AN AMAZINGLY APPEALING ADDICTION

RICHARD LEDERER
Concord, New Hampshire

I am an alliteration addict, a slave to the seductions of sequential stressed syllables starting with the same sounds.

Even as a baby, I was alliterating before I could speak a sentence. "Da-da," "ma-ma," and "bye-bye," I would gurgle gleefully. When I got a little older, I read stories and rhymes about Jack and Jill, Simple Simon, Miss Muffet, King Cole, Boy Blue, Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater, Georgie Porgy pudding and pie, and Jack the Giant Killer ("fee fie fo fum"). In my comic books I read ravenously about the amusing adventures of Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig, Donald and Daffy Duck, Mickey, Minnie, and Mighty Mouse, and Little Lulu and Wee Willie Winkie.

Feeding on french fries and chomping on chocolate chip cookies, I sat watching Romper Room, Sesame Street, and Captain Kangaroo while commercials told me that M&M's melt in my mouth and that I better buy BirdsEye and go for the gusto. Out on the street I'd play Kick the Can, Ring Around the Rosy, and Simon Says, all the while chanting "eeny meeny miny moe," "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers," "how much wood would a woodchuck chuck," and "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me."

When I began my study of great literature -- from Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight and Piers Plowman to Pride and Prejudice and The Great Gatsby -- I found that even the best authors were also alliteration addicts:

There lived a wife of Usher's Well
And a wealthy wife was she.
She had three stout and stalwart sons
And sent them o'er the sea.
(Anonymous ballad)

Whereat with blade, with bloody blameful blade,
We bravely broach'd his boiling bloody breast.
(Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream)

And the fickle finger of Fate pointed me down the primrose path to a poem by the Rev. B. Poulter that begins:

An Austrian army awfully arrayed
Boldly by battery besieged Belgrade;
Cossack commanders cannonading come,
Dealing destruction's devastating doom
and alliterates alphabetically for 26 lines!

I am an alliteration addict -- a shell-shocked sad sack beating his breast and caught betwixt and between the devil and the deep blue sea on the road to rack and ruin.

In wending my way through the whys and wherefores of this alluring addiction, I shall not shilly-shally, hem and haw, beat around the bush, pull any punches, leave you in the lurch, or make a mountain out of a molehill. After all, I'm not a dry as dust, dull as dishwater, down in the dumps worry-wart; a lily-livered, lacklustre mealy mouthed, tongue-tied nicenelly; or a backbiting, big for his britches, bird-brained party pooper.

You may think me a crazy coot with bats in my belfry; a tattletailing four flusher who's out to add insult to injury and run you ragged from stem to stern and pillar to post; or a flim flam man who wants to get your goat and make a monkey out of you by browbeating you every which way with far fetched tall tales of fiddle-faddle that contain neither rhyme nor reason.

But, jumpin' Jehosephat, have a heart and hold your horses. I may be fat and forty and worse for wear, but, to tell the truth, I prefer to bite the bullet (sure as shootin') by taking a no-nonsense, rough and ready, wild and woolly approach in pinpointing this hale and hearty, spic and span, fit as a fiddle, shipshape, worthwhile, picture perfect, and tip top topic.

I plan to bend over backwards to practice what I preach, to give it a go, hot and heavy, and fast and furious, with a vim and vigor and derring-do that should leave you pleased as punch and jumping for joy to beat the band.

Last but not least and before I call it quits and bid you a fond farewell, let's take the proof positive off the back burner, put the fat in the fire, and talk turkey. Here's the cream of the crop -- a treasure trove of 50 tried and true, full fledged, clear cut (not half-hearted) alliterative expressions (the more the merrier) that are good as gold and worth a pretty penny, not a dime a dozen. In each case, supply the missing alliterative word (for example, 'hide nor hair'). Answers appear in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

1. Adam's 9. brown as a
2. bald as a 10. busy as a
3. banned in 11. candid
4. barn 12. cool as a
5. bed and 13. copy
6. bee in her 14. cut a
7. blushing 15. dead
8. brains and 16. dead as a
17. fact or
18. fast
19. fame and
20. feast or
21. fine
22. fish and
23. footloose and
24. hard on the

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issue.

VERBATIM, 1974 TO 1980

The first six years of Verbatim: The Language Quarterly, with a circulation of almost 20,000, have been published in hardcover by Gale Research Company -- three volumes totaling 991 pages for $20 apiece, plus a 108-page index for an additional $20.

Verbatim and Word Ways are the only two journals in English that cover the entire field of recreational linguistics, although with different emphases: Verbatim is oriented toward usage and misusage, new words, the jargon of special groups, and word etymologies, and publishes lengthy book reviews; Word Ways emphasizes words as letters to manipulate, and publishes poetic and fictional versions of wordplay. Given the backgrounds of their editors (one a lexicographer professionally involved with words, the other a mathematician avocationally attracted to words), this is hardly surprising; neither magazine has been homogenized by an editorial board or referee reviews.

As with Espy's Almanacs, it is best to read these books in small doses to avoid literary indigestion from a rich but random word-feast. Is it possible to classify recreational linguistics into a more-or-less logical structure of interrelated topics (such as has been done for most academic subjects such as linguistics, psychology or physics), or must it forever remain a collection of beguiling but unrelated oddities, like pebbles collected from a beach? Would a structure make the field of recreational linguistics easier to comprehend, give it academic respectability, and help identify unsuspected byways -- or would it merely freeze recreational linguistics into an arbitrary form and stifle future growth?