

NO GNUS IS GOOD GNUS

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A gnu is a large, stocky antelope whose seeming ambition is to be a cow. Distinctive for its bizarre rocking-horse running motion, this oddly-formed even-toed ungulate has been described as being made up of parts left over from other animals, an assessment that is probably unfair to other animals. But although their droll appearance may endear gnus (or “gnu”; either pluralization is correct) to the public at large, few palindromists are ever charmed to find a gnu noshing nonchalantly in their word gardens; indeed, their more usual reaction to such a discovery is to, well, have a gnu.

The problem is that whenever a gnu chances to materialize in a palindrome (which they do with depressing frequency), the whole thing at once degenerates into *opera bouffe*. A palindromist might have labored for hours to fashion a poetic composition of refined sentiment, but let an unavoidable “gnu” turn up toward the end, and all becomes travesty. Few moods are gnu-proof; note, for example, the way in which the attempt to forge an ambience of Central America intrigue in this Panamadrome is completely undermined by the anomalous intrusions of a gnu and its bucolic traces: **“A man apt, a ham, a nap, a gnu (?), dungeon, a capital, a gat, a gal, a tip, a canoe, gnu dung (??), a Panama hat: Panama!”** Heartbreaking, isn’t it?

In that instance, a gnu infiltrated the palindrome ensconced as an inmate in “dungeon.” Other “ung” words often favored by gate-crashing gnus are bung, bungalow, bungee, bungle, dung, dungarees, fungal, gung, hung, Hungary, hunger, Jung, jungle, lounge, lung, lunge, pung, rung, sung, tungsten, young, unsung, plus a number of words beginning with “ung-,” and various -d, -ed, -r, -er, -s and -es forms of these words. (“Sung,” used as the alternative past tense of “sing,” is a vehicle especially popular with the obtruding artiodactyls.) Another way in which gnus may occur is when a word ending in “-un” happens to be followed by a word beginning with “g.” Common “-un” words that generate gnus in this manner include bosun, bun, dun, faun, fun, gun, Hun, nun, pun, rerun, run, spun, stun, sun and tun. Needless to say, palindromists are inclined to regard all such words as these with dark suspicion. The fifty-odd palindromes and two reversals that follow illustrate many, but by no means all, of the avenues (avegnus?) by which gnus are known to gain entry into reversible writings. Immediately below, herded together in momentary alphabetical order, is a mob of shorter gnudromes:

Ay! No tungsten-parts trap nets gnu , Tonya! + “Dias, no jungle has Sahel gnu!” Jon said. + “Do gnus, stung, “Yasser asks Ares, “ say ‘Gnuts!’, Sun God?” + Gnu doo: dung. + “Gnus, Art, amuse us—never odd or even!” Sue Sumatra sung. + “Gnus gnashed as gnu solos ululating ‘odd-dog’ Nita-Lulu solo sung; sad, eh?” sang Sung. + Hot new “gun tsar” Ira, stung, went “Oh!” + Marc’s tip: “As an obese gnu lunges, ebon as a pit, scram!” + Nay! Rub not, Sal, gnus—it is un-Glastonburyan! + Nell, a “Net gnu,” “hung ten,” Allen? + “Nice ‘zcz’,” snide “Big Gnu” Jung gibed, “in ‘Szczecin!’” + No dun gem, Adam saw, was Madame Gnu, Don! + “No, Nadia, Sara may *not* see gnu bungee!” stony Amara said anon. + “Oh, Norah’s gnus gnarled if Fidel rang,” sung Sharon Ho. + Stung, unsung, tuned-in: see snide “nut gnu” snug nuts! + Ungarbed ere we were—even, Eden Eve, ere *we!*—were,

Debra, gnu! + Ungava, Jon sees, sees no Java gnu. + Ungroomed or not, Lady Dalton rode moor gnu. (Come again?) + Young gnu...Oy! + Zulu nun Gwen Wen *knew* new gnu Nu, Luz?

Most palindromes longer than a line on a page seem deserving of paragraphs of their own. But despite their longer wheelbases, the new 2002 Gnudromes displayed below are still your basic no-frills, economy class gnumobile:

“Debar *gnu* goddesses?? Boffo!” yawned Ogden. “O.K., in a gnu herd a padre *hung* an ikon!...Ed? Go ‘den’—way off, obsessed dog!...Ungrab, Ed!”

“Del!” fit Selim snarled. “O *so*, seer? A gnu dons *no* dungarees? O, *SO*?” Del ran, smile stifled.

“Doc! O *stop*, tenderfoot!...Ungava, Levi, *lost* a wombat!” snaps Syd; “Don’t, noddy’s-span, stab Mowat’s olive lava gnu *too*!...Fred, net pots o’ cod!”

“Do gnome dates live alone?” Si sung. “Do ogres say,” Si sung on, redder, “*no* gnus is, Yasser, *good* gnus?...Is, Enola, evil Set a *demon* god?...”

Nan A. Lee was sodden: “Raw, inane GNU, lustily ‘LIT,’ Su, lunge—“ “Nan?” I warned. “Doss a wee, L.A. Nan.”

Norah Sad sung, e.g., a song of animals (“Oh, *woe*, dark rodeo!”) who “slam in a fog”: “No Sage Gnus Dash, Aron.”

“Oh? *Dias* spins gnus? *I*, dear Camylla, cite Nik: ‘Oh, *Cy* spun gnu *psychokinetically*, MacRae’,” Di sung. “Snips!” said Ho.

Red now, I deride Caryl: “To *Hungary*, Myra, gnu ‘hotly’ raced??...Ired, I wonder?”

For the luxury-minded, here is a selection of higher-end, legend-enhanced, SX-Series Grand Gnudromes:

The laconic instructions at a sanatorium for gnus and the gnats who gnaw them:

SUN GNATS; TAN GNUS

The regimen at Gramma’s Gnu Quests Camp for “problem” gnu youth, by contrast, is a bit more arduous. The staff’s posted instructions:

**A.M.: MAR GNU, SUN GNU, GUN GNU, RUN GNU, DUN GNU
P.M.: PUN “GNU,” DUN GNU, RUN GNU, GUN GNU, SUN GRAMMA**

Inexplicably, gnus appear to abhor certain currencies:

**No, Sibyl! *Do* gnu euros so rue? Ungodly bison!
Eew! Gnu juju *ngwee*?**

On the tenth day of a mail-order Christmas...

Revoltin'! Snide deliverymen enamelled saturnine "TUNGSTEN-NEB BENNET'S GNU, TEN, IN RUT" as Dell, Em, an "enemy" reviled Edin's "nit" lover?

The Grand Lama investigates a contretemps at the Gnu Lodge's mascot's paddock:

"God, no! Benign *Ulf*?" Gnu Don was...ired now? No, *tart* now. "A 'malign' Ulf gnu dung, ya say—*gnu* dung??—flung? I, Lama, won't rat on wond—er, I saw *no* dung flung in Ebon Dog!"

Owls may dubiously claim to get "too hot to hoot," but gnus are surely nature's past masters of the lame excuse:

"Gnu snivels are varied," Amy May Magoo-Pung went on. "Too bot-gnawn,' Eve, to hoot; 'too totalled,' Eta, to root; 'too lotto-needy,' Dee, not to loot; 'too rotated,' Ella, to toot; 'too hot' even, Wang, to boot—" "Not *new*, Gnu-Poo-Gamy Amy," "Madeira" Vera S. Levin sung.

Superstitious Evi apprehensively fends off an attempt by the red-haired woman in the next cell to perpetrate a pun:

"...No! Pander *me* no pun—EEK! Stop, murrey civet! A pun gives ya," says Evi, "gnu pate'!...Vic, yer rumpot's, keen upon 'em, Red? Nap on!..."

Gnus might well have an especial affinity for German palindromes, inasmuch as many German nouns end in the gnu-philic suffix "-ung" (e.g., *Heilung*, *Zeitung*, etc.) In addition, many a German word beginning with "ung-" may introduce a gnu to the brew: (*ungeraten* = spoiled, undutiful; *ungekünstelt* = unaffected):

"Ungeraten' nags, Rev," avers Gannet, "are gnu!"

"Ungekünstelt" Nedra Sawyer Grey was ardent: "Let's nuke *gnu*!"

Another name for a gnu is wildebeest, but to a palindromist these are two very different beasts. Unlike the persistent gnu, the wildebeest is difficult to raise in palindromicity, and usually requires the presence of a stock movie character, the immigrant servant Li, to thrive. Here's Li on safari:

"Not see *bed*!" Li wailed at Adelia. "Wildebeest on!"

Notwithstanding their general village-idiot innocence, gnus sometimes crop up in evil Sotadic reversals, whose undisplayed reverse halves are always derogatory. Take, e.g., this routine-seeming comment by an animal rights activist anent the sad plight of certain farm animals on the Scottish island of Rum, locally renowned as "the home of oam" (Oam: "*Scot*: warm vaporous air"—Web 3):

"Sal, a dairy made red Rum gnu test *oam*!"

As the dreaded "yips" are to a golfer, so the "gnus" are to a palindromist. (A case of the "yaks," by comparison, is considered almost a barrel of laughs.) What if the authors of the classic

palindromes had all been suffering from the gnus on the days when they composed their gems—how might their celebrated creations have turned out then? Here are a few possibilities:

A man, a pung, a gnu—Panama! (if Goethals had built a sleigh trail instead of a canal)

No dung was I ere I saw gnu, Don! (Napoleon regretting his Egyptian campaign)

“Gnu’d did I live & evil I did dung!” (from *Ye Confessions of a Were-Gnue*)

“Madam I’m,” Adam rimed, as gnus sung “Sad Emir,” “Madam, I’m Adam!”

(it was the only song they all knew)

Sums are sung, not “set,” as a test on gnu, Erasmus (he hadn’t herd the gnus...)

No, I lounged under it as a tired, nude gnu, O lion (hey--Maoris roam, gnu lounge)

“Emil, a gnu stage began! A more Roman age begat,” sung Ali, “me!” (hail, Cassius!)

T. Eliot, top bard, so sober, notes gnu doo—Zeus!—emanating, is sad: “I’d assign it a name, Sue—‘zoo dung set on Rebozo’s drab pot toilet!’”

(Nixon was none too pleased, either)

“Doc, note!” I disagreed. “Gnu deliver a rare, vile dung, deer gas; I diet on cod!”

(a Havasu gnu fast *never* prevents a fungus, Ava? Ha!)

Without consulting a reference, can the reader recall the exact wording of the originals?

Lastly, some free (but not, sadly, gnu-free) verse. The following are all end-to-end palindromes except for “Entre Gnu,” a word-unit Sotadic reversal poem which is semi-indebted to Gelett Burgess:

Donkey Vapor

“Waheehaw!

I’m as sad as a gnu’s nude end!”

**A song of sadnesses sad-eyed asses
send as fog,**

No sad need unsung:

“A sad ass am I!

Waheehaw!”

To A Sea Cow Celebrating Gnu Year’s

Morton’s red dugong, get a gnu-gong!

Nab ten tin tubs too, toots!

But, nit-net, bang no gun—

Gat eggnog udders not, Rom!

Don Gnuxote

One

Oho! Go gung-ho!

Oh, gnu, go!

Stone Bamako!

Two

Two kudu kowtow to kama:

“Be *not* so gung-ho!

“Oh, gnu, go—go *hoe*, no?”

Entre Gnu

You, than gnu, mine view?

Rather!

I’d *that*, entre-nous, you tell:

Can I?

But view to hope?

Never *I*!

One is, gnu mine, as homely as

Cow A!