

## WACKY WAYS WITH WORDS

A. ROSS ECKLER

Morristown, New Jersey

In the May 2000 Word Ways, Lionel Simard's story about Alma Anderson, an avid American amateur acrobat, uses only words starting with the letter A. Can other letters support extended narratives that make reasonable sense? Surprisingly, the letter W can be so used, as illustrated by the following story of Winnie and her brother Walter's misadventures in the Wisbeach Woods. The original can be found in Don Lemon's century-old *Everybody's Scrapbook of Curious Facts*.

"Warm weather, Walter! Welcome warm weather! We were wishing winter would wane, weren't we?"

"We were well wearied with waiting," whispered Walter wearily. Wan, white, woebegone was Walter, wayward, wilful, worn with weakness, wasted, waxing weaker whenever winter's wild withering winds were wailing. Wholly without waywardness was Winifred, Walter's wise, womanly watcher who, with winsome, wooing way, was well-beloved.

"We won't wait, Walter; while weather's warm we'll wander where woodlands wave, won't we?"

Walter's wanton wretchedness wholly waned. "Why, Winnie, we'll walk where we went when we were with Willie. We'll weave wildflower wreathes, watch woodmen working, woodlice, worms wriggling, windmills whirling, watermills wheeling. We will win wild whortleberries, witness wheat winnowed."

Wisbeach Woods were wild with wildflowers. Warm westerly winds whispered where willows were waving. Wood-pigeons, wrens, woodpeckers were warbling wild woodnotes. Where Wisbeach watermill's waters, which were wholly waveless, widened, were waterlilies, waxen white. Winifred wove wreaths with woodbine, whitehorn wallflowers, while Walter whittled wooden wedges with willow wands.

Wholly without warning, wild wet winds woke within Wisbeach Woods, whistling where Winifred wandered with Walter. Weeping willows were wailing weirdly, waging war with wind-tossed waters. Winifred's wary watchfulness waked.

"Walter, we won't wait."

"Which way, Winnie?"

Winifred wavered. "Why, where were we wandering? Wisbeach Woods widen whichever way we walk. Where's Wisbeach white wicket? Where's Winston's watermill?"

Wistfully, Walter witnessed Winifred's wonder. "Winnie, Winnie, we were wrong, wholly wrong, wandering within wild ways. Wayfaring weather-beaten waifs, well-nigh worn-out."

Winifred waited where, within wattled woodwork walls, waggons, wheelbarrows, wains were waiting, weighty with withered wood. Walter, warmly wrapped with Winifred's well-worn wadded waterproof, was wailing woefully, wholly wearied. Winnie, who, worn with watching, well-nigh weeping, was wistfully, wakefully waiting Willie's well-known whistle, wholly wished Walter's well-being warranted.

With well-timed wisdom, Walter was wound with wide worsted wrappers, which wonderfully well withstood winter's withering, whistling winds. Wholly without warm wrappers was Winifred, who, with womanly wisdom, was watching Walter's welfare, warding Walter's weakness.

"When will Willie wend where we wait?" wearily wondered Walter.

"Whist, Walter," whispered Winnie. "Who was whooping?"

"Whereabouts?"

Welcome whistling was waking Wisbeach Woods when winter's windy warfare waxed weaker.  
"Winnie! Walter!"

Winifred's wakefulness was well-grounded. "We're well, Willie! We're where Winston's wag-gons wait!"

Without waiting, Willie was within Winston's woodwork walls.

"Welcome, welcome, Willie!" Winnie was weeping with weakness with watching Walter, weak with wayfaring.

"Why, Winnie! Wise, watchful, warm-hearted Winnie!" Willie whispered wheedlingly. "We won't weep. Walter's well. What were Walter without Winnie?"

Wholly wonderful was Winifred's well-timed womanly wisdom, which well warranted weakly Walter's welfare. Whenever wandering within Wisbeach Woods with Winnie, -Walter would whisper, "What were Walter without Winnie--wise, watchful, warmhearted Winnie?"

## OULIPO COMPENDIUM

In 1960, a group of well-known French authors and poets founded OuLiPo, a society to promote "potential literature"--the creation of works of literary merit which are bound by various constraints. (As wittily defined by one of their members, Raymond Queneau, Oulipans are rats who build the labyrinth from which they plan to escape.) The classic example of their output is Georges Perec's *La Disparition*, a well-regarded novel written without the use of the letter E (translated into English as *A Void*). However, many other sorts of constraints, both lexical and semantic, have been proposed. (A simple one: replace each word in a story with the 7th word further along in a specified dictionary, in which "A quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog" becomes "A quoteworthy brusque fracas juttred over the leafy doggerel".)

The work of the Oulipans has been somewhat inaccessible to English readers, as most of their publication has been in French. Now, however, Harry Mathews, the sole American member of the Society and an erstwhile Word Ways contributor, has prepared with Alastair Brotchie *The Oulipo Compendium* (Atlas Press, London, 1998), which consists of an alphabetized list of their various constrained writing techniques plus short biographies of the members. Mathews has helpfully provided English translations (or analogues) of many of these.

The book, with ISBN number 0-947757-96-1, sells for \$19.99 in paperback. It deserves to be in every serious logologist's library.