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## The Longest Word

What is the longest English word? That is a question which has always intrigued people interested in words. For a variety of peculiar reasons, it has, until recently, not been possible to give a simple, clear-cut answer. Should we restrict ourselves to "dictionary" words? If so, which dictionaries should we accept as admissible? Should we accept geographic names? If so, must such names be found in Englishspeaking countries, or is the entire world fair game? Should we accept biographical names? If so, must we restrict ourselves to names found in "standard" reference works, or are names in telephone directories equally acceptable? Should we accept coined words found in English literature? If so, do we limit ourselves to the classics, or is any published book whatever acceptable?

These and other problems have made it impossible, until the last few years, to give a direct answer to the question about the longest word. Yet, certain words and names have stood out in the minds of word devotees. Often cited, for instance, was the 27-letter HONORIFICABILITUDINITATIBUS, a Shakespearean term best translated into ordinary English as "with honorablenesses"; the 28-letter ANTIDISESTABLISHMENTARIANISM (withdrawal of state patronage, support, or exclusive recognition from a church); and the 29-letter FLOCCI-NAUCI-NIHILI-PILI-FICATION (the action or habit of estimating something as worthless).

Somewhat more recently, longer words and names, representing a more sophisticated, second generation of word missiles, made their appearance on the language scene, and we began to hear about the 45-letter PNEUMONOULTRAMI-CROSCOPICSILICOVOLCANOKONIOSIS (a lung disease, occurring especially in miners, caused by inhaling very fine silicate or quartz dust); about the 69-letter LLANFAIRPWLLGWYNGYLLGERTROBWLLGERCHWYRNBYL-LGOGERBWLLYANTTYSILIOGOGOCH (a village in the southeastern part of Anglesey Island, in northwestern Wales, on Menai Strait, the name of which means "St. Mary's white hazel pool, near the turning-pool, near the whirlpool, very near the pool by Llankilio, fronting the real rocky islet of Gogo"); and about a multitude of 100-letter words in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake, words such as the weird-looking KLIKKAKLAKKAKLASKAKLOPATZKLATSCHABATTA-CREPPYCROTTYGRADDAGHSEMMIHSAMMIHNOUITHAPPLUDDYAP-PLADDYPKONPKOT (the sound of glass crashing).

With the advent of the Space Age, life among the sesquipedalia quickened, and words began growing to utterly fantastic lengths. In a book published in September, 1965,<sup>1</sup> we were able to report that a gentleman living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania boasted a surname spelled with 666 letters. To make life easier for himself, he generally signed his name as "Hubert B. Wolfe + 666, Sr." At the time, this name far outstripped anything else in the realm of language.

In a subsequent book, published less than two years later—in May, 1967<sup>2</sup>—we had to dismiss the 666-letter name as unworthy of attention and to crown as new champion the technical name for the protein part of the tobacco mosaic virus strain called *dahlemense*. This name was spelled with 1185 letters, racing into the wild blue yonder.

It is now less than a year later, and "1185" has already been consigned to oblivion. The champion of the moment is a 1913-letter monster, the chemical name for tryptophan synthetase A protein, an enzyme that the common intestinal bacterium *Escherichia coli* uses in synthesizing the amino acid tryptophan. The 267 amino acids in the structure of this enzyme translate into the following 1913-letter word:

METHIONYLGLUTAMINYLARGINYLTYROSYLGLUTAMYLSERYL-LEUCYLPHENYLALANYLALANYLGLUTAMINYLLEUCYLLYSYLGLU-**TAMYLARGINYLLYSYLGLUTAMYLGLYCYLALANYLPHENYLALANYL** VALYLPROLYLPHENYLALANYLVALYLTHREONYLLEUCYLGLYCYL-ASPARTYLPROLYLGLYCYLISOLEUCYLGLUTAMYLGLUTAMINYL-SERVLLEUCYLLYSYLISOLEUCYLASPARTYLTHREONYLLEUCYLISO-LEUCYLGLUTAMYLALANYLGLYCYLALANYLASPARTYLALANYLLEU-CYLGLUTAMYLLEUCYLGLYCYLISOLEUCYLPROLYLPHENYLALANYL-SERYLASPARTYLPROLYLLEUCYLALANYLASPARTYLGLYCYLPROLYL THREONYLISOLEUCYLGLUTAMINYLASPARAGINYLALANYLTHREO-NYLLEUCYLARGINYLALANYLPHENYLALANYLALANYLALANYL GLYCYLVALYLTHRFONYLPROLYLALANYLGLUTAMINYLCYSTEIN-YLPHENYLALANYLGLUTAMYLMETHIONYLLEUCYLALANYLLEU-CYLISOLEUCYLARGINYLGLUTAMINYLLYSYLHISTIDYLPROLYL-THREONYLISOLEUCYLPROLYLISOLEUCYLGLYCYLLEUCYLLEUCYL-METHIONYLTYROSYLALANYLASPARAGINYLLEUCYLVALYLPHENYL-ALANYLASPARAGINYLLYSYLGLYCYLISOLEUCYLASPARTYLGLUTA-MYLPHENYLALANYLTYROSYLALANYLGLUTAMINYLCYSTEINYL-GLUTAMYLLYSYLVALYLGLYCYLVALYLASPAR TYLSERYLVALYLLEU-CYLVALYLALANYLASPARTYLVALYLPROLYLVALYLGLUTAMINYL-GLUTAMYLSERYLALANYLPROLYLPHENYLALANYLARGINYLGLUTA-

1. D. A. Borgmann, Language on Vacation, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1965. See Pages 150-151.

2. D. A. Borgmann, Beyond Language, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1967. Sce Pages 226-227.

MINYLALANYLALANYLLEUCYLARGINYLHISTIDYLASPARAGINYL-VALYLALANYLPROLYLISOLEUCYLPHENYLALANYLISOLEUCYLCY-STEINYLPROLYLPROLYLASPARTYLALANYLASPARTYLASPARTYL ASPARTYLLEUCYLLEUCYLARGINYLGLUTAMINYLISOLEUCYLALAN-YLSERYLTYROSYLGLYCYLARGINYLGLYCYLTYROSYLTHREONYL-TYROSYLLEUCYLLEUCYLSERYLARGINYLALANYLGLYCYLVALYL-THREONYLGLYCYLALANYLGLUTAMYLASPARAGINYLARGINYL ALANYLALANYLLEUCYLPROLYLLEUCYLASPARAGINYLHISTIDYL-LEUCYLVALYLALANYLLYSYLLEUCYLLYSYLGLUTAMYLTYROSYL-ASPARAGINYLALANYLALANYLPROLYLPROLYLLEUCYLGLUTAMIN-YLGLYCYLPHENYLALANYLGLYCYLISOLEUCYLSERYLALANYLPRO-LYLASPARTYLGLUTAMINYLVALYLLYSYLALANYLALANYLISOLEU-CYLASPARTYLALANYLGLYCYLALANYLALANYLGLYCYLALANYLISO-LEUCYLSERYLGLYCYLSERYLALANYLISOLEUCYLVALYLLYSYLISO-LEUCYLISOLEUCYLGLUTAMYLGLUTAMINYLHISTIDYLASPARAGIN-**YLISOLEUCYLGLUTAMYLPROLYLGLUTAMYLLYSYLMETHIONYL** LEUCYLALANYLALANYLLEUCYLLYSYLVALYLPHENYLALANYL-VALYLGLUTAMINYLPROLYLMETHIONYLLYSYLALANYLALANYL-THREONYLARGINYLSERINE

Ordinary words consist of units called letters—A, B, C, and so forth. The monster just presented consists of units that are letter groups—ALANYL, ISOLEUCYL, PROLYL, THREONYL, and so on.

The end is not in sight. Words are destined to leap ever onward, successively passing the 2000-barrier, the 3000-barrier, the 5000-barrier, eventually the 10,000barrier. It is our aim to keep abreast of this surge forward, and to report in WORD WAYS each advance of the tide. Readers are asked to cooperate in calling our attention to the progressively longer words, as they come into existence, so that we may spread the word far and wide. Only a cooperative effort is now sufficient to cope with the fast accelerating onward sweep of words. The day of one man keeping tab on the longest word is over, never to return.

## THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF ALL THINGS

Zoologists inform us that the black-backed jackal is a common South African jackal, CANIS MESOMELAS, with a dark dorsal saddle mark. It is also known as the saddle-backed jackal.

Physicists inform us that a lead-lead acid cell is a storage cell in which the positive plate is lead dioxide, the negative plate is spongy lead, and the electrolyte is dilute sulfuric acid.

To the casual observer, there is not even a remote connection between these two sets of data. Yet, it is a profound philosophical truth that all things are intimately interrelated, and it has remained for the word expert to discover just what that connection is in this particular instance.

BLACK-BACKED JACKAL and LEAD-LEAD ACID CELL are the two longest terms in the English language spelled entirely with letters drawn from the first half of the alphabet!