



# Anagrammatismos

Building Blocks of Modern Poetry

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# **Anagrammatismos**

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Poetry has a history. It was something then. It is something now. Leave aside the possibility that a structure of rhythm and rhyme may once have been useful or necessary as a memory aid:

*Thirtey days hath November;  
 Aprile, June, and September:  
 Of twyecescore-eightt is but eine,  
 And all the remnante be thrycescore-eine.  
 O'course Leap yare comes an'pynes,  
 Ev'rie foure yares, gote it ryghth.  
 An'twyecescore-eight is but twyecescore-nyne.<sup>1</sup>*

Leave aside all speculation about beauty being truth,<sup>2</sup> about “conciseness, echoes and resonances,”<sup>3</sup> or about “saving power from itself.”<sup>4</sup> Every poem is just a bunch of words, and any bunch of words might be a poem. Like all art, poetry exists on a continuum: between “Whose woods these are I think I know...”<sup>5</sup> and “I know who owns these fuckin’ woods...” are more than a few cultural expectations, different sorts of pleasure or pain, and who-knows-what-else that might be tickled in any given cerebral cortex. To the extent that it tricks the brain into feelings or even knowledge not exactly contained in the mere meaning of the words, poetry might be characterized as deceptive. And that is why it is possible to take pleasure in poetry. Not in spite of the fact that, but precisely because, it is willfully and transparently deceptive.

The more recent a poem—the farther it is from having been conceived in a state of naïveté or promoted as a useful modality—the more deceitful it must be. But that hardly ensures that recent poetry is increasingly pleasurable. We get bored; our initial interest in new modes of expression quickly sours, and so we enter an epoch where the search for new modes of expression becomes predictable and the production of poetry becomes, ipso facto, cynical. To escape this cycle of boredom and cynicism, the contemporary poem must either link itself to some other medium so that the risk of boredom is reduced—the fine arts, dance, and music are the most obvious choices—or else contort its content and form so that it can address, exploit, and embrace precisely the cynical context in which it languishes and which it cannot, in any event, escape.

The poems in this anthology all subscribe to the latter strategy. Like Le Corbusier’s *Modulor*, famously described by Einstein as a “scale of proportions which makes the bad difficult and the good easy,”<sup>6</sup> these poems cynically exploit a structural device that also “makes the bad difficult and the good easy.” This poetic tool

is deceptively simple, and cynically efficient. Every poem in the collection has the same literal content: 144 letters based on a probabilistic distribution of the alphabet as determined by the award-winning creators of the anagram game, Bananagrams®.

Using this fixed set of letters, no conventional poem can be made. Every instinct to be trite, or clever, or predictable, or even to make sense, is frustrated and sabotaged. As a direct result, boredom is impossible, or at least made “difficult”; and the poems that emerge are inevitably “good,” if not necessarily “easy.”

All other prior poetic structures can now be clearly seen for what they are. Rules constraining rhythm or meter—whether deployed to create sonnets or haikus—are simply too open-ended. Their alleged formal discipline still permits the freedom to create meaning and purposeful expression, so that all such poems become inherently incompatible with modern taste. There are just too many rhyming words in the English language, and too many alternative linguistic formulations, for any rhythmic or metrical constraint to pose a serious challenge or offer any real resistance.

But try making sense when you’ve run out of the letter “t,” or when you are forced to deploy your last “q.” All conventional instinct and precedent become immediately useless. In fact, reference to any familiar mode of communication comes to a screeching halt. Yet it is not just the challenge to coherence that makes these poems astounding. It is the simultaneous transparency of the artists’ struggles and the cynicism of their attempts, that gives these poems an appeal that is at once visceral and intellectual.

## Notes

1. A medieval version of the famous rhyming poem.
2. George Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, 1819
3. Damaris West, <http://www.poem-and-poet.com/history-of-poetry.asp>
4. John Kennedy, “Poetry and Power,” *The Atlantic*, February, 1964
5. Robert Frost, “Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening,” 1923
6. The Einstein quote is deliberately taken out of context by Le Corbusier in his 1958 edition of *Le Modulor*. Le Corbusier pretends that Einstein is endorsing his proportional system when, in fact, Einstein is only politely paraphrasing what Le Corbusier has told him (the full quote goes something like this: “So, as I understand it, what you’re saying is that this *Modulor* is a scale of proportions which makes...”).

**A GOOD ELEMENTARY JAIL WINDING QUIET LIKE PAIN  
JAB THE BIG WAVE VEXED  
A POUR  
A VOW  
A DUB  
ZERO COMES FIRST COMES QUICK  
IF ANYTHING UPSETS THE ORDER  
FIND YOUR ZONE  
OR AT LEAST RELAX**

Untitled #91  
Jonathan 10/30/10

**CALL ME ISHMAEL SOME YEARS AGO NEVER  
THATS ABOUT IT  
WAKE YOUR FAT BABY  
QUEEN UNIDID QUEEN  
JOVE FLIPPING JOVE  
ZIG FIX  
I CANT PARK ADDITIONAL  
WORDS WITHOUT EXCEEDING ZERO ERRORS**

Untitled #94  
Jonathan 11/4/10

**COULD THE SAINTS WIN  
JAUNTY BREES WITH QUICK ARM  
DROVE ON**

**MAKE JAZZ NOT WAR  
A GOOD DARE  
PAIR OF GLOVE  
AX TAX**

**IF YOU BELIEVE  
QUEER ARTICLE IN TIMES  
IT DEPENDS ON PLAY OF  
REGGIE BUSH**

Untitled #40  
Jonathan 2/7/10

**EXQUISITE VANILLA COCOA DOUGHNUTS  
JUNK FOOD PARADISE YUMMY SQUIRREL PIE  
COWED LIKE ZERO FLAVORED WAFER  
EXAMINE JABBING WIRE VAPOR GAZE**

**IT DOES NOT GET ANY BETTER THAN THIS**

Untitled #8  
Jonathan 1/15/10



GAGGING REMAIN HURT  
COKE CAN BE OPEN MIDWAY  
A VALVE AXED  
POORLY FIXED  
JAW DROPS IN DISBELIEF  
USER BEWARE  
JURYS OUT ON THAT ONE  
QUICK  
ROAM QUIET  
AHA DONT LET IT EVER  
LOSE ITS FIZZ

Untitled #55  
Jonathan 3/6/10

**I AM BUYING THESE INDUCTION RANGES  
A QUIRKY  
ZIG ZAG  
CONVECTION OVEN  
  
TOP EXHAUST  
QUITE JIVE  
FIRMED FOOD  
A RAW RARE HAM  
DAD IT JUST LOOKS SEXY  
BEEF WELL DONE WILL APPEAR TO BE RARE**

Untitled #65  
Jonathan 8/22/10

I SQUARED LIMEY  
I FEAR FIXER  
I JABBER  
QUIET DONT COMPLAIN TO THE FUZZ  
YOU NEVER KNOW EXACTLY HOW

I IMAGINE A VALVE  
ADD IN JAB GAG  
CEST LA GUERRE DOESNT WORK  
I DONT USE APOSTROPHES

Untitled #93  
Jonathan 10/31/10

**JOIN ME FOR A QUIZ  
WITHOUT A SINGLE QUESTION**

**GIVE EXPERT  
ADVICE ON SUBJECTS YOU FAILED MISERABLY  
FOOLISH PINK VOTER**

**UNDREAMED PAGE RANK**

**RARE BOOZED RAG**

**EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED**

Untitled #6  
Jonathan 1/11/10

**LAX TAX JOKER WEB FRAME  
APPROVED  
QUIRKY UNUSUAL MEDICATIONS CONTAINING  
ZERO WHEAT MEAT OR  
QUESTIONABLE JUICE HAVE INGREDIENT  
PRIZED BY IDIOTS  
  
WHEATLESS EGGY FOOD FLAVOR**

Untitled #5  
Jonathan 1/9/10

MEAGER  
YOU WOULD THINK THAT THOSE SIX LETTERS  
WOULD PERMIT ANY  
QUIZZICAL OR CONVENTIONAL JOINING OF WORDS  
DREAM  
EXACT FIVE  
A JEER AND A BASE APE  
EVERY BAG OR BIKE FUDGES I QUIP

Untitled #92  
Jonathan 10/31/10

NO  
NOTHING SEEMED VERY QUICK OR EASY  
ZERO POUND  
  
I BOX A BIG BULKY QUILTED CROW JAM LOAF  
  
PERHAPS JAIL FIVE UNACTIVATED MALES  
OR FORGET TO USE WAXIER GAZE  
  
WAIT  
AND IN THE END I REST

Untitled #3  
Jonathan 1/9/10

**ON MY BIRTHDAY THERE WAS AN EXPLOSION  
NEXT DOOR TO AN UNUSUALLY QUIET OFFICE  
THAT SEEMED QUITE VIOLENT**

**FUCK I SAID**

**WE REALIZED A JAGGED MIRROR BREAKS  
ZIPPING OVER WEB COG JAVA**

Untitled #1  
Jonathan 1/8/10



SEARCH ME  
GIVE AIM  
WAIL A GROOVY JOY  
JERK MEAT  
I WIPE THE OZONE LAYER BARE  
A LOVE FAZED  
QUESTIONS ABOUND  
TAXING TEXTING  
QUICK FIND THE LAST WORD  
UNDER PRESSURE OF PUBLICATION

Untitled #60  
Jonathan 4/18/10

UBIQUITOUS I SAID  
ALL OVER THERE  
EXACTLY AS YOU EXPECTED  
QUICK NAME SEVEN THINGS I THINK ABOUT  
FROM JEWELRY JAMS BIG FRIEND NEEDED  
WAG TAIL ZOO PANDA OR  
WAVE FINGER ZOO PARROT

Untitled #20  
Jonathan 1/23/10

**VERY FUNNY  
QUEER  
SO VERY QUEER  
AMAZING**

**VEXING AS SEINFELD SAID  
AMAZED WHERE GLOBAL WARMING  
ICE OUT TWICE TAX CUT PAID**

**RUDER PHOTO FIT  
RIP BOOT BIT**

**NO JOKE  
NO JOKE AT ALL SHE SAID**

Untitled #29  
Jonathan 1/30/10

VISITING CAMP  
DUG DUST  
I IMAGINED A JOB OF ZERO PAIN  
TAKE NO EXAMS  
JOBS BRANDED FREE  
WE REALIZED  
QUITE UNLIKELY TO PROVE EXACT OR EVEN TRUE  
WHO CARES  
HIGH OR LOW QUALITY FANTASY

Untitled #66  
Jonathan 8/22/10

**WAITING FOR A SUPER BOWL  
HAVE TO BELIEVE COLTS WIN  
REQUIRES A QUICK BLITZ REFLEX**

**YOUR GAZE  
SOME JIVE FAME**

**SCARY PADDING HAS ODOR  
PAY ATTENTION TO THE AD  
DURING UNEXAMINED JOKE**

Untitled #39  
Jonathan 2/7/10

YOU FIND A WORD  
ANY EXACT BOOT SIZE WORKS  
I WAIL PAIN  
I CABLE MOON MILE VERVE  
I FEEL EAGER ABOUT GOOP  
JUDGE JURY ARE NEVER QUICK TO MUSE  
THE HARDEST PART IS FINDING THE LAST Q X AND Z

Untitled #90  
Jonathan 10/30/10

**ZERO TOLERANCE  
NO QUESTION OF IDEA  
FEEL LIKE THIS IS CHEATING  
QUICK TWO MORE PAGES  
A MAZE A JAG HEX  
JURY OUT WAVE DADDY**

**DOLT  
PAX  
VAN**

**GREAT PRINTER  
NUMBER IS NOW DIVISIBLE BY FOUR**

Untitled #108  
Jonathan 12/2/10





Each poem in this compilation contains exactly 144 letters. Moreover, each poem contains the same predetermined number of A's, B's, C's, and so on. This distribution of letters corresponds to the distribution of letters in the award-winning anagram game, Bananagrams®, and is reproduced in Table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of Letters**

Letter	Number of letters in each poem
A	13
B	3
C	3
D	6
E	18
F	3
G	4
H	3
I	12
J	2
K	2
L	5
M	3
N	8
O	11
P	3
Q	2
R	9
S	6
T	9
U	6
V	3
W	3
X	2
Y	3
Z	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>

