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Reference

Logodaedaly, or, Sleight of Words: A Dictionary of the Imagination
Erzsébet Gilbert
Sherise Talbott, illustrator
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Reading dictionaries is a particular delight enjoyed by those who find words fascinating. It may sound silly to those not as enamored of language as logophiles, but this practice builds vocabulary as it aids the mind in acquiring more information.

Erzsébet Gilbert has plucked over a hundred words from the Oxford English Dictionary—that noble tome from which all other dictionaries surely arise—and constructed an abridged version with fictional vignettes in each entry. Not only that, Gilbert skillfully weaves certain characters through the book via these flash-fiction additions. Some examples carry a dreamy quality, while others are clearly meant to be funny as well as clever.

The title refers to having a flair with words, which Gilbert has in abundance. Each entry includes a pronunciation guide, derivation, part of speech, and definition. No linear story line exists as it would in a short story or novel, but the fictional elements of each entry are coherent and complete, as well as containing the use of the word in question.

The genius of this book is in Gilbert's choice of words that are not typically used in English these days. She devised each entry's fictive portion with a specific year attached—and then wrote the flash fiction in the style prevalent for that year. Thus, for "wasserman" (a man-shaped sea monster): "(1533 ANONYMOUS. *Bestiarium Maestitia)* p 11 We depart to fight the Wasserman, and we daren't go unarmed. For we hath heard those Horros of the Lost Galleon, as tolden by the survivors whose near-drown'd skin hath turned entirely as Weed-of-Sea."

Illustrator Sherise Talbott's black-and-white drawings are well-executed whimsies which also visually define the entries where they appear. Some, like the entry for "tribuloid," "bearing prickly or spiny fruit," have straightforward illustrations, while others are more fanciful and even humorous. A spider hanging from its silk thread cleverly illuminates "filipendulous."

Logodaedaly would make a welcome gift to anyone interested in the English language,

from linguists to librarians. It can be sampled at leisure, and indeed should be, because not even logophiles read a dictionary as they would a novel. Opening this book is thrilling, something like getting a box of chocolates with no guide to what's inside them. Verbal effervescence of this caliber is a rare treat. Highly recommended.

J. G. Stinson