

PALINDROMANIA

DAVE MORICE

Saint Louis, Missouri

A few years ago I was a palindrophobiac. Although palindromes were majestic constructions to read, they seemed too majestic for me to construct. I had a fear of writing them.

Anagrams never gave me any trouble, but palindromes - argh! Their authors had to collect thousands of reversible words and spend hours looking for the right combinations among the lists - or so I thought.

After reading Howard Bergerson's Anagrams and Palindromes in 1980, I was inspired to create my own palindromes. Upon writing the first two, my antipalindromic mental block crumbled into symmetrical pieces.

One trick of the palindromist's trade was becoming clear: start with a middle word and build outward on both sides, instead of starting with two end words and building inward. The only word list necessary was the dictionary in my head.

The resulting palindromes were unpredictable, even uncontrollable - from the nearly normal to the weirdly surrealistic. They weren't that easy to invent at first, but something was happening. I felt as if I were viewing language in a concave mirror.

Palindromania seized my thoughts. Word flashed backwards and forwards through my mind. Even at the grocery store, the names of products raced in both directions.

After four days of this, my blue spiral notebook was filled up with false starts and true finishes. Finally, palindromania had run its course, leaving in its aftermath a collection of more than fifty works. I was cured.

Here are some of the symptoms of that amazing disease: thirty one-liners, presented in the order in which they were written, followed by three poems.

Bosses sob.

No, it can! Action!

Rot call. Abe's a baseball actor.

God! A note, O Poet, on a dog.

Ah, me! O, Poem! Ha!

Was an ode, Ed, on a saw?

'Tis muse sums it.

Rose mire! No fine venom, Muse. Summon even if one rimes or..

We, I - very rare till literary review.

Cuckoo book! Cuckoo book! Cuc..
 Are positions done? He nods: "No, it is opera".
 Salt a pup, Atlas.
 He hums it: "O, pencil lags Gallic nepotism". Uh...eh?
 Set a gasp, Inspiration. No "it"? A rip snips agates.
 Hot carts! Banana marathon! Oh, tar a man. An abstract "oh".
 Red, now is tundra bard nuts? I wonder.
 Nail a tin Italian.
 Muffins - sniff 'um.
 I'm a last salami.
 Stun, O Coconuts!
 Egad! Lo, senile lines: Old age.
 An alphabet ate (bah!) plan A.
 Pan a nose. Yes, Eye. Sleep peels eyes - eyes on a nap.
 O, go tar Erato. Go!
 No, sir, or rime-mirror is on.
 'Tis not elfin, Roberta. Can a cat, reborn, if let on, sit?
 Yell, eh Shelley?
 Did Pope? Pop did.
 Not lime! Milton!

FINE, IT'S STEIN IF..

Gertrude Stein, the great experimental writer, wrote the sentence "Rose is a rose is a rose". The title of this poem is almost palindromic, and the lines are individually palindromic. Each line can be extended indefinitely, as long as it ends at the appropriate place.

Roses or roses or roses or...
 Proses or proses or proses or p...
 Roses or proses or roses or proses or...
 Proses or roses or proses or roses or p...

GOGOL'S DODO

Gogol was a fiction writer in Czarist Russia. Each line of the poem is individually palindromic, and the body of the poem is also palindromic. Except for the title, the poem uses only four different letters of the alphabet. One to four new words are introduced in each line till reaching the last line, which repeats the first. The pivotal middle line can be divided in half to produce two mutually palindromic lines. Line pairs equidistant from the middle are mutual palindromes, except for the repeated first and last lines. The word "gol" is a short slang form for "golly", and "o" is "of".

Gold log.
 Logo: Gogol.
 Go, Doll! O, Dog!
 Do good. Do, O God.
 O, do, Dodo. O, Dodo, do.
 Dog? O, odd! O! O, God.
 Go, Doll o' Dog.
 Lo, gogo! Gol'!
 Gold log.

ISIS

The Egyptian goddess Isis, confronting herself in a mirror, undergoes an identity crisis. The body of the poem is palindromic, but the title and the individual lines aren't. The entire poem uses only two alternating letters, forming four words. It's a sonnet of sorts.

Sis, is Isis Isis?
 Is Isis I, Sis? I?
 Sis, is Isis I, Sis?
 Isis is I, Sis. I!

Sis is Isis? Isis
 Is Isis? I, Sis? Is?
 I. Sis. Isis is.
 Isis is Isis. Is!

Isis? Isis is I.
 Sis is I. Sis. I.
 Sis is Isis is I.
 Sis? Isis, I? Sis, I?

Sis is Isis; I, Sis.
 I, Sis, Isis - is Isis.

A POSITIONAL DICTIONARY

Most positional dictionaries are based on relatively small dictionaries because of the necessity to repeat each word as many times as there are letters in it. The Longman Crossword Key (1982), available in the United States for \$12.95 and distributed by Caroline House, Inc., Naperville, Illinois, lists 74,000 words of 3 to 15 letters alphabetically by each letter position. For example, of the 6762 11-letter words listed, 13 have a Q in the fourth position: barQentine, cenQuecento, conQuerable, ...). This book significantly extends the range of such out-of-print works as the Instant Word Finder which lists words through eight letters only. (J. Henrick)