

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

#7 • Nov 2024

**The Word Arch**  
Variations on a Theme

**Plus: "Five of a Kind"  
Subbookkeeper Sunk?  
A New Puzzle Genre  
Awardworthy Work  
Bilingual Punning  
R-Rated Anagrams  
Crossword History  
"Casting Call"  
And More!**



THE JOURNAL OF WORDPLAY

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T Campbell

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Published Quarterly in February, May, August, November

Issue #7

November 2024

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Front cover image cropped from a photo by **Matthias Cooper**. Interior introduction image by **Chris Janda**. Back cover by **NAUSHIL | SKYHAWK. ASIA**.

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## INTRODUCTION

T Campbell

Among the pleasures I've been afforded in the publication of *The Journal of Wordplay* is the chance to work with Darryl Francis. Like several of this publication's contributors, Francis made contributions to this magazine's predecessor, *Word Ways*—but he was there before anyone else, almost from the earliest days of the publication. I still consult those early issues for themes and ideas worth revisiting.

In this issue, my work with Darryl proves especially fertile. You'll see me chase a few ideas that he inspired—and one of those ideas, “Theming ‘Arch,’” has prompted Darryl to do a follow-up. All I could think when it came in was...*Isn't it apt for an “arch” to be built from two different sources at once? One of us piling stones on the left, one of us piling them on the right.*

But that just scratches the surface of what this issue offers. We've got a couple of celebrity-matching games by Louis Phillips, a Jeff Grant piece that *also* jumps off one of mine from the previous issue, and more award-winning palindromes. Don Hauptman has a roundup of colorful redundancies, Richard Lederer of bilingual puns.

Darryl also brings in some eyebrow-raising sexual anagrams. A word about those—because of the context, I was a little permissive about the use of a couple of words than I otherwise would be. I hope these, like the whole *Journal*, will be accepted in the spirit of good fun and broader knowledge.

Along those lines, I've contributed some early crossword history and prehistory, and to round things out, we have talks with a couple of wordplay innovators—Sue Mermelstein, who presides over *The New York Times*' creative letter-writing contest, and ambigram pioneer and other word-picture composer John Langdon. Enjoy!



## THE CASTING GAME

Louis Phillips

(Anyone can play!)

*Gone With the Wind* – Charles Blow, Gale Storm

*The Perfect Storm* – Claude Rains, Georgia Flood

*Reds* – Scarlett Johansson, Lucille Ball

*The Beast With 5 Fingers* – Pinky Lee, Tom Thumb

*Ice Station Zebra* – David Frost, Chill Wills

*Rear Window* – Beverly Sills, John Payne, Philip Glass

*The Overcoat* – Red Buttons, Rip Torn, Joseph Cotten

*The Spirit of The Beehive* – Buzz Aldrin, Sting, Honey Rose

*Silence of the Lambs* – Monty Woolley

*Airport* – Denis O’Hare, Arthur Kennedy

*Seventh Heaven* – Heather Angel, Arthur Godfrey

*The Birds* – Walter Pidgeon, Ethan Hawke, Robin Williams, Claudia Cardinale

## FAVORITE WORDS

Louis Phillips

ZORRO’S: PIZZAZZ

WALL STREET’S: \$u~~cc~~e\$\$

ALBERT EINSTEIN’S: EMC<sup>2</sup>EE

DONALD TRUMP’S: gImME

TIGER WOODS’: FOREplay

SEAN CONNERY’S: Bondage

LIZZIE BORDEN’S: axiom

NOAH’S: pARK

MARTHA WASHINGTON’S: D.A.R.ing

CASANOVA’S: broadminded



## THE ARTISTIC ONOMASTIC GAMES

Sandy Weisz

*While most of us were fixated on the Olympics this summer, Sandy Weisz focused on which of the many Olympians in competition excelled—in having unusual names!*

*Longest Isogram* (name with no repeating letters):  
**Felix Oschmautz** and **Fergus Hamilton** (tie, 14 letters).

*Longest Palindrome* (within a name): Alejandra **Zavala Vazquez** and Matteo **Della Valle** (tie, 9 letters)

*Greatest “Letter Efficiency”*: Anni-Linnea Alanen (16 letters/5 unique letters = 3.2)

*Shortest Supervocalic*: **Liam Jegou** and **Zhou Lafei** (tie, 9 letters)

*Vowel-Consonant Pattern*: **Darko Jorgić** and **Jorge Campos** play **table tennis** (tie).

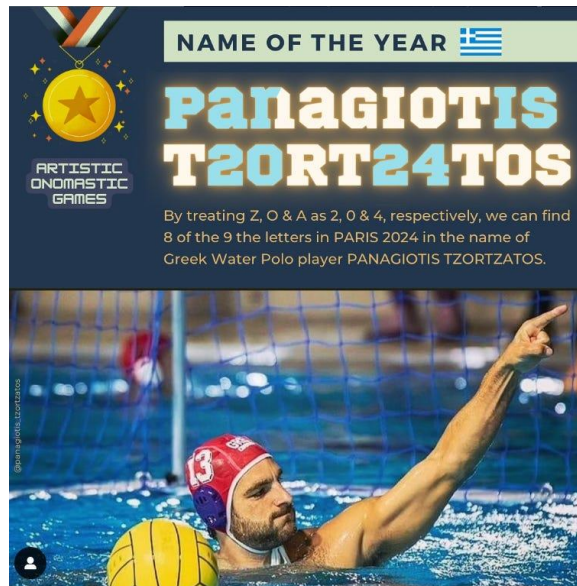
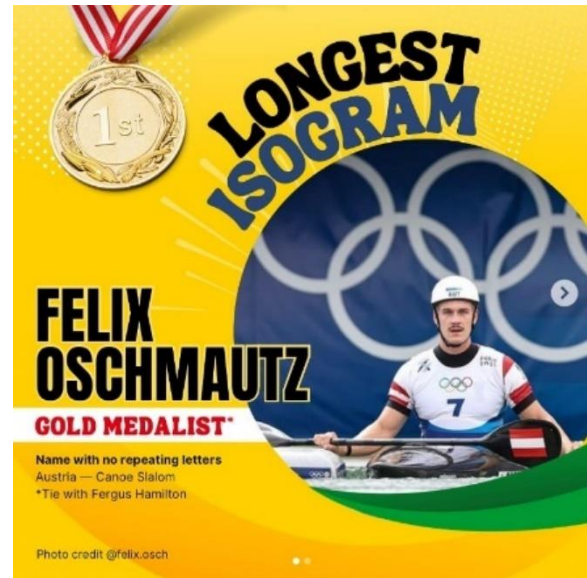
*Aptonyms*: Georgia **Rowe**, **Rowena** Meredith, and **Rowan** McKellar are all **rowers**.

*Bronze*: Sometime bronze (copper + tin, **Cu + Sn**) medalist **Marcus Nyman**.

*Same Name, Same Sport*: **Teresa Portela** (**canoe sprint**, Spain) and **Teresa Portela** (**canoe sprint**, Portugal).

*Most Decorated*: **Laura Glauser**, with two gold (**Au**) and one silver (**Ag**).

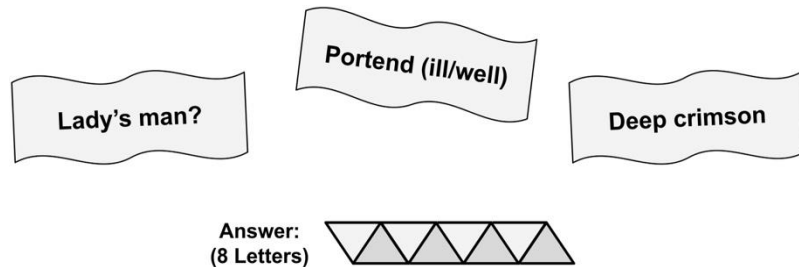
*Name of the Year*: **Panagiotis Tzortzatos**, including near-matches for **Paris 2024** as shown at right.



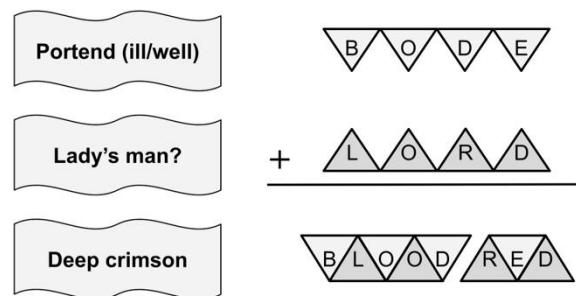
## GOOF-OFFS

Matthew Abate  
mabate13@gmail.com

The following is an original puzzle collection titled *Goof-offs*. A Goof-off is sort of like a one-dimensional crossword, without numbered clues.



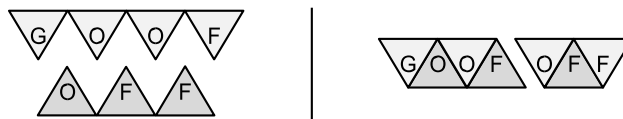
The solver is provided three clues, and the answer to the puzzle is a word or phrase. One of the clues will correspond to the final answer, and the others will correspond to words formed by taking every other letter of the final answer:



Answer: BLOOD RED

Just as in a traditional crossword, all cells in a Goof-off are “Checked” in the sense that every letter entry will be part of two answers—and this is true even though the puzzle is linear (as opposed to gridded).

**Note:** The phrase *Goof-off*, which gives the collection its name, exhibits a very special case of this property, where the two words that make up the phrase are the two words that make up the phrase:



The same property is also true with the plural, *Goof-offs*, as well as the similarly spelled *Good Odds* (possible clue: *Favorable probability*).

The puzzles begin on the next page—please enjoy.

### Standard:

Same rules as above—one of the clues corresponds to the final answer, and the others correspond to answers formed by alternating letters in the final answer. Remember: there is *no* special ordering to the clues; any of the three clues might correspond to the final answer.



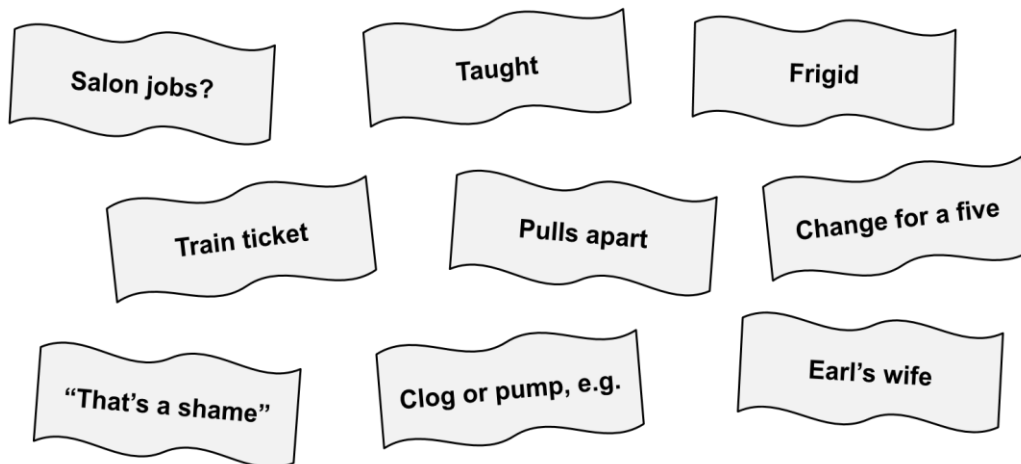
Answer:  
(7 Letters) 



Answer:  
(9 Letters) 

### Party Mix:

In this variant, I've given you three Goof-offs to solve at once! There are nine clues for three eight-letter answers, but I don't show you which clues correspond to which.



Answer:  
(8 Letters) 

Answer:  
(8 Letters) 

Answer:  
(8 Letters) 



**Tuplets:**

In this variant, you'll have extra clues. Use the shading of the cells and the number of the clues to determine whether clues pertain to every third letter or every fourth letter of the final answer.

First name in honesty      Hit the slopes

Cleopatra killer      Court divider

Answer: (9 Letters) 

“\_\_\_ and out”      Death Valley locale

Produced      Kid a king, e.g.

Answer: (12 Letters) 

Boxing great      Pre-marathon practice

Massachusetts cape      Sack      Director Howard

Answer: (12 Letters) 

## SUBBOOKKEEPER: IS THE WORD STILL LOST?

T Campbell

Back in 1971's "The Lost Word" (*Word Ways* #4.3), Ralph G. Beaman bemoaned the 1961 deletion of the word *subbookkeeper* from *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. The word is beloved by word lovers because it includes four double letters in a row: **sub**bb**ook**kk**eeper**. I thought there was a good chance that some prominent modern dictionary had a listing for it. And indeed, there was one.

But there was *only* one, and that one was Urban Dictionary, a site that illustrates many of the problems with the modern internet. It's built for engagement first and accuracy second, so respectable definitions share space with inaccuracies and joke entries, as seen in *subbookkeeper's* UD listings:

The image shows two side-by-side screenshots of Urban Dictionary entries for the word "subbookkeeper".

**Left Screenshot:**

- Word: **subbookkeeper**
- Definition: a person who [works](#) underneath the [main bookkeeper](#)
- Example: *There were several subbookkeepers working [overtime](#) to make up for the [absent](#) main [bookkeeper](#)*
- By: [Ennuiboy](#) December 30, 2009
- Interactions: 21 likes, 4 dislikes
- Flag button: FLAG

**Right Screenshot:**

- Word: **subbookkeeper**
- Definition: The only word in the English language with three [double letters](#) in consecutive order.
- Job profession that deals with the keeping track of money.
- Joke entry: **Fuck that game. Bookkeeper** isn't a word.
- Example: *The subbookkeeper will [substitute](#) for the [bookkeeper](#) because the bookkeeper is [sick](#).*

Is UD really the only source left?

Most online references to *subbookkeeper* reference either Urban Dictionary or its special status among word lovers. Definition-of.com [has an entry](#), and Definition-of.com is associated with The Free Dictionary, a respected online resource. Its definition is original, not a mere copy of another source. But still: Urban Dictionary and Definition-of.com are not exactly *Webster's* and the *OED*.

The word was never that popular. Google Ngrams refuses to cite any uses of it, implying its usage is so infrequent as to be beyond measure. In books, one only finds an [occasional reference to it](#) as a position, mostly in obituaries going back as far as colonial days. It doesn't seem like the kind of job too many people would brag about having while they were alive.

The word does have one thing going for it: if you know anything about accounting, then the meaning of *subbookkeeper* is intuitive, whereas a lot of odd words take some explaining to be understandable. Even so, it may be an outmoded concept: even if you're not the head of an accounting team, you're considered an accountant on the team.

So I'd use caution when deploying this example in discussions of "word records." Someone might ask you to cite your sources.

## MORE “FIVE-LETTER” WORDS

Jeff Grant

*The Journal of Wordplay* (no. 6) contains an article by T Campbell discussing words that contain five instances of the same letter, e.g., ABRACADABRA has 5 A’s.

The two lists, by Darryl Francis (WW, Nov 1970) and T Campbell (TJoW, no. 6), contain examples for every letter except J, Q and V. The general aim is to record the shortest terms possible, but rules for inclusion vary.

I tried to find some different examples, which are not always the shortest. It is hard to bypass a word like THROTTLEBOTTOM, even when there are shorter terms like TEETER-TOTTER, RATTATTAT and TIT-TAT-TOE. Like T, I have been liberal with hyphens. There are a number of entries that could be improved, particularly those for J, Q, V, and X.

**A:** ASARABACCA: The hazelwort plant. [OED]

**B:** HOBBYBOBBY: Var. of “hobby bobby,” UK slang for a special constable.  
“There are better things for a **hobbybobby** to be doing.” [Net]

**C:** MICROCOCCIC: Relating to a micrococcus bacterium. [Collins]

**D:** DADBODDED: Having a dadbod physique, slightly plump and untoned.  
“What a **dadboded** hunk.” [Net]

**E:** EYELETEER: An instrument for making eyelet holes. [OED]

**F:** FLUFF-OFF: A shirker. [DAS1]

**G:** EGGNOGGING: Drinking eggnogs.  
“Nutcracking and **eggnogging** taking place in Orlando this holiday season.”  
[[finedictionary.com](http://finedictionary.com)] (Net)]

**H:** THIGH-HIGHISH: About up to the thighs.  
“That lethargic **thigh-highish** wave in the water.” [Net]

**I:** MINIBIKINI: Very skimpy two-piece swimsuit.  
“Check out our sexy **minibikini** selection.” [Net]

**J:** JEJUNOJEJUNOSTOMI-JUNCTION: Coinage for the suture in the small intestine that results from connecting two parts of the jejunum (a jejunojejunostomy).

**K:** KNICKKNACK-LIKE: Resembling knickknacks.  
“A jar filled with small, **knickknack-like** school supplies.” [Net]

**L:** LILLIBULLERO: Protest song popular in England’s Glorious Revolution of 1688. [OED]

**M:** MAMMYRAMMER: Euphemism for “motherfucker.” [DAS2]

**N:** NONTANNIN: Any substance not a tannin. [Web2]

**O:** PROTOZOOLOGY: The study of protozoans. [OED]

**P:** POPPYPAP: Possibly a reference to laudanum-soaked possets to calm babies.  
**“Poppypap’s a passport out.”** [*Finnegans Wake*, James Joyce, 1939]

**Q:** QAWIQSAQQESQUE: In the manner of, or resembling Qawiqsaaq, an Alaskan bluff, coined by Palmer Peterson in WW, May 1978.

**R:** OVERREFERRER: A doctor who refers too many patients elsewhere.  
**“Found to be an overprescriber and overreferrer by GMC assessment.”** [Net]

**S:** SASSLESS: Without a sassy manner. [Urban Dict. (Net)]

**T:** THROTTLEBOTTOM: A harmless incompetent in public office. [Collins]

**U:** USUFRUCTUOUS: Usufructuary; of a usufruct, legal right to use or enjoy. [Wikt]

**V:** VA-VA-VA-VAVOOM: Extended “va-va-voom,” indicating high sexual interest.  
**“See that girl like va-va-va-vavoom”** [“Ricky Ricardo,” rap song by KAPTN (Net)]

**W:** BOW-WOW-WOW: Variant of “bow-wow,” to bark like a dog.  
**“Don’t hollo, nor howl nor growl, nor bow-wow-wow!”** [Cambridge Dict. online (Net)]

**X:** EX-DOXX-XEROXER: Coinage for a former photocopier of sensitive documents.

**Y:** POLYSYNBRACHYDACTYLY: A condition of multiple fused and shortened fingers and toes. [IDMB] Either M or N is used for the seventh letter.

**Z:** PIZAZZLE-DAZZLE: A blend of “pizazz” (var. of “pizzazz”) and “razzle-dazzle.”  
**“The show is...primed with all the showbiz pizazzle-dazzle.”** [Net]

## References

Collins *Collins Dictionary* online [Net]  
 DAS1 *Dictionary of American Slang*, Wentworth & Flexner, 1960  
 DAS2 *Dictionary of American Slang*, R.L. Chapman, 1987  
 IDMB *International Dictionary of Medicine & Biology*, ed. S. Landau, 1986  
 Net Internet, using Google search program  
 OED *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Ed., 1989  
 Web2 *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, 2nd Ed., 1961  
 Wikt Wiktionary, online dictionary  
 WW *Word Ways, the Journal of Recreational Linguistics*

## PRE-CROSSWORDS AND WORD FORMS

T Campbell

The word square goes back at least to ancient Rome (the Sator Square has been covered elsewhere), but records of it are highly spotty in its early days. In the nineteenth century, however, English word squares grew common, though most tended to be small. The first that was six letters by six letters appeared on July 2, 1859, in the British magazine *Notes & Queries*, with the following intro:

*Squaring the Circle.*—Of course you and many of your readers are acquainted with the game of “squaring” a given word, which has of late been current in society. I do not know whether any notice of this ingenious amusement falls within your field. If so, you will perhaps put upon record the “squaring of the circle” which I send you. It is as follows:

The condition of this squaring is that every line, horizontal and vertical, shall be a known word. There are very probably other ways of “squaring the circle”: if so, I should be glad to see them.

I may remark that the reason why the circle is especially difficult to square in this way is that in it three consonants come together, R C L, and these of course, in making the other words, must be followed by a vowel or a liquid.

<b>C</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>E</b>
<b>I</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>R</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>T</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>E</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>E</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>M.</b>

The “Squaring the Circle” exercise is signed only “W.W.,” leaving its author a cypher.

Next to nothing is known about Frederick Planche, either. But Planche’s *Guess Me*, from 1872, contains the earliest examples I can find of a fill-it-in-yourself, cross-these-words puzzle. The answers are classic word squares, reading the same across and down, but *you the reader* are invited to fill them in. Like many word puzzles of this era, it was presented in verse form:

The challenge:

*The name of an insect my first;  
My second no doubt you possess;  
My third is my second transposed;  
And my fourth is a shelter, I guess.*

The answer:

**GNAT  
NAME  
AMEN  
TENT**

A few features of this early puzzle would give a modern editor fits. The first and last clues are a bit vague, but crossword puzzles of fifty years later would still be using clues like “An insect” and “A shelter,” so we won’t demerit those. But “my second no doubt you possess” could be anything from “a body” to “a growing sense of impatience with this exercise,” and the third clue says only that it’s an anagram for the second. I do ironically enjoy the limp “I guess” at the end. (“Should we put a rhyme into this quatrain, Frederick?” “Oh, I *guess*.”)

I don’t have the resources to claim whether that was genuinely the first of its kind, but a lot of interesting crossed-word constructions were happening in that period. A couple of years later, in November 1874, the American magazine *St. Nicholas* published a word *diamond* (answers at right)

*ACROSS, from top to bottom: 1. A consonant. 2. A number. 3. Measures of distance. 4. An abyss. 5. A consonant.*

*DOWN, from right to left: 1. A consonant. 2. A snare. 3. A name. 4. The point of anything small. 5. A consonant.*

**S  
TEN  
MILES  
PIT  
M**

You’ll notice the down answers correspond to the across answers in *reverse*: the “number” is TEN and the “snare” is a NET. You’ll also notice, perhaps, that SELIM is given as “a name.” There were indeed three Turkish sultans named Selim, but the name wasn’t exactly as common as “John” even in Victorian days. But the original Sator Square relies on the idea of a farmer named Arepo, so there’s some precedent for using proper names in a crunch.

In April 1876, *St. Nicholas* took another step in the direction of the modern crossword by publishing a **double word square**. You may have seen such a square more recently in the “mini-crossword” format: at right, you can see the answers to a recent one from *The Atlantic*.

1	2	3	4	5
B	A	K	E	R
6	A	D	A	G
7	B	E	R	R
8	E	L	M	E
9	S	E	A	T

*by Paolo Pasco*  
Powered by [PuzzleMe™](#)



As you can see, it's a simple word square format, except that the across words and down words are *different*. You might think such a square would be easier to construct than a traditional word square, since it doesn't have the added constraint of building one set of words that goes in two directions.

But actually, it's about as hard to build a 5x5 double word square as it is to build a 6x6 "plain" word square. And that principle holds at any size, a 3x3 double is as hard as a 4x4 regular, a 7x7 double as hard as a regular 8x8. (Mini crosswords almost always include black squares past the 5x5 size.)

Word forms got wilder and weirder in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recreational grid-makers began to find each other: the first puzzling organizations came into being in the mid-1870s, and by 1883, the Eastern Puzzlers' League was founded. It became the National Puzzlers' League and continues to this day.

The NPL maintains a [few](#) different [pages](#) to [describe](#) various "forms," its preferred language for word squares, diamonds, pyramids, et cetera. Some of these forms are "inherently double," which is to say there's no way to arrange them so that they read the same across and down.

Surely these forms are crosswords, right? They're presented in puzzle form and they go across and down. At least the "double" forms would be, yes?

Not according to the NPL and other cruciverbalist connoisseurs. They'd say that if a form conforms to a known shape, even if that shape seems a bit exotic, then it doesn't qualify as a crossword, technically. Again, I tend to dissent, but I think there's one thing both sides can agree on: forms don't get a lot of study from crossword fans, and vice versa.

As the NPL explains, the word square is the prototypical word "form," the type from which all other types come. I'll lay this out, using mostly the NPL's own examples, beginning on the next page.

Below, you'll find a pure word square to the left (FORMER ORIOLE RICHES MOHAVE ELEVEN RESENT). On the upper right is a bigram word square (REARREST ARMATURE RETUNING STRENGTH), and on the bottom right are a pair of joined word squares (CLOMP LAMIA OMANI MINER PAIRS ARDEN IDAHO REHAB SNOBS). The use of Courier should help you read across and down as intended.

**FORMER  
ORIOLE  
RICHES  
MOHAVE  
ELEVEN  
RESENT**

**RE AR RE ST  
AR MA TU RE  
RE TU NI NG  
ST RE NG TH**

**CLOMPAIRS  
LAMIARDEN  
OMANIDAHO  
MINERREHAB  
PAIRSNOBS**

There are trigram-based as well as bigram-based approaches to word squares. Or variogram-based, where the number of letters used in one slot is unpredictable. There are forms that use vowelless or consonantless versions of words or phrases.

These little flourishes can be added to any word form, really, and I've seen them added to traditional crossword grids as well. But because the square is the simplest of forms, it tends to get the special sauce more often to liven it up.

"Progressive" and "sequential" squares are special types that can only exist as word squares—and smaller ones, on the whole. Look along the diagonal up-and-to-the-right axis at the grid at right:

As you can see, it "progresses" with each line: the last three letters in ICED become the first three in CEDE, then CEDE does

**ICED  
CEDE  
EDEN  
DENY**

the same to **EDEN** and **EDEN** to **DENY**. In the set of sequential squares below, the word *EASY* moves from top to bottom and left to right:

<b>EASY</b>	<b>REUP</b>	<b>OLEO</b>	<b>ALEE</b>
<b>AGEE</b>	<b>EASY</b>	<b>LEAR</b>	<b>LYRA</b>
<b>SEAT</b>	<b>USER</b>	<b>EASY</b>	<b>EROS</b>
<b>YETI</b>	<b>PYRE</b>	<b>ORYX</b>	<b>EASY</b>

The next simplest form is the rectangle.

Of course, this one has to be a double form, since a rectangle that's not a square doesn't have equal-length entries going across and down. The same is true for the rhomboids below, because you read their entries across and down, never diagonally. (If you read them diagonally, a rhomboid would just be a sort of italic-looking word square.)

<b>SADDEN</b>
<b>ORIOLE</b>
<b>DENNIS</b>
<b>ASSESS</b>

**QUARTER**  
**TROUGHS**  
**SANGOUT**  
**DENMARK**  
**ROBBINS**  
**GULLEYS**  
**SELENIC**

**RAWWOOL**  
**THREERS**  
**BROMINE**  
**SEAMIST**  
**SCRIBES**  
**PHALLUS**  
**COYNESS**

Triangular shapes include the pyramid, which is close to an equilateral triangle, definitely at least an isosceles. It comes in "regular" and "inverted" as seen below:

COMBATMISSION  
 YOUREINLUCK  
 BLINDCOPY  
 BANDITS  
 SILTS  
 SEE  
 S

M  
 GAG  
 LAGOS  
 SENNETT  
 SHEDATEAR  
 SEIZETHEDAY  
 DONNAREEDSHOW

A “truncated” pyramid is slightly broader, with its shortest across line two letters long instead of one. Then there’s the half-square, roughly equivalent to a right triangle. Below are the four variant shapes it can take (read across and down):

P  
 RA  
 ORS  
 GREW  
 REXES  
 ESTATE  
 STONING  
 SILENTLY  
 EVERGREEN  
 SETSEYESON

MAINFRAMES  
 ITERATIVE  
 EPISTLER  
 ESERINE  
 TRITON  
 STARE  
 ETON  
 EDE  
 DS  
 S

GRAPHPAPER  
 RETRIEVER  
 ATWITTER  
 PRINTER  
 HITTER  
 PETER  
 AVER  
 PER  
 ER  
 R

S  
 BE  
 RIA  
 PERM  
 SARDS  
 SILENT  
 PALAVER  
 REREVISE  
 BIRDNESTS  
 SEAMSTRESS

What about more sides? Well, here are four variations on the word pentagon, two of which are single, two necessarily double...

**T**  
**WHO**  
**KHEDA**  
**WHEEDLE**  
**THEENIGMA**  
**ODDITIES**  
**ALGIERS**  
**EMERGE**  
**ASSET**

**D**  
**MEM**  
**GIMEL**  
**PELOTAS**  
**SANITARIA**  
**IMITATED**  
**RETAPES**  
**ELATES**  
**DALES**

**LAPPS**  
**CATALO**  
**PANARAB**  
**LANDRACE**  
**DAYTRADER**  
**XEROXED**  
**DAVID**  
**PEA**  
**R**

**CAMEL**  
**ALINED**  
**MISDEAL**  
**ENDEMIAL**  
**LEEMARVIN**  
**DAIRIES**  
**LAVES**  
**LIS**  
**N**

The NPL recognizes three kinds of word hexagons, basic and left and right Cambridge:

LUNG  
FAROUT  
MEGASTAR  
LOVELETTER  
PERIGEES  
RETARS  
DEYS

TORAH	CANST
OPENED	GORIER
RELAXES	MAMMARY
ANABASIS	GARBAGES
HEXAGONAL	COMBATANT
DESOLATE	ARMATURE
SINAPIN	NIAGARA
SATIRE	SERENE
LENES	TRYST

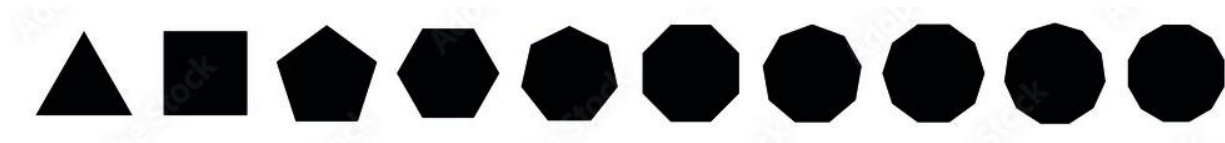


Nobody's figured out the word heptagon yet.  
But here's a word octagon...

This is also about as close as one can reasonably get to a word circle as a "form." In computing, one draws a circle by just adding more and more sides to a figure until one ends up with something indistinguishable from a circle. You can see from the images below that a dodecagon (a twelve-sided figure) is already looking pretty circle-ish.

But in practical terms, designing an evenly symmetrical shape with more sides than the octagon just ain't gonna happen—you'd have to make too many words too long just to achieve the necessary "resolution."

**SOL  
CACAO  
SAXTUBA  
OCTAGON  
LAUGHED  
OBOES  
AND**



There is such a thing as a word enneagon, though! Shapewise, it looks like a word pentagon joined to a couple of word squares. Like pentagons, these nine-siders can point in multiple directions, and some can be single while some are inherently double. You may find they look like a pair of dancing pants...

C  
PIP  
PAGAN  
CIGARETTES  
PARAGRAPH  
NEGLIGEE  
TRIOSES  
TAGS  
EPEE  
SHES

MAPS  
ALEE  
DINT  
MADNESS  
ALIENATE  
PENSACOLA  
SETSTOREBY  
ELENA  
ABA  
Y

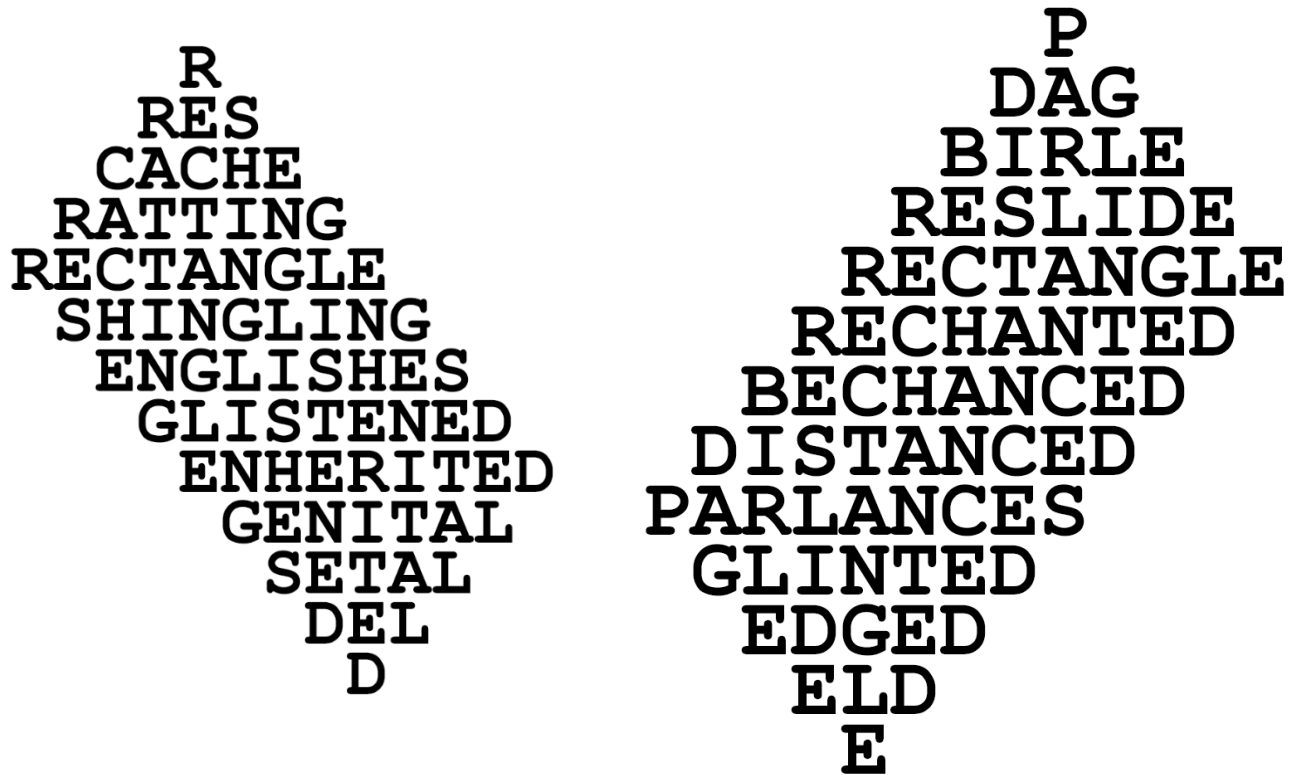
M  
DOG  
LARUE  
SALMONELLA  
CLEANSOFF  
AVENGERS  
BASHFUL  
EASE  
ICES  
MESS

PABA  
REEL  
OREL  
POLICED  
MANICURE  
WAGONETTE  
SESAMESEED  
DOTES  
NOR  
R

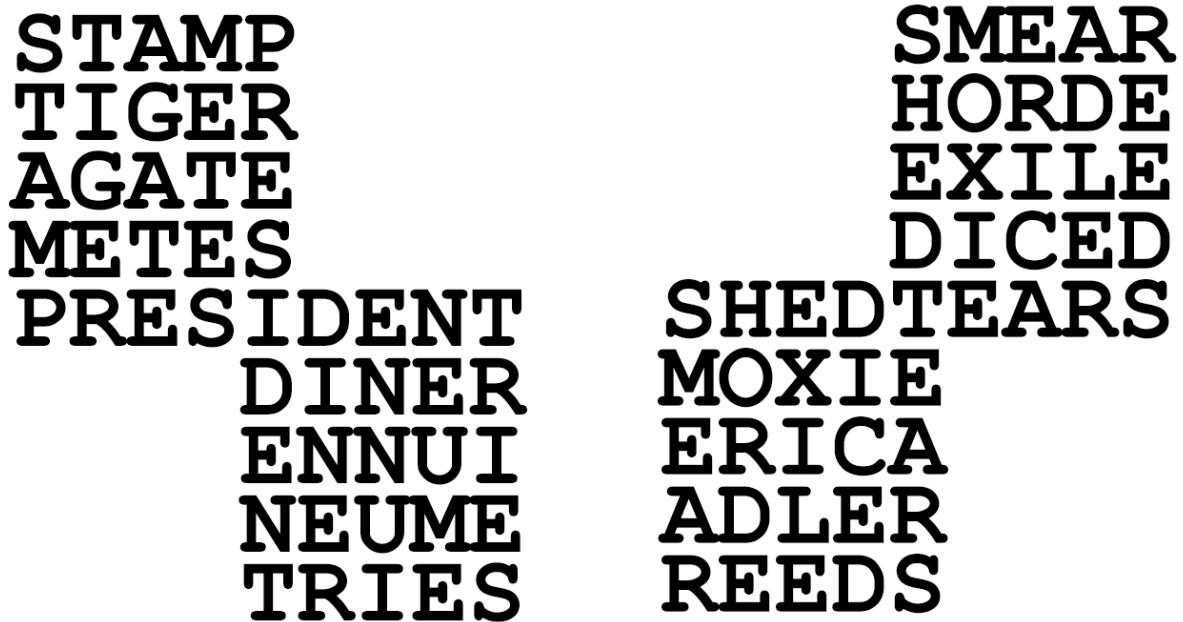
Side note: as you may have noticed, the modern rules for NPL forms allow the use of proper names like LARUE and OREL, as well as common phrases like CLEANS OFF and SESAME SEED. (You can find those examples just in the two enneagons right above.)

So much for the forms defined by their number of sides. Now for some even more complex constructions...

In geometry, the oblong is any rectangle that's not also a square—or as non-geometrists call it, any “rectangle.” In word forms, it's a rectangle balanced on one of its end points, like so (read across and down):



Windmills look like overlapping word squares:



Lattices are like windmills, but with more “crossbars” at the top, bottom, and sides, giving them a window-like appearance:

ISOSCELES  
 SARAH T  
 ORALE R  
 SALVE E  
 CHEERLESS  
 E LIMAS  
 L EMOTE  
 E SATYR  
 STRESSERS

TEAMSTERS  
 E HAVOC  
 A OKAPI  
 M REDES  
 SHORTNESS  
 TAKEN O  
 EVADE R  
 ROPES E  
 SCISSORED

The “fan” consists of three linked triangles which have answer words going across always, in *one* diagonal downward direction, and *not* in the other except for the biggest, triangle-spanning word in that direction. Like so:

S S  
 NU TO  
 PUG ALL  
 MAMA TUNA  
 JAWBREAKER  
 C  
 RA  
 AYN  
 FINE  
 TARES

BARBS  
 ILIA  
 GOB  
 BE  
 R  
 ARISTOCRAT  
 LINO TOAD  
 LOO HAM  
 AT EX  
 H R

E  
 UM  
 REB  
 OLEO  
 STAPLE  
 GUNS  
 D  
 RE  
 ERN  
 SLOE  
 SEWED

SEALS  
 TWIT  
 ERA  
 AR  
 K  
 SECONDBEST  
 HORA  
 OAK  
 NE  
 D  
 ITCH  
 AAR  
 NO  
 E

At the risk of editorializing, I think the diagonality of this form is less elegant than the forms you read horizontally and vertically. The two diagonal downward directions are equally valid, but to build a construction of much size, form constructors have to prioritize one such reading direction over the other. A puzzle structure can make the intended reading directions clear, but in the across-and-down forms, those directions are more intuitive.

The same issue is found in other diagonal constructions like the star, the pyramidal windmill, and...*the Pygmy hourglass?*

C		
SO		
CAN		
POLARISTIC		
OVERENTER		
LEFTSTAR		
ARTISAN		
CRESSENT		
SAINTANNA		
CONSTANTAN		
TER		
IR		
C		

S		
HOT		
PUREE		
MANTRAP		
PARTERRES		
BARKSDALEAIRFORCEBASE		
SIBYLLINE		
TIDALLY		
EERIE		
ROE		
S		

SICKIES		
ANOINT		
STANK		
SERE		
ARC		
PFFT		
KOREA		
DEPART		
GENESEE		

The star shown above has across and rightward-down answers. So does the unfortunately named hourglass at right—it's named for a wordsmith whose last name was Pygmy, but even

so, I think calling it a “word hourglass” is probably a better idea than taking time out to explain that. The pyramidal windmill, in the center, has across and down answers and one rightward-down that joins the structure together.

Windmills resemble two sets of overlapping word squares. In September 1904, *The People’s Home Journal* published a puzzle you could call an extended windmill, which it dubbed **Blended Squares**. The feature appeared ten times between 1904 and 1908. Here’s the first such puzzle, reproduced in *GAMES Magazine* #93, September 1988, by then-editor Will Shortz:

The answers are below. Note that the bottom right corner of this construction contains two identical across and down answers, so this is a double form with a single corner.

Is it also a crossword? Back in 1988, Shortz [posed that very same question](#):

A crossword is generally understood to be free of the constraints of simple geometric shapes, which means that crosswords are more complex constructions than forms, with more than one word in some rows and columns. Forms traditionally have only one word per line...

Is Blended Squares a crossword? That is the debate. The puzzle does meet the following generally accepted criteria: 1) Different words read across and down (except for the flawed lower right corner, which was fixed in later examples); 2) Some rows and columns have more than one word; and 3) A grid is presented for solvers, in this case a pattern of numbers showing the positions of the answer letters. The only feature that Blended Squares lacks is the now customary diagram of black and white squares.

No. 1.—BLENDED SQUARES.

1	2	3		7	8	9
4	5	6		10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
		20	21	22		
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	32		36	37	38
33	34	35		39	40	41

WORDS OF SEVEN LETTERS: 3–35, to mislead or speak dishonestly; 7–39, exercising care and wisdom; 13–19, on account of; 23–29, prominent or famous.

WORDS OF THREE LETTERS: 1–3, vexed; 4–6, mineral rock; 1–13, a noisy crowd; 2–14, part of the verb “to be”; 7–9, a block of writing-paper; 10–12, to regret; 8–18, abbreviation for Austria; 9–19, a river in Scotland; 16–26, the name of a girl; 20–22, the extremity; 23–33, a space of time; 24–34, encountered; 30–32, abbreviated title for a clergyman; 33–35, devoured; 28–40 and 36–38, an island in the Grecian archipelago; 29–41 and 39–41, part of the foot.

M	A	D		P	A	D
O	R	E		R	U	E
B	E	C	A	U	S	E
		E	N	D		
E	M	I	N	E	N	T
R	E	V		N	I	O
A	T	E		T	O	E



Shortz polled ten experts on the matter, including then-*New York Times* crossword editor Eugene Maleska, constructor Arthur Schulman, and Penny Press editor-in-chief David Heller. The vote was six in favor of Blended Squares as a crossword, four against. Pretty close!

When I asked Shortz about this for my own book (*On Crosswords*, 2013), he'd decided against it himself. Crosswords, in his view, need that diagram.

There were other “form” puzzles that had the diagram—but lacked some of the other criteria. The first was created by Giuseppe Airoldi in September 14, 1890, in issue 50 of *Il Secolo Illustrato della Domenica*, the bestselling newspaper in Italy. It meets criteria 1 and 3, too—but shapewise, it's just a double word square (see right).

However, a couple of those “simple” forms Shortz mentions *do* allow for more than one word per line. There's the chevron, below...

1	R	2	I	3	P	4	A
2	O	D	E	R			
3	S	E	R	A			
4	A	M	E	N			

Orizzontali:  
 1. Guai se l'onda mi varca o mi spezza 2. In Germania son acqua corrente 3. Ogni di quando il sole e morente 4. Così soglion le preci finir.

Verticali: 1. Sono un fiore di rara bellezza 2. Il medesimo in lingua latina 3. Quali frutti noi siamo, indovina! 4. Per la messe di la da venir.

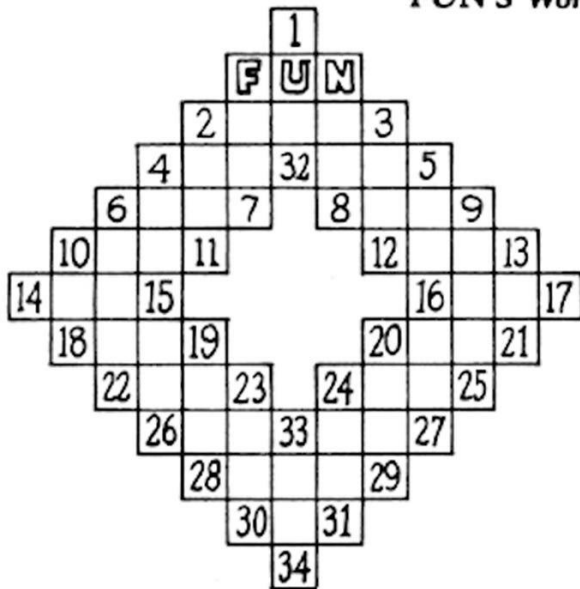
G  
 RED  
 LINEN  
 DEVELOP  
 DIAERESES  
 GASSTATIONS  
 ASHES EERIE  
 SHED RITA  
 LES ACT  
 IS HE  
 T D

T D  
 ES HE  
 DOS FOE  
 IONS CROP  
 UNITS SLAVE  
 MEDICINEMEN  
 RELATIVES  
 REPAPER  
 SELES  
 SIR  
 C

And then there's the hollow diamond. If you know Arthur Wynne's first crossword, you might find the hollow diamond's design familiar. Real, *real* familiar:

D  
 RAS  
 FETAS  
 MATINEE  
 NONEVENTS  
 SETTLESDOWN  
 NEURAL TINIER  
 MOTRIN NIPPER  
 FANTAN CELLED  
 RETELL SUEDED  
 DATIVE SAPPER  
 SANEST FUSION  
 SENDIN SILENT  
 ETONIC SARTRE  
 SWIPES FIRERS  
 NEPLUSULTRA  
 RELEASERS  
 REDPINE  
 DEPOT  
 DEN  
 R

*FUN'S Word-Cross Puzzle.*



**F**ILL in the small squares with words which agree with the following definitions:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>2-3. What bargain hunters enjoy.</p> <p>4-5. A written acknowledgement.</p> <p>6-7. Such and nothing more.</p> <p>10-11. A bird.</p> <p>14-15. Opposed to less.</p> <p>18-19. What this puzzle is.</p> <p>22-23. An animal of prey.</p> <p>26-27. The close of a day.</p> <p>28-29. To elude.</p> <p>30-31. The plural of is.</p> <p>8-9. To cultivate.</p> <p>12-13. A bar of wood or iron.</p> <p>16-17. What artists learn to do.</p> <p>20-21. Fastened.</p> <p>24-25. Found on the seashore.</p> | <p>10-18. The fibre of the gomuti palm.</p> <p>6-22. What we all should be.</p> <p>4-26. A day dream.</p> <p>2-11. A talon.</p> <p>19-28. A pigeon.</p> <p>F-7. Part of your head.</p> <p>23-30. A river in Russia.</p> <p>1-32. To govern.</p> <p>33-34. An aromatic plant.</p> <p>N-8. A fist.</p> <p>24-31. To agree with.</p> <p>3-12. Part of a ship.</p> <p>20-29. One.</p> <p>5-27. Exchanging.</p> <p>9-25. Sunk in mud.</p> <p>13-21. A boy.</p> |
|--|---|

Of course, Wynne called this puzzle a “word-cross” then, which suggests another shape entirely. The NPL didn’t have an example of this type, so I designed this one myself (at right).

Just for completism’s sake, below are the most complicated forms the NPL lists, the chevron star and the Rokeby star. They’re basically smaller shapes welded together by matching edges. (The overlaps are in boldface in the images below, so the first long line of the chevron star is DOLMAN, NE’ER-DO-WELLS, and SCHEME.)

There are three-, four- and even five-dimensional “word forms” as well, explored by Darryl Francis in 1971 installments of *Word Ways*, but those forms are more complicated to map out and would call for an article of their own.

ASS  
 UMA  
 TAC  
**AUTO**CRATS  
**SMACK**EROO  
**SACRE**DCOW  
 ARC  
 TOO  
 SOW

B M  
 IF PA  
 GAP TET  
 BRAD THAI  
 EMCEE SHORN  
 DOLMAN**NEERDOWELL**SCHEME  
 REELE**DRAGRACE**STHENO  
 GLACI**STIGMAS**ARANS  
 TMESE**SLIPT**ATERS  
 OSPREY**S**INISM  
 SUITE**S**ORDES  
 SATOUTE**DEB**TED  
 FIREUP**OLA**RAIDED  
 NADIR**S**EREN**ERE**OPEN  
 DULLE**S**TRANGLE**S**UTLER  
 GABLE**S**EETHEL**L**IGHT**H**ETAS  
 HAVES EELER  
 ITER RULE  
 LEN EVA  
 OD ET  
 H Y

V  
 SEA  
 SABLE  
 ROLLONS  
 MOUSEHOLE  
 DENT**I**NEWS**ANALYST**TOOTOO  
 LOOSE**D**UODE**C**IMO**E**RTER  
 RELAI**D**I**L**EM**M**ABLATE  
 DERA**I**LADEN**I**ELLO  
 SENSE**I**NS**E**NS**E**S  
**RAC**I**S**T**O**T**T**ER  
 TECHN**O**R**B**EAN**E**D  
 KAURI**S**T**I**E**D**ODGED  
 PARSE**C**HASS**I**SEG**U**ES  
 DONE**S**HORT**E**NER**R**AC**I**ER  
 NOLE**S**E**E**E**Y**E**T**O**E**Y**E**E**L**I**E**R  
 DERIVABLE  
 RIPENED  
 NERDY  
 STY  
 S

The first true crossword is thus a matter of opinion. I’d probably give the honor to the Sator Square, distinguishing “crossword” from “crossword puzzle.” But the view in favor of Wynne is valid. Sometimes an invention doesn’t come together until all the elements are in place.

## THE SYMMYS 2023

With thanks to Mark Saltveit, organizer

*The SymmyS is the world's foremost palindrome-writing competition, gaining momentum in participation and quality for most of its eleven-year existence. Last time we presented 2024's winners. Here are the 2023 SymmyS winners for best new palindromes in every category.*

### **Short Palindromes**

- 1. Baseball**, by Anthony Etherin  
Pull a bat up. Put a ball up.
- 2. Deer Eats**, by Martin Clear  
May deer uproot a top potato or pureed  
yam?
- 3. See Bees**, by Peter Sabra  
Motto: Bees reign! It's sting-ier. (See bottom)

### **Medium Palindromes**

- 1 (tie)**. By Anthony Etherin  
Went on. Saw tin. It was not new.
- 1 (tie)**. By Martin Clear  
Won't one man I met in a bar grab an item I  
name? Not now.
- 3. Mario Kart**, by Titus Meyer  
Mario speeds in ruts. I honk? No, his turn is  
deep, so I ram!

### **Long Palindromes**

- 1. The Lord of The Rings**, by Anthony Etherin  
Eyes, till it's won, kill orcs.  
A nine-men order, baser Gollum.  
I mull ogre, sabre, drone—men in a scroll.  
I know, still, its eye.
- 2. Hostage**, by Martin Clear  
Yell, "A van—I'm in a van!"  
It is in a void.  
A radio van.  
I sit in a van.  
I'm in a valley.
- 3. Fever Dream**, by Lori Wike  
Beware:  
Viral,  
I give no serum.  
Miserable...  
Vertigo...  
Fevered states...  
États de rêve.  
Fog:  
It revel-bares,  
Immures one.  
Vigil:  
A river,  
A web.
- 4. Cain**, by Anthony Etherin  
"Cain" (a man Eve delivered on, as Adam  
sired) is no cosy name. Now, one many so  
consider is mad as an ode reviled, even—a  
maniac.

## Palindromic Poetry

### 1. Elude Demon in Me, An Acrostic Palindrome Sonnet, by Lori Wike

Elated, echo lives, muse rune,  
Lie vast film's aim, enured am I.  
Un-nestle me, café-borne moon,  
Dew idle if, astray, assai.  
Emote own epic, I, sum won,  
Deliria, lived demon, or  
Erose most Bedlam's idyl, none,  
Men, only dismal debt, some sorer.  
O, no med, Devil air I led,  
Now music I pen woe to me.  
I assay arts, a field I wed,  
No omen, robe, face melts ennui.  
Made-rune, miasm lifts a veil,  
Enure sum's evil, oh, cede tale!

### 2. The Owl, by Anthony Etherin

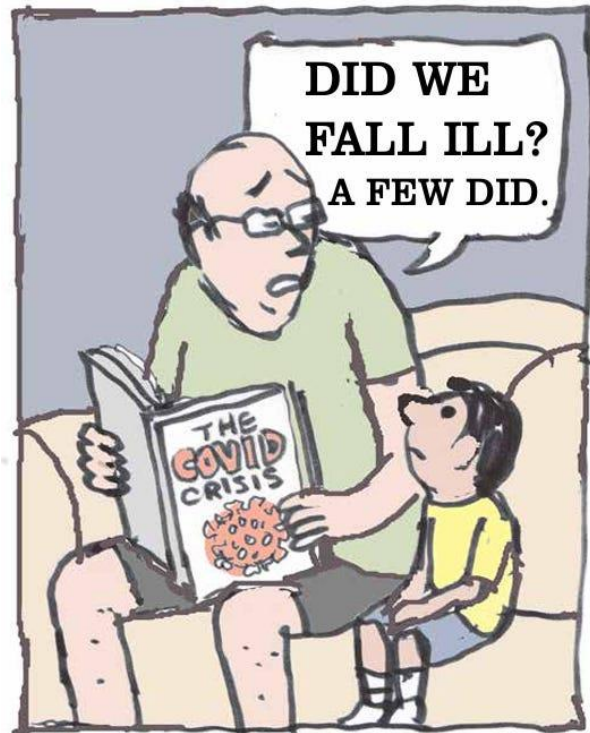
Too held  
in its tide,  
tan,  
a meek owl woke—  
emanated its tin, idle hoot.

### 3. The Word in the Stone, a palindrome pantoum by Lori Wike

Mix a mania, gain a maxim  
Trades revere no law onward  
Midst pure word, a mad row erupts, dim  
Trap awe, stone to mere sword  
Trades revere no law onward  
Page reversal allots time loops  
Trap awe, stone to mere sword  
Parted a veil, I assay art's sloops  
Spools stray, assail, I evade trap  
Drowse remote, not sew, apart  
Spool emits toll; alas, revere gap  
Draw now, alone, reversed art  
Drowse remote, not sew, apart  
Midst pure word, a mad row erupts, dim  
Draw now, alone, reversed art  
Mix a mania, gain a maxim

## Visual Palindromes

### 1. Covid by Peter Sabra and John Agee



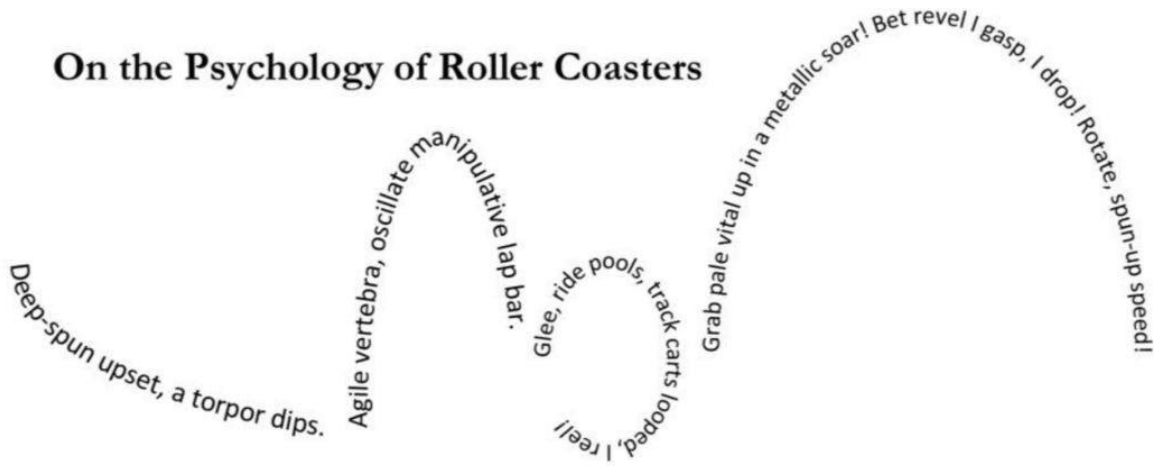
### 2. On The Psychology of Roller Coasters by Lori Wike

[See next page]

### 3. Red Robot Putin Is In It Up To Border! by John Agee



## On the Psychology of Roller Coasters



## Grand Prizes

1. **On the Psychology of Roller Coasters**, by Lori Wike
2. **Red Robot Putin Is in It Up to Border!** by Jon Agee
3. **Deer Eats** by Martin Clear
4. **Mario Kart** by Titus Meyer
5. **See Bees** by Peter Sabra



## ARTHUR WYNNE: FATHER OF THE MODERN CROSSWORD

T Campbell

Some of the following research appears in my book *On Crosswords*; other facts are gathered from new sources I've hyperlinked. What follows is, I believe, **the most complete account of Arthur Wynne's life to date.**

Wynne grew up in Liverpool, over seventy years before it would become known as the birthplace of the Beatles, and came to America at nineteen to become a journalist.

He wasn't very good at it at first.

I was fired from every newspaper in Pittsburgh... just about walked in the door, took off my hat, picked it up and went out again. But even these short jobs gave me experience I needed... Finally, I got a job on the *Pittsburgh Press* and stayed there for several years doing everything.

In time, Wynne graduated to the *New York World*, where he was responsible for fun—literally. The *Fun* supplement of comics, cartoons, riddles, jokes, and puzzles came out every Sunday. Among his duties, he improvised word puzzles for it: word squares, rebuses, hidden words, anagrams, and connect-the-dots drawings.

For the Christmas *Fun*, on December 21, 1913, he gave the readers something extra special: a hollow, double word diamond, presented in a grid for easier solving. Wynne would have been familiar with word forms, having solved them in Liverpool under his grandfather's instruction.

**FUN'S Word-Cross Puzzle.**

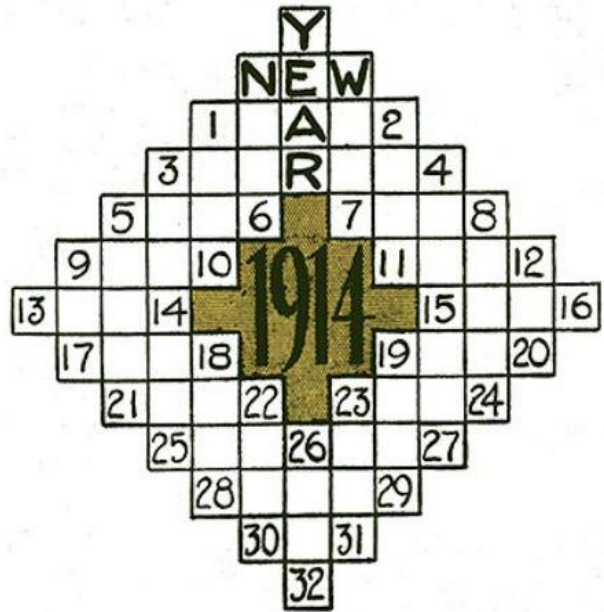
**F**ILL in the small squares with words which agree with the following definitions:

2-3. What bargain hunters enjoy.	10-18. The fibre of the gomuti palm.
4-5. A written acknowledgement.	6-22. What we all should be.
6-7. Such and nothing more.	4-26. A day dream.
10-11. A bird.	2-11. A talon.
14-15. Opposed to less.	19-28. A pigeon.
18-19. What this puzzle is.	F-7. Part of your head.
22-23. An animal of prey.	23-30. A river in Russia.
26-27. The close of a day.	1-32. To govern.
28-29. To elude.	33-34. An aromatic plant.
30-31. The plural of is.	N-8. A fist.
8-9. To cultivate.	24-31. To agree with.
12-13. A bar of wood or iron.	3-12. Part of a ship.
16-17. What artists learn to do.	20-29. One.
20-21. Fastened.	5-27. Exchanging.
24-25. Found on the seashore.	9-25. Sunk in mud.
	13-21. A boy.

The “word-cross” still had a little evolution to do to become the modern crossword we know. This one had no black squares, and its huge indicator numbers denoted the endings of words as well as their beginnings. Still, response was immediate, and Wynne lost no time making it a weekly feature. The second installment was for New Year’s, published December 28.

**FUN’S WORD-CROSS PUZZLE**  
BY ARTHUR WYNNE

- |                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1-2 Wild animals           | 3-10 Security for release |
| 3-4 Coating with tar       | 3-25 A lattice            |
| 5-6 A grating              | 5-21 Young women          |
| 7-8 Conversation           | 9-17 Good to eat          |
| 9-10 An iron wedge         | 18-28 To cut lengthwise   |
| 11-12 To bind              | N-6 German for North      |
| 13-14 A young woman        | 22-30 Cattle              |
| 15-16 Used as a gem        | 26-32 A journey           |
| 17-18 Ninety inches        | W-7 A summons             |
| 19-20 To remain            | 23-31 Torn                |
| 21-22 A food chamber       | 2-11 A hidden obstacle    |
| 23-24 To stagger           | 19-29 Perceives           |
| 25-27 A number             | 4-27 To sparkle           |
| 28-29 Gull-like birds      | 8 24 A Hottentot’s home   |
| 30-31 The egg of an insect | 12-20 Not wet             |



Arthur Wynne himself was a true Renaissance man, but perhaps more comfortable as inventor than craftsman. After inventing and renaming the basic puzzle, he invented its black squares...and then invented a system that saved him much of the work. Enthusiastic readers were sending in their own puzzles by the truckload: Wynne published samples of these alongside his own until he moved on from the *World* and left his most famous creation behind.

After he left the *World*, he did most of his work for William Randolph Hearst-owned papers, including King Features Syndicate—for a time, he was editor in charge of its formidable Sunday comics section. He held numerous other editorial titles at different times: assistant managing editor of the *Pittsburgh Press*, managing editor of the *Duquesne Herald*, sports editor of the *McKeesport Herald*, and music editor of the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*.

In a weird coincidence, he was also social editor of the *East Liverpool*—but it was a paper in Liverpool, Ohio, not the British Liverpool in which he grew up.

Wynne wrote for the papers he edited, on topics ranging in importance from school plays to the latest inventions of Nikola Tesla. And Wynne shared some of Tesla’s spirit of restless innovation. An amateur architect, he designed an early version of the ejection seat, to be used in manned missiles to bring down that universally feared scourge of the air, the war Zeppelin.



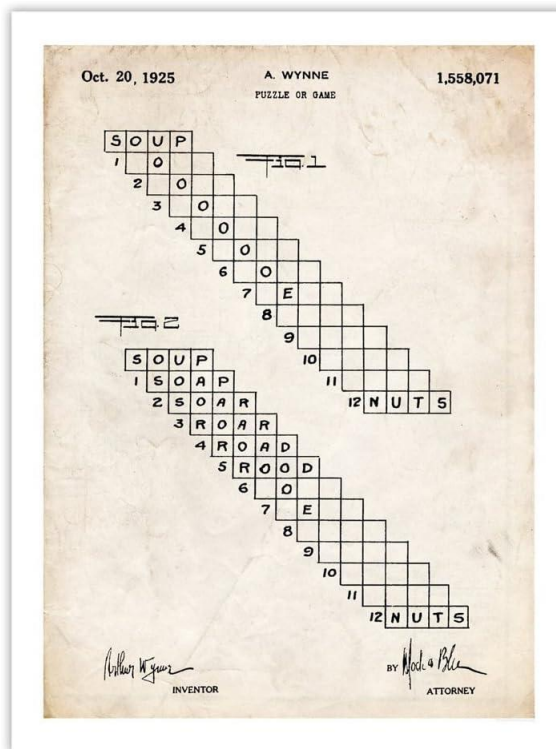
One of the great frustrations of Wynne's life was that the New York *World* wouldn't help him patent the word-cross/crossword. Business manager F.D. White and assistant manager F.D. Carruthers nixed the idea:

[They said] such puzzles are hardly worth the trouble or expense; they said it was just one of those puzzle fads that people would get tired of within six months.

In 1925, Wynne and King Features Syndicate successfully patented the **word ladder**, a form of puzzle where one word is changed to another word, one letter at a time. You've probably done a word ladder yourself at some point. Despite the clear appeal of the invention, the patent didn't bring him riches, and it lapsed with no drama after his death.

Arthur met his first wife, Elizabeth Collins, in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra—he was a second violin, she was a harpist. They married in 1895 and had one child, Rosa. Whether widowed or divorced, Arthur next married Lillian Webb in 1910, with whom he had two children, John and Janet. Janet [lived until 2007](#).

[The record suggests](#) Lillian outlived Arthur, so their marriage had probably ended in divorce when he [got married once more](#), to a much younger woman, and had one more child at 62, Kay. Kay was 12 when Arthur died at Indian Rocks Beach, near Clearwater, Florida, where he'd moved for health reasons four years earlier. The crossword great Merl Reagle interviewed Kay for the puzzle's hundredth anniversary in 2013, when she was 80 and went by Kay W. Cutler: conflicting records suggest she passed away recently at 91.



Of course, this family history raises further questions—but since Wynne's family was as private as he was, we're unlikely to get those answers. Some spaces in the history book will always remain blank—or in Wynne's case, perhaps, blacked in. But so long as the crossword lives, he'll be honored by puzzle-lovers—even puzzle-loving villains (*Batman* #619, 2003).



(No actual crossword designers were consulted in the making of the "puzzle" the Riddler is solving. #notacrossword. At least the creators had him do it in pen!)

## A TROVE OF “UNEXPECTED SURPRISES”

### More Redundancies, Tautologies, and Pleonasms (Is that Repetitive?)

Don Hauptman  
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All literate children and grownups are familiar with *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, Judith Viorst’s beloved 1972 book. The mischievous title, and the book’s enduring popularity, confirm that everyone, kids included, recognizes the fun of redundancies, in this case deliberately deployed as a humorous device.

But in most instances, tautologies are unintentional. They are mistakes, further evidence of declining literacy. As I noted in the three previous installments on this topic in *Word Ways*, they are casually employed for emphasis, or because the expressions, often bromides, have been absorbed unconsciously.

According to my totally unscientific survey, these are among the most frequently uttered and written redundancies: *collaborate together, each and every, end result, exact same, gather together, consensus of opinion, jump up and down, return back* (and other *re-* words), *screaming and yelling, thinking to myself*.

To avoid committing the error, apply this test. Ask: “Is there any other kind?” Or: “other possibility?” Consider, for example, *advance warning*. Are there ever any warnings that aren’t in advance?

Here’s a sampling of especially egregious misuses that I encountered recently via newspapers, television, radio, and online:

- “These issues affect the entire population as a whole.”
- “We are in a dead end with no exit.”
- “Their own tools will boomerang back on American targets or allies.”
- “But his deployment of such terms seems unnecessary, even gratuitous.”
- “[The accusation is] a baseless claim that lacks evidence.”
- “Five years ago, she was a lone rider out there on her own.”
- “The vast preponderance of today’s most influential and powerful progressives . . .”
- “[The music festival] was supposed to be ‘about coming together, rather than separating people apart.’”

- “The company that pioneered the very first building. . . .”
- “I remember what a wise sage of my generation once wrote. . . .”
- “[The group] went on to one of the many Chinese restaurants now serving al fresco, in the open air.”
- “The doubling of our Annual Fund two years early is just a precursor of things to come.”
- “An Upper East Side park is getting a full and complete renovation. . . .”
- “Prince Harry gets an unexpected surprise on his 40th Birthday.”

Shucks! I thought I had spotted a prime specimen: “lived experience.” In fact, however, the term has a distinct meaning in the social sciences, differing from mere “experience.”

Here’s another case of apparent redundancy that evaporates on examination: William Safire’s popular weekly “On Language” column ran in *The New York Times Magazine* from 1979 to 2009. Redundancies were a perennial topic; readers who submitted favorite specimens were appointed to the fictitious “Squad Squad.”

On one occasion, a lively debate erupted over whether “brutal murder” is redundant. Aren’t they all? Some readers said yes, while others pointed out that legal punishment can be determined, in part, by whether the killing was truly vicious. Really horrific murders warrant the adjective, the consensus went, but others, because of extenuating circumstances, might fail to qualify as brutal.

Although I mentioned Richard Kallan’s quasi-definitive anthology of humorous redundancies in my previous articles, I shall, at the risk of being repetitious, plug it again. *Armed Gunmen, True Facts, and Other Ridiculous Nonsense* is still available in hardcover and as an Amazon Kindle edition.

The redundancies keep coming, so I asked Rich for a list of his latest discoveries. Among them: *absolutely essential, dyad of two, eliminate entirely, exact replica, huge abundance, large feast, outer perimeter.*

Finally, I have long wondered about the pop song “You Raise Me Up.” It has been recorded by numerous vocalists, but Josh Groban’s 2003 version is the best known. I’m compelled to deploy the test: *Is there another way than up to be raised?* Still, the tune would make a neat pairing with “September Song,” an earlier classic that includes the lyric: “The days dwindle down to a precious few.”

*The “brutal murder” discussion appeared in The New York Times Magazine on November 10, 1985, and is reprinted, beginning on page 236, in Language Maven Strikes Again (Doubleday, 1990), one of William Safire’s collections of his columns.*



## LIVELY CORRESPONDENCE: SUE MERMELSTEIN

Interview by T Campbell

*The New York Times has published a contest in 2019, 2023, and 2024 called “Variations,” asking its letter writers to submit wordplay-based material tied to current events. For this issue, we spoke to Sue Mermelstein, senior staff editor in Opinion and the creator of the contest. A pair of sample entries follow the interview.*

**TJoW:** Seems like you found a good crop of submissions to work with. There were over 800 this time, I think you said.

**Sue Mermelstein:** Well, it was interesting, because your questions made me look back at how many we did get in the past. And then I saw when we did it in 2019, we got over 300; when we did it last year, we got over 500. So this is quite a huge jump. Over 800 is quite a good response. I mean, that doesn't mean 800 that were serious entries, but it was 800 we had to open the file and look at.

**TJoW:** How did the idea for the contest come about?

**Sue Mermelstein:** The truth is, it was five years ago, and I honestly don't recall. We regularly do what we call callouts. And all I can imagine is it was like, *Let's do something different*. I do know it was my conception. I just honestly can't remember what was exactly going through my head. But I know we're constantly looking for new ideas. You know, what can we do that's different, that readers will be entertained by? And I imagine that's all it was. And I happen to love show music, and I love parodies, so I think it's just reflecting my own personal taste.

**TJoW:** Most published contest entries do tend to be either song parodies or poetic exercises. What percentage of each did you get?

**Mermelstein:** I think I did specifically suggest revised song lyrics or poems, and I wasn't counting, but I would say, roughly three quarters were song lyrics and about a quarter were poems. I mean, obviously poems are somewhat harder to do, and to do it well is even harder.

Although I have to say, in terms of the submissions, we have an extremely literate readership. Some of the poems were original, but a lot were citing Tennyson, Emerson, Whitman, Shakespeare, Maya Angelou. They were obviously poetry lovers and were trying to mimic the poets they admired.

**TJoW:** I was heartened to see those myself. And I had a bittersweet moment when one of the winners seemed to be imitating a poem I was not familiar with, which I'll have to look into. I did wonder whether that had happened to you...

**Mermelstein:** I was a literature major at college, but I'm terrible at poetry. I mean, it's shameful how little I know. With songs, I know show music very well. I know the music of when I grew up. You know, folk music and the Beatles and all that. Today's popular music, I'm pretty clueless about. And there were a lot of cases where I just didn't recognize the song they mentioned. And there were many occasions where even if I knew a song, I didn't necessarily know it that well.

So I did go to the internet and play the song as I was reading it, just to make sure. I wasn't looking for perfection of meter and rhyme, but I wanted to make sure that when people sang

along, they didn't think, *This just isn't working*. So I also played some of the songs and said, *Yeah, this more or less works. It may not be 100% perfect, but it's, it's essentially there,*

Part of my idea in the ones I chose is, when you read it, you want to be singing it in your head, yeah? I mean, did you do that as you read it?

**TJoW:** Yeah, that's the natural instinct. You want to be singing along with it.

**Mermelstein:** And so I felt you really wanted songs a large majority of the readership would be somewhat familiar with, but since my knowledge is limited, I did a first cut, and then I passed them around to some of my colleagues and friends. Just because I didn't know a particular song, I didn't want to rule it out. Because some of these songs are tremendously popular, I just don't know them. Like, I don't know Taylor Swift at all.

I think my 22-year-old daughter probably wouldn't know some of the songs we did pick, but we do acknowledge a lot of our readership is on the older side. So we did tend to lean towards popular show tunes or things I thought would be widely known.

**TJoW:** Yeah, it's a moving target. What's the most creative entry you've gotten?

**Mermelstein:** This year, there were pretty much the standard songs or poems. But did you see last year's ones that we picked?

**TJoW:** Yes, I found there was a little more variety there.

**Mermelstein:** There was this movie script with Putin. It would never have occurred to me to write a movie script. And there was a haiku that we published. This year, one person submitted what they called a prose poem, which didn't make sense to me. It just looked like prose. I didn't quite get it.

**TJoW:** Yeah, I've run into that a little bit in college. It's considered a fused type, not quite one, not quite the other. So it reads like prose, but it has more elevated language.

**Mermelstein:** Yeah, it didn't work for me. The ones I thought were inventive and *usable* came in more last year; what I saw this year was much more traditional.

**TJoW:** But you had more of them this year, so it's a function of percentages as well as a function of absolute numbers. What was the most popular topic?

**Mermelstein:** I think it's pretty clear! I realized I made a mistake this year. In 2019, I wrote, "We implore you to consider topics that go beyond our president." I was considering doing that this year, and I said, *No, let's just see what comes in*. And I regret it. At least half, if not more, were about Trump. Okay, it's a few weeks before an election, and we couldn't do just a whole page of mocking Trump so much as we could have filled a book with it, there were so many good entries. But you can't just do a Trump page.

**TJoW:** The greatest trick a narcissist ever pulled was to get us all thinking about him as much as he does.



**Mermelstein:** So unfortunately, that ruled out a lot of the entries. Even aside from Trump, politics was the dominant theme. There were some on Kamala, not many, but several of them took the idea of Kamala and Camelot and did a takeoff on “Camelot.”

**TJoW:** You went with one of those!

**Mermelstein:** Yes, we did. We got a few like that. And there were a bunch on Vance. There were a lot on dogs and cats. One of them, which I actually loved, was a takeoff of Sweeney Todd’s “A Little Priest.” I know a lot of readers wouldn’t get it, but I thought it was great. For the Supreme Court, we got quite a few. Eric Adams, guns, ChatGPT. And then there were a lot of people who, I think, didn’t understand that the idea is to write about current events and just sent in poems they wrote. It’s like, *Oh, no, this is a lovely poem, but that’s really not what we’re looking for.*

**TJoW:** I’m sure some of them, if questioned, would do the literary major thing and say, “Well, it’s secretly *symbolically* about...”

**Mermelstein:** “It’s metaphorical!”

**TJoW:** My colleague was wondering if you had any participants whose names you might recognize from another context. Actors, celebrities...

**Mermelstein:** Not for the contest. I’ve dealt with a lot of famous people as a letters editor, but I don’t recall any here. It would have been fun if we had gotten some actual songwriters...

**TJoW:** Seems like a good way to sharpen your skills. I’m curious about the evaluation process. I mean, first you deal with what’s recognizable...

**Mermelstein:** Since there are just two of us in the department, I’m the first reader who goes through the 800 plus. I would love to have another person, but it’s not like I can ask someone else to go through 800 emails if they’re not part of the department. So I am the only first reader. I culled it to maybe about 25 or 30 that I thought were at least worth a second look, and I passed those by the eyes of two or three people in my office, just for them to initial the ones that they found funny or clever. Because, again, I was picking some where I really didn’t know the song that well, and I’m not so great at poetry, so I’d like to have someone else look and say, does this work? Is it worth publishing? Are we going to embarrass ourselves? And of course, people have widely different opinions. I mean, it’s really funny how there was not that much overlap between the ones people liked.

**TJoW:** I imagine not.

**Mermelstein:** It makes it harder because what you really want to see is that everyone likes the same.

**TJoW:** Well, I suppose an indication of a robust newsroom: if you’re bringing different slants to this, then you’re bringing different slants to other things.

**Mermelstein:** It’s just with any literature or comedy, different things touch people differently. You know, there’s no one taste. So I took that and tried to winnow it down further—like the ones on Trump, we can’t run just Trump. We need other themes. And I started thinking, *We’ve got to*

*vary the sources*, because I didn't want them all to be from, like, the same Broadway show. I wanted a variety of poems and songs. So I did the next cut for the variety and theme and format and all that. And then it came down to what works for print, what fits? When you're doing just normal prose, it's, *Oh, we can cut that sentence. We can cut that sentence.* Here, you cut a line, and it ruins the whole rhythm. So it was a real layout challenge. I ran a few more online, but one I would have liked to have put in print just didn't work with the layout. So there were the practical matters to get it to fit on the page.

**TJoW:** The other question I'll field from my colleague is, have you gotten any interesting reactions post-publication?

**Mermelstein:** I'll just mention one so far I read yesterday: "Wow, I was blown away by the clever poems and song parodies in the October 12 letters to the editor. What a great idea. The *New York Times* readers are very clever." Now this is the part I really like, because this is what I want. "I looked on YouTube for karaoke versions of some of those songs and sang them to the lyrics provided by your readers. What fun!" So that was a really nice note.

**TJoW:** So is it fair to say that this tradition is likely to continue for a while as an annual thing?

**Mermelstein:** The only thing is, I'm planning to retire in January. Whether someone else is willing to take this on, we'll see. It's a ton of work, but I think it's fun. I enjoy doing it, I would love it to continue. And that was one reason I wanted to make sure it got done this year, because I wanted to do this one last time, because I do find it so much fun.

### **ChatGPT**

I think that I shall never see  
A wonder like ChatGPT.  
Type "Write a sonnet"; out it churns  
A work on par with Robert Burns.  
Type "Write an ode," and in two shakes,  
Results to rival William Blake's.  
"Write comic verse," and in a flash,  
Wry humor à la Ogden Nash.  
Poems were made by fools like me,  
But now we use ChatGPT.

*Jacob Stulberg  
New York*

### **Trump's Campaign Love Song to America** (to the tune of "America," from "West Side Story")

I like to be in America  
They're all for me in America

I'll keep it free in America  
Free like I want it, America.  
Political party that obeys  
I eject anyone who strays  
All of the judges on my side  
They're all along for the great ride.  
I like to taunt in America  
Grab what I want in America  
There are no laws in America  
That I need follow, America.  
If I screw up it is OK  
I'll change the facts by the next day  
And if I'm really defeated  
I'll say the other side cheated.  
So vote for me in America  
And you will see that America  
Will cease to be your America  
It will be all my America!

*Naomi Pliskow  
Philadelphia*

## A BILINGUAL PUN IS TWICE THE FUN

Richard Lederer

International Punster of the Year

A good pun is its own reword, and bilingual puns are twice as rewording as those that stay within the boundaries of a single language. Some of the most pyrotechnic puns have a French twist, into which you can sink your teeth—*bon mot*-lars, perhaps: Let's start with the French connection:

Knock, knock.  
Who's there?  
Comet Halley.  
Comet Halley who?  
*Tres bien, merci. Et vous?*

*Quiche* me—I'm French.

Why do the French use only one egg to make an omelet? *Because in France, one egg is un oeuf.*

Have you stayed at the new luxury hotel in town? *It's a site for soirees.*

Have you heard about the student in Paris who spent too much time sitting in a hard chair studying? *She got sore buns.*

A French milkmaid usually has a prominent *dairy air*.

A company manufactured prosthetic devices for feline amputees but found there was no market for the product. You might say that they committed a *faux paw*.

A feline kept yakking away inappropriately. Finally, his fellow felines tied an anchor around his legs and threw him into a river. The result: *undue twaddle; cat sank.*

*Déjà Who?:* Someone whose name you have forgotten but should remember.

*Apéritif:* French for a set of dentures.

"I hate reading Victor Hugo," said *Les miserably*.

What do you get when you toss a hand grenade into a recreation room? *Linoleum Blown Apart.*

Motto of the Three Musketeers: "*En garde, we thrust.*"

I found a genie in a bottle, and I asked if he could change my French positives into Spanish positives, He replied, "*Oui shall sí.*"

A class of second graders inadvertently came up with a French pun. After an especially hard day, the teacher sighed aloud, “C’est la vie.”

With one voice, the children called out, “*La vie!*”

A snail oozed into an automobile showroom, pulled out \$70,000 in crisp bills, and ordered a fancy red convertible. “One favor,” the snail requested. “Please paint a big *S* on each of the doors.”

“Sure,” said the salesman, “but why would you want that?”

“So that when my friends see me driving down the street, they can all shout, ‘Look at the *S car go!*’”

Pyrotechnic bilingual tropes brighten languages other than French. The all-time prize for transmitting the fullest message with the greatest compactness must go to Sir Charles James Napier. In 1843, Napier quelled an uprising in the Indian province of Sind and announced his triumph via telegram to his commanders in London. All he wrote was the single word *Peccavi*.

The Foreign Office broke into cheers. In an age when all gentlemen studied Latin, Napier never doubted that his superiors would remember the first-person past perfect tense of *peccare*—and would properly translate his message as “I have sinned.”

Here are some polyglot plays on words that should be understandable, even without much knowledge of a second language:

When dining at an Italian restaurant, I don’t know whether I’m *antipasto* or *provolone*.

When a pig roast takes place in England, several boars are needed to feed the hungry, but in Russia, *one Boris Godunov*.

Have you heard about the Chinese restaurant that stays open twenty-four hours a day? *It’s called Wok Around the Clock*.

Have you heard about the secondhand clothing store in India? It’s called *Whose Sari Now?*

Have you visited the Jewish section of India’s capital city? It’s called *Kosher Delhi*. Does that pun get a standing oiy veytion?

A professor goes to a tailor to have his pants mended. The tailor asks, “*Euripides?*” The professor answers, “*Yes, Eumenides?*”

A Roman centurion walks into a bar and orders a martinum. The bartender asks, “Don’t you mean a *martini?*”

The centurion answers, “No, I only want one drink.”

No matter how kind you are, German children are *kinder*.

The panic buying of meat and cheese in Germany is a *Wurst Käse scenario*.

When Brutus told Julius Caesar that he had eaten a whole squab, Caesar replied, “*Et tu, Brute.*”

Chico Marx once took umbrage upon hearing someone exultantly exclaim, “Eureka!” Chagrined, Chico shot back, “*You don ’ smella so good yourself!*”

Mexican weather report: *Chili today, hot tamale.*

Why did the Mexican take anti-anxiety medication? *For Hispanic attacks.*

How do Mexican parents know when their children are running through the house? *By zapata of little feet.*

Why was the pepper unable to compete in the archery competition? *Because she didn ’ t habanero.*

A Mexican magician was performing her tricks and told her audience that if the audience would slowly count to three, she would disappear. The audience shouted “uno . . . dos . . .”—and she disappeared without a *tres*.

A Mexican visiting the United States went into a store to buy a pair of socks. He spoke no English, and the clerk didn ’ t know a word of Spanish. Through pantomime, the Mexican tried to explain what he needed, without much success. The clerk brought out shoes, then tried sneakers, then slippers, then laces—all to no avail.

Finally, he came out of the stockroom with a pair of socks, and the Mexican exclaimed, “*Eso sí que es!*”

Complained the exasperated clerk, “Well, for crying out loud. If you could spell it, why didn ’ t you say so in the first place?”

Did you know that back in 1912, Hellmann ’ s mayonnaise was manufactured in England? The Titanic was carrying twelve-thousand jars of the condiment, scheduled for delivery in Vera Cruz, Mexico, which was to be the next port of call for the great ship after New York City. The Mexican people were eagerly awaiting delivery and were disconsolate at the loss when the ship went down. So they declared a National Day of Mourning, which they still observe today. It is known, of course, as *Sinko de Mayo*.

At the start of a week, the mayor of New York gathered reporters and announced the rejuvenation of the ailing New York City transit system. The next day, the *Daily News* ran this headline: *SICK TRANSIT ’ S GLORIOUS MONDAY*.

I happen to be fluent in French, Russian, Italian, Thousand Island, vinaigrette, balsamic, ranch, green goddess, and honey mustard. I also speak Esperanto like a native, and my pig Latin will be good enough to get by when I visit there. For now, I say to you, *au reservoir, auf wiener schnitzel, hasta lumbago, and buenos nachos*.

## 69 SETS OF SEXUAL TRANSPOSALS

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After this article, you will never think of crinkle-cut fries the same again!

I have a large collection of long transposals, all 10 letters or longer, some much longer. The words, names and other terms have been extracted from various dictionaries and online sources - mainly *The Oxford English Dictionary*, *Webster's New International Dictionary* (both the Second and Third Editions), Wikipedia, and Wiktionary. But plenty of other sources have been scoured, too. Some of the individual transposals are tagged with a specific category, such as US placename, UK placename, drug name, and so on. One category which I have used is for words with the "sex" category—there are hundreds of these, again taken from a variety of printed and online sources. The category "sex" covers a wide range of human activities, including sexual activities, sexual perversions, sex workers, body parts, and many of these terms are expressed in potentially offensive language.

I thought it might be interesting to share some of these "sex"-category words and their transposals. The "sex"-category words are in the left-hand list, and their transposals are in the right-hand list. Each word is briefly defined, with its source shown in brackets. There is one particularly interesting pair of transposals here where both are sex category terms in the left-hand column (aphrodetette, deep throat), with nothing in the right-hand column.

<b>adulterine</b> Characterized by or committing adultery (0)	<b>Laurentide</b> Pertaining to or designating the ice sheet which covered the eastern part of northern North America during the most recent glaciations (0)
<b>amelotaxis</b> Sexual arousal at the sight of an amputation (4)	<b>isomaltase</b> An enzyme (9)
<b>amendolias</b> Forms of deceptive pleasantness in the behavior of girls which often lead to men to believe that they are amenable to sexual exploitation (1)	<b>Salmonidae</b> A family of soft-finned fishes (7)
<b>anaclitism</b> Adult erotic arousal from objects used as an infant (4)	<b>talismanic</b> Pertaining to a talisman; occult, magical, potent (0)
<b>anal eroticism</b> Gratification deriving from stimulation of the anus (0)	<b><i>Lost in America</i></b> A 1985 American satirical road comedy film (8)

<p><b>anal-erotic</b>  Characterized by anal eroticism (0)</p>	<p><b>alectorian</b>  a talismanic stone that is supposedly found in the crop of a cock and is believed to be magical (7)</p> <p><b>creational</b>  Relating to creation (0)</p> <p><b>Crotalinae</b>  A genus of snakes (6)</p> <p><b>laceration</b>  A wound (0)</p> <p><b>reactional</b>  Characterized by reaction (0)</p> <p><b>real action</b>  A legal term: a plea or action relating to the recovery of a particular object or immovable property (0)</p>
<p><b>anal-erotics</b>  Persons who seek gratification through anal stimulation (0)</p>	<p><b>alectorians</b>  Talismanic stones that are supposedly found in the crop of a cock and are believed to be magical (7)</p> <p><b>ancestral</b>  Relating to an ancestor (0)</p> <p><b>lacerations</b>  Wounds (0)</p> <p><b>real actions</b>  Pleas or actions relating to the recovery of particular objects or immovable properties (0)</p> <p><b>senatorial</b>  Pertaining to a senator or senators (0)</p>
<p><b>androtropes</b>  Male homosexuals (4)</p>	<p><b>parrot-nosed</b>  Having a nose like a parrot (0)</p>
<p><b>anocratism</b>  Obsessive erotic interest with the anorectal region (4)</p>	<p><b>anacrotism</b>  A secondary oscillation occurring in the upward portion of the curve obtained in a pulse-recording tracing (0)</p> <p><b>manticoras</b>  Legendary animals each having the head of a man often with horns, the body of a lion, and the tail of a dragon or scorpion (7)</p>

<p><b>anogenital</b> Involving the anus and the genitals (0)</p>	<p><b>negational</b> Negative (0)</p>
<p><b>anolinctus</b> Kissing and licking of the anus (4)</p>	<p><b>inoculants</b> Preparations of beneficial microorganisms used for the treatment of seeds and soil (0)</p>
<p><b>antierotic</b> Sexually <u>dampening</u> (9)</p>	<p><b>recitation</b> The action of relating, recounting, or describing something (0)</p> <p><b>tetraionic</b> Composed of four ions (9)</p>
<p><b>aphrodette</b> An attractive girl who entices men into a brothel (1)</p> <p><b>deep throat</b> To take (an object) deep into the mouth, especially in a simulation of fellatio or a sexually suggestive manner (0)</p>	
<p><b>arse painter</b> One who licks an anus (1)</p>	<p><b>serpentaria</b> The plant Virginian snake-root (0)</p>
<p><b>aterpsists</b> Persons who believe that sexual intercourse should be engaged in only for the purpose of procreation (1)</p>	<p><b>asset-strip</b> To sell off the assets of (a company), especially one recently taken over, in order to make a profit, without regard for the company's future (0)</p> <p><b>stair-steps</b> The steps in a flight of stairs (0)</p>
<p><b>bean tosser</b> An erect penis, conceived as the 'spiller of the beans', which are spermatozoa (1)</p>	<p><b>baronetess</b> The wife of a baronet (0)</p>
<p><b>clitoridean</b> Relating to the clitoris (7)</p>	<p><b>directional</b> Relating to direction in space (0)</p>
<p><b>coprolagnia</b> Sexual excitement produced by contact with feces (7)</p>	<p><b>carpogonial</b> Relating to the carpogonium, the female reproductive organ of certain plants (0)</p>
<p><b>coprolagnist</b> A person who practises coprolagnia (7)</p>	<p><b>prognostical</b> Relating to prognosis (0)</p>
<p><b>copulating</b> Having sexual intercourse (0)</p>	<p><b>outplacing</b> Assisting a redundant employee in finding new employment, especially through an outplacement service (0)</p>



<b>cunt chaser</b> A womanizer (3)	<b>sun-catcher</b> In mythological contexts: a person, god, etc, who catches the sun in a snare (0)
<b>cunt-licker</b> A cunnilinguist (3)	<b>crinkle-cut</b> Especially of chipped potatoes: cut with corrugated or crinkly sides (0)
<b>cunt-pensioner</b> A man living on the earnings of a harlot (1)	<b>Superinnocent</b> Very innocent (6)
<b>cunt-teaser</b> A man who excites a woman sexually but refuses to have intercourse (3)	<b>utterances</b> Vocal expressions (0)
<b>delinolagnia</b> Afternoon lustfulness (1)	<b>diagonal line</b> A straight line joining any two opposite or non-adjacent angles of a rectilineal figure (0)
<b>demivirgins</b> Persons who, despite having engaged in sexual activity in some form, regard themselves as virgins (6)	<b>misderiving</b> Assigning an incorrect derivation to (0)
<b>enspasmation</b> The holding of a female in one's embrace, against her will (1)	<b>pantomnesias</b> Memories such that nothing once known is ever completely forgotten (6)
<b>erect penis</b> An erection (0)	<b>spencerite</b> A hydrated basic zinc phosphate (0)
<b>erotogenic</b> That gives rise to sexual desire (0)	<b>ergotocine</b> An alkaloid used to relieve migraine headaches (Dorl)  <b>geocronite</b> A mineral consisting of a sulfide of lead, antimony, and arsenic (0)  <b>orogenetic</b> Relating to the formation of mountains (0)
<b>estromania</b> Intense sexual desire in a menstruating woman (4)	<b>anatomiser</b> A dissector (0)
<b>eunoterpsia</b> The belief that the only real pleasure in life is sexual indulgence (1)	<b>eupatorines</b> Organic compounds extracted from various species of Eupatorium, a genus of chiefly tropical herbs (0)
<b>fornicated</b> Had sexual intercourse (0)	<b>fractioned</b> Broken into fractions (0)
<b>intercourses</b> Sexual connections (0)	<b>intercessour</b> An old spelling of "intercessor," a mediator (0)

<p><b>Latin lover</b> A southern European or Latin American man stereotypically characterized as having great sexual prowess (0)</p>	<p><b>nivellator</b> Something or someone which levels (6)</p>
<p><b>lesbionage</b> Coined by lesbian activists in the 1970s when calling for real dykes to break all ties with straight women because, having husbands or boyfriends, they were influenced by the oppressive male regime (4)</p>	<p><b>Begoniales</b> The family of plants containing begonias (6)</p>
<p><b>love pirate</b> A seducer of the innocent (1)</p>	<p><b>previolate</b> To violate before (6)</p>
<p><b>manotripsis</b> Manipulation of the phallus by a woman until ejaculation is effected (1)</p>	<p><b>atropinism</b> Poisoning by atropine (0)</p>
<p><b>mastopetal</b> Seeking the female breast (1)</p>	<p><b>postmeatal</b> Situated behind a meatus, a natural body opening (0)</p>
<p><b>medectasia</b> The bulging of an erect penis in the front of the trousers (1)</p>	<p><b>acetamides</b> White crystalline solids with an aroma of mice (0)</p>
<p><b>megalopenis</b> Abnormal enlargement of the penis (6)</p>	<p><b>megalopines</b> Large tropical marine fishes resembling herrings (0)</p>
<p><b>mentulagra</b> Pain in the male organ caused by excessive masturbation (1)</p>	<p><b>argumental</b> Argumentative (0)</p>
<p><b>mentulomania</b> Masturbation (1)</p>	<p><b>mountain meal</b> A soft whitish deposit of carbonate minerals found on the walls of limestone caves (0)</p>
<p><b>mother-aster</b> A bawd, a female pimp (1)</p>	<p><b>starter home</b> A first home; especially a compact house or flat of a type designed to meet the requirements of young couples seeking to buy their first home (0)</p>
<p><b>necrocoitant</b> A male who has sexual intercourse with a female corpse (1)</p>	<p><b>concertation</b> Cooperation (0)</p>
<p><b>nototentia</b> The opinion held by many men that the back is the most beautiful part of a woman's body (1)</p>	<p><b>Tionontate</b> An indigenous Iroquoian people of the woodlands of eastern North American (8)</p>

<b>pantilevers</b> Penises (4)	<b>vespertinal</b> Pertaining to the evening (0)
<b>paracoitus</b> Any form of coitus in which the phallus is satisfied extravaginally (1)	<b>capitosaur</b> A type of extinct amphibian (9)
<b>parthenocolpia</b> The condition of having a virgin vagina (1)	<b>paleoanthropic</b> Relating to extinct forms of human or hominid, known only from fossil remains (6)
<b>patrincest</b> Sexual intercourse between father and daughter (1)	<b>antescript</b> A note written on the front or at the top of a letter or other composition (0)  <b>scatter pin</b> A pin intended to be scattered decoratively (0)
<b>pintle-case</b> A metaphor of the container type for vagina (4)	<b>plasticene</b> An alternative form of 'plasticine' (9)
<b>pintle-maids</b> Prostitutes (4)	<b>diplanetism</b> A phenomenon in which a fungus has two distinct motile phases (0)
<b>post-coital</b> Occurring after the act of sexual intercourse (0)	<b>coast pilot</b> An official publication giving a description of a particular section of coast and usually sailing directions for coastal navigation (7)  <b>otoplastic</b> Relating to plastic surgical operations on the ear (0)
<b>premastorgia</b> The enjoyment of seeing women engaged in certain activities which cause intimate parts of the body to be subjected to pressure or friction, such as riding a bicycle, horse, etc (1)	<b>post-marriage</b> A marriage taking place after the partners have been cohabiting (0)
<b>promenotelia</b> Early onset of menopause (1)	<b>pre-emotional</b> In a state prior to being emotional (6)
<b>pseudoeroticism</b> The condition of being apparently, but not actually, erotic (6)	<b>pseudoisometric</b> A term from both mathematics and mineralogy (5)
<b>ropemaster</b> An expert bondager (4)	<b>permeators</b> Infiltrators of political organizations (0)
<b>scarleteer</b> A prostitute (4)	<b>steer clear</b> To avoid (7)

<p><b>scortation</b> Fornication (0)</p>	<p><b>cartoonist</b> An artist who draws cartoons (0)</p> <p><b>ostraciont</b> A boxfish, a tropical marine fish (0)</p>
<p><b>sororincest</b> Sexual intercourse between brother and sister (1)</p>	<p><b>coin sorters</b> Devices for sorting coins (6)</p> <p><b>Conirostres</b> A group of perching birds, usually containing finches, weaverbirds and tanagers (6)</p>
<p><b>spanecronia</b> Meager ejaculation (1)</p>	<p><b>paraconines</b> Chemicals obtained from butyric aldehyde and ammonia (9)</p>
<p><b>spectrolagnia</b> Craving to perform acts of affection in front of a mirror, including sexual intercourse (1)</p>	<p><b>pearl-coatings</b> Smooth, pearly layers covering something (0)</p>
<p><b>spelacratia</b> An unwillingness to insert the male organ in the vagina, based on a primitive dislike of cracks, fissures, etc (1)</p>	<p><b>separatical</b> Pertaining to separation in religion (0)</p>
<p><b>starfucker</b> A person who seeks out celebrities with a view to having sex with them (0)</p>	<p><b>fear-struck</b> Struck with or overwhelmed by fear (0)</p> <p><b>rat-fuckers</b> Contemptible or despicable persons (0)</p>
<p><b>stupration</b> Sexual assault or violation (0)</p>	<p><b>Port Austin</b> A village in Michigan (8)</p>
<p><b>supinovalent</b> Able to have pudendal intercourse in the face-up position only (1)</p>	<p><b>nonpulsative</b> Not pulsating (5)</p>
<p><b>swaffonder</b> Soixante-neuf (2)</p>	<p><b>wanders off</b> Goes on an irregular course or direction (5)</p>
<p><b>table-ender</b> An act of sex on a table (4)</p>	<p><b>tea-blender</b> A company or organisation which blends tea (0)</p> <p><b>tenderable</b> Available for delivery in fulfilment of contract (0)</p>
<p><b>tail around</b> Of a female, to engage in part-time or occasional prostitution (4)</p>	<p><b>durational</b> Pertaining to duration (0)</p>

<b>thelecomae</b> The hairs growing round the nipple of a female (1)	<b>hematocele</b> A tumour containing forced-out blood (0)
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Here are the sources from which the words and terms have been taken:

0	Oxford English Dictionary
1	Cyclopedic Lexicon of Sex
2	Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English
3	Green's Dictionary of Slang
4	<a href="http://www.sex-lexis.com">www.sex-lexis.com</a>
5	Random House Dictionary
6	Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition
7	Webster's New International Dictionary, Third Edition
8	Wikipedia
9	Wiktionary - en.wiktionary.org

I have deliberately excluded from the above list transposals of the fairly trivial nature where the initial S is simply transferred to the end of the word. Examples include sexhibition/exhibitions, sexhilaration/exhilarations, sexperiment/experiments, and sexploitation/exploitations. There are many others like these.

However, I end with a 14-letter sex transposal which doesn't fall into the sex category, but merely begins with the letters s-e-x. 14-letter transposals are few and far between.

<b>Sextipartition</b> Division by six (0)	<b>extirpationist</b> One who maintains a theory of extirpation, the rooting out of a religion or heresy (0)
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## 1914: THE YEAR IN CROSSWORDS

T Campbell

There are many stories about the alleged origins of crossword puzzles in 1913, but far fewer about their development. Inspired by my own “Year in Crosswords” series of year-ending articles, I thought I’d try to fill that gap.

The early history of crosswords is mostly the history of *New York World* crosswords. The *World* was a well-known paper and newspapers often imitated each other, so one might expect crosswords to blossom quickly. However...

*Though the puzzles were popular with readers, they were decidedly unpopular with editors. Crosswords were difficult to print and were plagued with typographical and other errors. In fact, no other newspaper wanted any part of them. So for the next 10 years, if you wanted to work on a crossword puzzle, you had to buy the World. (Best of Uncle John’s Bathroom Reader (BUJBR))*

”Uncle John” is overstating things a bit. Crosswords did appear in a few other publications before 1924. And the name “cross-words” appeared elsewhere in 1914—*St. Nicholas Magazine*, volume 41, issue 2. Margaret Laughlin published a “novel diagonal acrostic” and used the term “cross-words” for across answers, while the other answers traveled not straight down, but diagonally down and to the right.

Margaret was 15 and a “League member,” which probably referred to the Eastern Puzzler’s League (later the National Puzzler’s League), which had a lot of underage and female members then. The puzzle lacks a grid, but it’s still quite close to the crosswords we know.

It wasn’t until 1914 that even the *New York World* started using the term *cross-words*. The first three installments called the feature a *word-cross*. But one of those notorious typos, in the fourth installment, turned out to be a happy little accident:

*BUJBR* is more right than wrong. Editors did find crossword production a headache, and most publications would have nothing to do with it until the 1920s. If Arthur Wynne’s invention hadn’t been so popular with readers of the *World*, it would probably have died out within six months, just as its business managers believed it would (see Arthur Wynne bio, page 56.)

With the seventh puzzle in the series, Wynne foreshadowed the crossword’s fan-supported future:

**NOVEL DIAGONAL ACROSTIC**  
(Gold Badge. Silver Badge won January, 1914)

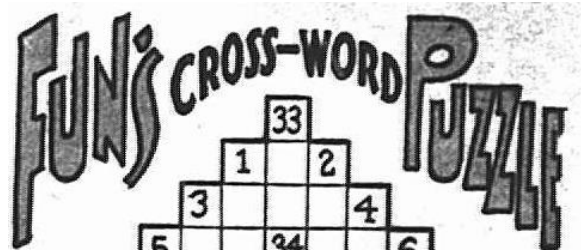
1 - - - Cross-words: 1. A dam. 2. A peasant.  
5 2 - - 3. The French word for a railway station.  
9 6 3 - 4. A drain, sluice, or gutter. 5.  
13 10 7 4 Several thousand pounds. 6. A ruler. 7.  
- 14 11 8 To wash.  
- - 15 12 From 1 to 4, a metal thread; from 5  
- - - 16 to 8, coverings for the head; from 9 to  
12, a kind of metal drum; from 13 to 16,  
vanished. When these four words have been rightly  
guessed, their sixteen letters may be rearranged so as to  
form the name of a national hero.

MARGARET LAUGHLIN (age 15), League Member.

**WORD-SQUARES**

I. 1. A TRACT of wet land. 2. Nimble. 3. To emulate.  
4. To toil severely. 5. The wife of Menelaus. II. 1.  
To bring. 2. To banish. 3. Periodically ebbing and  
flowing. 4. To embrace. 5. Assists. III. 1. A Medi-  
terranean island. 2. A large bird. 3. A happening.  
4. Stretched. 5. To go into.

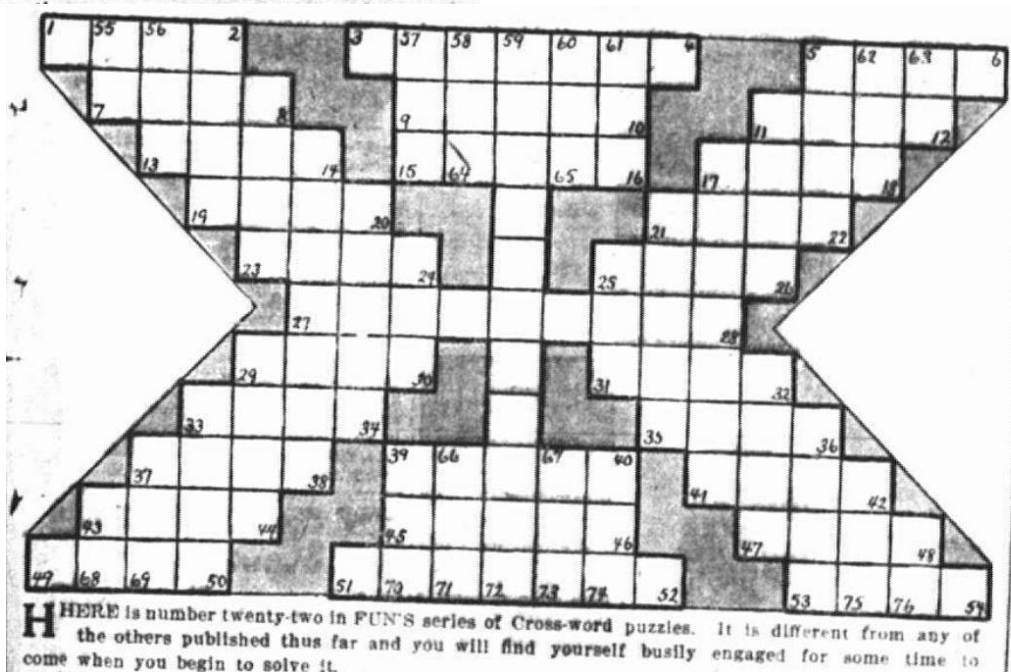
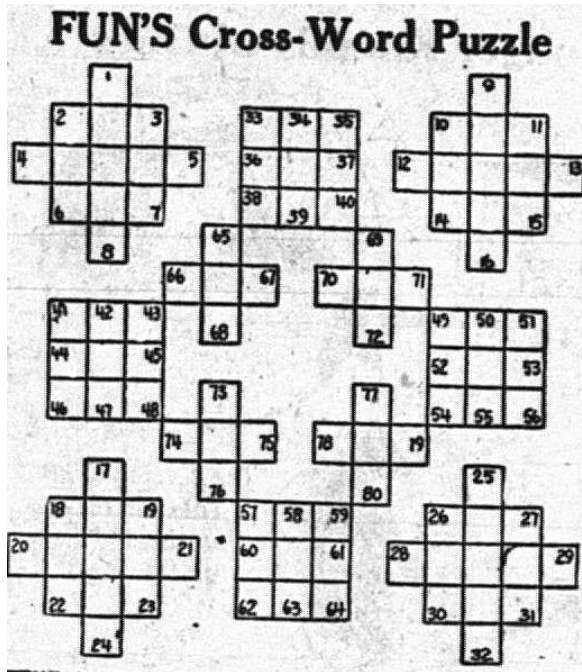
DUNCAN SCARBOROUGH (age 16), Honor Member.



*FUN's cross-word puzzles are apparently getting more popular than ever. The puzzle editor has received from readers many interesting new cross-word puzzles which he will be glad to use from time to time. It is more difficult to make up a cross-word puzzle than it is to solve one. If you doubt this try to make one yourself.*

One installment later, a puzzle appeared created by "Mrs. M.B. Wood."

At first, crossword puzzles all followed the hollow-diamond form above. But once Wynne started showcasing crossword fans' creations, designs got much wilder:



1914 also saw the creation of the first *themed* crossword puzzle—the tenth published in the *World*. The theme was George Washington, in honor of Washington’s Birthday—a holiday now subsumed into President’s Day. Ten of its 40 clues mention Washington—and the final down clue references Washington’s contemporary patriot, Paul Revere. That’s 25% or 27.5% theme content, not too shabby by modern standards.

Occasional other themes followed in 1914, all seasonally appropriate—there was a “summer fun” theme and a “Fourth of July” theme. These all ran without bylines, as did some other 1914 puzzles. Most likely, any puzzle without a byline is one that Wynne created, though some submissions may have been anonymous, and credits might have been lost here and there in the chaos of early crossword production.

Wynne’s inclination was to shower his contributors with honors—though the *World* wasn’t about to shower them with *financial* appreciation. Why pay for the cow when you’re getting all the free milk you can bottle?

Still, the credits Wynne published had a side effect that promoted the crossword’s long-term health. From them, the readers knew that puzzles were coming from New York City, from Somerville, New Jersey—and from overseas. Della Sherry, a European schoolchild, became the first international crossword contributor before the year was out. Crossword fandom may have been small, but it had already crossed the Atlantic.



## JOHN LANGDON: THE TAO OF WORD IMAGES

Interview with T Campbell

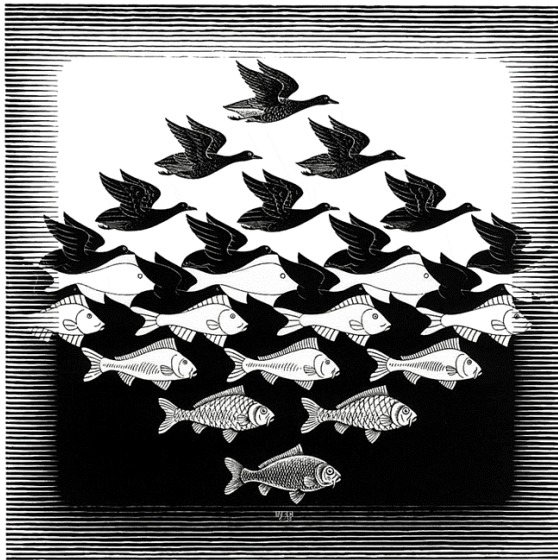
*John Langdon is one of the founding fathers of ambigrams and an avid explorer of other visual-verbal wordplay. In this far-ranging interview, we discussed his life and work.*

**TJoW:** I see a grasp of semantics in your work. It's not just a matter of, *What do these letter forms do?* It's, *What do they mean?*

**Langdon:** Well, thank you. Not a lot of people have said such a thing, and I appreciate it very much.

**TJoW:** But before I trip over my chronology completely, I should get into the obvious place for an ambigram-focused interview which was your first ambigram. According to my research, it was the word *heaven*. Do I have that right?

**Langdon:** You do have that right. I was, at the time. I was trying to force words into figure ground relationships. Are you familiar with Escher's work at all?



**TJoW:** Yeah, you're filling the space with letter forms that fit together.

**Langdon:** And I was creating some very unattractive results. One day I wrote the word *heaven* on a piece of paper. I happened to leave the room for some reason or other. When I came back to the room, I was viewing that piece of paper from the opposite vantage point, and I just thought, oh, look, I can make that work both ways. And that was all there was to it. I had been working along a parallel track, but that shift was necessary and really got me going.

**TJoW:** I also have that you did your first professional one for Jefferson Starship. I'm kind of curious how that came about.

**Langdon:** I was just wondering, is that really my first professional ambigram? It may not be. The public records out there are somewhat incomplete and questionable. I think it is possible—but it was early, anyway.

At the time, I could not really see too much of a commercial direction for ambigrams, but one appealing part of society, part of the culture, was rock music. Rock music album covers at the time were obsessive pieces of art, and so it seemed like the rock music community might be open to something as unusual and dramatically different as ambigrams are.

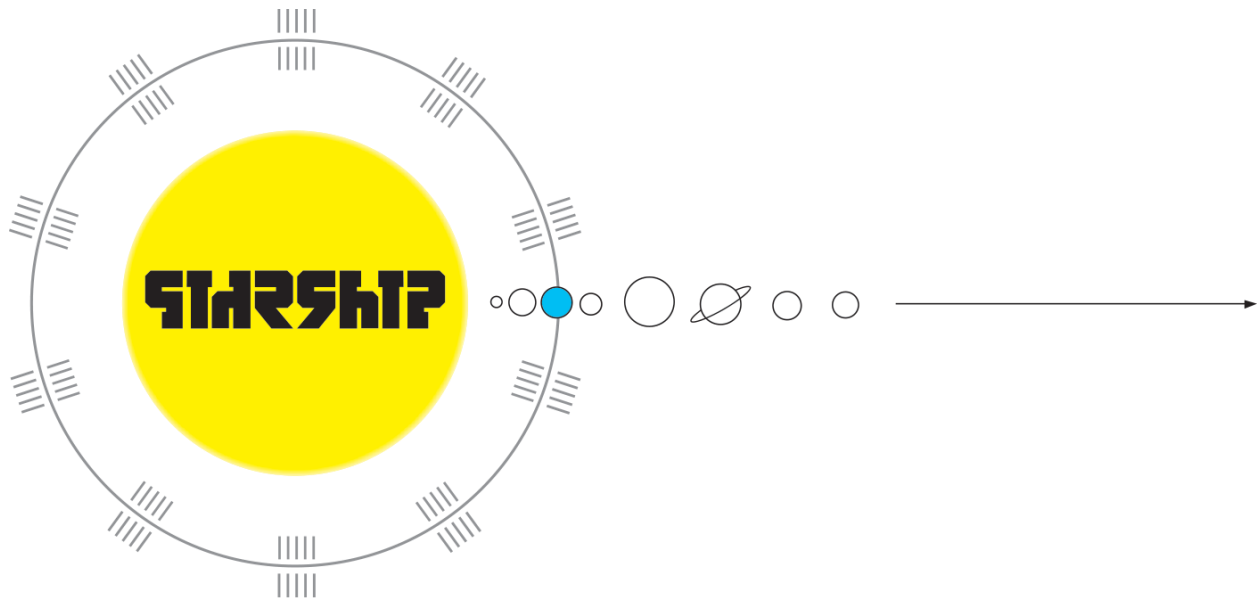
I was trying to make a rotationally symmetrical word *starship*, a favorite group at the time, and it kept resisting me. So what was really noteworthy about it, from my point of view, is that it was

the first mirror-image ambigram. I finally had to just drop back from what I was trying to force, seeing what was possible. Yeah. That made a big difference.



**TJoW:** Yeah. God. I feel like, I feel like those words, *dropping back from what I'm trying to force and seeing what's possible* can apply to a lot of creative exercises, with a lot of better results than planned.

**Langdon:** I agree, and when I heard myself use that phrase, I thought the same thing that you were thinking. It's even a good approach to anything in life. If you're trying to force something and it's not working, then back off. Keep your mind open. Back off.



**TJoW:** Ambigrams are a subset of things that can be done with typography and its study. And I'm curious about what led you to that study, what influences you might have had in those more general terms.

**Langdon:** I had always wanted to be an artist. When I graduated from college with a degree in English, I got a pretty crappy, ordinary job, just to have a little income. I was an assistant manager in a few different school and college food service outlets. It was unrewarding, to say the least. I was working 60 hours a week and realizing that left me no time to look for anything else in my life, so I had to just quit it flat.

Without any portfolio, with hardly any visual work to show, I figured, *If I'm going to make a living as an artist, I guess I have to go into advertising.* So I was going around to ad agencies, and I was showing personal work and getting a really good response from people, which I felt was amazing, but no job offers. Everybody said, Gosh, I'd really like to point you in a good direction. I can't hire you, but here's a couple of people you should really speak to and I just kept following those, over and over and over. Eventually, somebody said, I think you could get a job at such-and-such type shop.

In 1969, type was set by professional typesetters, and people who wanted typesetting for magazines, advertisements, brochures, et cetera, would have the type set at a place that specialized. That was the case until the Macintosh came along and we all got to the point where we could set our own type. So that's how I ended up in a type shop. And it was a huge influence, but it dovetailed so nicely with my already developing sense of both verbal and visual, or visual treatment of verbal images on a page.

**TJoW:** That does sound like fertile ground. So you got a few early gigs like Jefferson Starship—

**Langdon:** And I didn't finish that story. Once I had designed it, I sent it to the manager, the promoter, the producer, the road manager, like six different people associated with Starship. Not all at once, but I didn't hear back from anybody. So I was like, *Well, the first one failed, so I'll try another one, and then I'll try these two.* So it was actually over a period of a couple of years of making these attempts. And finally, when the group came to perform in Philadelphia, I made a print, took it to the arena, handed the envelope to a guard, and said, Could you get this to the group? And he said, "I'll do what I can." And then the next morning, Paul Kantner called me up. So that was what worked.

**TJoW:** I appreciate your persistence. So that got used? Did that lead right to other things? [See its use in the photo below.]

**Langdon:** It was used, but not extensively, and I realized some number of years later I didn't charge them enough to use it everywhere they were. I happened to visit the group in San Francisco a couple years later, and they were drinking bottles of wine that cost as much as what I had charged. So anyway, it was a lesson early on, but I was employed at a design studio at that point, and I probably had about four or five more years at that moment before I left the design studio, so I wasn't really into building a clientele yet. But I continued to develop ambigrams and virtually any visual expression in my own spare time.

**TJoW:** You did at some point leave the studio, and at that point you were looking for general design clients or typography design clients.

**Langdon:** I did want to specialize in logo design, and so I was showing by that time, I had a portfolio of work I had created at the studio, and



also more important personal things that my extended time in the professional world had led me to. So I was showing to prospective clients was heavily in the direction of corporate identity. We all sort of subconsciously know the rules there.

Getting started was a long, slow process. I did not love going out there and meeting people I didn't know and trying to show them how great I was. That was uncomfortable. And in fact, I had kind of rationalized my leaving the studio because my wife had a really terrific career underway, and we had a baby, and I thought my being the stay-at-home parent was a great idea, sure, and it kind of allowed me to get my business underway. It also kept me from being able to spend whole days on my design career. Balancing childcare and try to start a business was pretty tricky.

**TJoW:** I don't think that's easy on anybody. So you were getting a number of logo clients, but the ambigram angle didn't emerge until a little later, is my understanding.

**Langdon:** It did not become a part of my freelance business, hardly at all. Maybe 1% of the people who had come across my work somewhere or other. I did have a couple of commissions in my first couple of years, but I wasn't quite able to get beyond my discomfort with walking into a business and trying to sell them a new corporate identity, I felt much more at home meeting with people in advertising agencies. So virtually 99% of my clients for the first few years were art directors who were maybe working up a campaign or a new client or developing a new product for an existing client. So I would get called for logos for those sorts of projects, and in many of them, the art directors had already established a direction and maybe even scribbled something out to say, "I want it to look like this, only beautiful."

Most of my work at that point was not 100% from my heart and soul. But I did get repeating work from two or three ad agencies in Philadelphia that virtually kept me busy all year.

**TJoW:** Yeah. They're looking for reliable assets. According to the resources I've perused, you met Dan Brown's father, I believe a musician, Richard Brown...

**Langdon:** Richard got in touch with me after my book *Wordplay* was published. He was a high-level academic mathematician, and ambigrams, presumably because of their symmetry, appeal a lot to scientists of all stripes, mathematicians as well as more directly science-oriented people. So anyway, yes, he wrote to me through the publisher, and we just corresponded a bit about ambigrams for a couple of months. He asked if I could help him create an ambigram of his own man, which I did. I gave him suggestions, and he would show me what he had done. We worked back and forth. I did not design it for him: he wanted to do it himself.

But in the course of that, I made a good impression on him, I guess, and so one day, he showed *Wordplay* to his son Dan, who at the time was a developing a career as a singer songwriter. He was working on an upcoming CD, and Richard said, "He's thinking of naming it *Angels and Demons*. Could you try to make an Angels and Demons ambigram?"

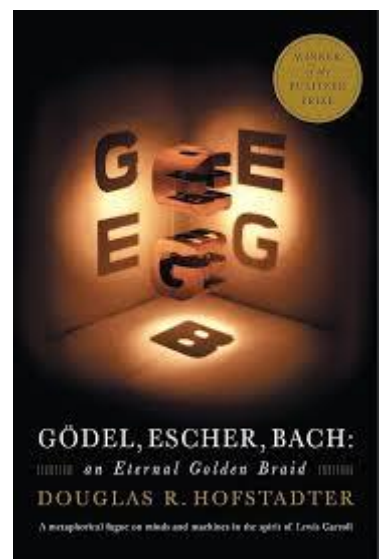
So I did that, and they were both pleased with the result. A couple of years later, Dan gave up his music career and decided to write novels. His third book would also be named *Angels and Demons*. He asked if he could use the A&D ambigram again and, of course, I said yes. As Dan got further into writing the book, he asked me to design five or six more for the text of the story. That was a huge, huge opportunity for me. As you know, *Angels and Demons* got sold by the hundreds of millions all over the world—though not at first. It wasn't until *The Da Vinci Code* came along with a new publisher that put an enormous effort behind promoting it.

# Angels & Demons

**TJoW:** Well, that does make a difference.

**Langdon:** They were very successful with *The Da Vinci Code*, and it wasn't long until people were saying, "Well, what did he write before this?" If you have read both books, you know they almost dovetail. Dan even told me that *Da Vinci Code* got started with leftover research from *Angels*. So that's how I went from zero to sixty once it was out there.

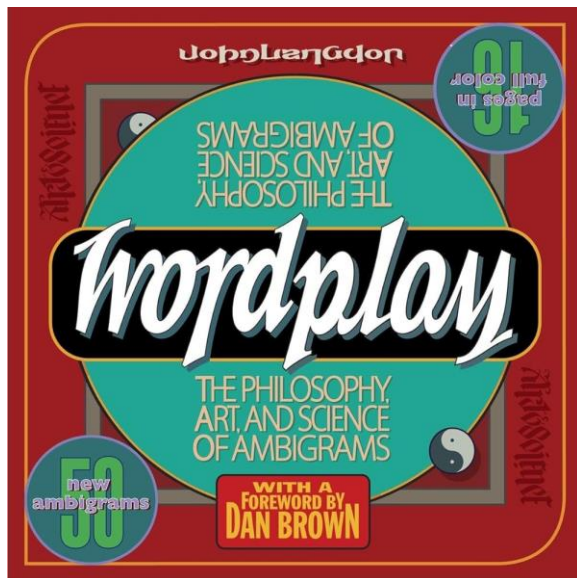
I don't know if you know the name Douglas Hofstadter. He was pretty well known at that point by virtue of his book, *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. Following my many, many attempts to find a publisher for my ambigrams—I had worked up about 60 of them at that point—he got in touch with me out of his interest in ambigrams and, again, a scientific orientation. Hofstadter is a cognitive scientist more than a physics professor or chemist. Anyway, he had a lot of interest in ambigrams, and so I asked him if he had any idea of a publisher who might be interested. And he gave me the name of his editor, and she loved what I was doing





at the point. She said, “Well, the ambigrams are wonderful, but now you have to write the book.” At that point, I hadn’t written anything—I had written things, sure, but I had never shown anybody anything.

But the essay format, a two- or three-page essay to accompany each ambigram, worked well. I could never have sat down and written 100 pages on any topic ever, anywhere, but I could respond to the meaning of the word and write a page or two, and that turned out to be very successful.



**TJoW:** In the post-Dan Brown explosion, I understand the ambigram community sprung up for a number of years there, and to some degree, it’s still going.

**Langdon:** I don’t know how many ambigram artists are in the world now. I belong to a Facebook ambigram group, and there’s probably 20 people who post every day, and maybe another 60 that are lurkers or just followers. So, that’s a large group compared to what it had been twenty or thirty years earlier. Of course, people all over the world tried to create ambigrams. When people ask me if I’m famous or something, I say, “At least 10 or 12 people in every country in the world know about me.”

**TJoW:** The term I hear in certain circles is *microcelebrity*.

**Langdon:** Yes, that’s where I am.

**TJoW:** And I know, because it’s how we started corresponding, that you’re also part of the ambigr.am (an ambigram creators’ and fans’ website) community, that you’re still contributing to them. Seems like someone of your stature in the community might be considered “above” that sort of thing, but I still see you on there, and it does my heart good.

**Langdon:** It’s an outlet. I mean, if I am bored for 15 minutes in my life, I will come up with something to design. I need to design something. And if there’s nothing else coming at me, then I will find a word to design an ambigram of. At least half the ambigrams I’ve ever designed brought me no income at all, so I’m happy to just do another one. It’s predominantly people who are amateurs who are excited about the idea of ambigrams. They’re not graphic designers and they’re not artists, and so I feel like with my presence, hopefully I can pull the amateurs into doing better and better work.

I do general critiques where I can and try to help people along verbally, not just by not just by showing what I do, but by talking about what they do. I taught typography courses at a university level for 30 years—I’m a third-generation teacher. But yeah, I do enjoy being part of those groups.



Contest: The Occult

**1ST PLACE**

John 🏆5

27th Oct 2022



ALCHEMY

**TJoW:** Is there anyone you considered a person to watch in that field? A rising star within the community, so to speak?

**Langdon:** That ambigram group on the web has certainly at least two or three guys who are doing some very nice work. They don't seem to challenge themselves hugely. They're doing short words, but they are doing visually good work with letterforms, and so I have hopes that they will be continuing to get better and better in the field. There's one guy, though, his name is Nikita Prokhorov. Have you run into his name?

**TJoW:** I've done more than run into his name. We did a talk together.

**Langdon:** Oh, good, good. Okay, he came to me, it must be 10 or 12 years ago, out of the blue. I don't know what he was doing at the time. He was young—he's still young by my standard. But he came from New York on the train down to Philadelphia just to chat with me. And it was clear that he had a real interest in ambigrams. But I don't think he had done anything yet, and for a few years, I didn't think his early work promised a good future what he was doing. But I gotta say, in the last three, four years, he's doing some terrific work, and I'm really impressed.

**TJoW:** He's figured it out, and by his own admission, it took him a while. So there may not be much disagreement between you about that. I did want to talk a little bit about your painting work. You've sometimes developed ambigrams and related forms in paint for display. How did that come about? I know a couple of people who got into the arts, and it's not always easy.

**Langdon:** No, it's not. And, I haven't sold a whole ton of things. I've got quite a few in storage. In college, I made my first attempts to teach myself to paint. I had known my whole life I was an artist. I can remember from when I was very small. But I got no encouragement or support in that direction.

I went through a pretty normal education through college. I did start to try to learn how to paint while I was in college, but I was in college getting a degree in English and playing pool and drinking and hanging out with girls. I did do a couple of paintings while I was in college. But then, as you point out, once I got out of college and into the working world, I didn't paint for quite a while, and during that time, I really questioned whether I was an artist at all, or whether I knew how to paint. I was really putting a lot of energy into graphic design, typography, logo design, and eventually ambigrams. When I was 50—big jump ahead—I said to myself, how long are you going to wait until you start painting?

**TJoW:** I'm turning 50 in a week.

**Langdon:** Pay attention. Anything can happen.

I had a little bit of trouble at the beginning, trying to develop a direction, but I saw an absolutely emotionally overwhelming gallery show of Andy Warhol's enormous Rorschach paintings. They fit right into my well-developed sense of symmetry and what I could do with it. But I wanted mine to say words, his are just abstract, right? And it took me a while. As I said, I started off with a lot of experimentation. I tried all kinds of paints, all kinds of surfaces, and very minimal approaches and very maximal approaches. I'm guessing it took me months to find a direction there, but eventually I was making Rorschach prints.



**TJoW:** I've been looking at your website, and I've seen the various categories of painting you got into, and I was curious about how some of those subgenres developed. Did you go through a "Blue Period" or was it more like, *well, I'll do one in this category and one in this category...?*

**Langdon:** Once I found a direction, like doing the Rorschach work, I stayed with it until I was tired of it, and also knew that I could go back a year later or five years later and revisit that. So what happened next was that I was in a drugstore, and I saw the *Tide* logo on a package of detergent. As I looked at it, in my mind, it said, *edit*, and by editing, I just moved some letters around. Even before I began painting, I found and developed ideas for, I guess, four or five logo parodies like that.



When I say I'm guessing, it's a wild guess, but it settled in and took me a while. As I'm relating this to you, I'm very aware of the difference between the spontaneity and unpredictability of a Rorschach image, since with the logo paintings, I demanded absolute perfection in the representation of what somebody else designed.

**TJoW:** It's got to be faithful, to be recognizable, otherwise, there's not much of a point.

**Langdon:** That's true. I didn't realize at that point that I was stepping into the world of pop art. And if I think about pop art and I think about logos that appeared in pop art paintings, other artists didn't seem to really need to be totally faithful to the original, but I did. At that point, I had been a logo design specialist for 25 years. Pop artists tended to come from an academic, art-school background, an artier, less representational background. Whereas I came from advertising and



graphic design, where there's high demand for accuracy, and so that explains the difference in my approach.

After doing several whole logos, like the *Tide* painting, I began to run out of likely subjects. So I started working with *half* a logo, like the Zenith logo, or taking half the letters out of the Dunkin Donuts. I began to feel pretty headstrong about making the logos do what I needed them to do, ultimately putting two logos together. I don't know if you're familiar, with the Playboy bunny and IHOP...

**TJoW:** Yes, yes.

**Langdon:** By the way, I have the sense that most people don't think of humor as an integral part of fine art, but for me, it's an integral part of almost everything I do. So I'm one of these people who thinks that there's never a point where a joke or a bit of levity can't help things out.

**TJoW:** Well, delight is always useful in terms of the emotions that a piece of art can evoke. When I was growing up, I was reading *Games Magazine*, and they did this one puzzle with the names of 14 or 15 television shows rendered—

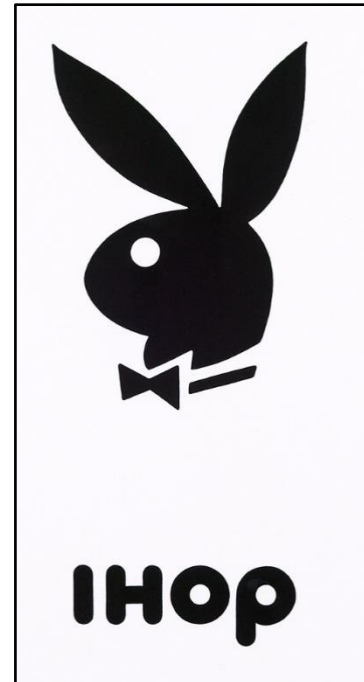
**Langdon:** [I did one like that.]

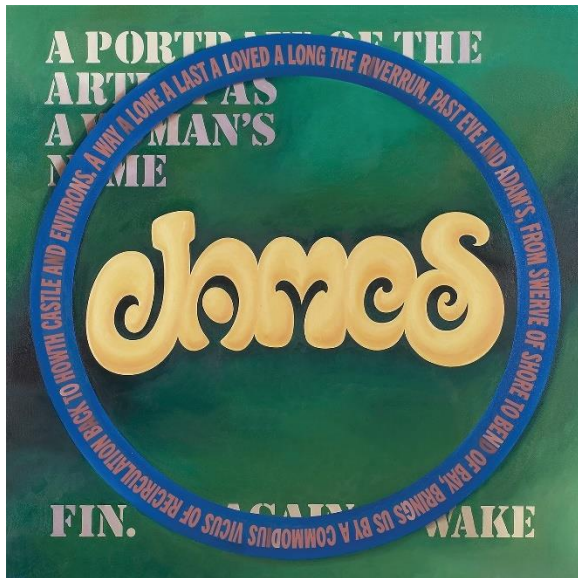
**TJoW:** How did that come about? Did you know anybody on the staff, or was it just something you thought of and submitted?

**Langdon:** Will Shortz, the editor, contacted me, and it was the first of two or three or four things I've been involved with him about. It's been a fun association. I think the most recent thing I did for him was a logo for his table tennis emporium.

**TJoW:** I know that he has two big loves in his life, and one is crosswords/puzzles, and the other is table tennis. So where did the paintings go from there?

**Langdon:** I had a big gap in my painting, I would say, from 2018 through 2022. Partly because there was a lot going on in my life, but I also had no idea what my next series was. I've been fortunate. I think that up until then, I have always known what the next series will be and I've always known what the next painting would be so that's been really good. Anyway, I haven't even mentioned my sketchbook, but for years, after my wife went to bed, I would stay up and just doodle and play with words in my sketchbook. And I





presume it was from there I discovered that I could get the word *James* to be a matrix surrounding area for the word *Joyce*.

I launched myself in that direction without even knowing that there might be more opportunities. I was unable to find another opportunity like the James Joyce one, but I ended up doing two or three or four paintings that were figure-ground relationships like that. They were homages to other artists that I have long admired, Picasso and Braque and other Cubists, painted in a Cubist style. I haven't even mentioned Cubism yet, have I?

**TJoW:** Not in this interview.

**Langdon:** When I was in college and trying to decide whether I was an artist or not, when I would look at a painting on a wall somewhere, it was almost always a portrait or a landscape. And I would look at those paintings and think, *I could never do that*. And of course, that kept me on the "I'm not really an artist" side of the question.

But I did rev up my self-confidence by putting a brush and some paint to some canvas on two or three cubist paintings that I felt very good about.

Right around then, I decided to take an evening course in painting. The teacher set up a model, and I started painting her in my very comfortable cubist style. He let me have that painting, but when I started the next one in the same manner, he came up to me and said, "When are you going to get over this pastiche of cubism?"

I don't know what I mumbled at the time. I had to go home and look up the word in the dictionary, but I knew instantly that he was right, so my cubism thing tapered off pretty quickly after that. Anyway, those later paintings allowed me to get back to my pastiche of cubism, or at least gave me an excuse. [See "cubism"/"Braque" at right.]

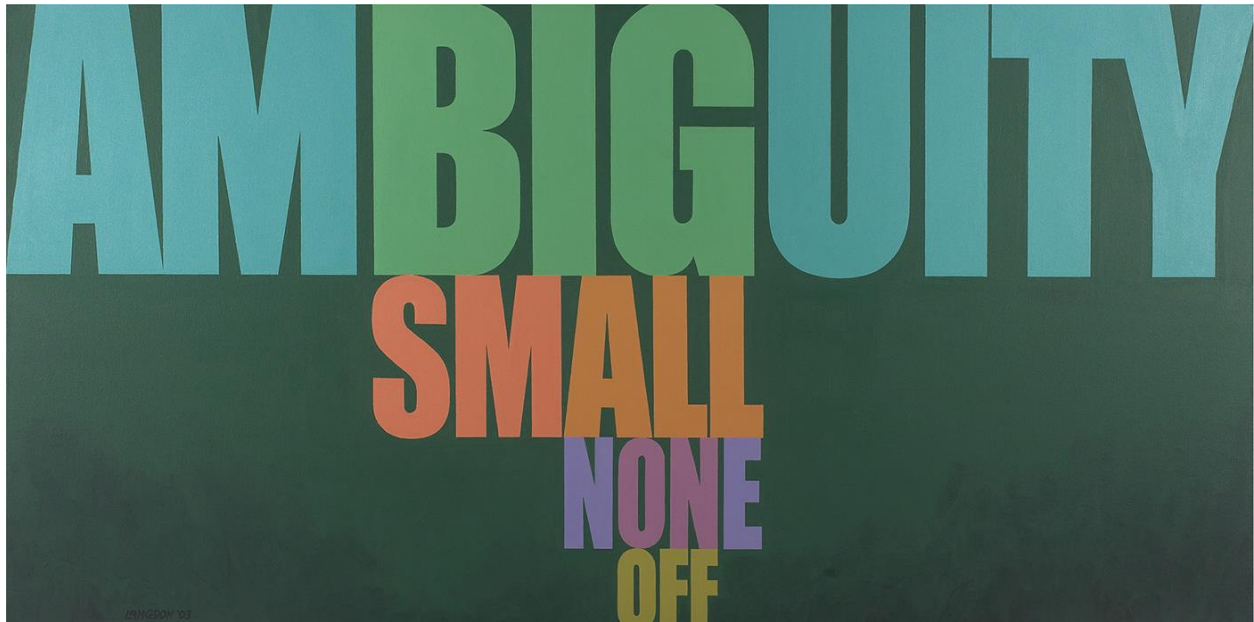


**TJoW:** You were at least bringing some experience with other art and design to the table.

What are the rules? One of the quotes about art that has always stuck with me is, *You can only bend the rules successfully after you've learned them perfectly*,

**Langdon:** That is absolutely the way that I taught my students in my typography classes. And that phrase, that concept, was spoken out loud frequently in my class.

I honestly can't remember my frame of mind or a particular day when I knew that I had come to the end of a series. All I know is that eventually, these series would peter out. I looked for my next phase, and I was probably flailing a little bit because I took refuge in typography. My next series goes back to my love of words and their meanings.



I was designing my canvases and setting type. This one, "Ambiguity", is typical of this group. I would make the colors of the *big* in the middle slightly different than the letters on either side of it, and then directly below the word *big*, I would have the word *small*, and then the *all* would lead to *none*...



I was not trying to pick a typeface appropriate to this word or these words. All those paintings are done in very, very bold sans-serif capital letters, and they fill the canvas edge to edge, and they sit right down on top of each other. And there must have been a good bit of open-endedness to that.

**TJow:** But it has to be a word with fairly straightforward opposites to get you to the next step.

**Langdon:** You're right. And I was fortunate that that lasted a while.

Another noteworthy aspect of that series is the color. My thinking before that had always been, *if I'm doing a picture of the flag, I'll paint it red, white and blue*. But here I was just picking words out for their meanings. Out of the blue, right? Words aren't inherently purple or orange. So when I did those paintings, the word within and then the word below it would be complementary colors. I was able to make color do things that the meaning of the word would support.



While I was doing that, I'm sure I had gotten back to occasional Rorschach images. You can create them in almost no time. I worked on those in the basement.

**TJoW:** I've seen a few combination Rorschach ambigrams, words designed to be symmetrical within a larger Rorschach design.

**Langdon:** Yeah, I neglected to mention that when I started describing them 20 minutes ago. But a word that's going to be symmetrical, that's what an ambigram is. I had already created a number of what I called totem ambigrams. Like a totem pole, they are vertical and bilaterally symmetrical [see "Imagination" at right].

My earliest attempts were to get Rorschach images with words were horizontal, not vertical, but I would say none of those were successful. That's partly because of the splashing, the randomness of the application of pigment to the surface of a Rorschach image. It took me a little too far in the direction of Jackson Pollock.

**TJoW:** You've alluded to Taoism when we set up this interview, and I want to ask about your history with that philosophy.

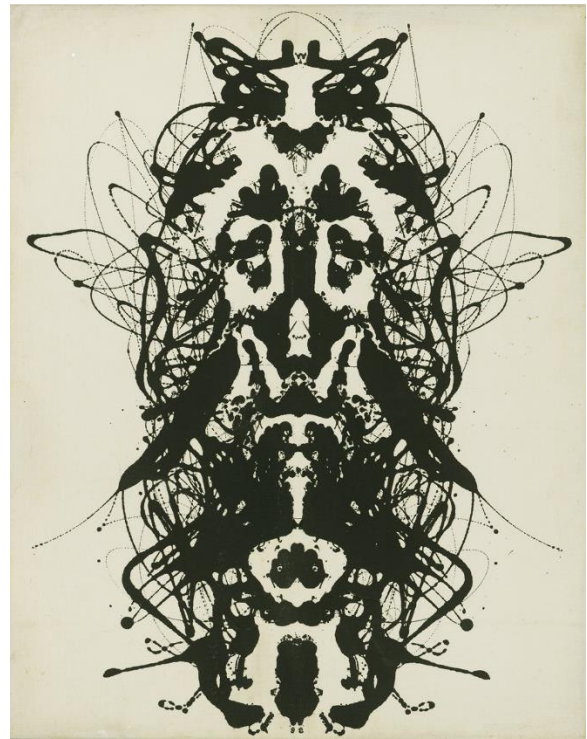
**Langdon:** Yeah, I may have made it sound like there's a direct relationship, which is not exactly the case, but the yin-yang symbol and everything it stands for—which, in my mind is virtually everything—that had been something that was coming along very powerfully in my mind, in my early twenties, the same period that I was becoming completely oriented around typography and aiming toward being a logo designer.

And of course, eventually, ambigrams came along. Ambigrams are directly related to the yin-yang symbol because they are rotationally symmetrical. And that underpins the spiritual aspects of Taoism — just the appreciation for complimentary opposites and balance in the universe.

People have asked me, *Well, does Taoism help you know what to do in your life?* And I had a tough time with that question the first time somebody asked me, but in fairly short order, I came up with the answer: No, it doesn't. It just helps me understand whatever is happening or has happened or might happen.

**TJoW:** It does seem like that would be a helpful base to move forward. It's not a guidebook, but it is maybe a place to help you get started.

**Langdon:** Yeah, I think you're on to something there. If you can reduce decisions in your life to distinct binary options, they become yin and yang, and so probably that thinking does enter in, somewhere along the line. I latched on to the idea of yin and yang, not only as complimentary opposites, but in and of themselves. Yin on the surface and yang on the other side of it.



HARMONIOUS  
COMPLEMENTS



POLARIZED  
OPPOSITES

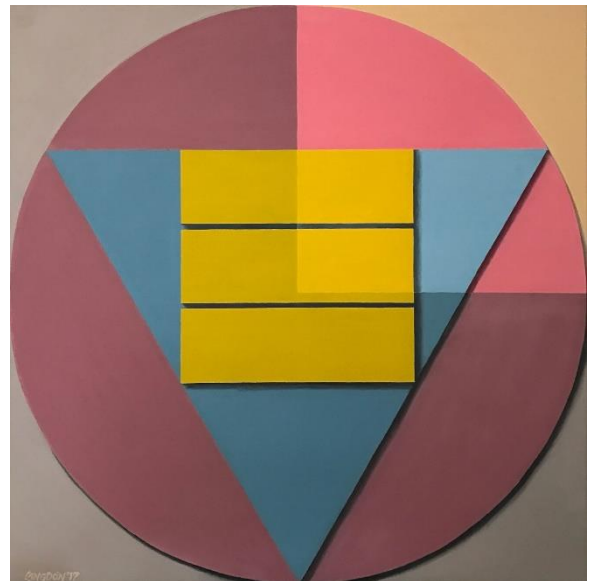
I did a piece where I cut yin and yang shapes out of wood, so they fit together, and then cut a ring to hold them together and the Yin side is black on the front and white on the back, with the opposite for the other part, and the one time it's ever been displayed in an exhibition, I placed those puzzle pieces about a foot above a mirror—both sides. So it's not just both sides, right and left, it's also both sides in depth, and that may have preceded my yin and yang sphere pieces, in which, again, the sphere has arguably two yins and two yangs.

Anyway. So what one of my friends said, in response to my insecurities about painting was, "You've done a lot of work on your house. You've got all kinds of tools, and you know how to use them. Why just do what's in your head and use whatever tools and materials you need? Forget about painting, just make shit." I wanted to draw strong connections between the yin-yang symbol and the normal bell curve and spirals and a wave pattern.

I've skimmed over enough physics books to have a sense that they really were all related. And so I was making things out of wood and wire and paint, and, whatever else I might need

to explore the those concepts, and I had to work through that process and series of works before I could believe in myself as an artist.

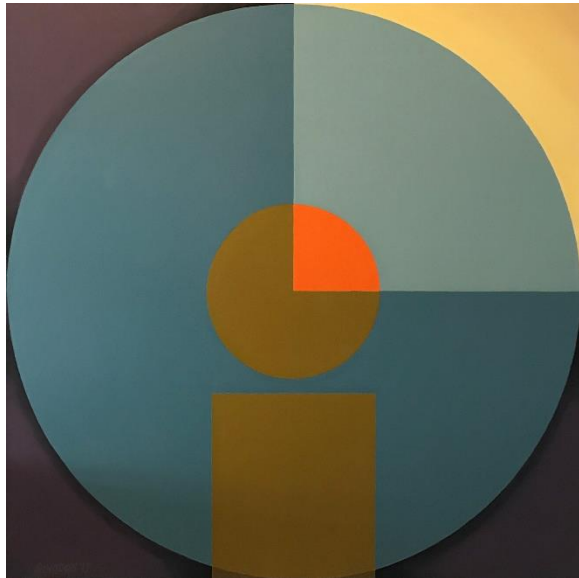
There's one last series. When I moved from Pennsylvania to California, I drove up and down California looking for a place that I would like to live and then downsizing as much as I could, getting rid of as much stuff as I could, and then packing and moving and unpacking. I really lost the continuity at that point, but during all that time, I had pictured that I wanted to do large paintings of short words. I think I probably had them in a square format from the beginning. So a square, a geometrical shape of a square filled by a geometrical circle, that's the letter O. Creating letter forms out of geometric shapes. And again, filling the canvas edge to edge, with these geometrical letterforms. [See "LOVE" at right.]



I think my first painting in that series, "Love" I don't even show people, and nobody has ever wanted it in a show. I was carrying stuff in from

the car. I left that painting on the front porch. I'd forgotten that I left it out there. It was about 12 feet from the sidewalk, and I left it out there for several hours — I was very upset that nobody stole it. "Oh, my God, it's still here! Nobody wanted it."

So that was my layers series. It started off, I think, badly, and got better and better. The last four or five paintings I did in that series, I think they're some of the best work I've ever done. I feel very good about them. [See "Oil on Canvas" below.]



I looked for a place to buy a year and a half and finally found a piece of land that I did like, and then designed my own house for it. So the years of looking for a place to live, and buying that property, and designing the house, and packing up to move, all of that was another two years.

**TJoW:** You did say that from 2018 to 2022, there was a lot going on in that period, and you were not getting much done.

**Langdon:** By the time I got moved into my new house, which was in mid-'22...I said, "I have nothing in my mind. I have nothing I want to paint. I haven't got a goddamn concept of any kind." Well, even though I was pretty well ensconced in my new place by the middle of '22 there were still a lot of things to do. I spent over a year hanging

all the art at my house, you know? it was a process of what should go there and what should go with it. And so the demands of creating my own house continued anyway.

But in the past year, I have forced myself back to the easel, and I am nearing the end of my second painting. They are not anywhere near within any areas of my previous work. You'll see them at some point. Maybe I'll send them to you.

**TJoW:** I would certainly be curious to see them.

**Langdon:** I have completed one painting. It has no words in it, but the items in the painting create a wordplay. That one was done six months ago, probably. I'm just now getting to the finishing the second one, and it does not have any words in it either, but it relates very directly to my Taoism. Really, just something that came into my mind and I said, *Okay, I'll paint that.*

I needed to just work, even though I still don't know what I'm going to do next.

It feels like my painting career is tapering off, but as long as I have a logo to design, a handful of ambigrams in mind, something. I've been doing more and more writing in the past several years. So, I don't want for creative outlets. I use them all day, every day-

I am now living in a house that I designed, where I decided where every single thing on the wall goes. I decided, when I started to think about what goes on the walls, *I'm going to put on the wall all the pieces of work that I have that other people have done, pieces I traded for, bought, or had given to me — all of those are going to go up first, and then I'll fill in with some of my own work.*

And so I'm living in a place that was designed by me for me.

**TJoW:** That's a dream a lot of us have when we were kids, and maybe we don't really get to follow through on it.

**Langdon:** And I implied, but I guess I didn't actually say: neither I or my wife had ever lived alone before we got married. 2013 was the first time in my life I ever lived by myself. So that's been a period of self-discovery.

**TJoW:** Yeah, makes sense to me.

**Langdon:** I've also learned one hell of a lot about my marriage just from just from playing it over and over and over in my head. And I know everything that was wrong with my marriage and what kept us from realizing it. So it's been very good. I think a lot of that sounds painful, and some of it is, a good bit of it is, but the aftermath of the pain is understanding, and that is very good.

I mentioned writing a moment ago. Part of that whole process, I think, is thinking. I'll be able to latch onto one of those difficult experiences and I'll design something that shows the dynamics between us and I'll end up writing essays about all that.

**TJoW:** Yeah, when you're writing, it's "emotion recollected in tranquility." You need the experiences. You need a little distance from them to really get the insight.

**Langdon:** Who said that? Wordsworth, right?

**TJoW:** I believe it was Emerson, but I might be mistaken. I know it was one of them from around that period.

**Langdon:** It was not Thoreau.

**TJoW:** It was not Thoreau. No, no. [Edit to add: It was Wordsworth.]

**Langdon:** I just said that because I recognize the quote. I have used it. It's a beautiful quote. I like it a lot.

**TJoW:** I think we've covered things pretty well. There's a James Joyce book cover I discovered recently I'd like to send you...it seems like it's in a similar spirit to your work.

**Langdon:** The reason I'm still excited about my James Joyce painting, not because of the James Joyce figure-ground relationship, and not from being a Joyce scholar...

**TJoW:** God, it's a challenging thing to be a Joyce scholar.

**Langdon:** My brother had a friend who was a professor, an English professor in a Florida University, and my brother reported to me that his friend was using my work to explain Joyce to his classes. Now I didn't know what the hell that meant. I'm still not positive, but it encouraged me to try to read some of Joyce's books, which I failed at, but then I started reading about James Joyce and his life and his writing, and I did find a lot of resonance between what I was learning about him and his work and my work.



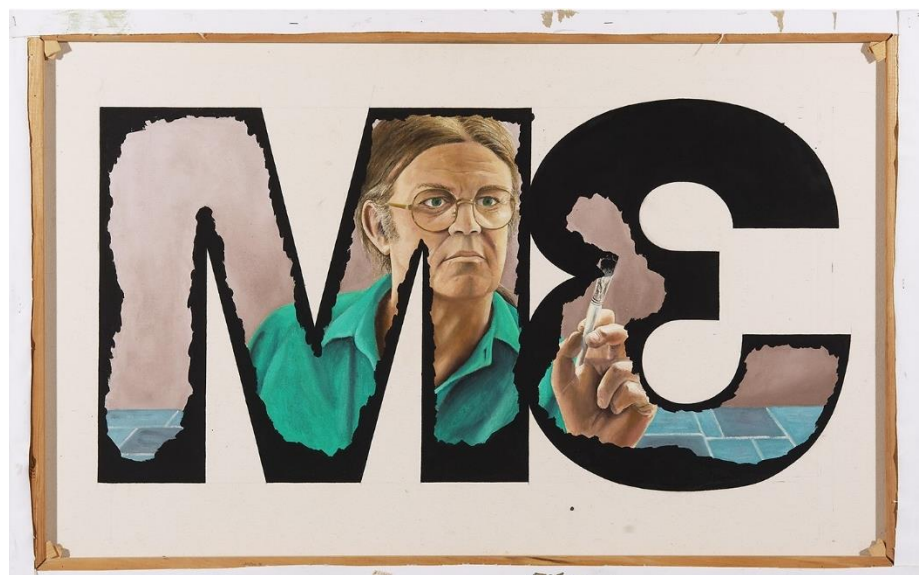
**TJoW:** There's definitely a sort of experimental spirit that his work and your work seem to have in common. You mentioned earlier that you followed a set of paintings until you were tired of them. And I feel like maybe another way to put that is that you'd exhausted all the creative possibilities that occurred to you. Which strikes me as what Joyce does. To the extent that I get him at all, he's definitely somebody who will say, *This chapter is going to be a story of the classroom, but it's also going to be a history of the universe,*

**Langdon:** That's exactly how I feel about my work.

Only after I had conceived of all the work that I could suck out of the yin-yang symbol, I decided I should read something about this. And I was a little blown away to find that everything I had read in the books about Taoism was stuff that I had already figured out from playing with the goddamn shapes.

**TJoW:** Well, that certainly makes you feel like you're going in the right direction.

**Langdon:** Yeah, that was self-affirming, obviously, but really a very good feeling to realize that.





## THEMING ARCH, 1 OF 3

T Campbell

In my Substack blog at <http://tcampbell.substack.net>, I explored the wordplay themes that could be spun out of a single word (inspired by a Darryl Francis piece). My most fertile subject, “arch,” offered results that I put into three installments. I present them here.

**Definitions:** *Arch* has two major root meanings: “upside-down U” and “superior.” The first stems from the Latin *arcus*, from which we get the somewhat similar *arc*. The second comes from the Greek *arkh-* or *arkhi-*, meaning “first,” “greatest,” “primeval.” That prefix passed through Latin as well.

The arch shape has applications in biology and art. A cat can *arch* its back, a foot can have an *arch*, a skeptical reader can *arch* an eyebrow. But arches show up most in architecture—yet the word *architecture* springs from that second meaning, not the first! (The *ecture* part comes from *tektion*, builder, or *teks*, to weave or fabricate.) Arches come in many styles: Gothic, Roman, Tudor, Moorish, semicircular, and horseshoe, for a start. Some are natural formations. A few examples of the most famous arches are below.

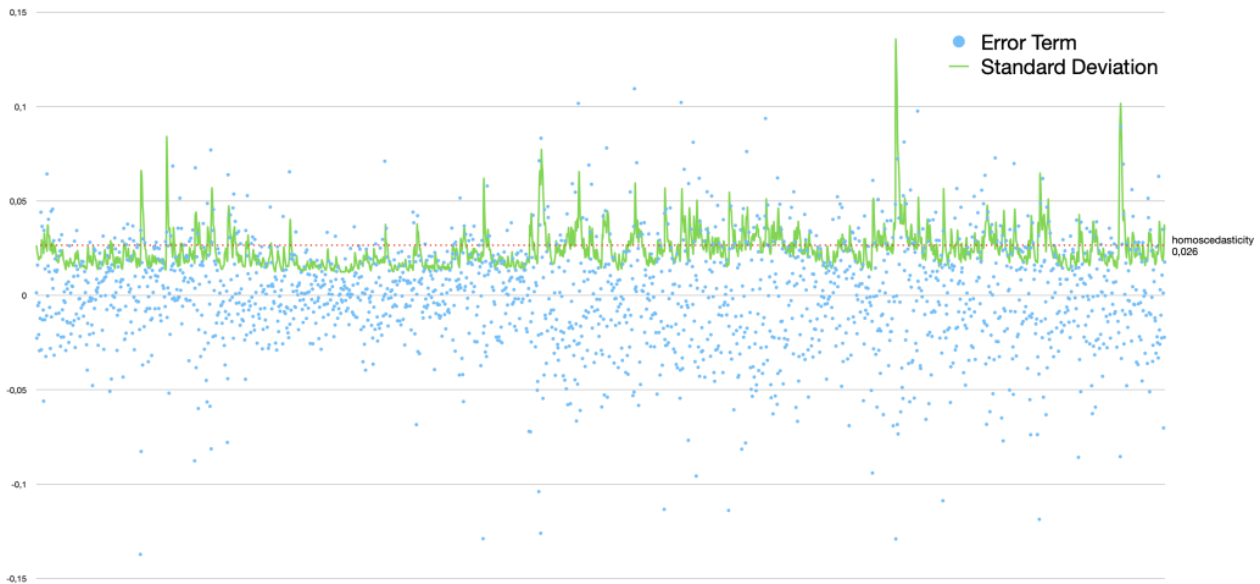


The second meaning often implies mischief or cold superiority: an *arch* remark is clever at others’ expense, and you’re more likely to hear about an *arch-nemesis* or *arch-villain* than an

*arch-hero*. It's not cut and dried: *archbishops* can be fine, depending on your feelings about Catholicism, and an *archmage* is sometimes good, sometimes evil. But those terms also sound a little archaic—and yes, the word *archaic* comes from the same root as that second meaning of *arch*, too. You can look that up in any etymological *archive*.

The Greek term *αρχη*, related to that second meaning, is best translated as “first principle.” Some philosophers considered *αρχη* the stuff of which the universe is made, but Plato and Aristotle thought of it more like a first law of thermodynamics.

*Arch* has a few other meanings. Some relate to *archery*. In statistics, *ARCH* stands for *autoregressive conditional heteroskedasticity*. *Autoregressive* means the value of each variable relies on earlier values, and *heteroskedastic* means that error ranges can increase or decrease. *ARCH* models can help estimate important things like how volatile a financial market is.



If you see a dot after *arch*, as in *arch.*, then it could stand for *archaism*, *architecture*, *architect*...or *archery* or *archipelago*.

*Arch* can be a nickname for *Archie*, which itself is a nickname for *Archibald* or *Archer*. So the nerdy question “Who is the greatest archvillain in comics history?” could be answered, “Reggie Mantle.” (But that’s kind of an arch answer.)



**Anagrams:** *Arch* has one common anagram, *char*, and one not-so-common one, *rach*, a dog that hunts by scent. *The rach ran up to the arch, sniffing the char on its wall*. Would a really good hunting dog be an *arch-rach*?

**Divisions:** In trigonometry, *h* can stand for *height* or *hypotenuse*, so the term *arc h* can be shorthand for the height of an arc.

**Rhymes:** Common rhymes for *arch* include *March*, *march*, *starch*, *larch*, and *parch*. A larch, like an arch, can be a feature in landscaping, so it seems like the most appropriate rhyme—but in poetic practice, *arch* is usually paired with *march* or *March*.

*I've seen your flag on the marble arch  
And love is not a victory march  
It's a cold and it's a broken hallelujah*

**Lipogram:** You can't get much out of the letters in *arch*, lipogram-wise. The best I can think of is this sports cheer, which one could imagine appearing in Archie Comics...

*Rah rah rah  
Cha-cha-cha  
Arch, Arch, Arch!*

(The nickname "Arch" also appears often in the classic sitcom *All in the Family*.)

If you pluralize to *arches*, though, the possibilities open up. One can now imagine *researchers' carcasses* under mysterious *harsh arches' access*, leading a wealthy garden owner to *reassess* his *recherché* decor. Shouldn't have picked it up from "Cursed Lawn Ornaments Ltd."

**Synonyms and Related Words:** In architectural terms, there aren't many pure synonyms for *arch*—*archway* is the only one that leaps to mind—but there are some related concepts. Of these, according to OneLook, *viaduct* is the most formal, *squinch* and *groined vault* the funniest. Its other meanings are much more common, found in concept clusters like *important*, *superior*, and *skilled*.

**Charades:** *Arch* is hiding inside many, many, many words—far too many to list here, though some of them appeared in the rhymes and meanings sections. There is [some dictionary support](#) for the word *architect*, which refers to the greatest of all architects—generally God Himself—and is the only word in my records to hold a double *arch*.

Many common phrases hide *arch* more effectively by dividing it among two words. The most common of these are *bar chart*, *war chest*, *cheddar cheese*, *star chamber*, *mouse-ear chickweed*, *star chart*, *Cesar Chavez*, *nuclear chemistry* (or *chemist*), *cedar chest*, and *grammar checker*. These all divide *arch* as *ar/ch*—no phrases divide it as *a/rch*, and only a few less common ones divide it as *arc/h*, like *arc hyperbolic*, *arc heating*, and noted news anchor *Marc Howard*.

There are, of course, even more kangaroo words and phrases that include the letters *a-r-c-h* in order, from *abnormal psychology* to *zebra orchid* (or *zygomatic arch*). Of these, some of the

most common (that don't have a-r-c-h all together) are *approach*, *handkerchief*, *parochial*, and *parachute*.

**Crosswords:** The most common clue for ARCH is "Bend." There are many cryptic clues for ARCH—one of my favorites is "Playful bow," which works as a double definition.

**Logo Design and Word Art:** There's no shortage of visual ideas for an *Arch* or arch-related logo, because the shape of an arch itself resembles a crude letter A. To the right is an interesting one from Shutterstock that works it into a lower-case a instead.



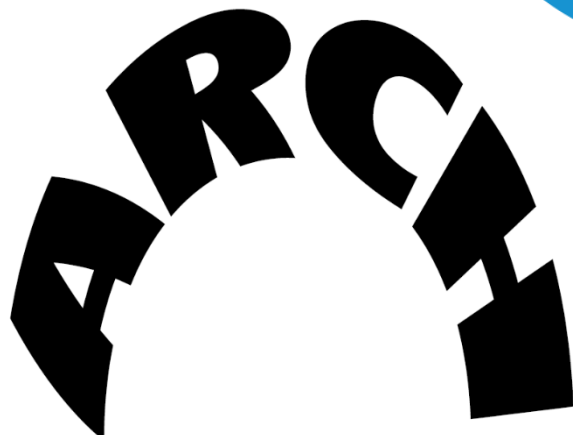
This sample by [Kanhaiya Sharma on Dribbble](#), takes a different approach by integrating the arch shape with the A and the R:



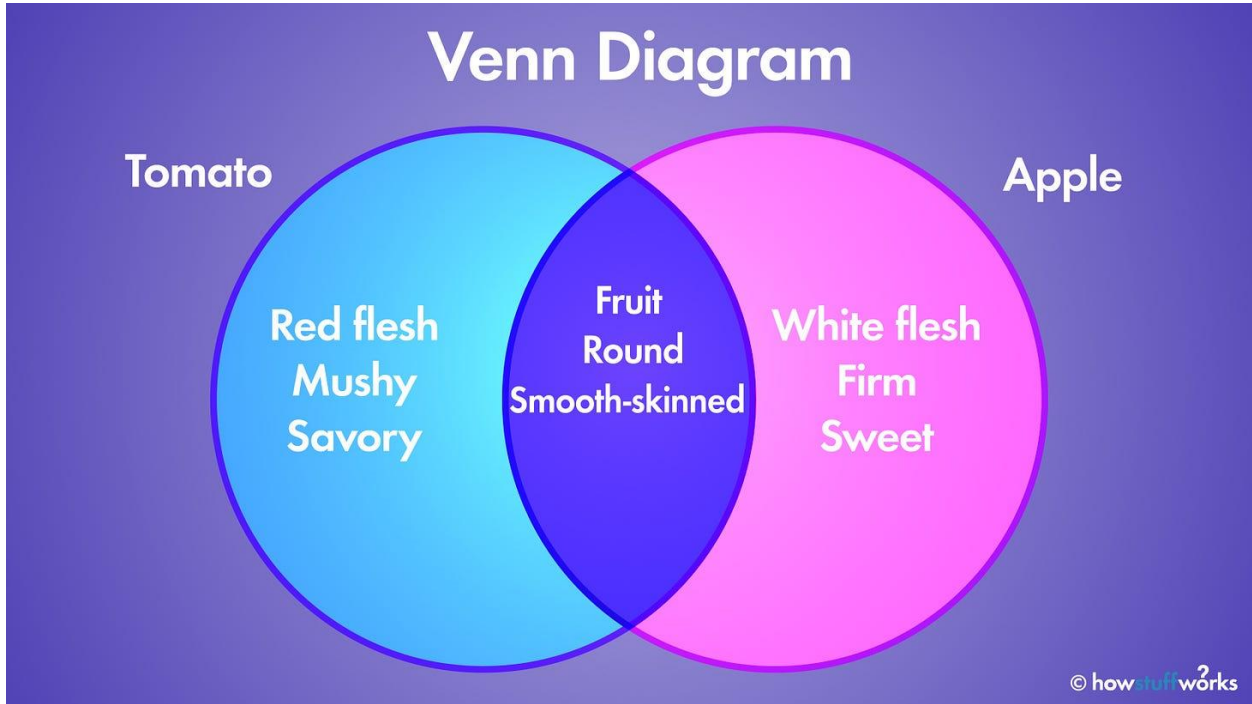
The best-known Arch logo, though, is the one for Arch Linux, with a slightly "weathered" effect and pyramidal outer shape suggesting an old stone monument, and an identifiable arch shape in its negative space.



Finally, you can distort full words into an arch shape, using a combination of what Photoshop calls the *arch effect* and simple stretching. See below for an example...



**Symbology:** The archlike symbol  $\cap$  is used to describe the intersection of two sets.  $A \cap B$  stands for the items that are part of both set A and set B—or the overlap you’ If set A is “characteristics of a tomato” and set B is “characteristics of an apple,” then  $A \cap B$  would be the overlap in the Venn diagram below:



The double intersection symbol  $\cap$  is much rarer, and it [doesn't even have a current Wiktionary definition](#) (never mind any listings in more restrictive resources!). Essentially,  $\cap$  is used for the intersection of *multiple* sets. The longer explanation is grounded in set theory, and it's a little too esoteric for a journal aimed at students of wordplay and not mathematicians. But the symbol's mere presence is a sign you're getting into the conceptual weeds.

There are a few more icons—emoji, that is—that don't have as firmly defined meanings but nevertheless recall an arch. These emoji's exact appearance varies from system to system, but this is an enlarged version of how they look on mine:



Darryl Francis continues the series on the next page!



## THEMING ARCH, 2 OF 3

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Back in early October 2024, T published on Substack three items called “Theming ARCH,” where he explored various themes around the word and the letters ARCH. Extensive as T’s explorations were, I decided to investigate some other themes around this innocent little word ARCH.

First off, let’s note that there are 24 different ways in which the letters of ARCH can be arranged, from ACHR to RHCA. Each of these sequences is a tetragram, a term used generally for any sequence of four letters. Is it possible to find words or names containing each of those 24 combinations from ARCH? There are easily over 700 words containing the sequence ARCH, and maybe 600 plus with the CHAR sequence. Yet some of the other sequences are much rarer, with some down in single figures or even zero.

My first stab at a set of results is below. Most of my offerings can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), but where an offering isn’t in the OED, I’ve mentioned a source for it. There are four where I’ve struggled to find solid offerings, **highlighted here in red**.

achr : **anachronism** : the placing of something in a period of time to which it does not belong, especially one which is earlier than its true date

acrh : **Macrhypena** : this is an early synonym, from 1873, for Hypena, a genus of moths; this appears in a list of synonyms at Wikipedia’s entry for Hypena

ahcr : **mullahcracy** : rule by Islamic religious leaders, or mullahs, listed by Wiktionary

ahrc : **sahrcely** : this is a spelling of ‘scarcely’ found only in an illustrative quotation in the OED. This word occurs in a quotation dated 1882 at the entry for the adjective ‘simple’ - it runs “Joe’s a bit better, but e’s mighty simple, ‘e canna stand sahrcely.” The source of this quote is given as *Glossary of West Worcestershire Words*. As Worcestershire is an English county, I wondered if the word might be shown in Joseph Wright’s *English Dialect Dictionary*, but I couldn’t find it there—shame!

arch : **arch** : a simple word that started the flurry of Theming ARCH material

arhc : **Arhcton** : this name appears just once in the whole of the OED, and is taken from an illustrative quotation at the entry “Charles’s Wain.” Why have I marked the sequence in red? The problem with the quotation is that it is dated OE, meaning Old English, which was a form of English as it existed between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The quote runs thus: “Arhcton hatte an tungol on norð dæle, se hæfð seofon steorran and is ge-haten septemtrio, þone hatað læwede menn Carleswæn.” This roughly translates into modern English as “Arcton is the name of a constellation in the north part, which has seven stars, and on that account is called by another name, septemtrio, which untaught men call carle’s-wain.” Arhcton and Arcton appear to be alternative names of the star Arcturus, also called Charles’s Wain. I think we need to find a more up-to-date word or name here.

cahr : **Cahroc** : this a variant spelling of “Karak,” an indigenous people of the Klamath river valley in north-western California

- carh : **carhop** : analogous to “bellhop,” this is a waiter or waitress who serves customers in their parked cars
- char : **char** : a small fish, also, to reduce by burning
- chra : **sepulchral** : of or pertaining to burial or a place of burial
- hacr : **methacrylate** : a salt or ester of methacrylic acid, especially any of its esters used in making resins by polymerization
- harc : **charcoal** : the black porous substance obtained as the solid residue in the imperfect combustion of wood, bones, and other vegetable or animal matter
- hcar : **healthcare** : the provision of care for the health of a person, community, etc. As a matter of interest, the *hcar* sequence also appears in North Carolina and South Carolina, albeit with intruding spaces
- hcra : **witchcraft** : magic or other supernatural practices
- hrac : **anthracite** : coal of a hard, dense, non-bituminous variety
- hrca : **Hrčava** : for the hrca sequence, the only solidly-spelled item I could find is this name of a village in the Czech Republic, listed in Wikipedia. It could be argued that this is imperfect because of the háček accent over the letter C. Another *hrca* sequence occurs in a two-word placename with an intrusive space:  
**Fluhr, California** According to various online websites, this is a place in Merced County, close to the town of Modesto. A few online sources say Fluhr is populated, but no population figures are given. However, my 1967 *Rand McNally Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide* says that Fluhr has no population – still, that was published almost 60 years ago, so maybe there’s been some population growth since then!
- rach : **parachute** : a device for slowing the fall of a person or object from a great height
- rahc : **Bozrah, Connecticut** : *rahc* is another sequence where I failed to find a solidly spelled word or name. The best I could find is **Bozrah, Connecticut**, a town in New London County, Connecticut. Wikipedia gives its 2018 population as about 2500. An alternative find is **menorah candles**, spelled in all lowercase, but still with an annoying space. Amazon has plenty of these for sale.
- rcah : **Marcahuamachuco** : Wikipedia lists this as an archeological site of pre-Incan ruins in the La Libertad Region of Peru. It has been referred to by archaeologists as the “Machu Picchu of the North”
- rcha : **merchant** : a person whose occupation is the purchase and sale of goods or commodities for profit
- rhac : **rhachitis** : another name for the disease rickets
- rhca : **Arthur H. Cash** : *rhca* is another failed sequence. To come up with anything for this sequence, I’ve had to resort to a name with two spaces, a period and one of the letters simply being an initial. Arthur Hill Cash (1922-2016) was an American scholar of 18th-century English literature – Wikipedia has an entry for him

The four sequences with dubious solutions are *arhc*, *hrca*, *rahc*, and *rhca*. I have a complete listing of all four-letter sequences (tetragrams) appearing in *Webster’s New International Dictionary, Second Edition*—produced by RCA in 1963—and can confirm that none of these tetragrams is listed there. Can readers improve on my finds for these four tetragrams?

## THEMING ARCH, 3 OF 3

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The sequence *arch* can appear pretty much anywhere embedded in longer words. Here are some examples where the sequence *arch* appears in every position in words of length 4 to 15 letters, nearly all taken from either *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) or *Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition* (W2).

It can appear in positions 1 to 4 in words of every length from 4 and 15 letters.

**arch, archy, archer, archive, archaism, archetype, architrave, archipelago, architecture, archbishopric, archiepiscopal, archaeopteryxes**

It can appear in positions 2 to 5 in words of every length from 5 and 15 letters.

**larch, parchy, marcher, parchesi, marchland, parchments, parchedness, carcharodont, marchionesses, parchmentizing, marchantiaceous**

It can appear in positions 3 to 6 in words of every length from 6 and 15 letters.

**search, anarchy, searcher, anarchist, starchiest, searchlight, unarchdeacon, exarchateship, searchableness, unarchitectural**

It can appear in positions 4 to 7 in words of every length from 7 and 15 letters.

**monarch, menarche, autarchic, monarchist, emparchment, subarchitect, disarchbishop, antarchistical, monarchomachist**

It can appear in positions 5 to 8 in words of every length from 8 and 15 letters.

**research, oligarchy, overarched, hierarchies, unsearchable, Petrarchizing, hierarchically, hierarchization**

It can appear in positions 6 to 9 in words of every length from 9 and 15 letters.

**matriarch, patriarchy, frogmarched, matriarchies, squirarchical, protoarchitect, patriarchically**

It can appear in positions 7 to 10 in words of every length from 10 and 15 letters.

**wordsearch, squirearchy, unresearched, antianarchist, pseudoarchaist, pseudoarchaists**

It can appear in positions 8 to 11 in words of every length from 11 and 15 letters.

**ecclesiarch, gymnasiarchy, unpatriarchal, antimonarchist, antimonarchists**

It can appear in positions 9 to 12 in words of every length from 12 and 15 letters.

**countermarch, squatterarchy, countermarches, antihierarchist**

It can appear in positions 10 to 13 in words of every length from 13 and 15 letters.

**antipatriarch, aristomonarchy, antepatriarchal**

It can appear in positions 11 to 14 in words of every length from 14 and 15 letters.

**pseudo-Plutarch, saccharostarchy**



It can appear in positions 12 to 15 in words of length 15 letters.

**protoheresiarch**

Note that one of the words in the above lists is **marked in red**. **Pseudo-Plutarch** is a poor example because it is both hyphenated and unlisted in OED/W2, appearing only as a main entry in Wikipedia. Is there a better example of a 14-letter word ending *arch*?

There are plenty of longer words containing the *arch* sequence, but not necessarily in every position in those words. Here are a few random examples which caught our attention:

**architypographer, anarchosyndicalism, nonarchitectonic, cytoarchitecture, hyperarchepiscopal ,  
promonarchicalness, antimonarchicalness , antihierarchical, zoologicoarchaeologist, protopatriarchal,  
archlexicographer, archicleistogamous, anarchoindividualist**

Is there another tetragram (four-letter sequence) which is even more fecund than *arch*? I might hazard that *rate* can be found in every position for every length of word between 4 and 15 letters, and that there are probably many examples longer than 15 letters.

## LETTERS, LENGTHS, AND LIGATURES

T Campbell

In *Word Ways* #4.2 (1971), Darryl Francis rolled out four lists of words and phrases tied to letters—two where the word’s length was linked to its final letter, two where the letter was isolated in a hyphenate or phrase. I thought I’d do a 2024 update, adding another pair where the word’s length is linked to its *initial* letter.

As usual, I don’t claim any special genius here, just access to different tools and dictionaries than Francis had in 1971, and the continual evolution of language and its studies. When finding a word was easy, I tended to favor the common ones. But in some cases, I counted myself lucky to find one example, and in a few cases I danced on the edge of acceptability. So let’s dive in...

### Length and Initial Letter

Here we have a one-letter word that begins with a, a two-letter word that begins with b, and so on...and conversely, a twenty-six-letter word beginning with a, a twenty-five-letter word beginning with b, and so on.

**a, by, cap, data, error, filter, gateway, hydrogen, important, journalism, kleptomania, longitudinal, manufacturing, neutralization, ophthalmologist, pharmacokinetics, quadrilateralness, representativeness, straightforwardness, tetrahydrocannabinol, undistinguishableness, ventriculosubarachnoid, [Wettererkundungsstaffel](#), xanthonoxypropanolamines, [yesterday-today-and-tomorrow](#), [zinc-dialkyldithiophosphate](#).**

**[acetoxycetylaminofluorene](#), [bromochlorosalicylanilide](#), [cholangiopancreatography](#), [dichlorodifluoromethane](#), electroencephalography, [Frankensteinification](#), glucocorticosteroids, hyperparathyroidism, interrelationships, jurisprudentially, knowledgeability, lightheadedness, multiplication, nationalistic, organization, performance, quarantine, reference, standard, through, united, value, with, Xer, yo, z.**

*Frankensteinification* is the loosest of these words: the dictionary it comes from is no longer online. I considered a few alternatives, including *Feldmarschallleutnant* (a German lieutenant field marshal) and some other chemical terms. But sue me: I find it very easy to understand what it means to “Frankensteinify” something, to turn it into a patchwork parody of its natural state, and that and the long form of “EEG” are the two big finds in those first eight letters.

### Length and Final Letter

Same as above, only it’s the final letters that relate to the length of the word:

**a, ab, arc, said, there, itself, nothing, research, spaghetti, [Narayanganj](#), electroshock, international, hypothyroidism, differentiation, [Chichicastenango](#), interrelationship, [Anctoville-sur-Boscq](#), auriculoventricular, radiopharmaceuticals, otorhinolaryngologist,**

[Yamagawaokachiyogamizu](#), [NAVEDTRAPRODEV CENCORDIV](#), neoconservative-worldview, [Ocatarinetabellatchitchix](#), uvulopalatopharyngoplasty, abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz.

hemangioendothelioblastoma, seven-hundred-watt-light-bulb, antihypercholesterolemic, metabolically-challenged, dehydroepiandrosterone, reichsberufswettkampf, contradistinguishing, hundred-and-eightieth, intertransversarii, [Chachaura-Binaganj](#), [Dneprodzerzhinsk](#), anthropological, utilitarianism, participation, Michelangelo, partnership, [Qaraqalpaq](#), character, analysis, without, bureau, Negev, know, six, by, z.

A few stretchy ones here, even beyond the obscure place names. I opted for *Michelangelo* as not only a famous name but as a synonym for “great artist”: *He’s a real Michelangelo*. *Ocatarinetabellatchitchix* is a character in *Asterix*, a comics series that features many such comically tortured names. *Neoconservative-worldview* isn’t usually hyphenated, but it can be when modifying something else.

*Seven-hundred-watt-light-bulb* is the only entry on these lists that’s purely my own invention: I think of it in the sentence “That’s a seven-hundred-watt-light-bulb idea!” I know, I know. I just *couldn’t leave a single blank space!* In my defense, such wattages do exist in light bulbs today.

## Letter-Hyphen-Word

**a-bomb, b-girl, C-section, D-day, e-tailer, f-stop, G-string, h-hour, I-beam, J-horror, k-capture, L-dopa, m-commerce, n-tuple, O-ring, p-value, Q-tip, R-rated, s-curve, t-shirt, U-boat, v-chip, W-2, x-ray, y-axis, z-score.**

If you’re wondering why I left out more obvious e-hyphenates like *e-mail* and *e-commerce*, it’s because many of them are increasingly non-hyphenated: *email*, *ecommerce*. Besides, I wanted to make each word unique if I could, and *m-commerce* is a more recent concept. *W-2*, rarely spelled out as *W-two*, is a widely discussed tax form: using a number was a little stretchy but still seemed like the best option. I stayed away from words that could pair with almost any letter, like *shaped* (*A-shaped*, *W-shaped*...).

## Word-Space-Letter

**type A, hepatitis B, middle C, 3-D, ukiyo-e, Asian F, zero-g, big H, Am I?, Dr. J, Special K, the L, immunoglobulin M, virus N, Jell-O, substance P, coenzyme Q, linking r, long s, Model T, non-U, flying V, Bill W, Malcolm X, Generation Y, Jay-Z.**

This one was pretty hard: you can see the exact point that I gave up and started letting proper names in.

## 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 resources can be from anytime in the last couple of years.

Longtime contributor Anil sent me his three newest books for review. I described *Haywire Way Higher* and *101 Animal Universes* in the prior issue of *TJoW*, based on their jacket copy, but can now confirm I've enjoyed them thoroughly. The same goes for his third book, *Dope Brands for the Under-the-Counterculture*, a catalog of fictitious weed products (at least I *think* they're fictitious), described via puns and other wordplay.

"Eris: A Wordplay in Catullus 40" by Simon Trafford in *The Classical Quarterly* 74(1), argues for a single instance of wordplay in one of the most famous Latin poets.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/classical-quarterly/article/eris-a-wordplay-in-catullus-40/C1FB199D62E6792E1BE93406227783B4>

"From Sentence Embeddings to Large Language Models to Detect and Understand Wordplay" by Ryan Rony Dsilva, is a conference paper found in the book series *Lecture Notes on Computer Science*. It concerns work on JOKER 2023 and its relative ability to parse various forms of verbal humor. [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-71736-9\\_15](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-71736-9_15)

"Lexical Ambiguity Represented through Wordplay from @Epicdadjokes Instagram Posts," by Yulia Hardiani, Meida Rabia Sihite, Yunita Mutiara Harahap, in *Excellence* 4(1), is a study and statistical analysis of a popular Instagram account that markets itself as a source of "corny" humor. <https://siakad.univamedan.ac.id/ojs/index.php/excellence/article/view/834/532>

"Puns and pain in Palestine: black comedy as cultural resistance in Ahmed Masoud's *The Shroud Maker*" by Natasha W. Vashisht, University of Toronto, Canada, *The European Journal of Humour Research* 12 (3)53–66, studies wordplay in a modern, fraught political environment.

<https://europeanjournalofhumour.org/ejhr/article/view/929/796>

## 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.)

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

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

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Matthew Abate**, Ph.D., is an Applied Mathematician from Rahway, NJ. He enjoys creating art with self-referential and self-descriptive aspects, often writing puzzles, patterns, music, and wordplay. Matt is the author of "Autograms," Issue #4 of TJoW, as well as "Puzzle Poetry" which appears in this issue. Personal Site: <https://mattabate.com/>.

**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*, *Gilded 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.

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

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

I'm a recreational linguistics enthusiast, thoroughly captivated by what Leo Rosten once called "the mischief of language." I've written two published books in this genre: My celebration of spoonerisms, *Cruel and Unusual Puns* (Dell, 1991), received rave reviews and quickly went into a second printing, selling in total almost 40,000 copies. The second book is *Acronymania* (Dell, 1993), a serious/funny look at abbreviations.

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

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

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

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

**Sandy Weisz** is the commissioner of The Mystery League. He writes and runs puzzle games for a living—he's built custom hunts for Google, The Field Museum, Alinea Restaurant, Field Notes, The Art Institute, and others. The escape room he designed with The House Theatre of Chicago was named one of the top rooms in the country. He is a member of the National Puzzlers League and is a frequent contributor to the NPR Sunday puzzle. He lives in Chicago with his wife, two kids, and a dog.

## ANSWERS

### Goof-Offs

Beach grains

S T A I N E D

Lobe locale

B A R B A R I A N

Knotted neckwear

+ T I E

Magic word

+ A B R A

Tinted, as glass

S T A I N E D

Brute

B A R B A R I A N

Answer: STAINED

Answer: BARBARIAN

Pulls apart

R I P S

Clog or pump, e.g.

S H O E

"That's a shame"

+ A L A S

Frigid

+ C O L D

Train ticket

R A I L P A S S

Taught

S C H O O L E D

Answer: RAIL PASS

Answer: SCHOOLED

Salon jobs?

C U T S

Change for a five

+ O N E S

Earl's wife

C O U N T E S S

Answer: COUNTESS



First name in honesty	A	B	E
Court divider	N	E	T
Hit the slopes	+ S	K	I
Cleopatra killer	S N A K E B I T E		

Answer: SNAKE BITE

Kid a king, e.g.	J	E	S	T
"___ and out"	O	V	E	R
Produced	+ M	A	D	E
Death Valley locale	M O J A V E D E S E R T			

Answer: MOJAVE DESERT

Sack	B	A	G
Director Howard	R	O	N
Boxing great	A	L	I
Massachusetts cape	+ C	O	D
Pre-marathon practice	C A R B O L O A D I N G		

Answer: CARBO-LOADING



