DEATH: A LOGOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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In my continuing search for answers to Life's Great Questions, I have run across a major imbalance between Birth and Death. That imbalance is by no means obvious to the casual observer, however. Both BIRTH and DEATH are five-letter, one-syllable words ending in the digraph TH. In addition, their first letters are only two spaces apart in the alphabet, and the printed lowercase forms of those letters, b and d, happen to be mirror images or reversals of one another. One can, accordingly, not really ask for greater congruence between BIRTH and DEATH, unless one seeks a single word conveying both meanings.

In logology, as elsewhere, things are not always what they seem to be. If we probe beneath the placid exterior, we find that there are only a few ways of being born, whereas there seem to be an almost limitless number of ways of dying. Consider: at the moment, there are only three ways of appearing in this world: in a normal birth, in a birth by Caesarian section, and in a premature birth. Science may gradually add two further ways: development of a fertilized ovum into an infant in artificially created and maintained laboratory conditions, and the outright creation of human life in the laboratory. That is still only a paltry five ways, which don't begin to compare with the splendor of death - so far as I have been able to determine, there are thousands of different ways of leaving this world, for parts unknown. That plethora of pathways into the future is the subject of this article.

Faced by the sumptuous banquet that Death had prepared for me, my first instinct was to arrange the various modes of demise in alphabetical order, then extracting from the full list a modest selection representative of the whole - in measured alphabetical steps. In other words, I proposed to select three forms of dying beginning with each of the 26 letters of the alphabet, balancing my selection logologically. With so many descriptive designations at my disposal, my hopes of succeeding were high, indeed. Little did I suspect the travail in store for me!

After considerable struggle, I fashioned the list presented here. One of my objectives in assembling it was to pick lethal designations that would be familiar to anyone reasonably facile in English, reserving the more esoteric forms of death for special treatment later in this article. I did not, however, manage to fill all 78 of the available slots in my list; in the case of each of the letters J, Q, X, and Z, one slot remained open. I invite readers to succeed where I have failed - if they can.
An inspection of the list reveals its heterogeneous composition. Some causes or modes of death are stated impartially: cancer, electrocution, and suffocation, for instance. Others are presented from the standpoint of the agent of death: flaying someone alive, choking someone to death, and torturing someone to death. Still others adopt the victim's perspective: going to Davy Jones's locker, worrying oneself to death, and yielding up the ghost, for example. I saw no way of imposing an artificial uniformity on the list, and decided to let nature take its course, so to speak.

The list is equally heterogeneous in a different respect. Some of the forms of death included are legally inspired by man (capital punishment, gallows); others are illegally inspired (assassination, throttling someone); still others are natural (natural death, old age); yet others represent illness (cancer, heart failure); and a few are accidental in character (accidental death, drowning). Once again, that is how life tends to end — as the result of a multiplicity of forces acting on human beings. Far was it from me to try inverting or disguising life as we actually end it!

Causes and Modes of Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Accidental death; Asphyxiatiion; Assassination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Bleeding to death; Burial alive; Burning at the stake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Cancer; Capital punishment; Choking to death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Decapitation; Dropping dead; Drowning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Electrocution; Euthanasia; Execution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Firing squad; Flaying someone alive; Freezing to death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Gallows; Going to Davy Jones's locker; Guillotinement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Hanging; Heart failure; Homicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Incineration; Inhaling carbon monoxide; Irreversible brain damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Judicial murder; Jumping from a tall building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Kamikaze mission; Killing someone; Knifing someone to death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Leaping from a tall building; Liquidation; Lynching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Manslaughter; Mercy killing; Mowing someone down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Natural death; Necktie party; Necromancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Old age; Organized murder; Overdose of sleeping pills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Pistol-whipping; Poisoning; Putting someone to the sword</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Quelling; Quenching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Race suicide; Regicide; Rubbing someone out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Shooting; Stoning someone to death; Suffocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Terminal illness; Throttling someone; Torturing someone to death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>Unboweling someone; Unfleshing someone; Unheading someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Vaporization; Violent death; Voodoo death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Wasting away; Witchcraft; Worrying oneself to death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Xenophobia; X-radiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Years are soon cut off; Yellow fever; Yielding up the ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Zapping; Zeroing in (of firepower)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With one exception, all of the forms of death were general ones: forms to which all humans are theoretically suspect. The one exception was REGICIDE, a death that only a king can experience. Again with just one exception, all of the forms could be experi-
enced by one individual at a time. The exception, RACE SUICIDE, is a death that only an entire body of individuals is capable of experiencing - collectively. These exceptions entered the list because of my fascination with death beginning with the letter R. Friendly as that letter has been to me in other contexts - it is, for example, included in my first, my middle, and my last names - it turned very hostile as soon as I began considering death. One other oddity of the list is the appearance of occasional synonyms in it. Thus, DROWNING and GOING TO DAVY JONES’S LOCKER are two names for one kind of death, as are ASPHYXIATION and SUFFOCATION. Since the English language teems with synonyms, it would have been distinctly improper for me to try concealing that fact in constructing my list.

A few of the entries on the list may puzzle some readers. Someone very near an exploding thermonuclear weapon will be vaporized instantly, making VAPORIZATION a legitimate form of death. A number of entries on the list - NECROMANCY, WITCHCRAFT, VOODOO DEATH - recognize the fact that some of us die of supernatural causes. Precisely because that is the sad case, I felt it best to admit that fact openly in my list, so as not to bring supernatural wrath down on me - it is better to be safe than sorry. Two of the terms, QUELLING and QUENCHING, are accidentally a bit unusual: each refers to destruction, including the destruction of human life. A few terms - MOWING SOMEONE DOWN, NECKTIE PARTY, RUBBING SOMEONE OUT - are on the informal side. Well, I'm really an informal person, once you get to know me well, and I didn't feel that the uninterrupted use of formal, stilted English was appropriate. You understand, of course, that I am advancing the real explanations for my various decisions here - the sheer unavailability of alternative entries had nothing at all to do with my choices. Nothing at all!

Of particular interest are the two causes of death beginning with the letter X. XENOPHOBIA is fear of strangers and strange things. Any fear, if it is intense enough, can do its victim in, and XENOPHOBIA is no exception to the general rule. In a similar vein, X rays, like any other form of radiation, can be lethal if they are strong enough, making X-RADIATION a possible cause of death.

The list, interesting as it was, however, was merely a stepping stone to something bigger and better. You see, there are forms of death so unusual that most of us are not even aware of them; or, if we have heard of them, they have seemed so remote from our lives that we have long since forgotten about them. It is my view that, on the one hand, those planning on suicide have a right to have all possible options at their fingertips, enabling them to make their departures as pleasant and comforting as they choose; and that, on the other hand, those not planning on suicide need to be aware of all possible dangers lurking in their environment, doing their best to avoid those perils. All of us, irrespective of our plans, consequently have a vital stake in mastering the more advanced terminology used in the realm of death. I now present that terminological entertainments.

The following follows a few less entertaining, yet less esoteric articles appended to this volume: First, the discussion of CIDE, for which we must thank the late Dr. Scudder, the word is SELF-PARRICIDE, for the word is SELL herself in, one's own house without a second thought. Then the more formal CERTICIDE, for the word is Company in, the existence of which is counterbalanced by the numerous articles appended to this volume.

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1. A revolver in your death: you employ your death and the trigger.

2. You’ve engaged in suicide, already quitting smoking.
that terminology as a public service, rendering *Word Ways* not just entertaining but also - literally - of life-and-death importance.

The following list includes terms of significance either for their sheer esotericism or for their intrinsic interest. Because a series of articles and follow-up notes in *Word Ways* during the period 1979-1982 devoted itself to terms ending in the suffix -CIDE, the appended list refrains from considering said terms further - it prefers to break new ground. For logological purposes, life begins the moment after a live birth has taken place. This definition therefore excludes such concepts as STILLBIRTH, ABORTION, CONTRACEPTION, MISCELLANEOUS and BIRTH CONTROL from the realm of death-dealing causes or modes.

For two reasons, one of the terms ending in -CIDE does require discussion. First, none of the participants in the 1979-1982 search for -CIDE words found this particular word - even though it appears in boldface type on page 2270 of Webster's Second Edition. Second, that word cannot possibly have a legitimate meaning. The word is SELF-PARRICIDE. To what does the prefix SELF- refer? If SELF-PARRICIDE describes the murder of someone's father by the victim, then the murder is suicide, not any kind of parricide. If the word is intended to emphasize that the victim was the murderers own father, then the element SELF- is superfluous - if the victim was not the murderers father but someone else's father, then the murder was no kind of parricide. Accordingly, the element SELF- cannot possibly convey any meaning not intrinsic to the word PARRICIDE itself. I defy anyone at the G. & C. Merriam Company in Springfield, Massachusetts to produce a rationale for the existence of the word SELF-PARRICIDE!

It is evidently one of the numerous errors in Webster's Second Edition. SELF-PARRICIDE is, incidentally, only one of four -CIDES overlooked by the 1979-1982 investigators of that subject. A second one, RACE SUICIDE, has already been mentioned. Two others in Webster's Second Edition, SELF-HOMICIDE and PSEUDO SUICIDE, like SELF-PARRICIDE, are undefined by the dictionary. Unlike SELF-PARRICIDE, however, they lend themselves to all sorts of interpretations - leaving the dictionary user wondering what they mean. Is SELF-HOMICIDE, for instance, an elaborate synonym for suicide? Or is it a homicide which you commit yourself, as differentiated from one that you engage a professional killer to commit on your behalf?

The term PSEUDO SUICIDE is even more ambiguous. Here are three possible interpretations:

1. A team of hit men bumps you off. The assassins then make your death look like a suicide by placing their partially-discharged revolver in your hand, wrapping your forefinger around the gun's trigger.

2. You've been a heavy smoker - 12 packs of cigarettes a day. Eventually, you die of lung cancer. It's as though you committed suicide, although you didn't - you were merely too weak-willed to quit smoking before it was too late.
3. You've been sentenced to life imprisonment for embezzling ten million dollars. Still free on your own recognizance, you take witnesses to the shore of the nearest lake, announce that you're going to end it all, and dive into the water, never to reappear. Your witnesses assume that you've drowned. Actually, however, you're a champion swimmer, swim under water past the next bend in the shore, surface out of sight of your witnesses, and hotfoot it to Brazil before the authorities drag the lake for your body and discover that there isn't any.

Which of these three situations fits the intended meaning of PSEUDO-SUICIDE? How many more interpretations do you have?

ANTHROPOPHAGY. A scholarly name for the practice of human beings eating one another. The practice involves the death of those eaten.

AUTO-DÁ-FÉ. The practice of burning an incorrigible and impenitent heretic at the stake, observed as an act of faith by the Inquisition, chiefly in Spain and Portugal. History is cyclical, so that the practice will probably come back into style in the near future.

BAPTISM OF FIRE. A soldier's first exposure to the enemy's artillery fire. It is a very severe ordeal. In the present context, it generally results in the soldier's death.

BED OF PROCRUSTES. An iron bed to which an ancient Greek highwayman tied his victims, either stretching their legs or shortening them surgically, in an attempt to adapt the legs to the length of the bed. These forced adjustments frequently terminated the lives of the victims. The highwayman may have been mentally disturbed.

BISHOPING. Murder by drowning the victim, for the alleged purpose of selling the body of the newly-deceased for dissection.

BREAKING ON (or UPON) THE WHEEL. The pastime of tying a victim to a wheel-shaped structure or to a wooden frame such as a St. Andrew's cross, then breaking his or her bones with an iron bar. Reports have it that the demand for iron bars was brisk, and the procedure quite painful for the victim.

BURKING. Murder by smothering or suffocating the victim, leaving few marks of violence on the body — thereby enabling the initiator of the action to sell the body for dissection. The profit motive seems to have been a well-developed one at the time.

BURNING AT THE STAKE. The quaint custom of tying a man or a woman to a post or other support, then setting fire to a supply of wood thoughtfully heaped around stake and victim. As the victim burned to a crisp, his or her screams could often be heard at a considerable distance.

CRUCIATION. A literate designation for the act of torturing or tormenting someone, with the latter's demise as the objective.

CRUCIFIXION. A novel method employed in ancient times to terminate the victim's life or to convert their hands to their own use.
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minate the lives of undesirables. They were attached to crosses, or to conveniently placed trees, either by nails driven through their hands and feet or by cords, being left in their constrained situation until they died of exhaustion.

CUSTOMS. The practice of sacrificing numerous human victims upon the death of a king or a chief. The practice was observed in certain African nations and was sometimes marked by a great deal of splendor and bloodshed.

DECOLLATION. Severance of a human head from the neck to which it had theretofore been attached, incurring its owner's ultimate displeasure but paying no heed thereto.

DEFENESTRATION. The act of throwing living human beings out of building windows, preferably onto the sharpened spears of those below. Those thrown, if they survived the experience, expressed considerable dissatisfaction with it.

EMACIATION. A wasting away of an individual's flesh, until none is left. The Grim Reaper then emerges on the scene.

EVISCERATION. An educated term for disembowelment.

FELO-DE-SE. Someone who deliberately puts an end to his own existence; a suicide. There is no corresponding abstract term.

PLAYING SOMEONE ALIVE. The process of stripping or removing the skin of someone while that individual is alive and conscious. The process pays no attention to the individual's comfort.

GARROTE (GARROTING). A mode of punishment used in Spain. The victim's neck was enclosed in an iron collar attached to a post. The collar was then tightened by means of a crank or screw, forcing a point or blade into the spine at the base of the brain — until the victim's life was snuffed out.

GIBBETING. Termination of the victim's life by hanging and exposing him or her on a gibbet — an upright timber with a cross-piece projecting at right angles from its upper end. While on the gibbet, the victim was kept in chains.

GUILLOTINEMENT (GUILLOTINING). A machine for separating an individual's head from his or her body, by means of a heavy ax or blade with a sloping edge, sliding in vertical guides. The device, used in France and originally known as a louisette or louisson, was very effective in terms of meeting performance objectives.

HAIL OF BULLETS. Sequences of bullets, moving along multiple trajectories, lethal in their effect on a human target. The life-terminating quality of the ensemble is skillfully disguised by comparing it with one of nature's refreshing and reinvigorating phenomena: precipitation in the form of hail.

HALTER. Death by hanging, or the hangman's rope. As its name quite accidentally implies, a halter does halt life.

HARA-KIRI. A form of suicide bequeathed to us by the mysterious Orient. It involves ripping the perpetrator's bowels open, true
to the literal meaning of the word: stomach cutting. See SEPPUKU.

IMMOLATION. The dispatch of a human being for sacrificial purposes, on an altar serving those purposes. The individual is first sprinkled liberally with a mixture of meal and salt — perhaps, to make him or her more palatable to the gods to whom the sacrifice is offered.

IMPALEMENT. Torturing an individual to death by piercing him or her with a sharp stake or pale. The stake or pale is thrust or driven through the body. Impalement is another both ancient and Oriental mode of capital punishment, overdue for a revival in the West today.

INHUMATION. Deposition in the earth as a final resting place. To serve as a means of terminating life, it is essential that the individual so deposited still be alive when inhumed. Inhumed individuals often remain alive for an hour or longer before lapsing into insensibility.

JUGERNAUTING. Death as the result of being crushed beneath the wheels of a car adorned with obscene paintings, as part of a festival honoring either Vishnu or Krishna. Hindu devotees are said to throw themselves under the car's wheels most enthusiastically.

JUGULATION. Life termination by cutting or severing the jugular vein. A common cutthroat may, therefore, be more elegantly described as a jugulator.

LAPIDATION. Bringing death to an individual by stoning him or her. The stones may either be thrown at the individual, or he and she may be struck with them at close range. Lapidation is particularly appropriate in cases of adultery.

LEACHING. Attaching leeches to an individual's body. The leeches then proceed to suck blood from the body, until none is left. The leeches have stomachs equipped with lateral pouches for the retention of the blood extracted from their human victim.

MACULATION. A very dignified term for the act of killing a sacrificial victim. Cain's offering was an example of Biblical mactation.

MAN EATING. A plebeian description of anthropophagy, also applicable to the gustatory habits of certain wild animals such as sharks, lions, or tigers. Do not let the sexist nature of the term deceive you: those who eat men also eat women and children.

MEGADEATH. A form of death made possible by the advances of modern science. In a megadeath, one million individuals perish in one fell swoop — usually, as the result of a thermonuclear blast.

MORGANIZING. Assassinating an individual secretly, in order to prevent him or her from disclosing secrets, or as punishment for their disclosure. The practice makes persons bearing the surname Morgan suspect of being potential perpetrators or victims.

MORTH. Any of the more serious forms of homicide, such as kil-
SEPPUKU. The artificial purgedual is first pierced him the sacrificial male is thrust both ancient the jugular the leeches are thrust beneath the jugular delicately des- the jugularly, also ap- "the victim is put to the victim. The leeches are left. The reten- tion, the jugularly, also ap- "the victim is put to the victim. The leeches are left. The reten- tion, the jugularly, also ap- "the victim is put to the victim. The leeches are left. The reten- tion, the jugularly, also ap- "the victim is put to the victim. The leeches are left. The reten- tion, the jugularly, also ap- "the victim is put to the victim. The leeches are left. The reten- tion, the jugularly, also ap- "the victim is put to the victim. The leeches are left. The reten- tion, the jugularly, also ap- "the victim is put to the victim. The leeches are left. The reten- 
mortalization is incendiariism; morth game, murderous play.

MORTHLAG. Murder, pure and simple.

MORTIFICATION. Killing by numbing and deadening the human senses or faculties one by one; murder by destroying the organic texture and vital function of one part of the body after another.

MURDER MOST FOUL. A description of murder by those whom it offends. Shakespeare attributes the term to the ghost of Hamlet's father (Hamlet, Act I, scene v, line 27).

MURDRUM. The logologically favored form of death, as it is a palindrome. It describes killing someone secretly or with concealment, as distinguished from an open killing. Contrariwise, the term also describes the slaying of a human being irrespective of whether the killing is accidental, deliberate, or excusable.

NECROMANCY. Magical means used to bring about someone's death. The necromancer practices the Black Art, invoking the assistance of Satan. See also SORCERY and WITCHCRAFT.

NOYADE. Death by drowning; more accurately, a method of executing considerable numbers of political prisoners all at once, by binding a male to a female, with the male-female pairs of prisoners being dropped into the water from a boat with a movable bottom. Also see REPUBLICAN MARRIAGE.

PUTTING SOMEONE TO THE SWORD. A functionally effective means for terminating life, the effect being achieved by piercing the individual's vitals with the long, sharp-pointed, and sharp-edged blade of a weapon such as a smallsword, rapier, saber, or scimitar. The term is, however, a misleading one, for it is not the victim who is put to the sword - it is the sword that is put to the victim.

QUARTERING. Effecting death by dividing the victim's body into four approximately equal parts (mathematical precision is not essential), cleaving the body asunder, or dismembering it, along the preselected division lines. The practice is often part of the procedure of hanging, drawing, and quartering the victim. It is useful, permitting the dismembered portions of the body to be sent to the place where the victim had committed his or her offenses, attesting to the fact that appropriate punishment had been meted out by the authorities. The practice is sometimes modified, postponing the drawing and quartering until the victim has died from the effects of the hanging.

REPUBLICAN MARRIAGE. A method of execution in which a man and a woman are bound together, then being thrown into the nearest major river. Women's libbers will be particularly pleased by the equal treatment accorded men and women in this procedure. Also see NOYADE.

RIGOR MORTIS. Strictly speaking, the term refers to the rigidity of the muscles that occurs shortly after death. It should, however,
be possible for modern medical science to induce rigor mortis in a living victim by injecting a suitable drug, thereby making rigor mortis the cause of death, rather than a sequel to it.

SATURNALIA OF BLOOD. A colorful term for a period or occasion of general license, marked by excesses of vice and crime, with blood flowing freely in the streets, its donors losing their lives.

SCALPING. Cutting or tearing the scalp of an individual off from his or her head, without first obtaining that individual’s informed consent, preferably in writing. The perpetrator generally keeps the scalp so obtained as a trophy. The perceived advantages of the practice for the victim, whose life is frequently terminated by it, are difficult to identify.

SCOURGING SOMEONE TO DEATH. Literally whipping the life out of the individual, using a scourge - a whip, lash, or switch consisting of a handle with one or more thongs. The term may also be used figuratively: Attila, King of the Huns, was the Scourge of God – appointed divinely, it is to be presumed.

SELF-IMMOLATION. Lexicographic authorities seem reluctant to define this term, contenting themselves with listing it. It refers to IMMOLATION (see above) in which the victim is also initiator of the procedure. According to the unabridged Funk & Wagnalls dictionary, the element "self-" in this term is intended to have a directly reflexive force – an excellent way of obscuring a self-evident meaning.

SEPPUKU. A more cultured term for the practice of HARA-KIRI (which see above). Like the latter, it refers to a cutting of the bowels.

SEPULTURE. An individual’s burial or interment, in a grave or sepulcher. As in the case of INHUMATION (see above), diligent care must be exercised to make certain that the individual is still alive before beginning his or her sepulture; otherwise, the procedure will fail to achieve its intended purpose of terminating the victim's life.

SORCERY. The use of preternatural agencies, including witchcraft and collusion with evil spirits, to effect a victim’s demise. See also NECROMANCY (above) and WITCHCRAFT (below).

SPEARING. The dispatch of a victim by piercing him or her with the sharp head of a spear - a long-shafted weapon typically thrust or thrown. Warning: do not confuse this death-dealing procedure with the spearing, another name for the synodontoid lizard fish Trachinocephalus myops, which infests West Indies and neighboring waters.

STAKE THROUGH THE HEART. This self-explanatory method for dispatching a victim is the favored one for terminating the existence of a vampire – the bloodsucking ghost or reanimated body of a deceased. The vampire has also been thought of as the supposed other-self of a ferocious savage, seeking to satisfy his bloodsucking propensities. The stake through the heart works equally well
well in such a case.

SUTTEE (or SUTTEEISM). The practice of a wife cremating herself on her husband's funeral pyre, as evidence of wifely excellence. Few wives in modern American society demonstrate such devotion to their marriage vows. O tempora! O mores!

TEARING SOMEONE TO PIECES. This life-terminating strategy is usually implemented by tying the victim's arms to the back ends of one horse-drawn vehicle; the legs, to those of another. The horses are then suitably motivated to gallop off in opposite directions. The procedure has been highly recommended as a spectator sport.

THUGGEE (or THUGGISM). The system of secret assassination by strangling practiced by thugs or phansigars, usually disguised as pilgrims or travelers, acting in the service of Kali or Devi, the Hindu goddess of destruction - portrayed as dripping with blood, encircled with snakes, and adorned with skulls. Her worship is appropriately attended with obscene and bloody rites.

TRUCIDATION. An elegant term for killing or slaughter. Our everyday vocabulary can be enhanced significantly by sprinkling words such as "trucidation" through it.

UNFLESHING. A simple, yet vivid term for the process of depriving a victim of his or her flesh, until only the skeleton remains: terminal emaciation.

VAMPIRISM. The action of a vampire - a spectral being or ghost still possessing a human body - which leaves its grave during the night and maintains a semblance of life by sucking warm blood from the bodies of living men and women while they are asleep. The condition of the victim soon becomes terminal. Dead wizards, werewolves, heretics, and bastard offspring of bastards also become vampires. A vampire is rendered harmless by disinterring its fresh, ruddy body, thrusting a whitethorn stake through it, and burning it.

VOODOO DEATH. Death as the result of a spell placed on the victim by a voodoo conjurer: one who deals in charms, snake worship, witchcraft, and - in some instances - cannibalism and human sacrifice. The spell may be either malicious or defensive in intent.

WAGANG (or WA'GANG, or WA-GANG). Death viewed as a final going away or adieu.

WAGES OF SIN. Death viewed as a fitting recompense for disobedience to the divine will. Warning: do not confuse such sin with sin, the 21st letter of the Hebrew alphabet, or with Sin, the Babylonian and Assyrian moon god conceived as the lord of wisdom, dispeller of darkness and its evils, and giver of dreams and oracles.

WINTERKILLING. Death as the result of exposure to winter weather. The term is occasionally also applied to the death of wheat.

WITCHCRAFT. A means for dispatching an individual to another
life that requires terminating his or her life in this world by em­ploying occult practices involving dealings with the devil or with spirits. Witchcraft was formerly considered a crime. Also see NEC­ROMANCY and SORCERY, above.

YIELDING UP THE GHOST (or THE BREATH, or THE LIFE). An ad­mirably florid equivalent for "death" or "expiry." Taken literally, it conjures up visions of an ethereal being separating itself from the physical body, leaving that body lifeless.

The foregoing glossary makes no pretense to being complete. Read­ers are encouraged to submit appropriate additions to it: words and terms of a similar nature that I have overlooked.

Left untouched by this article is the problem with which it be­gan: that of the imbalance between birth and death. I invite read­ers to try assembling a list of terms for birth comparable in their richness and diversity to those for death presented here.

AN ACRONYM DICTIONARY

In February 1983, Word Ways reviewed the two-volume 8th edition of the Gale Research Company Acronyms, Initialisms, and Abbreviations Dictionary. Five years later, the 12th edition has been issued, expanded to three volumes, with 420,000 entries instead of the previous 250,000. (Its price has risen correspondingly, from $98 to $190.) There seems little doubt that acronyms are experiencing explosive growth, far greater than dictionary words. Yet logologists have paid little atten­tion to acronyms as a source of interesting "words" and re­search problems. For example, if one wishes to generate a unique acronym, how many letters must one use? Are some letters systematically less-used than others? Are there any "rules" governing the way in which letters beyond the initial one are included in an abbreviation? On a less-scholarly plane, a patient combing of entries should yield the raw material for a light-hearted article on odd (or spoofing) or­ganizations and causes: consider AAAAAA (Association for the Alleviation of Asinine Abbreviations and Absurd Acronyms) or ABCDEFGHIJ (Automobile Builders' Combination Designed Especially For Getting Hitler Including Japan). (Additional examples can be found in the earlier review.)