SHAKESPEARE'S LOST PALINDROME

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In the summer of 1973, Miss O. P. Helier, a Yorkshire antiquarian, spent a few happy days rummaging through antiques shops in London. Among the items she unearthed was a small metal box with a label that read: "Ashes from ye gret London fyre, 1666". She bought the box for a few shillings and took it, unopened, home with her. Several months later, Miss Helier opened the box, expecting to find nothing more than some bits of charcoal, and was amazed to find a heap of charred paper, evidently pages from a book. The largest of these fragments was no bigger than an ordinary postal card, but there was enough legible print to make it obvious that the text was that of a Shakespeare play -- Hamlet, Miss Helier guessed.

Realizing that if the date on the box was accurate the charred pages might have some historical value, she sent the whole thing to the Bodleian Library, where it was examined by the noted Shakespearean scholar, Professor Rosencrantz. The Bodleian laboratory then took over and subjected the charred paper to exhaustive tests. Paper, ink and typeface, it was shown, were those in use by the Crudworthy Press, of London, at the time of the Great Fire. There could be no question, then, that these scraps of paper were all that was left of the much-lamented Crudworthy's Shakespeare Complete, which had, supposedly, been destroyed as unbound sheets during the London fire.

As a young man, Sir Claudius Crudworthy, proprietor of the famous press, had known Shakespeare himself. Although he died a few months before the edition went to press, he had, almost single-handedly, prepared the text. While engaged in this task he wrote a friend: "Will was the onlie man that ever writ a line to read the same from one end as t'other!" Since none of the known texts has such a line, the statement led later scholars to lament the loss of Crudworthy's edition. As Dr. Johnson, greatest of all Shakespeareans, observed: "We lost fair half of Shakespeare when London burned!"

To Professor Rosencrantz went the honor of confirming Crudworthy. The largest of the fragments discovered by Miss O. P. Helier was, obviously, part of Scene III, Act I, of Hamlet. This is Polonius's speech of counsel to Laertes, and lines 56 to 72 (Oxford numeration) are clearly legible. Rosencrantz was thunderstruck at finding a new line after No. 60, and at finding that this was, indeed, the missing palindrome.

According to the Crudworthy text, then, the three contiguous lines:

So a lucky leaf to the palin-

drome!
beginning with No. 60 should read:

Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Emit no evil; live on time;
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar;

So a lucky discovery in a London shop has established that not only are our texts of Shakespeare woefully abbreviated; it has added a new laurel leaf to the crown of our greatest playwright -- he invented the palindrome!

MR. JAYROBYN, MEET MISS GOATGOPE

To prevent unauthorized usage, each user of a time-shared computer with satellite terminals is given a codeword, or pseudonym, by which he identifies himself to the computer. To make it difficult for outsiders to hit on a codeword by chance, the Mitre Corporation recently devised a computer program for constructing random words. Unfortunately, purely random words, in which each letter has a chance in 26 of selection independent of adjacent letter-choices, won't do; to make it easy for the user to remember his codeword it must be pronounceable as well.

The program draws at random from 34 basic units (all letters but q, plus the digrams ch, gh, ph, rh, wh, qu and ck) and combines these into "syllables" (defined as a group of letters with one or two adjacent vowels) according to an elaborate set of rules. These rules determine whether or not a randomly-drawn unit can be legitimately added to the one to its left (drawn previously). A word consists of one to four such syllables. The probability that a purely random group of 6 to 10 letters is pronounceable ranges from 0.01 to 0.06; even so, the vocabulary generated far exceeds that of, say, Webster's Second. In a 2000-word set, I recognized only three common English words (caged, flecky, thefts). Hyphens denote syllables in the following sample:

ac-bra  
an-pe-da-wi  
baidd-byt  
bosht-pel  
ceas-jo-ta  
clis-cren-y  
cu-ri-ral  
dec-reab  
dod-nir-wa  
dy-wud  
ef-wup-dan  
eth-keff  
fed-tyo  
fra-lav  
ge-o-kays  
gos-ha  
hoc-foyd  
i-dl-ki-cu  
i-rint-tu-o  
jej-lu  
knect  
lag-mij-ly  
lyu-wag  
my-ha-ti  
ne-ma-serr  
nub-hyev  
oit-ques  
ott-ri-a  
phea-glo  
qua-vu  
rey-ja  
rou-du  
scl-o-bo  
sor-ri-fri  
teth-nan  
tre-bo  
ud-we-ry-ho  
vag-yoo  
vol-dyu  
wi-ab-ko  
wu-cu-ca  
yep-ros  
yu-fu-gha