

DROW ROT OR WORD?

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W O R D In the classic tradition of the famous SATOR word square, I
O D E R present at the left one example of what may be considered a
R E D O definitive English-language reversal square--if you accept my
D R O W argument. All the words used are perfectly valid:

ODER *n* a major European river which runs for 540 miles and forms part
 of the border between Poland and Germany

REDO *vb* to do again (unhyphenated form in the OED)

DROW *n* a fit of illness, a fainting fit, a qualm [Scottish]; a cold
 mist approaching to rain, a drizzling shower [Scottish]

A four-by-four reversal word square is not an especially remarkable achievement, but that is not the point of this discussion.

Some years ago, Dmitri Borgmann in *Language on Vacation* attempted to popularize the coinage SEMORDNILAP to describe a word which, when completely reversed, becomes a different word. (It appears that the coiner may have been Martin Gardner, in the "Notes" section of the 1961 Dover reprint of Bombaugh's *Oddities and Curiosities of Words and Literature*.) Darryl Francis is, perhaps, the only writer who uses this term (readers of Brandreth's *The Joy of Lex* should be warned that Darryl was the principal contributor to that work). SEMORDNILAP has, I suggest, failed to reach the public domain for two very sound reasons. First, the reversing of SEMORDNILAP produces PALINDROMES, but a word with reversal quality is not a 'palindromes'. SEMORDNILAP is simply a word written backwards and with far less aptness than examples such as LASREVER or MARGANA. Second (and more significantly), the term fails to trip lightly off the tongue.

Now consider word-reversal coinings which made the grade. First, the classic OHM-MHO. Lord Kelvin proposed MHO as the unit of electrical conductance of a body having a resistance of one OHM. MHO is now regularly found in dictionaries. Second, EREWHON. When Samuel Butler wrote of an imaginary Utopian country, he avoided the coinage EREHWON, an unpronounceable true reversal of NOWHERE. Kelvin and Butler got both aspects right, and both words became established in the language.

What is the right word? I offer DROW. It already possesses several meanings; why not give it another? DROW is truly a WORD reversed. Pluralize it and it still possesses reversal quality; DROWS-
D R O W SWORD. Thus, a drow word square is any square of the
R E N O SATOR type. Should its construction contain WORD and
O N E R DROW, it has self-descriptive properties in addition.
W O R D I rest my case with the word square at the left.