ALL THE BRAVE NEW PALINDROMES

JIM PUDER
Saratoga, California
jamespuder@juno.com

Recently in *Word Ways*, in Kickshaws and in the article presenting the entries in Dave Morice’s geographical-names palindrome contest, there have appeared several remarkable new palindromes which it seems to me ought not to be let pass without being commented upon. These include:

1. Three new palimericks by John Falcone and Lori Wike
2. Jeff Grant’s common-word eight-word “snowball” palindrome
3. Lori Wike’s novel “insider” palindromes
4. Lori’s amazing “pi” palindromes
5. Two notable standard palindromes by Martin Clear

1. Surprise! New palimericks

Palimericks are limericks which are also end-to-end palindromes of either the letter-unit or the word-unit variety; they have previously been the subject of articles in the Nov. 1997 and May 2007 issues of *Word Ways*. Palimericks of any quality are difficult to construct, and until recently I was unaware that any examples of the form had ever been published by anyone other than the author of the two *Word Ways* articles. Then three palimericks, two by John Falcone and one by Lori Wike, unexpectedly appeared among the entries in the aforementioned geographical palindromes contest. Here are two of them:

Guam’s devil lives; drab odor fog.
No garden olive, no grog.
Rob Erebor, Gorgon?
Evil? One dragon!
Go, Frodo! Bard’s evil lived: Smaug!

I lampoon small, able Bali;
Laid a track, ran at rally!
Din? All an idyll
Art? An ark-cart, a dial
I label ball (am snoop)... Mali!

~ Lori Wike

~ John Falcone

Interestingly, Lori and John, who are apparently in the habit of bombarding each other with oddly-constrained palindromes of various kinds, independently reinvented palimericks with no knowledge that anyone else had previously composed any. Lori even independently coined the name “palimericks” for these objects before discovering that it was already in use. They have composed other examples, which I hope will some day be exhibited in *Word Ways*. In my opinion, any reasonably successful specimen of this difficult form is eminently worthy of being published here.

As mentioned, palimericks may also be of the word-unit kind, which often yields more pleasing results. Here, e.g., is one which might once have rung loopily out across the Yorkshire countryside:

Where *is*, sir, fair Scarborough Fair?
Rhyme must Rosemary “thyme” and “lime” there!
Aye, there “lime” and “thyme”
Rosemary must rhyme—
Fair Scarborough Fair, sir, is *where*?

~ JP
2. A burgeoning new palindrome category: SNOWBALLS

Sentences in which each succeeding word is one letter longer than the previous one have traditionally been called "cascades" by wordplayers. Recently, the possibly more apt name of "snowballs" has been used with regard to palindromical cascades. Lori Wike was probably the first person to compose snowballs, several of which she contributed to an online forum some years ago. Clean snowballs (as opposed to dirty snowballs, or "comets") of more than five or six words in length seem to be difficult to construct, which is why I am impressed with this rather immaculate eight-word snowball contributed by Jeff Grant to a recent Kickshaws:

A ma, Ron, apes paler, redder 'relapse' panorama.

Note that this sentence contains only one proper noun, a very common one, and that all of the other words in it are quite common as well, which is the optimal way to do it. A masterly job. By contrast, my nine-word snowball, below, is forced to resort to a much more exotic (and so less desirable) vocabulary:

"A 'no gar' rate," dorts eboned Aladeno, "bestroye Tarragona!"

(Dort is a Scottish verb meaning "to sulk," Tarragona is a province of Spain, and Aladeno is a surname.)

A ten-word snowball is rumored to have been hooked off Honduras, but not yet reeled in; could such a fabulous creature really exist?

3. Palindromes and insiders—can this marriage last?

When a word or words is "hidden" inside of other words, as, e.g., "cat" in the phrase "Inca tigress," the whole thing has traditionally been called a "charade." This term, charade, has never greatly appealed to me, in part because I feel that it has been applied overbroadly to substantially different wordplay objects. When the words so hidden in sentences are personal names, some wordplayers have instead been calling such sentences "insider" sentences, and that is the term that I prefer to use. (Another good name for them might be "Trojan horse" sentences.)

It had never occurred to me that anyone would even think of trying to compose palindromical insider sentences until—who else?—Lori Wike contributed three such sentences (multi-sentence palindromical passages, actually) to February's "Kickshaws." Lori's long "palinsider" sentences, with their abundance of cover, are certainly successful in cloaking their hidden "insiders"—of the three, I could identify only Jim Morrison, and he only because his uncommon "J" was a tipoff. Personally, I feel that insider names ought not to be too hard to discern, since, after all, how can your audience admire your logical cleverness if it can't even perceive it? As the celebrated anonymous "Palindromical Poet of the Pot," who was ever too modest (or embarrassed) to sign his name openly to his work, once felt-tipped upon a restroom partition,

"Alone, a toilet's a pastel iota, Enola."

4. Hi, hi, palindromical pi!

So far this article has noted Lori Wike's publication the first "insider" palindromes, her probable composition of the first "snowball" palindromes and, with John Falcone, her independent re-invention of palinmericks. But to me Lori's most startling recent palindrome innovation has been her fabrication of several palindromical versions of mnemonic sentences for remembering the digits of pi. These are sentences in which the numbers of letters in consecutive words in the sentence are the same as those of the consecu-
tive digits of the decimal expression of pi, and Lori has crafted palindromical versions of such sentences (multi-sentence passages, actually) of six, nine and—incredibly—32 words (for the 32 digits up to the first occurrence of zero in pi). Here they are:

Six digits – 3.1459

                   Rot! A gill? A kayak alligator!

Nine digits – 3.14159265

                   Rag a Slav—I? Goons, Idappadi’s no ogival Sagar!

(Idappadi and Sagar are cities in India.)

32 digits – 3.1415926535897932384626433832795

Sex: a trot, a noted desuetude to pained rages, Ute. Syria parterre flowerpot, seniles? Abandoned ode? No, DNA baseline, stop! Re-wolf, er, re-trap airy set! Use gardenia pot, Ed. Ute-used detonator taxes.

Lori remarks that in her 32-word example she was forced to resort to a number of verbal expedients of a kind that she’d normally disdain in a palindrome, but to me this composition seems astonishingly literate, all things considered. Note, for one thing, the many pi-dictated long words in the passage, and for another the way its author has managed to eschew unfamiliar proper nouns and other esoteric vocabulary. Literarily less than perfect though it may be, this mnemonic, given the severe constraints placed upon its construction, must surely qualify as a palindromical tour de force.

5. **Mainstream magic**

Extra-constrained varieties of palindromes haven’t been the only notable ones to appear in Word Ways lately; also worthy of comment have been some of the regular kind, such as this long, consistently grammatical palindromical passage by Martin Clear:

Eh, can a primer of sex impugn Israel? Can a man ignite practised ire? Did a waning issue, a ripe note, yet abate? Yet one Piraeus sign in a wadi derides it, carpeting in a manacle, arsing up mixes for emir panache.

(Had its author not wanted to include the geographical name “Israel,” one imagines that he might have preferred the arguably more apt phrase “melding up mixes” to “arsing up mixes,” thereby changing the reading of the palindrome to “…of sex impugn idle Mel? Can a man… ...a manacle, melding up mixes for…” On the other hand, “arsing up” is undoubtedly the more amusing alternative!)

It often seems to me that long grammatical palindromic passages which attempt to mimic conventional writing by assiduously observing all of the rules and usual practices of ordinary writing do not receive the artistic appreciation that they might. Certainly it is true that if two palindromes say more or less the same thing, the one that manages to do so in fewer words is probably the cleverer and thus the more meritorious composition. That said, however, it is nonetheless also true that there are times when sheer lengthiness is in and of itself a virtue in a palindrome, and one of those times is when the palindromist is attempting to maintain a naturalistic flow of language in a palindrome for as long a space as possible. Although the foregoing palindrome probably cannot be said to be “naturalistic,” inasmuch as it seems to lack thematic unity, I feel that it deserves some recognition for being both long and, at any rate, fully grammatical.
This much shorter Martin Clear palindrome, in contrast, is most notable for its clean-cut succinctness:

An Italian is a Sinai Latina.

This would be an admirably efficient short sentence even if it weren’t palindromical. With a suitably contorted explanation, it could even be a true statement. And as is the case with many superior short palindromes, it immediately inspires a host of imitative palindromes of similar pattern:

Eno, no non-Italian is a Sinai Latino—no, none!
A Venetian is a Sinai “ten,” Eva! whereas
A Venusian is a “nil” in a Sinai sun, Eva!
A limp Martian, Isela Poot saw, was too-pale Sinai tramp “Mila!”
Oh, “Neptunian” is a Sinai nut pen, Ho!
A rare “tractarian” is a Sinai rat-carter, Ara!
A damp “utilitarian” is Adolph Plod, a Sinai rat I lit up, Mada!
Har! A star comedian is a Sinai democrat, Sarah!
Enid, an Elbonian, is a Sinai noble, Nadine? (Apologies to Scott Adams.)
Reg, a Lacedemonian, is a Sinai-Nome decal-ager. (Rex, -axer; Remi, -aimer)
No, do not yen! Dystopian is Sinai pot, Sydney, to nod on!
“Larissa, have an Albanian,” I sniff (it’s stiff in Sinai), “nab Lana; Eva has Sir Al.”
“Nah, a Tunisian is no sage,” we gas, “on Sinai sin, Utahan!”
“Hoo-ey!” asserts Ida. “Sinai toe,’ obese Boeotian, is a distress, aye! Ooh!”

But I digress. To get back to the subject of this article, which ostensibly is other people’s palindromes, let us conclude this review on a more cultivated note with this very thematic Lori Wike composition in which she adroitly manages to include the names of Verdi, Aida, Radames and Nile within the compass of one reasonably compact palindrome:

A diadem, a foe’s reverse, mad art-fed Nile: Verdi did revel in deft
Radames’ reverse, O famed Aida!

This lushly lyrical passage seems itself entirely worthy of being immortalized in an opera by, say, the late Edwin Fitzgerald, does it not? Indeed, Fitzgerald himself once penned an Aida-Verdi palindrome for his Sotadic opera “O Tongue in Cheek,” to wit:

“I’d revel—bong! Illicit song!” Aida signals. (Slang is a diagnostic ill, ignoble Verdi!)

(Fitzgerald and Verdi seem not to have been the most cordial of competitors.)

At the opposite end of the artistic spectrum, I am reminded of a loud exclamation reportedly overheard in London at the sole performance of a lost Puccini opera featuring the Norse gods; it was a rare Puccini flop and it closed the next day—in part, so the story goes, because key cast members declared in their own defense that on one should have expected them to sing the opera’s appalling libretto sober:

“Did I ’ear Puccini’s Sassanian Odin-assassin ‘iccup, Rae?...I did!”

The remark would probably not have caused the stir that it did if it hadn’t issued from the royal box.