

THE ORIGIN OF THE -GRY PROBLEM

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On page 96 of my book *Wordplay* (Sterling Publishing Company, 1999) I state that the “-gry” puzzle originated on the Bob Grant talk show on WMCA-AM in New York City and was:

There are only three words in the English language, all adjectives, that end in “-gry”. Two are “angry” and “hungry”; the third word describes the state of the world today. What is it?

I have uncovered evidence that this is incorrect.

In a recently-discovered letter dated March 17 1975 to the editors at Merriam-Webster, Patricia Lasker of Brooklyn, New York asks:

I have a question which I hope there is an answer to. Where I work one of the Plant Managers heard a question on a quiz show. Noone [sic] seems to know the answer. I hope you can answer it for me. There are three words that end in “gry” one is angry, the other is hungry. Please tell me the third word.

In Anita Richterman’s Problem Line column in Newsday on April 27 1975 there is this question and answer:

Q. On a TV quiz program, it was mentioned that there are three words in the English language that end in the letters “gry.” It’s driving me batty that I can only think of two of the words--angry and hungry. What is the third word? M.Z., Wantagh
A. Many of our readers asked the same question and some said it appeared in a crossword puzzle as well...[reports of failure to find the third word]

I conclude the following:

1. The original form of the puzzle did not specify that the third word was an adjective describing the state of the world.
2. The puzzle originated on a quiz show, probably a TV quiz show, broadcast in New York City in early 1975.
3. There may have been a crossword puzzle containing this puzzle.

Can any Word Ways reader confirm or deny these conclusions? Failing that, does any reader remember a quiz show on the air in New York (probably a local show) in early 1975?