

AN ACROGEMALIC APOLOGIA

WILLARD R. ESPY
New York, New York

The conventional journalistic wisdom anathematizes any mouthful of a word like anathematizes. Write clearly, write crisply, say the commandments; be positive, not negative; active, not passive; concise, not prolix. Never use two syllables where one will do.

Fair enough. But why did God make all those big words if not for man's delight? When I come across a yummy new acrogemalic word, I take a sextant measurement of its height, check its meaning a few times (my memory not being what it used to be) and hire it for my personal verbal zoo. How I admire Alden Whitman, the necrologist, for popping bloviate into a magazine column! No matter that I first suspected, through an association of ideas I propose not to explain, that he might be talking about the phenomenon of gas accumulation in cadavers. No matter that bloviate had no place in American Heritage or Webster's Second (I had to resort to the Third to find it, and resorting to the Third is a personal humiliation for me). The point is that bloviate is a collector's item.

(If Alden Whitman can do it, so can I. Did you have trouble locating acrogemalic in your dictionary? You won't find it, for I made it up as a variation on acromegaly, which uses the two Greek roots meaning extreme and big.)

The following quatrain celebrates not one but two acrogemalic words:

Moses Infanti

She took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink (Exodus 2:3)

Among the flags did Moses lie,
Cradled in akaakai,
While a hippopotamus
Made a borborygmic fuss.