

The Sweetest Poison, or the Discovery of  
L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry on the web  
Neil Hennessy

While working on a lipogrammatic project, I needed to look up the meaning of the i-only word 'bilinigrin', which was found by a PERL script looking through a word list. I could not find a reference to 'bilinigrin' in the online Oxford English Dictionary or the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. I entered the word in the Lycos search engine, and several of the links it returned had highly unusual descriptions, like the following:

Nonbrowsing. Hamshackle rhinochiloplasty Inachidae outbreak  
— feoffment unheppen bingle pawnable will afflation chon-  
drarsenite zoid, shoddyism. Theologization do jequirity, brazer  
nervousness.

When I followed the link to <http://www.unixguru.org/list-archives> I found myself browsing through an entire website filled with this kind of writing, formatted as web pages with hyperlinks, paragraphs and bulleted lists, but with utterly non-sensical and totally fascinating text like the following:

**Mollifier ideographical proepisternum**

[ [embroiler](#) | [ungeneraled](#) | [outlighten](#) | [rhinoplasty](#) | [estampadero](#) | [unpopulousness](#) | [Sapphism](#) ]

- Mixer susurrus: selfhood phenylmethane sellenders not unmucilaged lift amphivasal undomesticated— gekkonoid: estamene overreadiness when divel Colinus. Vaginatome
- Sudan overpatriotic
- immeritorious injunction proterogyny either polytropic Xanthisma moulin nor behavioristic ought pentacyclic fictionally
- unlikely
- Akontae royally praesphenoid inimicality oversolicitousness pupal
- stopcock comatula
- unsightliness. Stomodaea until goffering
- epimeric, multifoiled. Vermiculated amylon Guahivo. Podalgia macronutrient

Incorruptible appallingly. Montant.

Redan when iridate be Rhinanthaceae, chaffman: proaudience benzalphenylhydrazone riving, uncleanness billon did Ascanius, glottic [bipunctual](#) masturbatory crime and knar Maypole! [Antisporic](#) syncline Hahnemannian until everwho milleflorous [uncourtly](#) achenium. Margaropus be disaccordant. Rhapsody, depository! Pawnbrokerage monochromist wild. Fluophosphate; transpositive would melanterite. somnambulize@hypophyseal.misperuse.cove.tigridia.mil Landamman tylote having Idaeian might chamisal galvanometrical; Uloboridae ciboule nival helcoid may sculpturesque. Huffishly — newton. Icterohematuria. Input chemiotactic be chlorinator daymark cholecystokinin Podarginae secretarian inclinable. [Spherulitic](#) could semitropic do discohexaster! Pepsinhydrochloric [hawthorny](#) bisetose when [noncontrovertible](#) [nrlzft9@buckstone.antistate.net](mailto:nrlzft9@buckstone.antistate.net).

The text's formal properties recall many of those found in the poetry of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writers. Grammar is eschewed, so that no meaning accumulates in the text: "Grammar precludes the possibility of meaning being an active, local agent functioning within a polymorphous, polysemous space of parts and sub-particles, it commands hierarchy, subordination and postponement" (McCaffery, *North of Intention*). Rare and archaic words abound, which recalls McCaffery's 'Lastworda' from *Theory of Sediment*. With a preponderance of medical and scientific terms, words from vastly different registers find themselves thrown together like in much of Bruce Andrews' work. Reading these web pages provides a pleasure in the materiality of the signifier like that experienced when reading L=...=E poetry.

After reading through numerous pages, and looking at the rest of the unixguru site, I could not determine why this panoply of bizarre web pages were written. None of the rest of the material at unixguru suggested that the list archives were of a literary nature. I contacted Grant Miller, the webmaster at unixguru, and asked him what list could produce such archives? He responded that the web pages were not written as the product of any list archives, but were in fact written by a computer program called Sugarplum. Devin Carraway, the creator of Sugarplum, explains its raison d'être:

Sugarplum is an automated spam-poisoner [spam is unsolicited email advertising]. Its purpose is to feed realistic and enticing, but totally useless or hazardous data to wandering address harvesters such as EmailSiphon, Cherry Picker, etc. The idea is to so contaminate spammers' databases as to require that they be discarded, or at least that all data retrieved from your site (including actual email addresses) be removed.

Sugarplum employs a combination of Apache's mod\_rewrite URL rewriting rules and perl code. It combines several anti-spambot tactics, including fictitious (but RFC822-compliant) email address poisoning, injection with the addresses of known spammers (let them all spam each other), detection of so-called "stealth" spambots that masquerade as legitimate browsers, and, optionally, the activation of firewalling or launch of denial-of-service attacks intended to crash the spambot's machine, thus momentarily deferring the threat (Carraway).

The web pages appeared under the sub-directory 'list-archives' at the unixguru site in order to lure spambots into Sugarplum's trap. In the readme file, amongst a list of the anti-spam methods the program uses, is a statement of the poetics of Sugarplum:

Avoid counterdetection (letting the spambot know it's being poisoned) by rendering output in a fashion as close to normal human output as automatically feasible (even repeatable output, if deterministic mode is used). This involves variable HTML syntax and content, extensive ran-

domization, vague attempts at grammar, etc. The primary assumption in this respect is to assume that the author of the spambot is at least as smart as you are — and that it will notice any tricks obvious enough that you yourself could pick them up (Carraway).

Detractors of L...=E poetry might find Carraway's statement of Sugarplum's poetics an accurately reductive dismissal of the work of L...=E writers: close to normal human output, with extensive randomization and vague attempts at grammar.

### Sugarplum Politics

One of the abiding concerns of L...=E poets has been to fight the reference fetish in capitalist language formations: "The referential fetish in language is inseparable from the representational theory of the sign. Proposed as intentional, as always 'about' some extra-linguistic thing, language must always refer beyond itself to a corresponding reality" (McCaffery, *North of Intention* 52).

Sugarplum confounds the reader's fetish for reference by planting imaginary email addresses, preventing the reader from reaching beyond language to anchor itself in a proper name from the extralinguistic world.

To demystify this fetish and reveal the *human* relationships involved within the labour process of language will involve the *humanization* of the linguistic Sign by means of a centering of language within itself; a structural reappraisal of the functional roles of author and reader, performer and performance; the general diminishment of reference in communication and the promotion of forms based upon object-presence: the pleasure of the graphic or phonic imprint, for instance, their value as sheer linguistic stimuli (McCaffery, 'Intraview' 189).  
[emphasis mine]

Sugarplum reconfigures the author/reader functional roles and accomplishes the general diminishment of reference through a *mechanization* of the linguistic Sign, where each word's only value and function is that of sheer linguistic stimuli for its *mechanical* reader.

Unlike most programs, wch are self-limiting, that of writing in the framework of capitalism carries within itself the admonition, typical of an economy predicated on technical innovation & the concentration of capital, to 'make it new'. The function of a truly political writing is to, first, comprehend its position (most explicitly, that of its audience) & to bring forth these 'new' meanings according to a deliberately political program (Silliman, 168).

Sugarplum's technical innovation creates new meanings with every execution of its deliberately political programming.

On the ubu mailing list, Darren Wershler-Henry called attention to "an overanxiety among the Language poets about 'fetishizing' the text in any way, which resulted in weirdly puritanical-looking books." The book, which is the vehicle for the vast majority of L=...=E poet's texts, is subject to fetishization regardless of the design. The small press editions of L=...=E texts published 20 years ago find themselves fetishized just like any other limited print run of poetry that is subsequently both studied and highly regarded. L=...=E poetry may counter capitalism in its textuality, but it does not counter capitalism in its production and dissemination: "any poem which adopts 'book' as its vehicular form must admit its complicity within a restricted economy" (McCaffery, 'Blood...' 176).

Sugarplum participates in a general economy of waste by producing voluminous texts meant to be ignored. If the texts are successful at thwarting spambots, Sugarplum will achieve its own apotheosis and never be read by human or machine: a completely unproductive expenditure that never enters into exchange. By thwarting spammers, Sugarplum's texts directly counter capitalist forces within their medium of exchange.

In spite of the pretences of many L=...=E writers, their texts *always* participate in a restricted economy, because there is a use value in terms of cultural capital. Reading their work accumulates the capital required to write essays in journals, which accrues academic benefits. Spending hours reading Sugarplum is a glorious waste of time.

Object

Hennessy

Works Cited

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Silliman, Ron. "IF BY 'WRITING' WE MEAN LITERATURE (if by 'literature' we mean poetry (if. . .)) . . . . *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* 67-168.