

A FEW TRICKY LIMERICKS

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It's been more than a decade since Maxey Brooke surveyed the various ways in which the limerick has been gimmicked (see "Limerick-Gimerick", February 1980). It's time to revisit this specialized niche of wordplay.

First, a pure back-slang limerick. Vertical lines have been inserted as an aid to scansion:

Ereth ecno | saw a wollef | dellac mada,
Ni evol | a lerig | dellac ava,
Neth eh decked | reh taf esra,
Dena neth esh | dais, "Elba,
Saw l | ere l was | mada, dam-a."

Translation:

There once was a fellow called Adam,
In love -- a girl called Ava,
Then he kicked her fat arse,
And then she said, "Able
Was l ere l saw Adam, a-mad."

The ultimate would be a true, correctly rhyming limerick-palindrome. Whoever comes up with one should be buried next to Shakespeare -- scalped and upside down!

Now for some other slang. If you are an Oxford man, you won't need any translation of this one:

A young Oxford man with degrugger
Put a po on the Maggers Memugger.
After such a great ecker,
He got a stern lecker
By a buller and thrown from the Ugger.

For those from that other university, that's: A young Oxford man with a degree put a chamber-pot on the Martyr's Memorial. After such exercise he got a stern lecture by a proctor's assistant and was thrown out of The Union.

From Oxford let us go down to Cockney. I use that word "down" merely in the sense that when an Oxford man leaves Oxford he goes "down" (and, of course, an Oxford feminist does exactly the same thing).

"He's a bad artful dodger," she swears,
"He runs down the apples and pears."

It's a gooseberry puddin'
Sends his plates o' meat thuddin'."
"No bird lime for quiet," he declares.

In English? "He's a bad lodger," she swears. "He runs down the stairs, it's a woman that sends his feet thudding." "No time for quiet," he declares.

I don't know whether this one will be allowed by the editor, but:

A garage mechanic in Georgia
Said, "Mistah, ah've something to tell yia.
If y'all lose all your all,
Y'all be sore as a ball,
'Cause your water'll all ball awayia."

Pig Latin? The progenesis of the following one is a non-limerick verse in similar "pig Latin" form:

O, TOME, 1SA ERES AGO,
FORTIBVS ES IN ARO,
NOBILE, NOBILE,
THEMSTRVX, YVS1LE,
SEWAT SINEM -- 1VST GVANO.

The translation can be found in Answers and Solutions in August.

The palindrome here is not new but so far as I know the limerick is:

Naomi met a new pal in Rome,
Who devised her a new palindrome.
After eating boloney,
He then said, "Naomi,
Sex at noon taxes, I moan."

As for royal mottoes:

If honi soit qui mal y pense,
The dieu et mon droit's my response,
If evil's to be
Then let it be me,
Sic transit gloria mundi at once.

See a good dictionary if you need translations!

Incidentally, the limerick beat is generally anapestic: I am mon | arch of all | I survey. Fine, until the next line: My right | there is none | to dispute (both from William Cowper). What happened to the anapest in the first beat of line two? Ah, say the poetry professors, an iambus can be used instead of an anapest anywhere in the line -- especially in the first foot. It just shows how frustrating it can be trying to "scan" the beat of poetic lines. All of which is simply to lead us to a limerick Mrs. Malaprop surely must have written (actually I did!). She is here under an attack from a stern taskmaster:

"It's a true | actuar | ial fact," anapest,anapest,anapest
Said Ms. Mal | aprop un | der "a tact," anapest,anapest,anapest

"It's nev | er dactylic, iambic, anapest
 The stern limerick, iambic, dactylic
 It's a ve | ry didact | ical act." anapest, anapest, anapest

So mix your meter, but be careful; Mrs. M. just about gets away with it. (She knows it's an actual fact.)

I finish up with a limerick in Greek:

A Grecian called μ baked a π ,
 Made her friends on the δ all ψ ,
 "If one ι we η ,
 Your Π it will β ,
 ν Π we could not eat in χ ."

Again, look up the translation in Answers and Solutions in August.

ISMANIA

What should one call an uncontrollable urge to collect words ending in *-ism*? Alan and Theresa von Altendorf, the husband-and-wife compilers of *Isms: A Compendium of Concepts, Doctrines, Traits and Beliefs from Ableism to Zygodactylism* (Mustang Publishing, Memphis TN, 1991; \$16.95) obviously suffer from this not-yet-medically-recognized ailment. In a book of 335 pages, they have collected and defined some two thousand isms, from dictionary-sanctioned entries such as *atheism* to spur-of-the-moment inventions in newspapers and magazines such as *Nancyism* (policies or practices of Reagan's wife). A few isms peculiar to logology are included (anagrammatism, lipogrammatism, spoonerism, malapropism) as well as the family based on Greek letters (*itacism*, *iota-cism*, *rhotacism*, *etacism*, *mutacism*, *lambdacism*). There are even a few isms that relate to real objects rather than abstract beliefs (*jism*, *chrism*), plus the occasional witticism (*logarithm*, an *ism* for someone with a speech impediment). Based on a small sample (isms beginning *ra-* or *re-*), I note 35 isms, comparing favorably with the 40 tabulated in Gale Research Company's *-Ologies & -Isms* (Third Edition, 1986), but somewhat less favorably with the 59 in a reverse-alphabetical listing of 3900 isms from Webster's *Unabridged Dictionary*, Second Edition. If one is willing to overlook the authors' political biases (expressed in such entries as the ones on *Reaganism*, *capitalism*, *communism*, *historical materialism*, etc.), the book is a delightful browse through such oddities as *wowserism*, *booksellerism*, *ipsedixitism*, *jog-trottism*, *pussyfootism*, *upperhandism* and the like. The book is illustrated with a wide variety of droll drawings from the last century, supplied by Dover Publications.