

# VARIATIONS ON A PALINDROMIC THEME

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In a May 1991 Word Ways article entitled "Palindromic Construction", I explained how many palindromic sentences have inner structures that allow for substituting other words to form new palindromes. For example, in the well-known palindrome ABLE WAS I ERE I SAW ELBA, the palindrome is composed of an inner palindrome WAS I ERE I SAW and the words ABLE and ELBA which spell each other when reversed. Thus any word pairs which spell each other backwards will keep the palindrome in order. Two puerile examples that fulfill this criterion are ANAL WAS I ERE I SAW LANA and A SLUT WAS I ERE I SAW TULSA. In the last example, the two words A SLUT are balanced by TULSA.

There are other examples of this pattern. Take the palindrome TO LAST, CARTER RETRACTS A LOT, which can refer to an ex-president or an intern on ER. Here we have a balance between the words TO LAST and the last two letters of RETRACTS and the words A LOT. Expressing this in formula yields TO LAST = TS A LOT. The reasons the palindromic structure remains intact is because there is balance between CARTER and RETRAC.

Therefore, to create new palindromic sentences with the TO LAST = TS A LOT formula, we must find replacements for the CARTER RETRAC middle segment. Here are some possibilities:

To last, Rose sorts a lot  
 To last, Seth tests a lot  
 To last, Cal acts a lot  
 To last, Elana lets a lot  
 To last, Art rats a lot

Actually, for the last palindrome Ara or Ari could just as easily be doing the ratting.

In the November 1995 Word Ways, I wrote an article featuring names found in palindromes entitled "Madam, I'm Adam (Sir, I'm Iris)". One of the palindromes featured was AIRY, SNIDE GARY RAGED IN SYRIA. In this palindromic structure there is balance between AIRY, SNIDE and ED IN SYRIA. Written in formula, this yields the following equation: AIRY, SNIDE = ED IN SYRIA. The middle segment GARY RAG keeps the palindromic symmetry alive. Thus we can keep the palindromic harmony intact if we replace GARY RAG with another palindrome within a palindrome. After all, why should Gary be all alone in Syria? Here are some of his friends:

Airy, snide Ivy vied in Syria  
 Airy, snide Dawn waded in Syria  
 Airy, snide Bruce curbed in Syria  
 Airy, snide Matt tamed in Syria  
 Airy, snide Tamara mated in Syria  
 Airy, snide Roger gored in Syria  
 Airy, snide Liam mailed in Syria  
 Airy, snide Todd doted in Syria  
 Airy, snide Tony noted in Syria  
 Airy, snide Rob bored in Syria  
 Airy, snide Cal laced in Syria  
 Airy, snide Carl raced in Syria

If Carl is tired Cary can do the racing instead.

Try building some palindromes using this technique. Here are two suggestions: TENSE = ES NET and ARE WE N = NEW ERA? Good luck.

#### OPUS MALEDICTORUM

As readers of the February 1991 Word Ways are aware, the journal Maledicta has resumed publication after a hiatus of several years. Concurrently, editor Reinhold Aman has assembled a collection of the best of earlier (1977-89) issues. The book, bearing the above title, is published in paperback by Marlowe & Company of New York for \$14.95. Here's an inexpensive way to find out whether scholarly analysis of offensive language is your cup of tea--but be warned that it's not for the prudish or easily-offended. Topics are extremely varied, ranging from Nelson Rockefeller's death to the debunking of the jelly-doughnut translation of President Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner", from genital pet names to euphemisms for farting, from the sexual side of Cockney rhyming slang to ritual insults in black, Jewish and gay circles. Some of the funniest parts are found in Kakologia and Colorful Speech. Printable examples of these, respectively, are the definition of alimony (the screwing you get for the screwing you got), and the Army officer's injunction to his troops (I want it so quiet here that I could hear a rat pissing on cotton). Learn verbal offense from the Master of Malediction!