THE WAITING GAME

JOHN McCLELLAN
Woodstock, New York

To explain the title of this article, we must tell you about my friend and his wife who came to the City recently for a day's shopping. Their needs differed, as might be expected, and their stores lay in different directions. Deciding to meet at the Hall Columbia Hotel at one o'clock for lunch, they went on their respective ways. (You may well ask, what on earth does any of this have to do with word-lore? We didn't pay all that money for a shopping guide ... Nevertheless, we ask the reader's indulgence. Everything will be clarified in a very little while.)

My friend soon found that the waistcoat in his particular tartan was not to be had this season, despite its popularity a year ago; the cummerbund sale was over and he refused to pay the regular (exorbitant) price; the book he haa. looked forward to reading had not yet been published. All in all, it was a poor morning. Three-quarters of an hour early, he went to the Hall Columbia to await his lady. Sitting at the bar, he had a drink, and tried to not keep looking at his watch.

His wife in the meantime had found everything she wished, and several other items as well. The minutes dragged on -- he had another drink. "I can't do this," he mumbled to himself. "I'll be squiffed by the time she gets here...." He eyed the neat, shiny array of bottles in front of him morosely. Then, one label reached out, as it were, and caught his attention. CHEATERS

Now, that's a funny name for a liquor, even a Scotch! But another more careful look revealed that the label read TEACHERS, and that his drink-befogged eyes had played a trick on him and had reassembled the eight letters into another word. Good Heavens! he thought. Perhaps there are more of these -- Anagrams, aren't they? -- to be found among the labels of those glittering bottles! My friend found that indeed there were. And from such seeming trivia great ideas may arise: thus was the Waiting Game born.

When his wife joined him some time later, she was frankly apprehensive about her tardiness, and very apologetic.

"It's quite all right," he said magnanimously. "I was late myself and have only been here a short time."

"Oh, what a patient dear you are! Shall we have lunch?"

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My friend's account of his findings piqued my interest and prompted me to do some original research on liquor-oriented Anagrams. I thought it would be good to share our discoveries and serve, too, to while away the evenings my wife spent with her Bridge club.

So, turning to Dmitri Borgmann's encyclopaedic and entertaining Language on Vacation, I noted his four basic categories of Anagrams. Somewhat paraphrased, they are listed below and some of my own findings are placed beside their appropriate category:

1) All the letters of a word are rearranged to make another - TEACHERS / cheats, PERNOD / ponder, SEAGRAMS / mas-sager
2) The letters of a word make several other words - WHISKY / why sk? ?, METAXA / meat ax, IMPERIAL / I'm a peril, DRAMBUIE / rabid emu, BELLOWS / sob well
3) Several words make one word -
4) Several words make several other words - SAMBUCRA ROMANA / mas amor, Cuba

Foreign words might, I suppose, constitute a subset of the above - DUBONNET / bon tendu (Fr., roughly 'good, though strained'), TEQUILA / quillate (Sp., a jeweler's weight).

The best Anagrams, according to Borgmann, are those that indicate some subtle affinity between two or more anagrammed words, or are apt descriptions or explanations of the original word or phrase. An example of the former is, perhaps, BACARDI / Cid, Arab. Apt descriptions have been coined by members of the National Puzzlers' League and its predecessors for many decades; a small sample of their liquor-oriented wares (kindly supplied by the Editor) is:

MICHELOB BEER / I be 'belch more' ('Nightowl', Feb 1976)
SOUR MASH / so rum has? ('Hap', Jul 1977)
AN ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE / gal, can I have cool beer?
('Amaranth', Nov 1912)
A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY / it be thy flask o' woe
('Amaranth', Feb 1911)
LEMONADE / demon ale ('Merlin', Aug 1973)

The last is an example of an Antigram, where the phrase takes on a diametrically opposed meaning.

If Anagrams do not appeal to the Waiter (or, are not his cup of tea, as it were), he may prefer to fall back on the special case of Reversals and see what he can find in this charming field. Beside the century-old observation that RED RUM is, for the one who drinks of it too freely, MURDER, research turned up the fact that only a SLOB drinks BOLS (the name of a famous old Dutch house). We also noted a champagne bottle whose label proudly proclaimed that the product had won a first prize in Vienna some years ago. Surprisingly, VIENNA gave us ANNE IV in reversal; more surprisingly still, it led to the palindromic ANNE IV NIXES DNA AND SEX IN VIENNA, a little-known event about
a dreadful person, which seems to have been largely overlooked by historians.

We note in passing that the Waiting Game can be played in other ways. Looking at the labels as reflected in the mirror over the bar (assuming that we can focus at that distance after a few drinks), we can search for liquor names which remain invariant, or spell out new words. Or, we can ponder the changes on the printed wine and cocktail list when viewed through a transparent swizzle stick. Unfortunately, to date only one liquor-oriented word has been discovered that passes either test -- the German HOCK, a variety of white Rhine wine. BOCK BEER is only defective in the last letter. (Researchers who wish to explore the matter of vertical or horizontal letter symmetry when sober are directed to my article "A Note on Catoptrons" in the May 1971 Word Ways.)

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The above will give some inkling of the richness of the field and point up the fact, too, that Waiters need not be lonely folk, prone to high blood-pressure and other tensions. Neither my wife nor myself berate each other for being late for one of our appointments, as we once did. In fact, I'm surprised and pleased at her forbearance on the few occasions I have had to keep her waiting. She did take me aback, though, a few nights ago after one of her 'Bridge' evenings. I asked her if she would care for a nightcap before we turned in, and in the most natural way in the world she replied, "Yes, dear, I'll have a spot of GRAND MARINER!" It made me wonder if the Waiting Game may not be contagious ...

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Do you have a logological book or journal which you wish to sell, or are you searching for an out-of-print work? Starting this issue, Word Ways offers, on an experimental basis, a free service to its readers: as space permits, we will list your wants or offers (please, no more than five items per person).

To start the ball rolling: the editor is looking for Ernest Vincent Wright's Gadsby (Wetzel, 1939), the E-less novel, and offers a used copy of Dmitri Borgmann's classic text, Language on Vacation (Scribner's, 1965) for $4.50.