

ANGUISH LANGUISH

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Willard Espy writes in his 1980 book *Another Almanac of Words at Play* (Feb 12): "Anguish Languish, popularized by the late Howard L. Chace, is a form of punning in which words overlap to give an impression of other words, as clouds assume forms according to the fancy of the observer."

Here is a little fairy story told in other words...

Heresy ladle furry starry toiling udder warts...

It is a cipher in which an apparently-nonsensical cover text can be sounded out to reveal a hidden message. Although the mimicry in the passage above seems close, try reading the next line without help:

Warts welcher altar girdle deferent...

To aid the decipherer, most examples of Anguish Languish rewrite standard texts, such as *Mary Had a Little Lamb*, *Mother Goose* rhymes, or the *Gettysburg Address* (the *Spaghetti-bird Headdress?*). To illustrate, consider the following version of Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*, written by Jan Anderson:

Was Brillo'ing the slimy troves,
Adjured; and jumbled in the waves
All Mumsy's worthy borrowed gloves,
And that Mom's wrath is grave!

Bean ware, the jumbo wok, Mason-
ry jars that blithely clash and crack.
Brie-ware, jujube board: ants run
The fruit juice bamboo snack.

Hell take this four-bowl setting and
Long tines (for maximum onslaught).
Sorest at ease by tumbled trays,
En-stooled and wailing fraught.

And dazed in Oprah's thaw, this dud:
The jumbo wok with Ising frames
Crammed waffler! Throw, indulgent would!
And barbells use as cane!

Want to! Want to! And threw, and threw!
 The war ballad wins nick or knocks.
 Hell, if it's hit! End with a "heh!"
 I win Columbus' pox.

"And dust the sleigh, no gibber, walk.
 Can do more!" 'larms me. "Burnish, boil!
 A fridge decays!" (Colloquial lays:
 Each chore tolled and each toil.)

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Without the help of a known plaintext, care must be taken to render the cover text decipherable. It is the purpose of this article to suggest encoding techniques for doing this.

Ideally one would like to substitute homonyms for each word, but this is not always possible. One tour de force along these lines was provided by Hugh Denham in "Ann Owed" (An Ode) in the February 1992 Word Ways. A sample:

Yule fined fore hansom stories,
 Gneiss lorn, flours, likened waul;
 Weave gaits, muse, mote, stares, bawl rheum,
 Hie sealing inn the Haul.

You'll find four handsome stories,
 Nice lawn, flowers, lichen wall;
 We've gates, mews, moat, stairs, ballroom,
 High ceiling in the Hall.

Besides anagrams, this poem exhibits a phonetic charade (bawl rheum for ballroom), a topic discussed at some length by Willard Espy in the May 1973 Word Ways. There, he listed two pages of examples, from a bait (a-bate) and a butt (abut) to wretch shed (wretched) and wrote ate (rotate). In addition, he included a poem that later appeared in An Almanac of Words at Play, "Not To, Not For, One I Adore".

In general, greater freedom must be given to the writer of cover text. To begin with, there is no reason why words in the cover text cannot bridge words in the original, such as GNOME ATTAR for NO MATTER, or HAVE A KISS for HAVOC IS. More generally still, one must allow occasional liberties with the choice of consonants. The unvoiced consonants H and W should be freely added or omitted as necessary. Certain similar consonants should be permitted to substitute for each other: S for Z, M for N, F for V, T for D, N for NG, B for P. Similarly, some latitude should be allowed in substituting one vowel-sound for another, particularly if the syllable is unstressed. A consonant can be repeated

on both sides of a space; for example, both BUY CANS and BIKE CANS are allowable.

The syllabic stresses in the original must be reproduced in the cover text--easy enough if the cover text consists of one-syllable words, but harder with multisyllable ones.

It is much less desirable to substitute substantially different consonant sounds, or to add or subtract consonants, as illustrated by MB for V and an extra T in CYMBAL WART for CIVIL WAR, or by M for T in DAMNATION for THAT NATION.

The degree of fidelity of a cover text to the original can be exhibited by the following notation: an underline for an (unaccented) vowel change or a minor consonant change (S for Z, M for N, etc.), and capitalizations for major consonant substitutions or additions (parenthesized for removals). Unchanged words (to be avoided in the cover text) are bracketed. The oftener the underlines and capitalizations occur, the less likely is it that the original text (if not well-known) can be successfully decoded. "Mary Had a Little Lamb" in the November 1988 Word Ways is typical:

marry, addle id all am
id's fleas wash wide ass? no.
 end if reward add marry want
doll, lamP wash your tug, oh!

The first line sounds better than it looks, with the schwa-like A in 'Mary had a little lamb' represented by the UH of "add-uhl". The third line encounters a slightly rough patch with EVERYWHERE becoming IF REWAR and THAT, D ADD; the fourth line replaces THE with DO and adds an extra P to LAMB. IF FREE WARE THOUGHT reads a bit more smoothly than IF REWARD ADD, and TEAL HAM improves DOLL LAMP.

Frederick Landers attempted in the August 1979 Word Ways to introduce more multisyllable words into a cover text:

Lay decent gentile men! Police give mayor completed engine. You mused fine aunt's change. Is sin everything? Have a kiss in a vet: a bluntless, weak and controlled it forever endeavor!

Ladies and gentlemen! Please give me your complete attention. You must finance changes in everything! Havoc is inevitable unless we can control it for ever and ever!

The most substantial changes are the extra syllable in POLICE, and the extraneous T in BLUNTLESS, D in AND, and D in CONTROLLED. Several words are repeated without change. The substitution of G in ENGINE for the SH-sound in ATTENTION is nice.

The most difficult-to-read Anguish Languish cover text I have ever encountered appears in the previously-mentioned Feb 12 entry in Espy's *Another Almanac*. Can you decipher it, knowing only that it is a well-known text? It begins and concludes:

Fors oar in shaving ear she goes, awe foddors broad fart hunter dish
consonant hay noon action, corn sieved inebriety and addict hated
tutor preposition dot omen or crated inkwell ... end it grubby men,
other pimple, brother pimple, father pimple shell nut pair rich fern
dirt.

I would have written it thus:

Force core end shiv hen ears he go hour foddors broad fort up pond
his condiment hay gnu neigh shun, can sheave din lip per tea Anne
deadeye Kate Ed tooth up reposition tattle manner Cree eight Eddie
quell ... end tat guff fern men dove tepee pull, buy tepee pull, four
tepee pull, shell knot parish forum tea hearth.

Cover text can be created out of any sufficiently-large corpus of words. The most obvious stratagem, adopted by Luis D'Antin Van Rooten in *Mots D'Heures: Gousses, Rames* (Grossman, 1967) and further exploited by Ormonde de Kay in *N'Heures Souris Rames* (Clarkson Potter, 1980) and John Hulme in *Mörder Guss Reims* (Clarkson Potter, 1981), is to use French or German words in the cover text. Jay Ames mined surnames from Toronto telephone directories for a similar effect:

Jacques Aingell
Wenn Oppper Hill
Topicha Paylor Watter
Jacques Fell Down
Ann Brooke Hiss Crown
Angell Kamm Tumber Linn Affe Tarr

More examples can be found in "Nymo Rhymes" in the Feb 1977 *Word Ways*.

More specialized word collections can be selectively used with striking results. I recall the following colloquy from fifty years ago, based on tuberculosis terminology: "TB or not TB--that is congestion. Consumption be done about it? Of cough--but it'll take a lung time." More extensive essays of this type can be found in Espy's *Almanacs*--a poem using Washington state place names on July 10 (see also the Aug 1973 *Word Ways*), and a zoological fancy on November 26:

No sweeter girl ewe ever gnu
Then Betty Marten's daughter Sue.
With sable hare, small tapir waist,
And lips you'd gopher miles to taste...