A PALINDROMIC TRILOGY

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Although I have written poetry for many years, it was not until 1984 that I learned of Howard Bergerson's book Palindromes and Anagrams, stimulating a latent interest in palindromes. (I had long marveled at "Doc, note, I dissent...".) After writing some very odd one-liners, I set out to write an extended palindromic poem. I was intrigued by the possibility of creating meaningful poetry in such a restrictive form; I was also interested in impressing my wife-to-be, an English graduate student. (Eugene Maleska courted his college sweetheart via the campus crossword puzzle.) Indeed, "Etna Does Pale Seven Eves" (Nov 28, 1984) was the turning-point in our whirlwind courtship; we were married the following Groundhog Day.

After marriage came parenthood, and when the dust settled in late 1988 I decided to try my hand again. Although "Senile Lines" (1989) is nowhere near "Etna" in intensity, it has its moments; my wife Laura calls it my Virgil ("Etna" being my Homer). More recently, while sitting through a very dull briefing at Cape Canaveral (I'm an electrical engineer who works on satellites and rockets), it suddenly dawned on me that I should complete the trilogy with my Milton, which I started then and there and completed over the next few evenings at the hotel. I entitled it "Aetnam Recurrens" (1991), which means "running back to Aetna," a little pun on the word palindrome.

In these palindromes I do not hesitate to use abbreviations, acronyms, and foreign phrases. They do not detract from the legitimacy of the palindrome; on the contrary, they open up the range of possible palindromic choices so that one isn't continually boxed in. In "Aetnam" I have taken my palindromic licenses a bit farther, coining the following words: enebriate as an alternative, more proactive adjectival form of inebriate; nacer as a variant spelling of nacre; and teragic which means thrice-acting. Also, I have attempted to pay more attention to rhythm and meter, and have even included a few rhymes, notably the couple at the end.

The palindromic form gives rise to a highly-evocative type of poetry which serves as the linguistic equivalent of the Rorschach test. I have tried to imbue these works with as much "meaning" as possible. Of course, sometimes the palindromic image of a nicely-turned phrase comes up lacking a bit in style or content, but for the most part I work both halves of the palindrome so that each contributes significantly to the overall character of the work. All three works are morality plays; undoubtedly these Manichaean undercurrents reflect man's subconscious struggle with good and evil.

ETNA DOES PALE SEVEN EVES

O, Los Angeles,
Of Los Angeles,
O, so! To L.A!

I curb dogs I'd sled
On an eve seven
(Or even amoral devil sixes)
Sad ages ago today,
As I espy L.A.

Cop an ad, a boot
(Sole's id), a rap
Agnostic at Agnus Dei --
Lewd.

Ah! Sleep, R.E.M. muses!
Ol' Dew Eyes,
1 wonder if snug
Only nival roses are.

Damned -- I am one.
Man alive, one --
No sun, I'm live: ONE,
No, not a billion.
Go solo, man --
Ail a tired rumination
(Pun: rub, ewe, I dew. Dew ewe?).

Vile were here held: dimly
Bison saw tiaras, saw time last
At Salem.
1t was Sara, it was no Sibyl.

   (middle)

Here, HERE we live,
We wed, we die, we burn up --
No, I tan, 1 murder Italian:
Amo lo sogno illibato.

None, no evil,
Minus one, no evil:
A name no maiden mad erases,
Or L.A. vinyl.

No guns fired, nowise.

Ye! We'd lose summer peels had we lied,
Sung a tacit song,
A paradise los ...
Too bad, an apocalypse --
1 say ado.

Togas, egad!
As sex is lived, L.A.,
Roma never!

On eve seven an ode:

LSD is God:
Brucia lotoso, se legna solfo,
Se legna solo.

Seven eves elapse, O Dante!

SENILE LINES

Fit omen if, as 1 live,
Degenerative clod,
A loud deliverer of demand,
Nay, a devil,
On one poetic ode were to negate
Lot's awe, help Paris' madam.

In age, beheld demigod, a satrap,
1 wondered if an oblate peso (rare)
He (Vague! 1 dare him!) amassed
1s pilfer'd.

A cymbal song is a sullen key --
Enamor fear: is eidolon holy?

Rebel! 1 vote to, man!
Ruth saw a star;
Say names, old names:
Bats, dogs, alley llamas, maidens ...
Ahem! 1'm a sassy ban,
An ill Afro-Serb,
A stupid Ahab or a nob.

Amor from a war did else
But anima idle.
Held in iron,
Or in idle held,
1 am in a tube sled.

I draw amor from a bona roba
(Had I put sabres!),
Or fall in an abyss, as a mime has
(Ned, 1 am Sam).

All yell as God stabs 'em,
And lose many as rats awash
Turn a mote to vile beryl.

Oh, no! Lo!
Dies Irae from an eye!
Knell us a sign!
O, slab my cadre!
Flip sides: Sam am I.

Her adieu?
Gave her a rose petal
(Bona fide red).
Now I part.

As a dog I meddle:
He began, "l'm Adam, sir,"
(Apple he was to let age,
Not ere we do cite
"Open on Olive Day"),
And, named 'fore reviled duo,
"La Dolce Vita" reneged.

Evil is a fine motif.

AETNAM RECVRRENS

Ea, mucro felix, enates --
Recant some idyl, damsel truths;
If denies sad ogre tale
(Sold name open on a pot),
Do radical poetics drown
Eve's foe *(domu idem)* sly?

Bis sum in a son;
l want East pure.
No omen l waste,
Serene Vesta swan.

Gnostic ill is ever even.
Evil tuber uses irony, let alone
Vile, rotten, etymological ill.
Acolytical nature we kill,
Like web-stuck rat's cigarette.

Let air be new, or roses are nigh
To drop unruby -- let a lot-drawn
Ode run. lf for a few fine petals,
It flows, laminated acts' affinity;

Nival life resume, reward, relieve,
Remain -- am I unnew? Oh, how
Ennui-mania, mere veiler, draw!
Ere muse refill a viny tin:
If fast, *cadet,* animals wolf.

'Tis late, pen, if we, far off inured,
Onward to lately burn up,
Or doth gin erase sorrow
Enebriate?
Let teragic stark cuts be.

We kill like we rut.
An L.A. city local lilac, I go,
Lo! My tenet to relive?
No, lately, no.
Rise, sure, but live? Never.

"Eve's illicit son gnaws at seven:
Ere sets a wine moon erupts Aetna"
                    -- Wino's animus
                        [Sibyl's medium, Ode of Seven]

Words cite, O placid, a rod --
To pan one poem and lose later God;
As seined fish, turtles madly die,
Most nacer set an exile for Cumae.

A CHESSBOARD WORDGAME

In 1880, Lewis Carroll wrote in his diary "The idea occurred to me that a game might be made of letters, to be moved about on a chessboard till they found words." Although he never invented such a game, Martin Gardner did 111 years later; it is available for $25 from Kadon Enterprises, 1227 Lorene Drive, Pasadena MD 21122.

Each player draws eight anagram or Scrabble tiles from a stockpile (if no vowels, replace and redraw), and places them face up on the first row of a chessboard (where they would place rooks, bishops, knights and royalty in chess). The object of the game is to move the tiles one at a time, using the Queen's Move in chess, to the fourth row to form words of four or more letters (four- through eight-letter words score 10,20,40,60 and 100 points, respectively). One cannot jump a piece over another, nor occupy a square in the opponent's word-forming row, but one can move beyond that row (to the sixth or seventh row) to block his moves. When a word is claimed (one need not claim the first word formed), the tiles are returned to the stockpile, and a new set of eight is drawn and placed on the first row. Players alternate moves until one of them accumulates 100 points. Individual letters can be returned to the stockpile and replaced with new ones at any time, but each such exchange costs a move.

Decide beforehand on the dictionary to be used for allowable words. Ordinarily, proper names are not permitted, but derived forms such as plurals and past tenses are.