

COLLOQUY



On the day of the 2008 Summer Solstice, we spent several delightful hours meeting with Martin Gardner at his home in Norman, Oklahoma. The picture shows the editor discussing with Martin the manuscript of his soon to be published book on Word Play. The tentative title is *The Colossal Book of Word Play* and Sterling Publishing will be handling it.

His newest book, just out, is *The Fantastic Fiction of Gilbert Chesterton* (Battered Box, ISBN 978-1-55246-803-6). This year is the

100th anniversary of Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* (see the July 7 and 14 issue of "The New Yorker" for Adam Gopnik's piece about "the genius of G.K. Chesterton") and Martin's book is a welcome addition to the Chesterton literary criticism.

There are at least a half dozen other Gardner books in the works, one of which *The Adventures of Humphrey Huckleberry* (ISBN 978-1-55246-808-1) will collect Martin's 8 years of columns from "Humpty Dumpty Magazine" for whom he worked prior to his "Scientific American" stint.

Starting with this issue of Word Ways, we will reprint 20 of his poems from "Humpty Dumpty" that were reprinted in the now out of print 1969 Simon and Schuster book *Never Make Fun Of A Turtle, My Son* (illustrated by John Alcorn). These poems will appear from time to time as fillers.

We have learned that Dana Richards (richards@cs.gmu.edu) is writing a biography of Gardner and requests relevant information from any of our readers.

Or course, much, much more was discussed with Martin including his reminiscences about his multitude of friends. For instance, we spent some time trading stories about the noted mathematician John Horton Conway. Conway is famous for his popular books on mathematics which we hope can be catalogued in some future issue of Word Ways.

I cannot resist relating a Conway story. I had always thought that Conway himself was responsible for the wonderful numerical sequence 1, 11, 21, 1211, 111221, . . . So, what comes next? According to Marcus DuSautoy (*Symmetry*, 2008 Harper) Conway was in fact stumped for several months when someone else gave him the sequence. When DeSautoy's nine-year old son Tomer was shown the sequence, he immediately solved it, and said it was similar to a poem passed around in his school.

11 was a race horse
12 was 12
1111 race
12112

If this is not enough of a clue for the reader to get the sequence, see Answers and Solutions.

On other matters, Arthur I. Schulman was happy to see the article “Bailey’s Hexameters” in the May issue. He notes that there are at least a couple of typos in Bailey’s original, which are faithfully reproduced in the WW article: “fortis” (in 777777) should be “foris”, and “puti” (in 132436) should be “puto”. See Schulman’s article on Baileyisms in this issue.

James Puder adds that in the May WW, Ross Eckler asked if a set of word interlocks could be found in which some three-letter word appears in every possible position in a set of 20 six-letter words. After a bit of monkeying around, I came up with this set: APExes, APpEar, APicEs, APogeE, AsPEns, ApPIEs, AlPinE, AliPEd, AgaPaE, AsloPE, nAPEry, hAPpEn, rAPpeE, dApPEr, sAmPIE, cAnaPE, shAPEs, stAPIE, frApPE, scrAPE.

Ross Eckler comments on the May issue. Another enjoyable issue, filled with thought-provoking articles! It was especially nice to see new contributors in addition to the old reliables.

In Look Back, I should have recognized Susan Thorpe's Unique Generic Locks in the Aug 2007 Word Ways as another article entirely devoted to word interlocks, albeit of a special type (having constituent words constructed from palindromes, Miami words, tautonyms, etc.). Mea culpa!

Bailey's Hexameters was, as you indicate, a predecessor of the sort of wordplay emphasized by Oulipo. However, it must have taken considerable work on the part of the reader to generate the random poetry.

It was quite a surprise to see the Win Emmons article on mathematical puns, as contrasted with his usual palindromic fare.

I found Susan Thorpe's article on Gigantic words (ones with different pronunciations of the same vowels) fascinating. I enjoyed the three crosswords, as well as Dave Morice's many lighthearted items.

Alan Frank writes “I am a long time subscriber, but inactive as a contributor since becoming a father. I take credit for finding (in the pre-computer days) a solidly-spelled modern word with four Ys, and have a somewhat-related discovery to relate: a term containing J, Q, X, and Z.

In bridge, a “squeeze” is a play in which a defender is forced to make a discard, but whatever he discards will be advantageous to the declarer. A “jettison squeeze” is a much rarer play in which declarer has adequate winners, but due to a blockage is unable to take them all. Based on a defender’s discard, declarer is able to jettison an unneeded blocking winner from one hand. A puzzle in the August issue of The Bridge World magazine featured a position described as an “extra-winner jettison squeeze” in which multiple winning cards were discarded.”

Joseph Teeters comments: This just in. Obama will establish his national HQ in Obamaha, Nebraska.

P. S. A "plimp" is more than plump, but not as large as a blimp. Thus, to be tactful, never tell someone they are the size of a blimp; just say they are plimp.
Caution (disclaimer): While I am almost sure that the tact involved would be recognized and appreciated, I have not actually used "plimp" in a social setting.

Mike Morton said he enjoyed the May Word Ways greatly! I saw mention of the Odd Topics Society. Wanting to know more, I googled and found http://www.albion.edu/pleiad/Fall_2005/issue9/features/features4.asp , which claims Albion College is home to the only known Odd Topics Society (OTS). Unique in its existence, OTS allows people to share their unusual > interests and passions with others.

John Kondelik, library director, founded OTS in 1996 after receiving inspiration from a similar, now extinct, group at Butler University.

Perhaps the extinction explains the dodologo (a very hard word to type, by the way).

Doug McIlroy adds that those Scrabble mavens that Dick Wolfsie wonders about in WW Feb 2008 are awesome indeed. I played a tournament-level guy just once. He kindly let me take all the time I wanted rather than the regulation one minute per move. And I made the most of it. In a crescendo of brilliance, I laid my last seven tiles down for the most triumphant finish imaginable: a 50-point bonus and two triple word scores. I had never seen such a play before and I haven't seen one since.

But the pro still beat me by 100 points.

Darryl Francis reminds us that the transposal pair MARSIPOBRANCHIATA/BASIPARACHROMATIN has long been recognised as one of the best, long, well-mixed, single-word transposal pairs.

Playing around with some words today, I noticed that both of these mutual transposals can be spelled out from the letters of: PRESIDENT BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA, leaving the letters BDEEEKNSSU unused.

I'm sure Dmitri Borgmann would have evidenced this as proving the power of logology!