

KICKSHAWS

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Readers are encouraged to send their own favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Associate Editor. All answers appear in the Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

More on the Pangrammatic Window

Ralph Beaman's article "The Pangrammatic Window" in the August 1972 *Word Ways* inspired several readers to perform random word searches of well-known sources in hopes of finding short pangrammatic groups. Based on random sampling, Ralph estimates that if you pick a string of approximately 2000 letters of English prose (about the number of letters you might expect to occur in a pair of Shakesperian sonnets), your chance is only about 50-50 of finding all 26 letters. Since finding all 26 letters is virtually equivalent to finding a passage with the four rarest letters JQXZ, the search is made slightly (but only slightly) easier. Kevin Kearns has confirmed his hunch that every page in the main section of Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary is pangrammatic, and Leslie Card has long since deflated our conjecture that the same is true of Webster's Pocket Dictionary. If one widens the net and searches for pangrammatic windows in creative literature (the Bible, Dickens, Keats, Chaucer, etc.) the best example known is reported by Dmitri Borgmann in Language on Vacation: "It was an exquisitely deep blue just then, with filmy white clouds drawn up over it like gauze", from Sarah Grand's The Beth Book, published in New York in 1897. This 76-letter sentence is even more astonishing when one realizes that a window only 67 letters long is needed to catch all the letters of the alphabet!

The odds against an inadvertent creation of a 76-letter pangram are so astronomical that we wonder whether Ms. Grand (a pseudonym for Frances Elizabeth Clarke MacFall) may have deliberately constructed this curiosity. As Andrew Griscom of Menlo Park, California, has found, it is difficult to find literary examples even twice this length. Scanning the Penguin edition of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park, he discovered the following 139-letter string on p. 321: "...just to be denied. But there is no time fixed, perhaps tomorrow, or whenever your spirits are composed enough. For the present you have only to tranquillize yourself. Check..." We admire the patient devotion of a logophile who can read the immortal Jane Austen with one lobe of his brain while scanning her paragraphs for pangrams with the other!

Outside of the Grand quote, there is little chance that any reader can come up with a shorter pangram than this, even if he uses the shortcut of scanning for a word such as tranquilize that has two or more rare letters and then checking for the shortest pangram that includes it. We have computed the odds against Jane Austen's accidental creation of a 139-letter pangram as one out of ten million, approximately, and the odds of Mr. Griscom's discovering it as about one in ten billion. So you can see what you're up against.

More Griscom

When he first informed us of the fruits of his pangrammatic labors, Andrew Griscom was a relieved man -- happy in the thought that he could now go back to reading for the pure delight of it, rather than with a built-in alarm system that would interrupt the flow of enjoyment whenever a logological word passed across his natural scanner. During this period, he found he was never free from the compulsion to pangrammize, even in his professional reading (geology). Although he encountered no pangrams worth discussing in technical articles, he found some intriguing coinages for Jack Levine, the word-pattern collector. On page 21 of the June 1973 issue of *Geotimes* appears a map of the Ross Sea Continental Shelf (the Ross of the four-S "Ross's Seal", we think), and above it are references to what is called nannofossil ooze, subsequently shortened to the marvelous NANNOOOZE. Another discovery of Griscom's is HELLELESS, a coinage of E. E. Cummings on page 4 of his Six Nonlectures (Harvard Paperbacks, 1972).

Grateful for the pangram and the pattern words, we advised Griscom that he was permanently relieved of any further obligations to discover more and/or better pangrams and/or pattern words. Instead, he could now read for information, relaxation, amusement, and escape, with only one proviso: we had had such bad luck in discovering reasonably long homoliteral and heteroliteral passages in the King James Version of the Bible, that we needed the services of the scanner whenever he felt in a pious mood. The explanation of the terms homo- and heteroliteral, together with Andrew Griscom's reaction to our solicitation, will appear in a Kickshaw yet to come.

A Kickshaw Yet to Come

Two words which have no letters in common, such as MISSISSIPPI and BANANA, are heteroliteral. A string of words is heteroliteral if every adjacent pair of words is heteroliteral: "I'll ask the Major if he wants beer". Two words are homoliteral if they have one or more letters in common, such as PENCIL and ERASER. A passage is homoliteral if each adjacent pair of words is homoliteral: "Is this the face that launched a thousand ships?" (In the February 1973 *Word Ways* Judith Tarr Isquit coined the term "literary word-sequence" to describe a homoliteral passage, but we like our coinage better.)

Recognizing in Griscom qualities of persistence that make him seem the avatar of the patient researcher, we offered him the charter

to seek out the longest homoliteral (hereinafter called AA) and heteroliteral (AB) passages in the Bible (KJV). He accepted, and set to work in Genesis I, a chapter of slightly less than 800 words, in order to get a feel for the problem. "AB chains are exceedingly boring to look for," wrote Andy, "but I quickly noticed the glorious phrase 'And it came to pass', yielding in Genesis 14:1 'And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar'. This fine AB chain of length 13 is matched by at least one other of similar structure elsewhere in the Pentateuch." But not in Genesis I, in which Andy found three ABs of length five and one each of lengths six, seven and nine. As for homoliterals, the Bible, at least, is richer, if only because of the frequency of the letter A in Hebrew names. Genesis I has two AA's of length thirteen and one of length seventeen.

Expanding his base, Andy found a fourteen-word AB chain, which he has yet to surpass, in 2 Samuel 22:2: "And he said, The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer."

Concentrating on name-lists, Andy found AA chains of length 34 in 1 Chronicles and length 40 in Nehemiah 10:16-17. "Investigations bogged down at this point," said our researcher, "perhaps owing to the sin of pride, which generates overconfidence. Over a week later I was meditating (dozing) in a chair when the message flashed into my mind that the Gospels had a section of 'begats'. The prize was found in Matthew 1:11-16 -- an AA-chain of length 58 beginning with the words 'to Babylon: and after they were brought to Babylon...'"

In the course of Andy Griscom's labors, several more literary (but shorter) AA passages turned up -- one in Genesis 1:6-7 (17 words) and another of the same length in Deuteronomy 2:27-28, particularly remarkable since the words are extremely short: "I will neither turn unto the right hand nor to the left. Thou shalt sell me meat" -- a clear message to your recalcitrant butcher!

We are grateful for all reader contributions, but the hardest sort of fieldwork is obviously the kind that no word lists, concordances, or other references can further. Those Kickshavians who have read this far will have noticed in themselves a tendency to compare adjacent words for homo- or heteroliterality. Some of you have already opened Bibles at random, hoping to beat Andrew Griscom's 14-word AB-chain. As a prize to any reader who surpasses either of his efforts in the KJV, or who finds a shorter pangrammatic passage in creative literature (in English, you loophole-finders), we pledge to release you from any duties you may feel obligated to perform in the future when you are reading just for the sake of reading. Did you notice that the previous seven words were practically heteroliteral?

Absurdity of an Absurdity

No doubt Kickshavians are getting rather tired of the "Quiz of a Quiz" concept featured in two earlier issues; however, we couldn't resist printing Mary Youngquist's clever spoof of the whole business.

In the earlier quizzes the X word that satisfied the relation "X is a Y of 'Y'" was given, and the reader was asked to find the Y. In this quiz the object is still the same, but anything goes -- for example, "land pollution" is answered "a soil of soil".

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| 1. ilk | 6. bunches of partly-eaten apples |
| 2. house construction | 7. policemen hiding in the woods |
| 3. Greta's clothes | 8. silver-covered dish |
| 4. ale steward | 9. clothing storage for undergarments |
| 5. paying the check | 10. put mother's sister up for a gambling stake |

A Linguistic Landmark

The English Language in its panoramic modern evolution appears in two paperback volumes published by Cambridge University Press. Volume I, edited by W. F. Bolton and subtitled Essays by English & American Men of Letters - 1490-1839, was published in 1966 (\$2.75), and Volume II, edited by W. F. Bolton and D. Crystal and subtitled Essays by Linguists and Men of Letters - 1858-1964, was published in 1969 (\$2.95).

The first essay, by William Caxton (1422-1491), is the prologue to his translation of Eneydos (1490). In it he expresses his hope that a measure of uniformity will be achieved such as will one day enable a Yorkshireman and a Cornishman to converse fluently with each other (a hope still not fully realized). His prologue is printed with its quaintly archaic words and spellings unspoiled by the editor, and it is remarkable how modern his text appears when compared, for example, with that of Chaucer and his contemporaries of the previous century. Henry Alexander, author of The Story of our Language (Dolphin Books, 1962), places the transition from Middle to Modern English at about 1500, give or take a few decades. Perhaps we can attribute the transition in large part to Caxton's introduction of the new (to Occidentals) invention of movable type to England. How surprising it is, a scant forty pages later, to read: "The Invention of Printing, though ingenious ... is no great matter"! This is the anti-McLuhanist opinion of Thomas Hobbes in his essay "Of Speech" (Leviathan, Book I, Chapter IV, 1651).

Volume I illustrates well the reactionary tendencies of some of the more eminent men of letters. Joseph Addison, noting the widespread syllable dropping that transformed words such as drown-ed, walk-ed and arriv-ed to drown'd, walk'd, and arriv'd during the Restoration, attributed this "Disfigurement of the Tongue" to what he considered the natural taciturnity of the English rather than to a simple desire to slough off the deadwood of superfluous syllables. Addison begrudged the loss of every vowel as he did the proliferation of sibilants resulting from the equally repugnant dropping of the -eth ending in favor of the now universal -s. In influencing the course of our language or in impeding the evolution of atrocities, the great co-author of the Spectator was fully as successful as some of the other luminaries of Volume I. Samuel Johnson, in the preface to his Dic-

tionary, suggests that lexicographers should pay more attention to deciding what people should say rather than what they do say: "Our language, for almost a century, has, by the concurrence of many causes, been gradually departing from its original Gallick structure and phraseology, from which it ought to be our endeavor to recal it, by making our ancient volumes the groundwork of stile, admitting among the additions of later times, only such as may supply real deficiencies, such as are readily adopted by the genius of our tongue, and incorporate easily with our native idioms." Jonathan Swift proposes the establishment of an academy to fix the language in his proposal for "Correcting and Improving . . . the English Tongue". Had he been successful, words such as sham, banter, mob, bubble and shuffle which he attacked in the Tatler as repulsive innovations would not now be well-established and respectable words. Swift had been anticipated in his proposal for a Language Academy by Daniel Defoe, who shared the same repugnances as Swift and Addison plus a couple of his own. One thing that drove him up the wall was to hear people swearing and using gutter language, which act he likened to "(breaking wind) before a Justice or talking bawdy before the Queen." A strange reversal here: the reviewer, who finds nothing reprehensible about salty speech, is bashful enough in print to use a euphemism for Defoe's blunt word, while Defoe would rather write than speak it.

Volume I, which also features Ben Johnson, Lord Chesterfield, Benjamin Franklin, William Hazlitt, Emerson and De Quincey, is, to a large extent, a critique of the English language by great professional writers. Volume II represents not only a change in time (1858-1964) but in point of view. English is what it is, a marvelous field of study, and the writers are linguists or poets, novelists, and historians, who (like the linguists) rejoice in the perversities of English and exhibit them with enthusiasm. (George Bernard Shaw is an exception, but his "Plea for Speech Nationalisation" is distinguishable from the proposals to be found in Volume I, the distinction being the very important one of utility, especially in the area of spelling reform.) Here are found Bloomfield, Partridge, Sapir, Mencken, Burgess, along with Dickens, Whitman and Orwell.

Twenty authors and essayists speak their pieces in Volume I, and twenty-two in Volume II. Not all of the 42 pieces are equally informative or entertaining -- no large collection can be uniform as to quality, but the overall effect is one of high quality. The editors were wise in presenting the essays chronologically; the reader cannot help but experience the evolution of the science of linguistics as he reads them, preferably not more than two or three at a sitting. The pair are highly recommended for those logophiles who are interested in language history and structure, but readers who exclusively prefer the lighter side of logology are warned away.

American readers who have difficulty obtaining them from their local bookstores can obtain either or both volumes by writing to Cambridge University Press, 32 East 57th Street, New York, N. Y. 10022.

Corrections and Additions

The Pedant has found an addition to Darryl Francis' list of "ough" word pronunciations, which we had speculated back in May 1971 was complete: COUGH (off), THOUGH (blow), THROUGH (blew), BOUGH (how), TOUGH (muff), HICCOUGH (sup), TURLOUGH (rack), OUGH (book), WOUGH (poke), WOUGH (hoof), and SKEOUGH (jog). Darryl added BOROUGH, sometimes pronounced "burra". The Pedant adds HOUGH, pronounced "hock". Are there any others?

The Pedant adds that he has upped the Word Botcher's report that the Printer's Devil had gotten to in the August 1972 Kickshaws (page 175): the report should have read "Hoodla raised rumpi at the last two gymkhanae." (Word Botcher never got over his High School Latin. He's an incurable Romantic.)

The Pedant closes with a gentle rap on the knuckles: "You called English orthography 'crummy', Kickshaws, in the November 1973 issue, and that's what I call your grammar. I agree with your adoption of Don Ricker's 'indefinite' gender: XE, XEM, and XES instead of he or she, him or her, his or hers. But you close by saying 'If any reader has ideas for introducing new pronoun endings in cases where they are sorely needed, we would appreciate it if xe would take it upon xemselves to send us xes ideas.' That should read xemself, Kickshaws." Xe's right, you know?

Bumper Stickers

Mad Magazine's most notable contribution to the proliferating field of bumper stickers was a bumper sticker that reads BUMPER STICKER. Those of you who are not residents of states whose constitutions permit private citizens to initiate initiatives or refer referenda have never experienced the consternation of the Californian, who is periodically besieged by long lists of ballot measures such as Proposition A or Proposition 5. Some years the ballot committee starts numbering the propositions when it runs out of letters. (Occasionally, it would appear, they start lettering when they run out of numbers.)

A reaction set in in the sixties to the raft of bumper stickers such as VOTE YES ON PROPOSITION D or VOTE NO ON 14. Some wag printed up a few thousand copies of VOTE YES ON NO, which was relentlessly and inevitably followed by VOTE NO ON YES. The best of the genre was the wryly hilarious VOTE YES ON PREPARATION H. After that it was every man for himself.

Having been subjected for countless freeway hours to canned pleasantries such as HAVE A NICE DAY (why are the drivers who sport such stickers so savagely grim?) or such hypocrisies as WE'RE SAVING GAS, usually found at the rear end of Belchfire 8s, adding billowing smoky clouds of sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and volatilized lead to the already rich soup that gives Southern California its characteristic fragrance, we've decided to solicit some really

hypocritical bumper stickers from the Kickshavian cadre. For starters we offer the following collection:

Avoid Cliches Like The Plague
 Shun Pleonasms -- Don't Be A Mental Idiot
 Facilitate The Eradication Of Sesquipedalianism
 Stamp Out Self-Referential Bumper Stickers
 Try A Little Politeness, Dum-Dum!
 Don't Be Cynical (Fat Chance!)
 He Who Hesitates Is -- Uhh -- Lost

Whoever sends us the best hypocritical Kickshavian bumper sticker will receive, postpaid, a hypocritical Kickshavian bumper.

Challenge

This gem is offered by Harry Nelson, Livermore, California and James Haley Jr., Orinda, California. Turn to the entry "number" in Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary and observe the names of all the cardinal numbers listed on the facing page, from one to centillion (omitting the zero). Using these cardinals, it is impossible to find a pangrammatic positive integer, there being three letters that do not appear (JKZ). What is the smallest positive integer that uses the remaining 23 letters in its name at least once? Do not use "and" in the name of your number; for example, 3,000,000,769 is denoted "three billion, seven hundred sixty-nine".

Sunset Striplings

The following bit of doggerel is offered with apologies to the late inimitable Ogden Nash:

There are at least two life-roles that are unalterably denied
 to middle-aged citizens.

To wit: Godgerdom and Whipper-snapperhood -- like, y' know,
 if all whipper-snappers are young, the "young" seems a
 trifle pleonastic, at best, and, at worst, doesn't make
 a bitizens.

We'll undertake to provide the longest, most fragrant,
 purchasable Havana stogie

For any Kickshavian (or non-Kickshavian, if it comes to that)
 who can point out to us a bona fide example
 of an adolescent fogey.

If you happen to have one handy, please send it Air Mail,
 but before you stamp it you'd

Be well advised to look further; we're extending the offer
 to a whole box of expensive Havanas if you can also
 provide us a documented case of young cootship and
 of senile scampitude.