

MAKING THE ALPHABET DANCE

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This is the book that puts it all together--the logological advances in letterplay that have been accumulating for the past 30 years. Since most of these discoveries appeared first in *Word Ways*, what better person to attempt the complex task of assembling the puzzle than editor Ross Eckler, who has edited the mag since 1970? Ross's new book, just published by St. Martin's Press, presents the material in eight chapters (83 selections) progressing from simpler to more complex forms and containing dozens of illustrations, tables and lists interspersed throughout the text. At times, it works like a chess manual by a grand master who anticipates all the possible moves and discusses them.

Wordplay can be confusing, but Eckler deconfuses the intricacies of the alphabet, places them in a logical sequence, and interprets the relationships between them. In a precise, clear and crisp style, the narrative takes a serious look at letters, accompanied by illustrations varying from serious to humorous. The classic Mary Had a Lipogram take-offs and the "Ronald Wilson Reagan" interview using only the letters in that name are among the wordplay that leads off the book in the chapter "Forbidden Letters, Obligatory Letters". It continues through chapters on letter patterns, word fragments, word transformations, alphabetical order, word groups, and number words. It concludes with an afterword comparing two geometric ways of viewing words. The list of sources at the end cites many contributors to *Word Ways* whose work is included.

His previous books, *Word Recreations* and *Names and Games*, were anthologies of work that had appeared in the magazine, a selection of material written by Eckler and others. *Making the Alphabet Dance* is Eckler's interpretation of the myriad forms of letterplay appearing in the last 20 years, both his own discoveries and those of others. In Eckler's vision, the forms become integrated as parts of a complex whole, a whole that continually changes its own form as wordplay evolves through new discoveries. In his writing, he not only invents new forms but explains the inventions--his own and others. And he encourages the reader to do the same: "One of the great joys of recreational linguistics is the chance to do original work, to discover new techniques or better examples illustrating old ones."

Making the Alphabet Dance is a landmark in wordplay. No other work has dealt with letter manipulation in such a thorough and thoughtful fashion. It goes where no other book has gone before.