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Other striking alphomes are those composed exclusively of the first, or last, three letters of the alphabet. Thus we find the alphome ABC, of the mutual (and reverse) transport anagrams CAB and BAC (a type of ferry boat). AABC has the mutual anagrams CABA (the Somaliland equivalent of 0.453 liters) and BACA (Bible), AABCC is BACCA (a berry and also a form of tobacco), AAABC is revealed as the anagrams ABACA (the Manila hemp) and CAABA (variant of KAABA, a religious shrine in Mecca), whilst AAABBC derives from BACABA (any palm of the genus Oenocarpus). At the other end of the alphabet, certainly can

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Some alphomes, like the ACT of a CAT, are simultaneously words in their own right -- alphomic words in fact. Contenders for the most prestigious alphomic and reverse alphomic words must surely be those which span the alphabet from A to Z and Z to A, respectively. ARZ (obsolete variant for art) and ADZ (an ax-like cutting tool), however, hardly set us ABUZZ with enthusiasm, an emotion to be reserved, perhaps, for the plethora of words beginning with Z and ending with A. Amongst these we suitably find ZUBA, a buzzing (backward flying?) hymenopteran, along with ZOICA, ZUMA, ZUNIGA and ZURA (arachnids), ZIA, ZOEA and ZUPHEA (crustaceans), ZUA, ZEBA and ZIBA (molluscs), ZOOLEA (an orthopteran), ZULIA and ZICCA (bugs), ZUMBA (a fly), ZIA, ZOMIA, ZOLA and ZOLCA (lepidoptera), ZOMBA and ZUNIA (beetles), and, with 7 letters, the longest such word, ZYXOMMA, at first sight a relative of the flea ZYX but in reality a dragonfly. Non-animal offerings include ZONA (a girdle), ZONDA (a hot wind of the Argentinian pampas), ZUCCA (a gourd), ZUDDA (a large leather water bag), ZUPPA (soup), ZURLA (an Oriental oboe-type instrument), ZYGA (benches for rowers), ZOA (symbolic figures in William Blake's poems), ZEA (a grass genus with only one species, maize) and the Biblical ZIA, ZIBA, ZIHA and ZOBA.

A search for long alphomic words reveals ADDEEMS, ADELOPS, ALLOQUY, BEEFILY, BEGORRY, BELLOOT (OED), BILLOWY and EGILOPS, all with 7 letters. There exist, however, three mutual 8-letter anagrams whose alphome is, by good fortune, an alphomic word in its own right. The mutual anagrams are SPOILAGE, SPOLIAGE and PELASGOI (plural noun for the Pelasgians). The American Heritage Dictionary defines Pelasgian as 'one of a people living in the region of the Aegean Sea before the coming of the Greeks, OX pelasgoi, native name of unknown origin possibly reshaped by folk etymology as if to mean sea people, from pelagos, sea'. Their common alphome is AEGILOPS which takes the crown as the longest-known alphomic word. Already familiar to Word Ways readers, AEGILOPS is at once the name of a species of oak tree, a type of eye ulcer and the weeds found in a cornfield. A coined 9-letter phrase, CHILL LOSS (in
contrast to the better-known coinage HEAT LOSS), has been suggested by Ted Clarke as being that which happens when a fridge door is left open (Word Ways Kickshaws, February 1994). TROLLIED, with 8 letters, is seemingly the longest acceptable reverse alphomic word. There are several 7-letter examples: SNIPPED, SPIPPED, SPONGED, SPOOFED, SPOOKED, SPOOLED, SPONGED, TROLLED, TSONECA, VROOMED (OED), WOOLLED, WRONGED and ZYXOMMA. However, the 9-letter SPOON-FEED is relentlessly hyphenated in all the dictionaries I have consulted. Can anyone find an unhyphenated SPOONFEED?

Another little interesting amusement lies in treating the two alphomic superlatives AEGILOPS and TROLLIED as acronyms, whence we discover that Alphomed Entries Grouped In Letter Order Produce Sets & The Reversed Ordered Letter List Is Easily Documented!

Some words, when spelt backwards, form other good words, and so it is that certain alphomic words, read backwards, form good reverse alphomic words. The longest such pairs have 5 letters: ELOPS to SPOLE, SOMMA to AMMOS (Web 3), NOOPS to SPOON, MOOPS to SPOOM, DEEPS to SPEED and LOOPS to SPOOL. Such alphomic reversal pairs, just like non-alphomic reversal pairs, are useful when it comes to constructing palindromic phrases.

In his PAN-PD (see earlier), an author friend of mine has a policy of not defining the obvious meanings of words. Hence we discover that EFFING could therefore be defined as 'hunting for newts' so that common speech, normally dispensing with the G, conveniently creates for us the colloquial alphomic word EFFIN'. OOOOPS!

OOOOPS? A slip of the pen? Not at all. Rather an OED variant spelling of OOPS, but, more to the point, a special alphomic word. With the exception of NOOPS, NOOST and NOOSY, it appears that all alphomic words with 5 or more letters begin with a letter from the first half of the alphabet. In beginning with the letter O, the 6-letter OOOOPS seems to be unique. Looking at reverse alphomic words, OOOOPS finds its counterpart in JIGGED, no other 6-letter reverse alphomic word beginning with an earlier letter of the alphabet.

A strange question, perhaps, but what makes an alphomic word? Obviously the fewer the number of different letters in a word, the greater must be its chance of being alphomic. This is aided by the occurrence of double letter-pairs such as those in FOO and OOF. The preponderance of double letter-pairs in these words is striking. In addition to common pairs, such as those in FILLS, BERRY, SPOOK and TREED, less common pairs are to be found in CHIVVY, DIVVY, CIVVY, DIKKOP, BEKKO, DEKKO, BHUKKU, ABUZZ and BRUZZ. A few have 2 pairs: ABBOTT, ABBESS, ACCESS, ADDEEMS, BELLOOT (OED), POLLEE (Web 3), POMMEE, TOFFEE and WOOLLED. The absence of a double letter-pair in the longest alphomic word, AEGILOPS, rates it a rare word indeed, and it is also unusual in being one of only a handful of these words to begin with two vowels.

As might be expected, many of the alphomic words with 5 or more letters are a length reverses, at least one pair of words in one reverse alphomic pair is a length reverses. Given that the alphomic words with 5 or more letters include DIMP, BIJOUX, GIPS, YUNCA, ZONKE, and WOOFED. All alphomic words with 5 or more letters are length reverses of a word.

Wrong Spoon
First effort. Spoon poked.
Toffee sponged.
Solid yolked!
letters are adjectives ending in Y, whilst a high proportion of similar length reverse alphomic words are verbs ending in ED. There exists at least one pair of antonymic alphomic words, the verbal EMPTY and FILL. Numerically, only one's FORTY FIRST birthday is of interest to alphome devotees. Given names (especially those for girls) are more obliging, and those with 4 or more letters (some diminutives) include ABBEY, ABEL, ADDY, AMOS, ANNOT, ANTY, ALLY, BENNY, BERT, BESS(Y), BETTY, BILL(Y), CISSY, DIXY, DOTTY, ELLY, GILL, GLORY, HORST, ISSY, LOTTY, MORT(Y)... and EDDA, LIDA, OLGA, POLL, RONA, SONIA, VIDA, YVONNE and ZONA. (The names are taken from Peter Newby's Pears Word-Puzzler's Dictionary, Pelham Books, 1983.)

On a personal note, my favorite alphomic and reverse alphomic words include DIMPSY, DITTY, FLOOSY (Web 3), CHINTZ, CHOPPY, BEGORRY, EGHOST, BIJOUX, GIPSY, GHOST, GOOSY and SPOOED, TONGA, TSONECA, WUNGEE, YTTRIC, YUNGA, ZONKE (OED), VROOMED (OED), ZIPPEE (OED), MECCA, VOLGA, and WOOFED. And a taste of alphomic verse:

Wrong Spoon

First effort.  Sponge flops.  Bells tolled,
Solid yolked!  Dirty floors!  Abbey woke!

Abbey Amor

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