PALINDROMIC CONSTRUCTION

HOWARD RICHLER
Cote St. Luc, Quebec, Canada

LIVE NOT ON EVIL
ABLE WAS I ERE I SAW ELBA
DEGAS, ARE WE NOT DRAWN ONWARD, WE FREER FEW, DRAWN
ONWARD TO NEW ERAS AGED?

These statements are all palindromes, as they all spell the same
when read right-to-left as when read in the conventional left-to­
right manner. The construction of palindromes is not as difficult
as it seems once one understands their symmetrical nature.

All of the above palindromes share a similar structure. In each
one there is a shorter palindrome that can serve as a base for
construction. Hidden within the palindrome LIVE NOT ON EVIL, there is the
shorter palindrome NOT ON. Therefore, whatever is to the left of
this central core must balance in reverse what is to the right.
LIVE spelled backward is EVIL; therefore the symmetry remains
and the palindrome remains intact.

Other possibilities we can work off the NOT ON core include
STRESSED? NOT ON DESSERTS
GNAW NOT ON WANG
STEP NOT ON PETS

Perhaps this last admonishment would be stated after your pet Rott­
weilers mangled your father's Wang computer.

The palindrome ABLE WAS I ERE I SAW ELBA is one of the best
known palindromes in the English language. It is purported to
have been said by an enisled Napoleon. Why he was speaking in
English and who was there to hear him are questions that sceptics
have raised. Nevertheless, it has endured as one of the best-known
and best-liked English-language palindromes.

When I first heard this palindrome many years ago, I was im­
pressed that someone could compose a coherent statement which could
be read frontward and backward. At the time, I had problems writ­
ing properly just in one direction. The structure of this palindrome,
however, is actually quite simple.

There are two cores to this palindrome. The first is the word
ERE (itself a palindrome) which is placed in the middle of the
palindrome. There is, however, a larger symmetrical core in this
palindrome. The word WAS spelled backward is SAW. Since the word
WAS is followed by the word I and the word SAW is preceded by

the
the word 1, the words WAS 1 spelled backward yields I SAW. So at this juncture we have an enlarged symmetrical heart which reads frontward and backwards WAS I ERE I SAW. Whatever appears to the left of this phrase must be balanced in reverse to what appears to its right. Since ABLE spelled backward is ELBA, we can add these words to complete the palindrome ABLE WAS I ERE I SAW ELBA.

Using the enlarged core WAS I ERE I SAW as a base, we can make the following palindromes.

A SLUT WAS I ERE I SAW TULSA
SNUG, RAW WAS I ERE I SAW WAR GUNS
DEFACED WAS I ERE I SAW DECAF, ED
ANALYTIC WAS I ERE I SAW CITY, LANA

No doubt the last was said by Superman to his girl-friend Lana Lang when he moved from Smalltown to Metropolis.

A minor rearrangement of letters produces the palindrome AGLOW AS I ERE I SAW OLGA. Here we have added AGLO to the front and OLGA to the back, but we have borrowed the W in WAS to make the words AGLOW AS.

Our third palindromic statement at the start of this article is more complicated, but there is still a central core. The heart of this palindrome is the words DRAWN ONWARD, even though it does not appear in the middle of the statement.

Let us start with the palindromic phrase DRAWN ONWARD. If we add the words ARE WE NOT to the front of the palindrome and its reverse, TO NEW ERA, to the end, it yields ARE WE NOT DRAWN ONWARD TO NEW ERA.

The phrase WE FREER FEW is a palindrome in itself. If we insert this into our sentence, however, we destroy the palindromic equilibrium. The phrase ARE WE NOT DRAWN ONWARD, WE FREER FEW, TO NEW ERA when reversed yields ARE WE NOT, WE FREER FEW, DRAWN ONWARD TO NEW ERA. To restore equilibrium we must add the phrase DRAWN ONWARD after the phrase ARE WE FREER FEW to balance the DRAWN ONWARD phrase that occurs before it. Thus, at this juncture we have the palindromic phrase ARE WE NOT DRAWN ONWARD, WE FREER FEW, DRAWN ONWARD TO NEW ERA.

But what about our protagonist Degas, the recipient of our query? His inclusion entails minor surgery. SAGED is a non-word, but the S can be borrowed and added to ERA to yield the palindrome that occurs at the start of the article.

For neophyte palindromists, starting with a palindromic core like DRAWN ONWARD, NOT ON or ON NO is a good starting point. All that is required to enlarge the palindrome is words or phrases that can be reversed like LIVE-EVIL, MOOD-DOOM, etc. The core need not be a complex phrase; a word like DID or SEES will do.

Writing palindromes that make sense is like the search for the Holy Grail: out there lurks a palindrome of immense beauty and logic just waiting to be discovered. Good luck.