Ah," sighed the furry phascolome after a few atavistic gruntlets upon degustation of the emerald cake masterpiece, "we owe a lot to the Crusaders!"

"Hunh," said I, "what have the Crusaders got to do with this delectable cake? Is it that we destroyed it as they did fortresses in the Holy Land?"

"Not at all," explained Dr. Wombat. "This cake was sweet with sugar. The Crusaders brought sugar to Europe. Thereupon the Dark Ages began to ebb. Hence we owe the Crusaders a great deal."

"Big deal!" I replied. "Don't you know that Gloria Swanson says that sugar is poison? And she's in her eighties, but looks hardly fifty; and no sugar has passed her lips in decades!"

"Poof," puffed the pundit airily, "nor has much sense. Let's hope that Gloria's sweets song does not become her swan song. You look at TV too much. Anyway, back to amphibology."

"But we were discussing the Monosyllable Machine," came my remonstration.

"So we were. Well, all's grist that comes to my mill," aphorized the affable epheptic, hopping out of his chair, scooting over to the table, and snatching the blue baize off its bulky box-like burden to reveal an affable artifact cuboid in content and gleaming with the wholesome maroon sheen of a healthy eggplant. He thrice patted the top sharply, and the handsome receptacle silently unfolded to display a flat cathode-ray screen, a punched tape outlet, a print-out device, what seemed to be several loudspeaker faces, and various plugs for peripheral jacks. Dominating the whole, however, was a veritable forest of brightly colored keys, a tempting mosaic, just waiting to be "mashed", as Pres. Johnson (the operator, not the tailor) used to describe the pushing of a button.

"Truly a gay show, I would say, except that you might interpret that as a queer display," I commented to Dr. W.

"The only resemblance is that this machine stays in the closet,"
answered my friend, pushing an orange button, thus setting the machine alight and purr.

"An elegant assemblage," said I admiringly. "I didn't know you were so mechanico-electronically inclined."

"To tell the truth," replied the wombat with evident reluctance, "I do have a collaborator in this machine -- and I speak advisedly, for he does indeed reside therein -- one Atholl Asquith, not only an extronics genius, but living proof that one should never name a son Atholl."

"In there!" I exclaimed. "He must be no bigger than a mouse to live in that box."

"Ya, vole."

"Why do you answer me in German?" I queried.

"Who said anything in German? Let me expatiate, 'Yes, he is a vole.' He resides in the innards of this machine, shunning society because of his name, which, like that of Jehovah, is ineffable, unutterable, or even unspeakable -- or, at least, effable only with considerable care. Instead of The Name, however, I call him Moose."

"Hardly appropriate," I sniffed.

"Moose means mouse in Latin."

The good doctor, I thought, was pulling my leg. "Instead of going the Moose route why not call him Vole -- which means bullock in Russian -- and in that way you'd also be cutting the bull." Then, to get things started, I added "What happens if you do this?", reached over and pushed a prominent green button. Immediately an anapaestic pattern filled the screen.

"Great heavens," exclaimed Dr. W, "you've initiated the Limerick Mode -- override! We must go through it by entering a word on which to build a limerick before the machine can be used for anything else. Quick, a word, any word!"

"Let's see what it can do with bagel -- but no rhymes on haggle, draggle, spaggle, straggle, or any other -aggle. That should exercise the circuits."

"I'll just pass that on orally," Dr. W depressed a button marked AA and repeated my word and conditions.

The screen filled with chaff which swirled for a few seconds and then resolved itself to leave the lines:

SED TER-R-IST MIY-NAHK-UHM BEYG-L
DHUH SUH-LAH-MIY STEYTS AN-SR TUW HEYG-L
DHUH PAL-ES-TIN-IY-UHNZ WIYV TOST

"Convict," pushing the button.

Said the wombat, "The Sa-act"
"The El verto"
"Into the We-quest"
"Where Extr-'quat?" I queried.

A bass was tapping in a major key.

"Ahem, it's so, but get on with it, 'ere."

"Your:"

"Enough back on the blarney."

"We'll stand. Proceed an MUZ, MUV, we punch IR: separately, course, only entries with:

MAZDZ, etc."

"But yo-"

"Never to it and be MAZDTH de-
"Conventional spelling, please," commanded the wombat, again pushing the AA button, and the lines immediately transformed into:

Said terrorist Me-Knock-'Em Bagel,
The Salami State's answer to Hegel,
"The Palestinians we've tossed
Into their own holocaust
Where we'll rob 'em and kill 'em like the plague'll."

"Extraordinarily!" I blurted. "Did you do that, Mr. Atholl Asquith?" I was very careful to articulate the vole's name distinctly.

A bass voice came back with the words "Thank you, sir. All I did was tap various memories, tie in several registers, set the meter, select a few syntactical parameters, define the perimeters, adjust the program, program the..."

The wombat interrupted with "Moose, you don't have to go into all that" and the snappish accusation "You used 'like' as a conjunction."

"Indeed, sir, you amaze me," I acknowledged.

"No wonder. I took my basic training in a maze. I find my favorite food in a maize patch. A May's day gave me birth..."

"Ahem!" again intervened the wombat, "A may's well say it if it's so, but a may's hand will bat him if he doesn't cut it out. Let's get on with the demo of my Monosyllable Machine."

"Your Monosyllable Machine!" protested Atholl the Vole.

"Enough, Moose," admonished the phascolome sternly. "Quiet and back on the job! Or else!"

I wanted to ask "Or else what?" but the wombat hurried on to say, "We'll start with MEYZ. First we punch the buttons M, Vowel, Z, Proceed and get MAZ, MAHZ, MEZ, MEYZ, MIZ, MIYZ, MOZ, MOWZ, MUZ, MUWZ, MUHZ, MZ, MAYZ, MAWZ, MOIZ, MOUWZ. Then if we punch Initial we get all those one-syllables preceded by S, T, and Z separately, giving SMAZ, etc., TMAZ, etc., and ZMAZ, etc. Of course, only SMAZ, etc. is really English, but we do find dictionary entries with initial TM and ZM. Thereafter we can punch the Final button and out come MAZD, etc., MAZDST, etc., MAZDTH, etc., and MAZDZ, etc."

"But you didn't have final ZDTH on your list," I objected.

"Never mind! Everyone knows that anything can have TH affixed to it and be followed by the word 'degree' or 'power', e.g., 'the MAZDTH degree."
"But MAZDTH doesn’t make sense!"

"Who’s talking about sense? We’re talking about words." The savant rushed on. "I didn’t have initial SV on my list, either. A mere oversight, and most people pronounce svelte SVELT anyway. One needn’t be picky as long as one’s principles are sound. Slight errors of omission can indeed be found in my work, but no gross errors of commission. Besides, De minimis non curat lex -- the law does not bother with trifles." The good wombat grunted in annoyance.

"Then," he continued, "by pushing Initial-Final you get all combinations like S/T/M + MAZ + D/DZ/DST/DTH. Sim-m-mple! You’ve got enough buttons here to bebop every bloody costermonger in the United Kingdom! Just look at all those buttons for single significant sounds, initial and final consonant clusters, synaesthetic sound sensations! Here’s the Lisp button -- all Ss come out as THs and all Zs as DHs, etc. And there’s the Baby button -- consonantal R comes out as W and so on. Devoice -- B becomes P, D becomes T, G becomes K, etc. The Voice button performs the reverse. The Nasal Infix inserts N or NG wherever possible in a given one-syllable or set of one-syllables -- BAHZ becomes BAHNZ, STICK becomes STINGK, etc. The Labial Infix inserts M wherever possible, e.g., CHAP becomes CHAMP.

My learned friend paused when I made as to speak involuntarily, so I asked, "Why is your terminology not arcane like that of computerologists and programmers who say key instead of button and have a whole jargon of their own?"

"Un-n-necessary!" -- the wombat waved a commanding paw in a wide flat arc. "No need to know the jargon; the only need is to know what will be. Computing is too important to leave to computerologists and programmers. We must program our programmers, just as we must oversee our overseers.

"To resume, the Palindrome button will give you true palindromes, spoken palindromes, not written ones. LIGHTS is not orthographically palindromic as STHGL, but L + AY + T + S is orally and aurally palindromic as S + T + AY + L. Note that AY is treated as a unitary significant sound and is not inversed to YA or YAH. My machine opens whole new palindromic vistas.

"The Nonsense Reject button gets ride of all one-syllables not yet having any meaning. Sense Reject does the reverse. Random selects one-syllables at random. Combine combines them in groups of any desired number. Random and Combine give random groups."

"It seems to me that with proper button-pushing you could churn out a product which might reproduce anything written in Modern English purely by chance," I commented.

"Rather, it will reproduce by chance anything written in Modern English," corrected the wombat. "We can also use this machine to produce words of any length you might say, bass viol.

Think of the Mad Avenue.

Suddenly:

"Ah, you express dangerous views. Our corrupt monosyllables, fate of all such of them and in all into the latter that, like once TV, Hence engaged in ways that TV doesn’t.

"Yes," is in Tenny.

"Hush," say into 'the mouth that poem all.

Everyone says,

"You come mented," etc.

Suddenly

I’ll tell you

"Hush," he

I rapidly

I mistakenly

we read:

SANZ 4
FOR HWE
HER PTE
AND SO

This I in
words of a certain connotation, e.g. GLARG, something a choking man might say, as opposed to SPRUUM to denote a low pizzicato note on a bass viol. This is handled by the set of Sound Symbolism buttons. Think of the boon that is to those who must dream up names of products. Mad Avenue will be mad to have this machine."

Suddenly the words IY JING IY JING IY JING appeared on the screen.

"Ah, yes," said Dr. W., "the bass viol is reminding us of a very dangerous perversion of this machine: it can be used like the I Ching to corrupt weak minds with prophecies generated by a series of random monosyllables to be interpreted by a soi-disant psychic. That's the sad fate of all machines: they become perverted, or, rather, we pervert them and in turn they pervert us. The automobile chokes cities; TV kills conversation through deprivation of personal contact, the hypnotic eye giving such a surrogate of society that many of us no longer go out into the latter. That's why I keep this dangerous device in the closet so that, like other closet dwellers, it may have no offspring."

"Indeed," I mused, "you seldom see people on TV programs who themselves are watching TV, yet in real life people spend hours watching TV. Hence, to give a true picture of life, TV should show people engaged in watching TV. The absence of TV-viewers on TV itself shows that TV does not give a true picture of life. So why watch it at all?"

"Yes," agreed the wombat, "the first depiction of TV in literature is in Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shalott.' I am half sick of shadows, says she. Then, when she sees real life that she wishes to enter into, 'the mirror cracked from side to side.' Hereupon he declaimed that poem and in conclusion observed, "True verbal magnificence! Everyone should know it by heart!"

"You couldn't program anything like that on any machine," I commented, "even though you can limericks on your machine."

Suddenly a bass voice boomed "The limericks here are not canned! I'll tell you how to program for limericks..."

"Hush, Moose!" enjoined the wombat as he pushed the green button. "Quick," he said to me, "choose a rhyme."

I rapidly keyed in LUWS, but in my unfamiliarity with the keyboard I mistakenly typed LUMW. There were fireworks on the screen. Then we read:

SANZ IY-NAM-L AND RUWT IZ DHLY AHRD-VAHRKS TUWTH FOR HWICH COZ IT OFT BIYKUHMZ LUWTH HWER AHN SED CRIT-R TERYKS TUW ITS LIT-R AND SOWKS TR-MAYTS AND ANTS IN VR-MUWTH.

This I interpreted as
Sans enamel and root is the aardvark's tooth
For which cause it oft becomes looth;
Whereon said critter
takes to its litter
And soaks termites and ants in vermouth.

The volcanic bass made itself heard again, "I am torn between VR-MUWTH and FRUWT JUWTH. Note how the rhyme is suited to the loothness of the tooth. Now I'll tell you how limericks are programmed here..."

In the meantime the wombat had rung frantically for his housekeeper, who now came gliding in, a symphony in green silk moire that matched her slanting green eyes, and, indeed, she herself might have represented Moire to the mole, for at a tinkling syllable from her, high-pitched as breaking crystal, he cut off his deposition, the screen went blank, and the box folded back together, leaving its aubergine exterior to be covered with the blue baize by the scented seneschaless, who shoved it slowly back into its closet.

"Atholl might be a mite more reticent," observed the fulvous phascolome after his housekeeper had left. "Some day we will go further into this matter. Meanwhile, amphibologies..." And he began rummaging in his desk.

The secret circuitry, I wondered, what was its nature? No way of guessing...?

BUY, SELL, TRADE

Recently, the editor located a copy of Dmitri Borgmann's out-of-print book Beyond Language (Scribner's, 1967) in a Reston, Virginia bookstore. He offers it at cost to any interested Word Ways reader: five dollars, postpaid. (Please enclose SASE so checks of tardy bidders can be returned.)