly baloven' Orfei" (evro-orfe). The name of the main character of this famous poem is a semi-palindrome itself: Evgenii Onegin - gen-neg. We consider it as a specific case of intrinsic sound connection between two words.

S. Kirsanov identified a palindrome as a "self-rhyme". Let's look at some examples of partial palindromes:

srednii interes
subbotnii avtobus
ofitser Lutsifer
lebed' shelokhiula stebel'
travu zhuet zhuravl'
sterech' ochered'
nelepets Tepepin
doloi golod
los' lihet sol'
aforizm zhirafa

Can't you feel by ear the definite rhyme-like connection between these words? Indications of a self-rhyme can be seen as well in the following lines from Evgenii Onegin:

Zavodov, vod, lesov, zemel'
Zhovyain polnyi, a dosel' ... 

We can see another indication from line from

Sak
And here is another

Titmhska tak shutit.

Palindromes can notice such consonant repetitions:

Pizlar Prizrak
Vse prece
Qto rom
Kak v s
Chem meny
Brodii py
Drog
Davno byl ...

Za do

Some indications from

i Zhizn by O.
Likh bar
Uper Tit
Vakula
Amos iz
Mil Kim
Kolet ka
Zol i bo

The first of the slave is 1

[This translation]
There exist palindromes, pen-names: Alyi [Wild].

And here is an example of another very well-built self-rhyme:

Shila v meshke ne utaish' [a Russian proverb meaning "murder will out"].

Palindromes can be caught not only by an attentive ear; one can notice such a regularity in considering a large quantity of double and triple alliteration series, i.e., series based on several consonant repetitions. The examples which follow are also from Evgenii Onegin:

Kak dandy londonskii odet... (ddndnd)
Blistal poslushnovy slezo... (lsslsl)
Uzh barabanom probud'... (zhbrbrbh)
Kto zhil i myslil, tot ne molot... (tzhmttmh)
Ni miliy vzglyad, ni vzdoch neskromnyi... (nmnmnm)
A nynche vse mne temno, Tanya... (nnmmnn)
Lyvbi my tsenu tem umnozhit... (mmnmnn)
Prizrak nevozvratnykh deni... (rrrrrr)
Vse predressudki istrebya... (rrrrrr)
Oto romantizmom my zovem... (mmmmmm)
Kak v strashnom, neponyatnom sne... (nmnnnnnn)
Chem men'še zhenshchihmu my lyubit... (mmnmnmnm)
Brodili po svetu, Pozdravim... (mmmmmmmm)
Drog droga s beregom. Ura! (rrrrurr)
Davno b (ne pravda le?) Pora! (ddmdmd)
Za docher'mi smotrite vsled... (drmdrrmd)

Some interesting palindromes were sent to the Editor of Nauka i Zhizn by O. M. Korzhevskaya from the city of Ufa:

Likh baron, no rab khil
Uper Tit repu
Vakula lukav
Amos isthet u tezdhi soma
Mil Klim
Kolez kazak telok
Zol i bog: Ishil Gobi loz
Uvel ded Levu
Yure veryu
Senya lipu kupil, ya nes
Izhiti, nil, bim in shchi
A Vera - reva
Gorod massam dorog
Khil voron, a norov likh

[The first of these sentences translates: The baron is evil, and the slave is puny.] Another of her palindromes is a little poem:

Ragu
U bar -
A rabu
Ugar.

[This translates: Ragout for the masters, and fumes for the slave.]