



## OLDEST LEGIBLE ALPHABETIC SENTENCE + 1

by

*I.B. RAD*

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...*

*I.B. Rad's, dare we say, diatribe, "'Once Upon a Time,' a Fable for Today,' for me, is reminiscent of Swift's analogy of the Big-Endians and Little-Endians in Lilliput and Blefuscu. Rad's "Expansive and the Restrictive Crew[s]" on "the Good Ship US" allegorize the Democrats and Republicans." "So, as each crew sought to guide the ship to attain their own goals, / fickle waves of popular preference / swung the Good Ship to and fro, left then right," Something for everyone here. His second poem following this odyssey, 'Oldest Legible Alphabetic Sentence' reads like a brief word from our sponsors. "May this comb root out / lice on the hair and beard." Here is the long and short or I.B. Rad, a man who has moved from New York to Texas. I cannot think of two places in the United States more distinctly different...he is entitled to be thought to be a keen observer of the diversity of subcultures. (Spacing is poet's own.)*

**Oldest Legible Alphabetic Sentence\***  
I.B Rad

Clocking out at thirty seven hundred years,  
the oldest legible alphabetic sentence  
was unearthed in Israel,  
inscribed on an ivory comb.  
And what was its' incisive plea  
concerning the human predicament?  
'May this comb root out  
lice on the hair and beard.'

*\*Based on article, "Oldest legible sentence using first alphabet found,"  
page 24, "New Scientist," 19 November 2022*

## "Once Upon a Time," a Fable for Today

### I.B. Rad

"Once upon a time,"  
as fables often go,  
there was a miraculous ship,  
the Good Ship US,  
whose passengers alternately elected two crews,  
the Expansive and Restrictive Crews.  
While guiding their ship, the Expansive Crew  
pressed for expanding benefits  
to "improve passengers' lives,"  
promising that by billing the rich  
for their "fair share of taxes"  
these new benefits would be free for everyone else.  
And despite their calculations never quite adding up  
none of the crew worried too much  
for with lots of borrowing,  
a tap, tap, tap on a keyboard,  
a little hocus pocus,  
and presto,  
printing presses worked overtime,  
and the deficit was accounted for; albeit,  
with higher interest payments on the hiked up debt,  
along with a weakened dollar.  
And when the Restrictive Crew took control,  
claiming the real problem was that everyone,  
especially the well-to-do,  
were overburdened with taxes,  
they strove to cut taxes, chiefly on the rich.  
They also vowed their tax cuts would be "fully paid for"  
since such cuts act as an economic stimulus,  
at the very least, offsetting any lost revenue.  
And predictably, when their numbers didn't add up,  
the new crew also reacted with lots of borrowing,  
a tap, tap, tap on a keyboard,...  
and the deficit was accounted for; albeit,  
with still higher interest payments  
on a still higher debt,  
along with a further weakened dollar.  
And if occasionally the Restrictive Crew "got religion,"  
clamoring for "fiscal responsibility,"  
(always pushing for spending cuts rather than higher taxes)  
they never rocked the boat long enough to spoil the party.  
Additionally, as numerous ships ply the world's oceans

with quite a few having tyrannical crews,  
dirt-poor passengers,  
and recurrent gang violence ,  
it's not surprising that many of their passengers  
want to jump ship and clamber aboard the Good Ship US,  
whose decks are "awash with gold."  
Now, when the Expansive Crew took charge  
they implored, "Look at all those poor, oppressed passengers,  
we should help as many as we can."  
In the extreme case,  
they hoisted aboard just about everyone reaching the ship,  
asserting the ship's courts could decide afterwards  
who was suitable for admittance.  
And when some of the Good Ship's passengers protested that:

facilities like hospitals, shelters, schools were overburdened,  
boarding areas were being overwhelmed,  
cartels were cashing in on migrants and smuggled drugs,  
"Expansives" were stacking the deck with grateful future voters,  
their over-indebted ship couldn't absorb the vast migrant influx, ...

the Expansive Crew chastised these critics  
as being selfish and bigoted  
or, in a word, "racist."  
At any rate, unless substantially pressured to do otherwise,  
the Expansive Crew ignored these complaints  
alleging all boarding areas were "secure."  
And when the Restrictive Crew took over,  
they tried to drastically limit the extensive migrant influx  
asserting they were protecting the ship's passengers  
from "alien invasion,"  
highlighting totals for arrested criminals, terrorists,  
and drugs smuggled aboard.  
So, as each crew sought to run the ship for their benefit,  
fickle waves of popular preference  
swung the Good Ship to and fro, left then right,  
with no consensus on those and many other substantial issues,  
from funding Social Security to gun control  
and abating climate change.  
But fortunately for both crews, many of the Good Ship's passengers  
were prone to ease any natural queasiness  
by keeping their fingers crossed regarding the inevitable reckoning,  
rationalizing each passenger must eventually disembark;  
and then, as far as the departed was concerned,  
all would become someone else's problem.  
And so, as that old proverb goes,

"All's well that ends well."\*

- *Phrase in common use before Shakespeare used it to name one of his plays.*

**THE POET SPEAKS:** *The inspiration for "The Oldest Legible Alphabetic Sentence" is relatively easy to specify. When I read the corresponding article in the New Scientist, "I was struck and amused that the earliest alphabetic sentence concerned so mundane a matter, hair lice, (perhaps the article's authors were amused as well.) So I wrote a poem incorporating both the substance of the article and my reaction to it. The second poem has a more complex history. For a long time I had wanted to write a poem that captured the complexity of the migrant situation while at the same time not being restrained by current taboos associated with the topic. Then, one sleepless night, I thought of a way to do it. That night I composed the first draft of the poem, "'Once Upon a Time'...", which covered both the problem of accumulated national debt and the "border crisis." After the initial draft, I hammered the poem into shape over a period of 2 - 3 months, revising the poem almost daily. Sometimes I woke up in the morning with a word, phrase, or idea that I incorporated into the poem. How that came about I cannot say. Such are the joys of human creativity!*

*I can't honestly say I know that this or that writer influenced me. I can say that I very much like poetry by Anna Akhmatova, Wislawa Szymborska, Constantine Cavafy for their clarity, profundity, power, and wit, Vladimir Mayakovsky for marshalling words and images to support his theses, Soviet dissident poets for their power and courage, as well as the early Edward Field, Charles Bukowsky, E.E. Cummings, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka, to name a few. I'm also inspired by some satirical painters from Heronymous Bosch, Pieter Bruhgel, and Francisco Goya to George Grosz, and more recently by some of George Kocar's work, Jean Basquiat's "Mona Lisa," and Irving Amen's "Flight."*

*I write poetry for a variety of reasons including a self felt obligation to protest and critically examine policies or actions I think are unwise or unfair, as a sort of self stimulation, because I enjoy the challenge, "Can I do it?," and sometimes simply to express an emotional reaction such as love or simply awe or amusement. I enjoy mustering words and expressions to do my bidding and that give me a chuckle. Perhaps my late wife hit the nail on the head when she said, "You're not really a poet (or at least an American one.) You're a sociologist, a satirical social critic, and a philosopher who uses poetry as a means of expression."*

**AUTHOR BIO:** I.B. Rad, formerly of New York City, now lives and writes in Dallas Texas. Much of his work is available on the internet. He uses a variety of styles depending on subject matter and desired effect. Coming from a civic background, he particularly values clarity of expression.