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# INTRODUCTION

T Campbell, editor

Sometimes I jump the gun. I tinkered a bit with the "presidential rectangle problem," in which one tries to fit the last name of every US president into the smallest possible cris-crossword grid. But I'd forgotten some better work had already been done on that by Michael Keith, who was kind enough to share his results with me.

And now I'm gearing up to share them with you!

Most of these grids were published in *Interim* a few years back (the "interim" publication that ran between the end of *Word Ways* and the start of *The Journal of Wordplay).* We don't do straight-up reprints here, but I figured a re-presentation of his grids would be in order!

There's his 410-square, ten-unit high version:

```
     1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41
 1       T           M O N R O E       L I N C O L N       J E F F E R S O N       G A R F I E L D
 2   H A R D I N G           O     I             L       I     A           E                   I               K
 3   A   U       R   H   O   S   T Y L E R   X   C           A       M C K I N L E Y               E
 4   Y   M   O   A D A M S   E   A       V   P O L K       W   G   H             L       M       N
 5   E   P   B   N   R   E   N   F       E   N   S   I   A   H               M       A       N
 6   S     C A R T E R   V   H   T A Y L O R     O   C L I N T O N       C O O L I D G E
 7     B   M       I   E   O       A   F   N   S       O           R       I   D
 8   T R U M A N       S   L   W A S H I N G T O N       O       V A N B U R E N       S       Y
 9     S           O   T   E       D   R       N       E           O
10   J O H N S O N       N       A R T H U R   B I D E N         P I E R C E   B U C H A N A N
```

His 420-square version with VAN BUREN as separate words:

```
     1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42
 1   M C K I N L E Y     T R U M P       H       C       M           G   T   W           E
 2   G   L               A       A       J A C K S O N           R E A G A N           I       K
 3   A   E   J   H       C   D   A   Y   B   R       N   F   A   F   S   B   S   E
 4   R   V   O   A       O   P I E R C E   U   T Y L E R   B I D E N   T   H   U   E   N
 5   F   E   H A R R I S O N   S   T   S   C   E       O   L   T   W I L S O N       N
 6   I   L   N   D       L   O   H       H   R O O S E V E L T   P   N   H   H       E
 7   E   A   S   I   N I X O N   U       A   B           M   O   G       F O R D
 8   L I N C O L N       D       T R U M A N   A   T A Y L O R   C L I N T O N   W   Y
 9   D   D   N   G       G           A D A M S       R       K   O       E
10               J E F F E R S O N   N   A   H O O V E R         V A N     B U R E N
```

A six-unit tall version (444 squares):

```
E I S E N H O W E R   L I N C O L N   T         M C K I N L E Y
          O           E           A   R         O               T           J
F I L L M O R E   A R T H U R       B U C H A N A N         P I E R C E
O         V       G           T A F T   M       R             O       U
R   C L E V E L A N D         E           A     R O O S E V E L T   M A D I S
D         R       N   H A R R I S O N           E               K       P
```

```
T             C O O L I D G E         B                       T           W
A C K S O N                   R H     U     B   K E N N E D Y       C L I N T O N
Y         B                 A D A M S       I         I       L         L
L   W A S H I N G T O N       Y   H A R D I N G   X   J E F F E R S O N
O N       M                 T   E         E           O       R             O
R   G A R F I E L D           S     V A N B U R E N             J O H N S O N
```

And a 21x21 square (441, left). I only managed 22x22 squares, though I did do one with separated VAN BUREN (right):

```
    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21
 1  G   G   T       N     H                     C     C
 2  R E A G A N       I     A     J     W I L S O N
 3  A   R   Y       X     Y     A     A     I         O
 4  N   F I L L M O R E     C     S     N     L           B
 5  T   I   O       N     S     K     H     T     I       U
 6      E   R         B         S     I     O   D         C
 7      L     M     L I N C O L N     N     G         H
 8  M A D I S O N     D     N     G           E         A
 9            N     E             T               V     N
10  J E F F E R S O N     M     O       O B A M A
11            O             C     N             N     N
12    R O O S E V E L T     K               B
13            I     A     I     H             U
14    T R U M P     S     F     N     A R T H U R   K
15            O     E     T Y L E R     A     E         E
16  C L E V E L A N D     E     D     R     N     N
17  A       K     H     A     Y     I     R         N
18  R   B     F O R D           N     P I E R C E
19  T R U M A N     W     A     G     S           D
20  E   S         E     M         O             Y
21  R   H O O V E R     S             J O H N S O N
```

```
        P     J O H N S O N                       W
        I     E     O                             I
        E   F     O     V             P       L
        R   F     V     A             O     S   K
        C L E V E L A N D     F I L L M O R E
    B   E   R     R                 K     N   N
    I         S           B                   N
    D         O           U             C A R T E R
    E I S E N H O W E R               L         D
    N           A     A   E     M C K I N L E Y
        H A R R I S O N         O     N
        T     R   D   H         N     T A Y L O R
        R     T   I   I     F O R D   O           O
    B U C H A N A N             O     N     N I X O N
        M     U   G     G A R F I E L D             S
        P     R       T               I     T   M   E
    T           O B A M A       N     Y     A   V
    A     R E A G A N           C O O L I D G E
    F         D           B     O     E   I     L
    T R U M A N           U     L     R   S     T
              M       J A C K S O N             O
    H A Y E S           H           G R A N T
```

One thing I wish more people understood is that it's a *privilege* to be corrected, to know there are readers out there who share your passion and will improve your efforts. I've got a competitive streak for sure, and this isn't the first time I've gone for a record without knowing what the *true* record-setting precedent was. Sometimes learning that just inspires you to dream bigger.

We've got the fruits of some big dreams this time out, but lots of cool little stuff too: a vowel-string exercise you may be able to top, a new collection of "last words," a couple of fun "deca"-games for our tenth issue, collections of palindromes, puns, and rhyming synonyms, a scholarly report on bilingual palindromes, a meditation on word-square narratives, an interview with a comics writer about his own language plays—and an extensive account of the most dramatic years in the history of crosswords' development. Thanks for reading!

# MORE LAST WORDS
Jeff Grant

In Vol. 8 of *TJoW,* T Campbell, with contributions from Darryl Francis and Eric Chaikin, takes a modern look at finding the last words that follow each successive letter in words beginning A to Z. This challenge was originally undertaken by Francis (Aug 1972) and Dmitri Borgmann (Aug 1974) in *Word Ways* magazine.

For the following list we have included proper nouns, mainly place names and personal names. Some are contrived and fanciful. Some have appeared before, but most are new. A number of letters could certainly use improved examples. With a challenge like this it is often hard to draw a line of acceptability. Nevertheless, variety makes it an interesting collection.

**azzy-tree:** a type of hawthorn. [EDD]

**bzzzt:** variant of **bzzt**, the sound of a buzzer or of electricity. Often used as a reaction to a wrong answer. [Wikt]

**CzzzyL:** brand of women's maternity and nursing clothes. [Net]

**Dzzyzzle:** Dzana **Dzzyzzle** is a beauty and fashion influencer. [Net]

**Ezzy:** diminutive of the male given name Ezra or Ezekiel; also a British surname. [Net]

**Fzer:** another name for Wadi Fuzayr, a dry waterbed in the Al Marj region, northeast Libya. [Geo]

**Gzyz:** a rare surname, likely Polish in origin, found mainly in western Europe. [forebears.io (Net)] John **Gzyz** is buried in West St. Paul, Manitoba, Canada. [findagrave.com (Net)]

**Hzz:** reptilian Cavelands creature in *The Phantom* comic strip [PhantomWiki (Net)] I remember him from my childhood.

**Izzy:** short for the given names Isabel, Israel, Isaac, etc. [Wiki]

**Jzhidka:** variant of Jhidka, a settlement in the Transbaikal region of Russia. [Geo]

**Kzyl-Zharma:** variant of Qyzylzharma, a populated place in south-central Kazakhstan. [Geo]

**Lzzy:** variant of the female given name Lizzy (from Elizabeth). **Lzzy** Hale is lead singer of the American rock band Halestorm. [Wiki]

**Mzymtella:** genus of campanula (bellflowers), named after the **Mzymta** River in the Caucasus region, Russia. [International Plant Names Index (Net)]

**Nzyshat:** a form of "Nsisket," a village of the Nicola band of the Ntlakyapamuk (Salish) Indians in British Colombia, Canada. [*Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, F W Hodge, 1963]

**Ozzying:** sanding with an Osborne brush, a term used in log house restoration. [Net]

**Pzzazz:** variant of "pzazz," form of "pizzazz," sparkle, vitality, glamour.
'I still think that dress lacks a bit of **pzzazz**." [*All Inclusive*, J Astley, 2011, p252]

**Qziljah:** a settlement in the east Kurdistan region, Iraq. [Geo]

**Rzywno:** a village in north-central Poland. [Wiki]

**Szyza:** a rare surname, possibly Polish in origin. There are 19 people named **Szyza** on forebears.io [Net] Oliver **Szyza** is a film and TV editor [Net]

**Tzympe:** the original Byzantine name for Cimpe Castle, a medieval fortification which once stood on Gallipoli peninsula, Turkey. [Wiki]

**Uzzy:** nickname of Usman "**Uzzy**" Ahmed, former English professional boxer. [Wiki] Also a form of the Hebrew male names Uzzi and Uzziah. [Net]

**vzifur:** variant of "uzifur," an old name for cinnabar, mercuric sulphide. [MED, "uzifur" quots.]
**Vzzle** is a rare surname with 26 records on ancestry.com. [Net]

**Wzory:** a village in southeast Poland. [Wiki]

**Xzyte:** an online e-bike and e-scooter store. [Facebook (Net)]
**Xzavier** is a variant of the male given name Xavier. [*35,000+ Baby Names*, B Lansky, 1995] The form **Xzzavier** is also known, eg Malcolm **Xzzavier** Edelin of Cheltenham, Maryland, U.S. [Net]

**Yzzy:** usually a nickname of Ysabel, Ysrael, etc., but sometimes used as a gender-neutral stand-alone name. [Net] The surname **Yzzy** is recorded 10 times in South America. [forebears.io (Net)]

**Zyzzyzus:** a genus of marine tubulariid hydrozoans. [Wiki] Perhaps the last word before multi-Z examples. It is intended to be the final taxonomic name on any list, ahead of **zyzzyva**, a tropical weevil [CSD] and **Zyzzyx**, a genus of sand wasp. [Wiki]

The last entries in the international Scrabble lexicon are the "sleep" words **zzz** and **zzzs**. [CSD] Dmitri notes **zzzz**, to snore [ATS] and suggests the possibility of **zzzzing/s**.

At one time Mr Zachary **Zzzzzzzzzra** of San Francisco, U.S., was the last name in any telephone directory [*Guinness Book of Records*, 1991], but he was later surpassed by even more outlandish names. Then the Guinness people dropped the entire "Language" section from their book!

Darryl mentions a 43-Z representation of snoring [OED, "z," 1983 quot.] This is the penultimate entry in *Palindromicon 2*, a palindrome dictionary (J Grant, D Tilque, 2002), the last "word" of which is a 288-Z "snore" from a 2001 NZ newspaper.

No doubt there are longer buzzing or snoring Z-chains on the Net, but this kind of search could become rather bor…zzzzz…etc.

References
ATS *American Thesaurus of Slang*, Berrey and Van den Bark, 2nd ed., 1953
CSD *Collins Scrabble Dictionary*, 2019
EDD *English Dialect Dictionary*, J Wright, 1970 ed.
Geo GeoNames online gazetteer, www.geonames.org [Net]
MED *Middle English Dictionary*, 1959-2001
Net Internet, using Google search program
OED *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition, 2025
Wiki Wikipedia, online encyclopaedia, 2025
Wikt Wiktionary, online dictionary, 2025 ■

# THE FOUR-MINUTE MONDAY

Tom Rutledge

The Sunday *New York Times* puzzle is part of a nice routine at my house. It's a team sport: we put the grid up on the TV screen and my kids take their cuts. Leading off is Dan, lacing elusive idioms into the gap. Rose hammers the names of obscure deities into the upper deck. Maya and Taz pinch-hit admirably during occasional visits. And then Kevin is our closer, spotting the misplaced vowel and picking it off to end the game. It's fun, exciting, and our reward is a completion time far better than any one of us could achieve alone.

Monday morning, however, is about my time. I get up, take a deep drink of ice water, open the crossword app on my tablet, and take my solo shot at the four-minute Monday.

That's my goal: to do the Monday crossword in under four minutes. Just me against the clock. Perhaps it's silly but, in my little mind, I'm striving for a moment of individual glory akin to one achieved in the middle of the 20th Century by a gangly English pre-med.

On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister of Oxford University ran the mile in 3:59.4, becoming the first person to run a mile in under four minutes. It was "a goal sought from as far back as Victorian days," Bannister wrote in his memoir, *The Four-Minute Mile.* His success was achieved with some help, but really alone, under circumstances that seem spartan today. Your friends sporting state-of-the-art, foot-snuggling Nikes might go as far as to call it "barbaric."

Back then, the Mile was still a global track and field standard. It's a storied unit, tracing its origins back to ancient Rome through an Elizabethan proclamation and a series of more recent rulings by science-y international consortiums.

My Monday challenge is decidedly less renowned and less rigorous in its standards. The *Times* editors do have a knack for calibrating the puzzle's difficulty to levels that ascend reliably from Monday through Saturday. But you can still get a fairly hard Monday. I always assumed my four-minute breakthrough would be a combination of a good performance and an easier grid.

My best is just barely on the wrong side of the goal, a 4:05 finish on July 11, 2022. That puzzle's answers included, as usual, my home state of OHIO, and then SNOGS was an affectionate gesture to America's special relationship with Bannister's homeland.

Going the other way, I logged a 47:25 fiasco when I fell asleep midway through the Monday, April 10, 2023 puzzle. My dozing middle finger filled the grid with K's, a fitting comeuppance for someone who uses baseball metaphors for puzzle performance.

It's probably sporting to mention here that there's a certain element of humblebrag in all this. These are pretty good times we're talking about, and once I started logging six-minute times, and then four-minute times, I started wondering: Am I an elite Monday athlete? Very casual online puz-blog research revealed the answer: not even close. Two-plus Mondays are abundant.

A *Times* story from 2010 says a Mr. Dan Feyer posted a 1:22 Monday. So, at 4:05, I may well be the fastest on my block, and I'm probably in the upper tier of puzzlers in my Boston suburb—although a kid at the high school actually composed a Sunday *NYT* puzzle that achieved publication last year. Best case scenario, I figure it's a battle for second in Concord.

In retrospect, my times started improving when my strategy improved. I stopped jumping around and started sticking to a linear attack, first through all the across clues in sequence, and then the downs. Later, I tried snooping on the down clues during the initial acrosses. Getting the first letter in an across and avoiding revisiting the clue later can be a time saver. It's risky, though, with the possibility of getting waylaid too early. As many Times puzzlers know, getting stuck in Northeast traffic is the worst.

But one day, as an experiment, I committed firmly to the across plus down-snooping strategy. It helped me complete a lot of acrosses at the beginning; in fact, I'm pretty sure I got through the entire top half without a gap, and had a fairly thorough solve on the bottom half too.

I tabbed through to pick up the stray blank squares, and gasped when the *Congratulations!* jingle played. My time: 3:23. The date: April 4, 2023.

A Tuesday. ◼

## "AN 'ORRIBLE PRACTICE"

T Campbell

One of the first English rules you learn without thinking about it is that "a" stops being "a" when it proceeds a vowel sound—and at no other times, right?

In "An Horrible Usage," the Floridian George R. Berryman talks about the practice of saying "an historic" and similar phrases. I don't like to pre-judge people when I can avoid it, but a lot of people who do this one are trying to seem smart by clinging to a practice that language outgrew for a good reason. In older times, "historic" was pronounced *istoric,* so "an historic occasion" was as correct as "an hour that will live in memory."

Where things get a little complicated is that English keeps mutating and developing different strains. There are accents—not widely spoken, but in existence—that pronounce it *istoric* now. (They're especially notable in South London.) Is "an historic occasion" right if you're speaking one of those? And if so but if you're just writing it down, how would people know you were actually right?

Other h-words are even more contested. There's *homage, herbicide, herbivore, humble, hola,* and *hymn*—however you pronounce any of those, there's an intelligent person out there who thinks you're wrong. (I drop the h on the first three, not the second.)

Maybe the single most challenging word on this front is *herb,* because it has two distinct meanings, and different rules govern each. If you're talking about a guy named Herb, maybe short for "Herbert," then Americans and Englanders alike are likely to start the name with a pronounced H. But that's not a certainty: some people will pronounce it *erb.*

That's close to the standard American pronunciation for the lowercase herb, as in herbs and spices (or marijuana slang). Yet if you Google that pronunciation right now, it'll be written as (h)erb, and the audio file will sound like h-erb.

*A hour* sounds as wrong to our ears as *an hair,* so all these ambiguously pronounced words are opportunities to embarrass ourselves. Language provides a lot of those! ∎

## A VOWEL-STRING CHALLENGE

Louis Phillips

I told Ted G**ioia "Aeaea, i.e. a** mythical island in Homer's Odyssey was home to the sorceress Circe."

A sentence with 12 consecutive vowels. Can you construct a sentence, without repeating words, that contains more consecutive vowels? **(Editor's note:** I can think of one, building on the current effort, but I leave this as an exercise for the reader.) ∎

# DEC-AGRAMS

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According to the Merriam-Webster Unabridged website, DECAGRAMS is the plural of DECAGRAM, a variant spelling of DEKAGRAM, a unit of mass and weight equal to 10 grams. But for my purposes here, I'm using DEC-AGRAMS (note the hyphen) to refer to words beginning with the letters DEC- and which have transposals – all to celebrate this tenth issue of the Journal.

Familiar words beginning with DEC- where it indicates some connection to "ten" include DECADE a period of ten years, DECAGON a ten-sided geometrical figure and DECIMAL pertaining to the number ten. But … there are plenty of other words beginning with DEC- which have nothing to do with the number ten.

The following 10 sets of transposals all begin with DEC-. All are taken from my extensive collection of transposals having 10 or more letters. All the words and terms can be found in major dictionaries.

| | |
|---|---|
| **decantherous**<br>*having ten anthers* | **countershade**<br>*in camouflaging, to lighten the local colour of an object in parts that normally fall into shadow, or to darken the parts normally illuminated, thus making the object less conspicuous* |
| **decarbonating**<br>*removing carbon from* | **botanic garden**<br>*a garden in which plants are cultivated for scientific research, conservation, and display to the public* |
| **decentralise**<br>*to disperse or move out from the center* | **deinterlaces**<br>*converts video footage into non-interlaced formats* |
| **dechlorinations**<br>*acts of removing chlorine from* | **ornithoscelidan**<br>*an extinct reptile having hind legs and a pelvic arch resembling those of a bird* |
| **decimestrial**<br>*consisting of ten months* | **sedimetrical**<br>*a term from analytical chemistry, pertaining to a precipitate, or sediment, by volume* |
| **deckloading**<br>*loading cargo on the deck of a ship* | **deadlocking**<br>*bringing a situation to an impasse* |
| **declamations**<br>*recitations of a speech* | **anecdotalism**<br>*a propensity for telling anecdotes* |

| | |
|---|---|
| **decoratings**<br>*acts of decorating or ornamenting* | **endogastric**<br>*relating to the inside of the stomach* |
| **decreation**<br>*depriving of existence* | **dinocerate**<br>*relating to dinosaurs*<br><br>**edotecarin**<br>*a complex chemical used in DNA cleavage*<br><br>**Oedicentra**<br>*a genus of moths* |
| **decurionate**<br>*the office of a decurion, a Roman officer in charge of ten men* | **counteridea**<br>*an opposite idea*<br><br>**reauctioned**<br>*sold again at auction*<br><br>**recautioned**<br>*warned again*<br><br>**reeducation**<br>*retraining* |

As well as words beginning DEC-, I thought I might as well offer ten words beginning with the letters TEN- and which have transposals.

| | |
|---|---|
| **tenantless**<br>*without a tenant* | **latentness**<br>*the condition of being latent, or concealed* |
| **tendenciousness**<br>*bias* | **continuednesses**<br>*continuities* |
| **tenebrious**<br>*of a dark nature* | **Enterobius**<br>*a genus of small nematode worms* |
| **teniacidal**<br>*destroying tapeworms* | **acetanilid**<br>*a white crystalline compound used in medicine as an analgesic and antipyretic*<br><br>**laciniated**<br>*bordered with a fringe* |
| **tennesseensis**<br>*found in the name Echinacea tennesseensis, the Tennessee Purple Coneflower* | **intensenesses**<br>*intensities* |

| tenontophyma | nematophyton |
|---|---|
| *a tumorous growth in a tendon* | *a large branching fossil plant* |
| tenovaginitis | investigation |
| *inflammation of a tendon sheath* | |
| tensiometry | retestimony |
| *measurement of the surface tension of a liquid* | *repeat testimony* |
| tenterhook | heterokont |
| *a hook, spike or bent nail* | *a type of algae or other fungus-like organism* |
| tenuistriate | intersituate |
| *having slender striae, or grooves* | *to place between* |

An afterthought: The opening paragraph of this article uses the term "tenth issue." This has a transposal, EUTHENISTS, students or advocates of euthenics, a science that deals with developing human well-being and efficient functioning through the improvement of environmental conditions. The singular form EUTHENIST isn't listed in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (some catching up to do there!) but is listed on the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged* website, as well as appearing in *Webster's New International Dictionary*'s Second and Third editions.

The words and terms in this article can be found in at least one of *The Oxford English Dictionary, The Random House Dictionary* (Unabridged), *Merriam-Webster Unabridged* website, and Wikipedia. ◼

# DECADROMES

Jeff Grant

To celebrate the 10th issue of *The Journal of Wordplay*, here are ten coined palindromes starting with the prefix deca-.

**DECA-ACED:** aced ten times in a tennis match.
**DECADACED:** made with ten fried dace fish, as a Chinese dish.
**DECAFACED:** having ten faces, decahedronal. [PDicon]
**DECALACED:** of a sports shoe, done up with ten lace crossings, also a "bespoke decals" business in Auckland, New Zealand. [Net]
**DECAMACED:** disabled by ten different people using Mace teargas spray cans, as a stalker.
**DECAPACED:** operable at ten different rates or speeds, like a ten-speed bicycle. [PDicon]
**DECARACED:** of a theoretical track superdecathlon with ten running races, comprising the nine Olympic events from 100m to marathon plus a half marathon.
**DECASACED:** in Norfolk, England, having ten layers (saces) of bricks, e.g., a wall.
**DECATACED:** formed with ten overlapping plate-armor pieces (taces) that protect the upper thighs, as an armor skirt.
**DECAVIVACED:** in music, containing ten vivace (lively) passages.

References
Net             Internet, using Google search program
PDicon          *Palindromicon 2,* J Grant and D Tilque, 2002 ∎

# "LOOK WHAT THEY'VE DONE TO MY PUN, MA"
## More Wordplay Deployed in Recent Everyday Situations, Mostly

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Do you remember where and when you learned a particular word?

At the age of 11 or 12, I read a science-fiction comic book about a teenager who idly mixes several condiments in his high-school cafeteria. The result is a potion that gives him the ability to see the future. The power soon becomes a curse, however. For example, the kid has a premonition of the exact date his father will die, and he wails that this is something he doesn't want to know. The plot is not entirely plausible, but it was the first time I had encountered the word *condiment*.

The "unintended consequences" and "be careful what you wish for" themes are common literary devices. Think of King Midas, *Faust, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Frankenstein,* and many others. In this case, I guessed what would happen. That's the trouble with stories involving precognition and clairvoyance: *They're so predictable!*

Following is another compilation of puns drawn from my own recent experiences. Readers sometimes react with: "I don't get it." I get that a lot! But these specimens are simple and "self-exclamatory."

As usual, I thought all my quips were brilliantly original, but Googling proves that I was sometimes beaten to the crunch. It's not always easy to confirm because the number of search results, variations, and contexts tends to preclude attributing to a single creator. But several key antecedents are credited at the end.

- One afternoon, I had a 3:30 appointment with my barber, and another commitment elsewhere an hour later. That was cutting it close!

- I wanted to contact a specialist in lighting fixtures who years before had sold me several floor lamps and reading lamps. I sent him a message with the subject line "Reconnection." In this case, the pun was unintended. Really.

- A friend's memoir is filled with gossipy stories. I playfully accused him of telling tales out of "cool."

- I'm a New Yorker and lifelong theatergoer. I didn't agree with the rave reviews for one Broadway show. When asked for my review, I quipped, "More preachy than peachy."

- Everyone occasionally incurs costs that are not covered by insurance or unreimbursed. One year, I had so many out-of-pocket expenses that I jested that I needed cargo pants.

- One of my favorite beverages is iced tea. But squeezing wedges or slices of lemon is annoying. Why? It's the pits!

- I often create my own customized trail mix of nuts and dried fruits because I dislike certain ingredients in the packaged ones. Hence: eschewing before chewing.

- And on a final culinary note, I initially resisted an expensive treat, but caved because I craved!

- I'm easily perplexed by family trees, whether my own or those of others. Asked about how I'm related to various cousins, I often joke, "Twice removed, and once put back."

- Relatedly (pun intended?), I once declined a relative's request, insisting that this was not my responsibility and that other family members were better suited for the task. After all, I quipped, "Blood is thicker than *ought'er*."

- On another occasion, relatives who invited me to dinner made a last-minute adjustment to the reservation, resulting in a conflict with another engagement. Change of clan?

- A few weeks ago, I sent a serious complaint to the head of a prominent institution. Though it took a follow-up, I finally received a response, albeit from a subordinate, apologizing profusely and repeatedly, and promising that steps would be taken to correct the problem. Well, I thought, when the apology is *ab*ject, one can't *ob*ject.

- This time of year, the weather is so hot that I'm tempted to record a pop song titled "Gimme Swelter."

- It's surprising how often invitations to events omit mention of a dress code, forcing me to inquire about the attire they require.

- Friends tend to assume I'm a speed reader. To the contrary, I point out, I'm a *need* reader. I always need more time to catch up with everything!

Finally, a tale from decades ago. I somehow appeared in the final directory pages of a book on comedy writing, mistakenly included in a list of people who teach courses in the subject. From time to time, I was contacted by a misdirected aspiring comedian. The book went through several editions, perpetuating the error, and my irritation. The problem was solved when the author, at my insistence, removed the appendix.

*Credits: "Self-exclamatory" has many earlier coiners, and the A.I. Overview helpfully if humorlessly points out that it's "not a standard English phrase." "Tales Out of Cool" was the headline of a 1988* Washington Post *column by Hugh O'Neill. "Gimme Swelter" is the name of a beer by Arkane Aleworks.* ∎

## STRANGE TRAITOR LANTERN: THE PHANTOM WORD SQUARE
T Campbell

Can word squares inspire narratives? One accidental example hints at possibilities on this front.

*Green Lantern: Emerald Twilight* is a "heel turn" story, in which Hal Jordan, most famous of the heroic Green Lanterns, breaks bad. He's come back to a twelve-mile-across crater where his hometown used to be—and if he hadn't been performing his duties elsewhere in the galaxy, he maybe could've saved it.
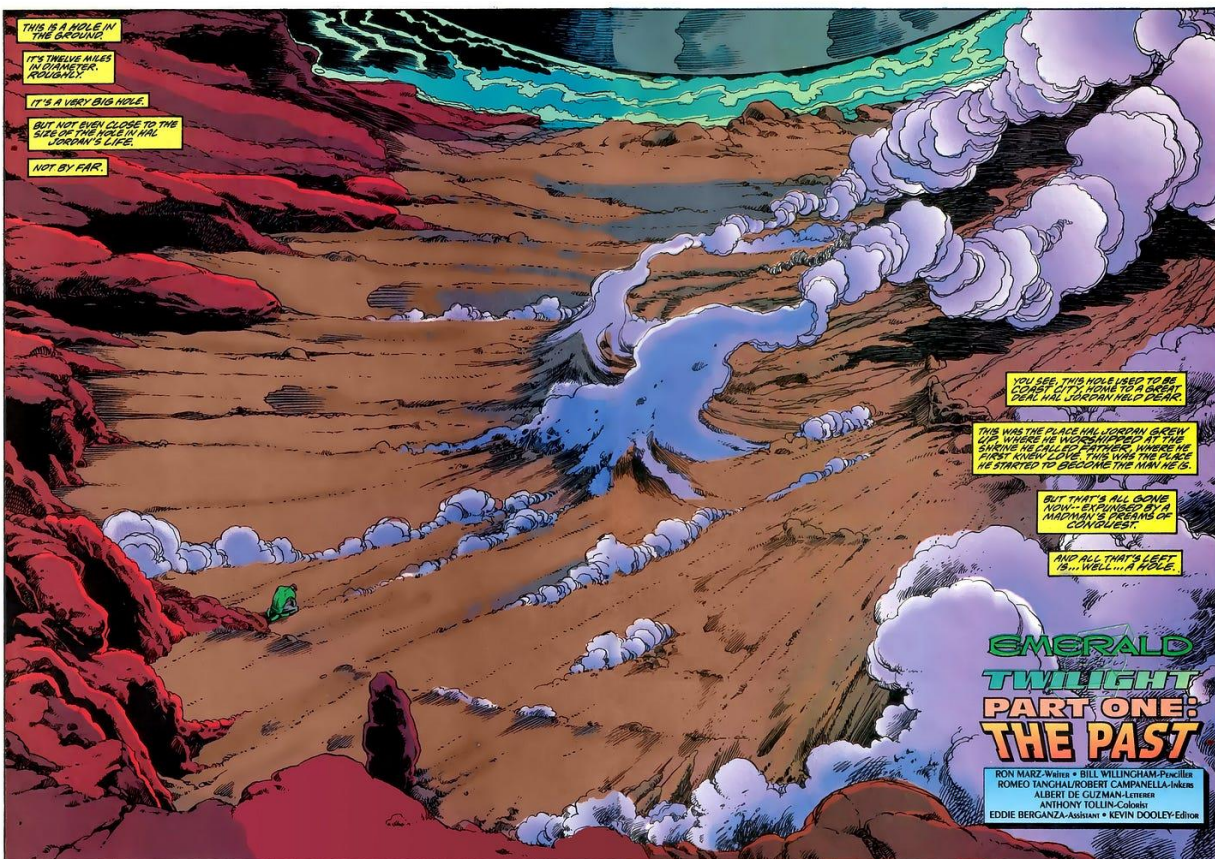


*Mourning in* Green Lantern *(vol. 3) #48, by Ron Marz and Bill Willingham.*

After wallowing in grief and denial, Hal turns on the Guardians of the Universe, who command him and every other Green Lantern in known space. He seizes their power in a misguided, grief-driven attempt to rewrite reality, going from one of the DC Universe's greatest heroes to one of its most powerful villains.

The story looks better in summary than it does in execution. As the *Game of Thrones* finale taught us, you can't rush a Shakespearean tragic fall. It's a powerful idea that such a change could spring from the same sort of catastrophic loss that drives heroes like Spider-Man—*I wasn't there, and look at what happened!* But one needs a certain investment of story time to show the

corruption of a noble soul with so much publication history. The story ran three issues and spent about half its 79 pages on predictable fights. That just wasn't enough to get the job done.

But from a wordplay perspective, the story has an extra feature. It *mirrors a 7x7 word square.* I found the square in a collection that far predates the story—but the coincidence is astonishing.

| N | E | S | T | L | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E | N | T | R | A | N | T |
| S | T | R | A | N | G | E |
| T | R | A | I | T | O | R |
| L | A | N | T | E | R | N |
| E | N | G | O | R | G | E |
| S | T | E | R | N | E | R |

*The 7x7 word square.*

As the story begins, a denial-driven Hal **NESTLES** himself in an idealized dream version of his destroyed city, using his power ring to bring it back to a semblance of life. He's not just the creator of this "ghost city" but an **ENTRANT** into its reality.

*Nostalgia from #48.*

He chats with an old ex and almost gets his father's approval before the ring runs out of power and everything fades.

Provoked one final time by the cold Guardians, Hal snaps, becoming a **STRANGE TRAITOR LANTERN.**



*The consequences of denying employees emotional self-care, also from #48.*

(Hal wouldn't be the first or last "strange traitor" in the Green Lanterns' history, but we won't get into that here.)

Hal defeats other Green Lanterns on his way, stopping to take their rings and **ENGORGE** himself on their power…



*Hal now all but unstoppable, in* Green Lantern *(vol. 3) #50, by Ron Marz and Darryl Banks.*

…and after engorging himself on the master battery that powers *every* Green Lantern, he emerges a godlike, **STERNER** figure.
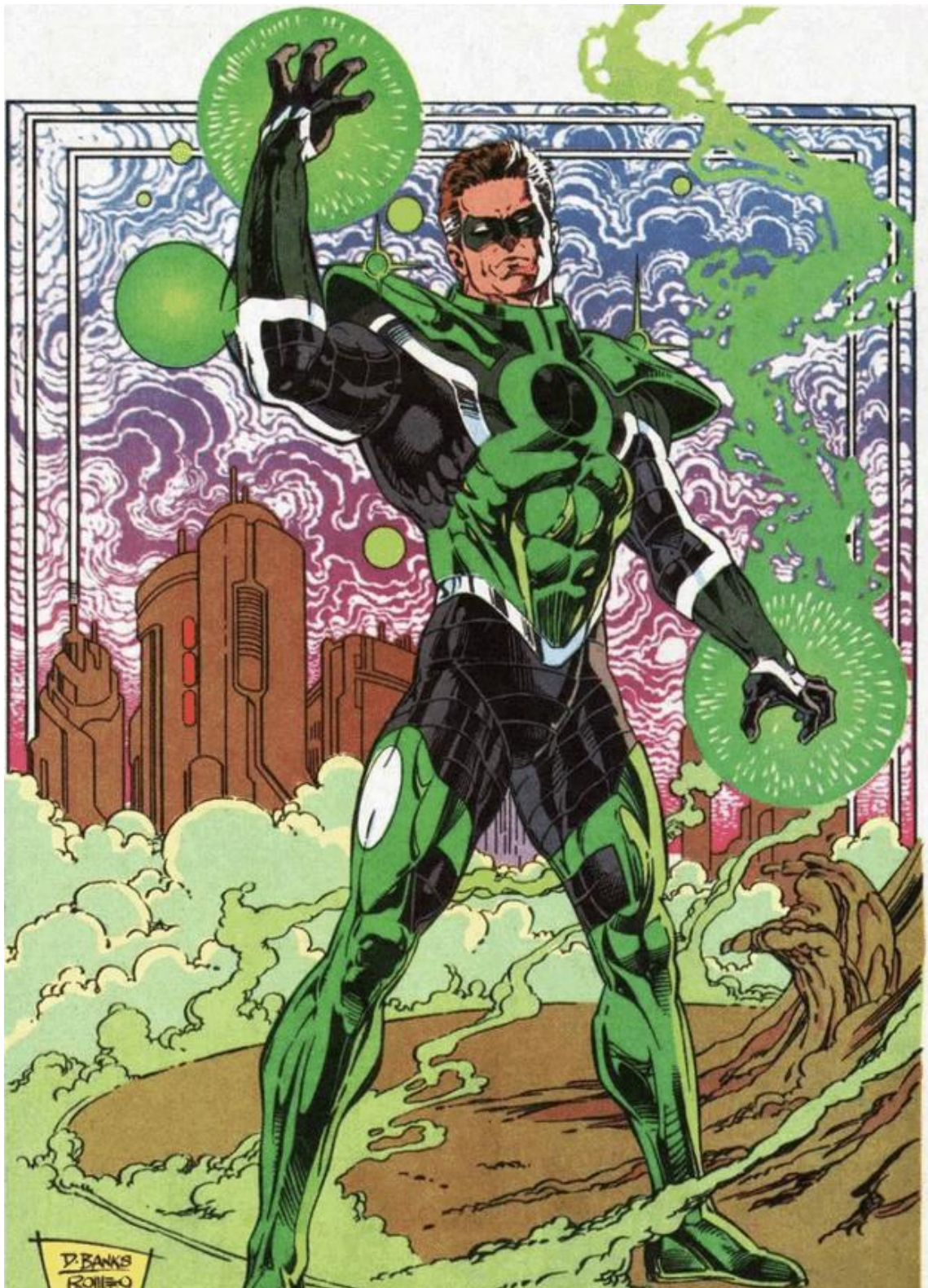
*Hal transformed, from #50.*

Are there any other word squares that parallel existing stories like this, or inspire new ones? One of the stories I did for my comics series *Fans* made use of a very simple one: ON/NO.
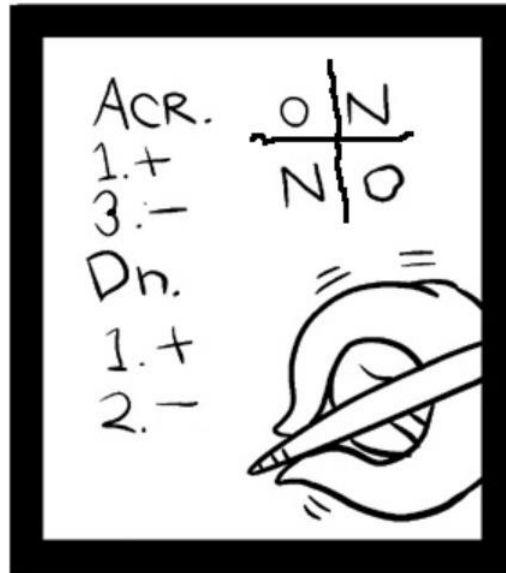
The Latin Sator square also presents a narrative: "The farmer Arepo works his wheels with care." Less directly, that square inspired the movie *Tenet*.
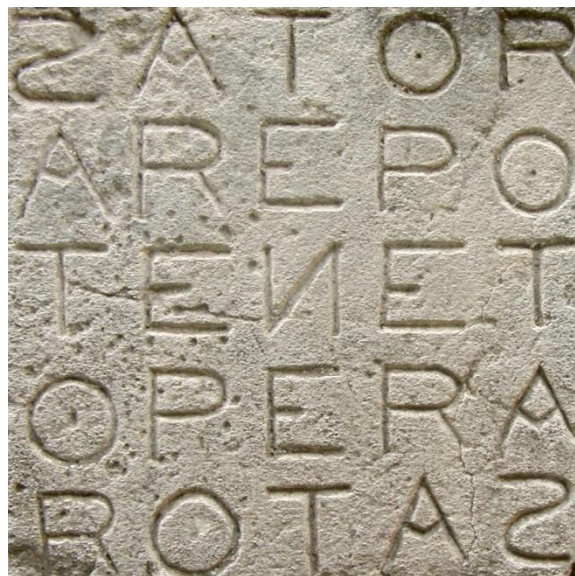


*The Sator square, found in several places in ancient Rome.*

Other squares also suggest story ideas, though adapting them gets more challenging as they get more complex. At the 7x7 level, one of the most suggestive squares—in the sexual sense as well as the story sense—is this one:

```
T O B A C C O
O V E R A L L
B E V E L E D
A R E O L A S
C A L L A N T
C L E A N S E
O L D S T E R
```

The smell of TOBACCO is a turnoff for some—including me. But OVERALL, images of young women smoking contain an erotic charge. As a heterosexual man, I've spent private moments dreaming of BEVELED slopes that culminate in AREOLAS. Might a CALLANT (a young boy) try to CLEANSE himself of such thoughts, yet retain them as an OLDSTER?

7x7 squares might be the highest-order squares that can get narrative interpretations like this. In a posthumous piece published in 1988, Dmitri Borgmann wrote,

> *The transition from 7x7 squares to 8x8 squares is an exceedingly difficult one, and it is no longer possible to limit eight-order squares to those consisting entirely of common words and names. What is possible, just barely, is to insist that they consist entirely of literary and technical modern English.*

My observations back this up—and a structure with obscure words isn't good grist for a story. You can get away with the occasional CALLANT, but that's about as far as that can go.

Hal's villain role lasted a few years, and he spent a few more as a penitent ghost. In the end, he went back to heroism, his heel turn explained away as a sort of demonic possession. That may sound like a desperate excuse, and it *was,* but by then, everyone was tired enough of "villain Hal" to pretend it was fine. Nowadays, the heel turn is all but forgotten—except when somebody wants to cite an example of how weird comics can get.

"Hey, remember when Hal Jordan was a villain for a hot minute?" they'll say.

And then I'll say, "Ha ha, yeah! STRANGE TRAITOR LANTERN!"

And they'll all stare at me. ∎

# CRYPTIC COUPLET: A MASOCHIST ADDRESSES XIMENES
or
# SOME SIGNIFICANT CORRELATIVES TO THE GOLDEN RULE
## (1, 6, 4, 3, 5, 3, 8, 3, 4, 4, 2, 7, 4, 7)
Daniel Galef

***Editor's Note:** These poems are puzzles in a style of wordplay that'll be familiar if you do cryptic crosswords. Consult the middle of Galef's text for further information if needed!***

> Reason, yes reason alone must alert us to the fact that doing harm to others can never make us happy, and our hearts must make us feel that making others happy is the greatest joy which Nature grants us on this earth.
> —The Marquis de Sade

Without a cry of pain amid romance—
Cruel traitor! Cut us with the heart of Salò!
Scornful ejaculations wildly dance,
are able to half dance in hellish show.
Deliver the Big O!—*In!, in!* (Hues toy,
you knit a tangled eon.) Lonely heart!
A cry for mercy leads to certain joy.
A sound of victory, sound without start.
Unfeminine, what's left. In His name
you bat them, till each pitch strikes on silence,
manifests the start and end. For I confess.
A throne topples, one different—or one the same—
attends shag. Mourn without rough violence,
rest a floral wreath enjoining—Yes!

*If this is opaque, look up "cryptic crosswords" (or watch the excellent* Inside No. 9 *episode written by Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith explaining them). As practice or prototype, below is a shorter poem with a similar mechanism, a limerick, first featured in the* Omnificent English Dictionary in Limerick Form. *The solution to the limerick is a five-word sentence glossing its subject. The solution to the sonnet is a fourteen-word rhyming couplet replying to the sonnet itself.*

*Every **cryptic** ache; every ache stirred (4)*
*A suggestion or hint some yarn heard (4)*
*Back in Rome, if exists (2)*
*One beginner assists (1)*
***Cross** Richard in short magic **word** (5)* ■

# TWO WORDS, TEN QUESTIONS: THE MARK WAID INTERVIEW

T Campbell

*Mark Waid has had quite a career in comics writing. At some point, he's written probably every superhero you and your friends know about, with particularly well-remembered runs on* The Flash, Daredevil, The Fantastic Four, Captain America, *and most recently* World's Finest, Batman and Robin: Year One, *and* Justice League Unlimited.

*He was one of the first comics writers whose style I learned to recognize as a style. When I talked with other fans, I used to call him "Two Words" Waid—a nickname meant with affection and admiration, referring to how he could get value out of a sentence or speech bubble that was only two words long.*



*A brutally brief exchange in Ka-Zar #9. Script by Mark Waid, as it is for all samples in this section; art by Adam Kubert.*

*Objectively speaking, it didn't happen* that *often, but it stuck in my memory as an example of his brisk, efficient style.*

*When our paths crossed again, I had to ask him a few questions. Most are aimed at the intersection between comics and wordplay, but I wanted to start with some context for the job to put us all on the same page…*

**What would you say are the principles of writing for comics compared to novels or screenplays?**

The only significant one is to THINK VISUALLY. Novelists are often too wordy, and screenwriters don't understand that there's no way to connote fluid motion in the static pictures that make up comics.

The basic principle I teach is this: a typical comics page has anywhere from 3 to 5 panels per page. Think of each of those panels as a Polaroid picture—a snapshot of a frozen moment. More than 5 panels, especially relentlessly, risks making the page just

Black Widow *#1 with Chris Samnee.*

too crowded for an artist to draw anything with impact. Same with dialogue and captions—as a general rule, no more than 15-20 words in a balloon, no more than two balloons in a panel, no more than 30 words in a caption. More than that and, again, you're crowding out the art and making it difficult for your artist.

**Where does the writer hand things off to the letterer in your experience? Do you write the sound effects or make any notes about the visual presentation of the words?**

The chain is actually this: I hand my script to my editor, who then makes a pass and hands it over to the artist, who begins drawing. Some artists enjoy putting in the sound effects as if they're part of the art, some hate sound effects, some let the letterer put them in from my script. It all depends on their preferences. Then, as the art nears completion, the editor shows it to me and I do a "dialogue pass," tweaking and honing the dialogue and captions and often adding words to describe action that's unclear, or removing words when the artist communicates the intent so well that they're not needed. (Chris Samnee's great at making me realize I don't need words in this panel or that panel, so good a storyteller is he.)

**Your career breakthrough was on *The Flash.* Some of your stories from that period hinge on what we might call a "crisis of definition," where the new Flash, Wally West, struggles**

to be worthy to use the same hero name as his late uncle, Barry Allen. Both are super-fast heroes, and a couple of other super-fast heroes use the name—but there are also many super-fast heroes like Max Mercury and Impulse who don't. Still, in most of the stories, Wally introduces himself to the reader with "My name is Wally West. I'm the Flash, the fastest man alive," or some variation.

The name "Flash" seems to have a lot of meaning, but the act of finding that meaning might be one of the things Wally is chasing in those stories. So, since we're about words and their definitions here—what makes a Flash a Flash? Is there some essential property that separates a Flash from a Max Mercury or an Impulse?


*Flash #79, with Greg LaRocque.*

In the DC universe, it's really all about legacy. Barry Allen adopted the Flash name from Jay Garrick because he was a fan and because Jay had been missing for a long time, so it was a way to honor him. After that, the mantle has tended to follow along family lines, the same way any name does. That's really the only separation—I can't imagine anyone deciding to call themselves the Flash without being in that bloodline somewhere.

A lot of DC and Marvel characters come with established names before modern writers ever get to them. When creating a new super-character, does the name come early or late in your process?

In my process, late (with the exception of Impulse, my greatest naming triumph). That's because for all my strengths, naming characters is something I'm really awful at for some reason.

This'll get into stylometric earmarks a little bit. I'd be willing to bet that of the well-known comics writers, you have more one-word and two-word sentences in your oeuvre than any other. There's a scene in *Daredevil* that I always wondered about, where the title


*Impulse #5, with Humberto Ramos.*

character gets criticized for brevity: "Your style isn't terse. It's trs. It's t" *(Daredevil #9, 2015).*



*Daredevil (vol. 4) #15, with Chris Samnee.*

**Most writers say it's more difficult, and better practice, to keep things brief wherever possible. Is that still true for you, or is it just natural at this point? Do you, like Daredevil, have to keep yourself from going too far in the other direction?**

It's honestly just natural at this point. Remember, I'll hit 2,000 scripts before I'm dead, God willing, and by now the "rules" are just baked into me. Now, some of it (as I alluded to above) depends upon how good a storyteller the artist is—if I know I'm working with one who's great at it, I can afford to be terse because the visuals will do a lot of the lifting. I actually prefer this—my favorite thing to do in comics is to be able to express an entire story in one image, which works when the artist plays along. (Examples would include the splash pages to *Captain America* #4 and *Fantastic Four* #61, just to name two.)



Captain America *(vol. 3) #4 with Ron Garney and* Fantastic Four *(vol. 3) #61 with Mike Weiringo.*

Look, the bottom line is that comics is a medium of economy—the goal is always to tell the best story with (allowing for style) the fewest words and simplest drawings possible.

**It's not like every Waid story uses a new term, but you seem more interested in keeping up with the language of today than other writers, especially other writers who use older comics as a touchstone. I think you were the first superhero writer to use "Bet" in the sense of "You bet" (*Shazam* #1, 2023) and the first to use "deepfakes" as a plot point (*Absolute Power* #1, 2024).**



Shazam *(vol. 5) #1, with Dan Mora.*

**It's challenging for all of us to keep up with current usage (unless we're teenagers, maybe). How do you manage it?**

With enormous caution. Nothing dates faster than slang, and nothing gets me all kind of "Hello, fellow kids" meme shit on social media when I use a term that lost favor between the time I
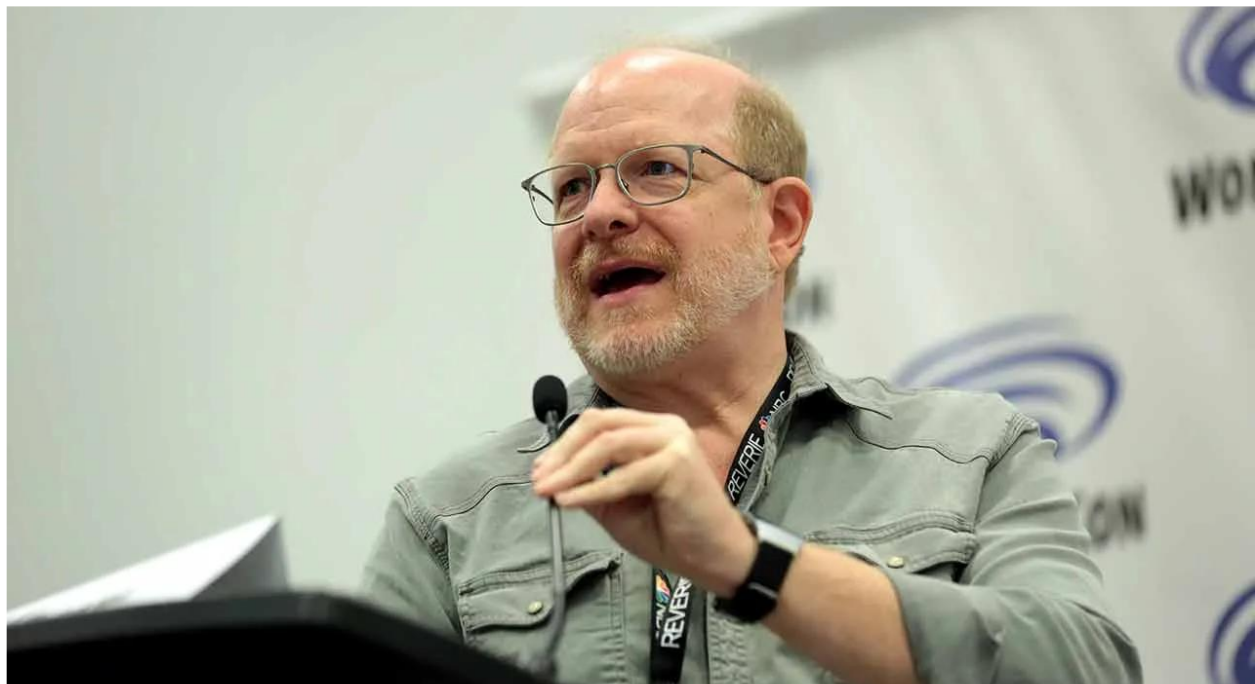


*Waid fielding questions at WonderCon 2025.*

wrote it and the time it was published. To be honest, I find that so long as I write from character, and know the character inside and out, the voices and the words they use just come naturally.

**On a similar note, there's a bit in the latest _Batman and Robin: Year One_ that hinges on the circus slang "slall," which threatens to expose Robin's history as a circus performer and therefore Batman and Robin's secret identity. I love the idea of so much riding on a single word. Were you poring through dictionaries of circus slang for that one, or was it just something you'd picked up somewhere earlier and hoped to use?**



_This page and next:_ Batman and Robin: Year One #9 with Chris Samnee.

31

Oh, I was poring. (And thanks for spelling that correctly.) I knew it was important in that moment to have Robin accidentally drop a subtle clue as to his circus background, so it was off to Google for me. At least once in every script, it seems—and often more—everything comes to a halt when I go diving through the 'net for big chunks of time searching for just the right scientific fact to back up a story point, or term to underscore characters. I could probably write twice as fast if I could just stop doing that.

**You've played around a few times with Bizarro, the bonkers Superman duplicate for whom every day is Opposite Day, and his world of like-minded Bizarro people (most recently in the latest *World's Finest*). How do you do his sort of "backwards speech" in a way the reader can follow along?**



Batman/Superman: World's Finest *#41, with Adrián Gutiérrez.*

Great question, and timely since I just finished a three-part Bizarro story and learned some stuff along the way. First off, you can't hew too closely to "everything is opposite," because then you're forcing your reader to have to decode every single word as they read, which is a pain and slows the story down. Besides, if you carry "opposite" to some sort of absolute extreme, then what the hell is the opposite of Tuesday?

Second, there's lots of pronoun substitution: "Me am," "Him am," etc.

Third, just to help ease the reading process and speed things up, I have frightened Bizarros scream "That not scary!" rather than "That am [pick an antonym for scary]." Lots of "nots"— "There you not am!" reads pretty clearly as an opposite without needing to be decoded or demanding a lot of thought.

**You've often expressed the belief that superheroes work best when tied to themes of positivity and hope, as opposed to the "grim and gritty" style that was in vogue when your career got started. Do you think there's a link between those themes and a more generally playful approach to the work?**

Maybe. I've not really thought about it, but themes of positivity and hope do not necessarily demand playfulness or joyousness. They can very easily be set in a grim and gritty world. I think I should express my theorem more along these lines: superheroes work best when they're not cynical or used to tell cynical stories.

**My wife is leaning in at this point to say, "Ask him about the Superman movie!"**

**There are lots of different versions of Superman at this point—one could say different definitions of the character. How would you say the latest movie defines him, and does that definition align with yours?**

Pretty much. I really dug the movie. I have my quibbles, but the things I loved far outweigh them. Hell, at 15, I had my quibbles about *Superman: The Movie,* too. ("That's not what Krypton looks like!") And those quibbles didn't kill my love for it. I think Corenswet was note-perfect and the movie defines Superman brilliantly in two moments: first, when he yells "People were going to die!," and second, when he pleads for the Justice Gang to not kill the kaiju monster but rather find a home for something that wasn't doing anything deliberately harmful. That's my Superman. ∎



*Superman saves the non-superpowered dog from the giant monster in* Superman *(2025).*

# PALINDROMANIA

Richard Lederer
San Diego
verbivore.com

It may be that the very first sentence ever spoken was a palindrome. We are told that the Deity plunged Adam into a deep sleep prior to extracting a rib wherewith to make him a helpmeet. When he awoke, Adam, to his amazement, found Eve (possessing the first palindromic name) by his side. Having no one to introduce him, he politely bowed and spake (in English, of course): MADAM, I'M ADAM:

**Name Me Man**
Backward and forward, as you will perceive,
Read Adam's first greeting to dear Mother Eve:
MADAM, I'M ADAM. Now we can conceive
That her answer was simply: EVE, MAD ADAM, EVE.

In addition to the names of celebrated personages, palindromes incorporate the likes of plain old Dennis and Edna:

DENNIS AND EDNA SINNED.

And they're not the only transgressors:

DENNIS, NELL, EDNA, MARVA, LEON, NEDRA, ANITA, ROLF, NORA, ALICECAROL, LEO, JANE, REED, DENA, DALE, BASIL, RAE, PENNY, LANA, DAVE, DENNY, LENA, IDA, BERNADETTE, BEN, RAY, LILA, NINA, JO, IRA, MARA ANNE, NORAH, SELA, GAIA, MABLE, MINA, RAE, BARBA, ROLLO, PAM, ADA,, FLORA, TINA, NELL, ETTA, MARY, META, NOEL, FLO, DOT, TOM, ASA, RITA, NAN, IDA, TED, ANA, ESME, HANNAH, EM, SEAN, ADE, TAD, INA, NAT, IRA, SAM, OTTO, DOLF, LEO, NATE, MYRA, MATT, ELLEN, ANITA, ROLF, ADAM, APOLLO, RABRA, BEA, RANI, MELBA, MAIA, GALE, SHARON, ENNA, ARA, MARIO, JAN, INA, LILY, ARNE, BETTE, DAN, REBA, DIANE, LYNN, ED, EVA, DANA, LYNNE, PEARL, ISABEL, ADA, NED, DEE, RENA, JOEL, LORA, CECIL, AARON, FLORA, TINA, ARDEN, NOEL, AVRAM, AND ELLEN SINNED.

Nonetheless, I am pleased to display a treasure trove of famous-name palindromes. First, have a look at a pyramid of palindromes related to single names only:

NEMO WOMEN
POSE AS AESOP.
SAD, I'M MIDAS.
XERXES: EX-REX
NO "X" IN NIXON
NO, I DID DIDION.
SUIT NO PONTIUS.

RED LENIN ELDER
A SANTA AT NASA.
I, PLATO, TOTAL PI.
O. J., NAB A BANJO.
Y'ALL, I'M MILLAY.
VANNA, WANNA "V"?
NO, SMASH SAMSON.
I'M RUNNIN', NURMI.
CAMUS SEES SUMAC.
NOW SUNUNU'S WON.
DRACULA VALU-CARD.
CAIN: A MONOMANIAC.
NO, SID. AM I MADISON?
PAGANINI: DIN IN A GAP.
NOT LENNON 'N' ELTON.
ROB A GEM? ME? GABOR?
BAR ARAFAT, A FAR ARAB.
I YAM POPEYE, POP. MAY I?
AH! A BAHA'I! AHAB! AHA!
GOD, ASTOR TROTS A DOG.
ERROL'S PAL SLAPS LORRE.
HELL, ATTILA LIT TALL, EH?
PURE VENUS: SUN EVER UP.
SO MAY APOLLO PAY AMOS.
NEMO, WE REVERE WOMEN.
NO, HAL. I LED DELILAH ON.
I DID NOT RUB BURTON, DID I?
MAN, OPRAH'S SHARP ON A.M.
NORIEGA CASTS A CAGE: IRON.
DRAT SADDAM, A MAD DASTARD.
SIR, I SOON SAW I WAS NO OSIRIS.
REPORT IT, ROPER. PULL A GALLUP.
TO LAST, CARTER RETRACTS A LOT.
DRAW, O CAESAR. ERASE A COWARD.
AH, ARISTIDES OPPOSED IT, SIR. AHA!
EVA, CAN I POSE AS AESOP IN A CAVE?
NO HAM CAME, SIR. RISE, MACMAHON.
RAW-FIST CAPONE: "NO PACTS IF WAR!"
YAWN. MADONNA FAN? NO DAMN WAY!
MANET TASTES SAP ASSETS AT TEN A.M.
DEPARDIEU, GO RAZZ A ROGUE I DRAPED.
NO, SIRRAH. DELIVER REVILED HARRISON.
EH? DID ZORRO GIVE VIGOR, ROZ? DID HE?
SUMS ARE NOT SET AS A TEST ON ERASMUS.
SET ARC. OSTRACIZE FEZ. I CART SOCRATES.
SIS, ASK COSTNER TO NOT RENT SOCKS "AS IS."

NOW ALL ARE NEGATIVE, EVITA; GENERAL LAW ON.
BERYL, NOSY VISIONARY CYRANO IS IVY'S ONLY REB.
SO MAY OBADIAH, EVEN IN NINEVEH, AID A BOY, AMOS.
MAD ZEUS, NO LIVE DEVIL DEIFIED, LIVED EVIL ON SUEZ DAM.
SALADIN ENROBES A BARONESS, SENORA, BASE-BORN ENID, ALAS.
DEER FLEE FREEDOM IN OREGON? NO, GERONIMO. DEER FEEL FREED.

To conjure up a palindrome is a Herculean labor because the vocabulary available to the task is severely limited. Most words simply can't be bent into a shape that can be included in a push me-pull you palindrome. For example, my first and last names, RICHARD LEDERER resist palindromy. But substitute my nickname, and, bearing in mind that I've been a professional brander, you come up with DARE DICK LEDERER RE: RED ELK CIDER AD.

So let's climb to the pinnacle of palindromes, in which both the first and last names are preserved by at least an initial. The final three palindromes are so pyrotechnic in length that they each take up two lines.

ONO OK, O YOKO ONO?
TO IDI AMIN: I'M A IDIOT.
R.E. LEE, POTATO PEELER.
LISA BONET ATE NO BASIL.
LEG, NET OILER, ELIOT ENGEL.
'TIS BURL IVES AS EVIL RUBS IT.
TARZAN RAISED DESI ARNAZ' RAT.
TONI TENNILLE FELL IN NET. I, NOT.
LIAM NEESON DEIFIED NO SEEN MAIL.
WON'T I, PATTI PAGE, GAP IT, TAP IT NOW?
NO, MEL GIBSON IS A CASINO'S BIG LEMON.
ED, I SAW HARPO MARX RAM OPRAH W. ASIDE.
E. BORGNINE DRAGS DAD'S GARDENING ROBE.
HAKEEM OLAJUWON'S NOW UJA! LO! MEEK! AH!

HE'S A CARAMEL IN NIGER, DAKAR—A BUM IN SOHO—
HOSNI MUBARAK, A DREG IN NILE MARACAS, EH?

OH, WE TALK LAWSUIT. NO PETAL, I PRESUME, RIPS A TACO CAT.
ASPIRE, MUSER, PILATE, PONTIUS, WALK LATE. WHO?

T. ELIOT, TOP BARD, NOTES PUTRID TANG EMANATING, IS SAD.
I'D ASSIGN IT A NAME: "GNAT DIRT UPSET ON DRAB POT TOILET." ∎

## SNEAKY AND GROSS
T Campbell

*The nature of this puzzle is such that I'm not sure I can say much to explain it without giving the game away. However, the title is a clue, and the answers should take some time to unravel!*

I find I go into cosmopolitan reef climb lacking the right boots. Step on aquatic stingray, stumble into neighbors, now hit El Salvadoran's brow, now pin Kenyan. Scared El Salvadoran generates a yell: "Ow! You ogre!" Entrants ban me from further participation.

Rebecca and the godfather have a rocky relationship; he's still unforgiven for the crash on the waterfront. She's more comfortable when she can moonlight as "the artist out of Africa" than under the titanic Chicago art-scene spotlight.

Ma, I don't know how your God-fearing lad yanks hisself into these messes. I only said rum merited a better taste than the mongoose crap I perceived their wares to be and gave them the bird. Then to avoid their vengeful six-shooters I swan-dove into the post office, the part ridged with mail-order boxes.

Ha! Yes, Garfield, hoover that lasanga! Good job, Amazon drone, for delivering it to him! I grant that after all these years Garf's gastric arteries should be bigger than a bus, his belly a dam soon to be pierced, but I ain't reading the funnies for drama!

Pete told Andy that Jay was dating John, but Phil told Bart that Tom wasn't having that. Matt and Jim are rooming with Thad and Jude now that Sonny's moved out.

That FOREHEAD BUMP, STICKING UP. Your photograph ID's horrific, Rick. Etiquette's been all that's limited my suggestions that you wear wigs to cover that horn. Etiquette was pulling me back so that I could briefly stifle a shout of "Hello? Hello? Use pimple cream!" Could've said it. Really wanted to.

Decent in your medical apron, Julie? May the doctor scan over your conjunctivitis now? Don't be distraught: mark my words, epidemiologists won't care if your party life brought a little Mary Jane into your system.

"You'll expose his secrets?" I ask the "wicked smart" emissary of mad science.
"Expose? I don't think that's the half of it. The lodemeter and psychograph rod I tether around his scalp—"
"And chest," I add.
"—will reveal secrets that amaze us. Like taking a poll of his mind and broadcasting it on radio NY. Suspicions, what scares him, other messy details all captured on camera, then aired."

Indicate birth name, vocation, location, and how best to catch you (social media? phone? local psychic?) at the top of the identification form. Don't panic: a team of adjudicators, and if justification exists, public attorneys will evaluate your certificate, Catherine.

Jess, I X-rayed this "smooth reef" of our dad's, and if I've broken in egregiously on your trust, I'm sorry, that wasn't my intent. But the reef doesn't have any flatworms on it. If I could model even one, if my microscope could witness even—we should've known Dad was telling tall tales, this thing was always too small. Natural habitats are weighty, oversize, rough.

Filched bag! (jk)

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# "SET UP SON? SCAM SET, ASSERTS BOB": SEMI-AUTOMATIC GENERATION OF BILINGUAL PALINDROMES

August Adams, Enka Blanchard, Inès Dardouri, Levi Gabasova, Pierre Midavaine

*See **Contributors** section for further information.*

## Abstract

We analyze the problem of composing bilingual palindromes, for which the only high-quality example known is more than 150 years old. We formalize the problem and introduce multiple partial solutions for computer-assisted palindrome composition, as well as a comparison between the composition difficulties in 15 different pairs of languages.

## 1 Introduction

*Evoles ut ira breve nefas sit; regna!*

This sentence is iconic as a linguistic anomaly, as it is the only known example of its kind. Taken in reverse, it gives "*Anger? 'Tis safe never. Bar it! Use love.*" Despite some liberties taken with the translation and typographical symbols, it is the only existing bilingual palindrome with closely related meanings in both languages. It was discovered—or at least, first published—by James C.P. in an 1866 issue of *Our Young Folks Magazine* [2], a children's magazine. Despite being at the time our only example of such a palindrome—and remaining so ever since its publication more than 150 years ago—it was presented with no fanfare at all by the magazine, in small characters on the last page, among other letters to the editor (under a letter featuring one of the simplest palindromes: "Madam, I'm Adam"), with the last name of its creator not even indicated.

The Latin phrase roughly translates to "go forth, in order that anger might be a shallow wrong [over which] you prevail." While the palindrome's English version is clearly not a perfect replication, it does communicate the sense of the Latin appropriately. James C.P. was the first to point out that when read forwards, the palindrome is not exactly classical Latin, but it is grammatical. The English version is both grammatically cohesive and in line with the Latin in tense and aspect.

Until recently, a legend permeated the anglophone world which treated this example as the only bilingual palindrome in existence, barring some examples made up of one or two words. This is, unsurprisingly, untrue, although examples are still exceedingly rare. Even when removing the constraint of having a similar meaning in both languages, only three sources appear to mention such bilingual palindromes. The first is the work of Luc short mention in a 700-word article in Le Figaro (23/07/1985) and some related drafts, today housed at the Bibliothèque Carnegie de Reims. They make no mention of the earlier English-Latin palindrome, but they introduce 11 French-English palindromes, one French-Latin palindrome and multiple unfinished attempts at French-German palindromes. They also show the steps taken to create such palindromes by finding candidate word pairs and variants — which is where the work below should be of assistance. The second is a book published by Gérard Durand on 20/02/2002 with a print run of a few hundred copies[1], which features two pages on the subject with a total of 6 French-English palindromes [5]. The palindromes in both works are not ones where the meaning is similar in both languages. Moreover, they are not perusable online,[2] and the only available online source that mentions a new bilingual palindrome features one that is not fully grammatical[3] [3].

This anomaly—and the associated legend which the authors initially believed—is linked to a diversity of reasons. A probable explanation is that Latin and English form a pair that is uniquely suited to such constructions. However, the number of fluent Latin locutors—especially the ones with the expertise and leisure to tackle such problems—has declined greatly since the 19th century.

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[1] The exact number is unknown but inferred from the single copy present as legal deposit.

[2] The corresponding author is ready to share their scanned sources upon demand.

[3] The featured palindrome is taken from Luc Étienne, and reads as follows: "*Ted, I beg, am I not ever a venom?*" which nearly works in French as "*Mon Eva rêve ton image, bidet!*"

We then propose to use computational tools to help modern palindrome composers create new bilingual palindromes between arbitrary pairs of languages (as long as they share a segmental script).

**Contributions**

Our contributions are threefold:

- We formalize some of the concepts associated with bilingual palindromes, which give rise to a few non-trivial algorithmic problems. We also introduce several algorithms to generate word lists that can be used as primers for manual composition of bilingual palindromes (which were used to create the palindrome in the title).
- We apply those methods and compare the relative difficulties of bilingual palindrome composition between the six following languages: English, French, German, Polish, Spanish, and Swahili.
- We put a final nail in the coffin of the legend that James C.P.'s palindrome is the only one of its kind (although it remains to this date the only bilingual palindrome with matching meanings).

# 2 Preliminaries

We will consider pairs of languages $(L, M)$, and the reverse languages $M^{\mathrm{R}}$ and $L^{\mathrm{R}}$, consisting of the words of $L$ and $M$ with reversed letter order.

As the languages can feature slightly different diacritics or character sets, we generally follow the convention of removing them (as well as any typographical symbol) to simplify the composition of palindromes, so we will concentrate on a set of characters corresponding to the 26-character Latin letters present in English.

## 2.1 Types of bilingual palindromes

We can define three main kinds of bilingual palindromes.

*Bilingual strings*, which are parsable in both $L$ and $M^{\mathrm{R}}$ with at least one decomposition in each language. For example, `wakazaa kazirika` in Swahili (a prefix–verb phrase meaning "then they gave birth," and the root form of the verb "to be angry") reversed corresponds to `a kir i zak a az a kaw` in Polish ("and pall and student and until and coffee"), and although both can be parsed, they do not have any clear meaning.

*Bilingual sentences*, which are not only parsable in both $L$ and $M^{\mathrm{R}}$ but follow a semblance of grammatical rules in both. The rules can be bent somewhat, as is frequently done already in palindrome composition and related word games. For example, `Sir, o, blame Diana` reversed corresponds to `An aide mal Boris` (where `An` is a first name) in French [5].

*Bilingual meaningful sentences*, which are not just grammatical but make sense in both languages even with limited context. A possible example is `I am near, I repel as a rat.` which becomes `Tara, sale, périra en mai.` There is a sub-type of this bilingual palindrome, which we could call a "true bilingual palindrome" where the meanings of both sentences are related, but the only palindrome corresponding to this is the one featured at the start of the introduction.

We can finally mention one specific kind of bilingual palindrome, in which specific words not only exist in two languages, but also share a meaning. Although they are exceedingly rare, such words are good candidates to build longer sentences. Tom de Backer brought four such words to our attention[4]: *Nier/Rein* meaning *liver* in Dutch/French, *Dop/Pod* in Dutch/English, in its botanical sense, *Knik/Kink* in Dutch/English, as a disruption in a cable or chain, and *Ikke/Ekki,* meaning *yes* in Norwegian/Icelandic.

## 2.2 Objectives

There is one central objective, which is to generate bilingual palindromes of the third kind, ideally ones with related meanings. However, short of being able to do that directly, we can look at simplifying the constraints by characterizing good sub-languages from which humans—who excel at pattern seeking—can hopefully work more efficiently to manually compose palindromes.

One possibility would be to generate many potential bilingual strings and choosing the best ones. This is because generating bilingual strings is theoretically easy: they correspond to words from $L^* \cap (M^{\mathrm{R}})^*$. We take a standard

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[4] As a sidenote, the authors would like to thank Tom, a Belgian pentalingual translator who has been looking at such palindromes for many years. He contacted the authors in 2025 after reading a preprint, giving them the missing impetus to finish and properly publish this version.

representation of $L$ as a prefix tree. We can then obtain a non-deterministic automaton corresponding to $L^*$ by adding $\varepsilon$-transitions from each terminal node to the root. The intersection $L^* \cap (M^R)^*$ can then be naturally computed by checking the product automaton. The issue with that is one of size: many languages used here have more than 300,000 word forms (including plurals and declensions), and the corresponding prefix trees can have more than a million nodes. Lazy evaluation can help, but this can still be prohibitively computationally expensive.

Besides the computational cost, however, is the fact the overwhelming majority of these strings will be nonsensical, with the probability increasing with the string length—even by uniformly drawing only three words from an English dictionary, one already at most a 5% chance of getting a grammatically correct sentence[6]. A second option is then to find a fixed point in $L^* \cap (M^R)^*$, or in $L_s^* \cap (M_s^R)^*$ for sub-languages $L_s \subseteq L$ and $M_s \subseteq M$. This is the focus of this article and the objective of the algorithms shown in the next section.

One point that we must be careful with is that we have two opposite constraints. If we look at extremely reduced $L_s$ and $M_s$, our work becomes easier in that we get more flexible words, but we might end up with sets too reduced to compose any complex palindrome. On the other hand, if $L^*_s \cap (M_s^R)^*$ has tens of thousands of words, we are too weakly constrained to aid our search efficiently. For example, the following list of 23 words correspond to the palindromic words present in both French and English. That is, for $L$ = French, and $M$ = English, the list is $L \cap L^R \cap M \cap M^R$:

```
{a, ana, bob, eme, ere, gag, kayak, non, pep, pop, radar, reifier, rotor,
sagas, selles, sexes, shahs, sis, solos, sus, tallat, tot, tut}
```

One can arrange the words in the list in any way one wants and have bilingual strings, but they are too constrained to make long, meaningful sentences. Thus, we will be looking for a sweet spot to help human creation.

## 2.3 Language and dictionary choices

For this study, we chose a first set of six languages, from different—although sometimes related—language groups: English, German, French, Spanish, Polish, and Swahili. As the dictionaries chosen matter a lot for the end results, here are the details of the choices we made.

- **English (278,794 words):** the Collins Scrabble Words word list (formerly SOWPODS) was combined with the three one-letter English words `i`, `a`, and `o`, and with words of length > 15 from Moby Words II (collected via [6]).
- **French (323,422 words):** the French word list from the Hunspell wordchecker was used, collected from [10]. Characters with diacritics were replaced by the equivalent diacritic-less characters (i.e. é → e).
- **German (675,659 words):** a word list designed for word games was collected from [7].

Special characters were replaced as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| ä, ö, ü | ae, oe, ue |
| ß | ss |
| all other characters | equivalent diacritic-less character |

- **Spanish (635,039 words):** a word list was collected from [12]. Special characters were replaced by the equivalent diacritic-less characters.
- **Polish (3,087,991 words):** a Polish Scrabble word list (collected from [11]) was combined with the six one-letter Polish words (`a`, `i`, `o`, `u`, `w`, `z`) and with words of length > 15 from the Hunspell Polish word list (collected from [10]). We had to make some tough choices for special characters and followed phonetic rules, replacing as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| ł | w |
| w | v[7] |
| all other characters | equivalent diacritic-less character |

- **Swahili (67,966 words):** the Hunspell Tanzanian and Kenyan Swahili word lists were collected from [10] and combined. Special characters, all consisting of punctuation, were removed.

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[6] This estimate was done empirically by drawing many sentences but corresponds to what one would expect from the proportion of the different grammatical classes in English.

[7] This was done to maintain distinguishability from ł and did not introduce further confusion as v is not in the Polish alphabet.

# 3 Algorithms

## 3.1 Precomputation

To make the algorithms more efficient, the first step is to remove words that are definitely not in $L^* \cap (M_R)^*$. We can then compute the $n$-grams present in $L$, that is, subwords of length $n$ present inside words of $L$. For a given word to be in $L^* \cap (M^R)^*$, for each $n$-gram in the word, the $n$-gram has to be either an $n$-gram of $M^R$, or split between multiple words of $M^R$. For example, VENT is a 4-gram of the French word ECRIVENT but does not exist as a 4-gram in reversed English. However, it is present in the reverse of IT NEVER.

If we denote the $n$-grams of $L$ by $(L)$, a first idea is then to compute $n(L) \setminus n((M^R)^*)$. The issue with this method is that, even if we compute $n((M^R)^*)$ using dynamic programming, the set has a size exponential in $n$, which generally becomes unwieldy around $n = 7$.

We do this for $n < 7$ and remove words from $L$ that have $n$-grams not in $(M^R)^*$, getting us a new language $L_2 \subseteq L$. We can then go the other way and remove from $M^R$ words that have $n$-grams that are not present in $L_2^*$. We can proceed iteratively until reaching a fixed point. This fixed point is generally reached in 2 to 5 iterations, depending on $n$, with some examples shown as Figure 1 and Figure 2 in Section 4.

## 3.2 General algorithms

We can aim to compute three different intersections:

- the words present in $L \cap (M^R)$, such as `snores,` which exists in both English and reversed French.
- the words present in $(L^* \cap (M^R)) \cup ((L^* \cap (M^R)^*))$, such as `set on,` which exists as it is in English and as `notes` in French.
- the words present in decompositions of strings from $L^* \cap (M^R)^*$, which can include arbitrary long sequences of words before a common decomposition can be found.

The first kind can be computed intuitively by checking the list of words in $(M)^R$ against a prefix tree for $L$. That said, this list is generally too small to be directly useful, as is shown on Figure 4.

To compute the second kind, one can operate in the same way, except that the prefix tree becomes a non-deterministic automaton, with $\varepsilon$-transitions from final nodes to the root. This allows a word to have multiple decompositions. Although we were expecting this set to be too reduced to be useful, it is in fact already nearly too large to work with in practice for certain language pairs, as shown in Figure 5.

As the previous set is already too large, the third set becomes *a priori* unnecessary. It is, however, the set whose computation introduces non-trivial algorithmic questions. As we said above, the intersection language itself can be computed by getting the product of the automata made from prefix trees for $L^*$ and $((M)^R)^*$. The issue is that this automaton does not allow us to trivially eliminate bad candidate words (that cannot be in a bilingual palindrome). There are sufficient conditions: for example, if any node reachable by reading this word and going back to the root (on at least one dimension) can reach an accepting state, the word will appear in a decomposition. But this is not a necessary condition.

We can then create dependency graphs to simplify the process. Our goal is then to make sure to link each word to the words in the other language that are necessary for it to be in the fixed point, and look at cycles within this new graph.

For every word $x \in L$, we start by splitting it into two halves (for every possible split into potentially empty subwords): $A$ and $B$. Then we know that $A$ must be the ending of a word in $MR$. That is, there must be $y_0, \ldots, y_k$ such that $y_{0<i<k} = Y_{i-1}Y_i \in M^R$, and $y_k = Y_k A \in M^R$. Similarly, $B$ must correspond to a node in the prefix automaton of $MR$, either reaching a final node or being splitable into two subwords (reflecting the process of $A$).

We then get two options. First, we could try to compute those sequences of words until we reach either a synchronizing prefix and suffix or an empty set. The latter would show that the $x$ cannot be in the fixed point of $L^* \cap (M^R)^*$. The former would give us a string with at least one decomposition in each language, with all the words from those decompositions being in the fixed point. The issue with this is that the direct way to do it is to compute—potentially lazily—a product automaton. To see whether $A$ is a compatible prefix, we need the product of $(L^R)^*$ and $(M)^*$, except that the latter is rooted in any potential node corresponding to $A^R$. To see whether $B$ is a compatible suffix, we need the product of $L^*$ and $(M^R)^*$, with the former being rooted in any node reachable by $B$.

The issue with this method is that we once again run into complexity issues, as the product automaton still has an unwieldy size. We can then weaken our constraint temporarily to partially resolve this.

To do this, we construct four prefix automata, for $L^*$, $(L^R)^*$, $M^*$, and $(M^R)^*$. For every final node $x$ in $L^*$, we look at potential splittings into two halves $A$ and $B$. For each splitting, we follow $A^R$ in $M^*$ and compute a set of accepting sets (each set is composed of the last node reached, plus any final node whose $\varepsilon$-transition we went through). We do the same with $B$ by following $B$ in $(M^R)^*$ and computing the accepting sets. We then take the set of set products.

By computing the union of all those sets, we get a set of accepting sets, each of which is sufficient to ensure that $x$ is in $L^* \cap (M^R)^*$. If the set of accepting sets is empty, however, the word cannot be in $L^* \cap (M^R)^*$.

Using all those accepting sets, we add dependency relations, which are represented by directed hyperedges from nodes in $M^*$ and $(M^R)^*$ to final nodes in $L^*$. We do the same for the final nodes in $(M^R)^*$.

We then get a quadripartite directed hypergraph. For every node that has no hyperedge pointing towards it, we do the following:

- delete all the hyperedges the node is a part of as a final node;
- if the node has descendants, remove its *final* indicator and the $\varepsilon$-transition to the root ;
- if the node has no descendants, remove it entirely, and remove ascendants recursively until reaching one that is final or has another descendant;
- do the same operations for the corresponding node in the reversed tree of the same language.

We repeat this process until the set of nodes with no incoming hyperedge becomes empty.

Alas, this method ignores the synchronization mentioned above but could already eliminate many words in certain contexts. Instead of computing the full product automaton, a hybrid solution would be to follow this and for each incomplete prefix and suffix to compute the first few levels of this product. For example, one could do a breadth-first search in parallel in both $M^*$ rooted in $A^R$ and in $(L^R)^*$, to try to find either a path leading in parallel to final nodes, or to show that there exists no such path.

## 4 Data analysis

This section shows the result of the first few methods mentioned previously, to give an idea of what happens in practice in the languages considered.

We first focus on the percentage of words that get deleted from each dictionary when we apply the $n$-gram elimination method until convergence for a pair of languages. This depends on $n$, but it is easy to see that larger $n$ removes a superset of words when we restrict ourselves to words of length at least $n$.
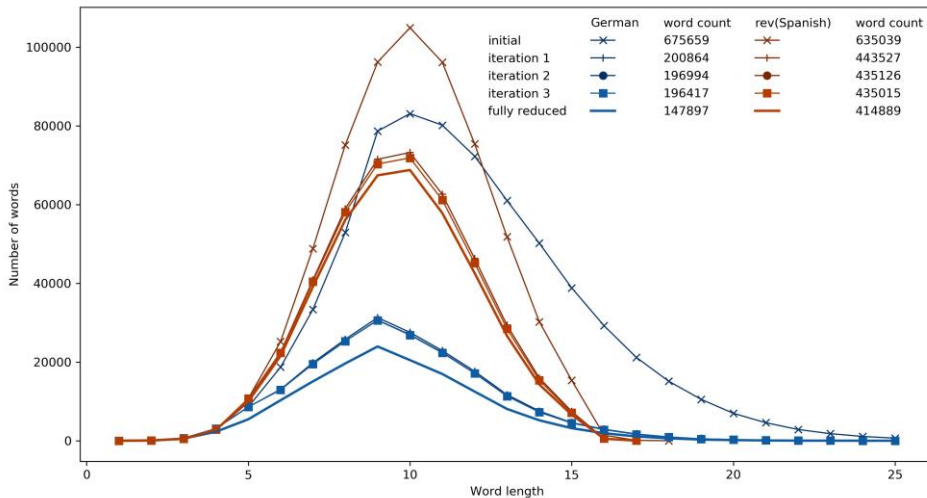


**Figure 1** Effect of removing the **6**-grams using the German–Spanish pair, with curves corresponding to the different iterations. The fully reduced curve corresponds to removing the full set (including the $n$-grams for $n < 6$).
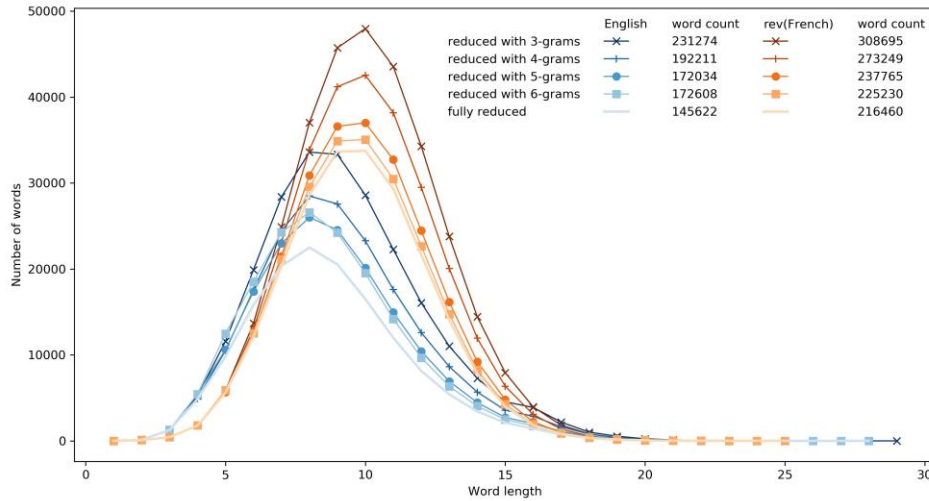
44

**Figure 2** Effect of removing the $n$-grams using the English–French pair until convergence, for different values of , as well as the intersection of all computed sets.

We can see that **6**-grams are more efficient at eliminating words, as they correspond to stricter constraints. We can also see that there is generally a last step in the iteration that removes words with very rare $n$-grams that depend on other rare words, with the last iteration sometimes only removing a few dozen words (Figure 1 and Appendix).

Figure 3 shows that the susceptibility of a language to vocabulary elimination depends on size, orthographic variation, and typological relationship to the other languages. Polish has an extremely high average elimination proportion: this is both due to its size and the high frequency of bigrams which are rare or absent in other (mirrored) languages, such as sz. We can observe several other patterns, such as Swahili's tendency to eliminate vocabulary from other languages and English's relatively low elimination proportion in all its language pairs, but they could be statistical artifacts.

(cont'd)
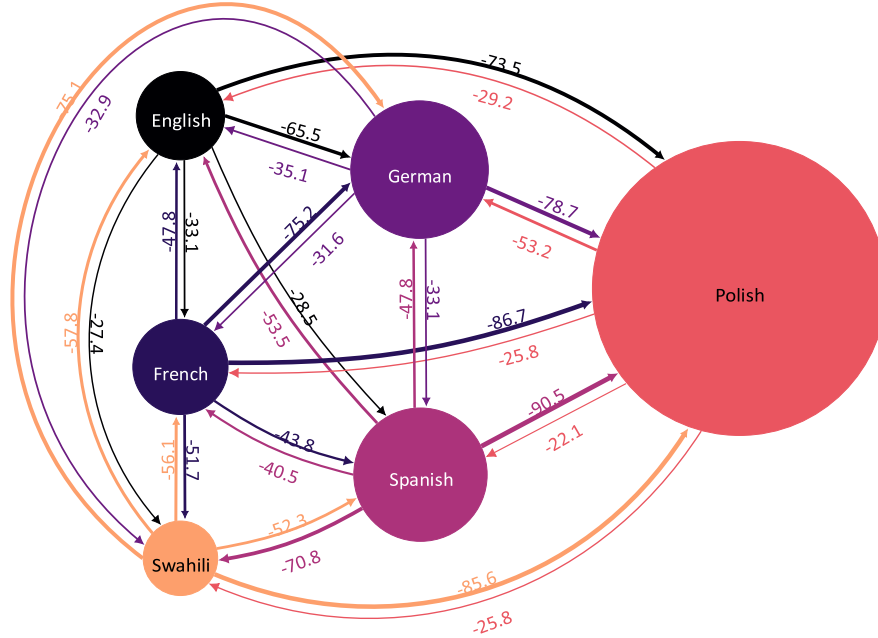
**Figure 3** Graph representing the proportion of words eliminated in each language pair by using the n-gram procedure until convergence. The arrow from *L* to *M* represents the proportion of words eliminated from *M*. For example, Swahili removes 85.6% of Polish words, but Polish removes only 25.8% of Swahili words. The node radius grows with the square root of the language size, and the edge thickness with the proportion of words eliminated.

Instead of eliminating as many words as possible, we can also go from the other end to find words in the fixed point. Figure 4 shows the strictest fixed point, corresponding to the number of full words that are shared between *L* and $M^R$, and Figure 5 shows the number of words that can be fully decomposed from one language to a reversed other.

Looking at Figure 4, we can see that the number of common words is related to the dictionary sizes. While the size of the Polish dictionary does inform the strong overlaps it has with all the other dictionaries, this factor does not explain the fact that it has nearly three times as many words in common with English as it does with French, which are comparably sized. This, rather, is probably due to the high variability of English orthography on account of its tendency to borrow word formation patterns from other languages [9].

Comparing Figure 3 with Figure 4 shows a potential inverse correlation between common word overlap and $n$-gram elimination. For instance, English has the largest overlap with Polish and eliminates the least of its vocabulary. This is not easily generalizable, as we can also see that while Spanish has twice as many words in common with Swahili as does French, it eliminates almost 20% more of its vocabulary. Conversely, between Figures 4 and 5, the size of the common word list does not inform the mutual decomposability: French and Swahili share the fewest words, but French is highly decomposable into Swahili.
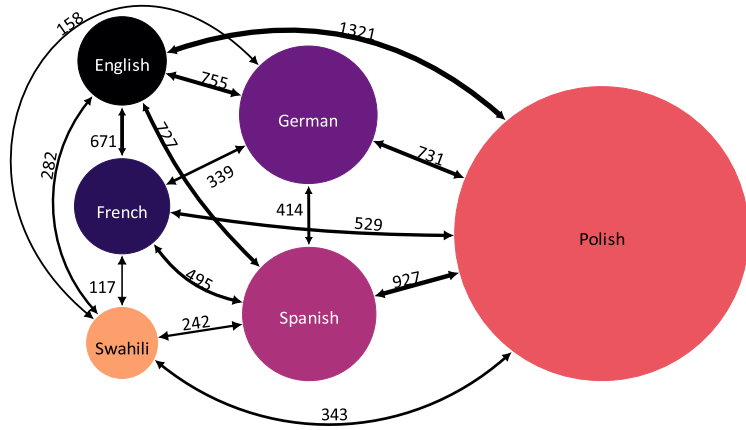
**Figure 4** Graph representing the number of bilingual palindrome words between pairs of languages. The node radius grows with the square root of the language size, and the edge thickness with the square root of the size of the number of bilingual palindrome words.
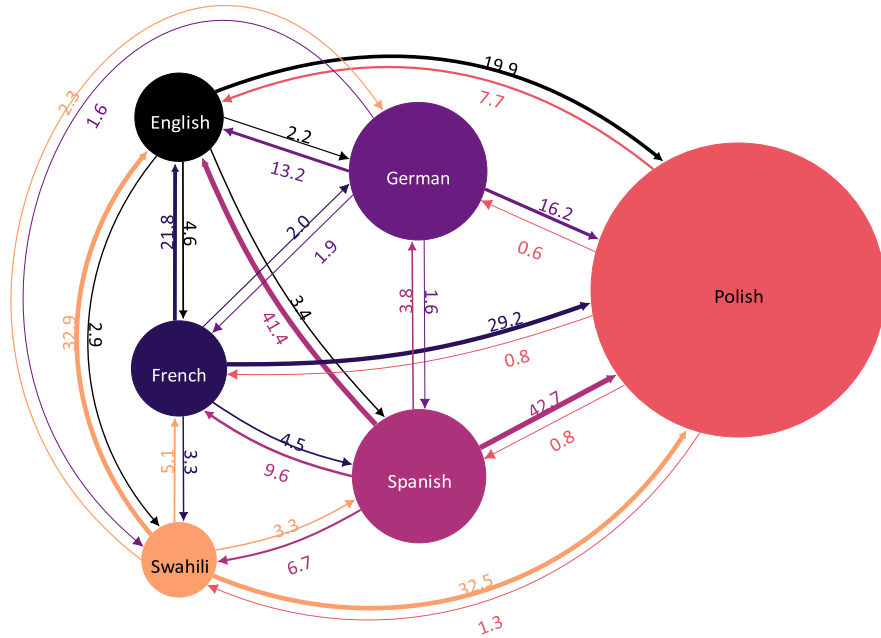


**Figure 5** Graph representing the proportion of words left in each language pair by only allowing perfect decomposition of one word into many. The arrow from *L* to *M* represents the proportion of words from *L* that can be decomposed into words from $M^R$. For example, 16.2% of German words can be parsed in reversed Polish, whereas only 0.6% of Polish words can be parsed in reverse German. The node radius grows with the square root of the language size, and the edge thickness with the square root of proportion of words decomposed.

# 5 Conclusion: the importance of grammar

Sadly, the efforts shown in the previous section do not lead to language sets of reasonable sizes that are both constrained enough to be manageable and large enough to be useful. One central reason why the word sets that are left are of limited help is that, with this restricted vocabulary, one has to handle grammatical constraints and still make sense. To give an example, one can look at the title of this paper: "`Set up, son? Scam set, asserts Bob.`" Backwards, it reads as "`Bob stressa tes macs, nos putes,`" which after translation from French, becomes "Bob stressed out your pimps and our whores."

Returning to the original palindrome, it seems that the key to its unlikely existence is within the language itself. Latin allows a leeway that many of the modern Romance languages don't—its word order is relatively free, allowing subject, object, and verb to come in any order, though this does affect meaning[4].

The freedom this creates is particularly useful in building palindromes , especially when using palindromic words as building blocks. For instance, if one wanted to create a bilingual French-English palindrome, one would have to take into account the strict subject-verb-object order of both languages. Thus, a phrase containing a transitive verb would require the word(s) forming the verb to be in the middle and those forming subject and object to be one another's reversible counterparts. The word(s) in question must be part of the narrow strata of each language's lexicon which will reverse into a word in the other language, while making functional sense as both subject and object. In theory, then, Latin or other languages without a fixed word order—or with a flexible order, such as with Polish—make for easier target languages in the creation of bilingual palindromes.

"Evoles ut" is able to sidestep this somewhat by its arguable lack, in the English translation, of a separately expressed subject to some of the verbs. For instance: "bar" as used here is a two-place predicate, requiring both an object and subject to fulfil it and thus make it grammatical. In English this usually looks like SVO, "[you] bar it." However, the "you" here is implied by the use of an imperative aspect, so the subject is already built into the verb—a separate expression of it is unnecessary. Thus there is more space for wordplay, as there are fewer building blocks required for the palindrome to be grammatical in English. Essentially, the fewer additional characters required to fulfil a predicate and the more flexibility with word order, the easier it will be (in theory) to manually build a bilingual palindrome.

In this regard, Latin and Polish are both ideal. The issue with the former is that it is becoming hard to find people proficient enough to accomplish the last step of mental gymnastics to create meaningful palindromes. The issue with the latter is its heavy reliance on bigrams that are rare in other languages, whether reversed or not. For example, 51% of the words in our Polish dictionary feature a "z," and 8.5% of them feature an "sz," whereas the corresponding values for English are respectively 4.2% and 0.002% (and 0.003% of "zs").

Short of using those languages, we should then rely on decorated dictionaries with indications of grammatical roles potentially held by words. However, there are few complete dictionaries featuring such information in languages other than English, and palindromists often bend some grammatical rules to achieve their ends. This practice and the fact that rare words are very frequently used in palindromes also complicate data-based methods (such as looking online whether a specific sequence of words has ever been used). This is also why automatically searching for bilingual palindromic words (or word pairs) is non-trivial. Either one takes a list between a pair of languages and does it by hand if it's small enough (generally a few hundred words as per Figure 4), or one requires decorated dictionaries or translation dictionaries, which seldom include the very rare words.

Until those problems are solved, making true bilingual palindromes will then keep a mystical aspect[5].

# 6 Acknowledgments

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[8] Indeed, the palindrome's function is not neutral, and early palindromes often communicated a moral. They also had a mystical aspect and were used to inscribe verses of the Torah and to aid in rituals [1].

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**9**     Suzanne Romaine. Variability in word formation patterns and productivity in the history of english. In *6th International Conference on Historical Linguistics*, pages 451–465, 1985.

**10**     titoBouzout. Hunspell utf8 dictionaries, 2019. URL: https://github.com/titoBouzout/ Dictionaries/.

**11**     Turekj. Msc project implementation of manisero & turekj, 2014. URL: https://github.com/ turekj/msc.

**12**     zeke. an-array-of-spanish-words, 2019. URL: https://github.com/words/ an-array-of-spanish-words.

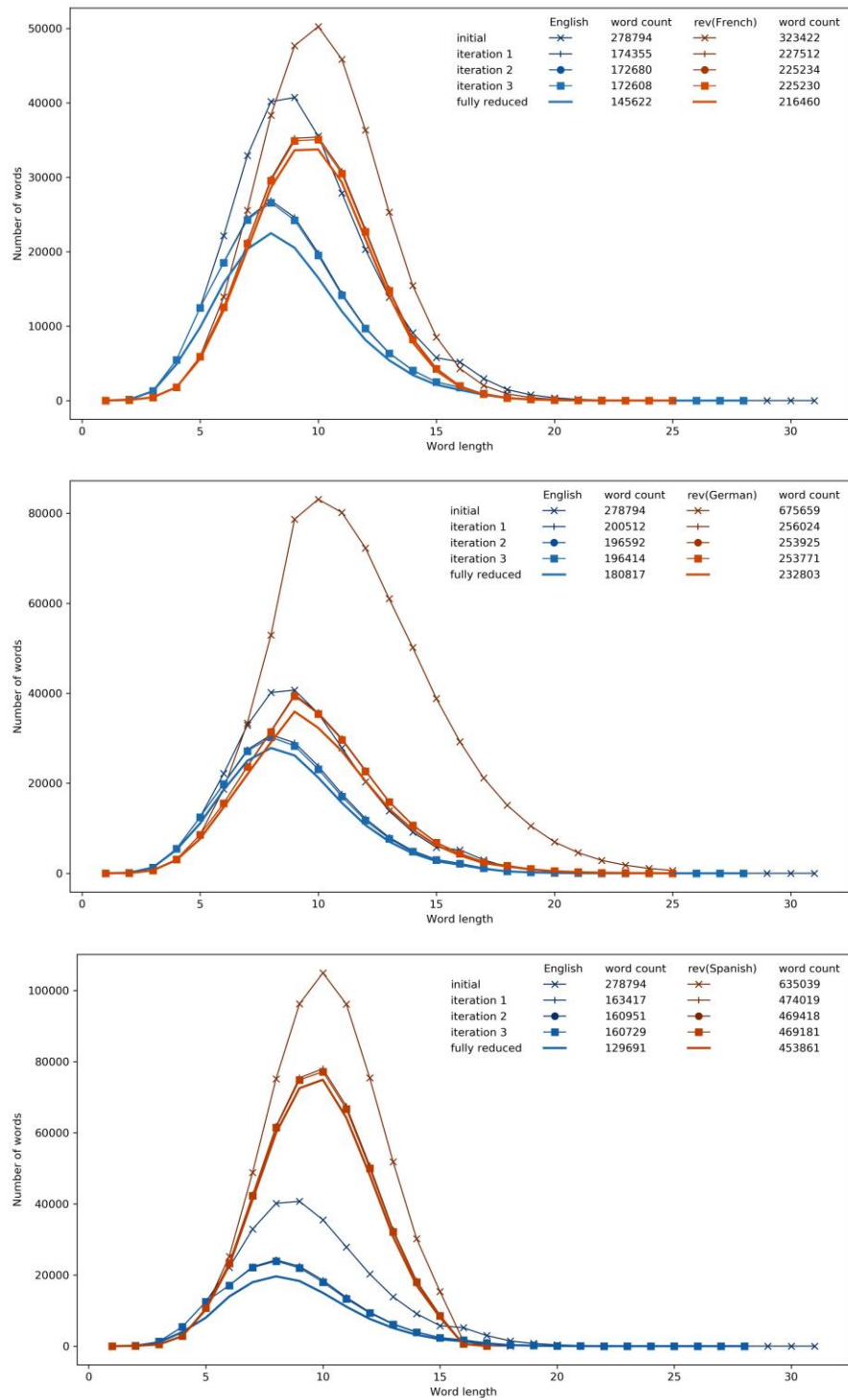# 7 Appendix: $n$-gram curves for all pairs of languages



**Figure 6** 6-gram curves for English–French, English–German, and English–Spanish.
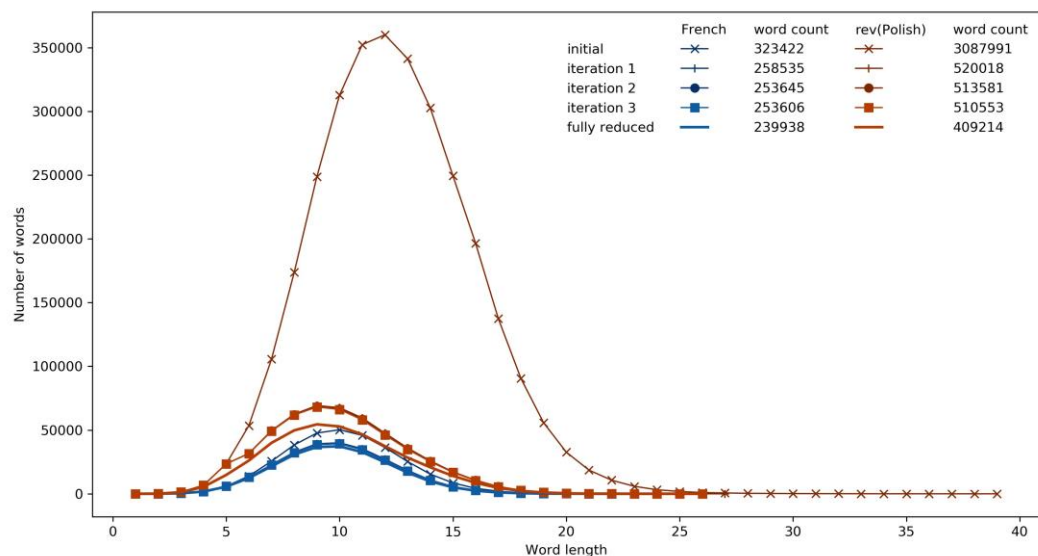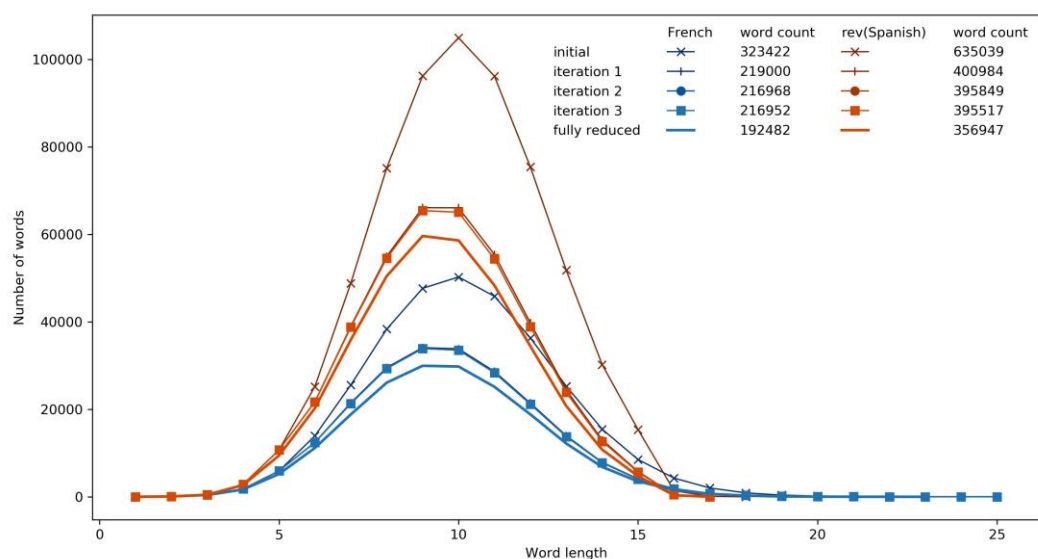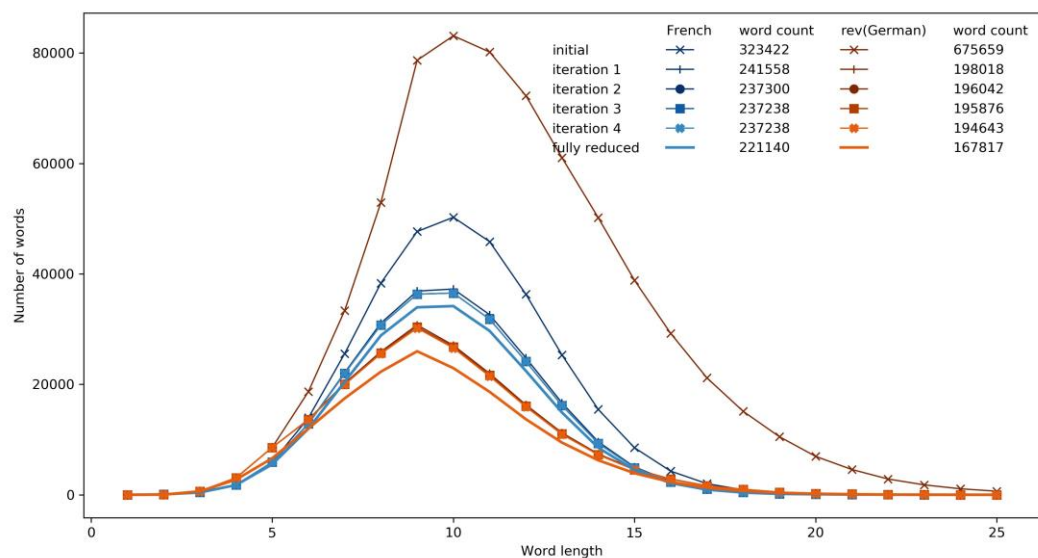
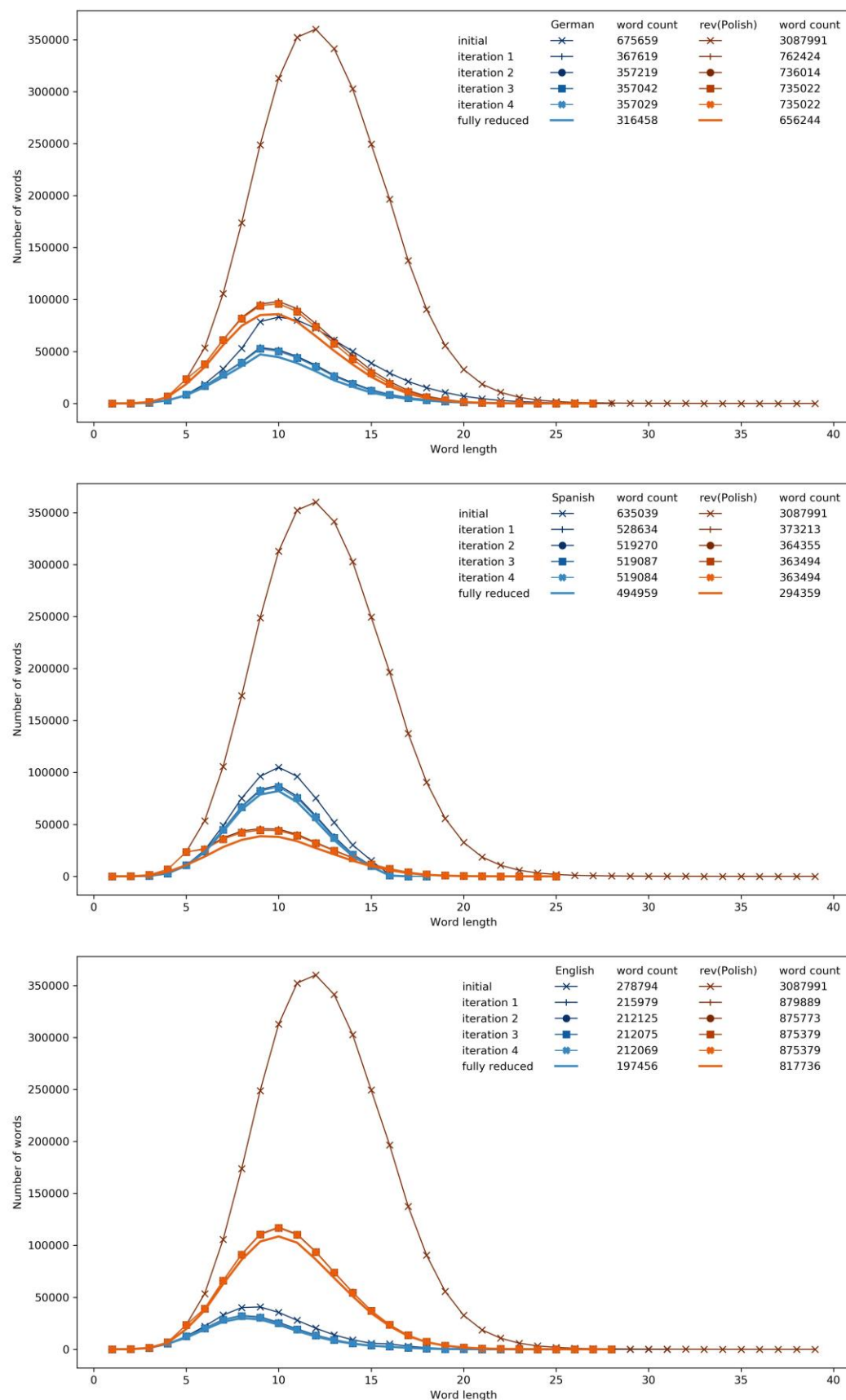**Figure 7** 6-gram curves for French–German, French–Spanish, and French–Polish.

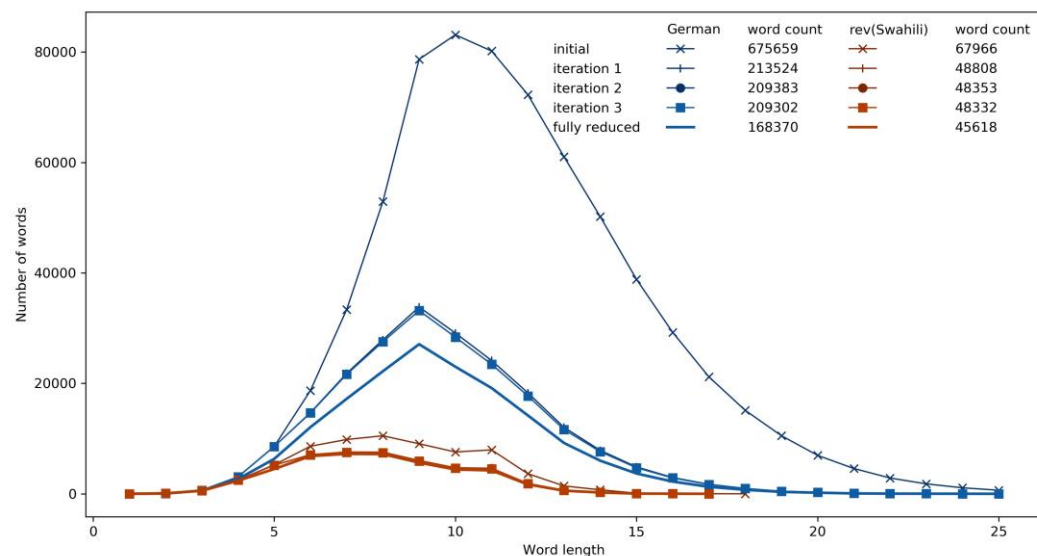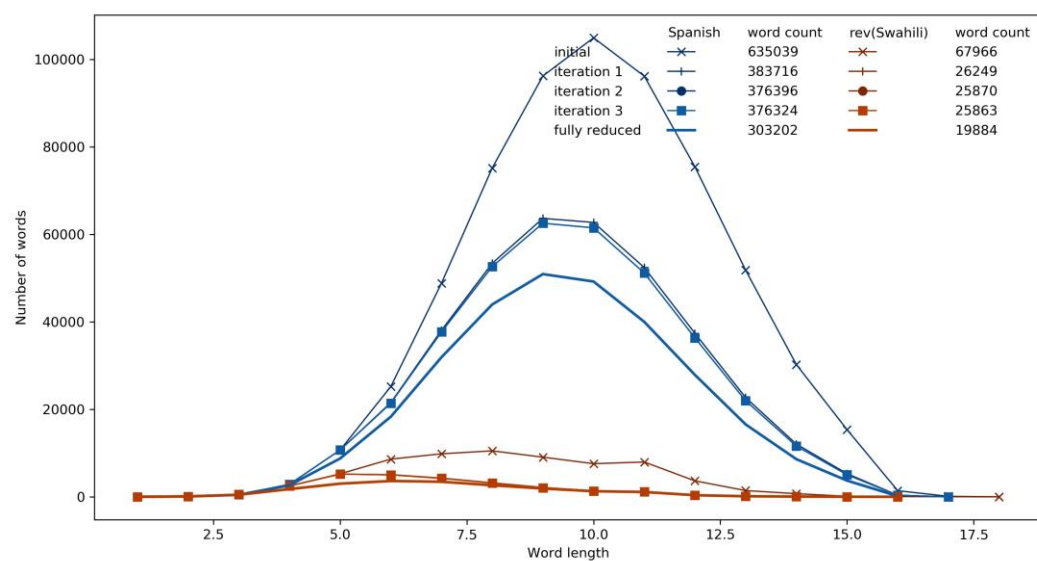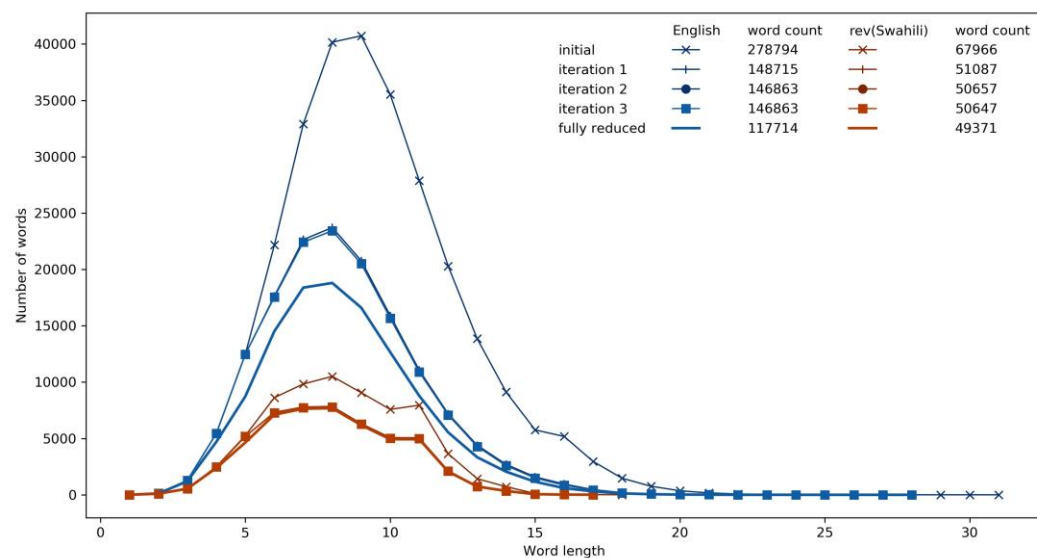|  | German | word count | rev(Polish) | word count |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| initial | ✕ | 675659 | ✕ | 3087991 |
| iteration 1 | + | 367619 | + | 762424 |
| iteration 2 | ● | 357219 | ● | 736014 |
| iteration 3 | ■ | 357042 | ■ | 735022 |
| iteration 4 | ✳ | 357029 | ✳ | 735022 |
| fully reduced | — | 316458 | — | 656244 |

|  | Spanish | word count | rev(Polish) | word count |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| initial | ✕ | 635039 | ✕ | 3087991 |
| iteration 1 | + | 528634 | + | 373213 |
| iteration 2 | ● | 519270 | ● | 364355 |
| iteration 3 | ■ | 519087 | ■ | 363494 |
| iteration 4 | ✳ | 519084 | ✳ | 363494 |
| fully reduced | — | 494959 | — | 294359 |

|  | English | word count | rev(Polish) | word count |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| initial | ✕ | 278794 | ✕ | 3087991 |
| iteration 1 | + | 215979 | + | 879889 |
| iteration 2 | ● | 212125 | ● | 875773 |
| iteration 3 | ■ | 212075 | ■ | 875379 |
| iteration 4 | ✳ | 212069 | ✳ | 875379 |
| fully reduced | — | 197456 | — | 817736 |

**Figure 8 6**-gram curves for German–Polish, Spanish–Polish, and English–Polish.

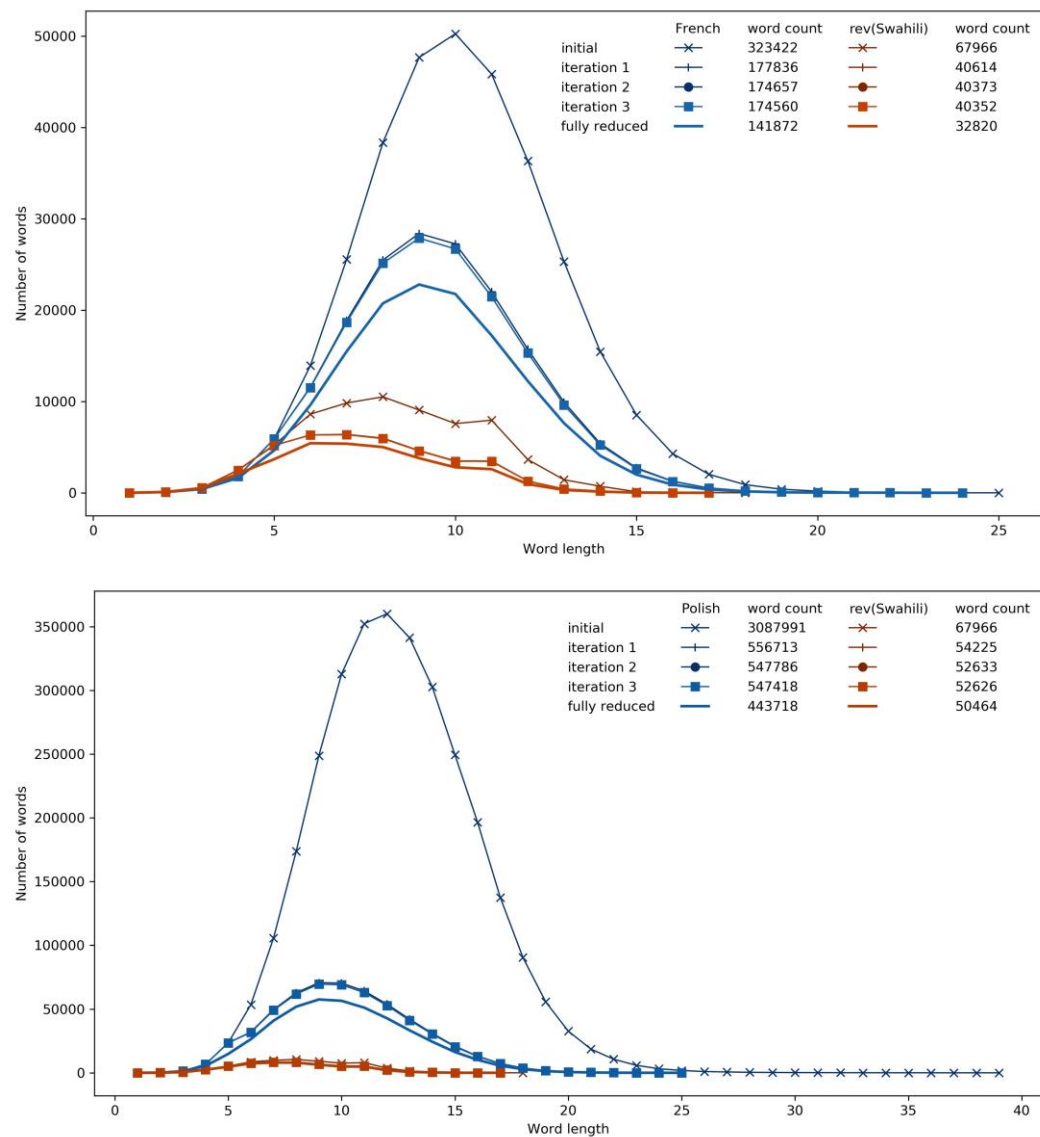**Figure 9** 6-gram curves for English–Swahili, Spanish–Swahili, and German–Swahili.

**Figure 10** 6-gram curves for French–Swahili and Polish–Swahili.

# CROSSWORDS 1920-1923: FROM BUST TOWARD BOOM
T Campbell

This continues an ongoing year-by-year exploration of the history of the crossword puzzle, beginning with its official origins in 1913. See previous issues of *The Journal of Wordplay.*

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## 1920
As 1920 began, the crossword vanished.

For two months, the *New York World*'s *FUN* section and its syndication partners offered up no new crosswords—except *The Boston Globe,* still syndicating on a schedule far removed from anyone else's. *(Globe* fans reported making yokes out of the grids after use.) In late February, *World* crosswords resumed with this note:

> *That the cross-word puzzle has not lost its popularity is attested by the numerous letters which come to* The Sunday World *each week asking why that feature has been omitted from recent issues. The answer is, of course, that we are crowded for space and are often obliged to omit features that we should like to print…*

"What else could we do? There was just *no space on the pages!"* That might explain a week or two's absence, but eight? What was really going on here?

We'll come back to that question. Regardless of cause, there were consequences. Walter A. Walker registered a copyright that winter through *The Pittsburg Press* for "Jerry King's Crossword Puzzle." In mid-March, the *Press* and *The Minneapolis Journal* began running it in the *World* puzzle's place, and *The Vancouver Sun* picked it up too. (Others may have, also—searchable newspaper archives are far from comprehensive.)
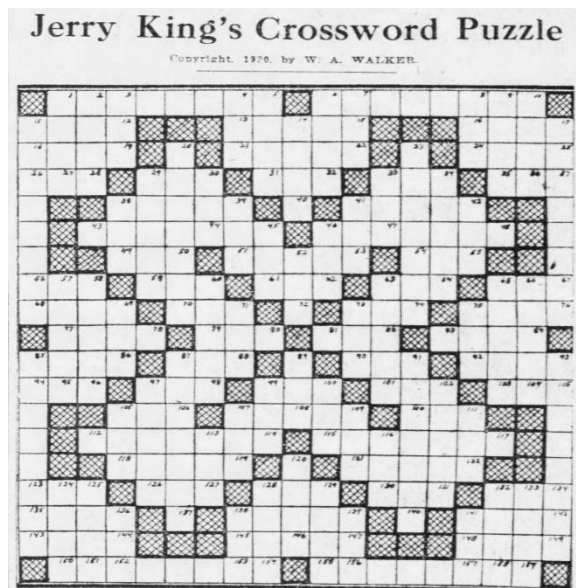


Jerry King's Crossword Puzzle, *the* World*'s first competition*.

"Jerry King" was likely a pseudonym. The copyright was in Walker's name, "Jerry" was slang for German then (too archaic to be offensive now), and this headline accompanied one puzzle in the *Sun:*

GERMANS WANT A MONARCHY AGAIN, STATES OBSERVER

Jerry King's Crossword Puzzle

*Note the headline about a "jerry king" next to "Jerry King."*

The puzzles did seem like the work of one hand: most used a distinctive hand-drawn crosshatch for black squares, and early designs tended to be more "connected" than the *World*'s, which could go as far as an astonishing 24 closed-off sections (see right):

Further details about Walker are lost to history.

About cartoonist Walter Wellman, more is known: he had a long list of credits in newspapers and magazines. His contributions to the *World* began in 1905. By 1920, he was a few years from settling into greeting card illustration, but he drew fusions of crosswords and cartoons, the most "crosswordy" of which is below.
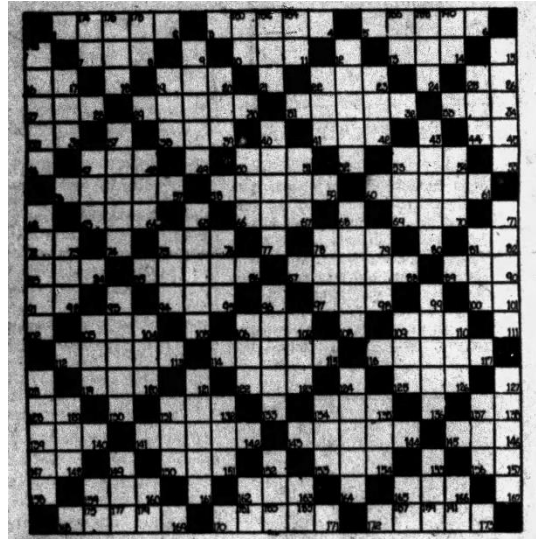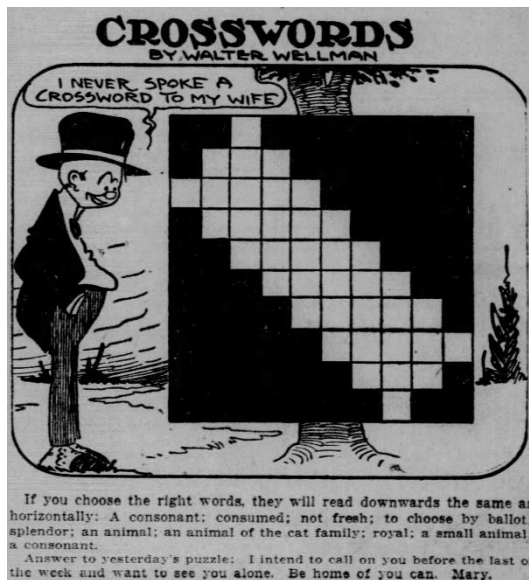


*This* World *crossword is really 24 minis.*

After its hiatus, the *World* continued its user-generated content strategy, which brought forth more innovations than its rivals. Joseph C. Taylor produced the first **pangrammatic** grid—or at least the first advertised as such, at right.



CROSSWORDS
BY WALTER WELLMAN

I NEVER SPOKE A CROSSWORD TO MY WIFE

If you choose the right words, they will read downwards the same as horizontally: A consonant; consumed; not fresh; to choose by ballot; splendor; an animal; an animal of the cat family; royal; a small animal; a consonant.

Answer to yesterday's puzzle: I intend to call on you before the last of the week and want to see you alone. Be home of you can. Mary.

*Walter Wellman's "Crosswords"*



*The first grid to contain all 26 letters and say so.*

By summer, the *World* was marketing an "Ingenuities" puzzle section with an aggressive subtitle—"Are Your Wits Equal to Them?" It also published "Hints for Crossword-Puzzle Makers" to inform submissions:

> *Do not make your diagram too large. We prefer to have them not more than twenty squares wide and about the same in depth.*

> *One diagram is sufficient. You do not need separate ones for the numbers and letters. Put both on the same diagram, but letter them distinctly so that there will be no confusion.*

> *Arrange the words in your puzzle so that they cross each other at as many points as possible, in order that each word found will help the solver find others.*

> *Avoid words from foreign languages unless they are so commonly used that they have been adopted into the English language.*

*FUN* would publish a 21x21 by year's end.

W.W. and L.T. Spencer composed the presidential grid at upper right, including four presidents and two candidates. Warren G. HARDING would get elected that fall and crossed outgoing president WOODROW Wilson. (The initials T.R. got bonus credit.) "Occupying prominent positions in the diagram," read the introduction, "are several words expressing the ideals for which our country stands."



*Seven presidential figures, 14 patriotic sentiments.*

The *FUN* grid at bottom right isn't one crossword but a set of overlapping **progressive word squares.** The first has the words ARID, RIDE, IDEA, and DEAR, each reading across and down, the last three letters of each word supplying the first three letters of the next. Same goes for ROPE-OPEN-PEND-ENDS, which overlaps the first square at the R. And so on.

Margaret Oliver's grid (not shown here) experimented with numbers in "black" squares instead of the white ones.
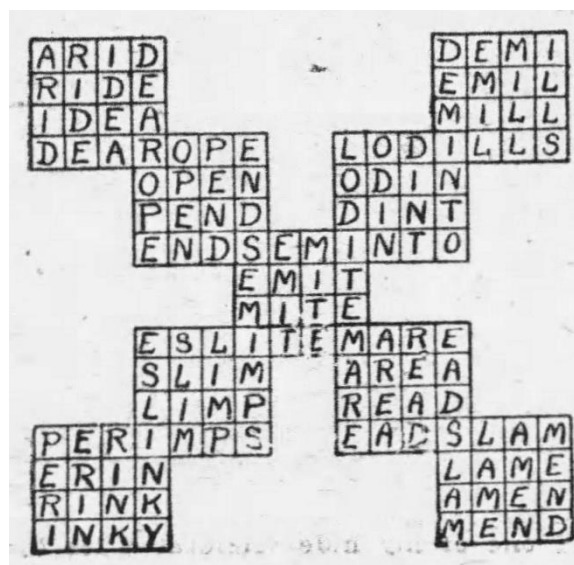


*Progressive word squares.*

On the other hand, M.L. Johnson's may just be the worst design of 1920 (upper right). Johnson wanted the solver to write in most of the shaded boxes below—legibly—somehow.

Plus, answers (lower right) included ORTIV and RACA—just in the first two lines!

Usage of *crosswords* or *cross-words* continued to hold the now-archaic meanings of "angry speech" and "acrostic puzzles." In the June 30 *Neodesha Daily Sun,* it meant "a state of constant argument."

> *It was through Joett Shouse that Hodges was put on the sub-committee. Shouse and Hodges are at **cross-words.** Shouse is a pal of Carter Glass, so just to heap coals of fire upon Hodges, he had Glass name Hodges on the sub-committee.*

Arthur Wynne wasn't quite "at cross-words" with the *World.* Its editors didn't always fathom the appeal of the "silly squares," but they understood the puzzle drove subscriptions and brought in syndication dollars. But behind the fun of *FUN,* Wynne was burnt out. After seven years, his interest in vetting new submissions was drying up: he now tended to approve most at a glance, without solving them.



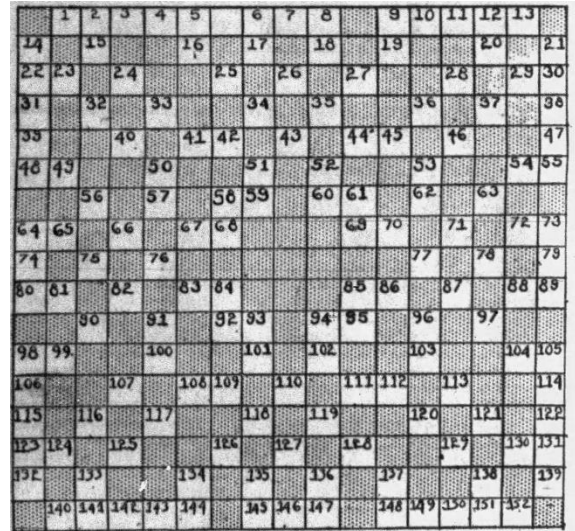*Shaded boxes—technically an innovation, but not one worth following.*

That burnout seems the most likely reason for the hiatus of early 1920. Still loved by its fans, the crossword was entering a period of neglect by its caretakers.

## 1921

And in 1921, things would get worse before they got better. It was the year that crossword editors just didn't care.

**Arthur Wynne** had invented the feature and encouraged readers to take it to further levels of creativity and amazement. **Margaret Petherbridge,** later Margaret Farrar, would become its brightest guiding light.
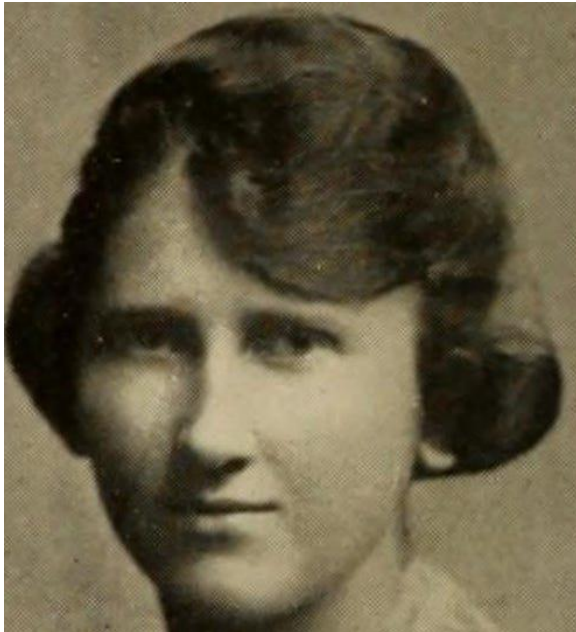
But that was Wynne's past and Petherbridge's future. Every hero has an origin story. Some begin as villains.

*Margaret Petherbridge as a younger woman.*

In 1921, a restless Wynne was ready to move on from the "silly squares." They'd never given him the financial compensation he considered an inventor's due, and he had other interests. Petherbridge, a secretary fresh out of college, became Wynne's assistant, then successor.

A lifelong New Yorker, Petherbridge (upper left) was a Renaissance woman well before she took the job. At Smith College, she'd been an actress, debater, and basketball player, and led a parade on horseback. Out of school, she'd organized college fundraisers and worked in a bank. But her real dream was writing, and she already had at least one story published—"A Bit of Irish Lace Which Failed to Adorn The Queen" (lower left).

Getting stuck with Wynne's cast-off and its demanding readers was nowhere in her life plan. She'd never solved a crossword before taking the job—and she wasn't going to start now. The burnt-out Wynne had been rubber-stamping the prettiest-looking grids without solving them for the last year or two. Petherbridge followed suit.

## A Bit of Irish Lace Which Failed to Adorn the Queen



By MARGARET PETHERBRIDGE.

JUST as Cathal O'Bryne was leaving a famous lace shop in Belfast, Miss Burke, vendor of laces, said to him:

"Why don't you take this to America with you, Mr. O'Bryne? It might interest some of your friends over there."

"This" was a tiny medallion of lace, seemingly modest and unassuming, but in reality all mixed up in this terrible tangle of Irish politics.

Mr. O'Bryne, who was bound for America to sing Irish folk songs to

Unionist lady, who had been examining the design closely, discovered in a corner of the veil a medallion bearing a strange symbol, and some words. Investigating further, she found that this was the Irish trademark woven into the design by the nuns, and that the words meant made in Ireland.
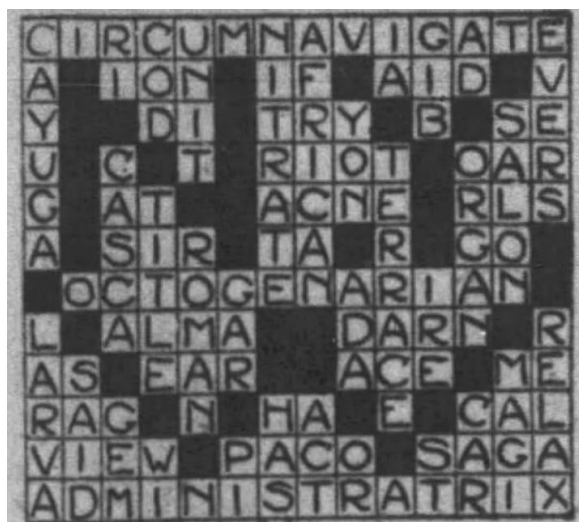
It did not fit in with the plans of the Unionist ladies of Belfast to have such an Irish trademark on their present to the Queen. In fact, they were scandalized at the thought, and set about some way of getting rid of the objectionable medallion. The

*An article Petherbridge wrote for the* World *in 1921.*

Wynne and Petherbridge's indifference didn't quite smother the submissions' creativity. The president-themed puzzle of the previous year got a sequel with *fifteen* presidential names in it (highlights added, at right).

And some of those "pretty" grids were very pretty, rendering a 3-D house, a stylized eye, an Easter cross…and the *New York World*'s initials (below left—which meant less if you were solving this syndicated in the *Buffalo Courier Express*).



*The second notable "presidential grid."*



*"N.Y. W."*

Also, Lulu C. Thurston offered up a circular "cross word baseball" (below right), with a few cartoons enlivening the margins!
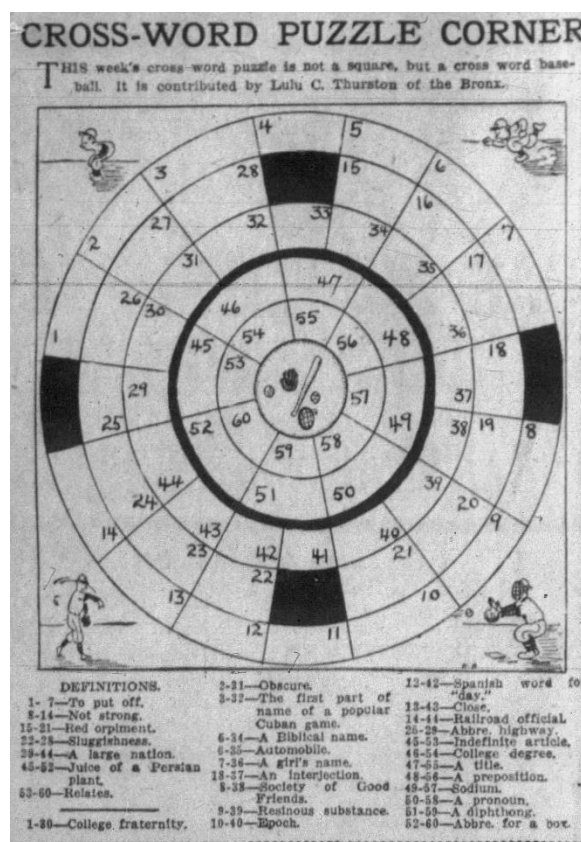
October 2's *World* puzzle (not shown) included BUTTERSCOTCH PIE, possibly the first "marquee" multi-word answer in a grid. (Other grids placed multiple words in a row, but as part of separate answers.)

However, just as many *World* grids of 1921 *lacked* ambition. Even by the relaxed standards of the day, it's hard to imagine them gratifying solvers much (next page).



*A "cross word baseball."*

*(DECAPIPATE? Did someone decapitate the proofreader?)*



*Most of the effort here seems to have gone into selecting the four longest words.*

The *World* did offer more crossword-*like* puzzles. Overlapping word squares became a regular feature (below right, coloring added for clarity).

King's-move and knight's-move puzzles let solvers find words in them by moving in the style of those chess pieces (below left).



*Move from square to square one step in any direction (like a chess king) to spell words here.*
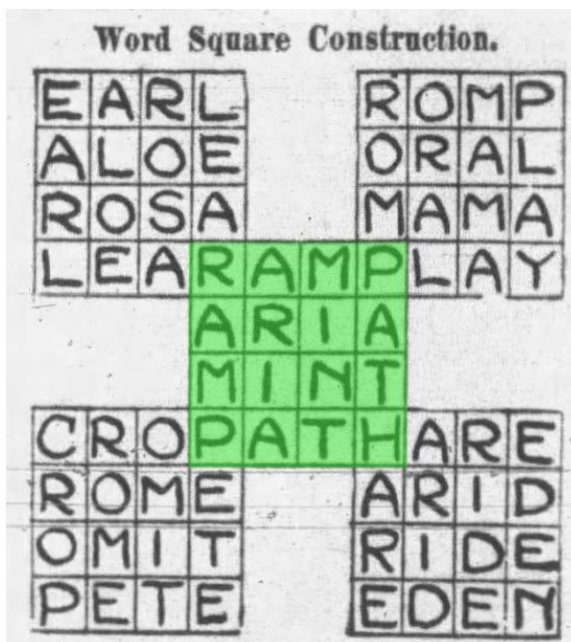


*While not "progressive," these overlapping word squares still amused solvers of the day.*

However, these other word-grids were not immune to the issues plaguing the crossword proper. Here's a word-square answer key with an E that should be an O (next page, top left):
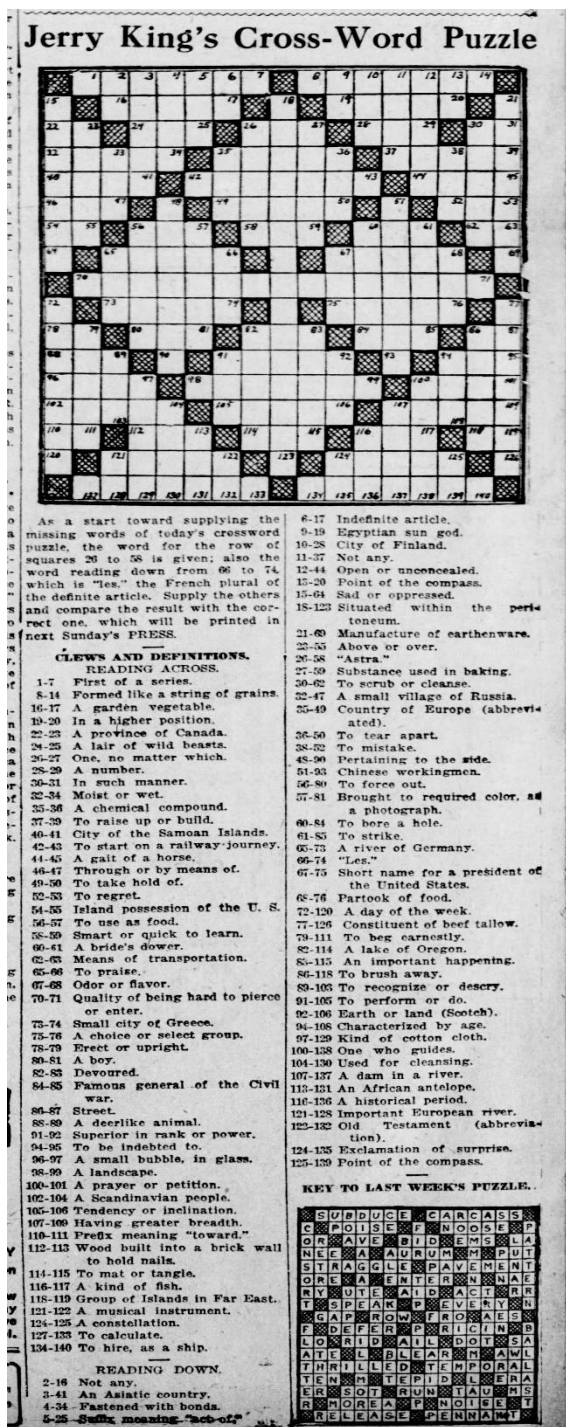
61

## Word Square Construction.
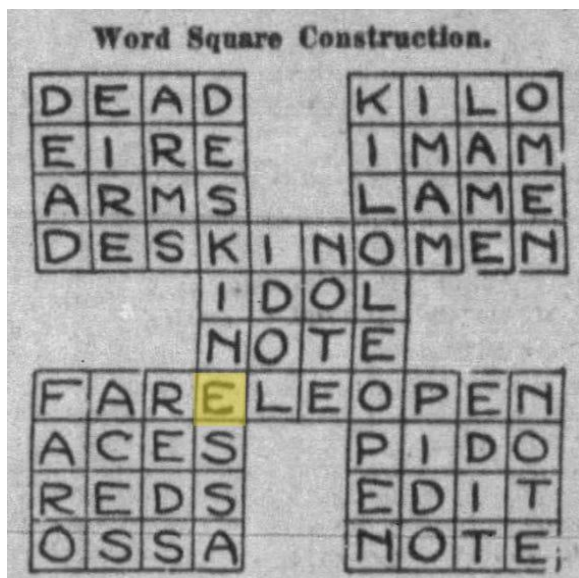
*The highlighted E should be an O.*

That's an easy fix, but by Petherbridge's own later admission, some puzzles had issues that rendered them unsolvable.

"Jerry King's Crossword" soldiered on, more reliable than the *World* but not without its eccentricities. The puzzle shown at right gave two answers in the clues—ASTRA and LES. (The *World* could publish such "gimmes" now and then too.)

Despite its quality issues, the crossword's pop-culture footprint was growing. A profile of the pioneering cartoonist Clare Briggs from the March 4 *Atlanta Journal* included his struggles with a crossword:

> *"I haven't got it yet," admitted Mr. Briggs. "They say Roosevelt had a vocabulary of 125,000 words, or maybe 25,000. Anyway, he'd have needed all of them to work that sort of stuff. 'Otic,' for instance. Ever heard of 'otic'? Neither did I, until I had to dig it up to fit the definition. 'Situated near to, or pertaining to, the ear.' Sounds like the rear end of a word: the caboose, maybe."*



## Jerry King's Cross-Word Puzzle

As a start toward supplying the missing words of today's crossword puzzle, the word for the row of squares 26 to 58 is given; also the word reading down from 66 to 74, which is "les," the French plural of the definite article. Supply the others and compare the result with the correct one, which will be printed in next Sunday's PRESS.

### CLEWS AND DEFINITIONS.

#### READING ACROSS.

1-7 First of a series.
8-14 Formed like a string of grains.
16-17 A garden vegetable.
19-20 In a higher position.
22-23 A province of Canada.
24-25 A lair of wild beasts.
26-27 One, no matter which.
28-29 A number.
30-31 In such manner.
32-34 Moist or wet.
35-36 A chemical compound.
37-39 To raise up or build.
40-41 City of the Samoan Islands.
42-43 To start on a railway journey.
44-45 A gait of a horse.
46-47 Through or by means of.
49-50 To take hold of.
52-53 To regret.
54-55 Island possession of the U. S.
56-57 To use as food.
58-59 Smart or quick to learn.
60-61 A bride's dower.
62-63 Means of transportation.
65-66 To praise.
67-68 Odor or flavor.
70-71 Quality of being hard to pierce or enter.
73-74 Small city of Greece.
75-76 A choice or select group.
78-79 Erect or upright.
80-81 A boy.
82-83 Devoured.
84-85 Famous general of the Civil war.
86-87 Street.
88-89 A deerlike animal.
91-92 Superior in rank or power.
94-95 To be indebted to.
96-97 A small bubble, in glass.
98-99 A landscape.
100-101 A prayer or petition.
102-104 A Scandinavian people.
105-106 Tendency or inclination.
107-109 Having greater breadth.
110-111 Prefix meaning "toward."
112-113 Wood built into a brick wall to hold nails.
114-115 To mat or tangle.
116-117 A kind of fish.
118-119 Group of Islands in Far East.
121-122 A musical instrument.
124-125 A constellation.
127-133 To calculate.
134-140 To hire, as a ship.

#### READING DOWN.

2-16 Not any.
3-41 An Asiatic country.
4-34 Fastened with bonds.
5-25 Suffix meaning "act of."
6-17 Indefinite article.
9-19 Egyptian sun god.
10-28 City of Finland.
11-37 Not any.
12-44 Open or unconcealed.
15-20 Point of the compass.
15-64 Sad or oppressed.
18-123 Situated within the peritoneum.
21-69 Manufacture of earthenware.
23-55 Above or over.
26-58 "Astra."
30-62 To scrub or cleanse.
32-47 A small village of Russia.
35-49 Country of Europe (abbreviated).
36-50 To tear apart.
38-52 To mistake.
48-90 Pertaining to the side.
51-93 Chinese workingmen.
56-80 To force out.
57-81 Brought to required color, as a photograph.
60-84 To bore a hole.
61-85 To strike.
65-73 A river of Germany.
66-74 "Les."
67-75 Short name for a president of the United States.
68-76 Partook of food.
72-120 A day of the week.
77-126 Constituent of beef tallow.
79-111 To beg earnestly.
82-114 A lake of Oregon.
83-115 An important happening.
86-118 To brush away.
89-103 To recognize or descry.
91-105 To perform or do.
92-106 Earth or land (Scotch).
94-108 Characterized by age.
97-129 Kind of cotton cloth.
100-138 One who guides.
104-130 Used for cleansing.
107-137 A dam in a river.
113-131 An African antelope.
116-126 A historical period.
121-128 Important European river.
122-132 Old Testament (abbreviation).
124-135 Exclamation of surprise.
125-139 Point of the compass.

### KEY TO LAST WEEK'S PUZZLE.

*The clues "Astra" and "Les" in the fine print have the answers ASTRA and LES.*

A profile of the National Puzzlers' League by Prosper Buranelli (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* March 20) labeled the crossword a gateway drug to more advanced wordplay: "How do people become puzzlers? Through the crossword puzzle."

Briggs and the NPL would both reenter the crossword's story in later years, Briggs offering multiple tribute cartoons, the NPL a contribution...then, later, jealous condemnation. Buranelli had a bigger role ahead of him, though not as big as he himself would later claim.

This joke from the March 27 *Gasconade County Republican* indicates a local market for crossword collections, a few years before that became a thriving publishing genre:

> **Clerk:** *Would you like one of our cross-word puzzle books? They are great to improve your vocabulary.*
> **Woman Shopper:** *We haven't any to improve. Only a dining room and a parlor.*

"Rural Editors Paragraphs" ran the following one-liner:

> *Speakin' of crossword puzzles, Steve Trotter says his wife is about the crossest word puzzle he ever came across.*

"Ha ha, *women,* right, fellas? They do words bad. And they're always mad, no matter *how* many times we insult them! Truly, they are nature's greatest mystery."

The early 1920s were a weighted time for women, who had only just gotten the vote in 1919. The pressure was pronounced for intelligent women to prove themselves, which was one reason Petherbridge resented her assignment. Soon she would come to see editing the crossword as less of an obstacle and more of an opportunity.

But she wouldn't come to this conclusion alone. An obnoxious poet would enter the picture first. And in 1922, the crossword's story would end up hitting some of the beats of a romantic comedy.

## 1922

You've seen the tropes before. *She's* a modern, independent woman, and she's doing fine on her own, thanks! Nothing missing in *her* life, no
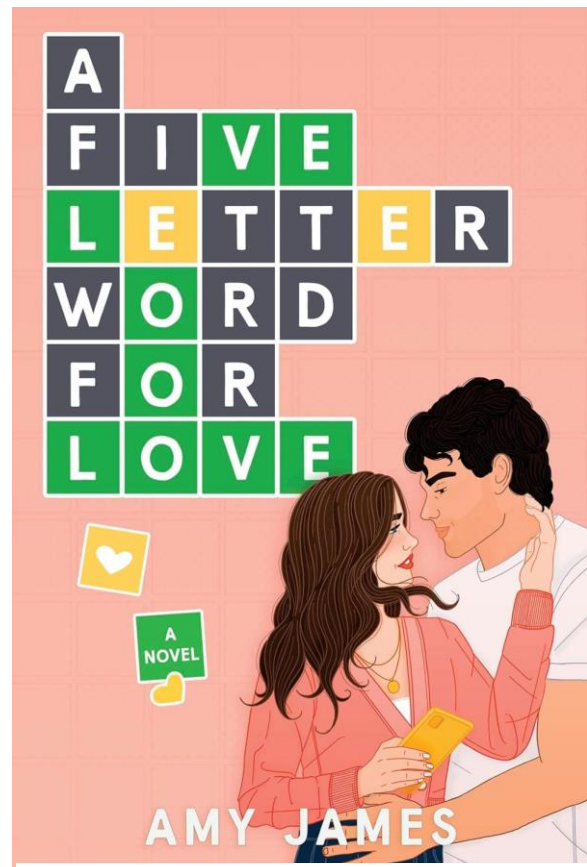


*If the 1920s crossword scene were a romance novel, it might look a little like this real one from a century later.*

matter what her friends say! Then *he* walks into it—and she finds him *infuriating.*
At first.

Margaret Petherbridge, later Margaret Farrar, is a *legendary* editor. Without her, the crossword might today be a niche product or dead of neglect. But in the 1920s, Petherbridge was first to admit—she herself would have neglected it to death, left to her own devices. And she only became her most fulfilled self because a certain pest kept walking through her door.



*Franklin Pierce Adams.*

Franklin Pierce Adams (left), F.P.A. to his fans, was a humorist-poet-columnist, sometimes called the father of the modern newspaper column. His "The Conning Tower" included humorous verse, parodies, and contemporary satire, his own and other writers', all tied together by his snarky sensibility. He thought the "cross-word" was a wondrous invention—or *could* be, if anyone cared to comb the damn *mistakes* out of it.

Irritating though Petherbridge found F.P.A., smarts recognized smarts: he was no "crank." Their conversations changed her mind—and her life. In *The Cross Word Puzzle Book,* she'd write:

> *When I was first made unwilling Cross Word Puzzle Editor some two years ago, the procedure in deciding what puzzle would be run was limited to picking out a good-looking one from among the bunch and sending it upstairs to be set. I saw no reason to change this splendid system. At that time, I had never taken the trouble to do a puzzle, and the letters of anathema and condemnation that came in by the dozens had small effect on my conscience. They were evidently from cranks and couldn't be avoided.*
>
> *I must admit that the dawning of conscience began with the arrival of F.P.A., who came to work in the next room. When he discovered I was responsible for the cross words, he formed the atrocious habit of stalking in every Monday morning bright and early (about eleven o'clock) to point out in sarcastic tones just what was wrong with yesterday's. Well, to make a long story short, to avoid the moronish feeling that usually followed such a lecture, I decided to reform and find out what a really decent puzzle was like.*
>
> *I began by trying to do one the next Sunday, and thus experienced the throes of acute agony that come to all solvers of puzzles on discovering definitions left out, numbers wrong, hideously warped definitions, words not to be found inside of any known dictionary, foreign words—very foreign—and words that had no right to be dragged out of their native obscurity. Then and there, with my left hand reposing on a dictionary and my right raised in air, I took an oath to edit the cross words to the essence of perfection. From then on, I instituted the procedure of doing the puzzles myself on the page proof— sort of trying it on the dog—applying the principle,*

> *"If it be not fair to me,*
> *What care I how fair it be!"*

This account crackles with Petherbridge's wit and modesty, but there's reason to trust it. The timeline lines up. F.P.A. joined the *World* staff in early 1922, and "The Conning Tower" lost little time putting out its first crossword mention in February:

> *I got the blues, I said the blues, I got the Cross-Word Puzzle Blues;*
> *I had no trouble with things like "moccasin-like shoes."*
> *But until I find out what the right letter word is for a crystalline compound formed by the action of iodine on alcohol and potash,*
> *I'll have the blues, I reaffirm the blues, I'll have the Cross-Word Puzzle Blues.*

He later published this contributor's poem:

> *My husband asks that I shall make*
> *A poem using just the same*
> *Amount of energy I take*
> *To solve the Cross-Word puzzle game.*
> *Betsey D.*

Soon, F.P.A.'s needling got more affectionate. In his ongoing observational comedy "The Diary of Samuel Pepys," "Samuel" solves many a puzzle, often to his wife's consternation:

> *Late up, and felt low-spirited, so to solve the Cross-Word Puzzle, which I did in less time than half an hour, which restored my confidence, till I said to myself,* Bring on your problems. *And that, methought, is why these puzzles are so popular, as the ability to solve them is mistaken by the solvers for intelligence. Lord, for a few minutes after I solve a puzzle, I am as vain as any peacock and strut about my house till my wife takes my vanity away by calling me silly or some such thing. But she away this day, so my inflation endured for an hour.*

F.P.A. made many more crossword mentions in 1922 alone—despite a busy schedule. That same year, he opened a one-act Broadway play (for one night only) and did a co-publishing project with Dorothy Parker.

Parker was one of several renowned authors (male and female) who got their start in "The Conning Tower": she later quipped that F.P.A. "raised me from a couplet." As a member of the Algonquin Round Table, a New York creative community, F.P.A. supported good work where he saw it. And once motivated, Petherbridge was *damn* good.

The same February F.P.A. began nodding to the crossword in his column, Margaret Petherbridge began writing copy for the puzzles. Arthur Wynne had dabbled in such intros, and

the Jerry King puzzle put out some simple instructions, but no one committed to this like Petherbridge. In doing so, she gave the puzzle a voice. That voice was mostly hers, though she wasn't quite ready to admit that it belonged to a woman.
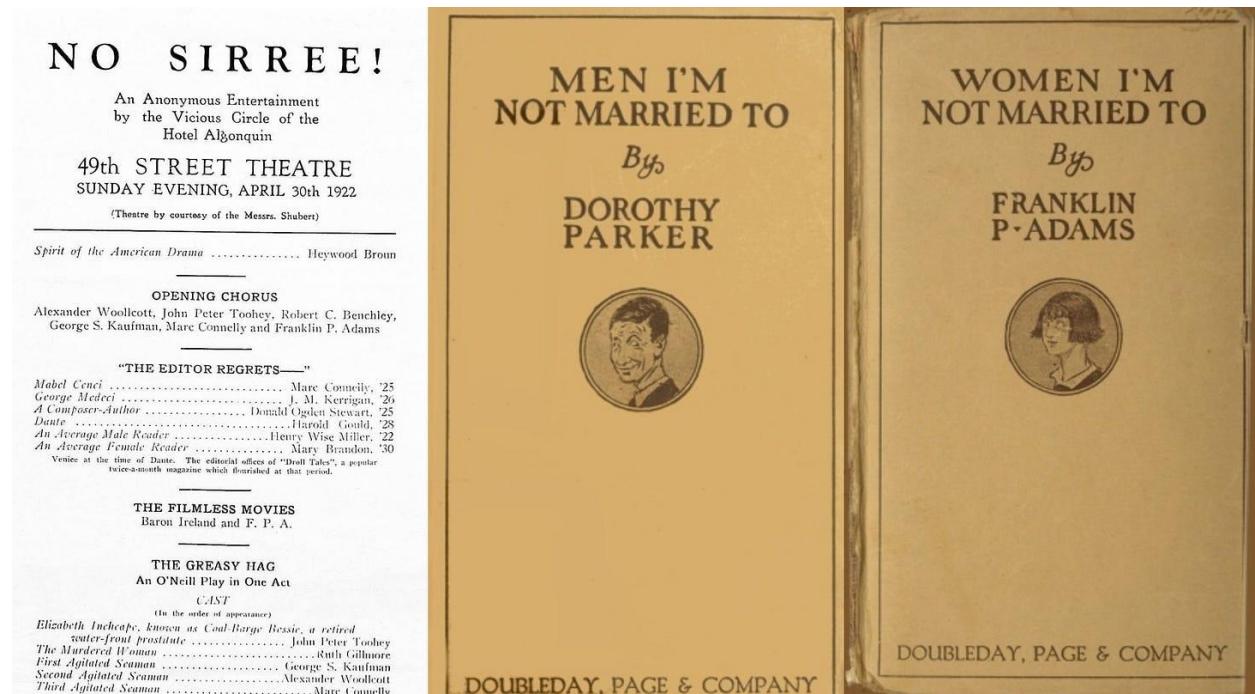


*The playbook from F.P.A.'s* No Sirree!*, and the humorous books* Men I'm Not Married To *and* Women I'm Not Married To*, released as a pair by F.P.A. and his mentee Dorothy Parker.*

Her first effort was wordy and apologized for a few stretchy answers, but it still showed love. The grid at right is the finished version of the puzzle she's describing below:

*Especially for St. Valentine's Day, Robert Hamilton has fashioned this intriguing cross word in the shape of a fluttering heart pierced by the arrow of the good saint whose day we celebrate on the 14th. Of course, considering the exigencies of the situation, one must not be too hard on such roundabout ways and means as 37-40 [L CENTS for "fifty cents"], 66-79 [MLT as shortened "emulate"] and 81-94 [SANT as a "Nickname for Santa Claus"]. The French word and the German word used should be reasonably familiar. If you get this solved by Tuesday, send it to your best girl. She will be so impressed by your brain power that she will say "Yes" immediately.*
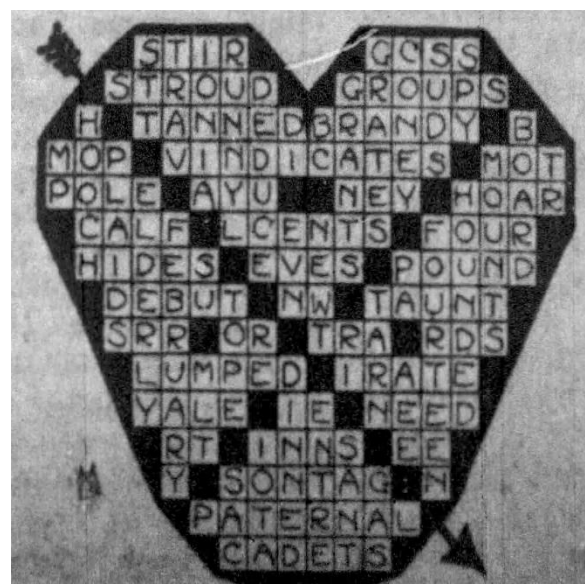


*A Valentine's crossword.*

Pithier lead-ins followed, communicating a joy you just didn't see in the Jerry King feature.

> *Some people assemble crosswords as fast as Fords are put together. Remember, we can't run the same author every Sunday...*

> *To-day's puzzle comes all the way from Rochester, N.Y., and was sent on its way by Eleanor Woodworth. Yes, Eleanor, we thought it Wood-be-worth using, so here it is.*

> *Here is a puzzle that we hope you sharks will like...*

> *...and if it seems too easy, be comforted. Next week's will be harder.*

Her droll copy was unflappable, even in the face of this Easter monstrosity at right (more unnerving than *Donnie Darko).*
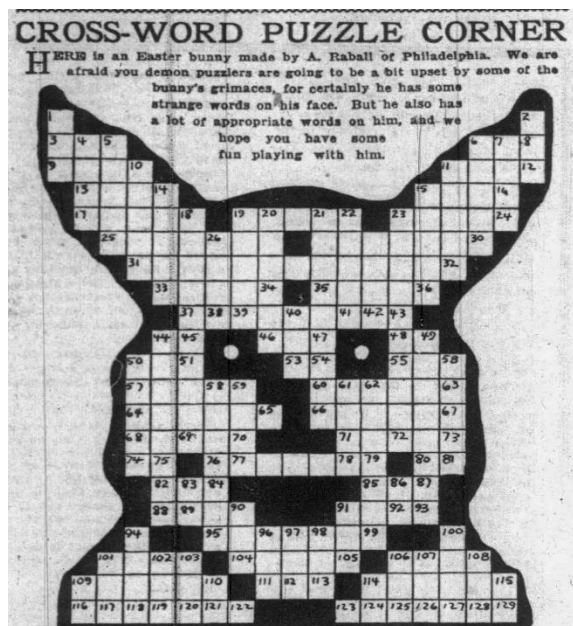


*A crossword for Easter, despite its Halloween look.*

Petherbridge could poke fun at her own early indifference (while hiding her gender)—

> *Ye Ed. solved his first cross-word puzzle the other Sunday and found it rather fun. True, it was an easy one, and he had friends to help, but we don't think he will get the habit. Sundays are far too complicated as they are.*

—and responded several times to F.P.A.'s mentions of her work, even publishing a puzzle about him. (Shortening "Editor" as "Ed." and "well-known" as "w.k." was part of her style.)
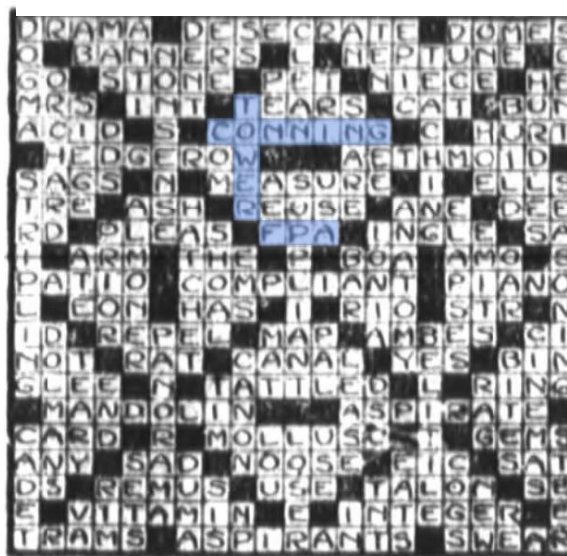


*A puzzle showcasing F.P.A's initials and column title (CONNING, TOWER, FPA).*

> *Here is where the w.k. demon puzzler comes into his own, for this perfectly lovely crossword is dedicated to 79-80 [F.P.A.]. Truly, the glory of this moment should make up for any number of wasted Sunday mornings. The contribs are Helen and Sam Boudin, who confess that puzzling is their new indoor sport.*

67

Petherbridge concluded her "confessions" in *The Cross Word Puzzle Book,* thanking F.P.A. for—pretty much everything:

> *Since that momentous day, F.P.A.'s visits have grown less frequent—in fact, he has to make up excuses to come in and converse on other matters… So now you all know whom to thank for the perfection (more or less) of the cross word puzzle found each Sunday on the* World Magazine*'s Ingenuities Page.*

This was the culmination of years of F.P.A. and Petherbridge alluding to each other, then alluding to each other's allusions, immortalized in one of the key texts of publishing history.

At times, in light of what we know now, the playful tone of these allusions reads as a bit flirtatious. How warm did this relationship get? F.P.A., sixteen years Petherbridge's senior, was married but a few years away from divorce and remarriage; Petherbridge was single, a few years away from her own marriage. One wonders. One wonders if *they* wondered.

But they could've just been good work buddies. We have no real evidence otherwise. Everyone can use like-minded friends of another gender, especially uncommon thinkers like humorists and crossword editors. In any case, the biggest new love in Petherbridge's life was her work.

Petherbridge hadn't yet firmed up the rules of crossword design for which she'd later be known, but she offered early thoughts about what was acceptable, or, as she'd put it, "according to Hoyle."

Under her influence, grids grew more interconnected. Walled-off sections got rarer, fewer, and smaller (see example at right).

Numbering also got easier. "Vertical" clues had been listed in "top-to-bottom, then left-to-right" order until Petherbridge quoted a letter from William C. Kaufman, suggesting "vertical" clues go in *numerical* order instead. She made no hard rule but wrote, "We hope the experts who contribute cross words will meditate upon the wisdom of the suggestion." They did. By the end of the year, numerical order was becoming standard.



*While not as integrated as more modern designs, this "snowflake" is a step in that direction.*

Like F.P.A., Petherbridge fostered talent, naming most contributors, apologizing when she couldn't. A 1922 favorite was Florence Farwell, who composed the "baseball" and Maltese cross seen below.
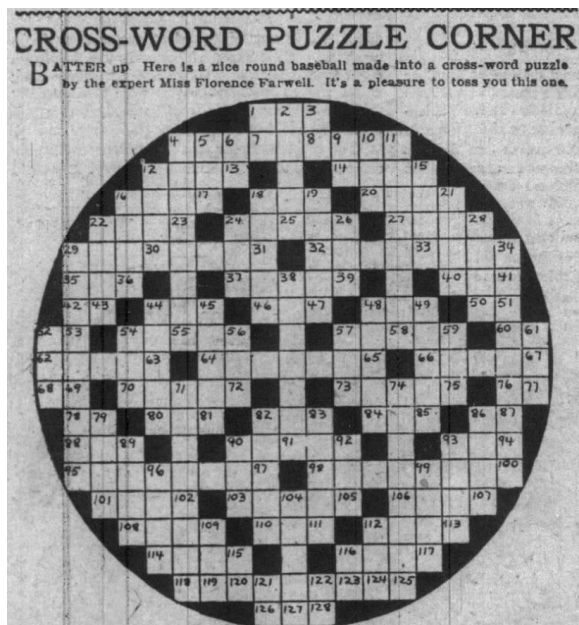
*A different sort of "crossword baseball."*
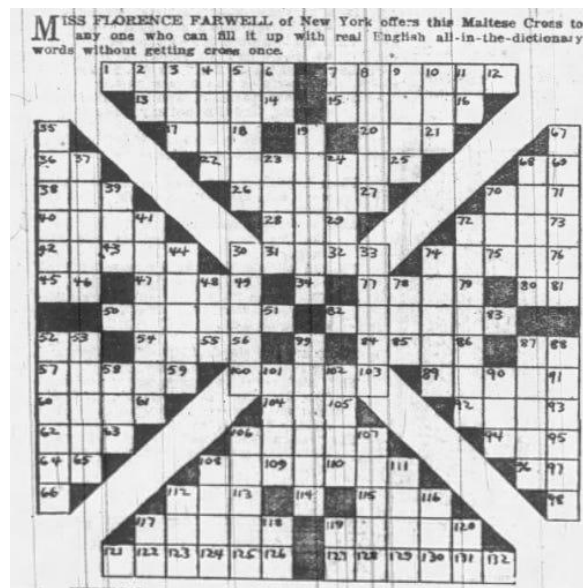


*A crossword shaped in the then-familiar form of the Maltese cross.*

Another time, Petherbridge defended a contributor from critics:

> *A word to the wise—don't bother writing us about corrections unless you are sure of your point. For instance, the person who questions the mental poise of Miss K. Higginson because she defines "volt" as a "leap to avoid a thrust" is in a questionable mental attitude himself. "Volt" is a perfectly good fencing term.*

"Of *course* ladies know fencing terms, boys. Ye Ed. doesn't like it when you underestimate those ladies! Whenever he thinks about it, his beard itches."

The colorful personalities of Petherbridge and F.P.A. were very visible in the *World* and its syndicators, leaving rich historical data to explore. Other crossword features appeared in **1922,** but far less can be said about them with any certainty.

"Jerry King's Crossword Feature" continued in *The Pittsburg Press* and other venues. *The Buffalo Courier Express* even ran *both* the *King* puzzle and the *World* puzzle for a while, running the former alongside Sam Lloyd's Brain Tests.

"Jerry King" took some halting half-steps in the direction of its rival. In 1921, it had only credited one outside contributor; in 1922, it credited seven. And like the *World,* it included notes for would-be contributors, though their tone wasn't exactly as warm as Petherbridge's:

> *We regret we have been unable to use some contributed puzzles, owing to the use in them of many obsolete and foreign words. Others were made into freakish or irregular*

*Figure 2*

*designs. We suggest that designs be made symmetrical and that words be in good usuage [sic] historical or geographical.*

"Freakish" designs (SMH) were, presumably, anything not square-shaped, symmetrical, and about 15-17 squares long and tall. Petherbridge was publishing grids like that, but also plenty of stuff like this the experimental circle at right.
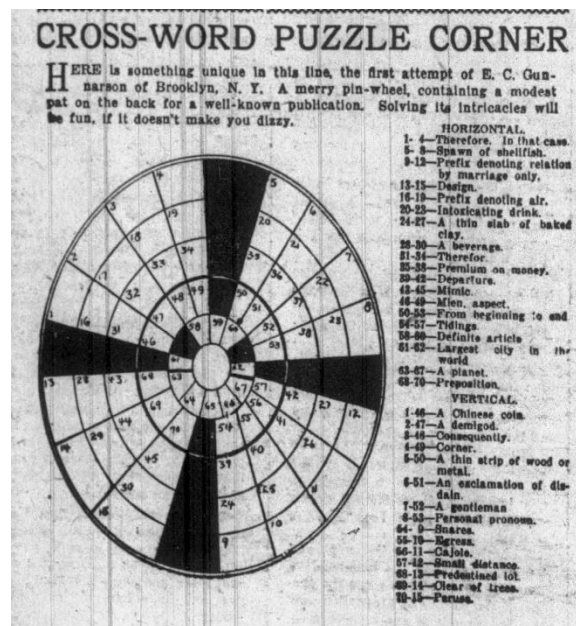
At the very end of the year, "Jerry King" seemed to attempt a more Petherbridgean tone. "W.C. Crocker of Lisbon, N.D., finds time from his business duties to solve our crossword puzzles. Having worked out many puzzles, he thought he would try his own composition, and today's example is the result."

(Do…do you think it's *good,* though, "Jerry"? The grid design is below at left.)



*Another circular* World *design.*

Crosswords crossed the Atlantic that year too, in a manner of speaking. The editor of *Pearson's* wrote in the February issue:

*Here is a new form of puzzle in the shape of a Word Square that will provide you with a very pleasant hour's entertainment… If you like this sort of thing, I shall be pleased to give you one every month, but in that case you must write and tell me… These new word squares are having a tremendous vogue in America just now.*

The puzzle was straightforward, with none of the quirks that the British style of puzzle would later develop.



*Jerry King crossword from 1922.*

The *Boston Globe* continued to offer puzzles not seen in the *World* or "Jerry King" that same month, but incomplete newspaper records mean we can't be certain if these puzzles were *Globe* originals or reprints from earlier years. It would do at least one such reprint in 1923. Unlike its rivals, though, it then offered little commentary about individual puzzle installments. It did, however, feature a remarkable targeted ad for the then-new edition of *Webster's Dictionary* and product placement for that same dictionary in a letter to the editor. (The scheme of using crosswords to sell dictionaries would see a lot of follow-up in later years.)
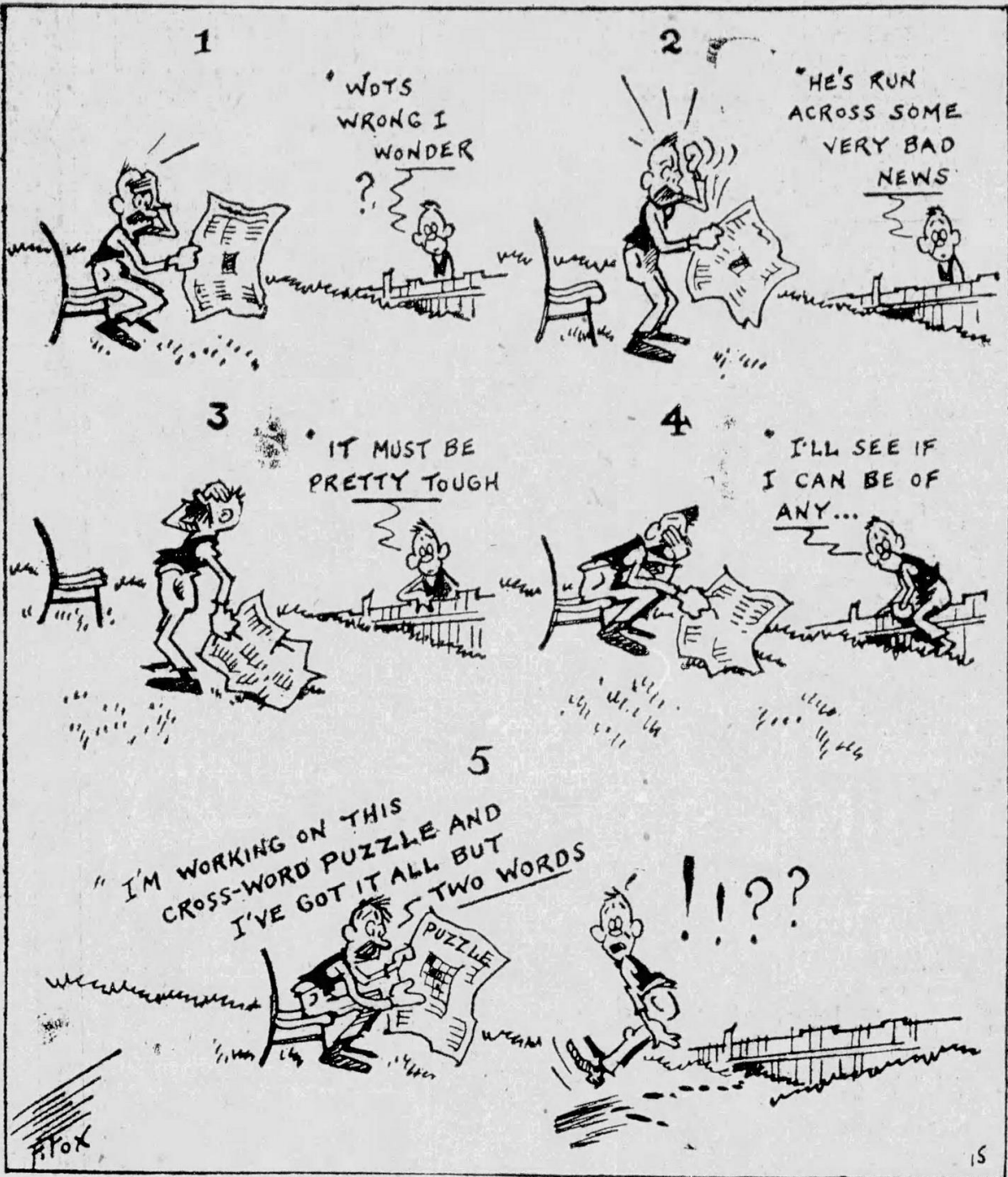
*Want to do better at crosswords like the one you're doing now? Buy our product!*

Nor was this the only colorful (albeit black-and-white) illustration of solver's dilemmas that year. Fontaine Fox and Clare Briggs both found some inspiration in them (see next two pages).

*"The Cross-word Puzzle," by Fontaine Fox.*

*"Movie of a Man Doing the Cross-Word Puzzle," Clare Briggs.*

 **"HOT DOG!** Here 'tis!"

From cartoonists to commentators to "cranks," everyone seemed to agree: the crossword's grip on the public consciousness was getting stronger, and it wouldn't be relaxing anytime soon.

Everyone, that is, except *The New York Times.* With a haughty, jealous sniff at its New York-based rival, an anonymous *NYT* feature in December 24 pronounced the crossword *so last year.* "The solving of cross-word puzzles has lost its popularity among the younger set in Our Town…" Sure it had, 1922 *New York Times.* Sure it had.

## 1923
As 1923 began, Jerry King's Crossword Feature was attempting the warmth and humor Petherbridge was showing in the *World.*

> *Howard Marshall, who contributes today's puzzle, seems to specialize in literature, judging from the number of author's names used…*

*Miss Olga Elstner, a puzzle friend, composed today's interesting crossword puzzle…*

It was hopelessly outclassed. As an editor, Petherbridge was already sharp; as a commentator, she was unstoppable.

*We were almost through verifying a good-looking puzzle when we bumped into one of those obsolete words and promptly tossed the whole thing away. Then this one by Walter B. Goodman happened along and restored our trust in contributors…*

*The following puzzle is by James Street. That's his name, not his residence…*

*[The crossword:] To be taken continuously Sunday morning, until completely dissolved. This is sure to be good for what ails you…*

*We hope our customers will like this one by Thomas Sayre. We are worried, however. If you all continue to get so much pleasure out of it, there will soon be a blue law against solving Cross Words on Sunday.*
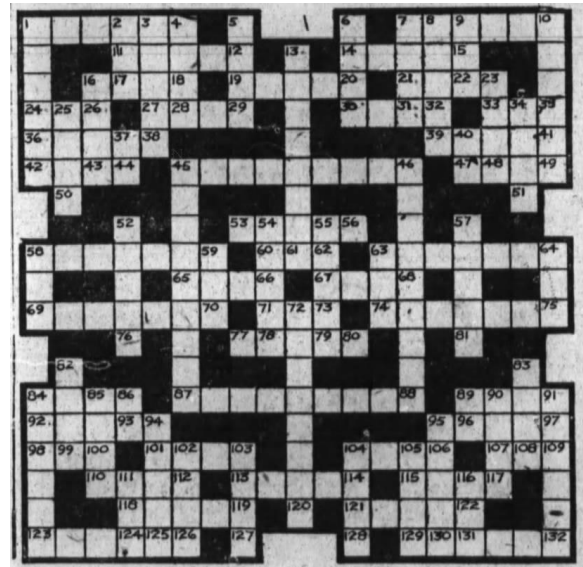
Petherbridge let "contribs" write their own intros now and then. One such was "Enigma," a representative of the National Puzzler's League with an ulterior motive—they wanted to recruit FPA to the NPL. Despite the unchecked and two-letter words at the corners, this construction feels close to modern standards and was the most "open" grid to date (below).
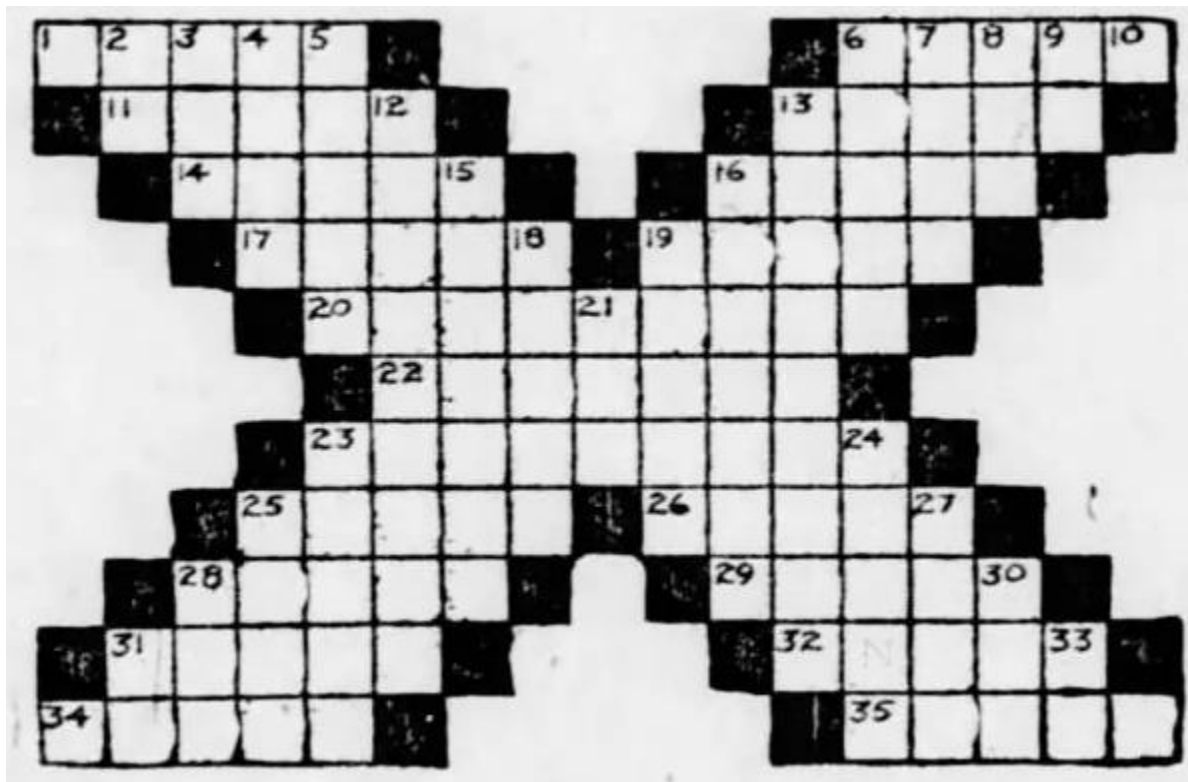


*A pioneering NPL design featured in the* World.

Sometimes Petherbridge published puzzles she didn't 100% endorse, pointing to their flaws to inform the next wave of contributions. Of the grid at right, she wrote,

> Its principal defect is that it doesn't follow the rule providing that every other letter of a word shall be keyed up with some other word. This would make it possible for you to get all the horizontal words and yet not all of the vertical—which is dissatisfying, to say the least.

In March, the *World* published its first **celebrity constructor,** Gelett Burgess, best known today as the author of 1891's "The Purple Cow":



*A less-than-ideal grid made into an object lesson.*

> I never saw a Purple Cow,
> I never hope to see one;
> But I can tell you, anyhow,
> I'd rather see than be one.

(He also invented many words, two of which are still in the language today—*blurb* and *bromide.*)

Mystery novelist and poet Carolyn Wells was published in May, just after a second Burgess work. She would publish a crossword book of her own the following year.

Other *World* novelties of 1923 included super-sized puzzles, a puzzle themed around the recent discovery of King Tut's tomb, an extra-hard pre-filled grid for which solvers had to write *clues,* and a set of interrelated answers (all working off the same grid design and four longest answers, below).
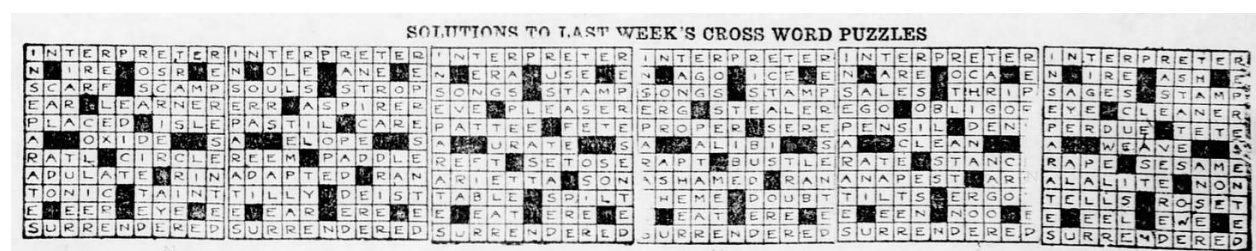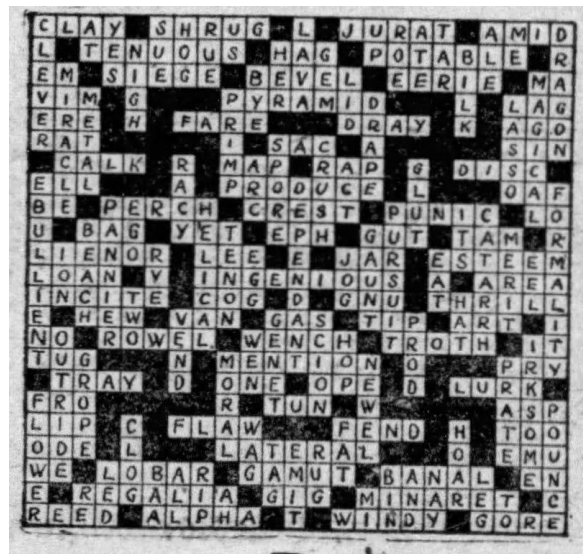


*Six solution grids, each built with the same perimeter: INTERPRETER, INSEPARATES, REPRESENTED, SURRENDERED.*

And…well…

It had appeared in crossword design before, but 1923 really seemed to be the peak of the swastika's popularity. (Forever, let's hope.) It was then still seen as a merry symbol of good luck, and the *World* and Jerry King crosswords *both* greeted the new year with it—the *World* with a central design and King with a duplicated central entry (below). *The Boston Globe* showed an original *four*-swastika crossword on August 5 (right).

All these came before the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch, the Nazis' first attempted rise to power. But the attempt was seen as an embarrassing failure at the time, so even *that* didn't taint the symbol too much: another such design appeared in the



*The Boston Globe's four-swastika design.*

following year's *Cross Word Puzzle Book.* 1923 may have been the peak of its nonpolitical usage, but such usage took a while longer to die out altogether.
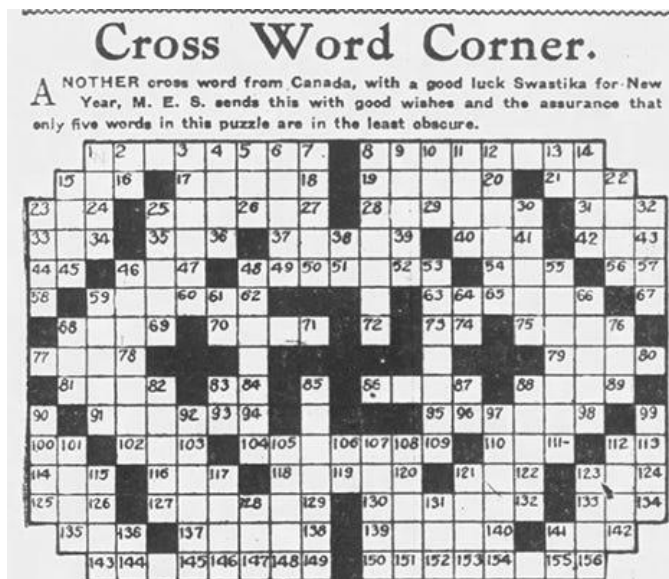


*Swastika-centered designs from the* New York World *and "Jerry King's Crossword."*

All was not clear sailing for the *World.* Syndicators like the *Buffalo Courier Express* dropped it for the now inferior but more predictable Jerry King feature, and *The Boston Globe* became a real competitor.

On March 18, the *Globe* was still recycling puzzles that had appeared in the *World* two years earlier. But on May 27, it became the first major venue to offer non-Sunday crosswords, adding Saturdays. The *Globe* advertised this move in its own paper and others, using it as a major circulation-builder.

The Saturday *Globe* developed its own style of commentary, addressing multiple letter-writers and submitters per week, including rejection notices, and even teasing approved contributors like Chet Bent:

> *I am afraid Miss L.C. of Peterboro is going to disapprove of you, "Chet." F'instance, she thinks it more fair, and I fear more erudite, to define "mare" more literally than as just as "a horse." From a strictly educational point of view she is right, no doubt, but we have considered the cross-word puzzle as a sort of delightful game and allowed some brainteasers to form part of the definitions. If the definitions are too hard and the fun too elusive, we want to know, of course.*

> *Dr. H.A. sent us a puzzle that was not interlocking throughout: in fact it consisted of 12 little puzzles very exclusive and much to themselves. This type of puzzle is not approved of by the majority of fans, for evident reasons. It is not hard enough. Try again, H.A., and mix them up, for as you say, it is fun.*

At year's end, the *Globe* offered up a cubic crossword and a Christmas star, the latter with a set of poetic clues (below).
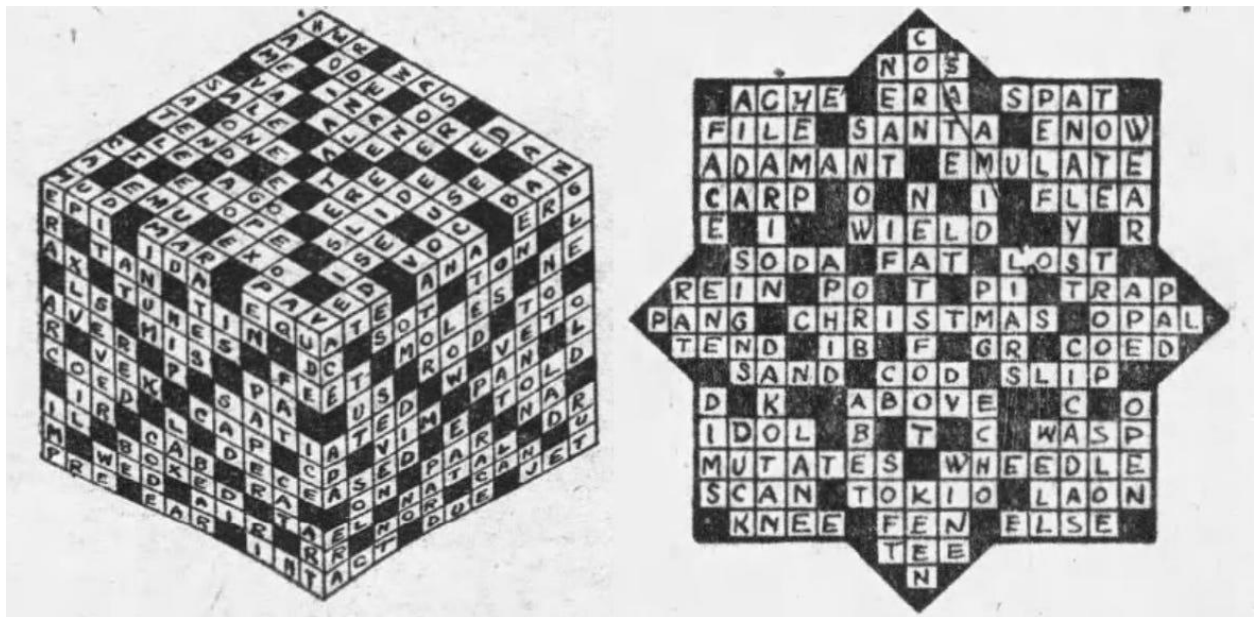


*Two of* The Boston Globe*'s more groundbreaking designs.*

Here's how it clued SANTA:

> *He comes in the night, one night in the year,*
> *Silent and stealthy, yet bringing no fear;*
> *Though mortals ne'er see him, return of glad day*
> *Brings proof of his presence. Oh, Lookit! Hooray!*

The *Globe* promised its puzzles of the following year would be even better than its puzzles of 1923—a promise it seemed more than capable of keeping.

Venues beyond the *Globe,* the *World,* and Jerry King continued to proliferate. One of them was *The Lloydminster Times,* an eight-page Canadian weekly with the **first known crossword to use the modern numbering system.** No end numbers on this grid (right)!

We don't know just when *The Lloydminster Times* began its feature. This sample is taken from the oldest issue currently in digital records—July 1, 1923—but that issue contains answers for an earlier puzzle, so it must have gone back at least as far as June. (The front cover lists the July 1 edition as "Vol. XXI, No. 1052," so the whole publication is much older than that.)
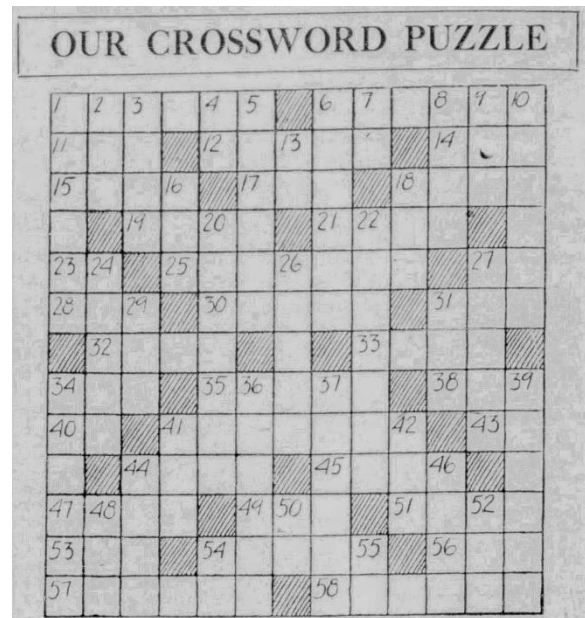


*Revolutionary numbering in* The Lloydmaster Times.

The *World* instituted this same numbering system at the suggestion of the contributor "Radical," introducing it on July 22. The grid below may not have been first to simplify numbering, but it was the most influential: other *World* puzzles and competitors soon followed suit.

The puzzle proliferation was unsurprising. Crosswords were good for business. Usually. Except for that one company that crossworded itself out of existence.

On July 1, a crossword and photo-captioning contest offered $5,000 in prizes—over $94,000 today—"to encourage the reading of good books—in particular, certain masterpieces contained in a new set of thirty volumes just published by the Little Leather Library Corporation" (next page).

*The Little Leather Library Corporation hoped big prizes would mean big profits. In its case, not so much.*

The publisher had done well with its small-scale leather-bound volumes, and this contest earned some publicity (the winner was Amelia E. Clark of Bennington, Vermont). But it didn't seem to work out. Robert K. Haas Inc. bought the company out the following year and shut it down one year later.

Perhaps there was too much competition for attention. The crossword was going international—publications in Australia and Russia had picked it up, and the UK's prime minister Stanley Baldwin was among its fans.

But those fans hadn't seen anything yet. Petherbridge was already working on something else, something that'd change the face of puzzling—and publishing—forever.

***To be continued!*** ∎

# OTHER RESOURCES OF INTEREST

T Campbell

This is the spot for additional items of interest to *Journal* readers. Though it's aimed at recent work, sometimes things don't come to my attention right away, so publications can be from anytime in the last couple of years. All of these appear in 2025.

"Automatically Detecting Amusing Games in Wordle" by Ronaldo Luo, Gary Liang, Cindy Liu, Adam Kabbara, Minahil Bakhtawar, Kina Kim, Michael Guerzhoy from the University of Toronto studies Wordle answers and whether words' inherent funniness can be calculated. Their results suggest it can—to some degree.

"Eyeing the pun: an eye-tracking study on the synergistic effects of visual and textual elements in tourism advertising," by Xianglan Chen, Yayun Yang, Anil Bilgihan, and Weiqian Liu in *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology,* 16 (4): 684–704 uses eye-tracking and other techniques to investigate how puns in texts and pictorial elements comprising human figures influence viewer engagement and potential consumer conversion in tourism advertising.

"Generating Code to Verify Cryptic Crossword Reasoning" by Martin Andrews and Sam Witteveen, presented as part of the ICLR 2025 Third Workshop on Deep Learning for Code, represents the latest research on LLM-driven cryptic crossword solutions, an important benchmark of comprehensible AI "reasoning."

"Linguistic Analysis of Wordplay in *Friends"* by Matea Mihalić, a master's thesis for the University of Zagreb, discusses various genres of wordplay and their use in a well-established, long-running TV sitcom.

"Numerical Wordplay in Digital Communication: A Corpus Linguistic Study on Cyber-pragmatics" by Kunjana Rahardi and Wahyudi Rahmat, *Indonesian Language Education and Literature* Vol. 10, No. 2, discusses a division of wordplay from a new, emerging perspective. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics studying "the language as it's spoken": cyber-pragmatics discusses the language as it's typed online.

"The Mathematics of Crossword Puzzles: In Celebration of Karen Hunger Parshall" by Joseph W. Dauben, published in *American Mathematical Monthly,* Volume 132, Issue 6, is a celebration of several achievements in crosswords from a mathematical perspective.

"The Role of Semantics in Humor: A Study of Wordplay and Double Meanings" by Heltri Firdayati Samongilailai and Bernieke Anggita Ristia Damanik, appearing in *Young Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* Vol. 1 No. 3, presents a simple theory of humor as semantics intersecting with pragmatics.

"Wordle Duel: Can Deep Reinforcement Learning Architectures Outperform a Heuristic Entropy Maximizer?" by Michal Krzysztof Kogut looks at two different solution algorithms against the backdrop of Wordle-solving.

"Wordplay: Accessible, Multilingual, Interactive Typography" by Amy J Ko, Carlos Aldana Lira, and Isabel Amaya from *CHI '25: Proceedings of the 2025 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems,* details a platform on which kids can program typography. ∎

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

*The Journal of Wordplay* is a free-to-submit, free-to-read publication. All rights revert to the original authors after publication.

*The Journal* is interested in any studies, essays, puzzles, exercises, or other works that showcase wordplay of any kind. However, broader forms of wordplay call for a more specific approach.

Almost any material that uses specific wordplay types like anagrams, spoonerisms, palindromes, or letterbanks might be of interest. That's just a quick list of some of the most prominent types: there are many more.

Broader forms of wordplay include puns, puzzles, writing-style exercises, and even well-worn literary techniques like alliteration and rhyme. However, we wouldn't want to publish a piece of short fiction just because it reads like James Patterson, or song lyrics just because they rhyme, or a crossword with some punny theme entries. In the case of each of those examples, there are plenty of other venues for such works, and there'd be no point in us competing for those!

Here are a few examples of specific approaches to those broader forms: a jokey exercise where a famous work is rewritten in the styles of different authors, an account of how a songwriter might build a "book of rhymes," a study of Shakespearean punning, or a survey of the most commonly used crossword grids. (Here too, there are many more possibilities.)

We are fine with wordplay that ventures into sex, bathroom humor, and other taboo topics. However, we do not generally accept studies that focus on words that primarily insult genders and minority groups, and we will sometimes edit submissions to remove those terms. This policy helps maintain the playful spirit and long-term health of the publication.

Rule of thumb: *The Journal of Wordplay* is here to provide studies and perspectives on wordplay that readers won't often find anywhere else. If that sounds like something you're into, then we look forward to your *Journal* submission! ▪

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Enka Blanchard** is a CNRS transdisciplinary researcher working on a few wildly different projects. Some of their main interests include voting security, research methodologies, and disability studies, and they strongly believe in acting on society as scientists (while keeping track of our own biases). As such, they've attracted some controversies with their work, up to and including a lawsuit (which they won) against their team's work denouncing irregularities and vulnerabilities in the French 2022 presidential primaries. Their work in this TJoW issue also involved their colleagues **August Adams and Levi Gabasova,** as well as their then-interns **Inès Dardouri and Pierre Midavaine.** More info can be found on their website, https://koliaza.com.

**T Campbell** has written many experimental works, including long-running webcomics series *(Fans, Cool Cat Studio, Rip and Teri, Penny and Aggie, Guilded Age, Traveler),* collections of anagrams, and the Ubercross Abecedaria, the world's largest crossword puzzle. He has served *The Journal of Wordplay* as editor and contributor since its inception. Regular updates can be found at his Substack, http://tcampbell.substack.com.

**Darryl Francis** writes:

> My introduction to word puzzles and word games came via a Martin Gardner review in *Scientific American* of one of Dmitri Borgmann's first two books—either *Language on Vacation* or *Beyond Language.* I very quickly bought both books, then began subscribing to *Word Ways,* from its first issue in February 1968. I've created over 200 articles for *Word Ways* right up until its last issue in 2020. Then a brief stint at *Interim,* and now finally onto *The Journal of Wordplay.* I had ongoing correspondence with *Word Ways* editors Borgmann and Ross Eckler over the years, plus plenty of occasional contact with other word puzzlers. I've also been a member of the National Puzzlers' League. I've written books on Scrabble and been a longtime compiler of Collins Official Scrabble Words, which is used pretty much everywhere outside the US. I also collect all sorts of dictionaries, word books, gazetteers, thesauruses (thesauri!), and puzzle material.

**Daniel Galef** is a PhD student at the University of Cincinnati, where he teaches classes on science fiction and collects counterfeit coins. His puzzling poems have appeared in, among others, *Word Ways, Light Quarterly,* and *Scientific American.* If you liked this and want to read more weird persona poems chock full of wordplay, check out his book *Imaginary Sonnets:* danielgalef.com/book/.

**Jeff Grant:** Contributed to *Word Ways,* 1977-2020, published *The Palindromicon* (1991 + 2002) and *Dictionary of 2-Letter Words,* NZ Scrabble champion 16x, 3rd in World Champs 1995, *Guinness Book of Records* for longest palindrome and shortest pangram, manual 10-squares.

**Don Hauptman,** *TJoW* Resident Punster, says:

> I'm a recreational linguistics enthusiast, thoroughly captivated by what Leo Rosten once called "the mischief of language." I've written two published books in this genre: My celebration of spoonerisms, *Cruel and Unusual Puns* (Dell, 1991), received rave reviews

and quickly went into a second printing, selling in total almost 40,000 copies. The second book is *Acronymania* (Dell, 1993), a serious/funny look at abbreviations.

For its last several decades, I was a regular contributor to *Word Ways.* My humor, wordplay, and light verse have appeared as articles, fillers, and letters in *Reader's Digest, Writer's Digest, The Village Voice, The New York Observer, 7 Days, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal,* and two major in-flight magazines: *Sky* (Delta) and *American Way.*

I made more than 100 appearances in the wordplay competitions that were a popular feature of *New York* Magazine. For four and a half years, I wrote "The Language Perfectionist," a (mostly) serious weekly column on grammar and usage, for *Early to Rise,* at the time the largest-circulation online daily newsletter. In real life, I'm a freelance advertising copywriter, now quasi-retired.

**Richard Lederer** is the author of sixty books about language, history, and humor, including his best-selling *Anguished English* series and his current books, *Lederer's Language & Laughter* and *A Feast of Words.* He is a founding co-host of "A Way With Words" on public radio. Dr. Lederer has been named International Punster of the Year and Toastmasters International's Golden Gavel winner.

**Michael Keith** is a retired software engineer who previously worked at the David Sarnoff Research Center in Princeton and Bell Labs in Holmdel (in the huge Saarinen-designed structure that now stars as the Lumon building in the TV show *Severance).* His abiding interest in recreational mathematics and wordplay is the direct result of religiously reading Martin Gardner's monthly column in *Scientific American* starting in the mid-1960s. He contributed around 40 articles for *Word Ways* and 10 or so for *Interim.* In 2010 his book *Not A Wake* was released, the first (and still the only) book ever published written entirely in Pilish (English but with the letter counts in successive words following the digits of pi).

**Louis Phillips** is a poet and playwright who enjoys wordplay.

**Tom Rutledge** is an early *Jeopardy!* champ (Trebek era). This is his first contribution. ■

**ANSWERS**

# ----*A Masochist Addresses Ximenes*----

Every line in both poems functions as a cryptic-crossword style clue. The answers to the fourteen-line sonnet form a mini-poem in its own right:

A BRUTAL BASH CAN BRING ONE PLEASURE;
ONE MAN'S LASH IS ANOTHER MAN'S LEISURE.

A can mean *without, a,* and extended, *cry of pain,* and it's in the center of *romance.*
BRUTAL = cruel, traitor BRUTUS cuts US and is with the "heart" of *Salò,* AL.
Scornful ejaculations (BAHS) anagram "wildly" to BASH, which means *dance.*
CAN = are able to, half *dance in hellish show* (CAN-CAN) is CAN.
BRING = deliver, B = BIG, RING = O, "IN" in BRG, which is RBG ("hues") spun like a toy.
ONE = you, "knit a tangled" anagram for EON, heart of *lonely.* "You knit" is also a tongue-in-cheek homophone for "unit."
PLEA = A cry for mercy, SURE = certain, PLEASURE = joy.
ONE = A, WON = "Victory!", TONE (or SONE) without its first letter is ONE.
MAN'S = Unfeminine, MAN'S = what's left in his name.
LASH = you bat them, LA = pitch, SH = "Silence!"
IS = manifests, I and S are the start and end for *I confess.*
A THRONE "topples" into anagram ANOTHER, which is "one different or one the same."
MANS = attends, SHAG MOURN without R-O-U-G-H "violently" rearranges to MANS.
LEISURE = rest, LEI = a floral wreath, SURE = Yes!

The limerick's answers form EACH CLUE IS A TRICK.

EACH = every, anagrams ACHE
CLUE = a suggestion or hint, *clew* (yarn) is a homophone
IS = exists, the word *if* in Rome (Latin) is *si,* which is *is* backward
A = one, the letter *a* begins the word *assists*
TRICK = short magic word, T = cross, RICK = Richard in short

# ----*Sneaky and Gross*----

The puzzle is called "Sneaky and Gross" because it is twelve sets of twelve hidden objects each. (12 x 12 = 144, AKA a gross.) All are items of a particular category concealed within a brief text.

*Colors:* I f**ind I go** into cosmopoli**tan** reef clim**b lack**ing the right boots. Step on **aqua**tic stin**gray,** stumble into neighbors, no**w hit E**l Salvadoran's **brow, n**ow **pin K**enyan. Sca**red** El Salvad**oran ge**nerates a **yell: "Ow!** You o**gre!" En**trants ban me from further participation. (Indigo, tan, black, aqua, gray, white, brown, pink, red, orange, yellow, green. Blue, purple, and violet were too difficult to include.)

*Oscar-Winning Movies:* **Rebecca** and **the godfather** have a **rocky** relationship; he's still **unforgiven** for the **crash on the waterfront.** She's more comfortable when she can **moonlight** as **"the artist out of Africa"** than under the **titanic Chicago** art-scene **spotlight.** *(Rebecca, The Godfather, Rocky, Unforgiven, Crash, On the Waterfront, Moonlight, The Artist, Out of Africa, Titanic, Chicago, Spotlight)*

*"The Twelve Days of Christmas" Gifts:* **Ma, I d**on't know how your God-fea**ring lad y**anks hisself into these messes. I only sai**d rum mer**ited a better taste than the mon**goose** cra**p I per**ceived their wares to be and gave them the **bird. T**hen to avoid their vengeful six-shooters I **swan-dove** into the post office, the **part ridge**d with mai**l-ord**er boxes. (Maid, ring, lady, drummer, goose, piper, bird, hen, swan, dove, partridge, lord)

*Presidents:* **Ha! Yes**, **Garfield**, **hoover** that lasanga! Good j**ob, Ama**zon drone, for delivering it to him! I **grant** tha**t aft**er all these years Garf's gastri**c arter**ies should be bigger than a **bus, h**is belly **a dam s**oon to be **pierce**d, but I ain't reading the funnies **for d**rama! (Hayes, Garfield, Hoover, Obama, Grant, Taft, Carter, Bush, Adams, Pierce, Ford)

*The Twelve Apostles, Nicknamed:* **Pete** told **Andy** that **Jay** was dating **John,** but **Phil** told **Bart** that **Tom** wasn't having that. **Matt** and **Jim** are rooming with **Thad** and **Jude** now that **Sonny's** moved out. (Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, another James, Thaddeus, Judas, Simon)

*Insects:* That FOREHEAD BUMP, S**TICK**ING UP. Your photog**raph ID'**s horrifi**c, Rick. Et**iquette's **bee**n all that's li**mite**d my suggestions that you w**ear wig**s to cover that **horn. Et**iquette **was p**ulling me back so that I could brie**fly** sti**fle a** shout of "Hello? Hel**lo? Use** pimple cream!" Could've said it. Really w**ant**ed to. (Tick, aphid, cricket, bee, mite, earwig, hornet, wasp, fly, flea, louse, ant)

*Months Abbreviated:* **Dec**ent in your medical **apr**on, **Jul**ie? **May** the d**oct**or sca**n ov**er your con**jun**ctivitis now? Don't be distr**aug**ht: **mar**k my word**s, ep**idemiologists won't care if your party li**fe b**rought a little Mary **Jan**e into your system. (Dec, Apr, Jul, May, Oct, Nov, Jun, Aug, Mar, Sep, Feb, Jan)

*Olympian Gods:* "You'll expose his secrets?" I ask the "wicked sm**art" emis**sary of mad science. "Ex**pose? I don**'t think that's the half of it. The lo**demeter** and psychog**raph rod I te**ther **a**round his scalp—"
"And c**hest," I a**dd.
"—will reveal secrets that ama**ze us.** Like taking **a poll o**f his mind and broadcasting it on ra**dio NY. Sus**picions, what sc**ares** him, ot**her mes**sy details all captured on camer**a, then a**ired." (Artemis, Poseidon, Demeter, Aprhodite, Hera, Hestia, Zeus, Apollo, Dionysus, Ares, Hermes, Athena. Hephaestus was excluded—although the usual number is twelve, Dionysus replaced Hestia in later accountings, so there have been thirteen in all.)

*Cats:* Indi**cat**e birth name, vo**cat**ion, lo**cat**ion, and how best to **cat**ch you (social media? phone? local psychi**c?) at** the top of the identifi**cat**ion form. Don't pani**c: a t**eam of adjudi**cat**ors, and if justifi**cat**ion exists, publi**c at**torneys will evaluate your certifi**cat**e, **Cat**herine. (Rather than

twelve different things belonging to a category, this paragraph just contains twelve instances of the string *cat.)*

*Numbers:* Jes**s, I X**-rayed this "smoo**th r**eef" o**f our** dad's, and i**f I've** broke**n in e**gregiously on your trust, I'm sorry, that wasn't my in**tent**. But the reef doesn't have any fla**two**rms on it. If I could mod**el even one**, if my microscope could witnes**s even**—we should've known Dad was telling tall tales, this thing was always too small. Natural habitats are w**eight**y, oversi**ze, ro**ugh. (Six, three, four, five, nine, ten, two, eleven, one, seven, eight, zero)

*Letters:* **"**Filched bag! (jk)" is an anagram for abcdefghijkl—the first twelve letters of the alphabet.

*Squares:* 269841361144529441676121729225961169 breaks into twelve three-digit square numbers: 269, 841, 361, 144, 529, 441, 676, 121, 729, 225, 961, and 169. ∎