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 onalosis, 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 Gil n 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 — TEAST — TEAST (vf) — TEART — TEARS
CURES — SURES — SERES — SECES (OED under cease) — SECUS (OED = sicker)
CUTER — RUTER (vf = Reter) — RECER (Pcon) — RECER — RECUT
DOSER — ROSER — RESER (Pcon, surname) — READER (vf) — REORD (OED) — REDOS (OED = reredos)
HATES — SATES — SETES (vf) — SEATES (vf) — SEATS — SEATH (= seathe, a fish)
HEIST — SEIST (vf) — SIEST (vf) — SITHT (vf) — SITHTE (OED sithe vb = mishap)
KEATS (poet) — SEATS — STATS (OED) — STETS — STEAS (vf) — STEAK
LEATS — SEATS — SETES (OED) — SEATS — SLETS — SLETS (vf = sleets) — SEAS (vf) — SEAL (OED bait, hunt, incite)
MATS — SEATS — STATS (OED) — STETS — STEAS (vf) — STEAL
MONAS (OED = monkeys) — SO-NAS (OED) — NANAS (vf) — NAMAS (ulceration of throat)
PATES — SEATS — STATS (OED) — STETS — STEAS (vf) — STEAL
REATS (OED = wrongdoings) — SEATS — STATS (OED) — STETS — STEAS (vf) — STEAL
SAMEA — SAMES (vf) — SEMES (vf) — SEAES (vf) — SEALM (vf = psalm)
SANE — SAMES — SEAMES (vf) — SEAMS — SEAMY
TANES — TANES — TANES (vf) — TENES — TENSES (vf = tense)
WANE — WAINES — WAINES (vf) — WAINES — WAIMES (vf = Waimes)

reverse replacement

ADRET (OED = slope facing sun) — ADRED (vf) — ADRAD — ADEAD — AREAD — TREAD
DELLA (pers name) — DELLE — DELDE (vf) — DEIDE (vf) — DAIDE (vf) — LAID (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 — ERNDE (vf) — ENDE (vf) — RANDE (vf = high ground or SA currency)
EREK (vf = feared) — FERIE — FERTE (vf) — FEFE (vf) — FITE (vf) — RITE (vf = rift)
HEALT (vf = lame, crippled) — HEALE (vf) — HEATE (vf) — HAHTE (vf) — HAHTE (vf) — HAHTE (vf) — HAHTE (vf) — RAHTE (vf = reach)
KEARN (vf = Irish foot-soldier) — KEARE (vf) — KEAKE (vf) — KERKE (vf) — KARKE (vf) — NARKE (OED, Grk whence narcosis etc)
MEROS (OED sea-perches) — MEROR (vf) — MERER (OSPD) — MEMER (OED) — MERN (OED = mern)
NOWIT (vf = nowt, nothing) — NOWIN — NOWON (Pcon) — NOT ON (Ch) — NITON — WITON (vf = wit)
PERIS (OED Persian superbeing) — PERIR (Ch, Old Fr whence perish) — PERER (OED) — PEPER (vf) — PIPER (vf) = PIPER (immoderate drinker)
REVIN (vf = raven) — REVIR (OED) — REVER — RENER (OED) — RINER (OED) — VNER
REVIS (vf = ravish) — REVIR (OED) — REVER — RESER (Pcon) — RISER — VISET (vf = visier)
SEALM (vf = salt) — SEALS — SEAES (vf) — SEALS — SALES — SALES — YALES (OED = fabulous beast)
SETIL (vf = settle) — SETIS (vf) — SETES (vf) — SELES — SILES (OED) — TILES
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) — TOWEE (vf) — TOOTE (vf) — TROTE (vf) — WROTE
TWAIN — TWAIN (vf) — TWAIN (Web2) — TWINT (Pull) — TAINT — WAIN (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.
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 matzo, 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
RAPPIS: is in Somerset
SCIVY: Ch under skive
SURUS: OED ennable 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
PASTE: 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