

ANOTHER ROBOT QUIZ

THE WORD WURCHER

The final batch of articles by Dmitri A. Borgmann published in the February 1988 issue of **Word Ways** contains "Robots on the Rampage," an example of Borgmann's wide-ranging logological interests. This article gave rise to remarks by Jed Martinez that show extensive acquaintance with robots in movies and television and state his interest in another robot quiz.

Although The Word Wurcker commented on the absence of puppet and marionette from Dmitri Borgmann's article, he himself would undoubtedly have missed several of Borgmann's twenty robots if he had had to write on the subject himself. Further reflection on the matter, however, leads The Word Wurcker to additional comment on the subject of robots and to propose another robot quiz, as well as to discuss in more detail the difference between the words automaton and robot, which Borgmann apparently considered synonymous.

The second query-definition in Borgmann's robot quiz is "A figure, such as a tiny wooden soldier, that appears to imitate the motions of a human being," and his answer is automaton. An automaton, however, may represent not only a human being, but also a bird, mammal, or any other living creature. An automaton's distinguishing features are (1) that it represent a living creature and (2) that, by the use of motive power within itself, it imitate some action or actions of the being it portrays. Automata may even represent parts of bodies, such as the fortune-teller automata in old amusement arcades in the form of a gypsy woman from the waist up, or even talking heads.

Robots, on the other hand, need not depict a living creature, but only perform a function, usually one that a living creature can perform. Robot welders on car assembly lines need only have a movable beam, metaphorically called an arm, which applies a welding device to the proper spot on the car assembly. Even computers, which have no external resemblance to living creatures, are really robots that receive, process, and emit information in a form understandable to human beings or to other devices that make it so understandable. Nor need robots in general contain their motive forces independently within themselves.

Dmitri Borgmann's definition six reads "A robot of human form, a synthetic man created from biological materials." With this he equates the words android or androides. The latter word (of which the first is merely a condensed version) has been around for centuries (in English since the early 1700s) and was first specifically

applied to the automata of antiquity and the middle ages in which no biological materials were used. The literature on automata and androids or androides is very extensive and dates from before the Christian era. This brief note by no means exhausts the subject; indeed, it hardly even broaches it.

The following quiz deals with what Borgmann would have called robots, but which are really automata. The percentage value of the query (on the basis of a total of 100%) follows its ordinal number.

- 1 (15%). In an ancient land this figure daily vocally greeted the sun's first rays.
- 2 (30%). A small tethered flying machine invented by a follower of Pythagoras.
- 3 (17.5%). After the enigmatic utterances "Time will be," "Time is now," and "Time was" this medieval automaton destroyed itself.
- 4 (20%). The greatest novel ever written mentions at least two automata, the first a flying beast of burden, the second a fraudulent imitation of something like No. 3 above. Identify the flying beast.
- 5 (17.5%). An automaton, invincible in a certain game nowadays very popular in Slavic countries, mentioned by perhaps the seediest or most seminal American author, who may be held in greater esteem in France than in America.

Answers will be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

A BOOK OF PALINDROMES

Illustrated books of palindromes have been around for a long time; the earliest one I know of is G. R. Clarke's Palindromes, first published in 1887. Madam I'm Adam and Other Palindromes has been published by Scribner's as a \$5.95 paperback exactly one century later; it contains more than seventy mostly well-known palindromic phrases selected by William Irvine and illustrated (one to a page) by Steven Guarnaccia. For example, the famous "A man, a plan, a canal --- Panama!" shows a patient in Dr. Panama's dental chair, and "Yell upset a cider: predicates pulley", a Rube Goldberg device in operation. As the author says, "at least half the fun of a palindrome is its random celebration of the absurd"; in this book, the absurdity comes through loud and clear.