

THE SORCERY OF CONTEXT

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There are countless one-word palindromes in the English language, many of them common, such as *Mom*, *Dad*, *poop*, *boob*, *sees*, *racecar*, *level*, and *rotor*, as well as the names *Bob*, *Otto*, *Ava*, and *Hannah*. At their most base level, one-word palindromes signify a concept, and the words themselves are palindromic more by coincidence than anything else; they sound perfectly natural when spoken. Slightly longer phrase palindromes, like *a red-eyed era* and *to prefer pot* are evasive as naturally uttered speech and in fact probably have been spoken by many yet recognized by few to no listeners or speakers. Many phrase palindromes are as coincidental as one-word palindromes; however, the phrase palindrome is more complex than the word palindrome because it boasts the dynamics of grammar and therefore meaning. Moving on, sentence-length palindromes, such as *Bob has inept penis—ah, Bob* and *Pot rewards Otto's drawer-top*, often bear more contrived and awkward instances of language usage, a complication that usually gives rise to surreal, almost ludicrous, contexts.

Take for example the following palindrome:

“Relapse,” he pondered. “No plasma, yet a straw, Latin egret-sewer grew ester genital warts, ate yams.” Al pondered. “Nope, he’s paler.”

One might read this palindrome and think it nonsense due to the unclear noun compound “egret-sewer,” preceded by seemingly unrelated modifiers “straw” and “Latin.” This is a good candidate for contrived word/phrase formation, because “a straw, Latin egret-sewer” doesn’t seem to make immediate sense, especially when the noun phrase in question is accredited with having performed the acts of growing genital warts upon one Ester, and eating yams; however, in the same manner that the human mind will invent its own truths in the boundless search for meaning, a palindrome (or any utterance or text bearing grammatical implication) demands that sense be made of it.

Whereas the above palindrome exhibits muddled phrasal and semantic elements, the following one further illustrates examples of contrived language:

Dog-bard, a wall arose. Soon, a red, nude-man era stole Gail of deli, and, lo, my tit-net carts bade, “Trap millions’ parts”, but a snag rose many fits, and I’d reward no cabs. Even Eve’s bacon drawer did nastify names, organs, a tub, straps. No ill-imparted, abstract-entity mold nailed foliage. Lots are named under a noose’s oral law—a drab god.

Again, the above example bears awkward sentences without clear meanings or contexts, but being grammatical, the palindrome will extract meaning from the mind of the reader. Contrived syntax comes in the form of “stole Gail of deli”. Most people who speak modern American English probably would not use such an archaic phrasing; instead, the most common way to say it would be: stole Gail’s deli. “Lo” is another archaic word that muddles the flow of the palindrome’s language; however, these examples of contrived sentence structure only lend to the eloquence of their reversal: “No ill-imparted, abstract-entity mold nailed foliage. Lots are

named...". Sometimes, for a palindrome to flow naturally on one side of its axis, the words on the other side must bear the burden of forced grammar.

Another interesting aspect of the above palindrome is the way it expands the boundaries of language by using the uncommon word "nastify." The meaning of "nastify" is somewhat obvious—to make nasty. Compare the morphological transformation from "beauty" to "beautify" which means "to make beautiful" (e.g., Warren will beautify the backyard by planting flowers). By extension, any noun or adjective can be supplemented with the suffix "-ify" to take on the formula $X + ify = \text{"to make X-like"}$. According to the above palindrome, "Even Eve's bacon drawer did nastify names, organs, a tub, straps." So Eve's bacon drawer made these four categories nasty; however, at this point, one might ask oneself, "What is a bacon drawer?" Here I will go out on the ever-so-shaky limb of contextual interpretation. First there is the obvious, literal translation: a drawer that contains bacon. The mind can easily bridge the manner in which a bacon drawer might nastify tangible objects like organs, a tub, and straps, but how can something concrete like a bacon drawer nastify something as intangible as a name? This is the point where the literal interpretation of "bacon drawer" might fall through thin ice. In the mind's obsessive egg-hunt for meaning, it may apply a more figurative meaning to "bacon drawer". Now, I interpret that "bacon drawer" could be used as another name for the vagina; hence "Even Eve's bacon drawer did nastify names, organs, a tub, straps," makes more acceptable sense, at least in my own mind, because a vagina can be said to nastify names in the sense that the reputations behind the names become marred...and, of course, a vagina can physically nastify the concrete entities: organs (musical and/or biological), a tub, and straps. This all makes sense to me; I can imagine a depraved scene including Eve and whatever sordid things her bacon drawer did to nastify the seemingly normal (at least according to my interpretation of this context) sexual objects—organs, straps, a tub—which in turn nastifies the reputations of the involved names (people). The interpreter of the palindrome not only walks away from the experience with new word usages and meanings but also with a freshly-birthered new image.

In my mind, a palindrome is an image and context generator, as if the austerity of the form itself creates a textual environment that catapults the human imagination into a place where it normally might not go via daydreaming. I see a palindrome, and though the sequential, reverse-order arrangement of the letters is perfectly symmetrical (thus qualifying a palindrome), and though the palindrome may be grammatical (even grammatical by extension), and though the implications of the words may incite a narrative or a meditation that the reader interprets as having some sense of resolution, despite all of these scenarios, upon reading a palindrome I am always left with a sense that any image or meaning I derive always alludes to a greater context. Image and context. These are the sorcery of not only palindromy, but of literature itself. If a picture says a thousand words, then a string of words paints a thousand pictures.