

THOSE CRYPTIC BRITISH CROSSWORDS

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When Will Shortz was gathering material for his recently-published book, World Class Championship Crosswords (Simon & Schuster, 1982), he visited me to consult some of my historical crossword competition material. We soon got into a spirited discussion about inadvertent ambiguity in British-style crossword puzzles: I maintained that the plethora of "outs" (black squares) in British diagrams allowed crossword fans sometimes to write different correct answers into the same word-path, whereas Will Shortz insisted that the typical British clue would not allow such a possibility.

After he left, I decided to test my assertion by constructing such a puzzle. Here are the two alternatives:

Across

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1. A lexicographer's highest degree | U T M O S T |
| 2. Unraveled, it is neither
insult nor sunlit | I L I
U N S L I T
Y A I |

Down

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 4. Circus fat person's nickname | U P M O S T |
| 5. Diva's repeated note resembles
a monkey in a tree | U L I
U N S L I T
Y A I |

In this puzzle, I created an ambiguity not only in an unkeyed position but also in the interconnection between two words. The pattern is typically British in that it allows black squares to occur between alternate boxes in each word path; however, it is undesirable that the initial or final letter of every word in the puzzle be left unkeyed.

Would this example have convinced Will Shortz? I don't know, but I note in his book that Puzzle 23, used in the 1953 British Cryptic Championship, allows both SCATTER and SCUTTER as an answer to "Hose will usually cause crowd to this (7)"!