

THE VOWELINDROME

STEPHEN CHISM

Fayetteville, Arkansas

I have coined a new term in order to point out a phenomenon in the English language: the vowelindrome. A vowelindrome is a series of palindromes which result from the placement of a single letter immediately before and after each of the five vowels. After 26 trials and 24 errors, I have determined that there are only two vowelindromes, corresponding to the letters P and T:

- PAP a teat or nipple; something resembling a nipple (archaic)
 PEP energy, high spirits, vim; to bring energy or liveliness to, to invigorate (informal)
 PIP something remarkable of its kind; the small seed of a fruit; a dot indicating a unit of numerical value on dice or dominoes (informal)
 POP to make a sharp explosive sound; to move quickly or unexpectedly; to appear abruptly; to open wide suddenly so as to protude from the sockets
 PUP a young dog or puppy; the young of certain other animals, such as the seal
 TAT to make tatting; to produce by tatting
 TET the lunar New Year as celebrated in Southeast Asia
 TIT a teat or nipple (vulgar); a breast; any of various small Old World birds of the family Paridae, related to the New World chickadees; any of various similar birds
 TOT a small child; a small amount of something, as liquor
 TUT an interjection used to express annoyance, impatience, or mild reproof

Vowelindromes share a relationship with language similar to which exists between prime numbers and mathematics. Prime numbers bear a unique relation to the common denominator of all whole numbers, the number one. Vowelindromes have a converse but similar relation to language. Each vowelindrome contains within itself the common denominators of English words: vowels. These compose the center or fulcrum of a vowelindrome.

Also interesting to note here is that the two vowelindromes of our language both contain a synonym for the female breast. PAP is defined as a nipple or whole breast, usually that of a woman. Its use can be documented in a wide variety of dictionaries. The word enjoyed its widest use during the nineteenth century but is still encountered regionally. TIT is a vulgar but very widely employed synonym for the female breast or nipple; it appears in all dictionaries. In view of the extreme constraints placed on inclusion in this ten-palindrome word list which uses only seven

letters from the alphabet, how can one account probabilistically for the occurrence of synonyms? Clearly, no one consulted palindromists when creating slang terms like TIT and PAP. This example takes its place in a long line of curious, statistically-unlikely truths surrounding the subject of palindromes. It also supports a previous contention I have made: the corpus of English palindromes contains an unusually large number of sexual references, many of them vulgar, but scarcely any references at all to romance or romantic love!

CONFESSIONS OF A COMPULSIVE TILE PUSHER

*Combined with his travels from coast to coast and his phenomenal knowledge of words and wordlists, not to mention his mastery of the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary, Stu Goldman takes us inside the elite world of the experts and non-experts. He not only confesses his personal lifestyle, but he reveals some of the strategy and tricks of the top-notch virtuosi of Scrabbledom. It seems like a strange addiction to a word game, but I suspect that some of us who are not Scrabble players are just as hooked on words in other ways. I have my own **meshuggash**, but at one time I also confess to being a Scrabble bug and sojourner in that realm of activity. However, I found a cure by playing socially instead of competitively.*

*Scrabble has left its mark in some players in amusing ways; Stu Goldman tells us about this in anecdotes and in descriptions of many players. He offends no one, though, because he uses mostly first names (including my own). The best accounts are those of the devilish fictitious games at the end of his book. It is his *pièce de resistance*, a verbal cocktail that is hard to swallow or best.*

In spite of some faulty writing, I like his book. He tells his confessions in his own style, though he had help from friends (not professional editors or proofreaders). The book is privately published (on limited funds), and is available for \$12.50 (\$13.50 California or foreign orders) at 1055 Fell Street, #2, San Francisco CA 94117. If Scrabble is your cup of tea, this book is a good read. Enjoy!

--David Shulman