

COLLOQUY

Several readers commented on the readability of *Word Ways*, in response to the query in the February Colloquy.

Chris Cole: I'm not sure who is complaining about the "unreadability" of *Word Ways*, but I for one find each issue to be very interesting...*Word Ways* is one of the few [magazines] I read cover to cover. I'm guessing that the reader is complaining about the use of math in wordplay, but I think this is inevitable as the field evolves. At any rate, I find it continually fascinating.

Jeff Grant: As you know, I'm primarily interested in basic forms of wordplay (palindromes, anagrams, word squares, pangrams, etc.), so I can understand another long-time reader's comments about some articles being "unreadable". Surely though, *Word Ways* needs to cater for all interests. I simply skim (or skip) any articles that are either beyond my understanding or interest. There's still lots there to keep me stimulated.

Rex Gooch: We all have different tastes, and to maintain the subs you will need to cater for many. Readers have to accept that some articles will be of no interest at all to them. Perhaps the odd puzzle would be of wider appeal. However, I do think you can have too much on a particular theme, for example William Webster's anagrams. I do not like anagrams unless they are really apt, or a tour-de-force, and I would probably declare a moratorium on palindromes (unless there were good ones).

In the February Colloquy Chris Cole responded to Jeff Grant's critique of *Wordplay*. Rex Gooch notes "QUESTIONAIRE shows Web 3 at its worst. No other dictionary gives the Web 3 spelling." Jeff Grant agrees, and adds "TATTARRATTAT isn't a dictionary error; the OED quote from Joyce confirms its legitimacy." Jeff notes "Lots of word records haven't been 'proved' to be maximal or 'best', but putting them in a book like Chris has done at least gives people a chance to evaluate them, and if improvements come to light, a 2nd edition could be considered. Anyway, good for Chris for producing the book--it has certainly provided some interesting discussion points."

Rex Gooch observes "Looking at why the headlines are ambiguous, mostly it's because a word has two meanings (may be different parts of speech, disguised by omission of short words like *to* or *the*). Sometimes the reason is bad English--a clause that has drifted too far from the thing it qualifies, so that something else gets attached instead. The most famous (I think) is the headline about a lunatic who managed to escape from an institution via the laundry, there encountering a woman for the first time in ages: NUT SCREWS WASHERS AND BOLTS."

Chris Cole found a longer elemental word, HYPoThAlAmICoHYPOPHYSeAIS, which appears as an example under HYPOTHALAMICO- in Web 3. Susan Thorpe introduces the game of Symbolic Transposals which can be played in two versions. In the first, divide a word into chemical symbols and rearrange the same symbols to make a new word: ONe to NeO, NeON to NONe, HaSTe to HaTeS, LiON to LiNO, SORe to OReS. In the second, divide a word into chemical symbols, redivide the word into a different series of chemical symbols (some may be the same), and rearrange the new symbols to make a new word. For example, one can construct CoSiNEs, CeNoSIS (Dorland), CEsSION, CONEsSI, COsSINE, OSclnEs. Similarly, one has ArSeNiC, ArCsINe (Collins English Dictionary under *arcsin*), CalrNEs, CARINEs, CaRnIEs, CAsErIN (Web 2), CErAsIn, CRaINEs, CRaNIeS, RaClNEs, SArCINE. All untagged words are in the OED Second Edition. What is the longest string of alphabetically-ordered letters which can be made from the 103 symbols? (See Answers and Solutions)

Mike Keith apologizes to Rex Gooch and Susan Thorpe for not being aware of (and not citing) previous Word Ways articles on the subjects of telephone and typewriter words. He promises to do his best not to let this happen again.

Rex Gooch writes about "Letter Spirals": "The main feature of Ulam's spiral is that it delivers odd squares on one diagonal and even squares on another. I'm not sure that the rather patchy diagonals of primes are much of a surprise."

Susan Thorpe: "Please, can Michael Keith be persuaded to use *heterogram* rather than *isogram*? The only reason for ever using *isogram* now is when referring back to some past item in which it was used, or in a phrase like *pair isogram*." Rex Gooch adds "*isogram* should read heterogram, haplogram, solo isogram, anti-isogram, non-isogram, or anything but isogram."

Susan Thorpe should have been credited with discovering AFGOIOGFA (misspelled AFGOTOGFA) and ALLENELLA, cited in Jeff Grant's "Long Palindromes from A to Z". Both appear in an as-yet-unpublished article "New Palindromes" received some time ago, and both were supplied to Jeff for use in his forthcoming revision of *The Palindromicon*.

Ted Clarke writes: "The article 'Dear Computer, Is The Letter-String a Word?' commanded my attention by its statements regarding the blistering speeds Michael Keith had obtained for searching for, and validating, the presence of words in computer-based lists. The quoted speeds of testing '...three million words a second for validity' and of requiring '...seven days instead of ten minutes', i.e. a thousand times faster than a '...linear search through all N-letter words...' would make a mockery of the 50,000 or so words per second I had been achieving in my ten-square searches. Were I able to increase my ratings by 60, or even 6 times, I would be over the moon!" Ted can't see

how this is possible, because “the article lacks much detail of how the alleged speeds are achieved in practice. Two main steps [Michael Keith] proposed for wordlists were ones I have used for nigh on ten years now and, bearing in mind that my lists are at least double the size of Michael’s, plus the vast amount of files’ opening and closing involved in the ten-square search, I was unable to judge from his article (and email contact) how his methods might benefit my program...His article showed that his methods required the creation of a multiplicity of word tables, converted to base-27 numbers, presumably from a basic wordlist, but there was no indication of the form of these tables and how they were accessed.” Ted concludes “It seems that this article could do with a sequel to supply much missing information.” [The editor believes that further technical details on how these methods are implemented would be of limited interest to most Word Ways readers, and merely contribute to the “unreadability” previously discussed. He suggests instead that Ted and Mike continue their email colloquy.]

Michael Helsem found the following 196-letter pangrammatic window in Rowe’s *Lucan*:

And [piercing Titan vex infernal Jove;
Full on his throne the blazing beams shall beat,
And light abhorr’d afflict the gloomy seat.
Yet, am I yet, ye fallen fiends, obey’d?
Or must I call your master to my aid?
At whose dread name the trembling Furies quak]e...

With respect to “Three More Nine-to-Fivers” in Kickshaws, Susan Thorpe notes that the fifteen-letter word MATHEMATIZATION found in the OED improves lengthwise on the eleven-letter MATHEMATICS in which only the fifth and ninth letters are invariant.

Mark Isaak writes “In the article ‘Elemental, My Dear Watson’, you ask in passing about wordplay in chemical literature based on chemical abbreviations. Although I am not familiar with chemical literature generally, there is an article worth note in the 17 Dec 1999 issue of Science. This article, by C.J. Cramer and J.T. Roberts, is about diyttrium potassium, or Y(sub2)K. The authors also mention a couple other yttrium-containing molecules which need more study: YOY and YNOT (which contains tritium).”

Errata: In “Typewriter Words: All Fingers Used” R4 should have petalism added to the list, and in L4 afterfellowship should have been affellowship. In “Isms Taler”, line 10 on p 42 should read “...Looted) cloud wive het mages form...”; line 14 on p 43 replace “then” with “hent”; third line from end on p 44 replace “said” with “sadi”; twelfth line from end on p 45 replace “depositer” with “depositor”. Incidentally, the “quite new” transposal of RAPES mentioned at the start of the story is APRES, as in APRES-SKI.