

AN EXCHANGE OF COMPLEMENTS

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In the following dialogue, Sebbie (short for Sebastian) uses only the letters BEHILOSZ, and Amanda the remaining eighteen. (Why this choice of letters? My children showed me how 71077345 on a pocket calculator would spell ShELLOIL if turned upside down, and I ascertained that 8 and 2 also led to letters.) Because of the paucity of words spelled with these eight letters or the complement, I have taken certain orthographic liberties with their conversation, but it should not prove too hard to understand.

AMANDA / SEBBIE

Guyd mawrnyng! / Hello!
My naym Amanda. / I be Sebbie.
Ar yu a Magyar? / Hoo? Sebbie?
A man mayntayn yu a Hungaryan. / He lies.
Du yu mayk munny? / Si.

Wat du yu du? / I sell.
Wat? / I sell heels ...
And? / soles ...
And? / shoes ...
And? / bees. Bees bizz.

A? Makyng wax. Ar yu 'ard-wurkyng? / Si. I be bizzie.
Apyan-myndyng pay? / So-so.
And du yu -- / Sssshh!
Wat matta? / I see Sisilie.
A wuman? / Is she!

A frump? / Sillie! She sizzles.
Wat, ar yu fry-yng? / I boil.
My, my! Wat turn yu up? Rump? Mammary? / Boobs.
Quant a ca, j'ay un grand payr. / So I see. Sizible.
Nauty man! / Hell's bells! Sesilie sees Sebbie. I'll be ill.

Cum, cum, 'av currayj! / She'll be Bolshie.
Ay can manayj. / H-h-hello, Sesilie.
A! Guyd day tu yu, yung wuman! / Oh losh!
Yu 'av cum yn guyd taym tu mayk an audytur: arrum!
A Puccyny - / Hoo?

--A Puccyny arya tu mayk yu 'appy ... and tu mayk yu cry ...
 "Wun Fayn Day ..." / She ebbs! She oozes ...
 Away? 'Urra! 'Urra! / Hee-hee!
 Wat fun! Wat taym ay cum agayn? Tunayt? / Oh-ho!
 Wat du yu du tunayt? / I see bills.
 Can ay cum Fryday? / I'll see.

Yu wat? A! Yngrayt! / Sloelie, sloelie.
 Admyt yt: ay am vurry guyd tu yu. / Oh, so bossie!
 Ay am away / Bie-bie!
 Ay put up a prayr fur yu. / Ho-ho! She is si belle ...
 so sossie ... she's lobbelle!

MONKEYS AT TYPEWRITERS

Nearly everyone knows the claim (apparently originated by Eddington in 1927) that, given enough time, a troop of monkeys at typewriters could reproduce all the books in the British Museum -- mixed, alas, with a vast amount of gibberish. In "How Artificial is Intelligence?" in the November/December issue of *American Scientist*, W. R. Bennett jr. has made the monkeys' task somewhat easier by providing them with special typewriters mirroring first-, second-, third- and fourth-order statistics of various languages, and even of various authors. (The *i*th-order statistics of a language supply letters at random depending upon the values of the *i* - 1 preceding letters; thus, U is 99.9 per cent certain to follow Q in second-order statistics, and U is very likely to follow YO in third-order statistics.) Briefly, Bennett shows, using computer-produced samples of text, that the second-order statistics of different languages are clearly distinguishable, and that the third-order statistics of authors produce characteristic phrases (Hemingway starts with "Mount me Sam" and Shakespeare contains the word "Hamlet"). By fourth-order, about 90 per cent of all Shakespearean letter-strings are English words, but Poe is more cryptic. Curiously, vulgar words and phrases are more frequent in samples of low-order statistics than high-order ones, lending scientific support to the observation that people who use them seem the least educated (do their brains contain lower-order statistical generators?). How high would one have to go before not only words but original thoughts emerged from these simulations? Computer advances may soon make fifth-order statistics feasible, but I, for one, doubt that this is enough.