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When I introduced the concept of Triplets in Pears Word Games
the emphasis was upon witty word transformations such as turning
WATER into WINE as featured in the February 1991
Kickshaws. In addition I demonstrated the drama­
tic shapes one could achieve such as that illustra­
ted alongside which builds up from a valid single­
letter word to the largest word possible and re­
turns to a different single-letter word without
repeating any word. Yet a third type was featured
which is of no consequence to this discussion but
all three had the factors in common of being sin­
gle-word transformations without any restriction
upon the number of intermediate stages. Though
Kickshaws gave examples in a horizontal plane,
I envisaged the concept as a vertical construction
having a consequent beauty of form. Now, I would
like to take the whole process a stage further
by bringing to your attention Triplets-In-Parallel.

To the basic rules that all transformations must
be to genuine words and no word may be repeated
in an individual column, Triplets-In-Parallel has
the additional discipline that all columns must
be equal in height. Thus, the illustrated example
of going from LOG CABIN to WHITE HOUSE necessi­
tated the elongation of the first column (a 'trip'
of LOG to CLOG rather than LOG to LO) to ensure
that the beauty of presentation occurs with para­
allel conclusion. But, in creating Triplets-In-Paral­
elle, I discovered that the original statement (LOG
CABIN) must be in mathematical harmony with the
conclusion (WHITE HOUSE) otherwise the whole con­
struction is impossible. The discovery I term 'the
law of harmonious statement' and will illustrate
with the example of the old conundrum HOW MANY
BEANS MAKE FIVE.

In this particular transformation, the columns headed by words
of an even number of letters (MANY, MAKE, FIVE) conclude with
like words (PLUS, PLUS, FOUR). Similarly, the words of an odd
number (HOW, BEANS) progress to the harmony of a likeness (ONE,
NIL). Equally harmonious would be a conclusion to the question
which read FOUR AND FOUR MINUS THREE. In this case all the odd­
numbered words have become even and all the even-numbered words
have become odd. Total harmony. But, attempts to reach an equally logical and satisfactory parallel conclusion with statements such as TWO PLUS TWO PLUS ONE or SIX MINUS THREE PLUS TWO will meet with failure as one is attempting to break the inviolate pattern of odd/even alternation of words in an insertion-deletion chain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW</th>
<th>MANY</th>
<th>BEANS</th>
<th>MAKE</th>
<th>FIVE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHOW</td>
<td>MAN</td>
<td>BEAN</td>
<td>MAE</td>
<td>FIE</td>
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<td>TONE</td>
<td>PUS</td>
<td>NAIL</td>
<td>PUS</td>
<td>OUR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>PLUS</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>PLUS</td>
<td>FOUR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A harmonious statement, therefore, is a conclusion which (in odd/even terms) exactly mirrors the opening phrase or is the complete opposite. Should, for example, you wish to answer the question WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN then you need a conclusion which is in harmony. I SAID THE SPARROW will never work as COCK to THE goes from one mathematical category to another, whereas the remainder (WHO to I, KILLED to SAID, ROBIN to SPARROW) are as they originated, be it odd or even. An apt solution, proposed by the editor, is THAT SPARROW DID IT as WHO to THAT, KILLED to SPARROW, COCK to THE and ROBIN to IT all go from one category to another.

Having decided upon your conclusion to the opening statement, the next point to consider is the column height and I am indebted to the editor for this following rule. One can determine the theoretical minimum by taking the words of maximum change after taking account of the longest set of common letters appearing in the same order, and counting the remaining letters in both words. This gives the number of steps needed. For example, KILLED and SPARROW have no letters in common, so that it will require 13 steps to go from one to the other. By contrast, WHO to THAT requires 5 steps (H is common to both), COCK to DID, 7 steps; and ROBIN to IT, 5 steps (I being common). The Sage of Morristown added the comment that "Because lengthening generally makes the connection task easier, one can find (probably) relatively common words joining these pairs, leaving the OED rarities for only the critical transformation of KILLED to SPARROW." This proved to be the case as the change from one to the other involved the obsolete spelling form of KILLE (KILL) and the obsolete form of SPARW and SPAROW (both SPARROWA) in the minimal change KILLED-KILLE-KILL-ILL-IL-I-AL-A-AR-PAR-SPAR-SPARW-SPAROW-SPARROW whilst the others can be artificially lengthened in many ways to effect a 13-stage transformation.

Whilst the great dictionaries of record will be needed from time to time for transforming an especially difficult word, it is the smallest (and cheapest) of all reference works which will prove to be your most valued aid in this art. The reason is simple. The key to transformation lies in the pivotal value of the single-letter word.
and the two-letter words which link to it. If one ignores the fact that each letter can be treated as the name of that letter (so has an intrinsic validity), one must seek genuine single-letter words. Fortunately, all the vowels and the Y come into this category. A, I and the poetic exclamation O are the three obvious ones and the only ones recognized by the American Cryptogram Association for its puzzles set in the English language. Two of the remainder are mentioned in this quote from The Oxford Guide to Word Games: ‘... and even U (as in 'U and non-U') is acceptable...[and] as for place names, Ross Eckler has discovered a town called Y in Michigan.’ [Editor’s note: actually, Dmitri Borgmann should get the credit.] To these, I can add my own discovery of a river in Scotland named E which completes a full set of the most versatile of all the single-letter words. These six words not only combine with each other to produce a profusion of genuine two-letter words but they also combine with virtually the remainder of the alphabet in similar valid fashion. The authority for this statement is the supplement of two-letter words for the games player found in the 1991 edition of the Oxford Minidictionary. This supplement is so extensive that it even contains words not found in its parent work, the magnificent OED!

This final example makes a parable of sorts by transforming one well-known palindrome into another, and the OED was consulted merely to confirm the guesses that VIL and INNE were obsolete forms and that the verb to INN exists. Incidentally, VI is one of the words in the minidictionary not given in the OED. The minimal columns are the first and the last and it was these which determined the overall size of the composition.

For me, one of the delights of this particular form of wordsmithery is that it is we pencil-and-paper practitioners as opposed to the computer buffs who will dominate creative output. But, I’ve been wrong before. It will be interesting to see.