

# 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.

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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, d̄ur, u ruch'ya  
Ish̄chu kush̄chi  
I kloch'ya d̄olki,  
I d̄uby zybuchi.  
Tish̄ine teni sh̄it'.  
Koster pret sok,  
Tish' rushit i sh̄ursh̄it.  
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.  
I kaby rybaki  
I te seti ...  
Udit' idy.  
A leska tak sela -  
Kryuk yurk.

lly byli.

Another short ironical poem is about Tit [a Russian masculine first name] who was a hobbyist of wordplay.

Tit rech' chertit  
 (Mozhet rech' 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 Odichalyi [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] Gavriila 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 Vigdel; 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	sterech' ochered'
subbotnii avtobus	nelepets Tseppelin
ofitser Lyutsifer	doloi golod
lebed' shelokhiula stebel'	los' lizhet sol'
travu zhuet zhuravl'	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'  
 Zhozyain polnyi, a dosel' ...

and

Kak tomno byl on molchaliv ...

We can see a mirror symmetry of sound arrangement in the following line from the play "Gore ot uma" by Griboedov:

Sam pogru zhen umom v Zhefirakh i Amurakh ...

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

Shila v meshke ne utai~~sh~~'

[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.. (dndndnd)  
 Blistal poslušnoyu slezoi.. (lslslsl)  
 Už barabanom probužden.. (žbrbrbžh)  
 Kto žil i myslil, tot ne možet.. (tžmttmžht)  
 Ni milyi vzglyad, ni vzdokh neskromnyi.. (nmnmmn)  
 A nynche vse mne temno, Tanya.. (nnmmnmmn)  
 Lybvi my tsenu tem umnozhim.. (mnmnmnm)  
 Prizrak nevozvratimyk~~h~~ deni.. (rzhzrh)  
 Vse predrassudki istrebya.. (rdrdrd)  
 Chto romantizmom my zovem.. (mzmzmzm)  
 Kak v strašnom, neponyatnom sne.. (nmnmmnmmn)  
 Chem men'she zhen~~sh~~ih~~u~~ my lyubim.. (mmnmmmm)  
 Brodili po svetu. Pozdravim  
 Drog droga s beregom. Ura! (rururur)  
 Davno b (ne pravda le?) Pora!  
 Za docher'mi smotrite vsled.. (drmmrd)

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	Uvel ded Levu
Uper Tit repu	Yure veryu
Vakula lukav	Senya lipu kupil, ya nes
Amos is <del>sh</del> et u tes <del>sh</del> chi soma	l <del>sh</del> chi, nil, blin i shchi
Mil Klim	A Vera - reva
Kolet kazak telok	Gorod massam dorog
Zol i bog: lishil Gobi loz	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.]