COLLOQUY

Webster's Dictionary defines colloquy as mutual discourse. Readers are encouraged to submit additions, corrections, and comments about earlier articles appearing in **Word Ways**. Comments received up to a month prior to publication of an issue will appear in it.

In "The Mathematics of Words" in the November **Word Ways**. the editor asked "Are there any seven-letter Abelian square-free words in English?" As pointed out by Philip Cohen and The Word Wurcher, he should have made it clear that he was looking for words matching the three maximum-length patterns abcbabc, abacaba or abacbab, all constructed from an alphabet restricted to three different letters. The editor's cachaça example was somewhat flawed; the Word Wurcher noted that it "really has four, ç never being confused with c in Brazilian Portuguese (from which it comes)."

One can, of course, ask for the longest Abelian square-free words in English using more than three letters. Philip Cohen believes that the longest one in Webster's using four letters is **taratantara**, the longest ones using five letters **nonintention, acetoacetate, senescencies, recrescences** and **taratantaras**, and the longest one using six letters **intertrinitarian**.

The word pneumOnoultramicrOscopicsilicOvolcanokoniOsis was misspelled in the article, and its cadence of length four mislabeled; the correct form is given above. Note that the -coniosis version adds a fifth cadence of length 3. Alan Frank has researched the longest Websterian cadences for various spacings:

spacing 2: hUmUhUmUnUkUnUkUapuaa (8), mOnOgOnOpOrOus (6)
spacing 3: noNcoNdeNsiNg eNgiNe (6), EffErvEscEncE, sigmOidOprOctOstOmy, unExpEriEncEdnEss (5)
spacing 5: NoncoNtamiNatioN (4)
spacing 11: TransubstanTiantionalisT, syNgenesiotraNsplantatioN (3)

The missing spacings are dominated by the listed ones; for example, the cadence of spacing 4 also has length 4 (StreSsleSsneSs, dAcryAdenAlgiA), and cadences of length 3 can be found with all spacings from 6 to 11. Note that the cadence of length 4 in P-45 has been omitted from this table; this word has an unfair advantage because of its great length.

Again setting P-45 aside, Alan Frank believes that there are no Websterian words with more than three distinct cadences of at least length 3; three double-three examples are coNsubsTaNTIaTloNlst (spacings 7,3,2), NoNINsTlTuTIon (spacings 2,4,2) and succESSlESSnESS (spacings 4,4,4). The latter example is somewhat less interesting because of the regularity of its spacing; it can be regarded instead as an example of a thrice-repeated trigram. Ignoring the

hyphens, nIEvIE-nIEvIE-nIck-nack has cadences of lengths four and five, and tANgANtANgAN has two cadences of length four.

> The Word Wurcher writes "The best completion of the graffito JESUS SAVES that I have ever seen was AT BANK OF AMERICA." Charles Suhor suggests graffiti permutations based on visual puns, such as JESUS SAVES / CHARLES IVES or BACH LIVES / BURL IVES. These are closely related to Suhor's Poemutations, a word-play form in which various subsets of a letter sequence are chosen (without rearrangement) to spell out different messages (see "The Poet's Corner" in the November 1974 Word Ways); the editor remembers a six-letter advertising sign in Washington, D.C. in the 1940s which sequentially blinked EAT AT EWARTS. Philip Cohen wonders "I'm dubious about the usefulness of tha analysis he [John Henrick in "On Writing Readable Graffiti"] constructs on it but the examples carried me through it happily."

Reaction to Bo Mitchell's article "The Great Oxymoron Contest" was decidedly mixed. Philip Cohen wrote "Some good, some bad, a welcome list on the whole" and John Henrick wondered what William Buckley might have thought of this contest, having sponsored one of his own in the National Review about a year ago. David Shulman characterized Mitchell as a "foxy moron", adding that many of the examples in his lists were not really oxymorons except by a long stretch of the imagination. The Word Wurcher said the article was "distinguished by most of the examples not being oxymorons" and felt that virgin birth and Immaculate Conception would be offensive to Catholics. (The editor agrees; these should have been modified by asterisks, indicating that the oxymoron depends on the reader's viewpoint.) The Word Wurcher comments "quite aside from any doctrinal meaning, virgin birth is merely a statement of fact because everyone born is a virgin at birth .. a tautology, if anything witty."

John Henrick offered the most thoughtful commentary on the subject:

> Possibly there would be some advantage in dichotomizing the list into deliberate and accidental oxymorons, with a few more deletions of spurious entries. The deliberate oxymorons are those which have been carefully selected at one time for their impact through the deliberate juxtaposition of contrasting terms. Items such as idiot savant, agree to disagree, tragicomic, stagflation and day dream belong in this class. Accidental oxymorons are those which are of primary interest, since, like malapropisms, they constitute an unintended misuse of language. They include such terms as holy war, fast food, even odds, pretty ugly, and liquid gas. Like malapropisms, they capture our interest because they are both naive and ludicrous; and like good malapropisms they are uncommon. Not many appear on the contest list. Spurious oxymorons are terms in which the contradictory element is lacking, or like beauty, only in the eye of the beholder. Terms of this type which have survived your preliminary purge include California champagne, go for broke, dry mop, dull knife, and liquid hydrogen. The term established trend could justifiably be

> called an instance of redundancy, rather than oxymoron. The contradiction, if any, in unmatched set, motor home, or peace activist is elusive, to say the least.

He went on to define a fourth category, the orthographic oxymoron, giving the two examples of **Noyes** ("silly but cute") and **monopoly**. Both he and The Word Wurcher noted that the **-poly** in **monopoly** has nothing to do with the prefix **poly-** meaning 'many'. Finally, Henrick proposed a few oxymorons overlooked by Mitchell: cherry tart, most good for the most people, novel short story, green orange, exceptional standards, officer's mess orderly, fun run, practically useless, needless poverty, hopelessly optimistic, flight remains, and vacuum packed. Timothy Wheeler noted **mini Big Bangs** in the July 18, 1983 issue of Time, **Super Low Foods** in South Chicago, and **Super Standard Food Stores** in Indianapolis.

> Alan Frank writes "Kyle Corbin continues to use outdated and misinterpreted rules for his Scrabble articles. Words with one-letter bases (e.g. KS) are not allowed under the current rules .. As [Dorland's Medical Dictionary]'s policy is not to provide explicit part of speech labels, one must consider words to be implicitly labeled on the basis of their definitions." He goes on to reopen the closed Scrabble board for Webster's Second with the word TELEVOX.

Solomon Golomb, the author of "Amalgamate, Chemist!" in this issue, notes that he is an anagrammatic twin of Gary S. Bloom, author of "Ensnaring the Elusive Eodermdrome" in August 1980: S.GOLOMB has the same letters as G.S.BLOOM. Bloom at one time was a graduate student of Professor Golomb, and they coauthored several papers. Bloom, however, had trouble convincing people that he really existed, for readers assumed that G.S.BLOOM was merely a Golombian pseudonym!

> In the November Kickshaws, Martin Gardner discovered that the riddle "How did the man with big feet put on his pants? Over his head" had been cited as the "latest new joke" in the diary of Reverend Edward Lee Hicks who heard it from Lewis Carroll [in 1870]. David Shulman notes that this riddle (more accurately, piece of nonsense) is much older; "A LARGE FOOT - Sam Slick says he knew a man down East whose feet were so big that he had to pull his pantaloons over his head" appeared on page 88/3 in Volume 6 of The New-Yorker of 1838.

In his August 1983 Kickshaws, Eugene Ulrich asked whether **Word Ways** readers could discover words with more than nine different letters in which no adjacent alphabetic letters were used. Jeremy Morse suggested the ten-letter **taperingly** in the November Colloquy. In a computer search of Webster's Second, Alan Frank adds **anticlergy, caperingly, escapingly, kerygmatic, trivalency** and **wateringly**. If hyphenated words are allowed, the eleven-letter plateau is reached with **parcel-tying**. If repeated letters are allowed, Alan Frank discovered the nineteen-letter dictionary phrase **ventilating engineer** and the twenty-letter hyphenated **nievie-nievie-nick-nack** (which can be pluralized to gain one more letter).

Jeremy Morse opines that Darryl Francis could have found many more WORD words for his "A Rhapsody of Words" article. For example, he suggests half-word, ill-worded, mis-word, mis-worded, mis-wording, out-word, over-word, overword, rewording, unword, unwordable, unworded, unwordy, well-word and well-worded, all from the OED. Examples also exist with no etymological connection as beword and unwordily (derived from 'worth') and sword and its derivatives.

Debate continues on William Sunners' "Those Cryptic British Crosswords" in the May **Word Ways**. David Shulman can't see what all the fuss is about. He says "we already know that more than one answer may be possible with a cryptic crossword .. I would agree with [Philip Cohen's August Colloquy comment that double clueing is almost always enough to eliminate ambiguity]." Will Shortz notes that the Alec Robins Crosswords quote in November, which cited the double solution VICEREGENT/VICEGERENT with the ambiguous letters on unchecked squares, continues

> Of course .. it was an unsatisfactory situation; and had I remembered earlier about the alternative word, I would have phrased my clue to fit one answer and to exclude the other. However, all crossword setters have suffered at some time from the unintended 'red herring'; but so long as care is taken in all foreseeable cases, solvers .. will be quick to forgive the occasional lapse which demonstrates our human fallibility.

Will Shortz adds "In arguing that duplicate answers for cryptic clues are common, Mr. Sunners is evidently operating under the old, loose rules of clueing, where this was sometimes a problem. Under the modern strict rules of double-clueing which have become generally accepted in America only during the past five years, alternative answers are indeed extremely rare."

Kyle Corbin, observing Jeff Grant's 24-letter solid-word transposal in the November 1983 Colloquy, points out that he independently discovered (in early 1981) a 28-letter solid-word transposal in Webster's Third, sending the results to the Guinness Book of Records: HYDROXYDESOXYCORTICOSTERONE / HYDROXYDEOXYCORTICOSTERONES. Note that both Grant's and Corbin's transposals exploit the **deoxy-desoxy** variation.

Writing about Eugne Ulrich's "Typewriter Recreations" in the November issue, Philip Cohen comments "Who'd'a thought there was still so much to be done in the subject?" Alan Frank answers one of the queries in the article by noting there are many ten-letter words using letters from all ten columns of the typewriter, **authorship** being a common example. He answer's Ulrich's other query by exhibiting the nine-letter **regretted** as a word typed with only two typewriter fingers. There are no solid ten-letter words having this property, but there are several hyphenated ones including **nonny-nonny** and **better-bred**. Generalizing the inquiry, Alan Frank discovered that the fourteen-letter **unthoughtfully** is the longest three-finger exercise, although **evergreen cherry** is one better with an embedded space. Finally, the twenty-two-letter **electrotelethermometer** is the longest four-finger example.

Tom Pulliam has improved on the 76-letter pangrammatic window from "Paradise Lost" cited by Eric Albert in November 1981, with the following 75-letter window taken from an article "Constructing Good Questionnaires" in the June 1983 Training and Development Journal:

> The advantage of questionnaires over interviews is that many more people can complete a questionnaire than can be inter-[viewed. The major drawback to open-ended questions is the complexity of scoring and analyz]ing the responses.

If only the V had occured beyond 'major', this would have been a 64-letter window.

Kyle Corbin has made another improvement to his May 1983 "N-Tile Scrabble Records" article: replace PREJUDGE(R) with FOREJUDGE(R) in the four-tile diagram, raising the score 2 points to 1249.

In the November 1983 Kickshaws Martin Gardner quoted from a book by Carl Jung on the "compulsion of the name" (the appropriateness of certain surnames to their owners), using Herr Rosstaucher as an example. The Word Wurcher notes that this does not mean horse-trader, but rather horse-dipper, horse-dunker or horse-immerser; it should have been spelled Rosstauscher.

Charles Suhor writes "Martin Gardner's citation of unintended puns by famous people [November Kickshaws] brings to mind Frost's line from his poem Mending Wall: 'Before I built a wall, I'd ask to know .. to whom I was like to give offense' (a fence). Also, Frost unwittingly played straight man for the wag who observed that the poem Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening can be sung to the tune of Hernando's Hideaway." Other authors, he adds, can be similarly adapted (would you believe Emily Dickinson sung to the Yellow Rose Of Texas, or Shakespeare to gutbucket blues?), but there is "no truth in the rumor that Paradise Lost scans with perfect congruence to Turkey in the Straw".

Kyle Corbin asks "How did Maxey Brooke ["A Word Square Update in the November issue] possibly miss Helen [Motamen]'s 5x5 word square containing 4x4s and 3x3s [in the May 1983 **Word Ways**]?"

Errata: Apologies to Ed Wolpow, whose three distinct patterns for 2-by-2 overlapping word squares were inadvertently omitted from the November **Word Ways**. In a May Colloquy, Sonia Buist's name was wrongly spelled Burst. Alan Frank sets the record straight in "Logology by Computer" - the Scrabble program was not written by a Selchow and Righter employee, but instead by an employee of the unnamed "large New England company" referred to at the start of his article. In the Colloquy item on **mameluke**, the label Aryan should have been Arabic. And, despite abundant evidence to the contrary, Martin Gardner and the editor do know how to spell the name Bowdler!

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B E      N O    A T O
E N Q    G O F  T O F
  O R    O R
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