TEXTUAL LOGOLOGY

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The most important purpose of Word Ways is to present new logological ideas, showing how far one can move beyond the well-trodden paths of palindromes, anagrams, word squares, lipograms and the like. However, it is also important to step back now and then to observe how disparate parts of logology relate to each other, as can be seen in *Making the Alphabet Dance*. This article shows how various logological concepts appearing in Word Ways during the past thirty years can be grouped in a new logological field, that of textual logology.

Textual logology is concerned with the properties of written text as a whole, not of individual word curiosities found therein. The earliest example I know of is the pangrammatic window, first recognized by A. Cyril Pearson in *The Twentieth Century Standard Puzzle Book* (George Routledge & Son, 1907), where he noted that all the letters of the alphabet are contained in a 65-letter section of text in Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (1897):

It was an e[xquisite deep blue just then, with filmy white clouds drawn up over it like gauz]e
to veil its brightness.

Before computers, the search for short pangrammatic windows was an exceedingly tedious task, but now it has become much easier. Nevertheless, uncontrived shorter examples have not been found. A simple generalization is to search for a pangrammatic window with the letters in order.

Textual logology need not be confined to the pangrammatic window. One can ask for the longest examples of text in which each pair of successive words always has a common letter (homoliteral text), or the longest example in which each pair of words never has a common letter (heteroliteral text). Mike Keith searched for long lipograms in texts in "Literary Lipogrammatic Windows" in the May 1999 Word Ways.

In the May 1979 Kickshaws, Will Shortz asked "What is the longest word you can find spelled in order by the initial letters of any series of consecutive paragraphs in any book on your shelf?" In 30 minutes, the best he could find was TIGHT in a Lord Peter Wimsey story. The query subsequently appeared as a contest in the Jul/Aug 1980 issue of Games Magazine, resulting in the seven-letter examples ACACIAS, ASSISTS, ATTAINT, DITTIES, EARTHLY, SITTING and THRIFTY. A further prize was offered for an eight-letter example, won by Shirley Tierney with SYNONYMS from page 10 of Elizabeth Grahams's *Heart of the Eagle* (Harlequin Books, 1978). One can equally well ask for an acrostic spelled out by successive words; in any event, computers make the search for nine-letter or longer examples trivial.

A somewhat different textual pastime, not particularly amenable to computer analysis, was introduced by Fritzi Striebel in the May 1986 Word Ways. She pointed out that if one squints at printed text, one can see how the spaces between words on adjacent lines line up to form a channel, which she christened a river of type. They need not be straight lines (she found one eleven lines long), but can take on a variety of curved or angled shapes: crescent, teardrop, lazy river, bend sinister, bend dexter. Could one perhaps detect the outline of a letter (one with no horizontal components, obviously) in text?

In the August 1984 Word Ways, Alan Frank examined another property of text, the middle of an alphabetic list. He examined some 50 sources, finding that the middle point ranged from EATON in the National Union Catalogue Supplement to NOMINAL in the Oxford English Dictionary. The first example, he pointed out, is biased toward the start of the alphabet because supplements inevitably include more early-alphabet examples than late-alphabet ones (assuming that the original text was published over many years, with addenda collected since publication). Incidentally, Webster's Second splits at MANDREL and Webster's Third, at LOMBROSIAN.

One of the most fascinating exampes of textual logology was introduced to Word Ways by Martin Gardner in "Mysterious Precognitions" in August 1998. Select a word in running text and count its letters. Count ahead in the text this number of words, and repeat the process. Amazingly, no matter where you start, these successive words will eventually join a master series, as illustrated in "Word Trees in Running Text" in the November 1999 issue:

> IN the BEGINNING God created the heaven and the earth. And THE earth was WITHOUT form and void; and darkness was UPON the face of THE deep. And THE spirit of GOD moved upon THE face of THE waters. And GOD...

By looking for texts which are at least reverse rhopalics, all earlier words of the text converge on a single word. By a reverse rhopalic, I mean a text in which the first word before the convergence-word is one letter long, the second word before it is at most two letters long, the third word before it is at most three letters long, and so on. Sampling Sherlock Holmes stories, I found that about one word in 1600 had this universal convergence property. An illustration:

> "You don't know Sherlock Holmes yet," he said; "perhaps you would not care for him as a CONSTANT..."

Can readers identify additional examples of textual logology that have appeared in Word Ways or elsewhere?

One last observation: as the above examples make clear, textual logology is not concerned with the message conveyed by a piece of text. In the past, Word Ways has suggested ways in which re- dundancy can be reduced, either by removal of letters from words or by polyphonic ciphers (see, for example, "Compression of English Text" in May 1982, or "Sending Messages by Telephone" in November 1995). Both strategies introduce ambiguities, and the question is how these may be minimized.