"ALAS, ALACK!" REVISITED

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In Gargantua and Pantagruel, Book 4, Chapters XVIII through XXI, Pantagruel and his men are facing a dreadful storm at sea. One of the sailors, Panurge, is convinced of impending death and spends all four chapters blubbering. While he lets loose with a few "boo-hoo-hoo’s" and a few well-placed "woe is me! woe, woe!"s and the like, most of his interjections are highly original, and packed with logological curiosities.

Many of these wails are merely compounds of "ub," "bub," and "ugh," such as "Abubububugh," "ubbubbubugh," and "ubbbubbugh-sh." Of these, the most interesting is undoubtedly "bububbubububu" which uses only two different letters in a fourteen-letter word!

Many of Panurge’s cries seem nearly inhuman due to the huge consonant clusters in them. Bgshwogrubh and grrshwappughbrub have the longest clusters at the beginning; ubububgrshlwuhfrtz, upchksvimitchbg, and ubbbubbubughshw have the most consonant-laden endings (note that the first two of these also have six-letter consonant clumps elsewhere in their lengths). The most incredible clump, however, is one of length nine: bubbubughshwtzrkagh!

Panurge, in fact, prefers these jawbreakers to the more likely-sounding vowel clumps in "Aaah" or "Eeeahh," which he never utters. In fact, the only vowel-packed exclamation he utters is "O-o-o-o-o-o-o-h!" (not to mention the shorter "o-o-o-o-o-h!"). While having an extraordinary six vowels at the beginning, the hyphens detract from this exclamation’s excellence. Panurge gets heavy mileage out of his extended "o-o-h"s, however, repeating them (of whatever length) no less than six times. (A shipmate, Friar John, berating Panurge, at one point cries "Guu-a-a-a-h!," proving that Panurge was not the only inventive crier on board.)

Tautonyms abound, as in the "bub" compounds. The longest are "bubububuss" (four, with excess at the end), and "bobobobobo" (five).

My personal favorite, however, is the incredible-sounding "Wagh, a-grups-grshwahw!" Aside from its logological interest (eight consecutive consonants, albeit divided by a hyphen), the word simply does not sound anything like a wail could possibly sound! The ingenuity of Panurge to come up with such a fresh-sounding, imaginative exclamation—particularly under such pressure—is awe-inspiring.

Other interjections of interest include "Grrwh" (five letters, no vowels) and "track-1 Haw-haw-haw!"

Oddly, this consonant clustering is thawing on the heels of the thaw in "... track-1 Haw-haw-haw!"

This sentence is a longer example.

Note: the translation was published in Language in 1976.

LANGUAGE

Language and Literature in "Gargantua and Pantagruel" by Bruce A. Lunde, 1984

In "The Languages of the Poets" in Language, 1984, Lunde tries to present a linguist’s view of the fictional languages and unities of the novel, "Gargantua and Pantagruel.

Playing with words, Lunde points out the many consonant clumps in "Word," which "... arise from the collective well of the abstractive language." He notes that "... the clumps usually have six or more consonants, with excess at the end."

Copies of "Language and Literature in "Gargantua and Pantagruel,"" can be found in the collection of the Library of Congress and in the collection of The University of Chicago Library.

Editorial
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vowels) and two words that did not fit nicely into any category but merit inclusion, "augkukshw" and "ubbbubbugshwuplk."

Oddly, this storm is not the only time the sailors meet such long consonant clumps. In Chapter LVI of the same book, words are thawing on the deck of their ship (don't ask!), and the sound of the thaw is described thus:

"... track-track tracketty-track, trr, trr, trr, trrrrrrr! Haw-haw-haw-wheeeeee! ..."

This sentence has an incredible twenty consecutive consonants. Does a longer example occurring naturally in literature exist?

Note: the translation used in this article is Jacques Le Clercq's, published in 1936 by Modern Library.