

## A SEAT IN LOGE A

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In his book Philosophy Through The Looking Glass (Open Court, La Salle IL, 1985), Jean-Jacques Lecercle concerns himself with a variety of perversion which Michel Pierssens termed logophilia, "...the love of language that knows no bounds, certainly not those of common sense." In his exposition upon *délire*, the point where grammar and madness meet, he introduces us to several obscure French writers and contrasts their varieties of *délire* with the more patterned and orderly nonsense of Lewis Carroll.

The bizarre writings of Jean Pierre Brisset (1837-1923) were an inspiration to André Breton and the Surrealists. Brisset was known for two "curious theses", the non-existence of Latin, and the demonstration, from linguistic evidence, that Man evolved from the Frog. This conclusion was based upon a series of homonyms of the French verb form *logé* (lodged). As recorded by Lecercle, here are seven:

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|----------------|---------------------------|
| 1. l'eau j'ai  | I have water              |
| 2. l'haut j'ai | I am high                 |
| 3. l'os j'ai   | I have a bone             |
| 4. le au jet   | where I throw that object |
| 5. loge ai     | I have a lodge            |
| 6. lot j'ai    | I bear my lot             |
| 7. l'auge ai   | I have my trough          |

Brisset indicated that all these homonymous ideas had the same basic origin. They tell a story of carnivorous (3) frogs (1) living in a village built on posts (2), etc. The French language is ideally suited to polyhomonymy, and it seemed odd that Brisset stopped short, since restraint seems not to have been one of his virtues. We dare to enlarge the list:

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|---------------|---|
| 8. l'O j'ai   | I have O: the letter or the porno novel           |
| 9. l'ô j'ai   | I have an interjection to call someone            |
| 10. l'oh j'ai | I have an interjection for expressing surprise    |
| 11. l'ho j'ai | I have an interjection for expressing indignation |
| 12. l'eau jet | the jet of water                                  |
| 13. l'Auge ai | I have the Valley of Auge                         |
| 14. l'augée   | the contents of a trough                          |
| 15. l'auget   | the bucket on a water-wheel                       |

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 16. l'eau geai     | the water of the jay(bird)  |
| 17. le haut geai   | the high jay(bird)  |
| 18. l'Auge, eh!    | surprise on seeing the Auge Valley                                      |
| 19. l'O. G.        | the Old Guard   |
| 20. Lô j'ai        | I have the Belgian town of Lô (a few kilometers from the French border) |
| 21. l'Auge hais    | I hate the Auge Valley  |
| 22. l'eau je hais  | the water I hate  |
| 23. loge haie      | box seat on a hedge   |
| 24. loge, eh!      | surprise at #23   |
| 25. l'eau jeu hais | I hate the water game   |
| 26. l'eau jeu ai   | I have the water game   |
| 27. l'os jeu hais  | I hate the bone game  |
| 28. l'os jeu ai    | I have the bone game  |
| 29. l'auge hais    | I hate the trough   |
| 30. l'auge ai      | I have the trough   |
| 31. l'auge est     | there is a trough   |

Enough! Permutations of the parts of the listed homonyms cry out for display -- not to mention forms of the original verb: *loger*, *logais*, *logait*, *logaient*. A wonderful saga of the history of the world is undoubtedly encrypted in these mantra-like monotonies.

One of the French surrealist artists apparently influenced by this sort of verbal punning was Louis-Auguste Déchelette (1894-1964), whose canvases always displayed a series of homonyms. In "*Les Arts, Lèse-Arts, Lézards*," pictured in *World Encyclopedia of Naive Art* (O. Bihalji-Merin and N.-B. Tomasević, Chartwell Books, 1984, on page 198) we see an artist painting a landscape, with bizarre statuary in the distance and lizards (*lézards*) creeping in the foreground.

It is unlikely that a homonymous list anywhere near this long could be generated from a single English word, and perhaps as unlikely that there are English punning visual artists to illustrate these homonyms.

### QUERY

*Among other things, the ancient alchemists searched for a universal solvent, or ALKAHEST. Michael Ravnitsky of Garden Grove, California wonders if any Word Ways reader knows of an antonym for ALKAHEST -- that is, a word for a substance which is unable to be dissolved by any solvent, to be applied to a new form of PTFE (Teflon<sup>R</sup>).*