FIVE-LETTER CONNOISSEUR’S LADDERS

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For five-letter words, over 60 per cent of words are heterograms, fewer than 2 per cent are isolanos, over a quarter onalisis, and each word has almost 13 neighbours on average—over two per letter. On the other hand, there are not many more than half the number of words to choose from compared to six-letter words. Also it is not possible to have sequential replacement between reversals: from ABCDE to EDCBA would proceed via EBCDE, EDCDE, then EDCDE again, and an implicit condition of all our ladders is that no word should be repeated, so we will not find reversals between words with an odd number of letters. We therefore find about 200 ladders that are technical Connoisseur’s Ladders, compared with just one for words of length six. In these ladders, the terminal words are heterograms, the word at one end being a permutation of the other with corresponding letters different, all words in the ladder are different, and letters are replaced in order. Given that there was a plentiful supply of semantic Connoisseur’s ladders for six-letter words, we can guarantee that there are very many of length five, but there are too many to fit into a short article, so, apart from a few examples at the very end, we will be content to see if there is a technical ladder which also qualifies as a semantic one. Such judgment is subjective, and it is a lot to expect a good semantic ladder from a mere selection of 200, but if you were a witch in the time of the Inquisition you might think that SPAIN and PAINS were synonymous, or at least apt. SERIC RICES actually means silk riches, from a period when silk was a major item in diplomacy and Byzantine Imperial grandeur. Other apposite pairs need similar thought or research, which I have attempted to report in the lists: how else would one find a connection between monkeys and salmon? And do some people think sealyhams are fabulous? What about the Persian superbeing superdrinker? Furthermore, the outlook is brilliant when desire rides! We can also reveal that Gins in Vietnam were not the first to use narcotics. As the old saw goes, many a true word is spoken in ladders!

In “Snakes and Ladders” in the May 1998 Word Ways, there was one example of an ideal ladder between heterograms with the terminal ladders mutual permutations, but the terminal words were not semantically related, and letter replacement was not sequential.

Given the restricted choice of ladders, it is difficult enough to find a common word at each end, let alone those in between.

Words in the following lists are OED headwords or obvious derivations thereof unless marked otherwise. The first word in the ladder is earlier in the alphabet than the last. Ch = Chambers, OSPD = Official Scrabble Players Dictionary, Pcon = Palindromicon, Tert F = Tertiary Faunas, and vf = variant form. The same place names may occur in different counties.

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Connoisseur's Ladders with terminal words which are permutations of one another (about a quarter of those found)

**forward replacement**

AREST (vf = arrest) — TREST — TEEST — TEAST (vf) — TEART — TREAT — TEARS
CURES — SURES — SERES — SECES (OED under cease) — SECUS — CHF-PULL — SECUR
CURES — SURES — SERES — SECES (OED under cease) — SECUS
CHF-PULL — SECUR (OED = sicker)

DOSER — ROSER — RESER (Pcon, surname) — READER (vf) — REDOR (OED) — REDOS (OED = reredos)

HATES — SATES — SETES (vf) — SEASES (vf) — SEATS — SEATH (= seathe, a fish)

HEIST — SEIST (vf) — SIIST (vf) — SITST (vf) — SITHT (vf) — SITHE (OED = sithe, 2b = mishap)

KEATS (poet) — SEATS — STATS (OED) — STETS — STEAS (vf) — STEAK

LAMES (vf = lamb ... of God?) — SAMES (vf) — SEMES (vf) — SEALS — SEALM (vf = psalm)

MALES — SALES — SELES (vf) — SAMES (vf) — SEMES — SEMAS (vf) — SEMAT (vf = undershin)

MAYES (vf = Mayas or Mays) — SEYES (vf) — SEYES (vf) — SEAES (vf) — SEAMS — SEAMY

MASON — NASON (OED) — NOSON (Pcon) — NOMON (vf) — NOMAN — NOMAS (ulceration of throat)

PAINs — SAINS — SPINS — SPANS — SPAIS (vf) — SPAIN

PERIS (OED = Persian superbeing) — PERIR (Ch, Old Fr whence Persian) — PERER (OED) — PEPPER (vf) — PIPER — SIPER (immoderate drinker)

REVIN (vf = raven) — REVIR (OED) — REVER — RENER — ORER (OED) — RIVER (OED) — VINEER

REVIS (vf = ravish) — REVIR (OED) — REVER — RESER (Pcon) — RIVER — VISER (vf = vizier)

SEALT (vf = salt) — SEALS — SEASES (vf) — SEALS — TALES. Old sea tales?

SEALY (Sealy Ham terrier, OED sealyham) — SEALS — SEASES (vf) — SEALS — TALES

SITEN (vf = sit) — SITES — SITIS (vf) — SINIS (Pcon) — SENIS (Ch, Latin whence senate) — TENIS (OED = tennis). Table tennis?

STIRE (vf = stir) — STIRS — STIES — STRES (vf) — SIRES — TIRES. So does whisk!

TOWER — TOWEE (vf) — TOWE (vf) — TOOTE (vf) — TROTE (vf) — WROTE

TWAIN — TWAIT (vf) — TWANT (Web2) — TWINT (Pull) — TAINT — WAINT (OED obs vaunt). A good writer?

**reverse replacement**

ADRET (OED = slope facing sun) — ADRED (vf) — ADRAD — ADEAD — AREAD — TREAD

DELIA (pers name) — DELIE — DELDE (vf) — DEIDE (vf) — DAIDE (vf) — LAIDE (Fr ugly!, or, worse, OED under lay)

DESIR (vf = desire) — DESIS (vf) — DESES (vf) — DEDES (OED) — DIDES (vf) — RIDES

ERAND (vf = errand) — ERANE (OED) — ERADE — ERANDE (vf) — RANDE (vf = high ground or SA currency)

FERIT (vf = feared) — FERIE — FERT (vf) — PETE (vf) — WETE (vf) — RIFTE (vf = rift)

HEAL T (vf = lame, crippled) — HEALE (vf) — HEA TE (vf) — HAHTE (vf) — LAHTE (vf = leap)

HEART — HEARE (vf) — HEATE (vf) — HAHTE (vf) — RAHTE (vf = reach)

KEARN (vf = Irish foot-soldier) — KEARE (vf) — KEAKE (vf) — KERKE (vf) — KARKE (vf) — NARKE (Grk whence narcosis etc)

MEROS (OED sea-perches) — MEROR (vf) — MERER (OSPD) — MEMER (OED) — MOMER (Old Fr whence mum, v) — SOMER (OED pack-horse)

NOWIT (vf = nowt, nothing) — NOWIN — NOWON (Pcon) — NOT ON (Ch) — NITON — WITON (vf = wit)

PERIS OED Persian superbeing) — PERIR (Ch, Old Fr whence Persian) — PERER (OED) — PEPER (vf) — PIPER — SIPER (immoderate drinker)

REVIN (vf = raven) — REVIR (OED) — REVER — RENER OEvf — RINER (OED) — VINER

REVIS (vf = ravish) — REVIR (OED) — REVER — RESER (Pcon) — RIVER — VISER (vf = vizier)

SEALT (vf = salt) — SEALS — SEASES (vf) — SEALS — TALES. Old sea tales?

SEALY (Sealy Ham terrier, OED sealyham) — SEALS — SEASES (vf) — SEALS — TALES

SITEN (vf = sit) — SITES — SITIS (vf) — SINIS (Pcon) — SENIS (Ch, Latin whence senate) — TENIS (OED = tennis). Table tennis?

STIRE (vf = stir) — STIRS — STIES — STRES (vf) — SIRES — TIRES. So does whisk!

TOWER — TOWEE (vf) — TOWE (vf) — TOOTE (vf) — TROTE (vf) — WROTE

TWAIN — TWAIT (vf) — TWANT (Web2) — TWINT (Pull) — TAINT — WAINT (OED obs vaunt). A good writer?

**Ideal Ladders, between heterograms, with forward replacement (a few samples only, A-F)**

The following may need to be reversed to reveal the apposite nature of the pairing: sometimes both directions work. A given word may carry more than one meaning. Intermediate words are forced by the end words, and are to be found in the usual major dictionaries I use, including OED variant forms, except where noted at the end.
CURED—DEBUG/SPANK/TEALS  CULLED—HAIRY/PALE/MAIDS  CURSE—MAIDS/MATES/MATHS/MEATS/MONKS
CURUS—PINED/SAGER/SULKY  CZARS—TIRED  DAMES—FUSTY/HONKY/SEAMY/SERIC/TEXAN/TON-UP
DANES—LUCKY/VEGAN  DARES—PUBLIC  DATES—FELIX/PERV/PONGY/PORNY/RISKY/SEAMY/TON-UP
DAWNs—LOIRE/LOUSY  DAZES—FELIX  DEALT—TWINS
DECKS—HOLED  DEGA—MAISY  DENTS—PITON
DICES—FELIX  DICYE—PALEMS  DICKS—HAIRY/HONED/LURED/SPARE/MAUSE/PAVED/RANDY/SOAPY/TURDY
DIETS—PARED/POKO/POSER  DIMES—MOLDY/TO/PAY  DINES—LARD/SERUM/Vegan
DIVES—JONAH/RAPID  DOCKS—LINER/LUNAR/MINED/SILTY  DOMES—TACKY (eg Millennium Dome)
DORs (in Highland)—LUCKY  DORKS—FROG/SIND  DOTEs—PANTO/PANTY/PAWKY
DOZEs—MARIO  DRATS—FELIX  DRIVE—WARNS/WARPS (Star Trek)/Wears
DUCkS—HAIRY/HARDY/MIREd/SOAPY (in bath)  DUETS—SEAMY/PAYSHY  DUKES—LOFTY/MACHO/MINGY/PERV/PINKO
DUMAS—PITHY  DUMPS—RAPID/SALTY  DUNCE—NOISY  DUNES—NOMAD  DUSPs—NOMAD
DURAN (Duran Duran pop group)—FAMED/GAMES/TOURS  DUSTY—LAIRS
DYGES—FINKY/FUSTY/HARDY/HONKY/MACHO/MANKY/MINGY/MURKY/SEAMY/SICKO/TACKY/TON-UP
DYNES—Hertz  EARLS—HULKY/MEATY  EMITS—SLURP
FACTS—PIANO/PITHY  FAILS—ROLEX (watch)  FAKES—LIMBO/LOGIN/LUCKY/MINAX (camera/MINTO/MOLAR/SERIC
FAKES—LIMBO/LOGIN/LUCKY/YMINAX (camera/MINTO/MOLAR/SERIC
FAMms—SEAMY/STENO  FAMILIES—FONG/TOURS  FATS—POKER
FAURE (v for Fr Composer)—LEADS/LEAPS/LOANS/LOINS/SCAMP/SCIVY/SPICY/SWAMI/SWIFT/TOWED/TOWNY
FAVES—SEAMY/WILMA (Flintstones)  FAXED—TEARS
FEARD—GOWNS  FEARS—HORNY
FELIS (genus, cat)—MANKY  FETAS (hard cheese)—LIMED/PALE/PARED  FERTY (Duchess of York)—GAWPS
FETEs—PUCKY  FAINES—PONTY  FESTs—PONY
FEUCh—RUNTs  FEUDS—LAIRD  FIBRE—LAUDS/LOUSY  FILED—WORKS
FILEs—TACKY  FILEd—WORKS  FINES—LUCKY/NAKRO/TOPAY/VALiD/PAPY/SPATTED  FIREd—TAMIL/TEARS
FIREs—LOFTY/LUCKY/MEaty  FIXEs—PAWTY/FLAGs
FLARE—SHINY/SMOKY  FLATS—SPIVY  FLIPS—SHOWY/STAGY  FLIRT—SHOWY/STENO
FLOGS—SCAMP  FLUES—SHINY  FLUNG—PRIGS  FLUTE—PRANK  FOIST—TWEAK  FOLDS—GIRLY
FORES (golf)—MACHo  FORTE (hotel chain)—VENDS  FOULs—PAWKY
FOyer—SAVoy/SHOWY  FRANK—PLOYS  FROCK—PLAnS
FULLS—PAWKS  FRUIT—TRED  Fucks—Hairy/Hardy/Harpo/Harpy/Manic/Paved/Pervy/Randy/SOAPY/TON-UP
FUDGE—MILKY/MINTY  FUNKY—GAUDI (architect, see Barcelona)/PIKES
FUSTY—LAIRS  PENIs—SALTY/SATED
PORNy—GENTS/HACKS/HANTS/HATES/HICKS/HINTS/HuntS/KAPES/KELTS/KYLIE (Minogue)/LAGos/LICKS/LIKES/
LINGO/MATES/MICKS/MULES/NITES  PUBIS—RAPED/RANDY  PUBES—RISKY/TACKY/HARES/HOLES/JOKES/LIKES/LORES/LYRES/MAILS/MORES
RANDY—HICKS/JOCKS/LICKS/MICKs (the Celts again)
Intermediate words that are more difficult to find:

BOECK: OED sarcoid 1941 quote
DEBUD: Bloomsbury Thesaurus
FRING: is in Norfolk
GARAN: Ch crane, Welsh
KINK: Northern dialect chink Ch
MATSE: Ch maizo, Yiddish
NAMAS: Sanskrit whence namaste
PALTA: OED sarcocol 1712 quote
POSTA: OED scud 1845 quote
RAPIS: OED rope 1400 quote
SAGUS: Ch Latin whence presage
SMIRS: OED SMUR
VENER: Ch whence venery

CANEH: Ch KANEH
DORES: in Highland
FRINK: Electronic Alveary, name in OED
GHOSE: (Longmans)
LEGIS: abbr legislate, or Latin whence legal
MEGAS: Ch Grk whence acromegaly
PAETS: EDD
PIRUS: Ch true spelling of Pyrus pear tree
RABAR: Pcon
RAPPAS: is in Somerset
SCIVY: Ch under skive
SURUS: OED ennoble 1565 quote
WROSE: is in Bradford

DEBED: inferred.
FRANT: is in East Sussex
GAMAN: Ch Norse whence game
HABIN: is in West Sussex
LOUTH: is in Lincolnshire
MILAS: OED above 896 quote
PALESE: OED palse
POKEL: Ch Ger whence pickle
RAPIS: OED rape 1502 quote
RIBER: is in Derbyshire
SELON: Roget, OED intension 1826 quote
TURAN: Ch Persian, whence Turanian