Webster's Third New International Dictionary (hereafter abbreviated W3) was published in 1961. The contents of this dictionary have been examined from many different angles over the years in Word Ways. Five years after publication, in 1966, the publishers updated the dictionary with an eight-page addenda section (pages 57a to 64a) containing words and meanings that had come into wide use since W3 was first published. Five years later still, in 1971, an expanded sixteen-page addenda section (pages 57a to 72a) was published, replacing the 1966 addenda. This contained further new words and meanings which had appeared since W3 was born a decade earlier. It seemed that the publishers were going to produce a revised addenda for the dictionary every five years. So, what did 1976 bring?

Word buffs were not let down by the appearance of a separate book entitled 6000 Words: A Supplement to Webster's Third New International Dictionary, published by G. & C. Merriam, Springfield, Massachusetts. This is a collection of over 6000 words and meanings which have become established in the English language since 1961; the 1966 and 1971 addenda sections, combined with a fresh collection of words and meanings, are available as an independent volume for the first time. The book runs to 20 introductory pages and 220 pages of entries and definitions. The selection draws heavily from the current vocabulary of science, mathematics and technology, although the languages of music, sports, politics, minorities and subcultures are also well represented. The book also includes information on how the English vocabulary changes, how new words are formed, which fields produce most of the changes, and how Merriam-Webster editors monitor these changes.

How many of the entries in the new book fail to appear in the 1971 addenda? Of 220 randomly-selected entries from 6000 Words (the last boldface entry on each of the 220 pages), 114 appeared in 1971, leaving 106 new. These figures suggest that roughly 2900 of the entries in 6000 Words are appearing for the first time.

Many of these 2900 entries are familiar words -- ones already in the main body of W3 -- with new meanings: Alpine, commutator, flak, generator, path, power, scenario, swinger. Other new entries are multi-word terms made up from familiar words: aversion therapy, blind trust, eye contact, fuzz box, hang loose, missionary position, plea bargaining, right on. Many of the 2900 new entries are words made up from familiar-looking parts: bioresearch, counter-
conditioning, dehydrochlorination, electrooculogram, enterobacteriologist, micropublisher, photoessay, sexism. However, there are yet other new entries, often borrowed from foreign languages, which seem to have little familiarity: Asti spumante, aioli, bargello, lekvar, linguini, reggae, samizdat, zuppa inglese. Beyond borrowings from foreign languages are several entries which look quite artificial: deet, dex, etic, gazump, glop, kludge, Muzak, skag.

As far as definitions are concerned, probably the most amusing one is associated with the word LOVEBUG:

"a small black bibionid fly (Plecia nearctica) with a red thorax that is often a nuisance especially while copulating along highways in states of the U.S. bordering the Gulf of Mexico where it is attracted to photochemical breakdown products of motor vehicle exhaust and tends to clog radiators and tarnish paint if the crushed bodies are not removed from the vehicle surfaces"

For some strange reason, a number of entries in the 1971 addenda do not appear in 6000 Words. It is not clear whether these rapidly became obsolete or were merely overlooked by the editors: acetylcholinesterase, bigit, calcia, monolayer, poromeric (as an adjective), Ruly English, scientology, screwbean mesquite. Even odder, several words in Webster's Eighth New Collegiate Dictionary, published in 1973, failed to appear in the new book: aah, bi, carful, dietarily, filmmaker, gallerygoer, ooh.

Various other oddities occur. For example, in the 1971 addenda, METALLIDING appears only as a noun, and there is no mention of a corresponding verb METALLIDE. But in 6000 Words, METALLIDE appears only as a verb, with METALLIDING as its present participle; no specific mention is made of METALLIDING as a noun. HYDROPLANE is not listed in the 1971 addenda, and HYDROPLANING appears there as a noun; in 6000 Words, the former appears as a verb, while the latter no longer exists as a noun, but just the present participle of the verb. Of course, these may not be anomalies, but rather genuine changes in the uses of the words which Merriam-Webster discovered and recorded between 1971 and 1976.

As with all reference works, the odd error creeps in. Under the main entry MIDDLE AMERICA, the derivative noun MIDDLE AMERICAN is misspelled: the N has disappeared, and the word is rendered as MIDDLE AMERICA, the same as the main entry under which it appears.