August 2002 is the 25th, or silver, anniversary of the death of rock’n’roll singer Elvis Presley. Elvis died in August 1977, and has been the subject of two previous articles of mine in Word Ways, “Elvis Lives” in February 1993, and “Elvis for Everyone” in May 1993. Prompted by recent trips to Tupelo, Mississippi (his birthplace) and Memphis, Tennessee, I decided to take a new look at the wordplay that could be spun around some of the words, names and song titles in Elvis’ life and career. My findings are presented here twenty-five years after Elvis’ death.

First off, the title of this article is simply an anagram of ELVIS PRESLEY. I suspect this has appeared before in Word Ways, but is worth repeating here. A number of other anagrams, none of which is particularly apposite, are suggested by Anagram Genius (the pc-based anagram creation software), but none is as good as the title here. Some examples: is every spell, less vile prey, severely lisp, sly peer evils, spy severe ill, I yell vespers, lips revel—yes!, silly peevers, sly severe lip, veilless prey.

Let’s try following an abbreviated history of Elvis’ life and career, and see what wordplay items emerge. I’ve used the following abbreviations here: tp = transposition, tdx = transdeletion with x letters deleted, tax = transaddition with x letters added.

Elvis was born in January 1935 and named Elvis Aron Presley. The transpositions of ELVIS were presented in my February 1993 article, and the commoner ones are summarised here.

ELVIS tp = evils, levis, lives, slive, veils, vleis, vlies
The singer’s middle name ARON transposes to one reasonably common forename.

ARON tp = roan, Nora
Taking his two first names together, there is a single transposition:

ELVIS ARON tp = versional
And the singer’s surname transposes to a couple of dictionary items.

PRESLEY tp = sleepry, yelpers
Because of their shortness and common letters, both ELVIS and ARON are capable of producing a multitude of transadditions. A few of the commoner single-letter transadditions are given here.

ELVIS ta1 = devils, levies, livens, livers, olives, pelvis, silver, snivel, swivel, vexils
ARON ta1 = apron, arson, baron, groan, manor, organ, radon, rayon, roman, sonar
The PELVIS and SWIVEL transadditions are particularly relevant to Elvis’ early onstage performances! (Some cynics might say that GROAN and ORGAN are, too.) Taking his two first names together, there are no single-letter transadditions, but there are some longer ones:

ELVIS ARON ta2 = oversalting, revelations, ventilators, voluntaries
ELVIS ARON ta3 = countervails, nonrelatives, overanalysis, revaluations
The singer’s surname is more interesting from a transadditional point of view. There are just a couple of single-letter transadditions, but the number of two- and three-letter transadditions starts to escalate. A few of these are given here.

PRESLEY ta1 = peytrels, sleepery
PRESLEY ta2 = employers, expressly, polyester, precisely, proselyte, supremely
The two names ELVIS and PRESLEY can be spelled out separately from the trio of eleven-letter words PERVERSIVELY, PRACTIVELY and REPULSIVELY. There only appears to be one word from which all three of the names ELVIS, ARON and PRESLEY can be spelled out separately: HYPERVENTILATIONS.

At Elvis’ birth in 1935, he was one of a pair of identical twins. His twin brother, JESSE GARON PRESLEY, died at birth. There are no transpositions for JESSE, and a limited number of transadditions, including the following:

- JESSE ta1 = jessed, Jessie, sujees
- JESSE ta2 = bejesus, jesters, Joneses

The logologist will immediately spot that the middle name GARON simply beheads to Elvis’ middle name, ARON, a fact almost certainly apparent to the twins’ parents when choosing their sons’ names.

- GARON tp = argon, groan, nagor, orang, organ
- GARON ta1 = angora, dragon, garcon, jargon, orange, sarong
- GARON ta2 = adoring, arground, clangor, frogman, groaner, paragon

What of Elvis’ parents? His father was VERNON ELVIS PRESLEY and his mother was GLADYS SMITH PRESLEY. There are no transpositions of VERNON, but there are a couple of single-letter transadditions and several two-letter transadditions, thus:

- VERNON ta1 = environ, unroven
- VERNON ta2 = conniver, convener, inventor, nonvoter, unproven, vigneron

Taking his two first names together, there appears to be just one transaddition:

- VERNON ELVIS ta2 = interinvolves

There are no transpositions of GLADYS, nor even single-letter transadditions. But longer transadditions can be found.

- GLADYS ta2 = amygdals, dayglows, ladybugs
- GLADYS ta3 = dashingly, daylights, dialysing

Prior to her marriage to Vernon Presley, Gladys was GLADYS SMITH. There seems to be just one transaddition using these letters, though other examples may exist:

- GLADYS SMITH ta7 = hydrometallurgists

After her marriage, Gladys Smith became GLADYS PRESLEY. There only seems to be a single transaddition here:

- GLADYS PRESLEY ta9 = phosphoglyceraldehydes

Elvis was born on January 8, 1935 at his parents’ two-room house on Old Saltillo Road, East Tupelo, Mississippi. (The house still exists, extensively renovated, but the street has long since been renamed after Elvis.) Anyway, what can we do with these names? There are no transpositions of SALTILLO, and just one single-letter and one two-letter transaddition:

- SALTILLO ta1 = flotillas
- SALTILLO ta2 = lallations

While there are no transpositions of TUPELO, there are many single-letter and two-letter transadditions. Examples follow:

- TUPELO ta1 = couplet, eelpout, gluepot, octuple, opulent, outleap, outyelp, pollute
- TUPELO ta2 = copulate, grouplet, nonuplet, octuplet, outsleap, outspell, petalous

Even the fuller name EAST TUPELO can be transadded, thus:

- EAST TUPELO ta1 = expostulate
- EAST TUPELO ta2 = expostulated, expostulates
Sometime in the late 1930s, the Presleys lost the house on Old Saltillo Road and lived in a series of small houses in East Tupelo. In 1940, the family moved briefly to Pascagoula, Mississippi, near Biloxi on the Gulf Coast. There appears to be just one transaddition of PASCAGOULA:

PASCAGOULA ta10 = semi-autobiographical

Between 1941 and 1948, the Presleys moved back to Tupelo and lived in a series of different homes. In late 1948, the family eventually moved across the state line to Memphis, Tennessee. There are no transpositions of MEMPHIS, but there are some two-letter and three-letter transadditions.

MEMPHIS ta2 = euphemism, mephitism
MEMPHIS ta3 = emphysemic, membership, midshipmen, morphemics

There are no transpositions of TENNESSEE, either, but there are several one-letter and two-letter transadditions:

TENNESSEE ta1 = seventeens
TENNESSEE ta2 = betweeness, genteelness, ressentences, tensenesses

From late 1948, Elvis lived with his parents at a series of different addresses in Memphis as he made his way through school, graduating in 1953, and then starting work.

It was in the late summer of 1953 when Elvis first visited the studios of Sun Records on Union Avenue, Memphis, but not until a year later that he released his first record on the Sun label. As Elvis recorded and released more records on the Sun label, they became local and regional hits, Elvis' fame started to increase, and he and his group were traveling over much of the South doing live performances and radio work. During 1954 and 1955, Elvis made appearances on Nashville's Grand Ole Opry radio program and Shreveport's Louisiana Hayride.

Let's pause awhile and look at some transpositions and transadditions here. The name of his first record label, SUN, is easy to find transpositions and transadditions for:

SUN tp = nus, uns
SUN ta1 = guns, nous, nuts, onus, shun, snug, stun, sung
SUN ta2 = bonus, ensuing, genus, hunks, punk, auna, kunk

Even the longer name SUN RECORDS is a good candidate for transaddition, thus:

SUN RECORDS ta1 = underscores
SUN RECORDS ta5 = superconductors

Sun's recording studio on Union Avenue, Memphis, may be referred to as the SUN STUDIOS. Again, both of these are good candidates for transaddition, thus:

SUN STUDIO ta2 = industrious, subductions
SUN STUDIO ta3 = studiousness, subauditions
SUN STUDIOS ta2 = studiousness
SUN STUDIOS ta5 = industriousness

Even UNION (of the east-west running UNION AVENUE) can be transadded easily, thus:

UNION ta1 = bunion, unison
UNION ta2 = inbound, nonsuit, quinone, unction, unicorn, unnoisy

How about Nashville and the Grand Ole Opry? As an earlier Word Ways article highlighted, the city name can be transposed if we resort to a word appearing in a quotation in the Oxford English Dictionary:

NASHVILLE = ill-shaven

As for transadditions, this appear to be the commonest:

NASHVILLE ta3 = slaveholding

And the Grand Ole Opry? No transposition of those twelve letters, but there are some transadditions of two-thirds of the name, thus:

GRAND OLE ta1 = clangored, girandole, negroidal, reloading
GRAND OLE ta2 = cradlesong, goaltender, longhaired, overloading
The Grand Ole Opry is regularly broadcast from an ex-tabernacle called the Ryman Auditorium in downtown Nashville. Even in the mid-1950s, the Ryman Auditorium was something of a shrine for country music, perhaps even more so now in the 21st century! Ryman offers us some transadditional capability:

And what of the Louisiana Hayride show and radio program broadcast out of Shreveport?

Let’s look at some of the people that Elvis dealt with professionally before and during his time at Sun Records. Probably most significant was Sam Phillips, owner and founder of Sun Records. Let’s look at his name in its various forms:

Sam Phillips’ partner at Sun Records was a lady called Marion Keisker. History has it that she met and dealt with Presley a few months before Sam Phillips became aware of him. Let’s look at the names of this lady:

Though not related to Sam Phillips, another influential person on the Memphis scene in Presley’s early days was Memphis disc jockey Dewey Phillips. This particular Phillips was the first deejay ever to play an Elvis Presley record on the radio, Elvis’ first record in early July 1955.

What of the musicians who performed and recorded with Presley during his early days? Three of the most significant musicians were guitarist Scotty Moore, guitarist Bill Black, drummer DJ Fontana and pianist Floyd Cramer. Let’s see what can be done with their names:
Three more names from Presley’s days at Sun Records: Bob Neal, Chet Atkins, and Colonel Tom Parker. Bob Neal was Presley’s booking agent as early as late 1954, and would book Presley into a variety of tours and shows in the South and Southwest; he obviously recognised Presley’s potential to become an international star. Chet Atkins was a renowned country music guitarist whom Presley first met during his days at Sun Records, but who would eventually wield more influence over Presley when he (Atkins) became RCA Victor’s corporate man in Nashville. Colonel Tom Parker eventually became Presley’s manager. Obviously, there were many more musicians, deejays, artists and record company people who influenced Presley’s career, but let’s just concentrate on these three individuals here and now. What can be done with their names?

Elvis eventually left Sun and moved to RCA Victor in December 1955, his contract with Sun having been bought by RCA for $35,000. Both versions of the new record company’s name are of interest to us here:

RCA tp = arch, card, care, carp, cart, carp, cram, craw, czar, orca, race, rack, racy, scar
RCA VICTOR ta3 = overcritical
RCA VICTOR ta4 = reciprocative
More names come into the picture soon after Presley’s move to RCA Victor. 1956 was the year of Presley’s earliest appearances on national television shows; April of that year saw Presley’s first appearance on the Milton Berle Show. What can we do with Milton and Berle?

MILTON ta1 = molinet, molting, moonlit
MILTON ta2 = longtime, monolith, motional, pilotman
BERLE tp = rebel
BERLE ta1 = belier, belter, rebels, treble
BERLE ta2 = belcher, blender, febrile, tremble

In July 1956, Presley made an appearance on Steve Allen’s late-night Tonight show. This was the show where Presley appeared dressed in tails, singing his then hit Hound Dog to a basset hound. Words like awkward and embarrassing appear in many of the contemporary accounts of the TV recording. Anyway, what can we do with Steve Allen’s name?

STEVE tp = evets
STEVE ta1 = events, svelte, vested, vetoes
ALLEN ta1 = enwall, fallen, leanly, lineal
ALLEN ta2 = cleanly, flannel, galleon, netball
STEVE ALLEN ta3 = televangelism, televangelist
STEVE ALLEN ta4 = televangelisms, televangelists, volatilenesses

Later the same year, in September, Presley made his first appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show. Let’s skip this TV host’s first name, and check out his surname and first name/surname combo:

SULLIVAN ta1 = alluvions, villainous
SULLIVAN ta2 = villainous
ED SULLIVAN ta3 = vaudevillians

It’s also worth noting that the letters of Nashville can be spelled out from the name of the television show:

ED SULLIVAN SHOW td5 = Nashville

Steve Sholes was the a&r (artists and repertoire) director at RCA Victor, and had shown an interest in Presley as early as the summer of 1954. He was the most senior RCA Victor executive overseeing Presley’s first recordings for RCA Victor during the first couple of months of 1956. We’ve already played with the name Steve, but what of Sholes?

SHOLES tp = hosels, sheols
SHOLES ta1 = asshole, hostels, shovels, sloshed
STEVE SHOLES ta12 = philoprogenitivenesses

Let’s take a look at some of the other names in Presley’s career. A couple of songwriters who wrote numerous songs for Presley during his early days with RCA Victor were Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. The publisher of many Presley songs was a company called Hill and Range, set up by a couple of Viennese refugees Jean and Julian Aberbach, the Aberbachs. One of the key men at the Aberbach’s publishing company was Freddy Bienstock. What can we do with these names?

JERRY ta2 = perjury
JERRY ta3 = joyrider
LEIBER tp = belier
LEIBER ta1 = beliers, febrile, libeler
LEIBER ta2 = believer, bluesier, reliable
MIKE ta1 = kelim, miked, minke
MIKE ta2 = kinema, kismet, milked
STOLLER tp = tollers
STOLLER ta1 = pollster, strolled, trolleys
Presley bought his Graceland mansion in early 1957. This is where he died in 1977; it is still part of the Presley estate, and is open to visitors daily.

The street address for Graceland is now Elvis Presley Boulevard. It’s interesting to note that both ELVIS and BOULEVARD can be spelled out separately from the letters of two words, BOULEVDIERS and UNDISCOVERABLE.

Presley joined the US Army in March 1958. His initial posting was to Fort Hood, Texas. In September 1958 he transferred to Germany, and was stationed near the village of Friedberg, not far from Frankfurt.

Elvis first met his eventual wife Priscilla Beaulieu while in Germany; she was the 14-year-old daughter of a US Air Force captain stationed in Wiesbaden.

Presley left the US Army in March 1960. His first television appearance after return to civilian life was on a Frank Sinatra special.

Presley eventually married Priscilla Beaulieu in 1967, and she became Priscilla Presley. Two points of interest. One, the names Priscilla and Presley share the same Soundex code, PRSL (in Soundex, names are reduced to four-digit codes that discount doubled letters and regard as equivalent similar letters such as B and P, or M and N). Two, the names Priscilla and Presley can both be spelled out separately from the word STEREOSPECIFICALLY. Presley’s daughter Lisa Marie was born in February 1968.
The three names LISA, MARIE and PRESLEY can all be spelled out separately from the word HYPERREALISM, while the two names LISA MARIE and PRESLEY can be spelled out separately from the longer HYPERALIMENTATIONS.

Presley was renowned for the Memphis mafia, an ever-present entourage of friends, relations, gofers and hangers-on who spent time hanging out with him, running errands, playing football and overseeing other aspects of his day-to-day existence. One of the members was cousin Gene Smith, and another was Lamar Fike. Others were Joe Esposito, Alan Fortas, Bitsy Mott, Ray Sitton and Red West.

After his discharge from the US Army, Presley turned out a string of unmemorable films between 1961 and 1968; some of the titles appear at the end of this article. Presley returned to television in 1968 with the NBC-TV Special, and to live onstage performances in Las Vegas in mid-1969. More TV and live performances followed. Presley returned to Las Vegas again and again for the next seven years. When he opened in Las Vegas in 1970, it was with his new jump-suited look, now familiar.

Negotiations for Elvis’ divorce from Priscilla began in July 1972, about the same time that he met Linda Thompson, a woman he was to be linked with for much of the next four and a half years.

The beginning of 1973 saw Presley’s satellite TV show, Aloha from Hawaii, broadcast from Honolulu. (Actually, it wasn’t broadcast simultaneously everywhere; different parts of the world received it at different times, even on different days, because of marketing considerations.)
What of Presley and drugs? He had probably begun using drugs such as Placidyl, Valium, Percodan and Demerol as early as 1960, mainly for insomnia. These are all heavily addictive, and Presley progressed to even stronger drugs such as Dilaudid by 1972. His usage of other drugs such as Lidocaine and Hyco dan is well documented.

Note, too, that the place of his death, MEMPHIS TN, can be transadded to give a class of drugs: MEMPHIS TN ta3 = amphetamines

Presley finally died on August 16, 1977.

On a less depressing note, let’s take a look at some of Presley’s song titles. There are very few transpositions and, not surprisingly, the ones that do exist are for fairly short song titles. Any advance on the eight-letter specimen here? Transdeletions and transadditions are somewhat easier to find.

IT’S A SIN tp = isatins
TIGER MAN tp = emigrant, remating
US MALE tp = Samuel, ulemas

BIG BOSS MAN td1 nabobisms
BLUE CHRISTMAS td2 = submatrices
BLUE MOON td1 = nelumbo
GUITAR MAN td1 = armgaunt
KING CREOLE td1 = relocking
LOVING YOU td1 = vinology
OLD SHEP td1 = sloped
ONE NIGHT td1 = nothing
SUCH A NIGHT td1 = hatchings
SURRENDER td1 = endurers
SUSPICION td1 = opinicus, psionics
TEDDY BEAR td1 = betrayed
TREAT ME NICE td1 = remittance

DON’T ta1 = donut, noted, tones
G.I. BLUES ta1 = beguiles, bulgiest
GUITAR MAN ta1 = armaturing, maturating
IT’S A SIN ta1 = pianists, sanities
LOVE ME TENDER ta1 = redevelopment
OLD SHEP ta1 = asphodel, depolish, polished, splo shed
ONE NIGHT ta2 = dethroning, shortening, toughening
SHE’S NOT YOU ta2 = autohypnoses
SOLDIER BOY ta2 = hyperboloids
US MALE ta1 = amulets, malleus, maulers

A number of Presley’s films, both pre- and post-Army, are useful for wordplay:
CHARRO ta1 = orchard, trochar
CLAMBAKE ta1 = blackgame, camelback
G.I. BLUES ta1 = beguiles, bulgiest
GIRL HAPPY ta2 = polygraphic
KING CREOLE td1 = relocking
LOVING YOU td1 = vinology
SPINOUT ta1 = opuntias, spouting, unspoilt, utopians
TICKLE ME ta4 = computerlike

And finally, a few last words and names connected with the Presley legend. Beal Street in Memphis is an area renowned for its musical influences during the 1940s and 1950s, where Presley probably spent much time hanging out. Billboard and Cash Box are the two US musical trade papers which charted the rise and fall of Presley’s records.
BEALE ST tp = Beatles, belates
BILLBOARD tp = broadbill
CADILLAC ta4 = dialectical
CASH BOX ta3 = matchboxes
GOLD RECORD ta6 = dendrochronology
GOLDEN RECORDS ta5 = dendrochronologies
GOLD LAME ta1 = gamboled
GOSPEL tp = golpes
GOSPEL ta1 = epilogs, prolegs, splodge
GUITAR ta2 = antidrug, gratuity, ligature, ziggurat
HIP-SHAKING td2 = kingship
HYSTERIA ta1 = hairstyle, yahrzeits
MEMPHIAN ta3 = amphetamine, impeachment
PELVIS ta1 = pelvics, plosive
SOUNDTRACK ta6 = counterblockades