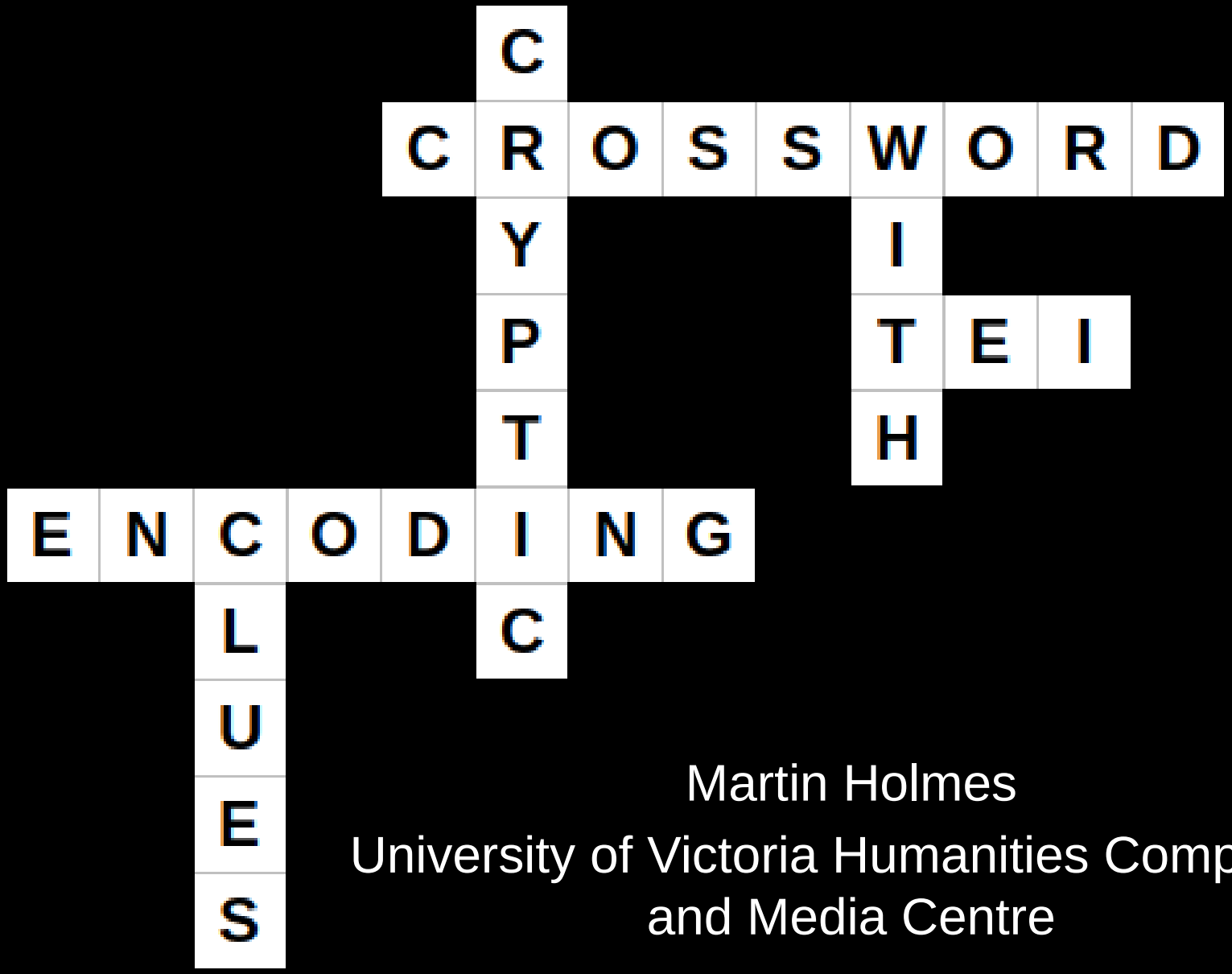


Martin Holmes

University of Victoria Humanities Computing and Media Centre

Outline

- How do cryptic crossword clues work?
- A *brief* history of cryptic crosswords
- Why they're worth studying
- How TEI encoding can help

Anatomy of a typical cryptic clue

- A clue is a phrase or sentence which has an apparent meaning as a whole.

Anatomy of a typical cryptic clue

- A clue is a phrase or sentence which has an apparent meaning as a whole.
- One part of it constitutes a definition of the answer.

Anatomy of a typical cryptic clue

- A clue is a phrase or sentence which has an apparent meaning as a whole.
- One part of it constitutes a definition of the answer.
- The other part of it consists of instructions for constructing the answer.

Four card players wrapping party gifts (6)

“Nutmeg”. Guardian Cryptic Crossword No. 27,183.
https://www.theguardian.com/crosswords/cryptic/27183

Four card players wrapping party gifts (6)

Constructor

Four card players wrapping party gifts (6)

Constructor

Definition

Four card players wrapping party gifts (6)

"Four card players" = **E N W S** (East, North, West, South)

Four card players wrapping party gifts (6)

"Four card players" = **E N W S** (East, North, West, South)

"party" = **DO** (UK informal word)

Four card players wrapping party gifts (6)

"Four card players" = **E N W S** (East, North, West, South)

"party" = **DO** (UK informal word)

"wrapping" = instruction to put one thing around the other

Four card players wrapping party gifts (6)

Answer:

ENDOWS

Brief history

- Word-grids go back to ancient times.

Image: Throwawayhack at English Wikipedia.

- Riddles are among the oldest English language texts we have.

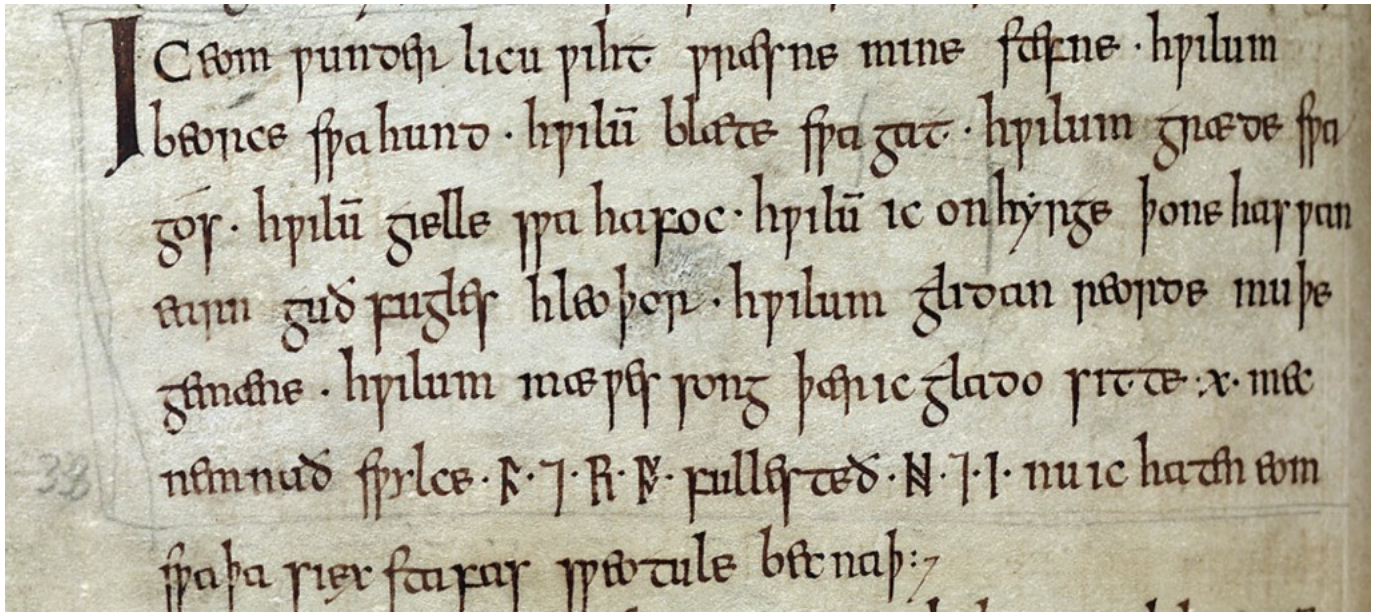
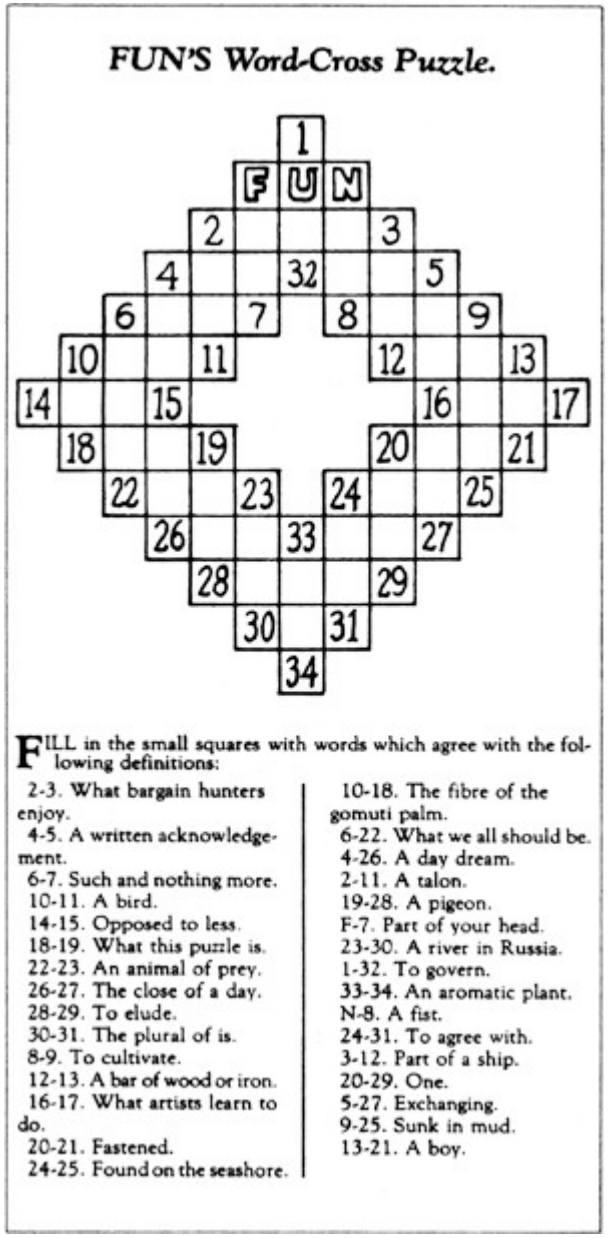


Image: https://sites.nd.edu/manuscript-studies/2017/02/17/reading-runes-in-the-exeter-book-riddles/.



FUN'S Word-Cross Puzzle.

FILL in the small squares with words which agree with the following definitions:

2-3. What bargain hunters enjoy.
4-5. A written acknowledgement.
6-7. Such and nothing more.
10-11. A bird.
14-15. Opposed to less.
18-19. What this puzzle is.
22-23. An animal of prey.
26-27. The close of a day.
28-29. To elude.
30-31. The plural of is.
8-9. To cultivate.
12-13. A bar of wood or iron.
16-17. What artists learn to do.
20-21. Fastened.
24-25. Found on the seashore.
10-18. The fibre of the gomuti palm.
6-22. What we all should be.
4-26. A day dream.
2-11. A talon.
19-28. A pigeon.
F-7. Part of your head.
23-30. A river in Russia.
1-32. To govern.
33-34. An aromatic plant.
N-8. A fist.
24-31. To agree with.
3-12. Part of a ship.
20-29. One.
5-27. Exchanging.
9-25. Sunk in mud.
13-21. A boy.

- 1913: first recognizable crossword
- Author: Arthur Wynne
- Published in New York *Sunday World*

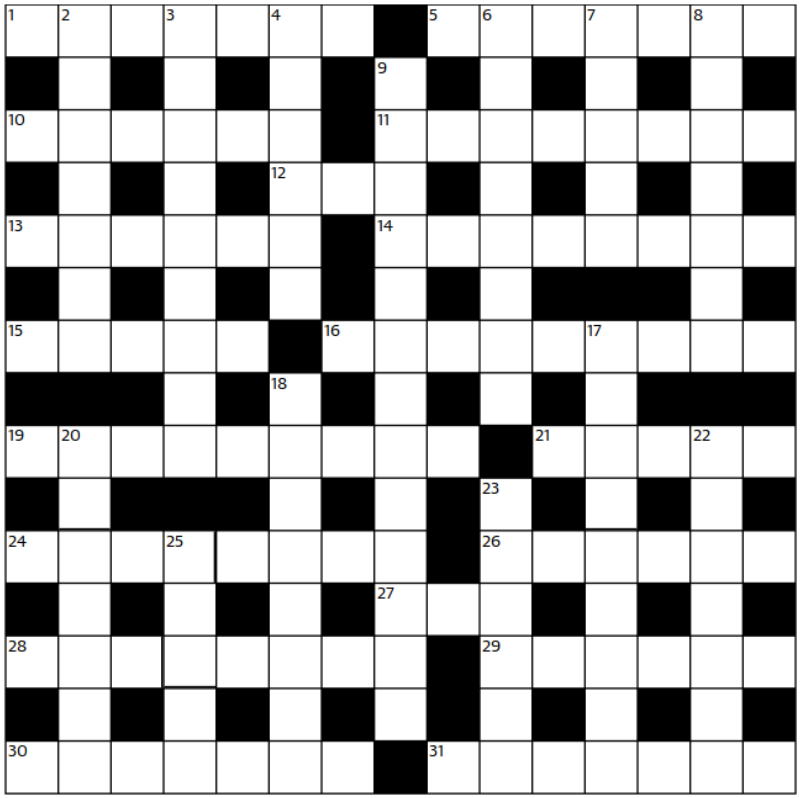
- 1925: crosswords are appearing in daily newspapers in US and UK.
- 1926: Torquemada (Edward Powys Mathers) begins using cryptic clues regularly in the *Observer*.
- 1949: Afrit (A. F. Ritchie) publishes *Armchair Crosswords*.
- 1966: Ximenes (Derek MacNutt) publishes *Ximenes on the Art of the Crossword*.

Ximenes on the Art of the Crossword

- Ontology of clue types
- Rules and principles for fairness ("cluemanship")
- Guidance on constructing grids and clues

Grids

- 15 squares by 15 squares
- Symmetrical
- About half the “lights” should be “checked” (part of at least two words)



Why are cryptic crosswords worth studying?

- The tradition stretches back nearly a century.
- It has been very stable for over 50 years.
- These are literary artefacts.

Features of good cryptic clues

- Elegance
- Concision
- Clarity
- Precision
- Allusiveness
- Multiple layers of meaning

Myxomatosis

by Philip Larkin

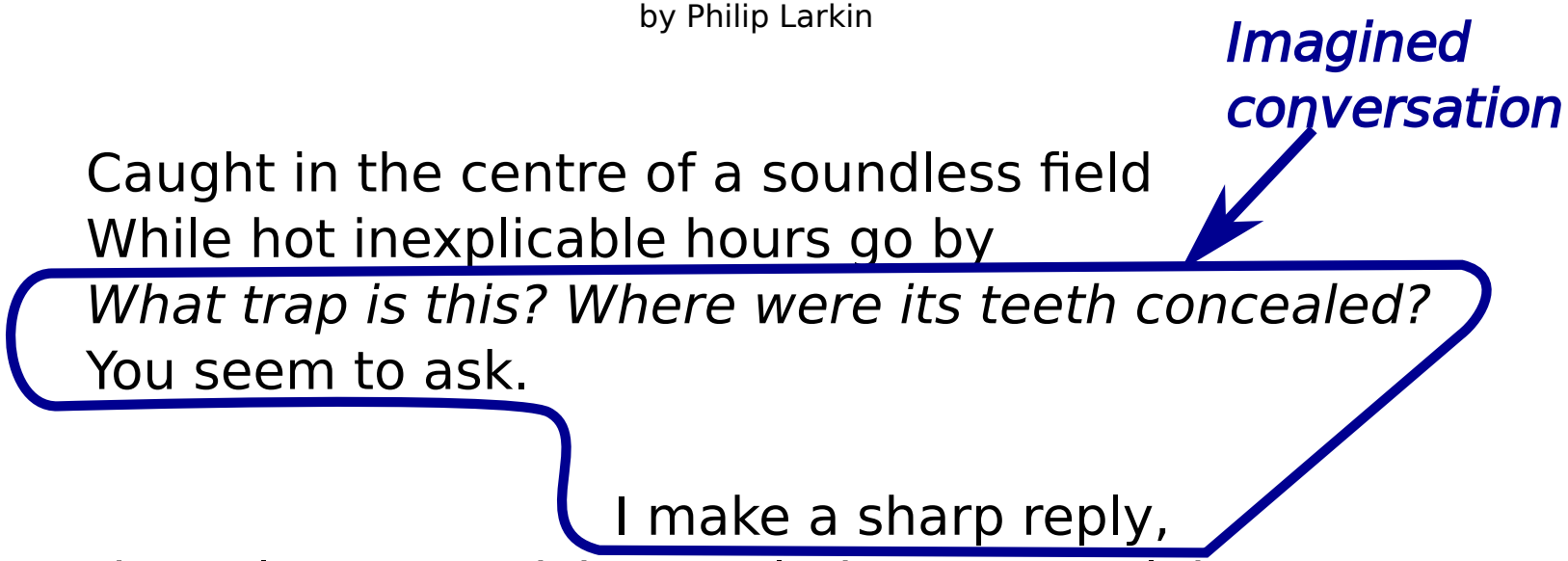
Caught in the centre of a soundless field
While hot inexplicable hours go by
What trap is this? Where were its teeth concealed?
You seem to ask.

I make a sharp reply,
Then clean my stick. I'm glad I can't explain
Just in what jaws you were to suppurate:
Perhaps you thought things would come right again
If you could only keep quite still and wait.

University of Victoria | Humanities Computing and Media Centre

Myxomatosis

by Philip Larkin



Caught in the centre of a soundless field
While hot inexplicable hours go by
What trap is this? Where were its teeth concealed?
You seem to ask.

I make a sharp reply,
Then clean my stick. I'm glad I can't explain
Just in what jaws you were to suppurate:
Perhaps you thought things would come right again
If you could only keep quite still and wait.

Myxomatosis

by Philip Larkin

Caught in the centre of a soundless field
While hot inexplicable hours go by
What trap is this? Where were its teeth concealed?
You seem to ask.

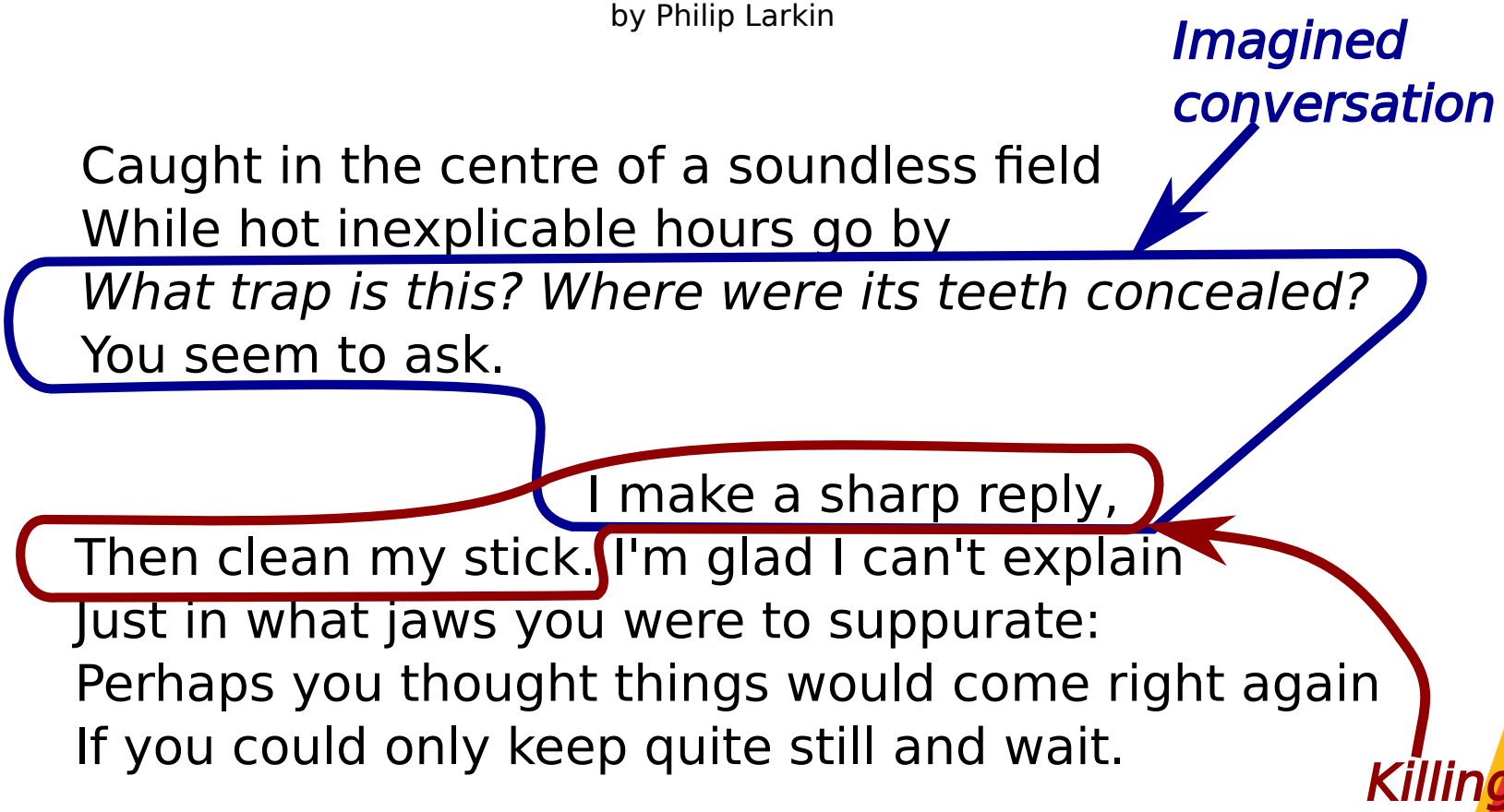
I make a sharp reply,
Then clean my stick. I'm glad I can't explain
Just in what jaws you were to suppurate:
Perhaps you thought things would come right again
If you could only keep quite still and wait.

Killing

University of Victoria | Humanities Computing and Media Centre

Myxomatosis

by Philip Larkin



University of Victoria | Humanities Computing and Media Centre

Guard dog kept within sight (6)

Daily Telegraph. 2002. The Daily Telegraph big book of cryptic crosswords. 9. London: Pan.

University of Victoria | Humanities Computing and Media Centre

Guard dog kept within sight (6)

Definition

Guard dog kept within sight (6)

Definition

Constructor

Guard dog kept within sight (6)

"dog" = **CUR**

Guard dog kept within sight (6)

"dog" = **CUR**

"sight" = **SEE**

Guard dog kept within sight (6)

"dog" = **CUR**

"sight" = **SEE**

"kept within" = instruction to put one thing inside the other

Guard dog kept within sight (6)

Answer:

SECURE

Guard dog kept within sight (6)

Overlapping hierarchy

Four card players wrapping *party* *gifts* (6)

Overlapping hierarchy

TEI encoding can be used to:

- Identify clue components
- Categorize clue and component types
- Delimit overlapping segments
- Categorize topics and themes

Taxonomies

- Clue components:
  - Definition
  - Form (constructor)
  - Signal (word or phrase signaling e.g. anagram or insertion of one thing inside another)
  - Misdirection (such as exploitation of overlapping hierarchy)
  - Convention (well-used or fossilized instances of word-play such as “worker” = “ant” or “bee”)
  - Length

Taxonomies

- Clue types:
  - Enumerates the range of types of clue
  - A single clue may have multiple values
  - Most types are initially derived from Ximenes Chapters VI and VII.

- Unknown
- Synonyms (Xim type 6.1: one or more meanings)
- Reversals (Xim type 6.2: reversal)
- Charade (Xim type 6.3: charade)
- Container and contents (Xim type 6.4: container and contents)
- Pun (Xim type 6.5: pun)
- Anagram (Xim type 6.6: anagram)
- Heads and tails (Xim type 7.1 Heads and tails)
- Speech peculiarities (Xim type 7.2 Peculiarities of speech)
- Words in words (Xim type 7.3 Words treated as parts of other words)
- Initial or final letters (Xim type 7.4 Initial or final letters)
- Foreign languages (Xim type 7.5 Foreign languages)
- Literary references (Xim type 7.6 Literary references etc.)
- Outsides (Xim type 7.7 Outsides
- Embodiment (non-Ximenean)
- Cross-reference to another clue/answer (non-Ximenean)
- & Lit. (Xim type 8 & Lit.)
- Unclassified (Xim type 7.8 Various)

Example encoding

```
<item ana="crs:ctpWordsInWords" source="bibl:xwDt_2002">
  <anchor xml:id="item_001_1"/>
  <seg ana="crs:ccpDef">Guard</seg>
  <seg ana="crs:ccpForm">dog<anchor xml:id="item_001_2"/>
    <seg ana="crs:ccpSignal">kept within</seg> sight</seg>
  <seg ana="crs:ccpLength">(6)</seg>


  <span ana="crs:ccpMisdirection" from="#item_001_1"
      to="#item_001_2">The phrase <mentioned>guard
      dog</mentioned> crosses the definition/form
     boundary.</span>
</item>
```

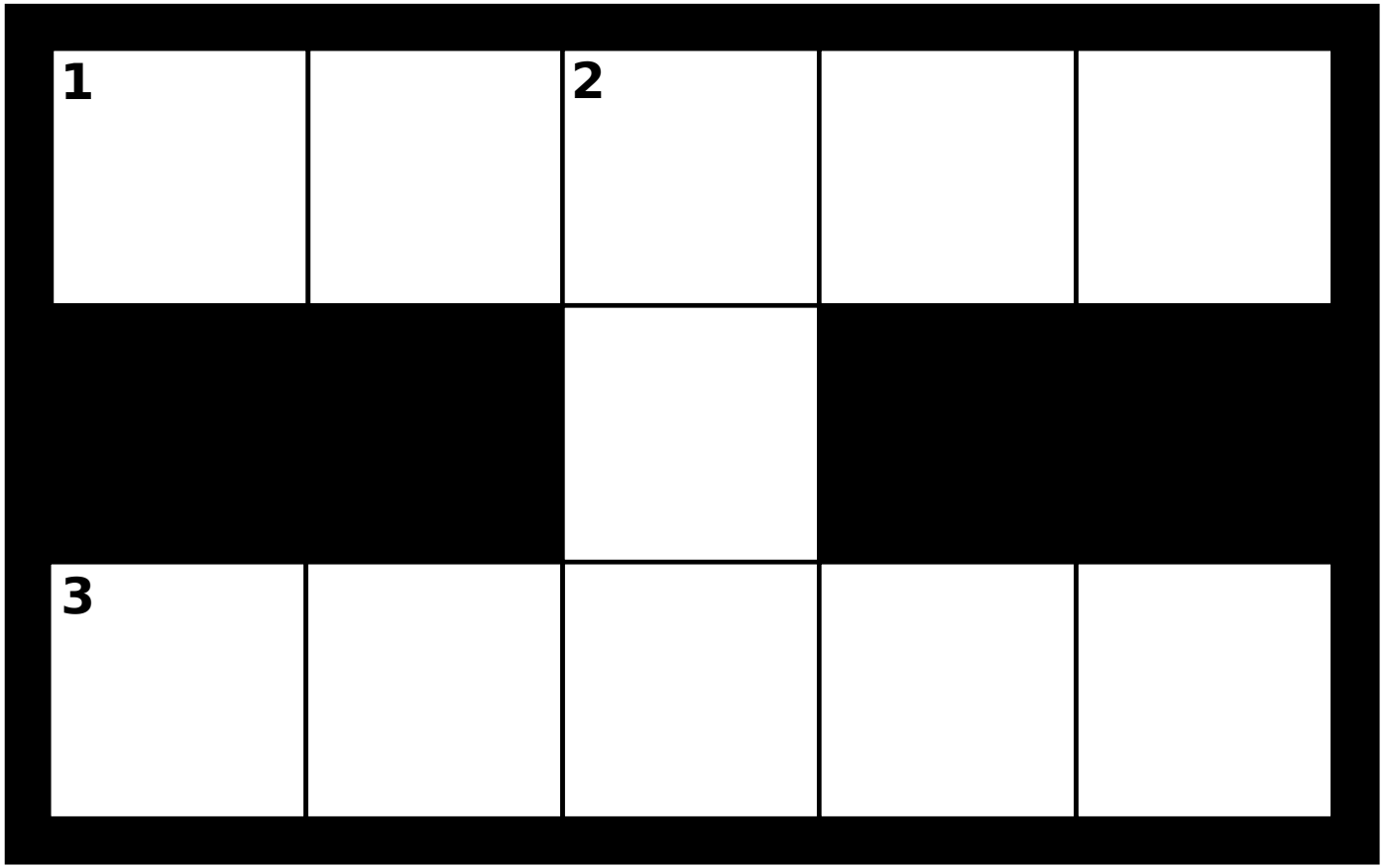
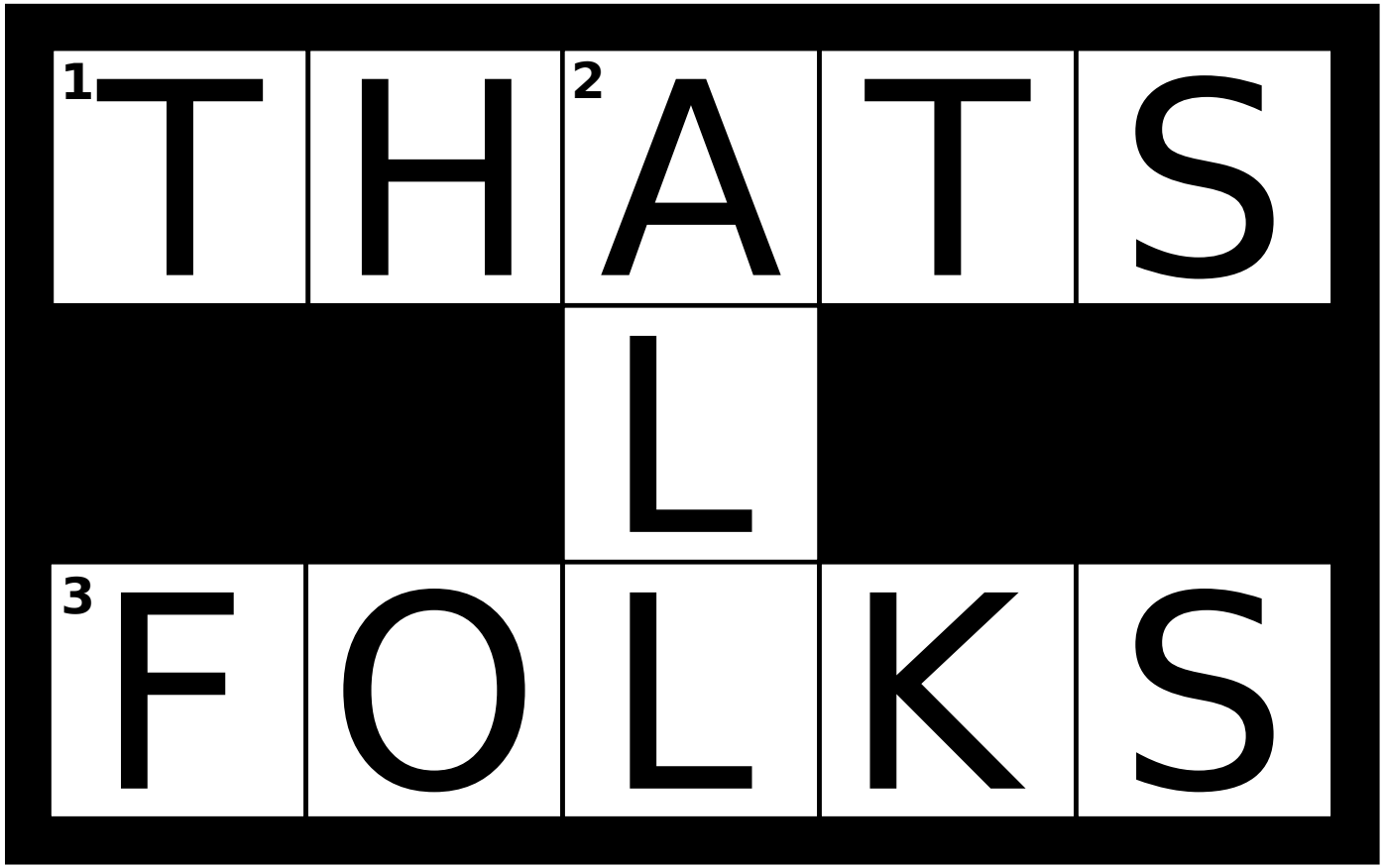
Possible research approach

- Select two or three British broadsheet newspapers covering 1930 to 2017
- Randomly select one crossword from each year from each newspaper (= 88 crosswords per paper)
- Encode and analyze

Possible research questions

- How do the various clue types emerge over time?
- When do the fossilized conventions emerge?
- How similar are well-known setters to each other?
- How closely are Ximenes's principles adhered to over time?

1, 2, 3: I.e. everyone, as Porky Pig said (5,3,5)



1, 2, 3: I.e. everyone, as Bosko said (5,3,5)