

The Wordplay Project

In conjunction with T&W's recent bestseller, The Dictionary of Wordplay by Dave Morice, Teachers & Writers invited several contemporary American poets to celebrate the spirit of wordplay by writing poems that incorporate wordplay into their form and/or content. We encouraged the poets to peruse the Dictionary's more than 1,234 entries, then to choose from wordplay genres that have direct poetic equivalents (e.g., the homophonic poem, the acrostic, macaronic verse, and palindromic verse) or find their own ways of transforming wordplay into poems. Here are two of the results.—the Editors

A ZEUGMA BY
MARJORIE WELISH

Palpitating Object

She who was selectively labyrinthine, a song without words
in anticipation of itineraries, whereabouts
with a noun from the column below, a verb from the almanac.
Say something that works by defect, by cross-talk
something that divides and ramifies attractively, laterally,
divides and attracts a skirmish, a harvest of scree
dressed in sheep's clothing—how intriguing, how forgetful!
A song without words was day-to-day, one-on-one.

Zeugma: connecting any two parts of speech
by any other part of speech.

Zeugma: a work written with a myriad
of zeugmas.

The word comes from *zeugos*, the Greek word for "yoked." A zeugma can be serious, as in the first example below, or humorous, as in the second example:

Much he the place admired, the person more.
(Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.444)

William was going crazy and to the store.
(Dave Morice, "Going Crazy and to the Store")

AN ERNULPHUS CURSE BY
SUSAN WHEELER

The Spirits Daughters Sooth Will Drink

Grin as though you've shirked;
Equivocate your mirth.
Oh, the itch your fine re-birth
Renders not a bit less urgent!
Go and call on your protectants
Employed for the sourest work.

(What failed us that we you are brought?)

Before the wagging dishrags stop
Up your naps with silt you sought
So wormily to leave behind,
Help extricate your kind.

Ernulphus Curse: an acrostic poem written to
condemn the subject.

The most common type of acrostic is a poem in
which the initials of the lines from start to finish spell the name of the individual to whom it is
addressed. (In Wheeler's case, the name is "George W. Bush.")