SIX-LETTER CONNOISSEUR’S LADDERS

REX GOOCH
Letchworth, Herts, England

By the time we reach six-letter words, conditions for superior ladders are much improved: nearly one-half of six-letter words are heterograms (all letters are different), the fraction of isolanos (words which have no neighbours) decreases to less than one-tenth, there is a reasonable number of onalosis (words which have neighbours for each letter-change), and each word has on average almost six neighbours (one for each letter). In this article, we therefore only consider ladders in which the terminal words are heterograms, with corresponding letters different, and with letters replaced in order. Even so, there are about fifty thousand of them.

In “Snakes and Ladders” in the May 1998 Word Ways, the reader can find four ideal six-letter ladders between heterograms, with terminal words either reversals or related in meaning; however, none changes the letters in order, as required here.

To make a Connoisseur’s Ladder of the semantic type, we only have to find terminal words which bear an apt relationship to one another, and it is hoped the reader will find most of the examples do show such a relationship, whether straightforward or contradictory, amusing or surrealistic, or even satiric. Just as a taster, consider: carton holder, donate saving, fasten lingam, meltlyd fusion, randie fucker, tricky rhymes, money’s lustre, gayest wreath, blinks stared, louche sentry.

It is also possible to find, despite the very significant restrictions, ladders in which all the words are instantly recognisable.

At last we find a Connoisseur’s Ladder of the technical variety, in that the terminal words are permutations of each other. Because this was discovered within a few hours of the birth of my first grandson to bear the family name, it is dedicated to him, and will be referred to as

**Dominic’s Connoisseur’s Ladder**

- LANTER (obsolete form of “lantern”)
- TANTER (12th-14th century popular Anglo-French form of “tempt”)
- TENTER (a frame on which to stretch cloth, hence “tenterhooks”)
- TERTER (variant form of “tertre,” a little hill)
- TERNER (a student of St. Andrew’s University, Scotland)
- TERNAR (alternative spelling of previous word)
- TERNAL (threelfold, triple).

Copyright Rex Gooch 2001
All words can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary. This is the longest known technical Connoisseur’s Ladder.

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. Bl = Bloomsbury Thesaurus, Ch = Chambers, Lo = Longman’s, Tert F = Tertiary Faunas, vf = OED variant form. The same place names may occur in different countries.

**Ideal Ladders between heterograms with sequential letter change (about 0.5% of those found)**

**forward replacement**

ALICES (pl. pers name) — SLICES — SPICES — SPACES — SPANES (vf) — SPANKS — SPANKY. Also — SPARKY

ALIGHT — BLIGHT — BRIGHT — BROUGHT (vf) — BROWHT (vf) — BROWST — BROWSE

AMORES (A of Ovid) — SMORES (OE D) — SPORES — SPARIES (vf) — SPANES (vf) — SPANKS — SPANKY. Also — SCALDY, — SCALPY, — SPINAL, — STALKY

AROUSE — CROUSE — CLOUSE (vf) — CLAUSE — CLAISE (vf) — CLAIME (vf) — CLAIMS. Also — CLANSE (vf) — CLANGE (vf) — CLANGS

ASTEN (OE D, also pers name) — LUSTEN (vf) — LISTEN — LINTEN — LINGEN (in Herefordshire) — LINGAM

AUSTER (OE wind, or light aircraft) — BUSTER — BASTER — BANTRY — BANDIR (The Electronic Alveary) — BANDIT

BACON (gas shore terminal in Norfolk) — HACTON (vf) — HOCTON (vf) — HOLTON (in Suffolk) — HOLD ON (OE D) — HOLDEN — HOLDER

BANGER — HANGER — HONGER (vf) — HOLER (Sted) — HOLDER — HOLDUR (OE D) — HOLDUP (Web2). Also BANKER — HANKER — HONKER — HOLKER (in Cumbria)

BANTER — CANTER — CONTER — COSTER — COSHER — COSHAM (Portsmouth, UK HQ of IBM)

BARLEY — CARLEY — CORLEY (in Warwickshire) — COOLEY (vf) — COREY (vf) — COURT — COURTS

BATHER — HATHER — LATHER — LUSHER — LUSTER — LUSTIR (vf) — LUSTIE (vf = lusty)

BAWNIE (vf) — COWDIE (vf) — COWDI — CONDI — CONGE (OE D) — CONGEE — CONGER

BERLIN — MERLIN — MARLIN — MASLIN — MASTIN (OE D) — MASTEN (Ger to feed, whence Eng mast = fruit of oak)

MOTHER — MOTHER — MATHER — MASHER — MASTER — MASTIR (vf) — MASTIC

BROOKS (badgers) — CROOKS — CROCKS — CHOCKS — CHICKS — CHIRKS — CHIRPS — CHIRPY. Also — CLOCKS — CLICHS — CLINGS — CLINGY

BOWERS — Sowers — SAWERS — SABERS — SABIRS — SABINS — SABINE

BOY — MAN (OE D) — COY — MAN (OE D) — CAYMAN — CARMAN — CARDAN (OE D) — CARDEN (OE D under trans-condyloid) — CARDEW (C the Cad, English comic character)

BRICKS — CRICKS — CLICKS — CLOCKS — CLONKS — CLONES — CLOSED

BRIDGE — FRIDGE — FLIDGE (vf) — FLADGE (OE D) — FLANGE — FLANK (vf) — FLANKS

BRIQUE — CRIQUE (OE D under creek) — CAIQUE — CANQUE (OE D) — CANOE (vf) — CANOE (OE D) — CANOPY

BRITON — WIRTON (vf) — WAITON — WALTON (angling author, or one of 16 towns in UK) — WALK-ON — WALKEN (vf) — WALKED/WALKER

BUSTLE (activity) — TUSTLE (vf) — TASTLE (vf) — TARTLE — TARDLE — TARDIS — TARDIS (Dr Who’s spaceship)

BUXTON (in Derbyshire, water very hard) — CUXTON (in Medway) — CAXTON — CARTON — CARION (vf) — CARION — CARIES
CANTOS—PANTOS (pantomimes)—PONTOS (OED)—PULTOS (Ch Gr, whence poultice)—POLIOS—POLISS (vf)—POLISH
CARTON—HARTON (in Shropshire)—HORTON (in Shropshire)—HOLTON (in Suffolk)—HOLDON (OED)—HOLDEN—HOLDER
CARTON—PARTON (OED under germ)—POUTON (in UK)—POURON (Bl)—POUREN (Middle Eng pour)—POURED
CASTLE—TASTLE (vf)—TUSTLE (vf)—TURTLE—TURKIE (vf)—TURKIC (OED)
CAXTON (word, but famous printer)—SAXTON (vf)—SIXTON (The Electronic Alveary)—SINTON (in Worcestershire)—SINGEN (vf, sect)—SINGEN (vf)—SINGER. Also nine other famous singers(!), including DALTON, DORIAN, GALTON, PAXTON
CHIVES—SHIVES—STIVES (OED)—STAVES—STALES—STALKS—STALKY
CHORES—SHORES—SPORES—SPARES—SPANS—SPANKY
CLARE—CLAIRE (vf)—ST AIRE (vf)—STEIRE (vf)—STEARE (vf)—STEADY. Also—STEAME (vf)—STEAMY,
—STOIRE (vf)—STORAGE (vf)—STORME (vf)—STORMY
DALTON (famous high school in Mass.)—HALTON (in Buckinghamshire)—HOLTON (in Suffolk)—HOLTON (in Kent)—HORSON (OED)—HORSON (OED)—HORSEY
DANGER—LANGER (vf)—MONIST—MODIST—MODEST—MODEL T (OED, Ford car)—MODELS
DEVOUR—LEVOUR (vf)—LA VOUR (vf)—LAMOUR (OED)—LAMBUR (vf)—LAMBER—LAMBS (vf)
DITHER—Li THER—LUTHER—LUSHER—LUSTER—LUSTER (vf)—LUSTIE (vf, Styly)
DIVERS—SI VERS (OSED)—SAVERS—SABERS—SABIRS—SABINS—SABINE !!!
DONATE—SONATE (vf)—SANATE—Savage—Savite (OED)—SAVINE—SAVING
DORIAN—SORIAN (vf)—SYRIAN—SYLIAN—CH. Old Eng defile)—SYLVAN—SYLVIN—SYLVIA—SYLIV. Sex change
DOUBLE—SOUBLE (vf)—STUBLE (vf)—STIBLE (vf)—STICLE (vf)—STICKE (vf)—STICKY. Also—STIGLE (vf)—STIGME—
—STIGMA,—STOBLE (OED)—STODLE (vf)—STODGE—STODGY
DOUCHE—SOUCHE (vf)—STUCHE (OED)—STICHE (vf)—STIGHE (vf)—STIGME—STIGMA
DRINKS—PRINKS—PLINKS—PLANKS—PLACKS—PLACES—PLACED
DWAYNE (pers name)—SWAYNE (vf)—SHAYNE (pers name)—SHRyne (vf)—SHRENIE (vf)—SHREWE (vf)—SHREWD
DWAYNE (pers name)—SWAYNE (vf)—STAYNE (vf)—STYNE (vf)—STEANE (vf)—STEADE (vf)—STEADY. Also—
—STEAME (vf)—STEAMY,—STOEYE (OED)—STORNE (vf)—STORME (vf)—STORMY
DWAYNE (pers name)—SWAYNE (vf)—TRAYNE—TREYNE (vf)—TRENNE (vf)—TRENDY
FAG-END—RAG END (OED)—REEND (OED)—REMAND—REMAID (OED)—REMAIN
FALTER—VALTER (vf)—VELTER (vf)—VERTER (vf)—VERDER (OED)—VERDUN (warfare in France)
FARTEN—LASTEN (vf)—LISTEN—LINTEN—LINGEN (in Herefordshire)—LINGAN (vf)—LINGAM
FASTER—HASTER—HISTER—HINTER—HINDER—HINDUR (vf)—HINDUS. Also—HOSTER—HOLTER (OED holt vb)—
—HOLDUR (OED)—HOLDUP
FATHER—LATHER—LUTHER—LUSHER—LUSTIR (vf)—LUSTIE (vf)
FICKLE—MICKLE—MUCKLE—MUSCLE—MUSCAE—MUSCAT (wine or shekhdom)
FINDER—MINDER—MANDER (vf)—MARDER (vf)—MARTER (vf)—MARTIR (vf)—MARTIN (bird or person).
Also FUDGES—JUDGES—KINDER—FOILER—FOULER—etc. Some also—MARTY
FORAGE—SORAGE—STRAGE—STOGAE (vf)—STORGE—STORME (vf)—STORMY
FORGED—PORGED (OED)—PARGED—PANGED—PANTED—PANTOD—PANTOS (pantomimes)
FORTES—MORTES (vf)—MARTES (OED fomart, 1523)—MATTES—MATIES—MATINS—MATING
FOSTER—MOSTER (vf)—MASTER—MANTER—MAGER (vf)—MANGOR (vf)—MANGOS. 17 others incl LOANED—BUSKED
FUCKER—RUCKER—RACKER—RANKER—RANDER—RANDIR—RANDIE. 19 other RANDIES, incl DOCKER—FICKER—
—LICKER.—POSTER
FUSION—MUSION—MESION—MELION (OED)—MELTON—MELTNY (vf)—MELTYD (vf)
GAMBLE—WAMBLE—WOBLE—WORLLE—WORLDE (vf)—WORLDE (vf)—WORLDS. Also—WORLE (vf)—
—WORTHIE (vf)—WORTHY
GAYEST—WAYEST (vf)—WRYEST—WREEST (vf)—WREAST (vf)—WREATTH (vf)—WREAT
GIVERS—SI VERS (OED)—SAVERS—SABERS—SABIRS—SABINS—SABINE
HAMBLE (river, Southampton)—SAMBLE (vf)—SEMBLE—SEABLE (OED)—SEARLE (Ronald, cartoonist or pharmaceuticals
coy)—SEARCE—SEARCH
HASTEN—LASTEN (vf)—LISTEN—LINTEN—LINGEN (in Herefordshire)—LINGAN (vf)—LINGAM
HELVIN (Marie, very beautiful model, or silicate)—MELVIN (pers name or Loch)—MALVIN (Pull)—MARVIN (pers name)—
—MARGIN—MARGON (vf)—MARGOT (pers name). Obviously christened wrongly!
HONEST—MONEST (vf)—MENEST (OED feeble, 1450, 2nd pers sing)—MEREST—MERIST—MERITT (vf)—MERITS
HUMBLE—WUMBLE (Web2)—WAMBLE—WARBLE—WARDLE (vf)—WARDEE (OED)—WARDEN. Also—WOMBLE—
—WORBLE—WORLLE (vf)—WORTHE (vf)—WORTHY
JAPERY—PAPERY—PIPERY—PILERY (vf)—PILOY (vf)—PILOYT (OED)—PILOTS
JILTER—MILTER—MALTHER—MANTER—MANGER—MANGOR (vf)—MAN-GOD (OED)
JUMBLE—WUMBLE (Web2)—WOBLE (Web2)—WORBLE—WORLLE (vf)—WORLDE (vf)—WORLDE (vf)—WORLDS
Kaiser—Paiser (Old Fr whence pease, or EDD)—PRIER—PROSER—PROFER (vf)—PROFIR (OED)—PROFIT
KATION—LATION—LUTION (The Electronic Alveary)—LUSION (OED)—LUSTON (in Herefordshire)—LUSTEN (vf)—LUSTER—anion!
LaurIE (pers name)—SAURIE (vf)—STURIE (vf)—STORIE (vf)—STODIE (vf)—STODGE—STODGY
LAYERS—SAYERS—SKYERS (OED)—SKIERS—SKIRRS—SKIRTS—SKIRTY. Crinoline?
LEMONS—SEMONS (OED)—SOMONS (vf)—SOLONs—SOLENS (OED)—SOLERS (OED)—SOLERA. For those who find
—grapes too sweet?
TROPEZ (ST T, S France)—TROPEE (OED)—TROPHE (OED)—TROTHE—TRUTH—TOUTHE—YOUTHE. Youth remove their topz at St Tropz.

TURKIC—TURKIE (vf)—TURKLE—TURBLE (vf)—TUMBLE—TOMBLE (vf)—WOMBLE (vf, UK children’s TV character). Also TURPIN—

TUSKAN (vf)—TUSKAR—TUSKER—TUSHER—TOTHER (OED)—TITHER—ZITHER—

VERDUN—VERDUR (vf)—VERDER (OED)—VERGER—VENGER—VINGER (OED)—WINGER. Also—WANTER, WINTER, WASTER.