

THE ELEMENTAL GAME

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Various aspects of 'elemental' wordplay have appeared in previous issues of **Word Ways**. In "An Elemental Problem" in February 1978, Dmitri Borgmann noted that LIVERS was an anagram of SILVER, NONE of NEON, ADORN of RADON, and DALE of LEAD, and that PLATINUM was A TIN LUMP! In February and August 1971, Mary Youngquist, Philip Cohen and Murray Pearce substituted an element for its symbol in a word to make another, elemental, word. This operation turned Sated into SULPHURated, FEy into IRONy, AGed into SILVERed, CUed into COPPERed, and, an excellent internal one, baSIs into baSILICONS. To these we now add jARGON, suitably expanded from jAR!

Another form of elemental wordplay involves chemical words, those such as AmErICa which can be wholly divided into a group of chemical symbols. In "Chemical Words" in November 1974, Dmitri Borgmann noted that certain elements can themselves be split into these chemical words and, without actually giving their breakdowns, he mentioned ArSeNiC, IrON, NeON, PHOsPHoRuS, SiLiCoN and XeNoN. (It should be noted that, except for iron and neon, there are alternate ways of symbolizing these elements.) Borgmann made special reference to carbon (CaRbON) as being able to be split into chemical symbols not including itself (C). But, we note, so can ArSeNIC (As), AsTaTiNe (At), IrON (Fe), SiLiCON (Si), CoPPER (Cu), and TiN (Sn).

In "On The Table" in November 1986, Henri Picciotto set an 'elementary' crossword puzzle in which each square had to be filled with the symbol of an element, be it of one or two letters. And so it is possible to divide words into symbols on a UNIVeRSAl scale, which INdICaTeS that 'symbolized' phrases and sentences are also feasible: ThOSe NARCoTiCS BUREAuS CoNFISCaTe COCaINe.

The Elemental Game involves both symbols and anagrams. The pig farmer was clearly disgruntled when I remarked that he seemed to have more than just a FeW undersized piglets. He muttered "GOT NINE RUNTS". Fleetinglly, the thought entered my head that this porcine person had hidden depths, or was it by chance he had stumbled upon our elemental code? Whatever the explanation, his statement had been a bona fide anagram of the two elements IRON and TUNGSTEN, represented by the symbols Fe and W in FeW! A few more examples:

Silver-Einsteinium: Einstein was one of the elite of his era, so it is fitting that in AgEs past there's been ELITISM IN UNIVERSE
Helium-Nitrogen: When the HeN got stuck in the rabbit burrow,

it sent out the message 'URGENT, I'M IN HOLE'
 Helium-Astatine: We advise you to avoid the HeAt in order to LIMIT
 THE NAUSEA
 Beryllium-Argon: BeAr in mind what the stud owner was anxious
 to confirm, 'YOU'LL BRING MARE?'
 Samarium-Arsenic-Hydrogen: SmAsH and please keep this to yourself;
 it appears that I'M DANGEROUS SHERRY MANIAC

THE ADVENTURES OF DR. ALPHABET

Word Ways readers know Dave Morice as its ever-inventive Kickshaws editor. Few, however, are aware that for the past two decades he has taught poetry-writing to a wide variety of Iowans, from schoolchildren to senior citizens. He displays many imaginative techniques for doing so in this 272-page paperback published for \$15.95 by Teachers & Writers Collaborative (5 Union Square West, NY 10003): poetry written on wooden nickels, on street pavements (using whitewash), on sheets of paper stretching the length of a football field (done as a half-time entertainment), or on Rolodex cards. His goal is to help potential poets break through the writer's block that most people suffer because they feel they must imitate Eliot or Wordsworth: **anyone** can write poetry!

Although much of the resultant poetry is less-than-memorable, such criticism misses the point: students learn to start the creative juices flowing, in order that they may, through further study and practice, eventually write poems that portray their past experiences, or their hopes and dreams. (To learn how to produce lightning, one must start with lightning bugs.)

They learn that poetry must be written with constraints (can one imagine playing tennis without a net?). The art of poetry-writing includes discovering what constraints one is personally comfortable with (it need not necessarily be rhyme).

Some of the 104 techniques--anagramming one's name, rearranging the words of one poem to produce another, writing poems from a menu of alternatives--have appeared in *Word Ways*. No doubt other remain to be exploited. What about writing sight-rhyming couplets, such as "The atom bomb | leads to the tomb" or "Attending ballet | drains my wallet"? Or poems all using words of the same number of letters?