

AN EXCHANGE OF COMPLEMENTS

IAN MACLEOD HUGHES
Aberdeen, Scotland

In the following dialogue, Sebbie (short for Sebastian) uses only the letters BEHILOSZ, and Amanda the remaining eighteen. (Why this choice of letters? My children showed me how 71077345 on a pocket calculator would spell ShELLOIL if turned upside down, and I ascertained that 8 and 2 also led to letters.) Because of the paucity of words spelled with these eight letters or the complement, I have taken certain orthographic liberties with their conversation, but it should not prove too hard to understand.

AMANDA / SEBBIE

Guyd mawrnyng! / Hello!
My naym Amanda. / I be Sebbie.
Ar yu a Magyar? / Hoo? Sebbie?
A man mayntayn yu a Hungaryan. / He lies.
Du yu mayk munny? / Si.

Wat du yu du? / I sell.
Wat? / I sell heels ...
And? / soles ...
And? / shoes ...
And? / bees. Bees bizz.

A? Makyng wax. Ar yu 'ard-wurkyng? / Si. I be bizzie.
Apyan-myndyng pay? / So-so.
And du yu -- / Sssshh!
Wat matta? / I see Sisilie.
A wuman? / Is she!

A frump? / Sillie! She sizzles.
Wat, ar yu fry-yng? / I boil.
My, my! Wat turn yu up? Rump? Mammary? / Boobs.
Quant a ca, j'ay un grand payr. / So I see. Sizible.
Nauty man! / Hell's bells! Sesilie sees Sebbie. I'll be ill.

Cum, cum, 'av currayj! / She'll be Bolshie.
Ay can manayj. / H-h-hello, Sesilie.
A! Guyd day tu yu, yung wuman! / Oh losh!
Yu 'av cum yn guyd taym tu mayk an audytur: arrum!
A Puccyny - / Hoo?

--A Puccyny arya tu mayk yu 'appy ... and tu mayk yu cry ...
 "Wun Fayn Day ..." / She ebbs! She oozes ...
 Away? 'Urta! 'Urta! / Hee-hee!
 Wat fun! Wat taym ay cum agayn? Tunayt? / Oh-ho!
 Wat du yu du tunayt? / I see bills.
 Can ay cum Fryday? / I'll see.

Yu wat? A! Yngrayt! / Sloelie, sloelie.
 Admyt yt: ay am vurry guyd tu yu. / Oh, so bossie!
 Ay am away / Bie-bie!
 Ay put up a prayr fur yu. / Ho-ho! She is si belle ...
 so sossie ... she's lobbelle!

MONKEYS AT TYPEWRITERS

Nearly everyone knows the claim (apparently originated by Eddington in 1927) that, given enough time, a troop of monkeys at typewriters could reproduce all the books in the British Museum -- mixed, alas, with a vast amount of gibberish. In "How Artificial is Intelligence?" in the November/December issue of *American Scientist*, W. R. Bennett jr. has made the monkeys' task somewhat easier by providing them with special typewriters mirroring first-, second-, third- and fourth-order statistics of various languages, and even of various authors. (The *i*th-order statistics of a language supply letters at random depending upon the values of the *i* - 1 preceding letters; thus, U is 99.9 per cent certain to follow Q in second-order statistics, and U is very likely to follow YO in third-order statistics.) Briefly, Bennett shows, using computer-produced samples of text, that the second-order statistics of different languages are clearly distinguishable, and that the third-order statistics of authors produce characteristic phrases (Hemingway starts with "Mount me Sam" and Shakespeare contains the word "Hamlet"). By fourth-order, about 90 per cent of all Shakespearean letter-strings are English words, but Poe is more cryptic. Curiously, vulgar words and phrases are more frequent in samples of low-order statistics than high-order ones, lending scientific support to the observation that people who use them seem the least educated (do their brains contain lower-order statistical generators?). How high would one have to go before not only words but original thoughts emerged from these simulations? Computer advances may soon make fifth-order statistics feasible, but I, for one, doubt that this is enough.