COLLOQUY

SIR JEREMY MORSE responded to **ROSS ECKLER'S** February riddle in "Look Back". He writes:

Many thanks for this month's Word Ways and for including my two poems in it.

I am particularly interested by Ross Eckler's article about the 19th-century riddle. He makes a plausible case for FAME=notoriety as the solution (though = celebrity would fit bettor, since few would lament the loss of notoriety). I would like to propose instead a related solution, GOSSIP=tittle-tattle, which is after all a vehicle of fame. I make my case by comment on the following lines.

And am furnished with many a strife – Gossip is often rebuked
I burn friend and foe – Very true of gossip
And my evenings I end with a pipe – Victorian men gossiped in smoking-rooms
Unless I am met by a stranger – You can't gossip about someone un-known to you
I am chaste – Irrelevant to fame, and wrong about much modern gossip, but the author may be thinking of self-righteous gossip about other people's failings
To court I ne'er go – Gossip is not admissible as evidence
If I add any more to what's said before – in relation to fame, these lines can only carry their surface meaning: in relation to gossip, they are much more pointed, since they describe exactly what gossip does

I would be very interested to know what you (and Ross) make of this suggestion. I would never have thought of it if Ross had not started me on the right track.

RAY LOVE and his solution to the same riddle:

I read the attached delightful poem about chess by a 16-year old. Halfway through the poem I encountered this line, "The jolly knights grin, for when they know it is time to go in, the equines will jump over friend and foe to wherever they are instructed to go." The phrase "friend and foe" leapt off the page and I knew I had read it somewhere else - yes, it was in the second stanza of the riddle.
Could the answer to the riddle be Chessmen (except the Queen and King)?
Yes, I answered, after I reread the riddle. Here are my thoughts:

Stanza 1

Could apply to many things, therefore essentially meaningless -Chessmen don't sleep and pay no regard to the light

Stanza 2

"Loss/gain and pleasure/pain" - Chessmen capturing and being captured
"And am punished with many a stripe" - ("stripe" meaning rank, power) - being threatened or captured
by an opposing chess piece in a superior power position
"To diminish my woe, I burn friend and foe" - to survive the battle, sometimes another chess piece (friend)
must be sacrificed
"And my evenings I end with a pipe (in the room)" -
stereotypically, chess was often played in the evenings
by men who were smoking a pipe, ostensibly for contemplative purposes

Stanza 3

A description of a game of chess and what happens to the chess pieces - if you come in my way you will be
in danger of being captured
"And ne'er miss my road" - each chess piece can only be moved in distinct ways; their path is defined

Stanza 4

"I am chaste" (Bishop), "I am young" (Pawn),
"I am lusty" (Knight), " I am strong" (Rook)
"And my habits oft change in a day" - the myriad moves in chess
"To court (a royal venue) I ne'er go" - although royalty I may be, I am confined to a chessboard
"Am no lady nor beau" - not the Queen or King
"Yet as frail (subject to capture) and fantastic (can make a brilliant move) as they"

Stanza 5

Another description of a game of chess and what happens to the chess pieces
"I live a short time" - chess pieces
"I die in my prime" - chess pieces
"Lamented by all who possess me" - a chess player's remorse at losing pieces
"I'm afraid you will easily guess me" - "me" refers to
the singular entity of Chessmen

Hopefully, I didn't overthink this. Of course, mine is not a perfect solution and is subject to argument. There is one thing that bothers me, however. Why are the King and Queen excluded in the riddle?
I have no explanation except maybe it is a riddle within the riddle. Did the author of this

riddle get the last laugh by purposely making the search for the answer as difficult and thought-provoking as the game of chess? Were we rooked?

ROSS ECKLER comments:

Sir Jeremy Morse"s "gossip" solution I think as good as mine, if not better (the "to court I ne'er go" seems particularly apt). Interestingly, neither "fame" nor "gossip" is the solution to any of the 1448 riddles in Mark Bryant's Dictionary of Riddles (1990). However, we both encounter inexplicable elements, so the true answer may well be something unthought of. I couldn't find the "Drawing Room Scrap Sheets" discussed on the Internet, though some similarly-named material did appear. Perhaps Sir Jeremy has access to English sources (the British Museum?) which might reveal the author's answer, or contemporary readers' attempts.

ANIL writes:

Regarding mondegrens, there is a whole book of them that I enjoyed and recommend, Martin Toseland's *The Ants Are My Friends* (2007, Portico: London).

In February 2010 Solomon Golomb called for more "odd homonym attacks". These are a special variety of "signature puns" which I coined with many examples in the November 2006 issue (as a quiz), except that mine were homophonic puns on *whole names* of actual people and aimed to characterise but only occasionally insult them. I've reviewed that article and extracted these surname-only examples that might fit Solomon's type, although many are only mildly mocking without being out and out and out insults. And some are "homophonies" or imperfect homophones.

Allen Ailin', **Bin Laden** Bent-Lot Den, **Caesar** Seizer, **Diaz** De Ass, **Eckler** Heckler, **Franklin** Fur-Ranklin", **Hoffman** "Off" Man, **Korsakov** Course Sick Of, **Leary** Leery, **Pasteur** Pest Tour, **Reagan** Ray Gun (This one's been around since star wars.), **Thoreau** Throw! (No, throw laurels!), **Vonnegut** "Funny" Gut, **Wayne** Wane!

SCOT MORRIS asks for reader help to find the shortest and longest two and three syllable words. He recalls that "I" is the shortest one-syllable word and "strengths" is the longest.

MARTIN GARDNER was asked by Alan Jackson of Cardiff, Wales if BRICKLEHAMPTON is the longest place name in England with no repeated letters.

DARRYL FRANCIS found in NI3 the word REPETITEUR (a coach or opera singers). Its 10 letters can be typed on the top row of a keyboard.