

ON CONSTRUCTING LONG WORDS

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Of perennial interest to *Word Ways* readers are very long English words - words of 27 or more letters, written solidly, without hyphens, apostrophes, or other letter separations. Unfortunately, almost all long words fall into one of four highly objectionable categories: obscure medical terms; even obscurer medical terms; weird place names of Amerind, Welsh, Maori, Thai, or other equally exotic provenance, resembling nothing even remotely English; fictitious words listed and defined by dictionaries. Examples of fictitious words include:

HONORIFICABILITUDINATATIBUS (Web 1 and 2)
FLOCCIPAUCINIHIPILIFICATION (Oxford English Dictionary)
SUPERCALIFRAGILISTICEXPIALIDOCIOUS (Random House)
PNEUMONULTRAMICROSCOPICSILICOVOLCANOKONIOSIS (Web 2)
PNEUMONULTRAMICROSCOPICSILICOVOLCANOCONIOSIS (Web 3)

So far as I know, there is only one long English word not subject to such condemnation:

ANTIDISESTABLISHMENTARIANISM (Funk & Wagnalls, Random House)

The fact that the English language includes only one authentic long word is a sobering thought. Even this lone example is, however, seriously flawed - no one except church historians and logologists know what it means. It is easy enough to surmise the connection between this word and ESTABLISHMENTARIANISM, but who knows what the latter word means? Of the five American collegiate dictionaries currently being published, only the largest one (the Random House) defines the word in the relevant sense. This means that ESTABLISHMENTARIANISM is not one of the 150,000 most common English words. It therefore ranks behind unknown words such as ARGILLACEOUS, HOMOIOUSIAN, and STOMODAEUM, each of which is included in all five of the collegiate dictionaries, accurately defined.

Isn't it possible to find long English words that not merely look like authentic English words but also have fairly obvious meanings? Certainly. Let us begin with a 27-letter example:

COUNTERCHARACTERISTICALNESS

This is defined as that characteristic of persons, things, or events which stamps them indelibly as being untypical.

Inspired by this auspicious start, we use compound adverbs to move to the 28-letter level, tying the only reasonably English word of that length heretofore known:

CABBALISTICINTERPRETATIVELY

This is defined as viewed in the light of a cabbalistic interpretation of events. The double B in the word seems unusual, until we compare it with the Websterian word HISTORICOCABBALISTICAL.

ECCLESIASTICOPHILOSOPHICALLY

From the standpoint of the organized Christian church's philosophy.

GEOGRAPHICOPALEONTOLOGICALLY

From the perspective of paleontology as it is influenced by geographic considerations.

The adverbial technique promises to be our springboard to much longer words, and we look around. After a little searching, we come upon a 39-letter example:

ECCLESIASTICOANTHROPOMORPHOTHEISTICALLY

In the style of the Christian church's ascription of human attributes to God.

The imp of the perverse within all of us immediately suggests that whatever can be real or authentic can also be feigned or spurious, giving us a 45-letter word:

PSEUDOECCLSIASTICOANTHROPOMORPHOTHEISTICALLY

The length of this word is highly significant, for we have now tied the 45-letter words in Webster's Second and Third Editions, and the longest spelling of the Amerind name of Lake Webster in southern Massachusetts. Merely tying records is not what logology is all about, however, so we must forge on.

There are also some nonecclesiastical philosophies that ascribe human attributes to divinity. To include these in the broadening sweep of our long literary word, we must increase its length to 57 letters:

PSEUDOECCLSIASTICOPHILOSOPHICOANTHROPOMORPHOTHEISTICALLY

With this term we have almost drawn abreast of that village in Wales sporting a 58-letter name. Almost isn't good enough, however, so we plow onward.

PSEUDOECCLSIASTICOTHEOLOGICOPHILOSOPHICOANTHROPOMORPHOTHEISTICALLY

At this point, we must stop and ask ourselves whether the word has not become just a bit redundant. Isn't there some overlap between ECCLESIASTICO- and THEOLOGICO-, and between THEOLOGICO- and PHILOSOPHICO-? Certainly not. The ecclesiastical aspect of the church is its secular, practical one, whereas its theological aspect is its ideational, theoretical one. Similarly, we can and must distinguish between theological views, based on authoritative revelation, and philosophical views, based on the activities of human reason. Our word absolved of any hint of impropriety, we look around for further conquests.

Concepts of divinity are so intimately bound up with the human psyche that we dare not omit psychology from our sweep. Including it results in a 79-letter word:

PSEUDOECCLSIASTICOTHEOLOGICOPHILOSOPHICOPSYCHOLOGICO-
ANTHROPOMORPHOTHEISTICALLY

Psychology is, of course, allied with hard-core sciences such as physics and chemistry, which also demand a voice, producing a 90-letter word:

PSEUDOECCLSIASTICOTHEOLOGICOPHILOSOPHICOPSYCHOLOGICO-
SCIENTIFICOANTHROPOMORPHOTHEISTICALLY

The word is certainly a long one - but the flock of 100-letter nonsense words in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake outdoes it. After some thought, we realize that Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, a mystical doctrine, shares in attributing human characteristics to the Infinite. Its inclusion in our word vaults us past James Joyce, to the 105-letter plateau:

PSEUDOECCLSIASTICOTHEOLOGICOPHILOSOPHICOANTHROPOSOPHI-
COPSYCHOLOGICOSCIENTIFICOANTHROPOMORPHOTHEISTICALLY

Memorize this word and work it into your cocktail party conversation. Use it three times and it's yours!

THE INSOMNIAC'S DICTIONARY

Word Ways readers are familiar with Paul Hellweg through his articles on -cracy and -omancy words (May 1982), chronograms (Aug 1982), -phobia words (May 1985), -cracy and -archy words (Aug 1981), -mania words (May 1986), and univocalics (Aug 1986). All of this material, and more, has now been published in a 159-page book with the above title, issued by Facts on File in 1986 for \$16.95. Like Paul Dickson (*Words*) and Josefa Byrne (*Mrs. Byrne's Dictionary*), Hellweg is fascinated by odd words. He has attempted to classify them in this book, usually by listing all the words he could discover having a given suffix. However, he also generates more conventional word lists: words about words, words relating to insomnia, collective nouns (an exaltation of larks), and descriptive adjectives pertaining to living creatures (ranine, cygnine, lupine). Several chapters examine more purely logological topics such as long and short words, q-not-followed-by-u words, vowelless words, palindromes, acrostics, lipograms, and pangrams. Most of this should be quite familiar to *Word Ways* readers, but serves to introduce the subject of logology (and *Word Ways* as well) to a much larger audience who know little or nothing of its scope.