THE POET’S CORNER

From time to time, Word Ways receives a variety of short poems related to recreational linguistics, some original, others previously published. As poetic output cannot be easily predicted, these will be presented on an irregular basis.

Frederick Landers of Fremont, California wrote the following during the summer 1979 gasoline shortage:

Are you bored when inching toward gasoline you can’t afford?  
Make time pass a great deal faster waiting for a tank of gas:  
Make a palindrome or two -- I can do it, so can you!  
A GAS SAGA ... SENILE LINES...  
But, if you’re less talented, here's what you can do instead:  
EMIT SAP AS A PASTIME

Jay Ames of Toronto, Canada sent in the following tautonymic crambo (definitions given at the end):

The aye-aye  
Never makes no fuss  
Where cuscus goes to sleep;  
The tsetse hums her hymn of death  
Where dik-dik lightly leap;  
The bulbul  
Sings bright, nightly lays  
No motmot ever hears;  
While matamata  
Slowly swims  
In wet warm hemispheres;  
Though lava-lavas  
Might be worn  
Where kavakava’s grown,  
You’ll find more Mau Mau  
On the moon  
Than tutus in Tyrone.

aye-aye - nocturnal lemur in Madagascar  
cuscus - Australian marsupial  
tsetse - a disease-bearing fly of central and southern Africa  
dik-dik - a small east Africa antelope  
bulbul - a Persian nightingale  
motmot - a bird of the tropical forest from Mexico to Brazil  
matamata - a turtle of Guiana and northern Brazil  
lava-lava - a Samoan or Tongan calico waistcloth
kavakava - an Australian pepper plant from which an intoxicating beverage is made
Mau Mau - a Kenyan terrorist group of the 1950s advocating native rule
tutu - a short ballet skirt

Walter Shedlofsky's Anachuttle is based on a figure of speech:

News sources obfuscate trite meanings near, non-cleanse;
Obscure, like xenon, words contradict to bind case.
Cruel master yielding alms becomes a kind base.
Often unsure motive emphasizes blight lack.
Yellow hints opine threat is merely a light black.

Oomph gossio, rapt over honeymoon byronic,
Reports maid outlandish will be boon moronic.

Murky advice notes, with tale from endowed proxy,
Infer turgid idler left wife for proud doxy.
Xanthic news could contend this verse was clear nonsense.

Martin Gardner sent in an ABC poem by John Updike (from The Carpentered Hen and Other Tame Creatures); note that it actually rhymes!

Capacity 26 Passengers
-- sign in a bus

Affable, bibulous,
corpulent, dull,
eager-to-find-a-seat,
formidable,
garrulous, humorous,
icy, jeune,
knockabout, laden-
without-luggage (maroon),
mild-mannered, narrow-necked,
oval-eyed, pert,
querulous, rakish,
seductive, tart, vert-
iginous, willowy,
xanthic (or yellow),
young, zebuesque are my passengers fellow.

Here are a pair of word-palindromes on Theseus and the Minotaur, the first by Dick Ringler from the July 1977 Scientific American magazine, the second an unpublished one by Patrick Hunt:
To Theseus: Finding no Minotaur

Thread the chaos, pattern the despair.
Shadows loom and worry you:
Dead hope, and empty heaven, and now bare
Meadows -- fearful! but all perspective true.

To Penelope: Weaving in Autumn

True perspective all, but fearful! meadows
Bare now, and heaven empty, and hope dead,
You worry and loom shadows.
Despair the pattern, chaos the thread.

Light to dark in winding thread out
saw Theseus unpuzzled through maze.
Bold was he, war past, to take his victory
from Minotaur, the end so feared he had
before challenge met Theseus so.

So Theseus met challenge before,
had he feared? So end the Minotaur.
From victory his take to past war
he was bold. Maze through unpuzzled
saw Theseus out thread winding in dark to light.

The following poem has been adapted from an item sent in by Ralph Beaman of Boothwyn, Pennsylvania some time ago:

At the zoo I chanced to eye
An Ai suspended in a tree;
As Aye-Aye made a face at me,
The sleek Aiaiai soared on high.
Aye or nay, it cannot be!
A four-eyes I shall never see.

Not so! According to Webster's Third, a four-eyes is (1) a person wearing spectacles, and (2) a fish belonging to the genus Anableps.

Ai - a three-toed sloth (also, ai is a variant of Ayu, a Japanese sweetfish)
Aye-aye - a nocturnal lemur from Madagascar
Aiaiai - variant of Ajaja, the roseate spoonbill