NUMERICAL PALINDROMES: PART 1

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At first sight, RESEDACEAE (the plant family to which the mignonette belongs) is not a palindrome. But it is—in disguise! When its ten letters are split into two equal groups of five letters each, and the letters assigned the values A=1, B=2, ..., RESE- totals 51 whilst -ACEAE totals 15. RESEDACEAE can thus be written 51.15 which is a numerical palindrome. The Romanian anatomist and surgeon, Dumitru GEROTA (12.33.21) and that useful garden tool, the WIDGER (32.11.23), are also numerical palindromes, but ones in which the word has been split into three equal groups of letters. Thus, assigning A=1, B=2, ... a numerical palindrome can be defined as a word which, when split into n groups each having the same number of letters, and the letter values of each group totalled, provides a number series whose digits read the same backwards as forwards. Here, however, I concentrate exclusively on splitting words (and phrases) into two groups (n=2) each of which consists of two digits.

As a genre, numerical palindromes have largely escaped the attention of Word Ways although EMBOLISM (35.53) was mentioned as such in "All Words Are Interesting" by Pamela Brang in the August 1977 issue. The current item seeks to redress this situation, not least because their counterparts, the numerical tautonyms—words such as MICROPHONE (58.58)—have long since received extensive coverage; see Leslie Card's "Six-Letter Numerical Tautonyms" in the November 1970 Word Ways, and "Eight-Letter Numerical Tautonyms" in the August 1971 issue. Incidentally, some words can lay claim to being both numerical palindromes and numerical tautonyms. These include CHEF (11.11), RACIAL (22.22), SAMPLE (33.33), CUTEST (44.44), SOURLY (55.55), INTERLOPER (66.66), GYNOPLASTY (77.77), STEPMOTHERLY (88.88) and TRANSVERSARIUM (99.99).

GAMBIA (21.12), HISPANIA (52.25) and COPENHAGEN (53.35) are all palindromic locations. SAMANTHA (34.43), PERNANDO (43.34), APPLETON (45.54) and CONRAD (32.23) are palindromic names. So is PANDORA, but only when she is in her Box-possessive mood: PANDORA'S (35.53). Descartes had palindromic aspirations too. He said "I think, therefore I am". But he wasn't. Short of an E, he could only contribute towards DESERCrATES (36.63), his andagram!

Numerical palindromes boast a sequence of superlatives. BARN-, BUFF-FOAM-, FOOG-, MANG-, PECK-, SCAL-, SEDG- and TACK- each accommodate -LEST (53) to make (35.53). Similarly, the -OLOGY (74) set ACTIN-, FEMIN-, MONAD- and REACT- each make (47.74).
The double letter delights KUANT (53.35) and PUDDEE (41.14), the UFOEA-word UNOCCIDENTAL (65.56) and UN-AMERICAN (54.45) are all numerical palindromes. So is the plant DECA-BELONE (15.51), one of the few words whose first five letters are ABCDE (DEBA-CLE is another). REACTS and its transposal CATERS not only share the same letters but also the same palindrome. But they cleverly use different combinations of letters (REA,CAT and CTS,ERS) as the basis of their common palindrome (24.42).

The synonyms KID (24) and BOY (42) are, appropriately, numerically-palindromic synonyms as well. And they nicely serve to bridge the gap between numerically-palindromic words and phrases, for there is no reason why a search for numerical palindromes should be confined to single words. In these phrases, the two equal-length words form the two numerical halves of the palindrome:

CARD VOTE 26.62  OLD AGE 31.13  PEACH MELBA 33.33
DARK BOGS 34.43  HIND WING 35.53  DROP GOAL 53.35
PALM LEAF 42.24  BOOK FAIR 43.34  MUSIC PAPER 65.56
WING FLAP 53.35  LOVE SEAT 54.45  CROWN HEADS 73.37

By way of contrast, the two words in each of these phrases are of different lengths and the junction of the two numerical halves lies within one of the words:

BACK GARDEN 24.42  BAGGAGE AGENT 25.52  NEWS AD 42.24
CONY HURROW 59.95  SERVICE HAT 73.37  PRIZE WINNERS 97.79

The words below have been selected from a list of 726, prepared with the minimum of computer assistance and the maximum of eyestrain! Together with 11.11, 22.22 ... to 99.99 (see above), they cover the 99 palindromic numbers from 0110 to 9999. The words ascribed to a particular number are of different lengths. A few numbers defied my attempts to find a word. In these cases, I have substituted a two-word coined phrase where possible. Ten numbers remain wordless: 0770, 0880, 0990, 2002, 3003, 4004, 5005, 7007, 8008 and 9009.

Unless specified otherwise, all words can be found in one or more of Webster's Second, Webster's Third, the Oxford English Dictionary, The Complete Word Game Dictionary (Tom Pulliam and Gorton Carruth, 1984), A Dictionary of Flowering Plants and Ferns (J.C. Willis, 1966), Nomenclator Zoologicus (Zoological Society of London), and Stedman's Medical Dictionary (25th edition).

0110 aj [Dictionary of Jamaican English (1967)]
0220 aas
0330 bask
0440 acus
0550 baboot
0660 Abba four [a pop group]
A word can form a six-digit UNINTERMITTENT word, together with two, will be co...
A word can also be split into two equal-length groups of letters to form a six-digit, rather than a four-digit, palindrome. For example, UNINTERMITTENT (101,101) can be found in Webster's Second. These words, together with words split into a number of groups other than two, will be covered by Rex Gooch in the sequel.