

The **Journal** of **Wordplay**

ambigram



ambigram

#6 • AUG 2024

Ambigrams!
Interviews with Three
Masters of the Craft

Politician Transposals
Humans vs. ChatGPT
Acrostic Translation
Palindrome Awards
Transcription Fails
The Saddest Word
Alphabetic Chains
And More!

THE JOURNAL OF WORDPLAY

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T Campbell

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INTRODUCTION

T Campbell

I've always been delighted by visual media and their interplay with words, and this issue we get to give focus to a special kind of word art, the ambigram. Our long main piece this time includes three interviews, one with K Pease, an ambigram artist who saw the mid-2010s boom in the field; one with Nikita Prokhorov, who has often been central to online ambigram communities; and one with Scott Kim, whose early work, along with John Langdon's and Douglas Hofstadter's, introduced the whole modern concept of the ambigram.

As ever, we have a lively variety of work beyond the main article. Two of our pieces build on the pioneering articles in early *Word Ways*—I've made it a mission to go through its 42 years of material and update what can be updated. We have Darryl Francis' ever-fascinating exercises in transposals, also known as anagrams. We have a general study of humorous syntax. We have a sample of a wordplay-focused poetic translation. We have some data about an early attempt at wordplay from AI (and its limitations when measured against human effort), and a set of transcription bloopers that proves AI's limitations in other areas.

We also have the results of the 2024 SymmyS, recognizing the best palindromes of the year. Future issues will include previous years' winners as well.

And this time out, many of our authors are offering up further pieces with no specific focus, letting their minds rove and just collecting whatever oddities will fascinate them—and you.

Feel free to turn the results over in your mind's eye.

THE APPLE SAUCE CHRONICLES

Fairly original wordplay by
Louis Phillips

THE IMPORTANCE OF MATH

The number Zero proves that nothing matters.

CROWDED ELEVATOR

Everybodyisall
Pushedtogether
Likethis&there
Nobreathingno
Roomatallhere
Sirsnosmoking.

K = A piece of cake

Is the opposite of conclusion PROCLUSION?

Death – Just live with it.

THOSE WHO SEIZED CAESAR'S SCISSORS

Those who seized Caesar's scissors
Were Caesar's scissors' seizers.
Various sizes were Caesar's scissors
& they who seized Caesar's scissors
of various sizes
Live across the seas, near Suez, sez Caesar.

(with the help of Robert Scotto, the following film title):

Goya Goya Goya – a Japanese film about a sneak attack on European paintings.

Future Menu Item – Welsh Robot

ANOTHER MUSICAL FILM FESTIVAL
From Martin Smith & Cynthia Epstein

1. the heroes of TELEMANN
 2. the ROREN twenties
 3. HAYDN plain sight
 4. how to succeed in BIZET-ness without really trying
 5. bad day at BARTOK
 6. sundays and SIBELIUS
 7. how GRIEG was my valley
 8. DOYLE in the sun
 9. RAVELs with my aunt
 10. the sound and the FAURE
-

Short story of a shotgun marriage – screWED

In a barroom moot tool looters are not welcome.

Sentence with 6 consecutive double letters.

ANSWER: Fast acting

QUESTION: What do you call it when you pretend to go on a diet?

PASTELS – subways of a by-gone era

OPTIMIST – high fog

FRUSTRATION – a dole of frust

Horror cowboy film: HOME ON DERANGE

CLEAN PORNOGRAPHY

The Philaunderer – man who has numerous love affairs and does the laundry while making love

THE CATE RING – Wagner opera about throwing a dinner party

BETTER SAFE THAN SIRI

Even More Amusing Dictation Errors

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Pièd-a-terre . . . or Pietà tear?

In a text, I dictated the former, but the latter appeared. Though accidental, it makes a strange sort of sense!

This is another compilation of funny errors generated by Siri, the iPhone's digital assistant that converts speech to text. According to Wikipedia, the first voice-recognition system was created in 1952. Sadly, despite many technological advances in this field, the process still doesn't always work perfectly.

Here are examples of bloopers from my own recent experience with text, email, and Google searches. Sworn statement: They all really happened. The pairs are usually homonyms, or nearly, thus qualifying this genre as wordplay, however unintentional.

- I uttered *panjandrums*, one of my favorite words, and got *pension drugs*.
- The term *sole heir* became *soul air*.
- *Archimedes* transmogrified to *our committees*.
- The word *émigré* mutated to *Emma Gray*.
- The word *covetous* became *covid test*. Proving, at least, that the system's lexicon is somewhat current.
- After dictating *and in any case*, I read: *Antonetti case*.
- *Chichester*, the city in West Sussex, England, became *chic ester*. The chemical compound *ester* is used in flavorings and perfumes.
- The expression *bête noire* transformed into *pet door*, retaining an animal connection.
- *The Who's Tommy*, the classic rock musical, at the time revived on Broadway, became *whose tummy*.

Want more? There's plenty online. Just search "funny dictation errors" and similar terms. In the meantime, remember that it's a *doggy dog world!*

CREDIT: I thought I had invented the title above, but a search revealed that I was anticipated by a 2012 article at venturebeat.com.

HUMOROUS ENGLISH SYNTAX

Don and Alleen Nilsen

There are two kinds of ambiguity—lexical ambiguity and syntactic ambiguity. All of the following sentences are syntactically ambiguous:

Smoking grass can be nauseating.
Dick finally decided on the boat.
The professor's appointment was shocking.
The design has big squares and circles.
That sheepdog is too hairy to eat.
Could this be the invisible man's hair tonic?
The governor is a dirty street fighter.
I cannot recommend him too highly.
Terry loves his wife and so do I.
They said she would go yesterday.
No smoking section available.

All of the following sentences are syntactically anomalous:

- I never saw a horse smoke a dozen oranges. (Martin Joos's example)
- Enormous crickets in pink socks danced at the prom.
- A verb crumpled the milk.
- Colorless green ideas sleep furiously. (Noam Chomsky's example).

But these are not nonsense sentences. Each sentence has a different meaning. "I never saw a horse smoke a dozen oranges" is not only meaningful, it is true. Furthermore such "nonsense" sentences can occur in a regular conversation. In fact, Chomsky's "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously" is a sentence which occurs very often in various linguistics classes. Furthermore, Chomsky's sentence is very poetic (as opposed to being prosaic). It brings up numerous images to the human mind and could be illustrated by a cartoonist in many different ways.

Like "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously," "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Did Gire and gimble in the wabe" is also syntactically well-formed but semantically anomalous. In the "Colorless green..." example the words are incompatible; however, in the "'Twas brillig" example the content words don't even exist. The function words "it," "was" "and" "did," and "in" exist, but the content words "brillig," "slithy" "toves," "gyre," "gimble" and "wabe" are not English words, and therefore the issue of their compatibility with other words is a mute point.

THE GREAT IRONY OF WORDPLAY STUDIES

T Campbell

The words used to describe wordplay are looser than they should be.

Consider the pretty word “logology.” As I mentioned [here](#), I considered using *Logology* as the title for what became *The Journal of Wordplay*. But I let it go when I realized “logology” has too many meanings besides “[recreational word studies](#).” It can mean [the study of logo designs](#), a [kind of theology](#), or [the study of science](#). The word “ludolinguistics” is more precise but not nearly as pretty.

What’s a homonym? [According to Merriam-Webster](#), it’s sometimes a soundlike word with a different spelling and meaning (e.g., *there* for *their*), sometimes a lookalike word with a different sound and meaning (e.g., *lead* the element for *lead* the verb), and sometimes a lookalike, soundlike word with a different meaning (e.g., *quail* the bird for *quail* the verb).

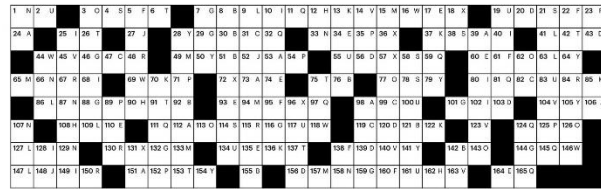
We usually call the first type a “homophone,” though some sources confuse that term, too. For the second type, Webster suggests “homograph.” (I’ve also seen “homogram.”) But a lot of sources still use the vaguer “homonym.” And the last type—do we think *quail* the bird is a *different word* than *quail* the verb, or is “quail” just one word with multiple meanings? You know, like “homonym” or “logology”?

Oh, and by the way—what about words that look different but sound alike *and mean* the same thing, like “cay” and “key,” “ax” and “axe,” “donut” and “doughnut”? We usually call those “variant spellings,” but it seems like they should be homo-*some*things. (And is “cay”/“key” a partial case, since “key” has some meanings that “cay” doesn’t?)

I’m more sensitive to these issues than most people, but the multiple meanings of “acrostic” have even tripped me up. *Acrostic* can refer to a poem with a vertical pattern between its lines, like the [Babylonian Theodicy mentioned later this issue](#), or to a [somewhat crossword-like anagram puzzle](#). There’s no good substitute word for either type of “acrostic,” and it isn’t always worth a digression to discuss that distinction. Mostly, I cross my fingers and hope the context clears up which kind of “acrostic” I mean.

Sometimes we have to muddle through with the terminology we’ve got. Still, the word-loving community could be a lot clearer about things like this than we are.

You’d think we would be, right?



- A. Fictional ensemble with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame
39 73 112 151 53 98 24
- B. Cloak-and-dagger dealings
155 76 121 8 142 92 30 51
- C. Sound from a bay
31 47 119 87 90
- D. Comedic style of Aubrey Plaza or Tig Notaro
103 56 156 43 20 139 120
- E. Seinfeldian “et cetera” (2 wds.)
74 93 164 34 60 135 110 17
- F. Dunder Mifflin employee Kelly
5 166 138 61 95 22
- G. Unthinking state
132 159 144 29 7 116 88 101 46
- H. Animated sax player
162 90 12 108
- I. Bound to fail, as many a soap-opera romance (hyph.)
25 102 149 10 128 68 40 90
- J. Service branch that might give you the blues?
148 27 52 106
- K. Doesn’t text back, say
37 70 122 138 85 13
- L. Hanna-Barbera production
127 41 63 86 147 9 100
- M. Point of a game
15 94 65 49 157 133
- N. The X-Men, e.g.
33 66 1 87 129 156 107
- O. Zinger during a roast, say
113 126 143 62 3 77
- P. Clutterphobe
54 71 152 23 35 126 89
- Q. Oxymoronic term for a temporary m.c. (2 wds.)
32 81 11 99 97 145 165 111 124
- R. Dependable, as a sidekick
115 48 54 67 130 150
- S. Contents of a windbag? (2 wds.)
78 21 114 26 4 58
- T. Extras on the set of “Scrubs” or “ER”
75 91 137 6 153 42 26
- U. Frowzy
19 161 83 2 100 117 134 55
- V. What God is frequently thanked for
45 140 14 104 123 163
- W. Proxy for a performer
44 118 146 16 69
- X. Makeup of certain tracks
18 57 96 72 131 36
- Y. Set of baby clothes
90 105 28 64 164 141 79

STRANGE SENTENCES

Richard Lederer

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Savor an unusual column this month, which contains this paragraph you now look upon. How quickly can you find out what is so uncommon about it? It looks so ordinary that you may think nothing is odd about it until you match it with most paragraphs that go on for this long. If you—smart as a whip and sharp as a tack—try your hand, strain your brain, and put your capacious mind to work studying it, you will find out. Do not solicit any additional coaching; nobody may assist you. Try your colossal skill at figuring it out and coming up with a solution. Finish this task and you'll wind up happy as a clam and lark. Good luck! I'm truly rooting for you!

The answer is that the paragraph you have just read is a lipogram that contains not a single “e”—the most frequently occurring letter in our alphabet.

Now use your logological mind to figure out what is unusual about each of the sentences that follow.

1. When you speak and write, there is no law that says you have to use big words. Short words are as good as long ones, and short, old words, like *sun* and *grass* and *home*, are best of all. A lot of small words, more than you might think, can meet your needs with a strength, grace, and charm that large words do not have.
2. A big cuddly dog emits fierce growls, happily ignoring joyful kids licking minute nodes on pretty quick, rotten, smelly toadstools underneath vampires who x-ray yucky zombies.
3. I do not know where family doctors acquired illegibly perplexing handwriting; nevertheless, extraordinary pharmaceutical intellectuality, counterbalancing indecipherability, transcendentalizes intercommunications' incomprehensibility.
4. Elk City, Kansas, is a snaky tickle.
5. Hears sum rye, humerus pros eye rote won idol sundae mourning our discreetly four nun butt deer auld ewe.
6. Feigning proficient weird science, foreign neighbor Keith Einstein, seeing eight beige, kaleidoscopically veined weightlifters, seized feisty caffeine protein reinforcement.
7. Good housekeepers vacuum skiing bazaars.
8. Early legendary armies assault gutsy ribald hippies' lapels.
9. Cowardly, catastrophic dogmas battle apex-rated, emulated, pigmented antagonists.
10. Although yeoman folk owe Pharaoh's Vaud bureau hoed oats, chauvinistic van Gogh, swallowing cognac oh so soulfully, sews grosgrained, picot, broochéd chapeaux.
11. Mr. Jock, TV quiz Ph.D., bags few lynx.
12. Unsociable housemaid unnoticeably discourages facetious behaviour.
13. Discounter introduces reductions.
14. Biopsy chimps almost abhors chintz chinos.
15. IMAIM TA IXAT A TIH AHTAWAIH OTUA TAHT HTIW

(Answers in back!)

THE SADDEST WORD

T Campbell

In *Word Ways* #3.2, Mohan Lal Sharma echoed a conversation overheard by Sir James Barrie, wherein five young ladies discussed the saddest word in the English language. One Poe fan promoted *nevermore*; another, who was into Shakespeare and especially *King Lear*, went with *never*. A third, apparently not understanding the assignment, stumped for *it might have been*.

Of the three, *nevermore* is my personal favorite. It's got a strong association with "The Raven," it's more specific than *never*, and while it could be used for a positive purpose—"Nevermore will that gaslighting monster be a part of our lives," "Nevermore will people speak my name with pity"—it just doesn't seem to get used that way.

William Faulkner argued that the saddest words were *was* and *again*. He's an authority on the matter: as a writer, he knew how to make you ache! But I think it's more like these words have the potential to convey sadness than that they're really, inherently sad themselves. "Was" can convey the irretrievable past, but some things are worth getting rid of. "Again" is sad when those things come back, but many repeated actions are good ones.

Experience is subjective, eye of the beholder and all that. Sharma notes that the word *harmless* can be quite sad when applied to an elderly man.

Alone is such a subjective word, in my eyes. Our lives have more meaning when shared, and being alone is tied to so many fears and anxieties for us, whether we're young or old. Yet solitude can also be a pleasure, and one can stand alone in accomplishment as well as isolation.

For my money, the saddest word is *heartbreak*. I've had my heart broken and gone on to love again—you could even argue that's a rite of passage for many of us. But something about the noun form of *heartbreak* sounds more permanent, more final. I don't know if the arrangement of four consonant sounds at its center adds to the word's sense of permanence, its melancholy effect. Like *nevermore*, it seems to be reserved for special moments.

What about the happiest word? *Euphoria* is very pretty, and despite its use as a TV show title, it's not so often used that it loses its currency. But I prefer *bliss*. It implies a sustainable state of happiness; euphoria is more of an enjoy-it-while-it-lasts feeling. Bliss is a state to which we can aspire.

THE SYMMYS 2024

With thanks to Mark Saltveit, organizer

The SymmyS, a palindrome-writing competition, has been gaining momentum in participation and quality for most of its eleven-year existence. Here are the 2024 SymmyS winners for best new palindromes in every category.

Short Palindromes

1. Brekkie, Martin Clear

Max, I stagger off for egg at six a.m.

2. The Struggling Bard, Anthony Etherin

Too long I go, no gig, no loot.

3 (tie). Location, Location, Location, Martin

Clear

All I've lived in's a snide vile villa.

3 (tie). Seniority, @SquidgyTheWhale on

Reddit's /r/Palindromes

"Now, Ned," I began, "on age, Biden won."

Medium Palindromes

1. Reformed Lothario, Anthony Etherin

Motto: Be most apt. Now, I won't pat some bottom.

2. Email to R&D Division, Steven Fraser

Sir,

Is drag error relative to new racecar? We note vital error.

Regards, Iris

3. Soviet Nostalgia, Jeff Grant (New Zealand)

Putin was slapdash:

"Promote Russia is All!"

Asia is sure to morph;

Sad pal's sawn it up.

Long Palindromes

1. A Toast for Our Times, Steven Fraser

To new eras!

To boredom!

To idiots!

To ire!

To vote riots!

To idiot-mode robots!

(Are we not?)

2. Rotative Levitator, Pedro Poitevin

No omen in a call, it's still a sign,
a faraway, reviled delivery.

Assay a war, a flavor of no wine,
risen urn, inward gaze, no laniary.

Beryl, one rock, core mass laid rotative,
layer gyrator, never ever apt,

a gift, part saved, I ride, yaw. Still, I give
no one vigil. Lit, swayed, I ride, vast, rapt.

Fig at par, ever even, rotary, grey,
a levitator dial's same rock core.

No lyre by rain, a lone zag drawn in rune.

Siren I won for oval far away:

Assay reviled delivery; a war?

A fang is all. It's still a canine moon.

3. Meditation, Steven Fraser

Now do I repel dissent, relax.

I meditate...

Let a tide melt, subdue frosts or feud, bustle.

Meditate...

Let a tide mix alertness,

idle period won.

Palindromic Poetry

1. Ethereal Menace, Mike Maguire

I am air,
a war of evil,
a sin.
A month gifts a last fight.
No man is alive for a war.
I am AI.

2. Aurora Borealis, Steven Fraser

Spots, spires,
ions tire,
paths arc.
Loops yarned, dusk's a madded light,
a boreal aerobath,
gilded damask.
Sudden rays pool, crash, taper.
Its noise rips,
stops.

3. Catching Nessie, Lori Wike

Yaw a raft: Nessie is sensed!
O reel at, nab, run at it!
Lasso loch's awash colossal titan!
Urban tale erodes. Nessie is sent far away.

Grand Prize

1. Ethereal Menace, Mike Maguire

2. Meditation, Steven Fraser

3. Rotative Levitator, Pedro Poitevin

Visual Palindromes

1. Potatop, Malaki Stahl

POTATO: "I DID, I PUT STUPID IDIOT ATOP!"



2. Too far off for a foot, Jon Agee



3. A Butt Tuba, Martin Clear and Jon Agee



“FIVE-LETTER” WORDS

T Campbell

I’ve cited Darryl Francis and Dmitri Borgmann a lot as I’ve read through the early *Word Ways* and added modern notes, but issue #3.4 shows the two starting to work together more often. Among its features was Francis’ sequel to Borgmann’s “Multiple-Letter Word Hunt.” At Borgmann’s instigation, Francis found the shortest words he could containing five of each letter in the alphabet except J, Q, and V:

ABRACADABRA, HUBBLE-BUBBLE, CIRCUMCRESCENCE, FUDDY-DUDDY, TELEMETERED, FLUFFY-RUFFLE, WIGGLE-WAGGLING, TSCHISCHLKHATHKHOAN, ILLIMITABILITY, KVIKKJOKK, LILLY-PILLY, NIMBO-MAMMATOCUMULUS, NONINTERVENTION. ORONOOKO, PEPPER- UPPER, TERROR-STIRRING, ASSESSES, TOTIPOTENTIALITY, UBURU-UKU, M’DAYWAWKAWNTWAWNS, EX-MAXIXE-EXECUTRIX, GRYFFYGRYFFYGRYFFS, ZZZZZ.

Naturally, I thought I’d give it a go. I ended up with...

Abracadabra, hubble-bubble, catch-as-catch-can, fuddy-duddy, beekeeper, fluffy-ruffle, frog-gigging, high-churchmanship, invisibility, knock-knock-joking, lilly-pilly, mammogramatically, non-Newtonian, door-to-door, pepper-upper, horror-thriller, assesses, tutti-frutti, untumultuous, bow-chicka-wow-wow, polysymbrachydactyly.

That’s two letters less than the prior version—no X or Z. Darryl included “Zzzzz” on the basis of it being a Los Angeles wake-up service, but that one’s been out of business too many years for me to include it on that basis. And I didn’t want to open up the doors to extended sound effects, because then you’ve got *aaaaa!*, *aaaaah*, *eeee!*, *mooooo*, *pffffft*, and on and on.

Ex-maxixe-executrix (former dancer of a specific dance, the maxixe) is a cute construction, one of Borgmann’s suggestions, and I considered borrowing it. But I never would’ve come up with it on my own, so that didn’t feel honest. The same goes for a few other entries on Darryl’s list.

I did consider using *zizzer-zazzer-zuzz*, a Dr. Seuss creation with *nine* z’s in its name, and there were a few other examples that had six of one letter that seemed smoother than the corresponding fives. But that seemed to bend the spirit of the “five letters” exercise too far. When people say there are five donuts, they don’t mean there are five and then some more.

I did get a little liberal with hyphenation: *frog-gigging*, *high-churchmanship*, *knock-knock-joking*. But those are all based on well-established phrases, although “high churchman” is an outdated position.



I had high hopes that I'd be able to get one of the three letters Darryl didn't get, but no dice. I did discover the semifamous names **Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov** and **Mumilaq Qaqqaq**, though.

There were a few words I bypassed, like "Aashaadha," the fourth month in the Hindu calendar. A decent pick if there were no other options, but it's a variant spelling and not nearly as familiar as "abracadabra." A similar line of thinking pulled me away from *Oroonoko*, one of Darryl's examples that I did find with my methods. It's an important novel named after its main character, but I was interested in working without proper names—and if there was a word that was still *almost* as short and far more familiar like *door-to-door*, that seemed to be the better choice.

Not that this kept me from a few obscure-ish words when there were no better options! I like the understatement of *untumultuous*. It feels like it's saying "eh, it's not a disaster." And *polysymbrachydactyly* is a condition meaning "six (or seven) webbed fingers."

My favorite discovery, though, has to be *bow-chicka-wow-wow*, a term that suggests sexual activity (loosely based on the music from old porn movies). Sure, I could've used *bow-wow-wow*, but that extension isn't seen as natural, so that runs into the same problem as *owwwwww!*

MORE TRANSPOSALS OF THE WORD *PALINDROME*

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Back in the May 2024 edition of TJOW, I posed the question “Is there a transposal of the word *PALINDROME*?” And I answered it by pointing out the existence of the words **emordnilap**, **dimepranol** and **pramindole**.

I’m grateful to Jeff Grant, who reminded me of other transposals of **palindrome** and **palindromes**. I promised Jeff I’d write this brief update piece describing these additional transposals. So thank you, Jeff.

First off, there’s **Imponderal**. This is a delightful nonce word created by Lewis Carroll in his book *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*. I’ll let the relevant sentences from the book help define the word:

“We have applied the same process,” Mein Herr continued, not noticing Bruno’s question, “to many other purposes. We have gone on selecting *walking-sticks*——always keeping those that walked *best*——till we have obtained some, that can walk by themselves! “We have gone on selecting *cotton-wool*, till we have got some lighter than air! You’ve no idea what a useful material it is! We call it ‘**Imponderal**.’”

“What do you use it for?”

“Well, chiefly for packing articles, to go by Parcel-Post. It makes them weigh less than nothing, you know.”



Mein Herr explaining Imponderal to Sylvie and Bruno

Imponderal obviously owes its creation to the existence of **imponderable**. Carroll has simply dropped the letters B and E to create a name for the lighter-than-air cotton wool.

Secondly, there's **premondial**. This word previously appeared in *Word Ways* (volume 37, number 4, page 296; November 2004). It refers to a time before situations and events were considered on a worldwide scale. A Google search for **premondial** will throw up various occurrences of the word. Here is one such find:

“In this work, Salvatore Bono tries to adopt a holistic approach to the Mediterranean world, recounting its history from the **premondial** until modern times to move on to discuss how contemporary European politics is effecting this region.”

A third word which Jeff pointed out is **prolamined**. Let's unwrap this. Various dictionaries contain the word **prolamine**, any of a class of simple proteins that are found especially in seeds. It's not difficult to conceive of a biochemical reaction where a substance has been treated in some way with prolamine, and can be said to have been **prolamined**. Jeff said that the occasional use of this word can be found via a Google search—but I was unable to find an actual example of **prolamined**.

In my previous article, I also pointed out that **semordnilap** was a transposal of **palindromes**. Jeff managed to find a transposal of this plural, **Promiseland**. There are numerous definitions for this transposal. Here are just a few:

- *Urban Dictionary* has **Promiseland** as a term of endearment for the town someone has left behind;
- **Promiseland** is a music festival set for October 2024 in Queensland, Australia;
- **Promiseland** was a television series set in Paloma Creek, Utah (fuller details on www.imdb.com);
- *Living in the Promiseland* was a 1986 Willie Nelson song;
- *Promiseland* was a 2015 song by Mika.



ALPHABETIC WORD CHAINS

T Campbell

In *Word Ways* #3.1, Darryl Francis constructed word chains that ran through the alphabet, one as short as he could get it and the other as long...

AB, BAC, COD, DE, EF, FIG, GASH, HI, IGEJ, JAK, KIL, LAM, MAN, NO, OP, PONTACQ, QUAR, RAS, SIT, TU, UNOV, VOW, WAX, XRAY, YEZ, ZA

ABSCOULOMB, BACTERIOTHERAPEUTIC, CHONDROALBUMINOID, DIPHENYLQUINOMETHANE, ENKERCHIEF (or EARTHQUAKE-PROOF), FABLEMONGERING (or FERTILIZER-CRUSHING), GRASSHOPPERISH, HOMALOSTERNII, INATHGANJ, JESTINGSTOCK, KINEMATOGRAPHICAL, LAEMODIPODIFORM, MICRODETERMINATION, NONPARIELLO (or NOV-ESPERANTO), OBSERVERSHIP, PONTACQ, QUINQUETUBERCULAR. REPRESENTATIONALISTS, SUPERACKNOWLEDGEMENT, TOROROKONBU, ULANOV, VANDEW, WHEELBOX, XYLOGRAPHICALLY, YEZ, ZONOPLACENTALIA

In both cases, place names span the IJ and UV areas, with Igej, Inathganj, Unov, and Ulanov. The place name Pontacq and the word yez (a dialectic variant of *you*) appear in both lists. Francis also made a start on lists moving backward:

Would the reader like to try his or her hand at the construction of various back ward chains? For the largest possible chain, we suggest ZYGOMATICOMAXILLARY and YUNX as the first two words. For the last two words, we suggest BLEPHAROBLENNORRHEA and AUSTERLITZ. In the case of the shortest backward chain, we suggest the reader begin with ZANY and YEX and end with BA and ADZ. The task of filling in the remaining two groups of twenty-two words is the reader's.

I thought I'd see how we could do today, building on Francis' example and maintaining his basic rules—place names okay, hyphenated words fine as an alternative, but no multi-word phrases or initialism because then it's not really a *word* chain.

I'm going to confine myself to “short” and “accessible” versions of the chain. It's possible to go longer than Francis' long versions (*Ishwarganj* is one letter longer than *Inathganj*, for instance). But considering how long some chemical names can get, it would take more time than I have to verify I'd found the longest possible alternative to entries like *diphenylquinomethane*.

There's a river (once a lake) in Amsterdam called the IJ, so we can maybe go shorter than the original:

Ab, bac, cod, de, ef, fig, gash, hi, Ij, jak, kal, lam, man, no, op, perq (short for perquisite), Qar (village in Iran), Rs (more than one R, natch), sit, tu, univ (slangy shortening of university), vow, wax, xey (alternative gender-neutral *they*), yez, za (slang for marijuana—or pizza).

Most of these are fun words to learn about, too. If I were to do a more accessible list, I'd probably replace *Qar* with *quarter* and “relax” *jak* and *kal* to the alternatives *jack* and *kill*. (I'm tempted by *bcc*, which I use as a verb, but most would probably call it an initialism.)

There's no everyday word that fits the i*j slot. The closest one gets is *interj.*, an abbreviation for *interjection* often seen in dictionaries, but it hasn't crossed over into a casual shortening like *perq* and *univ* have.

Now let's focus on Francis' “backward challenge,” which (according to my searches) later issues of *Word Ways* didn't seem to take up. “Zay” is an interesting word, [cited in Wiktionary](#) as a “pronunciation spelling” of *say* and *they* which indicates a foreign accent like French or German. (In my experience, cartoonists who want to render “French-accented they” spell it “zey” or “zhey.”) Tentatively accepting it, we get...

Zay, yex (hiccup), x-bow (kind of ship design), wiv (variant of *with*), vau (Hebrew letter, alternative spelling), ut, Ts, sir, req, quip, po', on, nom, mil, lek, kaj (Armenian storm spirit), Ji (state that preceded modern Beijing), ish, hag, gif, fee, ed (short for edition or editor), doc, cab, ba, adz.

I considered *vu* as part of *déjà vu*, but it didn't really have an independent meaning in English. Commoner alternatives include *zany*, *Vishnu*, *lack*, *jinni*, and *bra*, but there's no common words for the x*w and k*j spots. I couldn't even find an unhyphenated alternative to *x-bow*.

Darryl himself wrote in to suggest *wiv* and *ut*, above. He also mentions *Xsnow*, a [program designed to “make it snow” in graphical user interfaces](#) on Apple and Linux machines. The brand-nameyness of that one makes it an imperfect solution—but it has no hyphen, so the reader can make their own choice there.

And again, I'm more interested in going short and/or common than going long. But I'll leave the sesquipedalian version of the z-a word chain as an exercise for the *next* writer!

CINDERELLA: FINALE (JOHN-HENRYING CHATGPT)

T Campbell

In the first issue of *The Journal of Wordplay*, I detailed a bit of wordplay performed by ChatGPT-4 as it announced itself to the world:

A beautiful Cinderella, dwelling eagerly, finally gains happiness; inspiring jealous kin, love magically nurtures opulent prince; quietly rescues, slipper triumphs, uniting very wondrously, xenial youth zealously.

Was this the new standard in wordplay composition? I resolved to find out. With the help of friends and colleagues, I gathered seven alternatives to this sentence, all following the same rules—*write an abecedarian sentence that summarizes the Cinderella story*. Some followed the rules closely; others got a little more inventive, especially when getting to the challenging “xyz” conclusion. One entry even described a “basketball Cinderella,” a sports term for an against-all-odds victory.

1. A ball? Cinderella’s desperate; enter Fairy Godmother. Heroine, in jubilation, knowing limit’s midnight, nearly overstay. Prince’s quest: revisiting slipper-wearers, trying until... victorious! Wedding’s xenial, years zoom.
2. A basketball Cinderella dreams eternally for glory, heaving impossible jumpers, knowing longshots mostly never obtain precious quest, rather stressing teamwork, underdog vitality... Xavier yearns zenith!
3. A beautiful Cinderella dances. Earlier, fairy godmother helped impressively. Junior king loves mystery night outing. Plentiful questioning regarding shoes, toes. Ultimately, wonderful victory. Xylophone yellow zebra oh god I’ve had a stroke
4. A beautiful Cinderella, dwelling eagerly, finally gains happiness; inspiring jealous kin, love magically nurtures opulent prince; quietly rescues, slipper triumphs, uniting very wondrously, xenial youth zealously. (GPT entry)
5. Abused beauty crashes dance. Enchantress facilitates gatecrash heist. In jazzy kicks, lady makes noble overtures princeward. Queenship readies search to uncover vixen’s wearabouts, eXamining YeeZys.
6. Always, by Cinderella’s decree, every fairy godmother had input jarringly kindling love; making no open prophecies/quaint resolutions, save to undermine veritably wasteful xanthic yellow zealots.
7. Angst burdened, Cinderella daintily emerged from galley’s hellfire incessantly jig kicking, lightly moved, never ominous, perpetually quick regarding secret tales upon vested waifs xylomancing yesterday’s zealots.
8. At brilliant cotillion, debutante employs fairy godmother’s help, impeding jealous kin; love magically nabs opulent prince, quartz resembling slipper’s timely use validating wondrously xenial youths’ zeal.

For the second issue, I conducted a survey of “best” and “funniest” entries. ChatGPT’s entry won “best” by one vote, but the winner of the funniest entry was #3, and combining votes for funniest and best resulted in a tie between #3 and #5.

Survey participation was low, however, and I resolved to gather more data. I opted to simplify the test for an online survey, this time asking respondents only to choose the best of the eight. The online survey also had its order randomized, to prevent any primacy or recency effects in selection. Though turnout for the survey was still low—34 in all—it was high enough that I feel some conclusions can be drawn.



“A ball?” gets 14 votes, a clear win over ChatGPT’s 8, with “A beautiful Cinderella dances” (and its snarky ending) coming in third with 6. Second place is still quite respectable. However, if ChatGPT were superior to human efforts, it would be scoring #1 consistently, if not taking more than 50% of the pie.

In retrospect, I also have to question the validity of the test. The humans at ChatGPT picked “A beautiful Cinderella, dwelling” to represent them. That means the result was probably among the best ChatGPT had to offer, and another such test might not do so well. In fact, one can test this by asking the current system to do the same thing. I reproduced the query in the original promotion, and got this reply:

Explain the plot of Cinderella in a sentence where each word has to begin with the next letter in the alphabet from A to Z, without repeating any letters.

A beautiful Cinderella dances elegantly, fairy godmother helps, inviting joyful kindness, love magically nourishes, overcoming poor queenly realm’s sorrows, transforming uniquely vibrant, wondrously xenial youth zestfully.

Not bad for the constraints given, but it doesn’t mention the prince or slipper and describes a “queenly realm,” unlike the version selected. A further request, “Write a set of scary palindromes,” produced this:

Certainly! Here are some chilling palindromes that have a spooky twist:

1. ***Evil is a name of a foeman, as I live.***
2. ***Madam, in Eden, I’m Adam.***
3. ***No lemon, no melon.***
4. ***Red roses run no risk, sir, on Nurse’s order.***

These sentences read the same forwards and backwards, adding an eerie feel to their symmetrical nature.

Only the first of these sentences is in any way scary, and all are well-known palindromic sentences from other sources. Even among well-known palindromes, “Was it a rat I saw?” is scarier. The explanation seems downright defensive: “Have you considered palindromes are scary...just because they’re palindromes?” ChatGPT is far from useless—but in wordplay as in so many other areas, it can’t quite live up to its own hype.

SOME US POLITICIAN TRANSPOSALS

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It was back in 2008 when Sarah Palin came to the attention of the world outside of Alaska. US Senator John McCain selected Governor Palin as the 2008 Republican vice-presidential nominee. Apart from my interest in US politics, the name **Sarah Palin** looked like it ought to figure somewhere in my world of wordplay. Her name looked like it ought to have a transposal.

It didn't take me long to track down the adjective **Pharsalian**. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines the word thus:

Originally: of, relating to, or designating the battle of Pharsalus in Thessaly (48 BC). Later also: of or relating to Pharsalia.

The adjective was listed in the second edition of *Webster's New International Dictionary* but didn't rate a mention in the third edition.

Some years later, another US politician's name which caught my eye was that of **Henry Cisneros**. He had previously served as mayor of San Antonio (1981-1989) and the secretary of housing and urban development (1993-1997) under President Clinton. I managed to find the transposal **resynchronise**, listed only in Wiktionary, the sister of Wikipedia.

Beyond the two examples above, my interest in finding transposals of US politicians' names remained dormant until earlier this year. Then, for some reason, I decided it would be interesting to see how many members of the US House of Representatives had names which could be transposed to other words or names. Here's my list so far:

Al Green	enlarge , general , and gleaner are three easy transposals
Ami Bera	Braemia is a genus of orchids (Wikipedia)
Andre Carson	Anna Records was a 1950s/60s US record label eventually absorbed into Motown (Wikipedia)
Andy Barr	barnyard is another easy-to-find transposal.
Andy Harris	Rhys Adrian (1928-1990) was a writer of various television mini-series (www.imdb.com)
Andy Ogles	gondelays is the plural of gondelay , a variant spelling of gondola , given in the OED
Austin Scott	constituta's is the possessive form of constituta , the plural of constitutum , a type of agreement in Roman law (Webster's Third)
Brian Mast	Tanimbar's is the possessive form of Tanimbar , a group of islands in Indonesia (Wikipedia)

Bryan Steil	Salty Brine is a current New York-based cabaret artist, writer, and actor (www.thesaltiestbrine.com)
Chip Roy	Chirpoy is an uninhabited volcanic island in the Sea of Okhotsk, Russia (wikimapia.org)
Dale Strong	golden star is the name of various plants and herbs (Webster's Third)
Daniel Meuser	Sedum lineare is the scientific name for needle stonecrop, an Asian plant (Wikipedia)
Daniel Webster	Darwin's beetle is a type of stag beetle found in South America; its scientific name is <i>Chiasognathus grantii</i> (Wikipedia)
Darrell Issa	serradillas are types of clover (Webster's Third)
Darren Soto	retornados are Portuguese subjects formerly resident in a Portuguese colony who return to settle in Portugal after colonial independence (OED)
David Trone	Doertdivan is a variant spelling of Dörtdivan, a town in the Black Sea region of Turkey, with a population of about 2800 (Wikipedia)
Dina Titus	Studinita is a village in Romania (Wikipedia)
Doug Lamborn	Gordon L. Baum was the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Council of Conservative Citizens, a US white supremacist organization, until 2015 (Wikipedia)
Ed Case	ceased is another easy-to-find transposal
Ilhan Omar	harmonial means characterized by harmony or agreement, harmonious (OED)
John Duarte	Duane J. Roth (1949-2013) was a respected San Diego business and life science leader (Wikipedia)
Lance Gooden	Golden Ocean is a Norway-based shipping company (Wikipedia)
Lori Trahan	Rhinalator is the trade name of a drug used in combination to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or narcolepsy (www.minclinic.eu)
Nancy Pelosi	penny social is a group meeting with simple refreshments (Dictionary of American Regional English)
Neal Dunn	unnaled is a Shakespearean spelling of unaneled , without extreme unction (Chambers Dictionary)
Randy Weber	Barney Drew is a fictional character in the books <i>Over Sea, Under Stone</i> and <i>Greenwitch</i> , written by English author Susan Cooper (Wikipedia)
Rick Allen	Neil Clark is a Scottish guitarist, known for his work with Lloyd Cole and the Commotions (Wikipedia)
Ro Khanna	knorhaan is any of several South African bustards (Webster's Third)
Ron Estes	enstores means renews, repairs (OED); Esterson is the surname of Bill Esterson, a Member of Parliament in the UK (www.members.parliament.uk); estrones are certain hormones (Webster's Third); storeens is an Irish word for darlings (Webster's Third);

	torneses are obsolete coins of Sicily (OED)
Ryan Zinke	Niekarzyn is a village in western Poland (Wikipedia)
Sam Graves	mass grave is a grave containing multiple human corpses (OED)
Seth Moulton	Melton South is a suburb in Melbourne, Australia (Wikipedia)
Summer Lee	Summerlee is a museum of Scottish industrial life and social history in Coatbridge, Scotland (Wikipedia)—not exactly a transposal, but worthy of note
Ted Lieu	dilutee is an unskilled or semi-skilled worker who takes a place previously occupied by a skilled worker (OED)
Tom Cole	Tecolom is a Salinan (Native American tribe) settlement in Monterey county, California (Wikipedia)
Troy Carter	retractory is a word only appearing in a quote at the entry <i>attractory</i> in the OED; Retractory is also the name of a heavy metal group from the Philippines (www.metal-archives.com)
Troy Nehls	Lyshornet is a mountain in Norway (Wikipedia)
Val Hoyle	Holy Vale is a minor valley and small settlement on the island of St Mary's, the largest of the Isles of Scilly, England (Wikipedia)

If anyone wants to check out which states and districts these congressmen/women represent, the details are at www.house.gov/representatives.

THE BABYLONIAN THEODICY: ACROSTIC TRANSLATIONS

T Campbell

The Babylonian Theodicy is one of the earliest acrostic poems, and one of the most imaginative.

It may be the oldest work of literature to ask the really big questions. If the gods are fair, why is life unfair? How do we live a meaningful life when we see evil rewarded? And how do we counsel our friends when their lives are much worse than ours? Economic inequality, the profit of the unworthy, the problem of evil—all these issues are much on our minds in modern life.

Modern translations neglect the acrostic aspect of the work, focusing on a more literal approach. While this is most useful for scholarship, it renders poetry as something close to prose.

Building on the excellent work of Takayoshi Oshima, I've published a translation using rhyme, meter, and acrostic effects to bring out the feel of the original. The first is a *graphic* acrostic, like most acrostic poems in English; the second is a *syllabic* acrostic, further replicating the repetition of sounds and structure of the original.

The full text is [available for purchase online](#). A sample of both translations follows:

(Graphic)

Strophe I: Sufferer

- 1 Insightful one, I'll tell you, and this story's clear and true,
- 2 I'm troubled, friend, I've got a tale of woe.
- 3 Inside your heart and gut I know compassion pulses through.
- 4 In angst, I hope you'll let me praise you so.
- 5 Inimitable are you. Who could match your wise belief?
- 6 In knowledge, who could ever be your peer?
- 7 Is there a sage like you to whom I can recount my grief?
- 8 I'm finished, friend. My sorrow's met me here.
- 9 I was a youthful child when fate felled Father to a tomb,
- 10 Invasion from the Land-of-No-Return took Mother's womb.
- 11 I'd no one then; my parents both met doom.

Strophe II: Friend

- 12 That's terrible, my thoughtful friend, a miserable tale,
- 13 Though poisoned soil brews in your mental field.
- 14 Thoughts so unworthy spoil your meadows, make your reason frail;
- 15 That shining face of yours is care-concealed.
- 16 Time loans us parents; loans come due, so death must take them first.
- 17 They've ever said, "I'll cross the Hubur stream."
- 18 Think of humanity, the whole of it from best to worst.
- 19 The poor man's son: can he reach wealth supreme
- 20 There in his father's service? Rich men too make stingy lords:
- 21 The servant millionaire does not exist; deity's wards,
- 22 They're wealthier; in hard times, they'll have hoards.

Strophe III: Sufferer

23 Helpmate, your soul pours sympathy, its spring will never dry,
24 High waters unabated fill a sea.
25 However, I will question you; take note of my reply;
26 Hear worried words and listen close to me.
27 Hope's lost for my physique, I am impoverished by need;
28 Hale manliness is gone, my vigor's lost.
29 Hard times have stripped my savings, sapped my strength, and slowed my speed;
30 Heart-heaviness and grief my looks have cost.
31 Here harvests of my meadow cannot sate my hungry gut;
32 Half-empty, my kurunnu-beer (life-drink) supply's been cut.
33 How can my happy days return? With what?

Strophe IV: Friend

34 Eloquent advice I'll drop until it forms a mount.
35 Erratic are your thoughts, and thus your speech:
36 Enfeebled, scattered, senseless, choked off like a spitting fount,
37 Evil such as robbing rogues might preach.
38 Everlasting constancy is that which you desire.
39 Entreaty brings the god with fury bright.
40 Exhortation likewise brings the goddess; when need's dire,
41 Empathy they show to beggars' plight.
42 Eternal quest for justice should become your final goal,
43 Established by yourself in a tenacious fighter role.
44 Escape your woes; may mercy make you whole.

Strophe V: Sufferer

45 Penitence I show, my friend, I bow to your advice,
46 Precious words inspiring me to parley.
47 Permit me to seek others' wisdom. I will question thrice.
48 Pray, onager who eats the ears of barley,
49 Paid you attention to the one who prayerful wisdom said?
50 Pride's savage lion, prideful carnivore,
51 Put you out flour offerings to pacify godhead?
52 Please, guarantor, whose wealth grows more and more,
53 Probed you the crimson gold preferred by Mami's temple priests?
54 Penury do I show in my offerings of yeasts?
55 Pfft, no! She-deity? I give her feasts.

(Syllabic)**Strophe I: Sufferer**

1 Iconic sage, I'll tell you, and this story's clear and true,
2 I'm troubled, friend, I've got a tale of woe.
3 I know inside your heart and gut compassion pulses through.
4 I'll praise you in my angst; allow it so.

5 Eyes cannot find a wise one who could match your wise belief,
6 Ideal in knowledge. Sir, who is your peer?
7 I know no other person with whom I can share my grief.
8 I'm finished, friend. My sorrow's met me here.
9 I was a youthful child when fate felled father to a tomb,
10 Isle-of-No-Return usurped my incubating womb,
11 I'd no one then; my parents both met doom.

Strophe II: Friend

12 Amigo mio, what you tell's a miserable tale,
13 Amanita poisoning your heath.
14 Amateurishly, you've spoiled your thinking, made it frail;
15 Amber's dimmed your shining face as sheath.
16 Ambling steps ahead of us, our fathers pay death's toll,
17 "Am I to cross the Hubur?" all have said.
18 Am I—if sampling countless people, humans as a whole—
19 Am I to see a poor man's son well-fed?
20 Am I to see a servant given generous rewards?
21 Amulets of deity protect gods' servant wards,
22 Ambushed by care, they fall back on their hoards.

Strophe III: Sufferer

23 The heart you hold, my friend, is yet a spring that never dries,
24 The surging of an unabated sea.
25 Thus I will question you, and please take note of my replies,
26 The words I speak; please listen close to me.
27 The body I once built is overwhelmed by squalid need;
28 The gains I've missed, my manliness is lost.
29 The times have stripped my savings, sapped my strength, and slowed my speed;
30 The hopelessness and grief my looks have cost.
31 The harvest's insufficient from the meadow that I plow;
32 The source of life, kurunnu-beer, is cut off from me now.
33 The days I live, can they grow blissful? How?

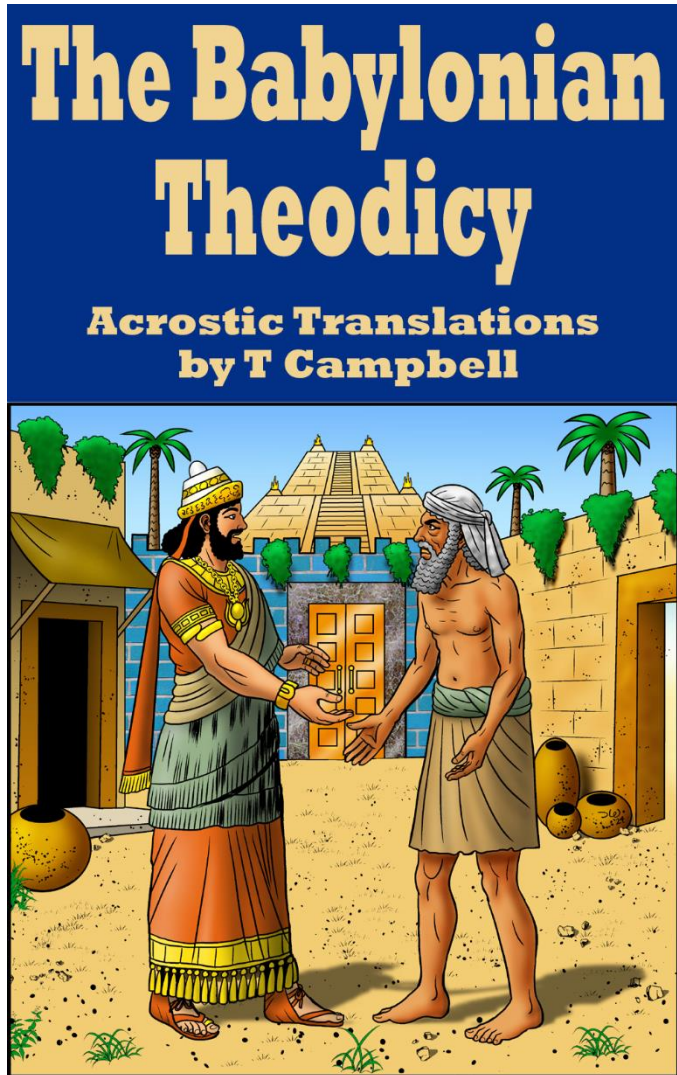
Strophe IV: Friend

34 Homologated are my words and firm like rock-faced mount.
35 Holes punch your balanced thoughts to pockmarked cheese,
36 Holding nothing, scattered, senseless, rambling in account,
37 Wholly suitable for roguish sleaze.
38 Homeothermic and eternal is what you desire.
39 Hold out your hands, divinity's ahead.
40 Holy goddess too returns if beggars' needs are dire,
41 Hopes answering for those who've been misled.
42 Hold fast onto the ever-lasting path of justice pure.
43 Ho, your tenacious warrior will keep your flank secure.
44 Home may you find; may mercy be your cure.

Strophe V: Sufferer

- 45 Lead me well you have, my friend, I
bow to all you've known,
46 Lean I now upon your speech and class.
47 Leave me time, though, to respond with
wisdom of my own.
48 Leaves and ears of barley sate wild-ass:
49 Leads ass, then, to the guarantor of
wisdom as we've read?
50 Leo, lion eating prime-cut meat—
51 Leaves he mahsatu flour gifts to pacify
godhead?
52 Lease-holders grow their wealth with
each heartbeat:
53 Leave they the crimson gold preferred
by Mami's temple priests?
54 Leered I at prayer? I'm generous in
offerings of yeasts,
55 Leaving the she-deity with feasts.

The rest is available [here!](#)



IT'S OVER THE TROP

A New Recreationally Linguistic Gallimaufry

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“As a wise person once said, ‘Every encounter is a learning experience.’” *Dramatic pause.*
“Full disclosure: I am the wise person.”

Go ahead! Feel free to deploy this mischievous all-purpose rhetorical device in cocktail-party conversations. It works as a “bookending” template for any self-quoted original proverb or aphorism or aperçu.

This is my eighth compilation of miscellaneous wordplay. Most of the following have been semi-certified as original, though one never knows for sure. As usual, if searches indicated that I had been anticipated, I appended credits.

- When an appointment is canceled, I often quip, slightly revising Ms. O’Hara: “Tomorrow is another day. In fact, *every* day is another day.”
- A surprising or shocking event or utterance can motivate me to observe that it’s eye-popping, jaw-dropping, and hair-curling. Which suggests an interesting picture or emoji.
- Why are individuals “related by blood” or called “blood relatives”? Sounds gory! References to kinship as consanguineous go back as far as Aristotle. Of course, that was before the era of DNA, genetics, and testing via 23andMe. Today, perhaps we should instead say “related via chromosomes.”
- The phrase “rinse and repeat,” commanding the duplication of an action, was metaphorically borrowed from shampoo labels. It’s invoked humorously in all sorts of contexts, from time management to film criticism. By now, however, the expression may be a bromide because it has so often been, well . . . rinsed and repeated!
- It’s often noted that *Satan* and *Santa* are anagrams. In addition, both personages are “Nicks.” Satan is “Old Nick” and Santa Claus was originally St. Nicholas. Chance—or coincidence? You be the judge! Both appellations date from the 17th century, so there may be a connection that my non-scholarly research hasn’t turned up.
- Response from an advice columnist: “The rest [of the bibelots] are just dead fly collectors.” Wouldn’t a hyphen help here? Punctuation would clarify the meaning, differentiating it from fishing enthusiasts who are no longer pursuing their hobby. Hyphens in compound adjectives—also called phrasal adjectives—are often omitted, which can cause ambiguity and confusion.
- Suggested name for a white-collar law firm: *Dunn, Diehl*.

As an avid *Playboy* subscriber in college and the Navy, I read a satirical short story themed with the cliché of an encounter between an adolescent delivery boy and a sexy French cougar. Among the seductive dialogue: “*Oui* [Yes].” The device is used throughout the tale, becoming increasingly absurd: “*Mon Dieu* [Wow]!” “*Au contraire* [Are you kidding?]” Similarly “translated” are the utterances of other characters who speak German and Spanish.

I was amused then, and still am. Of course, the fun resides in the fact that the expressions don’t require translation. Thus, the jokes fall into the category I’ve dubbed “humor of the obvious.” (See my article in *Interim*, February 2022.) What’s going on here is also what linguists call as *hypercorrection*.

The following catalog might initially appear to be the usual sort of rant bemoaning the decline of standards of grammar and usage. But these quibbles and whinges incorporate enough elements of wordplay to qualify for the pages of this *Journal*.

Slangy and silly exaggerations such as *gazillion* and *bazillion* are acceptable in informal contexts, but I’m gobsmacked whenever I encounter them in serious journalism, even in the Opinion sections of major newspapers. Consider this example, by a prominent political columnist: “China, to whom we owe a gazillion dollars. . . .” Um, how much is that exactly?

Even legitimate words denoting quantity can cause problems. “Inflation is so bad that a package of chewing gum now costs a million dollars!” is recognized as hyperbole. But when the discussion shifts to, say, retirement plans, is it evident that the same figure is meant literally? Still, perhaps I should temper my criticism. I recently spotted a news story quoting a professor named . . . Morgan Bazilian!

A similar pet peeve and *bête noire* is the proliferation and apparent tolerance of *incredible* to express enthusiastic praise. Example: “Thirty incredible fashion moments from Pierre Cardin.” *Incredible* means implausible, or not to be believed, thus implying the *opposite* of the intended encomium. *Garner’s Modern American Usage*, the authoritative style guide, calls it a “vogue word.”

On April 27, 2024, at the annual White House Correspondents’ dinner, comedian Colin Jost of *Saturday Night Live* quipped: “There are so many incredible news organizations here tonight. Also a few credible ones.” *Touché!* Let’s eschew the misuse of *incredible* along with *unbelievable* as alleged praise. After all, no shortage of unproblematic accolades exist: *excellent*, *great*, *marvelous*, *outstanding*, *superb*, *wonderful*, and others. Take your pick.

Finally re: linguistic gripes, this news report: “Drugs that work in mice often fail when tried in people.” To my ear, this common use of *people* invariably sounds peculiar and puerile. To differentiate our species from others, *human beings* or *humans* is more appropriate. Who can forget the scene in the classic science-fiction movie *Soylent Green*, wherein Charlton Heston bellows—well, if you haven’t yet seen the film, you’ll find no spoilers here!

CREDITS: The creative variation on the classic “Gone with the Wind” quotation comes up via Google repeatedly, but most such mentions don’t draw the humorous parallel. Closest is a fan-fiction story by a writer who goes by “VreaMuffin.” “Dunn Diehl” is the name of a farm and a dental lab, but it’s unclear if the appellations are whimsical or the real names of the founders. The story is “The Adventures of Chauncey Alcock,” Playboy, April 1972. The author is Lawrence Sanders (1920-1998), better known for novels in the mystery and thriller genres.

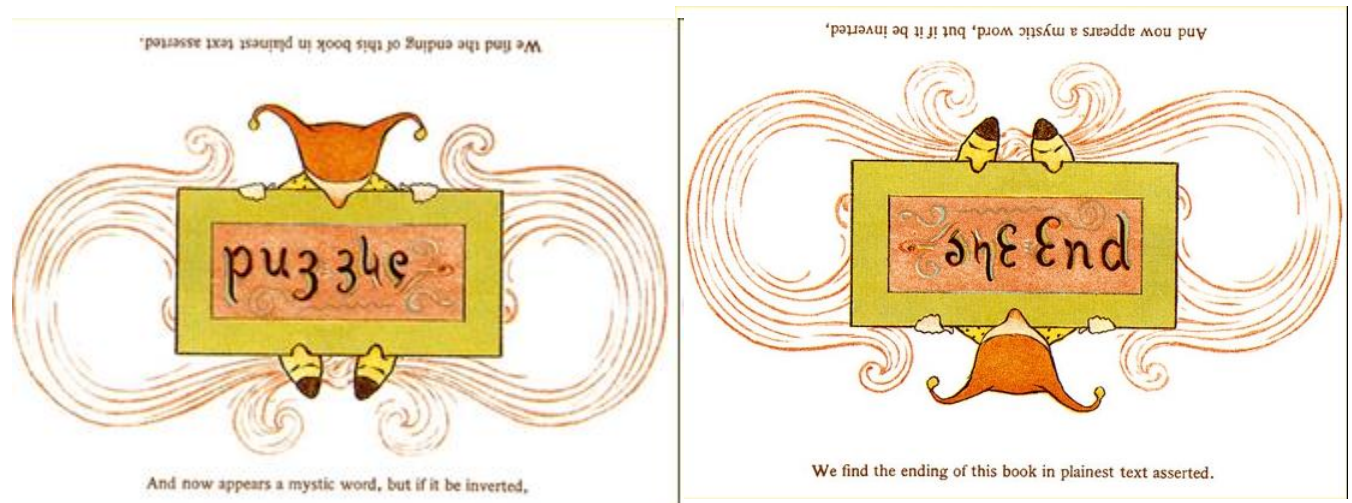
THE AMBIGRAMMISTS

Interviews by T Campbell

If you can read a design rightside up and then read it again upside down—if you can read it with a mirror and without—if you can read a design any two ways, then that design is an ambigram. And if those words don't explain it, then maybe this sample by K Pease will. Read it upside down!

yyeToselpeoPle

Ambigrams are a long-treasured form of word art. The first well-known one came about in an 1893 puzzle book by Peter Newell...



But the modern form began in the mid-1970s, with the work of Scott Kim, John Langdon, and Douglas Hofstadter. Outside of a brief boom in the mid-2010s, ambigrams haven't gotten that much mainstream attention, but plenty of devoted practitioners have kept the form alive and vibrant. *The Journal of Wordplay* spoke with three of them. (All ambigrams accompanying the interviews, unless otherwise noted, are the work of the interviewed artist.)

K Pease

TJOW: How did you discover ambigrams? What introduced you to them?

K Pease: I discovered ambigrams at a very young age indeed, with Scott Kim's *Inversions*. So I've been practicing them my whole life. I still have the very book, with a mirror-symmetrical version of my deadname scrawled in the back page as best a six-year-old could. I also had Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, which I maintain is best read in selective pieces over a lifetime. By the time you can understand all of it, you've outgrown some of it.

TJOW: Would you call them your biggest influences, then?

K: They were the spark for the interest, but I would say a bigger influence on my ambigram work was John Langdon, whose book *Wordplay* came out when I was in college studying graphic design. The works of Kim and Hofstadter were of scientists at play, whereas Langdon is a graphic artist, and he demonstrated how a strong grounding in type design can be applied to ambigrams for better legibility.



TJOW: When did you cross over from appreciation to creation? Do you remember your first ambigram?



K: There's no clear line to be drawn. Like I said, I was always trying my hand at them. I would make a project of doing all my schoolmates' names. And when the interest was sparked again in college, it was at first again just doing my friends' names as gifts. Even though I was always trying to make a business of art and design, ambigrams couldn't easily be

introduced because in a professional logotype, clarity is always more important, and you can't compromise that for no reason. So it didn't really become relevant until the fluke trend.

TJOW: When did you notice that starting up?

K: Langdon was friends with writer Dan Brown, and the work he contributed to *Angels & Demons* got noticed when *The Da Vinci Code* made it big. The way Brown spun them into the narrative was generally kind of embarrassing to see, as he first redefines "ambigram" as any symmetrical shape and says things like "symbolologists have long thought a word ambigram to be impossible" before revealing them later in the book. This brought a lot of interest, which I am grateful for, and it also shaped many people's expectations. There became a presumptive emphasis on blackletter style.

Because I was setting my prices so low for the novelty, I think some businesses were not so much interested in the gimmick as using it as a way to get a logo quick and cheap, when they would have been better served by something easier to read.

TJOW: I'm a little surprised that the ambigram prices were lower than non-ambigram ones! I would have thought the extra difficulty would have raised the rates. Was the novelty discount common in the design market or more specific to you?

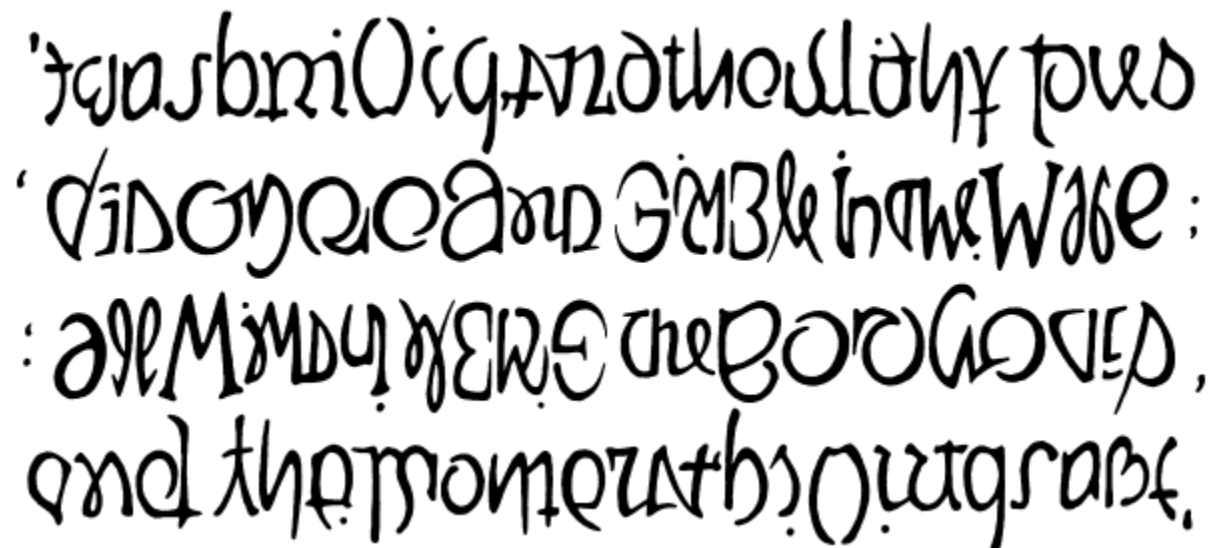
K: It was about clearly defined parameters. Advertising a set price for design isn't practical; you have to do a lot of back-and-forth figuring out what the client needs, and negotiating a quote, and making clear what's included. It's open-ended and you always end up having to do more than expected. But to say: I will solve this puzzle, the main objective of which is to make it read the same upside-down, and I will do it once. That I could put a price tag on and expect to be finished in a few days. And it had to be priced for the casually interested, who made up the majority and didn't need polished vectors.

TJOW: Do you remember any particularly interesting clients from those days?

K: That's why it worked well, the relationship would not have time to develop into "interesting." I would take my money in advance, and the overwhelming majority would just be immediately happy with what I produced. A few people would get a couple go-rounds of "I expected it to be fancier," but not many. The challenge itself, well, that can be interesting almost every time, in the little details.



[Below, a treatment of Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*.]



TJOW: The challenge level of "interesting" is probably worth talking about. Are there ambigrams where you remember the process of breaking them down, figuring out how to get them to work?

K: Yes, the way it happens is that most of the corresponding shapes will line up just fine, but that forces one leftover match-up which seems to be impossible, and then you have to be flexible and invent new ways to do things.



A good example of an especially interesting commission is “The Sky Belongs To You.” The easy part is “belong.” Then, because none of the remaining letters match up at all if you just lay them out one by one, it becomes necessary to shuffle things around. You might say my background in comics has some influence, because it’s a medium in which space translates into time in multiple dimensions, so I know how to introduce illusions into the expectation of “what happens first” i.e. what order the shapes will be read in. The S at the end of “belongs” is scooted away from the beginning of “belongs” to where it goes in “sky” while being in the same place. Descenders and ascenders reach up and down like a comic character reaching out of the frames into the past and future.

TJOW: In your online material, you mentioned that people tend to read letters from the top down. I imagine that’s a big factor too?

K: To be precise, when you read quickly, you read along the tops of letters, scanning the shape of a word, and your mind tends to fill in what’s underneath from context. It’s a fundamental tool of ambigrams,

yes, and one that beginners and automatons usually have to rely on so much that the result can look like the tops of words were simply cut in half and glued together. The principles of legibility, as it pertains to overall word shapes, is where knowledge of typeface design comes in. When something is supposed to be an ascender on one side but absolutely not a descender on the other, you have to judge: how long is too long, and how short is too short? How thin should a stroke be to be read as important from one direction and ignored from the other?

TJOW: You’ve anticipated some of my next question. You mention how type design can make an ambigram more legible, and that the post-Da Vinci Code ambigrams leaned on blackletter. Are there approaches that seem well married to particular challenges? To be more specific, do you look at a string and think “Lots of L’s and T’s here, better go geometric all-caps.” Or is it more a matter of sketching out ideas and seeing what works in a rough?



K: Usually, when looking for the solution, no forms should be off the table. By forms, this is type jargon, I mean the letter “g” has the “binocular form” and the “cursive form” and such. Capital and lower-case forms have to be available for consideration and they’re likely going to be all mixed together. Now, some forms are more at home in particular styles, so completing

the solution can inform what style to choose. But if the subject matter or the commission brief calls for a certain preferred style to begin with, one can usually force a form into most any style.

TJOW: Once the ambigram trend really took off, did you feel yourself as part of a community? What were your experiences with other ambigram artists?

K: No, I can’t say that I did. But in the early days of the web, it was nice to see links from other sites. I did once arrange to meet up with John Langdon at a diner because I happened to live so close to Philadelphia and it just seemed to us to be a good idea, but we didn’t find a lot to talk about. He gave me a copy of his updated book, and to my shame, I didn’t have anything to offer him in return.

There was one site that ran a nice casual round of contests, I don’t remember the names of the couple who ran it, but it used to be ambigram.com before the domain was abandoned and snapped up by a commercial site. The winner would pick the theme of the next one and get to judge it. “White Rabbit” came out of that, and I picked Shakespeare as the theme and produced “R&G are Dead” as an example for that as well.



TJOW: Yeah, we’ll be talking with someone who did a lot of work on that one [Nikita Prokhorov]! Of course, all things must pass...when did you start to get the feeling that the trend was on the wane?

K: I don’t think I made it a point to notice. There were so many other things I was trying to do.

TJOW: Like what?

K: Webcomics, typefaces, arts of all kinds. Maybe it’s a grim thing to say, but I’ve come to accept that I’m never meaningfully rewarded for anything I do, so I’m taking it easy, living off my savings, and doing what I want. I’ve got a comic that I’m updating even more ponderously slowly, and I’ve gotten into making custom puzzle rooms for a game called Escape Simulator. I was always interested in making games, but not enough to learn competent programming, and the building interface in ES is easy enough to be a good compromise.



ΗολυολΙοΗ

I see ambigrams making a bit of a comeback, but it’s as clickbait. There are shorts on YouTube from crowd-funded streams where a camera is pointed at some graph paper, and the onlookers will go “I bet

you can’t do my name, it’s impossible” and the artist will take a marker and act out a “process” of writing the name right-side up, then lined up upside down beneath it, as if it’s a tutorial, and finally drawing out a sort of picket-fence ambigram. I, unfortunately, am not a performer. I do much of my work in my head, and I work best on my own schedule with no one looking over my shoulder. I tend to lament that what people want out of art is not the result, but to watch someone work. It’s great for the people who are performers, but that’s not me.

There are, of course, those who are more interested in the end product than watching artists work, because they actually want to use it for something, but more and more of them are happy for it to be extruded from a machine. I don’t expect that the machine-learning models being pushed into everything nowadays are anywhere close to making inroads on ambigrams, but I understand Flipscrip is still doing business.



They devised this modular font and a program to automatically assemble the pieces, if they are determined to fit. It was Flipscrip, I remember now, that took over ambigram.com, and they had a go for a while at keeping it up as the forum for ambigram enthusiasts, even as they made it more and more about promoting their products.

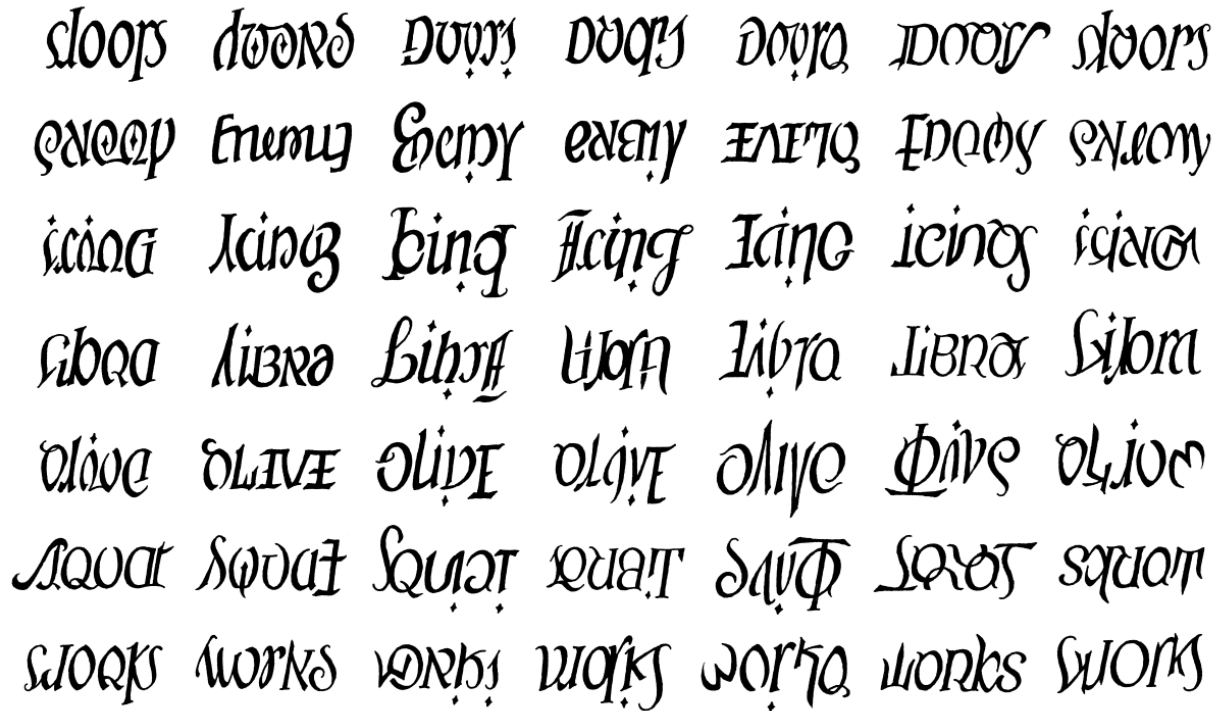
So, during this time, they marketed this basic card game. The round cards had ambigrams made by their robot, pairing every two of a pool of seven five-letter words. You would play matching words like Uno, I guess. A lot of the designs could be mistaken for one

another. And, being given to hyperbolic superlatives, they boasted that their program had searched and found the only set of seven words that would ever work. Well, on those forums, I, of course, went to bat for creative organic lifeforms and said that if you gave me any eight five-letter words, with one to throw away at my discretion, I would do the same.



The Flipscrip people took me up on it and gave me what they claimed were random words but were obviously chosen to be as impossible as they could be, with lots of O’s and I’s in inconvenient places (“mommy” was the word I was forced to throw away). Prudently, they merely said they’d send me a copy of the game if I could do it.

I sketched out the whole array in only three days. They complained that it wasn't really that good, not legible enough, but said they would send me the game anyway. They in fact did not, which is okay because I didn't particularly want it.



Ambigrams are about being flexible and finding the flexibility in language and letterforms. That can't be automated.

Nikita Prokhorov

TJOW: When did you first become aware of ambigrams as a thing?

Nikita Prokhorov: It was a great happy accident. I was walking through—I don't know if you remember those things that had books in them and coffee shops, you know, "bookstores"? There are very few still around, unfortunately. Thankfully, Barnes and Noble is down the road, but Borders used to be my home away from home when I was in school. And I was walking through Borders, and I saw this cover of the book *Angels and Demons* and I thought *oh, that looks pretty cool*. So I picked it up, grabbed the coffee, and started flipping through it, and then I got to page 6 maybe, and there was an ambigram on it. The Illuminati ambigram by John Langdon [pictured on the page following]. And I stopped reading the book I said to myself, *What the f is this? I've never seen this before*.

Illuminati

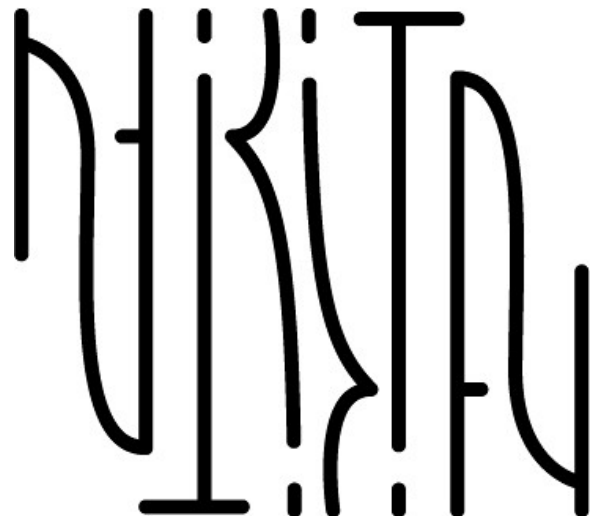
I always loved works like MC Escher, and I love the surrealist movement and truthfully any artwork or architecture, anything, that makes you want to take a second or third look—like a crossword puzzle, a visual puzzle that you need to figure out. That drew me in right away. I always loved type. Being a designer, of course I saw it and I just became absolutely enamored by it. So I spent like two weeks drawing my first ambigram. Finished the book much later than I thought—I put it down after page six so it took me a while to finish! Yeah, that’s ever since then. It was that I was completely hooked on ambigrams hook, line, and sinker.



TJOW: [K Pease] mentioned that it was that it was kind of a quiet niche interest until the John Langdon/Dan Brown book came out and then suddenly it was everywhere. Did you just see the book and go straight to designing your own or did you look up other people who were doing this before that?

Nikita: I just dove right in. The ironic part about my first ambigram—like everyone, you do your first name or you do your loved one or your dog or cat or you want to impress a girl or boy, you do their name. *Hey, look at this! I made this for you!* But I was very vain at the time. I probably still am in some ways. So I did my first name. It was very simple. And it wasn’t bad; for a first attempt I think it was pretty good. And I put it online and forgot about it.

And maybe four or five years later, I got an email from this random woman in Moscow, Russia, who found my ambigram online. She took the time to find me and ask permission if she could tattoo the ambigram on her wrist because her son’s name was Nikita as well. That was a public view. You could find it through Google images. So the fact that she actually sought me out and asked for permission—to me, it was mind-blowing. So I said “Sure, absolutely, if you can send me a photo of it.” And she’s like, “Sure.” So three, four



weeks later, she sent me a photo on my camera and my ambigram, my first ambigram, was on the wrist of some random woman in Russia!



And, yeah, then I started diving into the world. And I was trained as a graphic designer, but I never really drew custom lettering, never really considered it. So when I kind of tried to delve beyond my first ambigram, which was a very simple model with mono-weight lines, I realized that, *Hey, I actually need to learn how to draw letterforms*. I kind of went

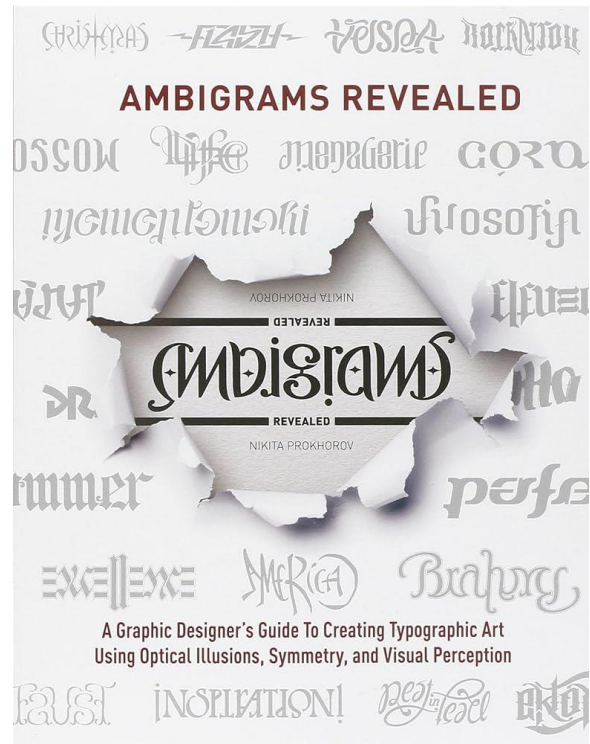
backwards. Before I had any knowledge of drawing custom letterforms and basing them on Art Nouveau or Art Deco or any other art period, I had to actually learn how to draw letters. And that's when I found a bunch of different lettering communities and artists online and I became an admirer of their work. And it took a while, but after that period, I went back to drawing ambigrams and they started coming out quite a bit better than just thin mono-weight lines! And then I just continued with my traditional graphic design, which is what, you know, pays the bills, and ambigrams are more of a fun side passion, hobby, hustle, whatever term you'd like to use, whatever term is popular nowadays.

TJOW: *Side hustle's* what I hear a lot.

Nikita: *Side hustle*, exactly, as much as sometimes that word makes me twinge a little bit. You know, "I have a side hustle!" No, it's your passion. Just do your work and have fun with that side if you're passionate about it. But to each their own, right?

TJOW: It's something I imagine you'd keep doing in some capacity, regardless of the profit and recognition involved.

Nikita: Absolutely. The book that I put on 2013, *Ambigrams Revealed*, I knew full well going into it that it wasn't going to be a *New York Times* bestseller. I wasn't gonna get a nomination for it as the Book of the Year. It was more like, "Let's get together some brilliant ambigram designers of the world, not just us." It was a very international book. I think I had artists from as far as Japan entering into the book and submitting their work. So it was just about assembling all that under one cover. As a designer, you know, we always look for inspiration. LogoLounge releases some great logo books, or there's *The Big Book of Lettering* or *The Big Book of Stationery Design* or *Packaging*, but there's never been an ambigram book aside from John Langdon's, which just focused on his personal work, or Scott Kim's, which just focused on his personal work. There was never a collection of ambigrams from around the world. So that was what caught my eye. I



REVEALED
AMBIGRAMS
REVEALED

wasn't hoping for anything beyond a first printing, which it didn't have. I would have been very surprised, but I was absolutely at peace with that. That didn't bother me one bit.

TJOW: You were mentioning you'd gotten involved in various creative communities, and from what I was able to dig up through the through the Wayback Machine, that seemed to intensify in the early 2010s, maybe just with *Ambigrams Magazine* [ambigrams.com, now defunct] and maybe with others... You were the lead contributor for a while there, from what I could see.

Nikita: I did do a lot of writing for it. It was integral to developing the fabric of the community and bringing people together and just bringing that art form to the world—to the local audience, US-based, international. So it was a great experience. I met a lot of good people, made a lot of contacts from that. And I think *Ambigrams Magazine* was a springboard towards other ambigram communities.

T: I've heard people say that the ambigram scene seemed to dry up around 2015 or so, but I see you not only still posting ambigrams yourself but pointing out other designers. Would you say there's still a community today? Maybe not quite the level that it was right after *The Da Vinci Code*, but still present?



Nikita: That's kind of a two-part answer. One, there's absolutely an underground community. There's one or two big Discord servers. There's a website that a gentleman named Kai runs, ambigr.am. That's probably the biggest website-based community right now aside from Discord. There's a lot of contest challenges: people just post their ambigrams and thoughts on ambigrams almost daily. So there's definitely still a big community, and not just Discord where people just talk about it, but a lot of ambigrams being posted.



The second part of the answer is a little more delicate. I feel like a lot of ambigrams that are made nowadays, especially by new people that are discovering them, are made without any regard for traditional and classical typography. I'm not saying that everyone who creates ambigrams needs to be classically trained typographer or graphic designer. That's not the case. But as a graphic designer, if I focus on branding or illustration, I don't have to be an expert in UX, UI, or

building a website, but I have to have some awareness and knowledge of it. So if I do work with an app designer or web developer or web designer, I know how to give them files or designs that don't make their life more difficult.

And I feel like a lot of a lot of people that are learning ambigrams nowadays are ignoring that it's still typography. It's very heavily manipulated from different perspectives! But at its core, it still needs to follow traditional rules of classical typography. And a lot of ambigrams that I see made nowadays, they are...illegible? Not very readable, not very legible. And that's simply for the reason that there's no interest or no desire to actually do a little bit of research, a little bit of thinking and a lot of actually

writing and learning about typography and lettering. I'm all for exploration and experimentation, but you need to have a foundation. You wouldn't go and run a marathon without doing some training.

So I feel like that's the negative part of the community nowadays: it feels like people don't want to take the time to learn. Ambigrams are only going to get better if they do learn. And remember, I said that the same thing happened to me. I tried drawing ambigrams before I knew about drawing custom letters. I was only using premade typefaces at that point. Once I took the time to learn about typography and writing systems, different tools...you know, how writing with a brush pen versus a parallel pen versus a nib would affect the writing style on the letters. That's when my work began to improve, visibly. Not year by year, but day by day. So I feel like yes, there is a community, but I feel like ambigrams have become more generic and not as unique because there's no background, no training, and no real desire to learn about it. But it is what it is. It's part of the community. Some of the ambigrams coming from the community are absolutely fantastic. And some I was looking at like, *I can't read this*.



But my work is not perfect. Sometimes I come back to my own ambigrams a few days later, and I can't read them either.

TJOW: Yeah, I find as I get older that I've started to turn my lack of short-term memory to my advantage.

This crossword puzzle that I made looks brilliant to me now. But let me walk away and forget about it for a few days, then come back to it and see if I can make any sense of it.



Nikita: Sometimes I do a little sketch in my notebook, and I come back to it and I'm like, *What the heck was I trying to make? What is this word?* And then I just scratch it out. I start over because I don't have any idea what the word is. I'm like, *Alright, forget it. I'm going to a different word.*

TJOW: You did something for Pepsi recently where you were walking people through the creation of your ambigrams.

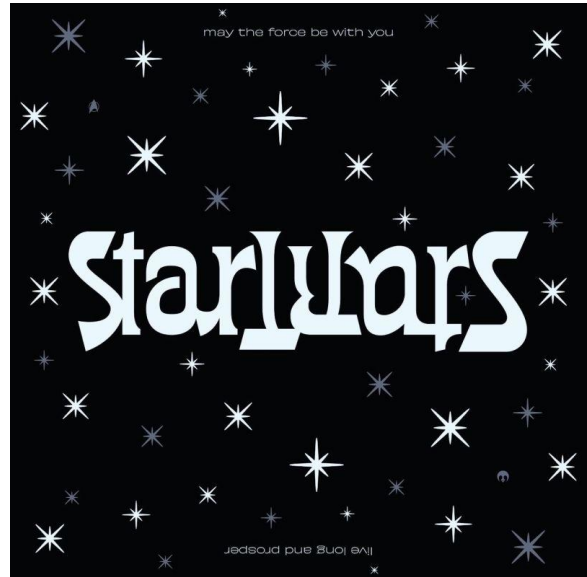
Nikita: One of my former students is working as a brand designer there. Pepsi does a yearly workshop series for their team, and they bring in different designers, illustrators, artists, for the workshops. And she wanted me to do a couple of ambigram workshops. I've done a few ambigram workshops

before, but I structured this one a little differently. I didn't know whether I would get people who were lettering artists and graphic designers or people who worked in the finance department and they just wanted to take the workshop and they've never drawn a custom letter in their life. And I did *get* some people from finance and project management. I had some people who were from the brand side and the design side of the packaging side. So it was a nice little merger and mishmash of people who had drawn custom letters and people who had never drawn a letter or illustration or logo in their life.

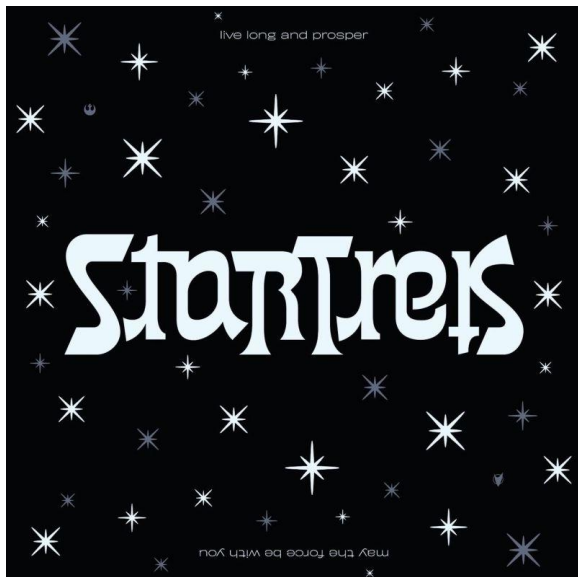
TJOW: I wanted to talk a little about your *Star Wars/Star Trek* ambigram.

Nikita: I have to confess my sole purpose in that was to rub two groups of people the wrong way. There's very diehard *Star Trek* fans and diehard *Star Wars* fans, and they do not agree. They do not agree on anything. And I thought to myself, *Well, ambigrams are all about opposites and two different perspectives. Why not? With one stroke of a pen or pencil or one vector point, why not offend two big groups of people at the same time?* So that was my sole purpose. Everybody likes to stir the pot a little bit.

It's funny you mentioned it because that was an ambigram I've been trying to crack for a couple of years. I worked it on and off for a few years and I just couldn't crack it. I'm not sure why, whether I was limiting myself to too specific a typographic style, but something prevented me from cracking it. And in maybe March or April, I thought, *You know, let me try this again.* Rather than using any of the sketches that I'd done before, I started with a clean piece of paper. I did some initial sketching, and somehow, I stumbled upon this. I've been a fan of the kind of reverse contrast typefaces, and I tried to make this a reverse contrast typeface, and it worked out really well. I think that starting off with a focused style helped bring it together. Which is ironic because the first rule that I follow is never to dive into one with a specific style in mind. A style does not guide the legibility of the ambigram, the legibility guides the



style. But in this case, it worked out, and it came together. Starting fresh and bringing in the reverse-contrast type of graphic style proved to be the winning combo.



TJOW: Just last year, there was a *New York Times* puzzle that had a clue, "Better of two sci-fi franchises," and it was designed so that the crossings would work whether you filled in *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*. [It was for February 6, 2022.]

Nikita: I love it.

T: I'll see if I can send you that design at some point after we're done. Are there other people who strike you as ambigram designers to watch?

Nikita: It's very hard to pick favorites, but I do have a couple I can name off the top of my head. [Jennifer Lynch](#), she's been designing ambigrams for a couple of years. She's been doing [some really, really great work](#). There's a gentleman, [Jeff Harrison on ambigr.am](#), and I'm not 100% sure of his kind of background or training, but he does beautiful, beautiful work. There's a gentleman whose name I'm probably going to butcher...[Vasillis Stergioudis](#). [José Aquino](#) has been doing a lot of really beautiful, beautiful work as well, in terms of just experimentation. [Otto Kronstedt at Ambigr.am](#), he's been doing some fun and unusual approaches to ambigrams aside from your typical rotational effect. Those definitely come to mind.



TJOW: Do you see any movements in technology being helpful in terms of designing good ones? We've discussed how it's made it easier to design bad ones.

Nikita: AI has been such at the forefront of a lot of conversations, whether in the artistic world or engineering world or programming world. Pretty much any niche industry has been touched upon one way or another. I don't think AI is going to make a huge difference. It's going to make a difference, but the starting point is still paper and pencil. It's still drawing, it's still trying to figure out—I refer to an ambigram as a puzzle that's finished, and you have to figure out the starting and the in-between pieces to make that puzzle come together. And there's no replacement for paper and pencil. In design, 98% of it is the grunt work, and then the 2% is refining it for the client. In that 2%, AI can replace me because I can take my ambigram and AI can apply a fire effect, ice effect, rock effect, you know, shiny pro effect in a matter of seconds. Whereas even though I can do it in Photoshop, it could take me you know, 20 minutes, half an hour or maybe an hour depending on how complex the effect is. If it's something that needs to be modeled in 3d and not just more of a flat design, that can take hours as well. So it can be helpful in the finishing and making it look pretty for the masses, right? I don't think there will ever be replacement for paper and pencil and just thinking about it and planning it out and seeing what works, and what doesn't. That's my take on AI, but AI is like a curse word to a lot of designers.

meaty

TJOW: A lot of writers too. I wanted to know if you had any advice for somebody who was who is where you were at the start of this narrative, like just discovering ambigrams and thinking, *Maybe I could do something like that*. An aspiring designer.

Nikita: Yeah, absolutely. I'd be happy to talk about that.

I think the first step is doing some research and seeing what kind of work is out there. Not necessarily to see what you can design, but to see how many different styles I mean different approaches for many different aesthetics Whether you're a graphic designer, whether you're a surrealist painter, whether you're an architect, you develop your signature style. And you can recognize the stroke of somebody's work. I know some of my friends in the community that they can look at an ambigram I posted anonymously and say, *Oh, yeah, that's Nikita's work.* So looking at the different ranges of work, so you're not constrained to one specific style, whether it's the line weight or the sans serif or serif, just absorb as much as you can from the research about the different writing systems and explore actual existing typefaces, so you can look at the consistency in the design and the proportions.



And then the best advice is start sketching. And start simple: pick a simple word, don't use something like *supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*. I would even go as far as saying pick a word that's already an ambigram. For example, *Mom*, which upside down says *Wow*. That's a natural ambigram that already exists. The skeleton structure is there, take that simple ambigram and try it, 20, 30, 50 different ways, each with a different type of graphic style. You know, do your research. Let's say you want something that's more art deco, or art nouveau, or wood type, explore a few different typographic styles on top of structures already established. And that will help you see how different writing styles or aesthetics affect how legible an ambigram is and how readable it is. I almost give the same advice for lettering.



Also, there's nothing wrong with taking someone else's work and tracing on paper, just to get the muscle memory, just to see how your hand gets used to a certain style. I'm not saying you know, posting online, saying *Oh, look at that, I traced that, therefore it's my own work.* But using the foundation to learn and grow, absolutely, you can do that.

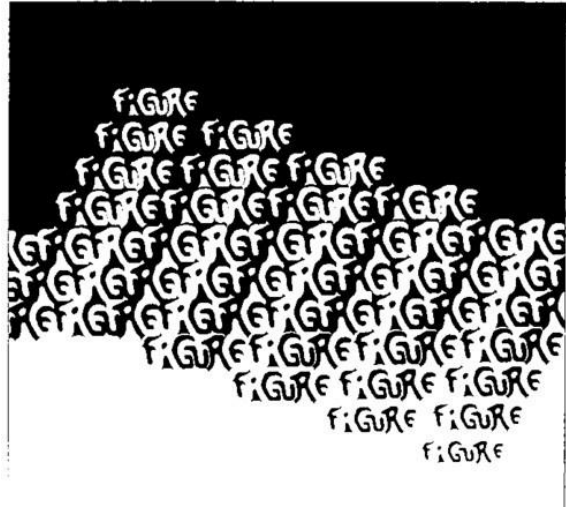
So look at the research work that's already out there. See how different artists approach ambigrams in their own unique way. And then just pick simple words. Start on paper. Writing with different types of graphic styles on paper. You know, forget the computer. It's all about kind of training your hand and training your eyes. I always say there's no more personal connection than from the artist's mind to their eyes to their hand and the tip of their pencil or pen or marker.

That's where the magic—I know. I hate this phrase sometimes—that's where the magic really happens. It's not Adobe Illustrator or some AI plugin or Photoshop to finish, it all happens on paper. So just absorb, learn, start simple. Get a few simple ambigrams under your belt and then just continue expanding.

Scott Kim

TJOW: I think the place to start is where you started. Correct me if mistaken, but you had an assignment in design class that started you on this path?

Scott: Yeah, that's an origin story in the introduction of my book [*Inversions*, 1982]. As an undergraduate at Stanford University, I took a graphic design course from Matt Kahnddd, one of the best teachers I've ever had. I clearly had a budding interest in graphic design, but like many kids had no idea that the field even existed. You know, I loved lettering design, I always did. Frankly I loved all wordplay, so I gobbled up *Language on Vacation*, Dmitri Borgmann's book.



One of the assignments was to create a design where the figure and ground are both equally active, or there's no ground per se. There's nothing that's unimportant. The most famous examples is MC Escher tessellations [like *Metamorphosis*, sampled below]. And it's a remarkable skill. John Langdon likes to say it's like visual algebra. Every line has to serve two different functions. You try to balance the equation and get it just right.



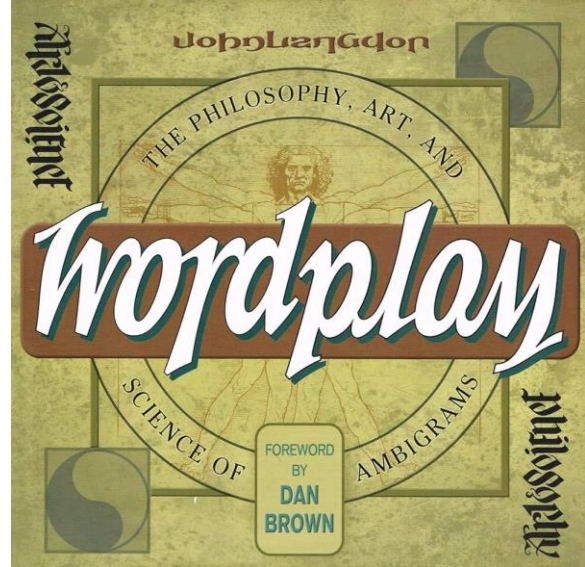
So I just latched on to the idea, *I will try to write the word figure so the remaining space also spells the word figure*. The very first attempt I did put *figure* upside down. But I didn't like it very much. It wasn't very legible. The letters weren't up to the level of quality I wanted. At the same time, I noticed that the inside of a capital R is a lowercase i with the dot.

TJOW: One of those little flashes that suddenly lets you move forward.

Scott: It turns out that this happens in ambigram creation all the time, you find the place that works well then try to build around it. Like if you're trying to construct a palindrome, you might notice there's certain patterns that work really well or a word, a single word that works great. And then you try to build something around that core.

TJOW: To take an example [used in John Langdon's book], *wordplay*, the *d* and *p* are a good place to start because they're basically naturally flippable.

Scott: Yes. John Langdon's book cover [shown at right] takes advantage of that and extends it. *R* and *L* are next, that's pretty easy. *A* and *O*, in lower case, they're both basically ovals. That's pretty easy. The *W* and the *Y*, that's a little more difficult, takes a lot of tenacity to get that to work. Yeah.



TJOW: Yeah, that is the hard part.

Scott: There are three constraints you're always trying to satisfy. The most important one is you want the word to be legible. That does not mean that the letter shapes have to be conventional. We're really good at reading very strange shapes as words. In fact, we don't even read letters, really. We read whole words.

TJOW: That's a good way of putting it.

Scott: You'll see this trick on magazine covers all the time. The portrait of the person will cover up part of the logo. You still read it fine.



TJOW: I was looking at a set of periodicals recently and I saw the logo was actually covered more often than not. They had so much faith that people would autocomplete it that they made that regular habit.

Scott: Yeah, it's just like autocomplete.

So your first thing is legibility. Second thing is you're trying to make things exactly symmetrical. That's the geometric constraint. And that puts a lot of pressure on the letter shapes. Sometimes it works in your favor. Like you said, *d* and *p* are great.

TJOW: But if you flip *w*, it wants to be *m*. You have to work to make it not *m* if it's not supposed to be *m*.

Scott: Yeah. I'm also a musician and obsessed with Bach, written a lot of music in the style of Bach. And Bach is famous for being a very mathematical composer. I don't know that he thought he was not a mathematician. But certainly, his compositions had very, very intricate structures. At the end of the day, it has to sound like music and communicate as music. And he was a master at doing all these tricks, but still sounding musical.



TJOW: One of the things you said in [an earlier] interview that stayed with me was that creating or seeing an ambigram was what math felt like.

Scott: When creating an ambigram, I'm doing the same things mentally that I do when I'm creating puzzles or doing mathematics. Yes, that's true.

TJOW: Can you tell me about the general flow of your career after college?



Scott: When I came into college, my identity was that I was interested in music and mathematics. As an adult, I find that a very common combination, but it was strange when I was a kid. Because those are supposedly from the arts and sciences. Do they really combine? Steve Jobs is famous for saying, *Yes, that's exactly what we need.*

And at Stanford, I was immediately interested in computers. This is 1973. I spent a huge amount of time at the Stanford AI lab and I was obsessed with computer graphics at that point, which was pretty new. So I went to Stanford because they had a strong

computer music program. I got a music major. I knew I wasn't going to go on in it, but I wanted to study it. So I made music my major, but I was also in mathematics and computer science.

The computer music crowd was all people who were excellent musicians and—oh, by the way, if they needed to invent a programming language and write a compiler for it in order to do this assignment? They did that.

TJOW: It does sound like a fascinating crowd.

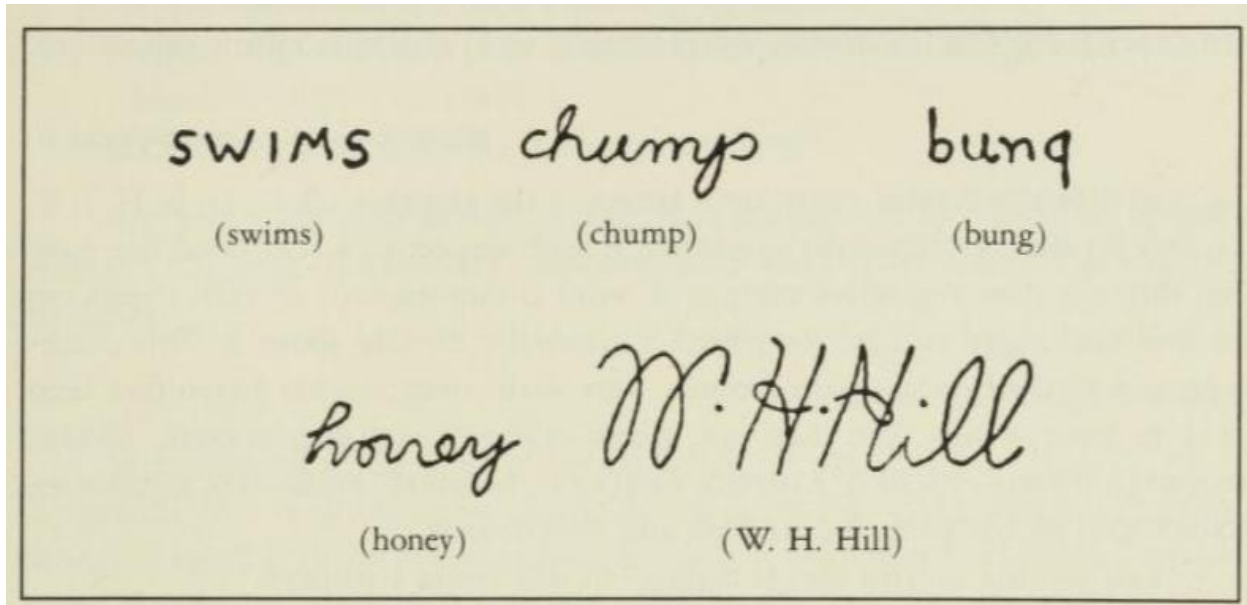
Scott: Yeah, I loved it. That's the same thing that appeals to me. As I mentioned earlier, in game design, its people are extremely interdisciplinary. Within college, I eventually focused on user interface design before the field really existed. I created my *Inversions* book while I was in college.

TJOW: And that's established you as associated with you with ambigrams for years there.

Scott: I assume that will always be the thing I'm best for, and that's okay. There are plenty of other things I do. But it's a pretty good summary of the way I look at the world.

In Borgmann's book [*Language on Vacation*, sampled on the page following] he has *W.H. Hill* and the word *chump*, so I'd seen some examples, but it never occurred to me to take it further until I did that assignment.





I did it as a hobby for a while and I basically said, “You know, my ambigrams don’t look good enough. I better study.” So I took a year of calligraphy. I studied type design. I bought all sorts of books on book design. My advisor at school was a professor named Donald Knuth. He’s a giant in the computer science world. And although he’s very much a computer scientist, he really cares about the arts. He built his house around a pipe organ, which he plays and composes for, and he cares about the aesthetics of typesetting. He was in the middle of writing (and still is) a multi-volume series called *The Art of Computer Programming*, but at the time mathematical typesetting was getting really ugly. Typesetting math is hard, and this was the time when mathematical typesetting was transitioning from handset type to photo typesetting, which worked poorly. The only thing harder than typesetting math is typesetting music.

He decided he would take a year sabbatical and said. “I’m a computer scientist. I can solve this problem. I’m going to create a typesetting language for mathematics and it’s going to become the standard for all technical journals all over the world.” Which is exactly what he did, though it took longer than a year. He created a typesetting language called TEX. And he also designed his own typeface, as well as a language for designing parametrized typefaces. That work attracted the interest of type designers. There was a major type design conference in 1982 that brought all the world’s best type designers to Stanford.

TJOW: Wow.

Scott: Soaking in that, I just love that.

TJOW: I can see it in your work.

Scott: My two mentors were Knuth and Douglas Hofstadter, both of whom are obsessively detailed people. I helped Hofstadter typeset *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. He cared about typesetting it and drawing the illustrations because a lot of jokes in the book depend on exactly where the line breaks are and how it’s typeset.

So I got a bunch of books on book design and typesetting to teach myself book design so I could typeset my book. About a third of the illustrations were done on an early version of PostScript before it was

commercial. After college, I did user interface design and graphic design for a few years. I designed the Silicon Graphics logo. I've done about a dozen logos. But I didn't want to do that full time. Same thing with user interface design.

So, starting in the early Nineties, I became a game designer, specializing in puzzle design. And I did that for about twenty years. I did it for print — *Discover Magazine* is the most visible one — but I also did puzzles for other published magazines like *Games* and *Scientific American*. The person whose name I haven't mentioned is Martin Gardner. Huge inspiration for me.

TJOW: I know him! And I've seen the different ambigrams that you did in tribute to him.

Scott: He helped launch my career with his review of *Inversions*.

In the background, my lifelong mission is to improve mathematics education. I love this field. It's very beautiful. It makes sense to me. But the way it's being taught is guaranteed to not work.

For the last five years, I've been working with my wife, Amy Jo Kim, on being a startup coach. Both of us have charted our own careers. It's always based on everything we've done up to that point, but keeps evolving to the next thing. So that's a lot of what I'm doing. And I'm using a lot of my visual design skills because I'm creating all the marketing materials and overseeing the video production. I absolutely love animation. So I love creating informational graphics.

I'm hoping to make a big contribution in education but haven't found a viable way to do that yet. But I've given tons of talks to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, often building on ambigrams as a way to introduce kids to symmetry and creativity and mathematics.

TJOW: You've been inventive even within the ambigram space. Coming up with a star design for the name Gardner, I believe, and some animations as well. Is that just kind of natural for you? Or is there more of a conscious attempt to expand the form?



Scott: I am aware that I pushed the form more than most people. A lot of new ambigram artists start by learning the conventions, *Oh, there's these types of ambigrams*. I never was that way. I just said, *Well, there's many things you can do*. Yeah, I would say pushing the form comes naturally to me. I like being creative. But most of all, I want to express the meaning of the word. And that often drives me to do something haven't done before.

There's somebody I admire, the juggler Michael Moschen. He's extended juggling into the realm of kinetic sculpture. So I wanted to create an ambigram that involved motion, and as astonishing as some of the things he does. So I started thinking, What can I do? Well, how about two layers that slide over each other — in one position they spell *Michael* and the other they spell *Moschen*.

Th ambigram worked out pretty well but not quite up to my own standards. He's got a lot of three-dimensional rotating sculptures, that's a beautiful way to express him, so when I get good at a 3-D animation program I'll realize that.

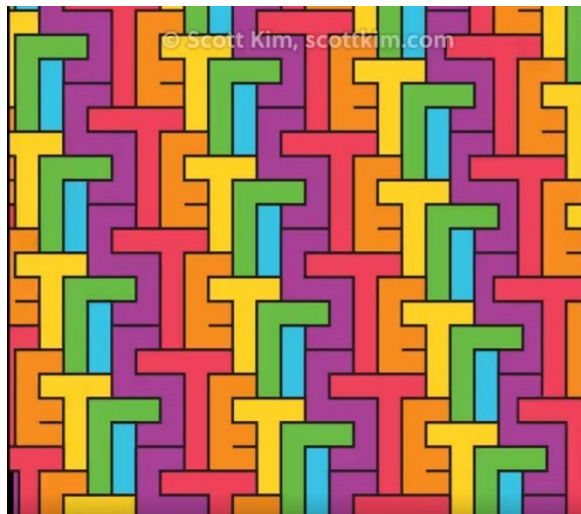
TJOW: So we're gonna look forward to that one.

Scott: To elaborate on your question, there's three of us that I think of as sort of grandparents of ambigrams. John Langdon, and Douglas Hofstadter, who is about to publish another ambigrams book.

TJOW: I'm looking forward to that, too!



Scott: Yeah, I just wrote an intro for that. And I will be interviewing him about his book for our channel. Each of us has a clear, different role in the ambigram world. Doug is all about the philosophy and about using ambigrams as a space to explore how cognition, perception, and creativity work. Of course he cares about quality in ambigrams—he's done thousands of them at this point. But that's his specialty is using ambigrams as a microworld for exploring philosophical issues.



John is more of a typographic perfectionist. He's created some of the most refined ambigrams aesthetically, that really tried to conform to typographic standards. I look up to him and learn a tremendous amount from him. We recently reconnected a year ago. He's out on the West Coast now. As prolific as ever. We hope to collaborate on doing something together. To pass on what we know the next generation.

My role is to keep pushing at the edges of "What's an ambigram?" And I think that's a very good division of approaches and philosophies we three have sort of naturally fallen into.

Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* [pictured] said there's two types of artists. One is pushing the form. And then the other is pushing the meaning. I relate to that completely — I flip between the two.

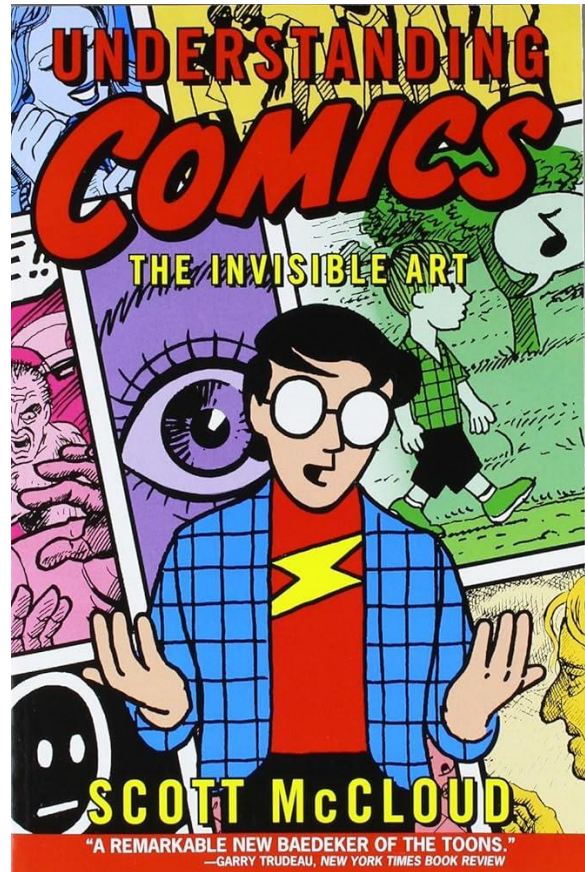
TJOW: And sometimes the meaning requires you to push the form. You talk about the next generation. Are there members of that generation that have that have gotten your interest? People we should be paying more attention to as ambigram designers?

Scott: Nikita Prokhorov is someone who has helped the field as a whole, with his book *Ambigrams Revealed*. And some of the artists he cites are the next generation. Of course, he's one of them. He's very prolific and good at it.

Ambigrams now are all over the world, in all languages now.

TJOW: It has become a multilingual phenomenon, which is amazing to see. You've done some of that.

Scott: Yeah. I've done quite a bit of English-Hebrew and English-Chinese.



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loved one. Doing names of friends is something I do a lot. Doug's book is largely a compendium of ambigrams he's done for particular people, often as gifts. So start there. In many ways the art will teach itself to you. I don't need to tell you much more.

One piece of advice: be sure to show your ambigrams to somebody other than the person who you're doing it for and yourself, right? It's quite tricky to determine whether an ambigram is legible or not, because you are heavily biased. You have to see it through the eyes of people who don't know what it says. That's the same advice that I give to entrepreneurs in startups. You think you have a good idea for a product? That's only a starting point. Show it to the customers and get feedback. And be prepared to be surprised. You always will be.

TJOW: Not to give your work with Langdon away entirely, but I suppose we should close with a little advice for would-be ambigram designers.

Scott: There's two classes of advice. One is, how do you get started? The other is, how do you get good at it?

There are a couple of ways to start. One way is make an ambigram with a word or name you want to do. It's often your own name, or the name of a friend or

One place where people get stuck is, *Where do I start?* The answer is, start from the outside and move towards the center, assuming you're doing a rotational ambigram or maybe a mirror image.

If one letter just really won't turn into the other letter, consider other ways of writing the letter like lowercase cursive. And the thing that came easily to me but was a revelation to Doug is that one letter doesn't always have to turn into exactly one other letter. In the *wordplay* example we started with, each letter does map onto one other letter. But try making an ambigram out of the name *Tim*. Turning *T* into *m* isn't going to be so easy. *T* has one vertical stroke, and *m* has three. When I'm looking at ambigrams, I tend to match up vertical strokes. I don't match up letter for letter. And if you can try matching stroke by stroke, you'll come up with an ambigram for *Tim* pretty quickly.

Also, when we read words, we read the top halves of letters much more than the bottom halves, so you can mess with the bottom halves much more. There's a some of those standard tricks that I communicate to people, and you'll find them out if you do it on your own.

The other piece of advice—if you want to get good at ambigrams, there's really only one way, which is to get good at lettering. There are many types of lettering, including sign painting, calligraphy, type design, and graffiti. They're all valid. But get good at it. Drawing good letters, that's the hardest skill to teach.

It's like at Pixar. It turns out that teaching artists to use the computer is the easy part. The hard part is learning how to draw the human figure. So my friends who have worked at Pixar, they have internal figure drawing classes so that even the programmers can learn some of the basics of drawing because that's the most important skill.

TJOW: Advice I'll take to heart. I'm working on an ambigram logo for this very issue.

Scott: Ah, designing title lettering. I get a lot of commissions. And the first thing I have to do is warn people that it might not work out. [Editor's note: we did indeed reject that logo in the end!]

TJOW: You did mention in a prior interview where you were ambigramming a person's name that if it had not worked out, you might have asked, "What was his middle name?" I think that's interesting to know from, if you'll forgive me, one of the one of the acknowledged masters of the field, that certain projects just won't come together and no amount of effort is going to change that. I could have asked "When do you know when it's time to turn to the next project?" but I imagine that's something that just comes with experience.

Scott: Yeah, that's right. You try lots of things, most of them don't work, and you got to keep going. And knowing when to give up and when to stay the course is a skill you learn over time. When I see beginner ambigrams, I'll say, "No, you should have given up on that approach and tried something else."

But sometimes they'll persist into something I would never have thought of that works. So I'm always open to learning.



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.

I'd like to begin this section with a special announcement: longtime contributor **Anil** has two new books available! *Haywire Way Higher* "mixes original spoonerism couplets with explanatory or crazy comments or stories, aimed at entertaining both wordplay nuts and ordinary mortals." And *101 Animal Universes?* "This delightful collection of animal-themed poetry mixes fantasy, nonsense humour, sentimental poems, parody, satire, and polemics, twisting the animal kingdom into flashes of witty wordplay to amuse and bamboozle. Taking the world of animal poetry beyond the realm of children's literature, this collection brings all the fun and ingenuity of playful rhyme to the adult reader."

"A good pun is its own reword" by Zhijun Xu, Siyu Yuan, Lingjie Chen, and Deqing Yang, published at <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2404.13599> poses the question, "Can Large Language Models Understand Puns?"

"AutoBreach: Universal and Adaptive Jailbreaking with Efficient Wordplay-Guided Optimization" by Jiawei Chen, Xiao Yang, Zhengwei Fang, Yu Tian, Yinpeng Dong, Zhaoxia Yin, Hang Su, published at <https://arxiv.org/abs/2405.19668>, discusses how wordplay-based queries can break the security on current LLMs!

"Autoethnography: An (Incomplete) Abecedarian Assemblage" by Graham Francis Badley, found at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/10778004241250067>, is an attempt to use abecedarian literature to outline cultural background.

Pragmatics of Internet Humor is a 2023 book by Francisco Yus. "Pragmatics" is a linguistic term, referring to aspects of language like context-dependence, underlying assumptions, and implication.

"Rhyme in Language: Cognitive, Neural, and Cultural Perspectives" by Tozagul Raupova, found at <https://jainkwellpublishing.com/index.php/conferences/article/view/747/745>, aims for a "comprehensive review of research on rhyme."

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The Journal of Wordplay is a free-to-submit, free-to-read academic 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.)

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

Anil is a preacher turned biologist turned writer of wordplay. Born in Henderson, Kentucky, he was valedictorian and senior class president. He was further educated at Wake Forest (BS) and Johns Hopkins (PhD), with positions at U. Illinois, U. Pittsburgh, and U. Western Australia. Now a dual citizen of the USA and Australia, he lives in Perth.

He has published six books of wordplay humor, with two others in press, four of them award-winning. He published over two hundred articles in the now defunct *Word Ways* and will continue contributing to its successor, *The Journal of Wordplay*.

His major influences were a humor-loving mother and authors Walt Kelly (*Pogo*), Lewis Carroll, Will Cuppy, and Dave Morice.

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.

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.

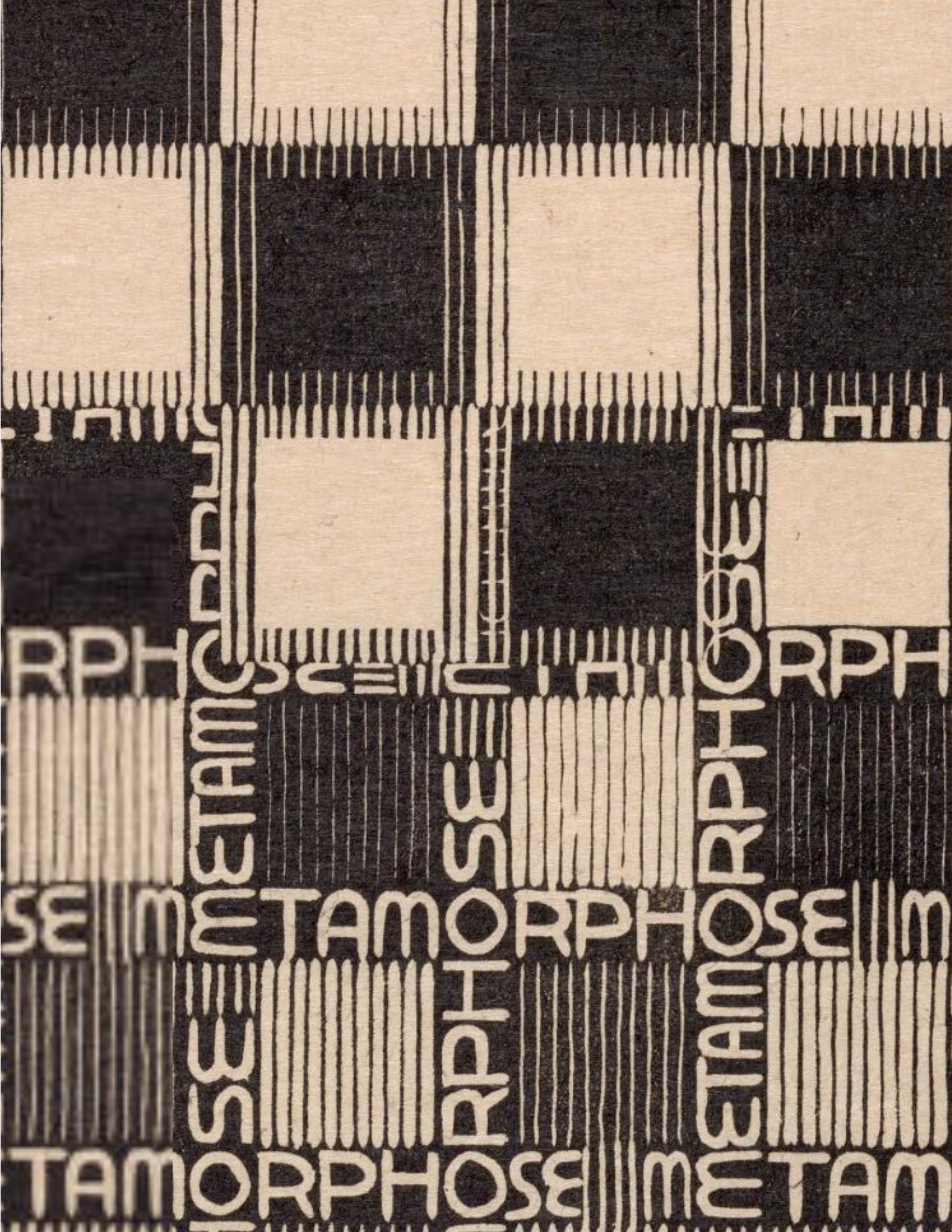
Don Nilsen is the Assistant Dean of Arizona State University’s Emeritus College’s Division of the Humanities. **Alleen Nilsen** is the wife of Don Nilsen and was ASU’s Assistant Vice President for Personnel. Don and Alleen are the co-founders of the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS), and co-winners of the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor Association (AATH). Their most recent books include *Encyclopedia of 20th Century American Humor* (Greenwood, 2000), *Names and Naming in Young Adult Literature* (Scarecrow, 2007) and *Literature for Today’s Young Adults* (Pearson, 2013). *The Language of Humor* (Cambridge University Press) was published in 2019. Since their retirement from ASU’s English Department in 2011, they have taught courses for the ASU Honors College, Osher, New Adventures, New Frontiers, Sagewood, Stonegate, Sun City, Friendship Village, and the Arizona Humanities Council.

Louis Phillips is a poet and playwright who enjoys wordplay.

ANSWERS

Strange Sentences

1. Befitting the theme, every word is a single syllable.
2. The first letter of each word progresses alphabetically.
3. Each word gets longer by one letter.
4. This one is a palindrome—a sentence that reads the same forward and backward. (FYI, there really is an Elk City in Kansas.)
5. Every word in this sentence is a homophone, a word that sounds like another word but is spelled differently. Hence, the sentence looks like gibberish but, if read aloud, makes perfect sense.
6. Each word violates the “*i*-before-*e*, except after *c*” rule of spelling.
7. Each of the five words contains a different double vowel.
8. Each word begins with a three-letter name of a body part. I consider a lap to be a body part, at least some of the time.
9. Each word begins with a three-letter name for a member of the animal kingdom.
10. Each word contains the sound “oh,” but each “oh” is spelled differently.
11. In this pangram, each letter of the alphabet occurs but once in this 26-letter statement..
12. Each word contains the major vowels, *a-e-i-o-u*, in a different order.
13. Each 10-letter word is an anagram of the other two.
14. Although afflicted with subject-verb disagreement, the sentence consists entirely of words in which the six letters appear in alphabetical order.
15. Because every capital letter in this statement features left-right symmetry, this sentence reads just fine if you look at it in a mirror or read it backwards. This line also preserves the trochaic tetrameter meter of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “The Song of Hiawatha.”



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