

ELVIS LIVES

DARRYL FRANCIS

Mitcham, Surrey, England

ELVIS LIVES says the graffiti. You've seen it on tee-shirts, in headlines in the popular press, and on dozens of other items of an ephemeral nature. While the average reader of this particular item of graffiti probably notices that ELVIS and LIVES use the same letters, he or she probably muses over it for no more than a second or two, thinking how appropriate/cute/sad, before dismissing the matter. The serious logologist, however, gives the matter more attention.

The idea for this article was sparked recently while I was re-reading C.C. Bombaugh's Oddities and Curiosities of Words and Literature. The Dover edition, with an introduction and notes by Martin Gardner, has been around since 1961, and can always be relied on to suggest some area of logological activity that needs revisiting. In the first chapter, Alphabetical Whims, Bombaugh offers a piece of verse built round the mutual transposals VEIL, VILE, LEVI, LIVE and EVIL (page 54 in the 1961 Dover edition). In the notes by Martin Gardner (page 339), he offers a further piece of verse, expanded to include the extra transposal IVEL.

Rather than attempting to expand the collection of EVIL transposals, I wondered about the possibilities of an ELVIS collection. Kicking off the collection with ELVIS and LIVES was easy; supplementing it with the -S forms of the EVIL transposals would give the collection quite a boost; but what about the real esoterica - the words and names never before unearthed? This was the subject of my most recent logological research. Put quite simply: what transposals exist for the name ELVIS?

The letters of ELVIS can be arranged in 120 different ways. It was most unlikely that more than just a few of these would exist as genuine transposals.

My collection of genuine ELVIS transposals is given in the first list below. It runs to 17 items. No other previously-published list of anagrams or transposals has even half of this number.

ELVIS Elvis (RHD) a boy's given name

elvis (OED) an obsolete Scots plural of elf (also shown in a 1513 illustrative quotation)

EVILS evils (W3) wicked acts and experiences

ISLEV Islev (TIG) a place in Denmark

IVELS ivels (OED) the plural of *ivel*, a 12-15th century variant of *evil* (shown in two illustrative quotations about 1300)

Ivels (Barth) the plural of the proper name **Ivel**, a river in both Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire (the plural could be construed as meaning rivers such as the River Ivel)

LEIVS leivs (OED) a possible plural or verbal form of **leiv**, an obsolete spelling of **leave** (**leivs** does not appear, even in an illustrative quotation)

LEVIS Levi's (W3) a trademark used for heavy blue denim pants
Levis (RHD) a trademark used for heavy trousers made of denim or denimlike material
levis (OED) an obsolete plural of **leaf**

LIVES lives (W3) exists, subsists

SEVIL Sevil (OED) a 17-18th century variant of **Seville**, the name of a city and province of Andalusia, Spain

SILVE silve (W2) an obsolete spelling of **self**

SIVEL Si-vel (Webb Hodge) the name of a Kawia Indian village in Cahuilla valley, southern California

SLIVE slive (W3) to move furtively, to sidle

VEILS veils (W3) lengths of cloth worn by women for covering the head and shoulders

VELIS Velis (TIG) a place in Czechoslovakia

VIELS Viels (DBS) the plural of the surname **Viel**, which could be construed as members of the **Viel** family

VILES viles (W2) the plural of the noun **vile**, one who or that which is vile (an obsolete word)

VLEIS vleis (W3) the plural of **vlei**, a temporary lake

VLIES vlies (W3) a presumed plural of **vly**, a temporary lake, although **vlys** could be inferred from the W3 entry (this is the plural form of **vly** which is given in Official Scrabble Words)

vlies (OED) the plural of **vlie**, a variant of **vlei**, a temporary lake

Of the 120 different sequences of the letters ELVIS, the above list contains transposals for just 17. What about the remaining 103? Even if transposals cannot be found, how about searching for words and names which have some of the missing 103 sequences embedded somewhere in them? For example, SquaresVILLE contains the letters ESUIL. In all, there are 28 ELVIS embeddings in the list below. For some, I have offered more than one example.

ESILV resilver (W3) to silver again, as a mirror

ESUIL Squaresville (OED Supp) an imaginary town characterized by dullness

EVLIS Tevlis (TIG) the plural of the proper name **Tevli**, a place in the former USSR (the plural could be construed as meaning places such as **Tevli**)

- ILES^V Stilesville (TIG) a place in Indiana
- ILEV^S Milevsko (TIG) a place in Czechoslovakia
- ILVES Eilvese (TIG) a place in West Germany
 shilves (W2) the presumed plural form of **shilf**, soft slaty rock (some might argue whether this can have a plural; others would accept a plural form but then argue as to whether it should be **shilfs** or **shilves**)
 shilves (EDD) the plural of **shilf** which is given as a variant of **shelf**
- IVLES Divles (TIG) the plural form of the placename **Divle**, a place in Turkey (the plural could be construed as meaning places such as Divle)
- LESIV Plesivec (TIG) a place in Czechoslovakia
- LESVI Slesvig (RHD) the Danish name of **Schleswig**, a former duchy of Denmark
- LIVSE Livsey (LTD 1989) a surname listed five times
- LSEVI Elsevier (RHD) a style of printing type
- LSIVE pulsive (W3) impelling or tending to impel
- LVI^{ES} shelviest (W3) the superlative form of the adjective **shelvy**, sloping or inclining in the manner of a geologic shelf
- LVISE pelvises (W3) a plural form of **pelvis**, a basin-shaped structure in a skeleton
- SELIV Selivanovskaya (TIG) a place in the former USSR
- SELVI selvidge (OED) a 17-19th century variant of **selvedge**, a narrow strip at the edge of a piece of cloth (in an illustrative quotation dated as late as 1864)
- SEVLI Sevlievo (WGD) a town in Bulgaria
- SILEV Silevhu (TIG) a mountain in South Africa
- SLEIV sleive (OED) a 16th century Scots spelling of **sleeve**, listed at **sleeve**
- SLIEV slieveen (W2) a smooth-tongued schemer
 slieve (EDD) a mountain
- SVILE Svilengrad (TIG) a place in Bulgaria
- SVLEI Kiekoesvlei (TIG) a place in South Africa
- SVLIE Visvliet (TIG) a place in the Netherlands
- VESIL sleeve silk (W2) untwisted silk that tangles easily
 Vesiluoma (TIG) a place in Finland
- VIESL viesly (OED) an obsolete form of **wisely**
- VILSE Vilsen (TIG) a place in West Germany
- VISEL viselike (W3) acting like a vise
- VISLE Visletto (TIG) a place in Switzerland

These two lists bring the total number of ELVIS sequences up to 45, still leaving a massive 75 to be conquered. I am confident that for quite a few of these real words or names exist; can **Word Ways** readers help out?

REFERENCES

W3 Webster's Third Edition
 W2 Webster's Second Edition
 RHD Random House Dictionary
 OED Oxford English Dictionary
 OED Supp Oxford English Dictionary Supplement
 EDD English Dialect Dictionary
 WGD Webster's Geographical Dictionary
 TIG Times Index Gazetteer
 Barth Bartholomew's Gazetteer of the British Isles
 Webb Hodge Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico
 LTD London Telephone Directory
 DBS A Dictionary of British Surnames, by P.H. Reaney

THE LINGUISTICS OF DNA

*In the February 1992 **Word Ways**, Anthony Sebastian's tongue-in-cheek article "The Linguistic Genetic Message" suggested that the amino-acid sequences of which proteins are constructed might contain hidden messages. The Nov/Dec 1992 issue of American Scientist contains an article by University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine genetics professor David Searls, in which he applies Chomskyan linguistics theory to the sequence of cytosine-guanine and adenine-thymine links in the DNA double helix. To rephrase the Chomskyan objective in genetic form, can one construct a set of parsing rules which characterize all real-world DNA sequences but forbid impossible ones? Curiously, some DNA sequences are analogous to reversal-pairs such as STRESSED-DESSERTS; others are analogous to interleaved reversal-pairs such as DNA's **loops** AND **spools**. In the Chomskyan hierarchy of language, the DNA language is context-sensitive (not context-free), suggesting that complete parsing rules must be very complex. However, Searls has constructed a simplified parser which is only "slightly" greater than context-free but nevertheless can reconstruct both of the above-mentioned sequences.*