

"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 "ubbbububughsh." Of these, the most interesting is undoubtedly "bububbububbubu" 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. Bgshwogrbuh and grrrshwappughbrdub have the longest clusters at the beginning; ububbubgrshlouwhftrz, upchksvomitchbg, and ubbubbubughshw 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-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 "Guaa-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-grrshwahw!" 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 two words that did not fit nicely into any category but merit inclusion, "augkukshw" and "ubbubbugshwuplk."

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-wheeeeeee! ..."

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.

LANGUAGE ON A LEASH

Language on a Leash (Editorial Experts, Alexandria VA, 1988) by Bruce O. Boston, is a set of 44 two-page essays on writing and editing, originally appearing in his monthly column in *The Editorial Eye*. "I think of myself neither as one who tries to keep our language cooped up behind impossibly high fences nor as one who lets it run loose, like a neglected and undisciplined hound...What we ought to do is keep the language on a long but well-anchored leash" is his middle-of-the-road attitude towards language change that I heartily endorse. The essays are often as entertaining as their titles: *Playing Mozart on a Ukulele*, *The Portable Curmudgeon*, *Hedgehogs and Foxes*. He occasionally touches on topics explored in *Word Ways*, such as confusable words, oxymorons, lost positives (kempt and couth, for example), venereal terms (collective nouns), and whatchamacallits (words that always go together, such as high dudgeon or arms akimbo).

Copies of this paperback can be obtained from Editorial Experts, 85 S. Bragg Street, Suite 400, Alexandria VA 22312-2731 for \$11.50 plus \$2 postage. Free sample copies of *The Editorial Eye* are also available.