

grammar
as style

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University of Southern California

with the assistance of

Garrett Stewart

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Preface

Grammar as Style is a study of grammatical patterns and the way they work in the hands of contemporary professional writers. It is addressed to anyone interested in stylistic theory and practice. I hope it will find readers among teachers and prospective teachers of English; students of composition, creative writing, grammar, literature, stylistics, and literary criticism; and writers outside the classroom who are interested in studying professional techniques.

Each chapter, except the first, concentrates on a major syntactic structure or concept and considers its stylistic role in sentences from twentieth-century fiction and nonfiction. In all, the book includes fifteen major grammatical topics and more than a thousand samples of modern prose.

I have tried not to depend on old assumptions about style but to take a fresh look, through syntactic glasses, at the actual practices of today's writers. Although I have examined a fair number of samples—many more than are quoted—it may well be that in some instances other samples would have supported different conclusions. I hesitate even to use the word *conclusions*; *observations* is more accurate. The book is exploratory rather than definitive, and its *method* is more important than its statements.

On the whole, *Grammar as Style* is meant to be practical, even pedagogical, but Chapter 1, "The Relation of Grammar to Style," attempts some theoretical justification for the book's approach, and Chapter 16, "Syntactic Symbolism: Grammar as Analogue," also pushes somewhat beyond the purely practical realm of the usual textbook.

As a college textbook, or as a self-help book, *Grammar as Style*

might best be used along with its separate workbook, titled *Grammar as Style: Exercises in Creativity*, although either book can stand on its own. *Grammar as Style* identifies and shows in action some of the components and techniques of professional writing; *Exercises in Creativity* suggests to the reader topics that draw on his own experience, and guides him in framing his own writing on appropriate professional models.

The prose samples in both books come from a wide range of good writers—novelists, poets, playwrights, biographers, reporters, columnists, critics, historians, statesmen, scientists, professors. In Chapter 11, “The Appositive,” for example, the authors quoted include James Agee, Neil A. Armstrong, James Baldwin, Saul Bellow, Ruth Benedict, Joan Bennett, Truman Capote, John Dickson Carr, Noam Chomsky, Francis Christensen, Winston Churchill, James Dickey, Richard Dorson, William Faulkner, John Fischer, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Northrop Frye, William Golding, John Hersey, James Joyce, Robert Lowell, J. F. Powers, J. D. Salinger, Orin D. Seright, John Steinbeck, Janice S. Stewart, Dylan Thomas, James Thurber, J. R. R. Tolkien, Louis Untermeyer, Evelyn Kendrick Wells, T. H. White, and writers from *Consumer Reports*, *The Countryman*, *The Economist*, *House Beautiful*, *The Illustrated London News*, *The London Times Literary Supplement*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Radio-Electronics*, *Saturday Review*, *Scientific American*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Yachting*. Many of the prose samples were written in the past five years.

Recent grammatical theory, as well as traditional, is reflected in this book, but intensive training in grammar is not a prerequisite for the reader. Indeed, the book itself constitutes a basic course in grammar, with the grammatical terms and concepts defined by the many examples. Most of the terminology is familiar and conventional. The concern in this study is not with the hypothetical “deep structures” or processes by which syntactic forms have come into being, important as these are, but rather with the manifest structures of English sentences, the structures that actually appear in modern prose.

Whether he is aware of it or not, any reader of this book already has a built-in understanding of grammatical patterns. All of us are able to comprehend literally millions of spoken or written sentences we have never heard or seen before—simple sentences and complicated ones, fact and fiction, prose and poetry. We are able to understand each new sentence only because all English sentences are built on a limited number of standard patterns. Most of us comprehend a good many patterns that we do not ourselves use, or that we use in only a minimal way. We admire the style of our favorite authors, but few of us have tried to do what this book proposes—to take an analytical look at the professionals’ work and then compose our own sentences on their models.

It is probably true that many gifted writers do not know the names of

the grammatical structures they use. They know what they want to say and how they want the sentence to *sound*, and they choose and arrange the components almost instinctively. They compose by ear. Other good writers consciously manipulate sentence forms and parts, altering, editing, perfecting as they write. One writer who testified to his own sense of the relation of grammatical structures to style was Winston Churchill. He realized, he said, that "good sense is the foundation of good writing," but he valued also the detailed knowledge of sentence components instilled during his school days: "Thus I got into my bones the essential structure of the ordinary British sentence—which is a noble thing."

That is really what *Grammar as Style* is about—the "essential structure" of the sentence, in all its variety, and the relation of this structure to the craftsmanship, to the artistry, to the style, of the writer. Some years ago Edward Sapir commented on the relation of a language's basic structure to the artist's individuality of expression:

The major characteristics of style, in so far as style is a technical matter of the building and placing of words, are given by the language itself, quite as inescapably, indeed, as the general acoustic effect of verse is given by the sounds and natural accents of the language. These necessary fundamentals of style are hardly felt by the artist to constrain his individuality of expression. They rather point the way to those stylistic developments that most suit the natural bent of the language. It is not in the least likely that a truly great style can seriously oppose itself to the basic form patterns of the language. It not only incorporates them, it builds on them.

Grammar as Style, then, is an effort to examine some of what Sapir calls "the basic form patterns" of English and to see how expert writers build on them. We know there is no magic key to good writing, and no magic key to the study of style. Style, of course, is not any one thing. It is the simultaneous working of many features of language, and the role of any single feature varies with its context. We recognize this, but we want to begin somewhere. The study of structural patterns, along with an attempt to isolate some of their effects in the hands of contemporary writers, is one way to begin.

In several chapters I have mentioned Professor Francis Christensen, formerly my colleague at the University of Southern California, and have called attention to aspects of his work that have influenced the present study. As these pages go to press, I am saddened by his death. Francis Christensen was a modest and gentle man, a brilliant and painstaking scholar whose contributions to modern thought on rhetoric are original, significant, and practical. He did more than anyone else of his time, I think, to help teachers do a better job of teaching writing.

I am grateful to all the writers whose works are quoted in *Grammar as Style*. The name of each author and work accompanies the quotation in the text and also is listed alphabetically by author, with publisher and edition, in a bibliography-index at the back of the book. I thank Marianne Boretz, a candidate for the Ph.D. in English at USC, for her diligence and good humor in the long task of preparing and checking the bibliography.

Although he has not read this book, I want to mention in particular Professor L. M. Myers of Arizona State University (quoted in Chapter 8), whose work in language and literature has long influenced my thoughts on these subjects. I am indebted also to Professor Richard S. Beal of Boston University for reading this book in its early stages and offering suggestions that improved it.

For several years, during summers and midsemester breaks, it was my good fortune to have the assistance of Garrett Stewart, a graduate of USC, now writing his doctoral dissertation in English at Yale. His name appears on the title page, and I want to record here as well that he contributed substantially to every chapter and collaborated on the last chapter, "Syntactic Symbolism: Grammar as Analogue" and on the companion volume, *Exercises in Creativity*.

Wyatt James, with extraordinary skill and care, saw *Grammar as Style* through the press.

Two research grants from the Research and Publication Fund of the University of Southern California were helpful when I first began work on this subject.

*Los Angeles, California
October 1970*

V.T.

Contents

Preface *iii*

<i>Chapter 1</i>	The Relation of Grammar to Style	1
<i>Chapter 2</i>	Kernel Sentences	13
<i>Chapter 3</i>	Noun Phrases	41
<i>Chapter 4</i>	Verb Phrases	56
<i>Chapter 5</i>	Adjectives and Adverbs	69
<i>Chapter 6</i>	Prepositions	86
<i>Chapter 7</i>	Conjunctions and Coordination	99
<i>Chapter 8</i>	Dependent Clauses	116
<i>Chapter 9</i>	Sentence Openers and Inversion	125
<i>Chapter 10</i>	Free Modifiers: Right-Branching, Mid-Branching, and Left-Branching Sentences	141
<i>Chapter 11</i>	The Appositive	160
<i>Chapter 12</i>	Interrogative, Imperative, Exclamatory	175
<i>Chapter 13</i>	The Passive Transformation	189
<i>Chapter 14</i>	Parallelism	206
<i>Chapter 15</i>	Cohesion	225
<i>Chapter 16</i>	Syntactic Symbolism: Grammar as Analogue	233
<i>Bibliography-Index of Authors and Editions Quoted</i>		<i>255</i>
<i>Index of Terms</i>		<i>277</i>

The Relation of Grammar to Style

The goal of this book is to explain its title. The task is quite ambitious enough, for *Grammar as Style* is not just a topic, or two topics. It is a thesis. It does not merely advertise that the book it names will discuss the paired subjects of grammar and style, but it presumes that grammar and style can be thought of in some way as a single subject.

There are those who would at once take objection. To view grammar as style blurs the traditional distinction between the grammarians and the critics of style, and it threatens another time-honored division of labor, the separate teaching of grammar, composition, and literature. As a thesis, then, the title must be defended, and it must seem to deserve a book to explain and justify it. Its proponents must show what its claim for the merger of grammar and style can conceivably teach the amateur writer and the student of literature. Once the writer has ceased committing dramatic, showstopping blunders, once he has mastered the notions that a sentence needs a subject and predicate, that a plural subject needs a plural verb, that a pronoun usually needs a referent, and all such matters, how much further can grammar possibly take him toward improving his style? "A very long way indeed" is the answer upon which these first pages will enlarge, and which the coming chapters will exemplify. And what of the student of literature? Can viewing grammar as style add anything to his appreciation of a play, or a novel, or a poem? These chapters will suggest that it can, and that details of technique, illustrated here in samples from twentieth-century prose, can be helpful in studying the prose and poetry of any era.

This set forth, there is no escaping that ubiquitous requirement to define one's terms. Grammar? It is an account of the formation of words

matter-of-fact, stylized, literary, poetic, conversational, pedestrian, taut, over-drawn, visual, direct, lucid, dramatic, dispassionate, forceful, harsh, suspenseful, brisk, meditative, mysterious, polished, graceful, precise, blunt, symbolic, omniscient, prosaic, conventional, unconventional, clear, crisp, cadenced, colorful, drab, graphic, photographic, concise, verbose, wordy, moving, uninvolved, detached, balanced, discerning, alliterative, well-developed, orderly, impressionistic, rhythmic, ominous, reportorial, natural, artificial, easy, pretentious, methodical, rambling, compact, vivid, thoughtful, imagistic, sensitive, incisive, clinical, chiseled, and sterile.

The reports of professional critics on a given style betray as much seeming confusion and difference of opinion. Louis T. Milic gives evidence of this when he points to some of the adjectives other critics have applied to the prose style of Jonathan Swift, among them *civilized, clear, common, concise, correct, direct, elaborate, elegant, energetic, graceful, hard-round-crystalline, homely, lucid, manly, masculine, masterly, muscular, nervous, ornamented, perfect, perspicuous, plain, poor, proper, pure, salty, simple, sinewy, sonorous, strong, vigorous*.¹

The classification of different types of prose style has evoked a similar variety of labels, with commentators naming one type by analogy with another, or describing it, as if definitively, with submerged metaphors of no exact application. These tendencies characterize five centuries of talk about English prose style. In the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth, descriptions such as *Ciceronian, anti-Ciceronian, Attic, Senecan, Stoic, and Tacitean* linked certain English styles to classical rhetoric. Adjectives like *baroque, curt, libertine, loose, plain, courtly, and grand* carried aesthetic, cultural, and even moral overtones. Others like *trailing, rambling, circuitous, hopping, tumbling, and jog-trotting* suggested affinities of language with motion, exercise, even acrobatics. Sir Francis Bacon, in contrasting what he called *magistral* or *peremptory* prose with *probative*, associated prose techniques with those of law and science. Critics later than Bacon, with labels such as *metaphysical, prophetic, romantic, and democratic*, brought into the description of prose an aura of religion, sentiment, and politics. A recent classification of prose styles distinguishes five primary types: the *deliberative style* of persuasive prose; the *expository*, that of the treatise, the lesson, and the sermon; the *prophetic style*, of biblical prophecy, of Stoic philosophy, and of the essay (all of these styles with counterparts in narrative writing); the *tumbling style*, itself a narrative style of energy and heavy accent; and the *indenture style* of legal documents and private formal messages.² The twentieth century has made frequent use of the label *colloquial* to align written prose with the speaking voice. And

¹ Louis Tonko Milic, *A Quantitative Approach to the Style of Jonathan Swift* (The Hague, 1967), pp. 15–39.

² Huntington Brown, *Prose Styles: Five Primary Types* (Minneapolis, 1966).

matter-of-fact, stylized, literary, poetic, conversational, pedestrian, taut, over-drawn, visual, direct, lucid, dramatic, dispassionate, forceful, harsh, suspenseful, brisk, meditative, mysterious, polished, graceful, precise, blunt, symbolic, omniscient, prosaic, conventional, unconventional, clear, crisp, cadenced, colorful, drab, graphic, photographic, concise, verbose, wordy, moving, uninvolved, detached, balanced, discerning, alliterative, well-developed, orderly, impressionistic, rhythmic, ominous, reportorial, natural, artificial, easy, pretentious, methodical, rambling, compact, vivid, thoughtful, imagistic, sensitive, incisive, clinical, chiseled, and sterile.

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Walker Gibson's book *Tough, Sweet & Stuffy* uses a kind of colloquial language itself to designate in the title what its author believes to be the three reigning styles in American English today.³ Professor Gibson, unlike many critics, offers some precise and observable characteristics to identify the three categories.

With a few exceptions, however, most efforts to divide and classify style do not succeed in telling us very much more than do impressionistic definitions of style, of the sort collected by Professor Milic: "Le style, c'est l'homme même" (Buffon). "Proper words in proper places make the true definition of a style" (Swift). "Style is the ultimate morality of mind" (Alfred North Whitehead). "Style is not a dance, it is an overture" (Jean Cocteau). Or "In stating as fully as I could how things really were, it was often very difficult and I wrote awkwardly and the awkwardness is what they called my style" (Hemingway).⁴

The welter of impressions summoned up by the very idea of style, like the many reactions a single piece of writing can awake in us and the parade of labels we muster to approximate our feelings—all this merely attests to the richness of language, and should not in itself hinder our appreciation of it. The beginning writer, however, like the critic, needs a more accurate and consistent method, and a more concrete vocabulary, for examining the work of others and for making and remaking his own. The emotive and the metaphoric should not be lost to the study of language—and could never be to reading itself—but should be accompanied by and grounded in some more careful and specific observations. The intuitive approach must not be cured, it must be educated. To this end it is a premise of *Grammar as Style* that an understanding of syntax can be most instructive.

This confidence rests on another premise, namely that style can be found to depend closely on grammar and can be thought of in this way at no cost to the subtlety and strength and emotional variety of its effects. To defend this assumption we must now brave the crossfire of the debate about the nature of style and its relation to meaning. A stand must necessarily be taken on this issue before style's relation to grammar can be adequately decided.

A position must be secured somewhere between the opposing forces of the *ornamental* and the *organic* schools, between those who think that meaning precedes and is then decorated by style, and those who feel that meaning and style are simultaneous because the same. If style is purely ornamental, if it only adorns written ideas, it can hardly be possible to consider grammar as style. Grammar is itself the carrier of ideas, syntax

³ Walker Gibson, *Tough, Sweet & Stuffy: An Essay on Modern American Prose Styles* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1966).

⁴ Louis Tonko Milic, "Metaphysics in the Criticism of Style," *College Composition and Communication* (October, 1966), p. 124.

no accessory but the very means of meaning. This fact seems also at first to exile grammar-as-style from the opposing organic view, in that the same grammatical form must carry many different meanings. Thus, if style is meaning, grammar can claim only small and unconvincing credit for the full impact of any piece of prose. The grammar-as-style idea could, of course, reconcile itself to this organic theory, which is certainly much sounder and more useful than thinking of style as ornament. Grammar could, if it had to, live with the rudimentary role thus assigned it in comprising the whole meaning that is style. But the title-thesis of this book would welcome a more complete marriage of grammar and style, performed with benefit of theory, and it is worth contending briefly with the organicists in order to have this.

They have almost won the day. Their position is established as a kind of orthodoxy, and they defend their truth against all heretical comers. Richard Ohmann observes that their cause, which champions the union of form and content, "has nearly attained the status of dogma, of an official motto, voiced in the triumphant tones of reason annihilating error."⁵ We can catch these tones in William K. Wimsatt's rendition of the ornamental view he is opposing: "It is as if, when all is said for meaning, there remains an irreducible something that is superficial, a kind of scum—which they call style."⁶ But is there not in fact something left to talk about, after all is said for meaning—not a "scum" to be sure—but some essential quality that gets slighted if only meaning is considered?

Perhaps we can call forth an example that will help settle this, at least for all practical purposes. The example comes from C. S. Lewis, from the famous conclusion to his chapter on "Courtly Love" where he summarizes the retractions of medieval writers with an implied metaphor of truancy:

In the last stanzas of the book of Troilus, in the harsher recantation that closes the life and work of Chaucer as a whole, in the noble close of Malory, it is the same. We hear the bell clang; and the children, suddenly hushed and grave, and a little frightened, troop back to their master.⁷

There is some controversy about Lewis's ideas here, his reading of Medieval literature, but it would widely be agreed that his last sentence, say, is quite well done. Subscribers to the organic theory, where style and meaning are inseparable, if they happened to disagree with Lewis's attitude toward

⁵ Richard Ohmann, "Prolegomena to the Analysis of Prose Style," in *Essays on the Language of Literature*, ed. by Seymour Chatman and Samuel R. Levin (Boston, 1967), p. 398.

⁶ William K. Wimsatt, Jr., "Introduction: Style as Meaning," *The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven, 1941), p. 1.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London, 1936), p. 43.

Chaucer and Malory, would be forced to say something like: "This has a fine meaning, but it is false." Yet doesn't this kind of example begin to show what we can obviously say about style apart from meaning? Lewis might have written "We hear the bell sound; and the children, suddenly taciturn and solemn, and somewhat alarmed, return to their master." He did not, and he has our gratitude. The organicist might rightly insist that, if he had, he would have *meant* something different from what his actual sentence managed to say. We can object that changes in diction have made the sentence flaccid and lifeless, but we should also notice that they have caused it to say something not quite the same as the original. Changes in syntax, however, alter meaning, if at all, much less obviously. Endure one more revision as example: "We hear the bell clang, and the children are suddenly hushed, grave, and a little frightened, and they troop back to their master." Again great damage has been done, but it is hard to see how meaning itself has suffered any change. One may surely say that more is lost to our enjoyment in reading the idea than is lost to our understanding of it. There may be an enlightened sense in which meaning and emphasis have been minutely altered, but to nothing like the extent to which rhythm and impact have been violated. Our first revision suggests that diction, a major element in what is usually called style, is so much allied with the specific meaning of words, as well as with levels of usage, that it lends itself easily to the organicist position. It is in the area of syntax, as seen by comparing Lewis's original with the second revision, where style can best be recognized as something not exactly like meaning, and where one feels justified in talking at some length about grammar as style.

When the example from Lewis was brought to the rescue, it was said to be recruited "for all practical purposes." This can now be read "for all pedagogical purposes." Indeed, a very large objection to the organic theory of style's oneness with meaning is the difficulty in finding the idea at all useful when trying to write better sentences, or when helping others to write them. It is all very well for teachers to ask their students to improve their thinking, to refine their powers of meaning, until their new brand of thought warrants nice, stylish sentences, but this is almost certain to produce no results. Better to instruct them, with practice and example, in the many possibilities of English prose—and, importantly, of English syntax—so that they can make anything they might have to say clearer, more assured, more attractive. With this new access to the countless effective ways of putting ideas down on paper, writers may well become eager to make use of appositives, say, or of nominative absolutes, of devices learned for subordinating ideas, of right-branching sentences maybe, or of the previously undreamed of benefits of parallelism. Doing this, writers are likely to think through their ideas, elaborate and sharpen them, until they deserve such professional treatment. When this becomes habitual, the actual teaching of style is over.

One last excursion into theoretical waters, however, may yet be worthwhile, to find out a bit more exactly what those qualities of style are that we enjoy in a sentence of C. S. Lewis, for instance, and how those qualities owe, for a large measure of their success, a discoverable debt to the nature of English syntax. Venturing once more into theory, we again need to adopt a compromise position. It profits us to consider Richard Ohmann's modest but important one, in the essay already cited. He divides style into "epistemic choice" and "emotional form." By the first he means the selections and decisions a writer must always make with respect to his materials and their arrangement, as he sorts out his experience of the world. Grammar figures importantly in this phase of "style."

A heavy dependence on abstraction, a peculiar use of the present tense, a habitual evocation of parallel structure, a tendency to place feelings in syntactic positions of agency, a trick of underplaying causal words: any of these patterns of expression, when repeated with unusual frequency, is the sign of a habit of meaning, and thus of a persistent way of sorting out the phenomena of experience.⁸

Ohmann admits, as he must, that this does not amount to much of a departure from the conventional organic view. He is talking about a writer's persistent manner, not about particular sentences in isolation. Stylistic tendencies thus accompany tendencies in meaning, and style as a "habit of meaning" is little more than a generalization, for a particular writer, about style as meaning, and grammar as its carrier.

Syntax begins to separate from meaning, as style, only in the second stage of Ohmann's classification, in the area of feeling rather than of choice. Traditional rhetoric tells us about the emotion involved in *persuasion*, and Ohmann adds the feeling of personal *expression*, the recorded emotion of a private speaking voice. "Emotion enters prose not only as disguises for slipping into the reader's confidence, but as sheer expression of self."⁹ But beyond persuasion and self-expression, emotion makes a third entrance into prose, in a way that Ohmann finds "almost beyond the power of language to describe."¹⁰ His is a very good try, nonetheless. He suggests that a sentence begins by raising rather than answering questions, and that the incomplete utterance sets up demands for completion.

These demands for completion of a sequence are of course subverbal; they are the vaguest sort of dissatisfaction with suspended thought, with a rational process not properly concluded. As the sentence progresses, some of its demands are satisfied, others deferred, others complicated, and meanwhile new ones are created. But with the end

⁸ Ohmann, p. 405.

⁹ Ohmann, p. 409.

¹⁰ Ohmann, p. 410.

of the sentence comes a kind of balance which results from something having been *said*.¹¹

Ohmann speaks here in "the vaguest sort of" terms, making his way toward a feeling for style as itself a matter of feeling, and, consequently, as a matter hard to be exact about.

But is this quality of style really so much a "subverbal" phenomenon, really so elusive as to tax description "almost beyond the power of language"? Is it not, rather, a very sensitive way to appreciate, apart from meaning, and with a real sense of its nature and function, the role of syntax itself at that final level of reading that goes beyond the reception of ideas to the emotional response we have, and the pleasure we take, in the way we are allowed to receive them? Take as examples Ohmann's last two sentences from the passage just quoted. In the first, a parallel syntax, tightened by ellipsis, itself complicates the sentence, and defers its conclusion. Meanwhile, Ohmann adds mention of new created demands by adding a new clause to tell about them. The unmistakable rhythm of his sentence is an effort to give us in his own prose some feeling for what he is saying about sentences at large, and his means are neither mysterious nor subverbal. They are syntactic. Grammatical patterns establish the "demands for completion" and move us along until they are satisfied. So too with his last sentence, which might have run: "But a kind of balance which results from something having been *said* comes with the end of the sentence." Instead, his inversion of normal syntax imparts a quality of anticipation to the prose, holding appropriately till the end the grammatical subject and the idea of balanced completion, and thus balancing his own sentence with a sense of something awaited finally "having been *said*." Ohmann has succeeded here with a rhythm, an "emotional form," that is obviously syntactic. It should be clear, too, that his larger theoretical understanding of a sentence's felt movements rests on the very nature of syntax—on its rhythm as a series of relationships unfolded in time.

A dictionary records that syntax is "the arrangement of words as elements in a sentence to show their relationship." The key to this definition is the phrase "to show." It names the real action of syntax, which should be thought of as a disclosure made piece by piece, not as a revealed frame or pattern to be seen and comprehended at once. Syntax has direction, not just structure. It starts, and goes forward, and concludes. It is an order of grammar experienced *in* a certain order, not a system or arrangement so much as a succession—*syntax as sequence*. As a stretch of verbal space, a sentence has an entrance and an exit and a terrain we cross and track—and all this over a stretch of time. As an emotional span, uniting its movement in space and time, a sentence seems to generate its own

¹¹ Ohmann, p. 410.

dynamics of feeling, ushering us into its meaning and escorting us across it, anticipating, deflecting, suspending, and finally going to a satisfactory close. As a verbal terrain, as a series of encounters across it, or as the emotional curve that follows them through, the sentence—as a unit of style—is being defined by its syntax. It is often said of prose, as of poetry, that it must be read aloud to be really known. The indispensable quality of prose that is met by the ear in reading, that must be heard as passing sounds and stresses and ideas, that must be listened to as much as understood, followed through as a sequence rather than grasped whole as a structure: it is this quality that brings style and syntax closest together. For it is the effect of syntax on style. It is *grammar as style*.

And it is, of course, the subject of the present book. The concept of grammar as style will guide our examination of those syntactic effects that are divided over the following chapters. These chapters, incorporating both traditional grammar and more recent ideas about the structure of English, will consider one by one the major elements of sentence-making. At the same time, inevitably, they will suggest the value for stylistic analysis of syntax considered as sequence. They will not have to labor the point. The usefulness of this approach reveals itself at every turn.

Even *kernel sentences*, the spare source from which other structures and sentences are generated, work as a sequence, however compact. They set up a basic pattern of expected order, and are expanded with this in mind. There must be something to talk about, the *noun phrase*, and once the subject has been selected, something must be said about it in a predication, a *verb phrase*. *Adjectives* and *adverbs* help to fill out the patterns, and they do not merely specify or qualify or complicate. They have a place as well as a meaning. They come before or after the word with which they are associated, to anticipate or complete its meaning, sometimes piled around it in groups of two or three, or more, to dramatize what they do. Prepositional phrases, too, expand the patterns. More than just signaling a new relationship, a *preposition* that starts a phrase makes an independent grammatical move, briefly channeling the sentence away from its main course in some new syntactic direction. Simple *conjunctions* and *correlatives* are readily available for compounding, and thus enlarging the parts of a basic sentence, or for hooking two sentences together. They are less important to the drift of a sentence because they weigh the elements they join and tell us they are equal, however, than because they reveal a decision to give us one before the other, to move us along in a determined order. *Coordination* itself is a logical relation, but in syntax it is also a sequence.

Kernels are expanded with *dependent clauses*, for a remarkable variety of effects. The way we leave such clauses and move into the main one, or encounter them in the middle of a main clause, or come to them later, the whole strategy of sequence and transition accounts for the chief

effects of relative and subordinate expansions. Neither is the *sentence opener* a static factor, a grammatical fixed point to which the elements that follow are attached. On the contrary, the opener can be a crucial first move, overcoming inertia, ushering us into a thought, or nudging us backward for an instant, before activating necessary grammatical momentum to send us off in one syntactical direction or another. *Inversions* other than those necessary for questions and exclamations also have an important stylistic role. They can manipulate the order in which we reach certain parts of a sentence. Varying the way we normally receive information, their effects, successful or not, may shift the focus, may alter the linkage of one sentence to another.

In addition to the familiar means of expanding kernel structures, and of opening all kinds of sentences, a whole class of nonrestrictive modifiers, well-named *free modifiers* by Francis Christensen, also depends on syntactic movement for its effects. When free or even bound modifiers come together in such numbers or are so extensive themselves as to define the overall shape of a sentence, when they accumulate before the subject, or between it and the verb, for instance, or after the predicate of the base clause, their weight and placement are so important to the sentence that we are warranted in using directional labels: *left-branching*, *mid-branching*, and *right-branching sentences*. Professor Christensen's title for the last, the cumulative sentence, also captures that interest in one-thing-after-another that is at issue here. Often the cumulative sentence makes use of the *nominative absolute construction*. It creates a grammatical subplot quite distinct from the main action of a sentence, and one sequence must be held loosely in mind while the other is assimilated.

Perhaps the most useful of all free modifiers, and one of the easiest to master, is the *appositive*. It renames smoothly without requiring any change in syntactic plan. It simply appears after (sometimes before) the word or phrase it restates, and we are involved as much in the feeling of afterthought, or of arriving clarification, as we ever are in a sense of alternate and equal possibilities. It really matters what comes first, what is named, and how it is then amplified. With appositives as with all free modifiers, and indeed with syntactic expansion in general, order and movement are more important than structure and logical relationship.

The process of transformation is able not only to enlarge the basic patterns with added or embedded materials, but also to deform certain kernels themselves into new arrangements, and these may stay short or themselves receive new material. *Interrogative*, *imperative*, and *exclamatory* transforms are examples, with distinct emotional patterns of emphasis and expectation set up by their syntax.

With the *passive transformation*, minor changes in meaning and emphasis may occur, sometimes with deadening results. But when passives

are cleverly used, it is often their syntactic features on which a writer is capitalizing. The passive can serve as a kind of tactical inversion. It can be used to arrange ideas for a special stress, or to move them into positions from which they can be more easily modified.

Within a single sentence or across wider verbal spaces, syntax also has an important part to play in the experience of *parallelism* and *cohesion*. It is a role that assumes an audience reading one thing after another and feeling how things begin to take shape as they have done before, or how one idea grows out of another comfortably, coherently. The dramatic analogy here, of a role played to a reading audience, is deliberate. It is meant to suggest again what the recent discussion has said about syntax as sequence, with every sentence performing its own separate drama and involving the emotions of its readers in the way it develops syntactically and is worked out. The main grammatical action of a sentence and its subplots should never be at odds with meaning, of course, but they have a motion and a rhythm all their own. Yet when the rhythm and sequence of syntax begins to act out the meaning itself, when the drama of meaning and the drama of syntax coincide perfectly, when syntax as action becomes syntax as enactment, this last refinement of style is called *syntactic symbolism*. It is the subject of the last chapter of this book. Beginning with a thesis that allows us to talk separately about style and meaning, we naturally work toward the organicist's equation of the two, the fusion of form and content, not as the inevitable condition of language, but as a very special achievement.

These last few paragraphs have rapidly surveyed the syntactic topics that head the remaining chapters of *Grammar as Style*. This summary has hastily sketched some idea of the gains to be made by thinking of these topics in terms of syntax as sequence. This concept will be touched on repeatedly in the remaining chapters and demonstrated with many examples. The syntactic phenomena selected for discussion have earned a place in such a book because of their considerable bearing on the subject of style. Much has been overlooked. What has not, it is hoped, is the most important.

Excerpts from contemporary writers are everywhere in these chapters. They have been gratefully borrowed for their capacity to perform the double duty assigned them here: to exemplify the syntactic phenomenon in question, and to demonstrate its contribution to style. They are chosen, in general, to be representative samples of good prose. Some are very fine; a few poor ones are included now and then to show an amateur what not to do to improve. As a rule, they are the findings of a search not for mannerism and brilliant eccentricity, but for what is most often done with success in contemporary writing, and for what can be imitated by the novice with best results. The search was made through reviews, quarterlies, and journals, learned and otherwise; through all sorts of popular magazines,

12 *The Relation of Grammar to Style*

newspapers, and collected journalism; through biography, history, studies in social and political science, art, and literature; and through original literature itself, essays, stories, and novels. The examples are ordinarily sorted and arranged after some general discussion about the grammatical topic, and they appear with a minimum of additional comment. The assumption is that once we know what to listen for when we read, we can learn most by allowing good sentences to speak for themselves. It is high time to let our examples have their say.

Chapter 2

Kernel Sentences

And the words slide into the slots ordained by syntax, and glitter as with atmospheric dust, with those impurities which we call meaning.

—*Anthony Burgess*, Enderby, p. 406, closing paragraph.

This epigraph may sound like the work of a grammarian caught in a rare use of metaphor and simile. The novelist, indeed, is using the term “slots” as some grammarians do, to identify the key locations fixed by syntax, the important grooves into which words fit to make sentences.

Just as the sentence is the basic unit of English speech, so the kernel is the basic unit, the core, of the English sentence. It is the germ from which other patterns grow and branch, and to which still others can be grafted, whole or in part. It is defined by its “slots.” Each of the four main types of basic sentences is recognized by positions than can be filled with only certain types of words, the carriers of “those impurities which we call meaning.” It is this contamination of syntax by words that makes meaning, makes style. Diction resides at that level of writing where style and meaning, as we have seen in the first chapter, are one. Diction, not syntax, is probably the most important single aspect of style, as it is of meaning. Burgess is right: it is the words that give off the real light of a sentence, that shine and sparkle and glitter, sometimes radiant with an author’s inspired choice. All syntax can do, and it is a very great deal, is to make the right word shine to its best advantage, as brightly as possible and in just the right place, set off from others or clustered with them. Syntax ordains position in the constellation of words that is meaning. This book is about what happens when words participate with syntax in this way. A study of diction itself is indispensable, but syntax rather than diction is our particular subject, although something can be learned about diction from the masterful choices in many of the coming syntactic samples.

But our main chore will be to see *where* words can and should go once the right ones have been hit upon.

Underlying all of "the slots ordained by syntax" is the concept of the kernel sentence. Noam Chomsky once described kernel sentences as "simple, declarative, active sentences (in fact, probably a finite number of these)"¹ and as "sentences of a particularly simple sort that involve a minimum of transformational apparatus in their generation."² He remarked that "the notion 'kernel sentence' has . . . an important intuitive significance . . ."³

Most of the sentences we read and write are transformations, with several predication in the underlying or "deep" structure. Indeed, the "surface" structure—that is, the sentence we actually read or put on the page—often has more than one subject and predicate expressed, as we well know. But even professional writers do on occasion use very short basic sentences—simple, declarative, active, with no complex noun or verb phrases. Often, even in long sentences, good writers preserve a terse kernel intact as a base clause, attaching free modifiers loosely around it. It seems appropriate, therefore, to explore at some length the four types of basic sentences and the uses professional writers make of them.

The Four Types of Basic Sentences

A sentence is a predication, something *said* about a subject. Basic sentences may be divided into four main types, depending on the nature of the thing said. The thing said about a subject has to do with the subject's state of existence or *activity*. To quote Edward Sapir:

It is well to remember that speech consists of a series of propositions. There must be something to talk about and something must be said about this subject of discourse once it is selected. This distinction is of such fundamental importance that the vast majority of languages have emphasized it by creating some sort of formal barrier between the two terms of the proposition. The subject of discourse is a noun. As the most common subject of discourse is either a person or a thing, the noun clusters about concrete concepts of that order. As the thing predicated of a subject is generally an activity in the widest sense of the word, a passage from one moment of existence to another, the form which has been set aside for the business of predication, in other words, the verb, clusters about concepts of activity.⁴

¹ Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague, 1957), p. 80.

² Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 17.

³ Chomsky, p. 18.

⁴ Edward Sapir, *Language* (New York, 1921), p. 119.

The kernel sentence, then, has two main parts—a subject and a predicate. The subject consists of a noun phrase; the predicate consists of a verb phrase. The four types of basic sentences are distinguished by four types of verb phrases, arranged here according to increasing verbal activity:

1. Some form of *be* with a noun, adjective, or adverb as predicate;
2. A linking verb such as *seems*, *feels*, *remains*, *becomes* with a noun or adjective as predicate;
3. An intransitive verb, which may or may not be followed by an adverbial;
4. A transitive verb with a noun phrase as direct object.

Any of the above patterns may be followed by an adverb, or other adverbial, such as a prepositional phrase. In the fourth pattern, the transitive verb may be followed not only by the noun phrase that is the direct object but also by an additional noun phrase, either as an indirect object or an objective complement. The objective complement may also be an adjectival or an adverbial or even a verb form.

Let us label, then, the “slots ordained by syntax” into which various kinds of words may be fitted, and then go on to examine some examples of each of the basic patterns, as used by professional writers.

	<i>Basic Sentence</i>			
Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	
Subject	<i>Be</i> or a verb— including tense	A complement or object	An optional adverbial or addi- tional complement or object	

As for the kinds of words that may be fitted into each slot, they are, in general, as follows: *Slot 1* takes a noun phrase. A noun phrase may, of course, be a proper noun, or a common noun plus determiner, or a personal or an indefinite pronoun, or some other noun substitute. *Slot 2* takes *be* in its various forms, or any of the kinds of verbs, with auxiliaries. The verb phrase must be finite, that is, it must have tense. *Slot 3*, if it is filled, may contain a noun phrase, an adjectival, or an adverbial; thus it may be a prepositional phrase. *Slot 4*, if it is filled, may contain an adverb or other adverbial (such as a prepositional phrase), a noun phrase, an adjective, or even a verb form as complement or object. After this cursory review of the basic slots and components, let us look at some examples.

TYPE 1: THE BE-PATTERN, EXAMPLES

The simplest form of the *be*-pattern is tautology, the exact equating of two noun phrases:

Nat was Nat.

—Bernard Malamud, *The Assistant*, p. 130.

So that was that.

—Eric Ambler, *Intrigue*, p. 300.

“A Pangolin Is a Pangolin.”

—essay title, Willy Ley, *Another Look at Atlantis and Fifteen Other Essays*, p. 8.

This is scarcely the most important type of *be*-kernel. No writer is going to make it his mainstay. It would neither sustain him nor nourish his readers with much food for thought. However useful the emphatic gesture it makes, it does not feed us enough new information about *Nat* or *that* or the *Pangolin* to satisfy us.

Far more common are equative clauses that use a copula to hook up two *different* versions of the same thing, the second adding something new—a subject and a renaming of it in the predicate; this is the usual predicate noun or predicate nominative.

Dali is a voyeur.

—Salvador Dali, “*A Beast’s Repast*,” *Evergreen Review*, December 1966, p. 33.

Work was his life.

—Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway—A Life Story*, p. 562.

The child had been father to the man.

—Conrad Aiken, *Ushant: An Essay*, p. 346.

Harm is the norm.

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*, p. 25.

I am no thaumaturgist. [This is a negative transformation.]

—Max Beerbohm, *Yet Again*, p. 65.

His clothes were an abomination.

—Desmond Hall, *I Give You Oscar Wilde*, p. 47.

This is a novel.

—James A. Michener, *The Source*, opening line.

Below, in three roughly similar excerpts, the *be*-pattern shapes the rhetorical figure known as *synecdoche*, where the part stands for the whole. In order, the personal subject of each clause is equated with the virtue it embodies, the annoyance it inflicts, and the school it attended:

I was all humility.

—Rupert Brooke, *The Prose of Rupert Brooke*, p. 3.

She was exasperation, she was torture.

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada*, p. 199.

He was Princeton, his daughter was Vassar, and I was College of One.

—*Sheilah Graham*, *The College of One*, p. 77.

Here adjectives stand as nouns in an equative pattern:

The longest is the loveliest.

—*Truman Capote*, *Local Color*, p. 72.

The next group of equative forms are all metaphors, and they show a very common syntactic shape for metaphorical statement, one of the several syntactic shapes that metaphor may take:

Her spine is a denial.

—*William Gibson*, *A Mass for the Dead*, p. 14.

Chaos was yawn.

—*Samuel Beckett*, *Murphy*, p. 175.

Women were loot.

—*Joyce Cary*, *An American Visitor*, p. 112.

Stieglitz was a chameleon in his affections.

—*Edward Dahlberg*, *Alms for Oblivion*, p. 6.

His room was a world within a world.

—*Dylan Thomas*, *A Prospect of the Sea*, p. 26.

Her answer was ice.

—*Bernard Malamud*, *The Assistant*, p. 130.

Death is divestment, death is communion. . . .

—*Vladimir Nabokov*, *Pnin*, p. 20.

Metaphor is one of the most important elements of style, a hallmark of professional writing, and yet it is never mentioned to have anything to do with syntax. In addition to equative forms (with noun complements) that lend themselves to pointed metaphorical statements, *be*-kernels that direct their subjects toward a predicate adjective in the third slot can also be used for metaphor:

Kingsley was wrong-footed.

—*Fred Hoyle*, *The Black Cloud*, p. 66.

Parkinson was wrong-footed.

—*Hoyle*, p. 70.

An adverbial phrase can often fill this third slot:

He was in Hell.

—*Wright Morris*, *The Field of Vision*, p. 151.

He was in a fog.

—*John O'Hara*, *Assembly*, p. 231.

When a *like*-phrase fills this third slot, the metaphor, of course, becomes explicitly a simile:

Sincerity is like sleep.

—*W. H. Auden*, *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays*, p. 17.

Returning from these metaphorical samples, let us look at some more *be*-kernels with adjectival complements. These are at least as common as the equative forms:

His mouth was clever.

—*William Golding*, *Pincher Martin*, p. 10.

Milton is almost too honest.

—*G. Wilson Knight*, *Poets of Action*, p. 31.

The woman was most evil.

—*James Baldwin*, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, p. 43.

Joy is free again.

—*Ludwig Lewisohn*, *Anniversary*, p. 29.

Obstinacy is rare.

—*Walter Kaufmann*, *The Faith of a Heretic*, p. 15.

Facts are counterrevolutionary.

—*Eric Hoffer*, *The Passionate State of Mind*, p. 47.

The heart attack was strange—fear is strange.

—*James Baldwin*, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*,
opening line.

Again, the complement can be an adverb or an adverbial phrase:

Change was everywhere.

—*John Steinbeck*, *Sweet Thursday*, p. 2.

Her solicitude was upon him.

—*John Updike*, “*Pigeon Feathers*,” *Olinger Stories*, p. 37.

TYPE 2: THE LINKING-VERB PATTERN, EXAMPLES

In the preceding section, we have seen many examples of the kernel sentence of Type 1, that is, the *be*-pattern, which may have a noun, adjectival, or adverbial as complement. We shall now look at some examples of the linking-verb pattern. The first two samples have nouns as complements:

Everything became a mist.

—C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, p. 380.

He became a castaway in broad daylight.

—William Golding, *Pincher Martin*, p. 56.

Adjectival complements are more often the case:

The maid looked doubtful.

—Dorothy Parker, “*Big Blonde*,” *Here Lies*, p. 250.

His mind turned opaque at the word.

—John Knowles, *Indian Summer*, p. 152.

The weather got worse than ever.

—Edmund Wilson, *Memoirs of Hecate County*, p. 256.

Von Prum became ridiculous.

—Robert Crichton, *The Secret of Santa Vittoria*, p. 322.

I kept dumb about my home life.

—Janet Frame, *The Reservoir*, p. 55.

The body was growing rigid.

—Philip Wylie, *The Answer*, p. 28.

His dream remained dormant. . . .

—Carson McCullers, *Clock without Hands*, p. 174.

Her narrative grew less coherent here. . . .

—John Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy*, p. 491.

Kingsley seemed unperturbed.

—Fred Hoyle, *The Black Cloud*, p. 133.

Marlowe became excited.

—Hoyle, p. 134.

His legs felt weak.

—Bernard Malamud, *The Assistant*, p. 45.

He felt uncomfortable.

—Malamud, p. 77.

She looked old again.

—Malamud, p. 149.

In these linking examples, as in those of the *be* kernels—as, indeed, in all of the kernel patterns—the major emphasis *tends* to fall on whatever word is at the end of the sentence (unless that word is a personal pronoun), giving added weight to what tends, anyway, to be the most important information—the real news of the sentence. The subject, falling

in the first slot, is often a character we already know or an idea that has been under discussion, often a pronoun substitute that must refer backward. Often, although not always, it is a person or a thing or an idea carried over to receive some new predication, and the chief interest is thus likely to be found in the second half of the sentence. That the stress in the first two kinds of kernels therefore falls on a noun that merely renames or an adjective that adds description, or even on adverbs that convey little verbal force, helps to account for the relative lack of activity in many of the sentences with copulative and linking kernels. Some of the linking verbs, like *become*, *get*, *grow*, *turn*, have a little more active verbal suggestion than simple *be* forms, but greater activity is more likely to be found in the intransitive and transitive kernels, with emphasis respectively on a verb or a closely tied adverb, or on an object of some verb or on an adverb telling how the object was acted upon. Types 3 and 4 provide more room for activity.

TYPE 3: THE INTRANSITIVE PATTERN, EXAMPLES

The following samples display various degrees of activity in the intransitive pattern. It is interesting to read the following sentences aloud to see the differing effects, depending on what kind of word receives strongest stress and what its position is in the pattern:

The world suffers.

—*Bernard Malamud*, *The Assistant*, p. 10.

Ida reddened.

—*Malamud*, p. 34.

Her sleep suffered.

—*Malamud*, p. 147.

She blushed under her clothes.

—*Malamud*, p. 15.

The nothingness continued.

—*Tennessee Williams*, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*, p. 147.

Autos honked. Trees rustled. People passed. Arnie went out.

—*Langston Hughes*, *The Ways of White Folks*, p. 155.

Term dragged on.

—*Evelyn Waugh*, *A Little Learning: An Autobiography*, p. 113.

It came up. It came on.

—*Brian Moore*, *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*, p. 249.

Harmony settled over the kitchen.

—*Norman Mailer*, *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 127.

Whiskey came first.

—*Bernard De Voto*, *The Hour*, p. 1.

Blame rests always.

—*Janet Frame*, *Scented Gardens for the Blind*, p. 26.

They turned as one.

—*Mark Van Doren*, “*Not a Natural Man*,” *Collected Stories*, Vol. I, p. 124.

It began so unrecognizably.

—*John Wyndham*, *Out of the Deep*, p. 6.

A face looked in the spy-hole.

—*Brendan Behan*, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel*, p. 11.

The cancer came sooner.

—*Iris Murdoch*, *An Unofficial Rose*, p. 7.

They exulted in her speed.

—*Thomas Wolfe*, *The Web and the Rock*, p. 300.

A humidifier steamed at her feet.

—*J. F. Powers*, *Morte d'Urban*, p. 116.

The train chuffed round a curve.

—*John Wain*, *A Travelling Woman*, p. 142.

He will enter upon his immortality.

—*Robert Penn Warren*, *Flood*, p. 57.

These poets rose to the occasion.

—*Jack Lindsay*, *Meetings with Poets*, p. 236.

Curiosity was growing inside him like the cancer.

—*Graham Greene*, *A Sense of Reality*, p. 61.

The clouds were sitting on the land.

—*William Golding*, *Lord of the Flies*, p. 70.

The ululation spread from shore to shore.

—*Golding*, p. 244.

Time stretched on, indifferently.

—*William Golding*, *Pincher Martin*, p. 182.

His mind brimmed with speculation.

—*Thornton Wilder*, *The Cabala*, p. 10.

The orderlies were cowering in a ditch.

—George Steiner, *Anno Domini*, p. 15.

TYPE 4: THE TRANSITIVE PATTERN, EXAMPLES

The first four transitive samples have what might be called minimal direct objects, personal pronouns that convey no new information but rather refer back to some person mentioned in a previous sentence. Thus, the main emphasis remains on the verb:

The room alarmed him.

—Brian Moore, *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, p. 182.

Slaughter paid her.

—William Goldman, *Soldier in the Rain*, p. 80.

Everybody hated her.

—John Updike, “*The Alligators*,” Olinger Stories, p. 10.

The notion titillated him.

—Leslie Fiedler, *The Last Jew in America*, p. 71.

In the next group of samples, the focus shifts to the noun phrase that is the direct object, in final position:

Some men were chewing their fingernails.

—Lin Yutang, *The Flight of the Innocents*, p. 300.

Matter dominates Mind.

—Jacques Barzun, *Classic, Romantic and Modern*, p. 108.

His mind bred vermin.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 234.

Marlborough swallowed the bait.

—Fred Hoyle, *The Black Cloud*, p. 63.

They exalted the sacraments. . .

—Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw, A Study in Baroque Sensibility*, p. 7.

Her eyes bleed tears; His wounds weep blood.

—Warren, p. 156.

Veterans send ball-point pens. Banks send memo books.

—E. B. White, *The Points of My Compass*, p. 126.

That meant ash; ash meant burning; burning must mean cigarettes.

—Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*, p. 64.

We have our destinies. No man knows what.

—*Archibald MacLeish*, *A Time to Speak*, p. 156.

In the final group of transitive samples, an adverb or a prepositional phrase occupies the terminal slot and thus comes in for a strong share of attention:

She changed the subject immediately.

—*F. Scott Fitzgerald*, *This Side of Paradise*, p. 143.

Helen crushed the child into her arms.

—*William Styron*, *Lie Down in Darkness*, p. 30.

They peel the morning like a fruit.

—*Lawrence Durrell*, *Justine*, p. 215.

Bondage gives place to liberty. . . .

—*Aldous Huxley*, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, p. 210.

Life struck her across the face. . . .

—*Alan Paton*, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 106.

Before moving on, a word about our generalization that transitive patterns tend to involve more activity than the other patterns. This is obviously not true in many instances, even though the transitive involves one more participant, the object. "The rocket exploded," or "I came, I saw, I conquered," both intransitives, are considerably more energetic than a transitive like:

Two stripes ornamented the sleeve.

—*Wyndham Lewis*, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p. 75.

Here no real action is performed, and the verb itself is created from a noun, but Lewis's sentence is more energetic than "Two stripes were on the sleeve," or "There were two stripes on the sleeve."

In spite of the many samples of unadorned sentences quoted and sorted so far, no one writes a prose made up only of these. They are patterns to be used—to be altered and expanded when necessary, as it usually is. It is important to remember the kernels and to write them when and where they are useful, for any of the reasons we will consider in the rest of the chapter. But it is even more important to develop dexterity and versatility in performing the alterations, and to learn also the many ways new material may be embedded or attached. These are the subjects of most of the other chapters.

The Dynamics of the Kernel Patterns in Context

The four types of kernel sentences have thus far been illustrated with isolated sentences. Let us now look at some contexts to see whether a scale of verbal activity has any validity in actual practice, and whether a particular type of kernel has a specialized utility.

Somebody sighed, from the heart (3); he looked up (3); it was Hannah (1). They were looking downward and sidelong (3). His sister's face had altered strangely among this silence (3); it had become thin, shy and somehow almost bridal (2). He remembered her wedding in Panama (4); yes, it was much the same face (1). He looked away (3).

—James Agee, *A Death in the Family*, p. 150.

This scene of looking and recognition, of description, identification, and the transitive act of memory, is written with a mix of all four kernels. Most of us usually write this way. Few ideas demand the services of only one kind of kernel. The application of the kernels is just not that restrictive, as a rule. But it can be, sometimes, or can be made to seem so for a planned effect. In the next excerpts, for instance, the *be*-kernel, both its equative and its descriptive forms, seems exactly suited to the terse, aphoristic style:

There *is* a radicalism in all getting, and conservatism in all keeping. Lovemaking *is* radical while marriage *is* conservative. So, too, the get-rich-quick capitalism *is* radical, while a capitalism intent solely on keeping what it already has *is* conservative.

—Eric Hoffer, *The Passionate State of Mind*, p. 12.

Religion *is* not a matter of God, church, holy cause, etc. These *are* but accessories. The source of religious preoccupation *is* in the self, or rather the rejection of the self. Dedication *is* the obverse side of self-rejection.

—Hoffer, p. 33.

Parallel patterns of the *be*-kernel are useful in the set of descriptive samples below, two recounting a dull, dreary routine and the third a scene of evacuation or absence:

Casualties *were* very few, and supply *was* regular. . . .

It *was* dreary. There *was* danger, but it *was* remote; there *was* diversion, but it *was* rare. For the most part it *was* work, and work of the most distasteful character, work which *was* mean and long.

—Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 133.

My classes *were* dull, my masters with a few exceptions *were* dull, the school-life in general, apart from the sports, *was* dull.

—John Drinkwater, *Inheritance*, p. 235.

The big sycamore by the creek *was* gone. The willow tangle *was* gone. The little tangle of untrodden bluegrass *was* gone. The clump of dogwood on the little rise across the creek—now that, too, *was* gone.

—Robert Penn Warren, *Flood*, p. 4.

The next sample offers an exact contrast to the above in its convening of active kernels of Types 3 and 4 with limited expansion, to portray a frenzy of violent action. The whole paragraph is guided by a parallelism of subject-opened, brief declarative forms, sometimes compounded:

He began to curse. He scrambled down the rock, found a too heavy stone, moved it about a yard and then let go. He threw himself over the stone and went cursing to the water. But there was nothing visible within reach that he could handle. He went quickly to the top again and stood looking at the headless dwarf in terror. He scrambled back to the too heavy stone and fought with it. He moved it, end over end. He built steps to the top of a wall and worked the great stone up. He drew from his body more strength than he had got. He bled. He stood sweating among the papers at last. He dismantled the dwarf and rebuilt him on the stone that after all was not too heavy for education and intelligence and will.

—William Golding, *Pincher Martin*, p. 80.

In the following passage by Thomas Merton, a parallelism of subject-opened, active kernels (many of Type 3) in its loud excess, contrasts with the declarative simplicity of a passage on the next page of Merton's book, arranged in equative clauses (Type 1):

He thought that he was god and that he could stop everything from moving. He thought that since he could, he had to. He cried out loud. He swore at the top of his voice. He fired off a gun and made the people listen. He roared and he boasted and made himself known. He blew back into the wind and stamped on the rolling earth and swore up and down he could make it all stop with his invention. He got up in the teeth of the storm and made a loud speech which everybody heard.

—Thomas Merton, *The Behavior of Titans*, p. 31.

Now this fatman had been brought up on oats and meat and his name was secret. His father was a grocer and his mother was

a butcher. His father was a tailor and his mother ran a train. His father was a brewer and his mother was a general in the army.

—*Merton*, p. 32.

The two longest sentences of the next passage are structures of definition, each one having an equative clause as its base (*italicized*), followed by action clauses that give details:

The word “bore” is of doubtful etymology. Some authorities derive it from the verb meaning to pierce. *A bore is a person* who drills a hole in your spirit, who tunnels relentlessly through your patience, through all the crusts of voluntary deafness, inattention, rudeness, which you vainly interpose—through and through till he pierces to the very quick of your being. But there are other authorities, as good or even better, who would derive the word from the French *bourrer*, to stuff, to satiate. If this etymology be correct, *a bore is one* who stuffs you with his thick and suffocating discourse, who rams his suety personality, like a dumpling, down your throat. He stuffs you; and you, to use an apposite modern metaphor, are “fed up with him.”

—*Aldous Huxley*, *Two or Three Graces*, *opening paragraph*.

In the next collection of samples, even greater gains seem to be made by the deliberate placing back to back of the relatively static kernels 1 and 2 and those more active, 3 and 4. In the first, a series of descriptive clauses is jolted by the abrupt conclusion, as in the second a long front-shifted series of appositives anticipates an equative clause, which then moves in turn to an emphatic transitive at the end:

Her ringlets are dark, her skin very fair. She is not mourning deeply. Her smile is smug, her fine eyes inviting and she did not wait long for a second husband.

—*Evelyn Waugh*, *A Little Learning: An Autobiography*, p. 3.

Not a nasty, dirty wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

—*J. R. R. Tolkien*, *The Hobbit*, *opening paragraph*.

A *be*-pattern establishes the nature of Hebrew poetry below, and transitive forms then take over to describe, actively, the rhythm supplied and the effect given:

In other words, in Hebrew poetry the number of syllables is nothing; the accented words are everything. They alone supply the rhythm, and they alone give the effect.

—*Mary Ellen Chase*, *The Bible and the Common Reader*, p. 76.

Even more in the following excerpts, the contrast in kernel forms is appropriate to the difference between things in themselves static and things properly active. The dynamics of the arrangement is thus fitted to the nature of the expressed ideas. Here an equation is made, an explanation, and its result described, all in the smallest possible space:

The illumination was an irritant for them. It penetrated into their nests.

—*Wallace Fowlie, Pantomime, p. 184.*

Here an infant is defined as alive first, and then shown to move, to reach out, and chuckle:

It was truly alive, and seemed to be pleased at being picked up, for it held out one hand toward her nose and chuckled.

—*T. H. White, Mistress Masham's Repose, p. 19.*

After the initial movement of perception below, there ensues a static description of the observed figure, then punctuated by the last intransitive kernel:

He looked up and perceived a great lady standing by a doorway in a wall. It was not Jane, not like Jane. It was larger, almost gigantic. It was not human though it was like a human divinely tall, part naked, part wrapped in a flame-colored robe. Light came from it.

—*C. S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength, p. 382.*

The next passage begins with a linking pattern and moves into a procession of dancing and glimmering activity:

The air became gray and opalescent; a solitary light suddenly outlined a window over the way; then another light; then a hundred more danced and glimmered into vision. Under his feet a thick, iron-studded skylight turned yellow; in the streets the lamps of the taxicabs sent out glistening sheens along the already black pavement.

—*F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, p. 254.*

Kernel 2 frames the next selection in a more complex way. In transformed shape it begins the long sentence, which then charts the motion of the stream in intransitive and transitive verb phrases—until it returns to the subordinated climax of “all grew dark and baleful,” another kernel 2 pattern:

All very simple, it appeared, simple as the brightly coloured leaves that drift over a sedgy stream, only that too often, before one's eyes, the stream sang its way out of the meadow and carried its bright burden into the forest, where all grew dark and baleful.

—*Van Wyck Brooks, A Chilmark Miscellany, p. 219.*

Next, abruptly, a terminal action (3) closes in stasis (1):

His world is blowing over; his day is done.

—James Thurber, “*Women Go On Forever*,” *Let Your Mind Alone*, p. 230.

Here, in two short paragraphs, is a termination rendered in reverse, with two static kernels finishing in a terse intransitive:

It is over, then. Our good friend is no more.

An era ends.

—Garson Kanin, *Remembering Mr. Maugham*, p. 3.

Even within the briefest paratactic space, a contrast can be managed between kernel forms. *Man Does, Woman Is* juxtaposes an intransitive and a *be*-kernel in the title of a recent book of verse by Robert Graves, and of a poem in that collection, intending a contrast between masculine energy and action, and feminine being, feminine presence.

The Kernel as Topic Sentence and as Syntactic Punctuation of the Paragraph

So far we have sampled the four main types of kernels, and, most recently, the way a writer can capitalize on differences between the four types, differences in the degree of activity. Now we are ready to widen our view somewhat, ready to see the differences between the kernel form itself, any one of the four types, and larger patterns against which the kernels can be set off, either as short sentences in paragraphs of longer ones, or as short clauses in much longer sentences.

The grammar of the kernel is, of course, minimal, and there often appears something minimal or rudimentary about the kind of idea that is compressed into the kernel shape or that naturally assumes it. Kernel 1 offers perhaps the most prevalent examples. It is the kernel of definition, of equation, of quiet first observation—as a writer feels the way for his readers into a new subject. Here is a precise introduction to the author’s case, a quick stroke of self-definition:

I am a determinist. None of the arguments offered on the other side seem of much weight except one form of the moral argument, and that in itself is far from decisive. Perhaps the most useful thing I can do in this paper is explain why the common arguments for indeterminism do not, to my mind, carry conviction. In the course of this explanation the brand of determinism to which I am inclined should become gradually apparent.

—Brand Blanshard, “*The Case for Determinism*,” *Determinism and Freedom*, ed. Sidney Hook, p. 3.

Kernels marked off in this way can also be doubled, or tripled. The next two samples, one from narrative prose, one imitating its techniques, begin with static kernels before the scene really gets underway, the first suggesting silence and finish, the second a white sameness—and both awaiting motion:

In the morning *it was all over. The fiesta was finished.* I woke about nine o'clock, had a bath, dressed, and went down-stairs. The square was empty and there were no people on the streets. A few children were picking up rocket-sticks in the square. The cafés were just opening and the waiters were carrying out the comfortable white wicker chairs and arranging them around the marble-topped tables in the shade of the arcade. They were sweeping the streets and sprinkling them with a hose.

—Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, p. 227.

The walls are white. The rug is white. The furnishings are white. A ceiling of white gauze diffuses the lights glaring overhead. A long travelling shot through the corridors of *The April Fools* penthouse set finally discloses Catherine Deneuve, sitting in a white fur-covered chair, in a white lace dress, the long blonde hair pulled back to reveal a face with outrageously perfect features.

—Mary Most, “*Une Créature du Cinéma*,” *Cinema*, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 10.

Now is a good time to generalize. What we have seen in the last three samples hints at something that will be further displayed by the kernels to follow, something about the making of paragraphs that has to do with grammar—grammar as style—but that is too often ignored. Ideas about the building of paragraphs from sentences have usually been left to the vague and questionable mercies of “the logic of composition,” with its concern for “topic sentences” and the proper ordering of “subordinate ideas.” Yet accomplished writers usually seem to have something additional in mind when deciding how to put sentences together. The better the writer, of fiction and of nonfiction alike, the more he tends to vary his sentence length. And he does it as dramatically as possible. It is this trick of professional style to which Sheridan Baker alerts us in his section “The Long and Short of It.”⁵ Time and again the shortest sentence in a professional paragraph is brought up against the longest, or at least lodged among some much longer. This smallest sentence is often a kernel, or a near-kernel. And it may be a basic sentence both grammatically and semantically, stating in simplest terms the central idea of the paragraph. Thus syntax, taking shape as a kernel, often marks the so-called topic sentence of a paragraph. This is true primarily of expository prose, more

⁵ *The Complete Stylist*, p. 109.

likely than any other to have a straightforward and orderly topic that can go, by way of summary, into a single sentence. Narrative prose is fashioned on a somewhat different principle, a more dramatic one. It is still disposed into paragraphs, of course, but whatever short kernels do appear are more often, rather than a condensation of the topic, some narrowed, relaxed point of departure or a slamming start, a later point of rest, an abrupt turn or climax, or a simple close. Either way, as a topic sentence or as a kind of syntactic punctuation, the kernel is in great demand.

The *be*-kernel can also, making its simple definitive statement, appear in the middle of a paragraph, here as a kind of pivot aided by the contrastive conjunction that starts the sentence after the kernel:

By leaving out essential elements in the language situation we easily raise problems and difficulties which vanish when the whole transaction is considered in greater detail. Words, as every one now knows, "mean" nothing by themselves, although the belief that they did, as we shall see in the next chapter, was once equally universal. It is only when a speaker makes use of them that they stand for anything, or, in one sense, have "meaning." *They are instruments.* But besides this referential use for which all reflective, intellectual use of language should be paramount, words have other functions which may be grouped together as emotive.

—C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, pp. 9–10.

Or here, abbreviated further by ellipsis, it can make for transition between paragraphs:

Because of its devotion to freedom, this magazine is always on special assignment.

It has been. Let it be enough to mention the China Lobby, the Berlin Wall, Joseph McCarthy, direct democracy, which lately was given the fancier name of participatory democracy—one of the best recipes for establishing tyranny that has ever been concocted—and, of course, any attempt to establish a Buonaparte dynasty.

—Max Ascoli, "Farewell to Our Readers," *The Reporter*, June 13, 1968, p. 18.

The same kind of shortened, partial kernel punctuates the close of the next paragraph by relying on, and thus calling to mind, earlier materials needed to complete it; emphasis is pointed, too, by the author's own italics:

Whatever we may think of the adequacy of this theory of Pareto's as an entire explanation of social groups, I think we all recognize that these 2 types of human beings do exist. Whether they

were born that way, or whether their environment and training made them that way is beside the point. *They are.*

—James Webb Young, *A Technique for Producing Ideas*, p. 20.

Kernel 1 is used to finish off succinctly, and informally, the next two excerpts, first as the kind of tautology discussed earlier, and secondly with an adjectival complement:

Although Ernest Hemingway is dead, so are Gertrude Stein and Scott Fitzgerald. Since they cannot defend themselves against his defamation of character in *A Moveable Feast*, his death need not shield him from recrimination. *Unfair's unfair.*

—Brooks Atkinson, *Brief Chronicles*, p. 176.

Mr. Frank is very skillful, but his novel remains airless, claustrophobic, locked into a ruthlessness of perception. In real life Bartholomew might indeed be a hopeless case, but in a novel there has got to be some contingency, some surprise, some variation. Even if you don't believe the human lot has more to offer than this prospect of wretchedness, you must write *as if* you do. Otherwise, *liquor is quicker.*

—Irving Howe, “First Novels: Sweet and Sour,” Harper’s, May 1968, p. 84.

Next, an equative clause stands by itself as a paragraph to summarize the preceding three:

If you stop Ted in the street and ask him the way he is always eager to direct you. He helps the aged, the blind, the crippled. He will rescue children in distress separated from their mothers in a crowd. At the scene of an accident he is among the first to restore calm, to comfort people, ring for ambulances, distribute hot tea.

He will reprimand or report to the police anyone making himself a public nuisance or breaking the law. Ted has deep respect for the law.

If you say good morning to him he returns your greeting with a cheerful smile.

That is Ted.

—Janet Frame, *The Reservoir: Stories and Sketches*, p. 117.

The same kind of summary, again with an equative clause, is provided within the passage below, arriving after a long infinitive fragment that stands before the kernel almost as an appositional structure:

Those four years are the most prodigious four years in the life of genius of which we have record. No one, as far as I know, in any

nation or at any time, has travelled so far along the steep road of poetic achievement in such a space of years: certainly no one in England. In four years to have achieved, with no advantages of education and against the dead-weight of cockney tradition, the opulent perfection of language, the living depth of poetic thought which is in *Hyperion* and the *Eve of St. Agnes* and the great Odes! *It is a miracle.*

—John Middleton Murry, Keats and Shakespeare, p. 13.

Here action closes down to finish in a static *be*-kernel:

The silence of the theater behind him ended with a curious snapping sound, followed by the heavy roaring of a rising crowd and the interlaced clatter of many voices. *The matinée was over.*

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, pp. 254–255.

The same sort of kernel is used twice in the next paragraph, for a doubled emphasis, an insistent finality:

The relaxation of the dying hand. He jumped to feel Ann's clasp upon his arm. She had been saying something to him. *It was all over.* He had seen the coffin awkwardly descend into the watery pit and heard the earth fall upon it. *It was all over.*

—Iris Murdoch, An Unofficial Rose, p. 11.

Finally, there is a special kind of paired formula that, for the simple contrast of its thought, finds equative kernels very useful. This is the negative-positive, or contrastive pattern. Here are some, in separate sentences and in various internal combinations:

The life of his body, illclad, illfed, louseeaten, made him close his eyelids in a sudden spasm of despair: and in the darkness he saw the brittle bright bodies of lice falling from the air and turning often as they fell. Yes; and *it was not darkness* that fell from the air. *It was brightness.*

—James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, p. 234.

"Women's lives are more subject to fragmentation, by the very fact that women must weave home, family and careers into a life. Men have good blocks of time. They can achieve a flair and a sort of steady progression, which is sort of hard for women—that is one of my thoughts. One wouldn't have it any other way; *this is not a grumble—it is an observation.*"

—Mrs. John Freeman, as quoted in an interview, "British Envoy's Wife Gets First Look at the L.A. Empire," by Mary Lou Loper, Los Angeles Times, June 23, 1969, Part IV, p. 15.

Housing is not the first problem. It may be third, but far behind police-community relations and employment and education.

—Joseph C. Harsch, "Ghetto impressions —3," The Christian Science Monitor, Tuesday, June 3, 1969.

The key to the problem is not more relief, but more regular work.

—Harsch, June 3, 1969.

In addition to the *be*-patterns of all kinds, linking kernels of Type 2 are sometimes used in many of these same ways to punctuate a longer passage. In this use, as everywhere, they are less common than the other three types and are sometimes ignored in favor of the *be*-kernels. When they are wanted, however, these linking arrangements can be very effective:

Perhaps people think *A Man for All Seasons* is so great because unlike the usual movie which is aimed at twelve-year-olds, this one is aimed at twelve-year-old intellectuals and idealists. And if they're grown into compromising and unprincipled people, can hail *A Man for All Seasons* as a masterpiece: heroism so remote, so totally the property of a suprahuman figure, absolves them of human weakness. *It becomes romantic.*

—Pauline Kael, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, pp. 154–155.

Now and then a linking verb, more often an intransitive or a transitive, joins with a *be*-pattern as final punctuation for paragraph or novel:

And now I realized that I couldn't return to Mary's, or to any part of my old life. I could approach it only from the outside, and I had been as invisible to Mary as I had been to the Brotherhood. No, I couldn't return to Mary's, only move ahead or stay here, underground. So I would stay here until I was chased out. Here, at least, I could try to think things out in peace, or, if not in peace, in quiet. *I would take up residence underground. The end was in the beginning.*

—Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 494.

The intransitive kernel is often used to set off or to break up long stretches of dialogue—for emphasis, for interruption, for transition, for the introduction of a new speaker. It is, of course, the simplest pattern by which we learn about the speaking act itself: *he said, he vociferated, she announced, they bellowed*, and so on. Apart from its almost constant use in this way, the intransitive kernel is, after Type 1, probably the next most frequent kernel in use to punctuate a gathering of more complex sentences. It can introduce, here an entire volume:

Charles Dickens belongs to all the world. He is a titan of literature, and his own moving life-story, with its radiances of laughter, its conquests of genius, and its dark and fateful drift toward disillusion even in the midst of universal acclaim, epitomizes hardly less powerfully than his works the mingled comedy and tragedy of the human struggle. This book is therefore addressed not only to literary scholars, but to all who find compelling the color and fullness and travail of life itself.

—*Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph,*
p. vii.

Like all kernels, it can be doubled:

I know, I know. I do not for a minute forget the dark gusts that roll dooms like tumbleweeds in the night across troubled America. But, for a few hours on a few days, at least I see the mixture. I know the paradox of this country.

—*Ray Bradbury, "Any Friend of Trains Is a Friend of Mine,"*
Life, August 2, 1968, p. 50.

It can relieve longer patterns in the center:

No other natural phenomenon on the planet—not even mountains five miles high, rivers spilling over cliffs, or redwood forests—evokes such reverence. Yet this same “all-powerful” ocean now proves as slavishly subservient to natural laws as a moth caught by candlelight or a rose seed blown into the Atlantic. *The ocean obeys. It heeds. It complies.* It has its tolerances and its stresses. When these are surpassed, the ocean falters. Fish stocks can be depleted. The nurseries of marine life can be varied. Beaches can erode away. Seawater, the most common substance on this earth and the most life-nourishing—at once liquid soil and liquid atmosphere—can be hideously corrupted. It can host substances that in the stomachs of oysters or clams are refined into poisons that paralyze porpoise and man alike.

—*Wesley Marx, The Frail Ocean, pp. 2–3.*

The intransitive kernel can also provide a quick restatement at the end of a paragraph, leaving us suspended:

Marvin bowed to the moustached man’s superior wisdom and made himself at home in the posada. He settled himself at an outdoor table that commanded a good view of the courtyard and of the road beyond it. He fortified himself with a flagon of wine, and proceeded to fulfill his theoretical function as called for by the Theory of Searches: viz., *he waited*.

—*Robert Sheckley, Mindswap, p. 132.*

Or, an abrupt conclusion:

He stood in the rain, unable to move, not knowing if the lovers were real or simply creations of the lightning and when it stopped, they stopped; unless of course he was dreaming one of those dreams from which he would awaken in that pain which is also sharpest pleasure, having loved in sleep. But the cold rain was real; and so was the sudden soft moan from the poolhouse. *He fled.*

—*Gore Vidal*, Washington, D.C., p. 4.

Or, a conclusion that moves us forward to what ensues:

When, for example, the wise and humane Odysseus, the loyal and affectionate Telemachus; together with their faithful henchmen celebrate their triumph in Ithaca by hanging twelve of Penelope's false handmaidens, "like netted thrushes," from a ship's cable; when we read how, in vengeance on the goatherd Melanthius "with the ruthless edge of bronze they severed his ears and nose, and tore away his genitals for the dogs to eat raw, and hewed off his hands and feet in the fury of their hate"; then indeed the long illusion of perfect understanding is abruptly broken. For a moment—if only for a moment—we are utterly estranged. Such horrors do not bear imagining. *We hasten on.*

—*F. L. Lucas*, *The Search for Good Sense*, pp. 2–3.

Or, it can itself constitute a paragraph of transition:

. . . and in utter abjection of spirit he craved forgiveness mutely of the boyish hearts about him.

Time passed.

He sat again in the front bench of the chapel. The daylight without was already falling. . . .

—*James Joyce*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 126.

Various kernels are allotted carefully to the next two paragraphs, arriving at key points to signal the essential events. In each, transitive patterns join with intransitive at the end for a well-planned conclusion, in the one a collapse into sleep, in the other the activation of a simple movement:

The doctor went away into the mist. It was daylight now, but everything was still grey and hazy—the pine trees floating in mist, their branches drooping like burdened wings that no air can lift. Janek slipped into the brushwood and raised the rusty iron door. He climbed down the ladder and threw himself on the mattress. It

was pitch-dark in the hideout. He got up and tried to light a fire; the wood was damp. He got it going at last, lay down again, trying not to cry. He took up the big book, *Winetoo, the Red Indian Gentleman*. But he could not read. The silence in his ears was frightening; it was as if the whole earth had turned to stone. *His eyes closed. Weariness numbed his body, his mind. . . . He fell asleep.*

—Romain Gary, *Nothing Important Ever Dies*, p. 3.

He turned round to know if Randall and the children were following, and saw like a shaft of light through a cloud a momentarily opened vista between the rows of dark figures. Something at the far end of that vista arrested his attention for a second before the opening was closed again by the movement of people towards the gate. Two women he had seen like bats clinging together, their glasses glinting under the black canopy, two women facing him in grotesque stillness down the rainswept vista. One of them was Emma. Hugh stopped. The vision had gone, but as if to confirm its reality he caught sight of the intent averted face of his son, and his son's hand descending after a gesture of greeting. *Hugh stood still for another moment. Then he set his feet in motion.*

—Iris Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose*, p. 13.

The transitive kernel, however, is less common in pure, isolated form than either the *be*-patterns or the intransitives. With its two nominal elements, its two actors—subject and object—there is twice as much chance for modification or expansion of some kind—in one of the two slots. Examples, of course, can still be found without too tiring a search. Here a transitive pattern, including an indirect object, accompanies an intransitive for punctuation, a syntactic relief from the longer structures around these kernels:

Back in Cambridge, the next few days were among the most interesting in my memory. The phone rang continuously—so continuously that my secretary went home in annoyance, leaving me to answer it myself. Some of the calls were from the very great like Ed Murrow, who wanted me to extend my remarks for an even larger audience. *I declined.* A few wanted to know if I was likely to say anything that would affect the market in the near future. *I promised them silence.* The rest wished to denounce me for destroying their dream.

—John Kenneth Galbraith, “*Introduction*,” *The Great Crash, 1929*, p. xv.

SOME SHORT TRANSFORMS WITH EFFECTS LIKE THOSE OF THE KERNELS

In all these samples, the effect derives far more from the unmistakable separation of a kernel from longer sentences than from any differing characteristics of the four types. It is, simply, the effect of a deliberately short sentence. The sentence need not be a perfect kernel. The passive, for instance—a transformation of those transitive kernels just sampled—can work the same way:

The editor of this anthology, who took part and was wounded in the last war to end war, hates war and hates all the politicians whose mismanagement, gullibility, cupidity, selfishness and ambition brought on this present war and made it inevitable. But once we have a war there is only one thing to do. *It must be won.* For defeat brings worse things than any that can ever happen in a war.

—*Ernest Hemingway, ed., "Introduction," Men at War, pp. xi–xii.*

A *there*-transformation can also stand in for a kernel:

We need not be told that life is never going to be free from trouble and that there are no substitutes for the dead; but it is a fact as well as a mystery that weakness is power, that handicap is proficiency, that the scar is a credential, that indignation is no adversary for gratitude, or heroism for joy. *There are medicines.*

—*Marianne Moore, Predilections, p. 133.*

The Kernel as Base Clause with Free Modifiers

Related to the effects of isolated kernels we have so long been considering, kernel clauses blocked off from structures of free modification also create a distinct, strong texture. Below, very near each other, are an intransitive main clause located and expanded in this way and a separate transitive kernel:

One afternoon, in an early summer of this century, when Laura Rowan was just eighteen, *she sat*, embroidering a handkerchief, on the steps leading down from the terrace of her father's house to the gardens communally owned by the residents in Radnage Square. *She liked embroidery.*

—*Rebecca West, The Birds Fall Down, opening paragraph.*

The results are not the same, but both rely on a kernel in isolation. Here is another intransitive kernel occurring in the middle of a long sentence:

At the medicine-cabinet mirror, eyes still closed, *I stood*, hoping as always that when I opened them something would have happened overnight, and I'd see a change.

—*Jack Finney, The Woodrow Wilson Dime, p. 7.*

The preceding sentence consists of a base clause that has free modifiers both before it and after it. To use the terminology of later chapters, the sentence has a base clause, with both left-branching and right-branching free modifiers. The next example consists of a kernel as base clause, interrupted by free modifiers in the middle:

Anne, sticking entertainment-tax stamps on to green and orange tickets, listening to her mother's rich lazy ironical voice, frowned.

—*Christopher Isherwood, The Memorial, p. 11.*

The following sentence also contains a kernel as base clause, interrupted by a mid-branch. In addition, the sentence has right branches, that is, free modifiers that follow the base clause.

The Russians, coming from streets around the cemetery, were hurrying, singly or in groups, in the spring snow in the direction of the caves in the ravine, some running in the middle of the slushy cobble-stone streets.

—*Bernard Malamud, The Fixer, p. 9.*

Next, two offerings from the same author show an intransitive kernel as the base clause, respectively, of a left- and a right-branching sentence:

On the last day of January 1915, under the sign of the Water Bearer, in a year of a great war, and down in the shadow of some French mountains on the borders of Spain, I came into the world.

—*Thomas Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, p. 3.*

I looked ahead, up the long street to Villenouvelle station, where I had taken the train so many times in the small hours of the morning, on my way home to spend the Sunday in St. Antonin.

—*Merton, p. 60.*

Below, two right-branching sentences begin with a kernel as the base clause. The first kernel is a *be*-pattern, the second an intransitive:

He is the puritan, holding to the tradition of Socrates' cheerful indifference to bodily pleasures, but disposed to mistake this indifference for a rather grim and graceless asceticism. He can see no distinction

between trust in providence and submission to fate. *He marches*, in the filthy rags of righteousness, with face set towards a peak of infallible wisdom and virtue, which even the small company of the elect have little or no hope to climb.

—F. M. Cornford, Before and After Socrates, p. 108.

In still another example, a *be*-kernel serves as base clause, to open a cumulative, right-branching sentence:

They are suburbs, for the most part superior in their aspect to those of Britain, suburbs such as would not, on the whole, displease the Georgian Group.

—Lord Kinross, The Innocents at Home, p. 53.

Here are some transitive patterns deployed in this way:

I examined her face, the eyes so heavily mascaraed, but large and grey, the lines extending from her lips that the makeup failed to hide, the creases in her forehead.

—Hollis Alpert, The Claimant, p. 293.

He entered the pro-cathedral, an echoing vastness of beauty and silence, pillared in marble, rich in oak and bronze, a temple of towering and intricate design, in which his mission chapel would have stood unnoticed, forgotten, in a corner of the transept.

—A. J. Cronin, The Keys of the Kingdom, p. 333.

In the following sentence, a transitive pattern serves as base clause at the *end* of the sentence, with free modifiers preceding it, that is, branching off to its left:

In the sound of the wood pigeons calling in the trees behind them, and the sound of running water at their feet, *they unpacked their tea*.

—Nevil Shute, Pastoral, p. 240.

Linking-verb kernels, too, may be held intact, as in the following right-branching sentence:

She looked mad, absolutely round the bend, standing in a filthy bare hall on ragged linoleum under the dismal light of one feeble, fly-blown, naked bulb, casually dispensing thousands of pounds.

—Angus Wilson, No Laughing Matter, p. 401.

This preservation of the kernel, or a succinct base clause of some kind, amid elaborate free modification is one of the most important lessons any writer can master. It is touched on only briefly here because the materials of free modification, which allow the kernel or near-kernel to stay separate, are taken up in the next two chapters, on noun and verb

phrases, as well as in the chapters on the three kinds of branching sentences, and in many other places in *Grammar as Style*. Free modification is absolutely essential. It is the means by which a writer avoids the danger of “loading the patterns,” the tendency to stuff the kernel slots with bound modifiers and embedded phrases. Here is what can happen without free modification:

Neglect of this rich mine of information is due in part to *the difficulty one faces in attempting to establish a suitable model in this area for modern quantification techniques that have contributed immeasurably to the formulation of historical generalizations in such areas as economic history and voting patterns.*

—Earl W. Hayter, *The Troubled Farmer*, p. 3.

This sentence suffers through eleven prepositional phrases, all tightly bound into the unattractive shape of the sentence, most of them in the ponderous thirty-seven word noun phrase (italicized). This is what can happen if no attempt is made to preserve the kernel. The worst offenders in this overloading of patterns are indeed the long noun phrase and nested prepositional phrases, often collaborating, as they do above, for clumsiness and verbal dead weight. Chapter 5 will be addressed in part to this prepositional glut. The next chapter will show better ways to handle the noun phrase.

3

Chapter

Noun Phrases

The very hallmark of jargon is the long noun phrase—the long noun phrase as subject and the long noun phrase as complement, the two coupled by a minimal verb. One of the hardest things to learn in learning to write well is how to keep the noun phrases short.

—Francis Christensen, “The Problem of Defining a Mature Style,” *The English Journal*, April 1968.

Noun phrases are any and all structures headed by a noun, or by a pronoun, or any other word or structure that stands in for a noun. Thus even an entire clause may function as a noun phrase. The basic sentence pattern:

Sentence → Noun Phrase + Verb Phrase

assigns the noun phrase to subject position, but the verb phrase itself factors to include additional noun phrases in several positions. In any position, the noun may be expanded by attaching before or after it modifiers of several kinds. Modifiers that are closely tied to the head, with no intervening punctuation, are called *bound modifiers* or *restrictive modifiers*. It is this kind of modification that sometimes creates “the long noun phrase” Professor Christensen is describing, and we shall shortly see some examples.

The *loose*, or *free*, or *nonrestrictive* modifiers—and these occur at the beginning of a sentence or are set off from the rest of the sentence by punctuation—are not included in what we are referring to as “the long noun phrase”; in fact, they are sometimes called *sentence modifiers* because they often seem to modify the whole sentence rather than a particular word;

they are outside the base clause, attached loosely, and comprehended as small units. The particular point at which they are inserted in the sentence is often optional; they may, as we have seen, branch off to the left of the base clause, or from its midpoint, or at its end.

In order to look at some stylistic effects of noun phrases, let us review first the several slots that a noun phrase may occupy in the basic sentence. They are (1) subject, (2) predicate nominative, (3) direct object, (4) indirect object, (5) object of a preposition, and (6) objective complement. Afterward, we shall look at some additional functions of noun phrases, usually outside the base clause, and we shall sample a number of structures and devices, including the following: (1) The noun as modifier of another noun, (2) the adverbial noun, (3) the noun as fragment, (4) the noun as appositive, (5) the noun in the nominative absolute, and (6) the noun series, or catalog. Finally, we shall look at some examples of what Professor Christensen calls "the very hallmark of jargon"—long noun phrases with bound modifiers—and we shall consider some devices for avoiding them.

Noun Phrases in Basic Positions

Although it may at first seem superfluous for us to bother with examples of noun phrases in these basic positions, there is much to be learned by close scrutiny of the professional writer's tactics in even these syntactic slots. In the subject position in the first sample, the noun phrase is to the point:

Nothing short of explosives would lay them low this time!
—George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, p. 94.

The following sentence is subject-heavy, and the reader, having finally made his way to the predicate, is somewhat disconcerted at the plural verb and singular complement:

The idea of everything being included in the humble thing, with mystical respect for poor men, fools, and children, and a contrasting idea of everything being included in the ruling hero, were a main strand of Chinese thought by the third century B.C.; before Buddhism and not limited to Taoism.

—William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 21.

In the sentence below, the predicate nominative in a *be*-pattern of definition is clear and efficient even though fairly long:

A rocket is *a jet-propelled missile which carries the source of its propulsion energy along with it and whose functioning is independent of the presence of an atmosphere.*

—The Way Things Work, An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Technology, p. 578.

It is easy, however, to overload relative clauses bound to the noun, as are those in the preceding sentence. Another effective predicate nominative, this time after a linking verb:

The youngsters, not immediately within sight, seemed *rather bright and desirable appurtenances than otherwise.*

—Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 19.

In a more complicated sentence, we see in a direct object slot three effective parallel clauses, each beginning with the word "that":

We want to emphasize here and now, even to the point of being evangelical in our emphasis, *that one gains a great deal by getting just as far from exhaust fumes and ringing telephones as his feet will let him; that feet are the readiest means of access to such sanctuary; and that so long as one can walk, if only a mile or two a day, it is possible to use the wilderness as a sanctuary.*

—The Sierra Club Wilderness Handbook, ed. David Brower, p. 46.

Next, in the indirect object position, we see a single word, a proper noun. The professional writer seldom elaborates much on a noun phrase in this position.

Her mother bore Tess no ill-will for leaving the housework to her single-handed efforts for so long.

—Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 16.

Prepositional phrases, with nouns as components, appear as both adjectivals and adverbials. First, a noun phrase as object of a preposition in an adverbial:

He delivered these stale goods with *the rotund gusto of the classical Alexandrinka (a theater in Petersburg), rather than with the crisp simplicity of the Moscow artists. . . .*

—Vladimir Nabokov, Pnin, p. 12.

In Chapter 2, in the section on equative clauses, the noun was shown to have a place in the fashioning of metaphor. Its role in the special brand of metaphor called *simile* (the *as* or *like* comparison) was also mentioned.

Here are further examples, with nouns and noun phrases acting as the objects of the preposition *like*:

The laugh of a Loon on a northern lake is like *the mirth of a maniac*.
—Roger Tory Peterson, *How to Know the Birds*, p. 27.

High on the slopes of the bullring, burning like *flares*, sheets of flaming newspaper soared skyward, suddenly cooled, powdered, and fell like a rain of ash.

—Wright Morris, *The Field of Vision*, p. 235.

The road lay like *a length of black tape* across the desert.
—Nathaniel Benchley, *Welcome to Xanadu*, *opening line*.

The engine looked like *a surly, crouching animal*. . . .
—Benchley, p. 6.

I saw this specter of white anger coming from the savage gray and meanwhile shot northward in a great hurry to get to Bruges and out of this line of white which was like *eternity opening up right beside destructions of the modern world, hoary and grumbling*.

—Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*, *last page*.

Noun phrases function as objective complements in the two following sentences, one in the short first sentence and two in the second:

They called my aeroplanes *darts*.

—Jerry Mander, *George Dippel, and Howard Gossage*, *The Great International Paper Airplane Book*, p. 13.

We may call the rhythm of literature *the narrative*, and the pattern, the simultaneous mental grasp of the verbal structure, *the meaning or significance*.

—Northrop Frye, “*The Archetypes of Literature*,” *Fables of Identity*, p. 14.

Nouns as Modifiers of Other Nouns

Nouns can modify other nouns:

To get straight to the worst, what I’m about to offer isn’t really a short story at all but a sort of *prose home movie*, and those who have seen the footage have strongly advised me against nurturing any elaborate *distribution* plans for it.

—J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey*, p. 47.

Something of literally *life and death* importance had happened in mortal history. . . .

—J. B. Phillips, *Ring of Truth*, p. 36.

A small *banana preservation* factory is experimenting with various methods of preserving this fruit for domestic market or for import.

—Jacques M. May, *The Ecology of Malnutrition in the French-Speaking Countries of West Africa and Madagascar*, p. 101.

Veteran union members were outraged when they learned that *Teamsters business* agent Eugene Williams of Local 544 was getting seven per cent of one *Teamsters union pension* fund for administering it.

—Clark R. Mollenhoff, *Tentacles of Power*, p. 17.

Here are these noun modifiers in combination with a noun-adjective compound:

Leaves long dead and brittle as old *butterfly wings*, an aqua *candy wrapper*, flecks and dust and *seed-sized* snips of *gutter chaff* all hurried in a rustling revolution under our eyes. . . .

—John Updike, *The Centaur*, p. 130.

That humiliated, bandy-legged, weak-haired and injured-in-the-eyes Sylvester, however. . . .

—Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*, p. 213.

Pursuit planes were traded for additional *cargo ships* or retained for *emergency invoice* duty and *small-parcel* service; trucks and tanks were procured from the *ground forces* and used for *short-distance road* hauling.

—Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*, p. 259.

. . . she bought the green *glove silk* slip with the *tea-colored* lace.

—Katherine Anne Porter, *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*, p. 200.

Noun modifiers can also be used as adjectivals in more unusual arrangements, here as a kind of appositional substitute for "moonless":

It was a dark night, *no moon*, but the stars diffused a very faint luminescence over everything, a light like softest sound, touch of fur on ebony.

—John Fowles, *The Magus*, p. 275.

In scientific writing, noun collocations and noun compounds are often deposited with attention only to economy and accuracy, hardly to style and readability:

. . . radiation existing at this stage must survive, subject to the appropriate red-shifts, as cosmic *blackbody background* radiation.

—W. H. McCrea, “Cosmology after Half a Century,” *Science*, June 21, 1968, p. 1295.

The most promising candidates for the oscillator now include such lasers as the *helium-neon gas* laser, the *carbon dioxide gas* laser and the *neodymium-doped yttrium-aluminum-garnet crystal* laser.

—Donald F. Nelson, “The Modulation of Laser Light,” *Scientific American*, June 1968, p. 17.

The Noun as Adverbial

Noun modifiers can stand in adverbial slots as well:

I could go on *a great deal*.

—Laurence Olivier, “Foreword,” *Stage Fight*, by William Hobbs.

He saw the functionary, *several times*.

—Peter Israel, *The Hen’s House*, p. 31.

They heard the whistles of tugboats, *all day and all night long*.

—James Baldwin, *Another Country*, p. 51.

It goes *a long way back, some twenty years*.

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, p. 19.

He added nothing to the terror of the dark, the terror generalized and mindless that had to be endured *nighthlong and night after night*.

—William Golding, *Free Fall*, p. 161.

The Noun as Fragment

From the opening of a novel, in a free-style grammar that mirrors its subject, we see another use of the noun phrase—in the loosely attached, almost independent noun fragments at the end:

I am an American, Chicago born—Chicago, that somber city—and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style, and will make the record in my own way: *first to knock, first to enter; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent*.

—Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*.

Usually, noun fragments stand by themselves. Here is one from the very end of a novel:

So much, then, for these things.

—*Robert Graves*, Count Belisarius, p. 415.

Following are several others of varying length:

Success. Triumph. Waves of applause. The night came to a kind of crescendo Andy Hardy finish that I have never been able to recapture.

—*Shana Alexander*, Life Magazine, May 19, 1967, p. 308.

If Bette Davis and Joan Crawford should ever come to blows, it is possible to make book on the probable winner. *Bette Davis*.

—*Brooks Atkinson*, Brief Chronicles, p. 33.

An explosive issue for Britain: supplying arms to countries that ask for them.

—The Christian Science Monitor, June 3, 1969, p. 1.

Stopping, he looked for daylight. Yes, it was there. The light was there. *The grace of life still there. Or, if not grace, air.*

—*Saul Bellow*, Mosby's Memoirs and Other Stories, p. 184.

A miracle worked by happiness!

—*John Wain*, A Travelling Woman, p. 137.

Indeed, many men feel that the imperfect social order is inadequate to resolve the inner conflict. *Hence the search for a philosophy, a religion, a faith which will transcend and unify the felt disharmony.*

—*Jacques Barzun*, Classic, Romantic and Modern, p. 16.

One of those fool toy bulls, and mounted on a big board, a pair of real bull horns. Two hundred pesos. That was almost twenty dollars for a pair of damn horns.

—*Wright Morris*, The Field of Vision, p. 250.

Last are three fragments of deliberately increasing length:

Sleep, and the approach of sleep. The pouring texture, beginningless and endless, that fulfills a dream. The dream-song at the end of little Jean's famous poem, "The Playlanders," which she had written, all magnificently, at Inglesse, when she was five—that masterpiece of alliterative spellings, with its wonderful, and somehow so world's-end, mountain, Juhoohooa.

—*Conrad Aiken*, Ushant: An Essay, p. 364.

The Noun as Appositive

There remain for sampling the three most important special uses of the noun phrase: two structures of free modification, the *appositive* and the

absolute construction, and one variety of cataloging, the *noun series*. These are so crucial to good writing that they receive attention in other chapters as well. The selection here is just by way of preview, beginning with the appositive—a noun or noun phrase placed alongside a noun principal for another look at it, another rendition of the same idea:

In New York I had met Mr. Charles Chaplin and Miss Greta Garbo, *the latter a being who is, physically, of the lily tribe, but with a human heart and mind.*

—*Edith Sitwell, Taken Care Of: The Autobiography of Edith Sitwell, p. 221.*

In this sense they are concerned only with realities, since they claim to interpret what is generally admitted to exist: *the supreme quality of Shakespeare's work.*

—*G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, p. 7.*

In the preceding example, the appositive seems to come at the climax of the sentence. This is often the case:

Despite its great variety of natural wonders, California is best known to many outsiders for just one thing—*earthquakes.*

—*Robert Iacopi, Earthquake Country, p. 4.*

Here the climactic appositive comes after a long wait:

To audiences who had been forced to sit through plays in which love was the motive of the intrigue, but who had an instinctive feeling that love, though all very well in its way, was not really quite so important as the dramatists pretended, for after all there were politics, golf, getting on with one's job and all sorts of other things, it was a welcome relief to come upon a dramatist for whom love was a tiresome, secondary business, *a quick gratification of a momentary impulse whose consequences were generally awkward.*

—*W. Somerset Maugham, The Summing Up, p. 88.*

Sometimes the appositional structure comes well after the principal to which it refers:

He left his name entangled with a cluster of unanswered questions, *this prince of our disorder.*

—*Irving Howe, A World More Attractive: A View of Modern Literature and Politics, p. 39.*

This tends to bring it more emphasis. On the other hand, the appositive can actually precede the noun it renames:

Half mountebank, half sage, Schumpeter had been the *enfant terrible* of the Austrian school of economists.

—Paul A. Samuelson, “*On Memories*,” Newsweek, June 2, 1969, p. 83.

Here appositives flank the main clause and its subject:

Whatever took place in the stateroom between the ideal father and the ideal son, its effect was indeed sacramental, *an effect of the purest unction and the most complete reconciliation*.

—Newton Arvin, Herman Melville: A Critical Biography, p. 299.

Thought of usually as a mere addition, the appositive often contains most of a sentence’s information, as it did above and does in the next samples:

He was unpredictable, *at times a sly mischief-maker, at other times a cruel tyrant, a rascal playing with dangerous arrows, and a beatific divinity, a dispenser as well as a healer of wounds*.

—Louis Untermeyer, An Uninhibited Treasury of Erotic Poetry, p. I.

Her warm untidy being emphasized the sleekness, the thinness, the compactness of the other two, *Mary with her straight dark hair tucked behind her ears and her air of a Victorian governess, Paula with her narrow head and pointed face and the well-adjusted surfaces of her cropped brown hair*. Kate, herself undefined, was a definer of others, *the noise, the heat, the light which flattened them into the clearer contours of themselves*.

—Iris Murdoch, The Nice and the Good, p. 14.

The paragraph below consists of one sentence. Except for the six words in the main clause, it is all one long appositive:

He taught Russian at Waindell College, *a somewhat provincial institution characterized by an artificial lake in the middle of a landscaped campus, by ivied galleries connecting the various halls, by murals displaying recognizable members of the faculty in the act of passing on the torch of knowledge from Aristotle, Shakespeare, and Pasteur to a lot of monstrously built farm boys and farm girls, and by a huge, active, buoyantly thriving German Department which its Head, Dr. Hagen, smugly called (pronouncing every syllable very distinctly) “a university within a university.”*

—Vladimir Nabokov, Pnin, p. 9.

The Noun Phrase in the Nominative Absolute

The nominative absolute is almost a clause. It consists of a noun phrase with a partial predicate:

He smoked briefly, *his eyes following a pattern of concrete blocks in the school building.*

—J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey*, p. 153.

He bent down, *himself forgotten, his face lit up with love and pride.*

—Alan Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 17.

The nominative absolute functions as a sentence modifier, not tied directly to any one referent in the main clause. Often, since it is understood, the verbal is simply dropped out, and what remains is a major noun phrase with whatever is left of the predicate:

So I sat before the fire, *a volume of Dickens upon my knee*, musing, till it grew late.

—Stephen Leacock, “*Fiction and Reality*,” The Bodley Head
Leacock, p. 305.

They faced each other on the floral rug, *feet apart and elbows crooked in uncertain attitudes*, as if about to begin some ritual of which neither had learnt the cues. “I’ll show you,” Bertrand chimed, and jabbed at Dixon’s face.

—Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*, p. 213.

Nouns act as subjects of participles, of course, in arrangements that are not really absolute constructions, not fully independent, not sentence modifiers. First, below, a noun twice heads a participial phrase, all used to fill a subject slot. The second excerpt seems to use this kind of noun phrase in a multiple complement:

Lowell, resting in the wing on the floor of the stage, Lowell recuperating from the crack he had given his head, was a dreamy figure of peace in the corner of the proscenium, a reclining shepherd contemplating his flute. . . .

—Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night*, p. 42.

If one were to figure out a visual symbol of Powys’s total accomplishment, it would be, I suppose a Cerne Giant, backed by granite, *body swathed in mists and cudgel resting on Earth; an expression combining the tormented thought of Dostoevsky and the laughter of Rabelais; eyes raised from sea to Aether, head gilded by the Sun.*

—G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest*, closing sentence.

The Noun Series

The last example could also serve to introduce the next important use of noun phrases to be demonstrated here, the noun series. It usually consists of three or more noun phrases, sometimes even split up, as in the first example:

His origins are obscure, his parentage, even his name.

—*Arthur Knight, The Liveliest Art*, p. 40.

Here is another noun series as subject, with a pronominal recapitulation:

The fragmentation of personality, the loss of the self in its social roles, the problem of discovering one's identity amid a din of public claims—all this, so obsessively rehearsed in modern literature, is the premise from which Stevens moves to poetry.

—*Irving Howe, A World More Attractive: A View of Modern Literature and Politics*, p. 163.

These noun catalogs often occur at the end of a sentence, swelling out a prepositional phrase with multiple objects:

Prose fiction, that form which “takes the minutest impressions,” is linked with *epic, chronicle, memoir, fable, essay, case history, biography, report, prose romance, and what have you, letter, rogue's tale, anecdote*.

—*Richard Stern, “Prefatory Note,” Honey and Wax: Pleasures and Powers of Narrative*, p. x.

Notice the way the preceding series was effectively broken up toward the end. Here are two more catalogs as objects of a proposition, the second summed up again by a noun phrase as appositive:

He was a Northerner who resembled the Southerners: in *his insolence, his independence, his readiness to accept a challenge, his recklessness and ineptitude in practical matters, his romantic and chivalrous view of the world in which he was living*.

—*Edmund Wilson, Patriotic Gore*, p. 537.

They mar themselves with *cacophonies, jagged rhythms, ugly words and ugly thoughts, colloquialisms, clichés, sterile technical terms, headwork and argument, self contradictions, clevernesses, irony, realism—all things which call us back to the world of prose and imperfection*.

—*Robert Penn Warren, “Pure and Impure Poetry,” Selected Essays*, pp. 4–5.

Below, noun catalogs are inserted at three key points, twice as complements in a pattern of equative clauses, once in the direct object slot, finally cut off with an impatient “etc., etc.”:

I am a novelist, painter, sculptor, philosopher, draughtsman, critic, politician, journalist, essayist, pamphleteer, all rolled into one, like one of those portmanteau-men of the Italian Renaissance.

I am a portmanteau-man (like “portmanteau-word”). I have been a soldier, a yachtsman, a baby, a massier, a hospital patient, a traveller, a total abstainer, a lecturer, an alcoholic, an editor, and a lot more. So I have met other editors, alcoholics, lecturers, patients, soldiers, etc., etc.

—*Wyndham Lewis, Blasting and Bombardiering, p. 3.*

Finally, here is a three-part noun series, another compound direct object like the last sentence above:

We have strong nouns, plain, usually active, verbs, sentences cleanly turned out, well drilled, and marching to their purpose.

—*G. Wilson Knight, “Byron: The Poetry,” Poets of Action, p. 190.*

This sentence, marching straight to its purpose, manages, so to speak, to come up to its own standards, matching the verbal success it describes. It is cleanly turned out and well drilled. It has rhythm, and is not clumsy. This can be said for all of the samples so far.

The Long Noun Phrase with Bound Modifiers

Let us turn now to a sentence that labors under the weight of a bulky noun phrase as subject:

A few families of farmers bound by the simple refusal to leave the grass, the lean growth coming slowly out of the raw soil, the trees, rock and hill—all that the ravaging waters had left behind—had survived.

Here, as the author in fact wrote it, is the sentence immensely improved:

A few families had survived, a few farmers, bound by the simple refusal to leave the grass, the lean growth coming slowly out of the raw soil, the trees, rock and hill—all that the ravaging waters had left behind.

—*Sue Grafton, Keziah Dane, p. 3.*

The noun phrase is still there but broken up by the appositional structure headed by “a few farmers.” This appositive device allowed the writer to

shorten her long noun phrase and remove much of it from its awkward place in the subject slot to a free location at the end. Now look at this sentence:

Stars shining through the isolated windows, showing the occasional tall, solitary wall of a house still standing like a makeshift crutch holding up the sky became visible again.

Again, its author did it much better:

Stars became visible again, shining through the isolated windows, showing the occasional tall, solitary wall of a house still standing, like a makeshift crutch holding up the sky.

—Alan Sillitoe, *The General*, p. 176.

The modification of the subject has been liberated by this arrangement for a free attachment at the end, and the sentence reads far more happily. Once again:

A confabulation accompanied by shruggings of the shoulders and shakings of the head, after which the chief informed me that I had no Polish visa, ensued in Polish.

This was more sensibly put together in the original, with the bound modifiers loosened so that they become almost sentence modifiers rather than structures tied closely to the noun head:

A confabulation ensued in Polish, accompanied by shruggings of the shoulders and shakings of the head, after which the chief informed me that I had no Polish visa.

—Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Adventures of a Biographer*, pp. 6–7.

With nouns estimated to make up about half of our general vocabulary, any rules against nominal style—and many have been advanced—become hard to obey. The best advice, in general, does not worry so much over the length or number of noun phrases as about the way they are made long and the way they are distributed—with a strong preference for commas and free modifiers rather than bound modifiers.

A writer who once learns the wrong way to expand sentences with noun phrases, and the wrong way to pad noun phrases themselves, finds himself beset with countless stylistic ills. The awkward loading and embedding of ideas becomes a habit of mind. Nouns get thoughtlessly piled up, verbs get forgotten, prepositions are drained of their possible force and are used to hold nouns together in a lumpy mass, as all sense of prose rhythm slips away. Jargon and Wordiness and Evasion rear their heads, and reading, without fail, suffers. Here is a quartet of samples, with lumpy

noun phrases as, in order, subject, direct object, object of a preposition, and noun complement:

The control of these fundamental protective systems and the channeling of them into team play and individual effort that possess logic and reason acceptable to the individual's culture represent the mental hygiene of athletic endeavor.

—*Joseph P. Dolan and Lloyd J. Holloway, The Treatment and Prevention of Athletic Injuries, p. 1.*

It is encouraging to note the progress made by beekeeping to meet the challenging times, particularly in connection with the difficult problem of pesticides as they relate to the keeping of bees in the highly cultivated areas where bees are needed for pollination.

—*John E. Eckert and Frank R. Shaw, Beekeeping, p. 458.*

At that time I surveyed a major portion of the work written on gene structure and I was struck by the numerous instances of independent discovery, periods of obscurity, and spurious philosophic attitudes that subsisted underneath the apparently smooth transition of ideas and experimental progress that reviews and texts alike tend to produce.

—*Elof Axel Carlson, "Preface," The Gene: A Critical History, p. v.*

Power then is generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective organization when the obligations are legitimized with reference to their bearing on collective goals and where in case of recalcitrance there is a presumption of enforcement by negative situational sanctions—whatever the actual agency of that enforcement.

—*Talcott Parsons, Sociological Theory and Modern Society, p. 308.*

We recall Francis Christensen's statement, quoted at the beginning of this chapter: "The very hallmark of jargon is the long noun phrase—the long noun phrase as subject and the long noun phrase as complement, the two coupled by a minimal verb." The last example, above, is a case in point. Although it has a single noun as its subject, it concentrates on an enormous complement after a minimal verb. Here, as in the examples that precede it, the very decoding of the long noun phrase is no small task. We are helped in this last instance by Ronald Sampson, who quotes it in *The Nation* (May 5, 1969, p. 563) in his article "What Is a University?" He feels it really needs a full translation and, for the way in which it might be "rendered into modern English," Sampson suggests:

"Power means being compelled to do what you ought to do by those who also define what you ought to do." This is far from a simple revision of the sentence, an editorial rewrite. Yet nothing short of this would have been enough. This and the other three samples are riddled with prepositions, one locked inside another, and heavy, too, with embedded relative and subordinate clauses. The noun phrases that barely contain all this are long, it is true. They are bad, however, because of what goes into them, not because of how much of it there is. Free modification is one solution, and perhaps its most useful forms—in addition to the appositive and the nominative absolute themselves—await us in the next chapter.

Personal Pronouns

One kind of noun phrase important to style but difficult to demonstrate in short samples is the personal pronoun. In expository prose, a writer's use or avoidance of *I*, *you*, and *we* helps to establish his stance in relation to the audience, and in fiction helps to establish the *point of view*, whether the author is speaking in his own voice or in that of a character or narrator. Personal pronouns and contractions, especially contractions including personal pronouns (for example, *I'll*, *you're*, *he's*, *we're*), have long been described, and accurately so, as marks of informal style. Many writers of formal or official prose—government, scientific, institutional, and committee reports—scrupulously avoid the first and second person pronouns, partly because they want the voice to be impersonal and objective, and partly because they do not want to fix responsibility on a particular speaker. The writer who wishes to be less formal, more direct, and more readable uses *I*, but soon finds that over-use of *I* tends to shift the focus from his subject matter to the personality of the writer. Wishing to avoid this, he sometimes substitutes *we* for *I*. This may be an editorial *we*, blurring the writer's personality with that of identified or unidentified colleagues, editors, or other persons of similar ideas or situation, or it may be a companionable or invitational *we*, or *us*, as in "We shall now consider . . ." or "Let us now go on to . . .," in which the writer includes himself and his audience, without directly addressing his readers as *you*.

Walker Gibson, in his book *Tough, Sweet & Stuffy*, has explored this subject at length and has illustrated what he terms the "I-Style," the "You-Style," and the "It-Style."

The functions of the personal pronouns in aiding cohesion and in avoiding cumbersome passive constructions are taken up in other chapters of *Grammar as Style*. The important function of the word *it* as a subject postponer is also illustrated in the coming chapters.

4

Chapter

Verb Phrases

About *adjectives*: all fine prose is based on the verbs carrying the sentences. They make sentences move. Probably the finest technical poem in English is Keats's *Eve of Saint Agnes*. A line like:

The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,

is so alive that you race through it, scarcely noticing it, yet it has colored the whole poem with its movement—the limping, trembling, and freezing is going on before your own eyes.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald in a letter to his daughter, *Frances Scott Fitzgerald*, reprinted in *The Crack-Up*, with Other Uncollected Pieces . . . , ed. Edmund Wilson, p. 303.

Verbs are action words. Verb phrases are action phrases. These generalizations hold true more for good writing than for any other kind, and they apply not only to the main predicate verb but to verb phrases in other positions as well. F. Scott Fitzgerald, advising his daughter “about adjectives,” directs her attention to verbs. In his example from Keats, “limped” is the *finite verb*, the verb that carries tense and fills the main verbal position in the clause. But two *nonfinite verb* forms, “trembling” and “frozen,” share in imparting the movement.

The skilled writer can install verb phrases almost anywhere. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s own prose often demonstrates this. Once he jotted in his notebook a sentence composed entirely of verbs:

Forgotten is forgiven.

Here by functional shift, he has converted two verbs—past participle forms—into a subject and a predicate nominative, thereby activating a normally static structure, the equative clause. One important secret of

the professional writer's success is his mastery of the nonfinite forms of verbs—the participles, the gerunds, the infinitives. With this great variety of action words, he can confer a movement and vitality to his material where the poorer writer would never think to. He can maneuver participles, gerunds, and infinitives into different positions within the kernel—into noun, adjective, and adverb slots. He can introduce verb phrases into numerous locations alongside the basic kernel positions. Wherever the clever writer installs the verbs, they may bring with them their ordinary constituents, their attached objects, complements, and adverbs. This they do in the coming samples.

The Present Participle

To begin. Among the nonfinite forms, it is the present participle that carries perhaps the strongest verbal or active force. Here are some present participles dispersed through a run of strong finite verbs:

Presently the pianist, *floating* up and *showing* his awful gums in a servile grin, tried to draw Ada into the pool from her outstretched position on the tiled margin, but she evaded the grab of his despair by embracing the big orange ball she had just fished out and, *pushing* him away with that shield, she then threw it toward Van, who slapped it aside, *refusing* the gambit, *ignoring* the gambol, *scorning* the gambler.

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada*, p. 200.

Notice, of course, the predicate material—adverbs and direct objects—that fills out the verb phrases.

In the example below, a clear sequence of action, one thing after another, is recorded by the finite verbs, with the paired participles at the end going into a nonfinite phrase to make them simultaneous with the action of the final predicate verb:

Dan was so astounded that he dropped the old lady on the floor, gazed in a hypnotized way at the old man, and withdrew, *shrugging* and *scratching his head*.

—Doris Lessing, *In Pursuit of the English*, p. 173.

The present participles above, distinct and independent from the main line of the sentence, are located at its end and are set off by a comma. Thus they constitute a *free-modifying* (nonrestrictive) phrase. Verb phrases headed by present participles can also serve as *bound* (restrictive) modifiers. The next three excerpts contain present participles as bound modifiers. The second and third contain additional present participles, which come after the bound modifiers, and are set off from them by commas as a long free-modifying series:

The little girls sat *watching the streets grow duller and dingier and narrower.* . . .

—Katherine Anne Porter, “Old Mortality,” *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, p. 40.

They came ambling and stumbling, tumbling and capering, kilting their gowns for leap frog, holding one another back, shaken with deep fast laughter, smacking one another behind and laughing at their rude malice, calling to one another by familiar nicknames, protesting with sudden dignity at some rough usage, whispering two and two behind their hands.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 192.

He hinted at himself striding recognised down exotic streets, walking in sandals through dust, moving slowly behind an ox-cart or a rickshaw, or a dog-sled, kicking aside the encumbrance of a cashmere robe, a furred cloak, shading his eyes from the sun, sheltering his head from the snow, regarding unmoved typhoon and flood, seeing with familiarity such scenes as the quiet eye could not envisage, laughing and looking easily and speaking intimately in strange tongues; yes, he agreed, he was a stranger.

—Shirley Jackson, *The Sundial*, pp. 95–96.

More often, the entire participial verb phrase is a free or nonrestrictive modifier, easy to hook on or insert and making important contributions without new whole clauses:

I met a Dinka once in Malakal who, being entranced by the spectacle of a white man falling prone upon the sand from the step-ladder of an aeroplane, emitted a low hoot. . . .

—Harold Nicolson, *The English Sense of Humour and Other Essays*, p. 7.

Belisarius took this oath, renouncing the world, the flesh, and the devil.

—Robert Graves, *Count Belisarius*, p. 13.

So, bobbling and plunging as if she were a long line of sea-elephants facing the surge of waves, she faced the poverty of her days.

—Edith Sitwell, *Taken Care Of: The Autobiography of Edith Sitwell*, p. 55.

Concluding these reflections, he concluded these reflections. . . .

—John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse*, p. 126.

When there is more than one participial phrase, there may still be no clear idea of sequence across them. They may well appear simultaneous with one another as well as with the main clause:

She sat quite still for a long time, remembering the smell of Francis' cologne on Celia's body, recalling the ambiguities of Celia's speech ever since and Francis' oblique contradictory replies when she talked to him about what was in her heart, remembering with bitter shock his face and his words, "Forty is old to have children."

—Richard Condon, *Any God Will Do*, pp. 293–294.

On the other hand, a sequence may be implied, strengthened too by adverbs, across space or time or both:

At a distance he can see the tall line of a dozen or more aqueduct arches, commencing suddenly, suddenly ending; coming now from nowhere, now going nowhere.

—James Gould Cozzens, *Morning Noon and Night*, last page.

The Past Participle

Verb phrases headed by past participles are also important for free modification, before, during, or after a main clause. Like the present participles, they are usually nonrestrictive modifiers. But the author of the next offering has chosen, among the many other past participles, to make restrictive the embedded phrases headed by “abandoned” and “set”:

Exiled, orphaned, without home, family, friends, country, he has ridden on his way abandoned even by Astraea now set in heaven, known to the world by his golden sword and his iron man; but, till he met Britomart, known to no one by “his lovely face.”

—M. Pauline Parker, *The Allegory of the Faerie Queene*, p. 207.

Past participles are reduced passive clauses, economical in the making of sentences because they eliminate the need for a separate passive clause. Their derivation from passive forms becomes evident at once when a writer fakes a past participle like this, one with no passive source:

Overslept, he awoke with a bang and was splashing cold water on his face when the landlady knocked.

—Bernard Malamud, *A New Life*, p. 364.

Taken from the passive transformation, the material that accompanies the past participle in verb phrases is often a prepositional phrase, sometimes of agent or of instrument. Here are examples:

A bridge—*painted with stylized flowers inside, stripes outside*—connects the foyer (rear) with a staircase (not shown) leading one flight down to the dining area.

—Barbara Plumb, “Ceiling Unlimited,” The New York Times Magazine, June 2, 1968, p. 70.

Tossed from side to side by the sharp turns, jerked forward by the sudden stops, his ear assailed by shrieking brakes and surly horns, he goes on talking or reading his paper, and reaches his destination heedless of the miracle that has brought him there.

—William K. Zinsser, *The City-Dwellers*, p. 78.

The third phrase in the left-branch above shows the function of the verb phrase within the larger structure known as the nominative absolute. The two participial phrases before it make another point about the past participle phrase. Its “pastness” may not come across strongly at all. The essence of the past participle is its “passivity,” and may be used to represent, as it is here, an action performed upon the subject of the main clause at the same time that the action of the main clause is going on. This is not always so. The front-shifted position, especially, can be used for an economical summary of prior action, after which the main clause arrives and out of which its action properly develops:

“Morally” weakened by fifteen years of service on the Editorial Committee, and physically disturbed by the approach of my sixty-third year, I agreed to abandon my normal habits of life and become (for a season) a statistical debauchee.

—Don Cameron Allen, “Preface,” The Ph.D. in English and American Literature, p. vii.

Next, in the freest of arrangements, past and present participles cooperate for a loose verbal progression:

Something dim and far removed—buried in the depths from immemorial time—stirring beneath the surface—coming to life—coming up at last—well, I know where I am now.

—C. S. Lewis, *They Asked for a Paper*, p. 135.

Below, a series of three bound past participles is followed by a participial phrase to render a blockage of action. In the second example a past participle used in a nominative absolute depicts action suspended:

Seduction withheld, deferred, foiled—at any rate never accomplished—produced many interesting and complex characters, who would not

have been born in a fiction that reflected the real world where men are more resolute and women are weaker.

—Angus Wilson, “*The Heroes and Heroines of Dickens*,”
Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson, p. 5.

Insoluble, unsolvable, the chord *suspended*—was it never to find resolution?

—Conrad Aiken, *Ushant: An Essay*, p. 60.

The one use of past and present participles that we will not dwell on here at all, because of the nearness of the next chapter, is their appearance in standard adjectival slots as prenominal modifiers. For a quick glance, on our way to other matters, here is an adjectival series using two real adjectives and, between them, two participles, past and present:

The prose style of Swift is unique, an irrefrangible instrument of clear, *animated*, *animating* and effective thought.

—Herbert Read, *English Prose Style*, p. xiii.

The Gerund

Present participles can also hold down nominal slots. Acting the part of nouns, these verb phrases are called gerunds. In the next excerpt we come upon four such verb forms where we would expect to meet nouns, and the effective variety of this kind of functional shift is apparent:

Turning from professional details and daily *winning* to consideration of these more fundamental problems requires not only the means of *acquiring knowledge* but also an opportunity and a stimulus for *examining its broader significance*.

—George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution*, p. 3.

In the preceding example, *turning* is the headword of the long phrase that serves as subject of the sentence. Below, a gerund series, recapitulated by the pronoun *all*, occupies subject position:

With this conversation, *the falling into creeks, the digging up of corpses and the confronting of lynch mobs that mark the plot*, all take on a new significance. . . .

—Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p. 274.

Gerund phrases also work as subjects in this continuing reminiscence:

Stealing watermelons on dark and rainy nights was a pious duty when I was a boy.

—Donald Day, *Uncle Sam's Uncle Josh*, p. 5.

Tying two cats together by their tails and leaving them to pull and claw and fight it out on a clothesline was the fashion, when I was a boy, but I will take my oath on a Bible as big as a barn door that I never did it.

—Day, p. 6.

Hitching old and worm-eaten tinware to the opposite end of a vagrant canine, and losing sight of the poor animal for the dust he kicked up, as he frantically fled along the streets to the music of his own yells of terror, was another cruel scene in the comedy of boy deviltry, but I solemnly declare that I never hung any tin things to a dog's suburbs, according to the best of my remembering.

—Day, p. 7.

These gerunds seem informal, conversational, colloquial because their own verbal activity seems closer to the described experience than some noun formulation would, if substituted.

Here is another gerund, this time as direct object:

I remember *seeing him a good many times* before I first spoke to him.

—C. P. Snow, “Rutherford,” Variety of Men, p. 4.

Next, a gerund series stands in apposition to a direct object:

We also devised ordeals, which we suffered, as tests of courage, *walking bare-legged through stinging nettles, climbing high and difficult trees, signing our names in blood and so forth.*

—Evelyn Waugh, A Little Learning: An Autobiography, p. 59.

The nature of the gerund as a verb form accounts for part of its effect in nominal slots. Noun alternatives, as we can see by rewriting the last sample, are not really equivalents:

We also devised ordeals, which we suffered, as tests of courage, bare-legged walks through stinging nettles, ascents of high and difficult trees, signatures in blood, and so forth.

The Economy of Verbs

The gerund, along with the two kinds of participles, is a structure of economy, saving a writer from recourse to independent, added clauses or nonverbal substitutes. To examine for a time the actual nature of this economy, we will draw examples from the three and a half pages of Marianne Moore’s essay “Compactness Compacted,” examples that illustrate the very “compactness” of the verb phrase.

Women are not noted for terseness, but Louise Bogan's art is compactness *compacted*.

—Marianne Moore, “*Compactness Compacted*,” *Predilections*, p. 130.

Her titles are right poetically, with no subserviences for torpid minds *to catch at*, the lines *entitled* “Knowledge,” for instance, *being really about love*.

—Moore, p. 130.

Best of all is the *embodied* climax with *unforced subsiding* cadence. . . .

—Moore, p. 132.

Job and Hamlet insisted that we dare not let ourselves be snared into *hating* hatefulness; *to do this* would be *to take our own lives*.

—Moore, p. 132.

Or is it merely a conveniently *unexpunged* superstition?

—Moore, p. 133.

Take the first sample. Try rewriting without the past participle “*compacted*.” You need a clause—“*compactness that has been compacted*”—and you begin to belie the very idea of compactness when you desert the reduced clause, the participle. Or, without participles, try the first sample from page 132:

Best of all is the climax *that has been embodied* and that has a cadence *which is unforced* and *which subsides*.

The subordination here is hardly unforced, and threatens never to subside. Who is not thankful that there are other options for expressing this idea? In the second example from page 132, there is also a gerund phrase, “*hating* hatefulness,” which is more attractive than either a nominal substitute like “*a hatred of hatefulness*” or some hopeless embedded clause like “*a position where we hate hatefulness*.”

The Infinitive

Following the semicolon in the sentence about Job and Hamlet, as well as in the second sampling from page 130, there is another kind of verb phrase italicized. The idea of “no subserviences for torpid minds *to catch at*,” in the earlier sentence, would have ended up, if Miss Moore had not been in command of the *infinitive phrase*, as something like “no subserviences at which torpid minds might catch.” Worse yet, after the semicolon in that sentence from page 132, we would have endured “if we

should do this, we should be taking our own lives." Instead, we get the equated infinitive phrases "to do this would be to take our own lives." Here are two more pairs of infinitive phrases from Miss Moore's essay:

She refuses to be deceived or self-deceived.

—*Moore*, p. 130.

When a tune plagues the ear, the best way to be rid of it is to let it forth unhindered.

—*Moore*, p. 132.

To rewrite the first—"She refuses that anyone should deceive her or that she should be self-deceived"—is bad enough, and unidiomatic. But the second!

When a tune plagues the ear, in order that one might be rid of it one should let it forth unhindered.

This is clumsily subjunctive, and unsymmetrical, and no one would knowingly choose it over the parallel infinitive phrases.

Miss Moore is by no means unique in her use of this particular kind of verb phrase. All writers must rely at times, surprisingly often, on the infinitive phrase. In perhaps its commonest form as a way of expanding finite verbs, the dependent infinitive or a chain of such infinitives, can open up a main verb phrase for important expansions, often widening into the major stretch of the sentence:

Sir Walter Scott thought to flatter an old Scotswoman from whose singing he had taken down a number of ballads by showing her the printed texts of the pieces she had sung to him.

—*Albert B. Friedman*, "Introduction," *The Viking Book of Folk Ballads of the English-Speaking World*, p. ix.

I was not quite conscious of it at first, but then it came again a bit stronger, until I was sure I heard it, and then as I was reading I began to wait for it, and to make spaces in sentences for it, to enjoy it, and finally to play with the words and with the audience, to swoop and glide and describe arabesques with all the nutty abandon of Donald Duck on ice skates.

—*Shana Alexander*, *Life Magazine*, May 19, 1967, p. 30B.

The gilded words of later fourteenth- and fifteenth-century poetry and prose, for example, would seem to have a stylistic character distinctly their own and in a special way to deserve the name "aureate" given them by Lydgate.

—*W. K. Wimsatt, Jr.*, *Philosophic Words*, p. 1.

Infinitive phrases also occupy nominal slots in all kinds of writing, often as subject and complement in a *be*-pattern but also in many other arrangements of varying complexity:

To say this is not to condemn the age, but to discern its fate.

—Jacques Barzun, *Classic, Romantic and Modern*, p. 150.

To mention the name of Bert Lahr is to think of a number of enchanting words.

—Brooks Atkinson, *Brief Chronicles*, p. 148.

To write criticism about such nineteenth-century figures as Jane Austen, George Eliot and Joseph Conrad is largely to confirm established views; to write about Hardy is to encounter uncertainties, embarrassments, challenges and revisions.

—Irving Howe, “Preface,” *Thomas Hardy, opening sentence.*

To discover a new principle of morality, and to proclaim it without fear or compromise, is to incur the resentment of society living by the morality whose limitations are to be broken down. It is also to incur the risk of being misunderstood by hearers who are already chafing at those limits, but may not be capable of grasping the new principle in its positive implications.

—F. M. Cornford, *Before and After Socrates*, p. 49.

Mrs. Kelley reflected that, besides flying, one thing she had neglected and would like now to have done was *to learn to swim*.

—John Hersey, “*Over the Mad River*,” *Here to Stay*, p. 18.

To picture himself passing the limit would be to admit into his imagination the reality of death; and this even now he could not do.

—Iris Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose*, p. 6.

To review the concept of identity means to sketch its history.

—Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, p. 15.

For almost fifty years, *to read Ruskin* was accepted as proof of the possession of a soul.

—Kenneth Clark, “*Introduction*,” *Ruskin Today*, p. xiii.

Here are a pair of infinitive phrases acting as a postponed subject, followed by more such phrases gaining full independence as they distance themselves into separate verb fragments:

In spite of all, I know now that at least it is better *to go always towards the summer, towards those burning seas of light; to sit at night in the forecastle lost in an unfamiliar dream when the spirit becomes filled with stars, instead of wounds, and good and com-*

passionate and tender. To sail into an unknown spring, or receive one's baptism on storm's promontory, where the solitary albatross heels over in the gale, and at last to come to land. To know the earth under one's foot and go, in wild delight, ways where there is water.

—Malcolm Lowry, *Ultramarine*, p. 201.

The infinitive of purpose (for which we can read something like “in order to—”) is also a common form of verb phrase:

He ran around wildly, pursued by Indians, wheeling to shoot one dead, scalp another, then ride off in all directions firing volleys of sparks into the air.

—Wright Morris, *The Field of Vision*, p. 235.

I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, pp. 252–253.

This is a dramatic resolution one sentence from the end of the novel, a rousing statement of purpose. The infinitive of purpose is also used, in many different kinds of prose, as an introductory device, a kind of sentence modifier used as a lead phrase:

To prove a point, PERMANEX containers were filled with sand, frozen to 20° below zero, and dropped from a helicopter.

—Sears, Roebuck and Co. Catalog, Spring through Summer 1969, p. 4.

To return to the center of the Romantic scene, the testimony of Coleridge and Wordsworth implies that the main initial agent in the revitalizing of Greek myth was the Romantic religion of nature. . . .

—Douglas Bush, *Pagan Myth and Christian Tradition in English Poetry*, p. 37.

To find the square root of a hog's nose, turn him into a garden patch.

To enjoy a good reputation, give publicly, and steal privately.

To remove grease from a man's character, let him strike some sudden oil.

To get wrong things out of your child's head—comb it often.

—Donald Day, *Uncle Sam's Uncle Josh*, pp. 89–90.

To hold the attention of the ordinary reader or even of the educated but fatigued mind in search of diversion, a story must be full of suspense, surprise, and startling contrasts.

—David Brian Davis, “Violence in American Literature,” The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, March 1966, p. 28.

To know what the student sees and feels, the teacher must know a lot about his own feelings. . . . To do this successfully, the teacher must latch on to a personal feeling that is very real in the students and in himself. . . . To “learn” anything about the electoral process, the student must have a gut reaction; he must have an emotional experience.

—Eugene Hinkston, “Successful Teacher Senses Student World,” Los Angeles Times, June 22, 1969, Section F, p. 3.

Among verb phrases, infinitive structures are probably given the least attention in manuals of style; as we have seen, they don’t deserve this slighting. They are essential for any writer who wants to cultivate ease and economy of style. They are natural, normal, efficient, and all the types converge effortlessly in many different sorts of prose. Here, in the normal course of things, five infinitive phrases help to develop first four sentences, then two:

There will always be the businessmen *to take the Friday night flight home*. There will always be the Christmas rush, the Summer Vacation in Europe and there will always be many more people who prefer *to fly during the daytime rather than at night*. These people are willing *to pay more for these privileges*. *To fill their flights* the airlines have been forced *to give a good break to others who will use their services at less popular times*.

—Jim Woodman, Air Travel Bargains, p. 9.

It is at this point that we begin *to get at the burden of criticism in our time*. It is, *to put it one way, to make bridges between the society and the arts: to prepare the audience for its arts and to prepare the arts for their artists*.

—R. P. Blackmur, The Lion and the Honeycomb: Essays in Solitude and Critique, p. 206.

Here are four infinitive phrases in three sentences, then four in a single long sentence:

I do not put this question *to be impertinent*. I put it because I should like *to know*. I have been—officially at least—a teacher of English

for the last twelve years and I have yet *to hear myself defined*. I will go further than that: I have yet *to be told precisely what I'm doing*.

—Archibald MacLeish, “*What Is English?*” A Continuing Journey, p. 250.

The first function of the founders of nations, after the founding itself, is *to devise a set of true falsehoods about origins—a mythology* —that will make it desirable for nations *to continue to live under common authority*, and indeed, make it impossible for them *to entertain contrary thoughts*.

—Forrest McDonald, “*Preface*,” E Pluribus Unum: The Foundation of the American Republic 1776–1790, *opening sentence*.

Chapter 5

Adjectives and Adverbs

Your coloring words, particularly adjectives and adverbs, must be used where they will do the most good. Not every action needs a qualifying adverb, not every object needs a qualifying adjective. Your reader probably has a perfectly serviceable mental picture of a lion; when a lion comes into your story you need not burden him with adjectives unless it is necessary, for instance, to point out that he is a green lion, something of which your reader might not have a very vivid mental picture.

—*Shirley Jackson, “Notes for a Young Writer,” Come Along with Me, pp. 239–240.*

Adjectives and adverbs are “coloring words,” as Shirley Jackson says, but this is not to deny their importance or to suggest that their roles are somehow always inferior to those of nouns and verbs. Often, in fact, the noun and the verb simply state the known or given information, and it is the adjective or adverb that carries the news of the sentence. We have observed in Chapter 2 that adjectives and adverbs occupy slots in the basic predication patterns of English, and we shall pause for a moment here to review the general status of adjectives and adverbs in relation to other categories of the English vocabulary.

Adjectives and adverbs, along with nouns and verbs, constitute the four main groups of *content words* in English, words whose main job is to carry content or meaning. These four *form classes* or *parts of speech* make up the bulk of the English vocabulary. Content words are hooked together into sentences with the help of the other segment of our vocabu-

lary, the small but indispensable group of *structural words*, labeled by many grammarians as *function words*. English has only about two hundred of them—determiners, prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliaries, and the like—but they are the most frequently used words in the language, words such as *a, an, the, this, that, my, of, on, to, and, but, for, can*, and *does*. These structural words are not devoid of meaning, but their main task is to help delineate the structure of the English sentence. The content words, too, help to indicate the pattern by the *order* in which they appear and by their *forms*, that is, by the inflectional endings they bear, such as the plurals of nouns, and the *-s, -ing, -en*, and *-ed* of verbs, the *-er* and *-est* of some adjectives and adverbs, and the *-ly* of some adverbs.

Our present concern is with the content words, and with their relation to style. Having looked at nouns and verbs in Chapters 3 and 4, we turn now to adjectives and adverbs.

Adjectives and Adverbs in Short Sentences

To begin with adjectival meaning, we have observed that it is carried by the kernel structure in the first two patterns. Here is an adjective as the complement in a *be*-kernel:

The relationship is *disgraceful*.

Here is the author's own compound treatment:

The relationship is *disgraceful, disgusting*.

—*Janet Frame*, Scented Flowers for the Blind, p. 194.

This is a common variation. Here are other such expanded complements:

The noise had been *so loud, so sharp*.

—*William Golding*, The Pyramid, p. 4.

My career at Fontlands was *short and inglorious*.

—*Havelock Ellis*, My Life, p. 125.

Value judgments may be *informed or uninformed, responsible or irresponsible*.

—*Walter Kaufmann*, The Faith of a Heretic, p. 335.

Here are adjectives at home in kernel 2, with a linking verb rather than a copula.

He sounded *weary, hurt*.

—*Bernard Malamud*, The Assistant, p. 88.

He felt *porous and pregnable*.

—*Vladimir Nabokov*, Pnin, p. 20.

What is clear in these samples was also discussed in the chapter on kernel patterns: the tendency of this third slot, in kernels 1 and 2 to carry the *new* information of the sentence. When transformed to appear in front of nouns in other places, as part of other patterns, the adjective is still often responsible for much of the new descriptive material. Here is an adjective before a noun complement in kernel 1:

But his life energy was *cheerful* stuff.

—*Iris Murdoch*, Bruno's Dream, p. 19.

The noun modifier "life" (see Chapter 3) operates in some ways like an adjective before the subject, as do the adverb and participle below, accompanying the authentic adjective "plump" before the subject in an intransitive kernel:

Her *plump, stickily glistening* lips smiled.

—*Vladimir Nabokov*, Ada, p. 75.

Next, a pair of adjectives modifies a direct object in kernel 4:

His economists have tightened the *fiscal and monetary* screws. . . .

—“*Nixon's First Six Months*,” Time, July 18, 1969, p. 12.

Finally, here is an adjective before an object of a preposition, in the adverbial slot that might occur in any of the four patterns:

Wisdom flew over his *hard* head.

—*Bernard Malamud*, The Assistant, p. 18.

As we have said, adverbs have a place, an optional niche, at the end of any kernel. But they become the most mobile of all speech parts, and are able to work in positions almost anywhere in the sentence. Beginning with adverbial openers, here are some of these other positions:

Gently he stopped the machine.

—*Romain Gary*, Nothing Important Ever Dies, p. 108.

Slowly I tapped along the way. *Obediently*, I turned.

—*John Wain*, Death of the Hind Legs, p. 73.

Slowly, the sky blew up.

—*Philip Wylie*, The Answer, p. 15.

Outside, the darkness was total.

—*Brian Moore*, The Emperor of Ice-Cream, p. 102.

Upstairs her nervousness grew.

—*Bernard Malamud*, The Assistant, p. 88.

He was *always* two men.

—*Alan Paton*, Too Late the Phalarope, p. 3.

We come, *then*, to the question of art.

—Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p. 82.

All that life *soon* faded.

—John Hersey, *Here to Stay*, p. 167.

Examples could be turned up forever. Also to be found almost anywhere are adverbs modifying adjectives, one of the adverb's most useful functions:

The man's face grew *visibly* paler.

—Romain Gary, *Nothing Important Ever Dies*, p. 110.

He was *fatally* vulgar!

—Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night*, p. 44.

It was very hot and bright and the houses looked *sharply* white.

Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, *last page*.

We were *rather priggishly* high-minded.

—Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning: An Autobiography*, p. 59.

The service was *fatiguingly* long.

—John Updike, *Olinger Stories*, p. 160.

This use before adjectives adds again to the variety of positions the adverb can assume.

The Adverb in Longer Patterns

Like the single adverb, longer adverbial patterns are often extremely mobile, willing to fit in several different positions in the sentence. The following examples display adverbial phrases and subordinate clauses in various positions:

On the edge of the silted and sanded up Old Harbor, right where the Hawley dock had been, the stone foundation is still there.

—John Steinbeck, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, p. 50.

The purpose of this study is to discuss, *as dispassionately as possible*, *on the basis of the information available*, the questions about communism and religion that have been frequently posed but never adequately answered.

—Ralph Lord Roy, *Communism and the Churches*, p. 3.

And New York, *somewhere, somehow, after a long struggle*, still is the place where they will adapt first.

—Jimmy Breslin, “*Jimmy Breslin's New York*,” Los Angeles Times Magazine, June 16, 1968, p. 25.

If I have any abiding satisfaction over this work of my youth, it is in the pioneer's secret pride that scholarly buildings are now being built, *in distant historic territory, over the buried ashes of a hasty campfire I once lighted, near a spring from whose waters I was the first explorer to drink.*

—Lewis Mumford, *Sticks and Stones*, pp. x–xi.

His grandfather's dry grip enveloping the end of his arm, David had walked up Wilson Avenue, *where men were digging for the clover-leaf, past the house of the woman who teased, along the wall where fearless bad boys dared run along the top, when a fall would probably break their necks.*

—John Updike, *The Poorhouse Fair*, p. 96.

In the days before the flood, when even the smallest babies were antediluvian, there was a pair of twins who were nobody's business.

—David Garnett, *Two by Two*, opening sentence.

Adjectives and Adverbs in Isolated Positions

As adjectives and adverbs take up their assigned positions, as they are arranged, developed, or expanded, they answer such questions as "Which one?" "What kind?" "How?" "When?" "Where?" and many more. The information they bring, ready to arrive at almost any point in a sentence, often makes its appearance marked by commas for special attention. Both adjectives and adverbs may be isolated this way in free positions for particular emphasis, set off by punctuation in sometimes unexpected places, often rather far from the word to which grammar actually attaches them. Adjectives deployed in this way are often what are called appositional adjectives, discussed in Chapter 11. However they are classified, their impact in a given sentence may be considerable. Here, for instance, what remains most forcibly with us is the highlighted adjective "imperishable":

I care about that moment which was true and inspiring. I saw it only a few seconds, but it will remain with me, *imperishable*.

—Henry Miller, *Henry Miller on Writing*, p. 123.

And the terse "dead" abruptly closes this sentence with appropriate finality:

A few minutes later he slumped from his chair, *dead*.

—Jerry Allen, *The Thunder and the Sunshine: A Biography of Joseph Conrad*, p. 238.

In this isolated use, as elsewhere, past and present participles are often found working as adjectives, and with adjectives. They can be every

bit as effective as the pure forms. Below, the sentence itself appears fixed by the last past participle:

Onlookers young and old line the curb, *transfixed*.

—*Sidney Petrie in association with Robert B. Stone, What Modern Hypnotism Can Do for You, p. 11.*

Here the present participial phrase interrupts the sentence just as the building it modifies interrupts the described view:

Our living room looked out across a small back yard to a rough stone wall to an apartment building which, *towering above*, caught every passing thoroughfare sound and rifled it straight down to me.

—*Ralph Ellison, Shadow and Act, p. 187.*

Without attempting to distinguish between their effects, here are participles and pure adjectives used in similar ways:

The lamp had been standing cobwebbed in a corner, *unplugged*.

—*John Updike, Of the Farm, p. 27.*

He thought of crawling under his bed and hanging onto one of the legs but the three boys only stood there, *speckled and silent, waiting*, and after a second he followed them a little distance out on the porch and around the corner of the house. . . . He stopped a few feet from the pen and waited, *pale but dogged*.

—*Flannery O'Connor, "The River," A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 35.*

Early in the afternoon on Christmas, after a good meal with Paul Smith, pastor of St. Monica's, Great Plains, Father Urban got on the train for Duesterhaus, *tired*.

—*J. F. Powers, Morte d'Urban, p. 90.*

Now they are on deck, *dancing*, each with her flaxen-haired suitor.

—*Noel Mostert, "The Glorious Great Lakes," Holiday, May 1968, p. 84.*

Heading towards unknown mountains in voyage to the Pacific Ocean, *world's greatest*.

—*Bernard Malamud, A New Life, p. 143.*

The moon had passed behind a cloud and the water looked dark and malevolent, *terribly deep*.

—*Norman Mailer, The Naked and the Dead, p. 13.*

Troops of grimed and burly laborers, a few women among them, ran hither and thither, *toiling, cursing*.

—*John Barth, Giles Goat-Boy, p. 177.*

The train fled, and Leventhal, *breathing hard*, stared after it, *cursing*, and then turned and descended to the street.

—Saul Bellow, *The Victim*, p. 3.

Few readers would take “breathing hard” in this last example to modify only “Leventhal,” and “cursing” to modify “it.” The point is that the second participle, since it is nearer something else than the word it is intended for—since it is separate and isolated, like most of these examples—might look to some like a “dangling modifier.” Here is a long one to which a teacher might object if he found it in a student paper:

Having rarely, so far as is known, given a penny to a cause for a charity, indifferent to the improvement of others while preoccupied with the improvement of himself, it never came into Holmes's head to contribute to the usefulness of an institution.

—Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore*, p. 796.

Of the next, it might be complained that the speaker himself is admitting to being “Mixed, officially”:

Mixed, officially, I can think of no other institution so rigidly divided.

—William Golding, *Free Fall*, p. 193.

Those few who are confused by this are the victims of the author’s efforts at emphasis and contrast. Sometimes, though, modifiers are dangled deliberately, in order to exploit their ambiguities for comic effect:

It is the cold hour of repentance, homecoming time for those who have wandered. *Blonde or brunette*, an Elk never really forgets his wife, never actually forsakes her.

—Anonymous, *brief address “To Our Wondering Wives,” from the inside cover of a matchbook, printed by the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks.*

On the subject of isolated modifiers, it is now the adverb’s turn.

From mind the impetus came and through mind my course was set, and therefore nothing on earth could really surprise me, *utterly*.

—Saul Bellow, *Henderson the Rain King*, p. 156.

And the fact remains, *mortifyingly*, that we can issue no book of this sort without ransacking the whole house.

—John Crowe Ransom, *The Kenyon Critics*, p. vii.

It is woeful, but *wisely*, no longer *madly*.

—R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam*, p. 147.

We have a variety of answers, most of them probably right for some god, *somewhere*.

—*Mary Barnard*, *The Mythmakers*, p. 90.

Every once in a while, and *faintly*, the wind moves the airplane on its landing gear struts.

—*Richard Bach*, *Stranger to the Ground*, p. 34.

I have told myself this day would come to meet me, as inevitably as the ground which rushes to meet me now, and yet I think, *quickly*, of a future lost.

—*Bach*, p. 152.

She held the paper bag containing two bottles close to her side, *a little furtively*.

—*William Van O'Connor*, *Campus on the River*, p. 54.

This is not how Dostoevsky meant, *intellectually*, for the history of Myshkin to come out, but it is how, *imaginatively*, it had to come out.

—*R. P. Blackmur*, “The Idiot: *A Rage of Goodness*,” *Eleven Essays in the European Novel*, p. 142.

Perhaps they reminded me, *distantly*, of myself, *long ago*. Perhaps they reminded me, *dimly*, of something we had lost.

—*James Baldwin*, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, p. 480.

That set off the biggest fuss and excitement to hit this archetypal rural American waystop since—well, *since ever*.

—*David Snell*, “*How Things Are in Podunk*,” *Life Magazine*, April 18, 1969, p. 81.

Look what has happened to her, an emotional cripple skating on artificial legs—*skillfully*, yes—so *skillfully* that no one was aware, except her husband, that the performance was done with such a handicap, that she ached at times with the strain of being “normal” and un hysterical.

—*Audrey Callahan Thomas*, *Ten Green Bottles*, p. 101.

Adjectives and Adverbs in Inverted Position

The process of inversion (see Chapter 9) can also bring about the front-shifted emphasis of isolated adjectival and adverbial phrases. Adjectival phrases open the first two samples, below, and adverbial phrases open the last two:

Perhaps most disconcerting of all was the almost 100 percent unanimity with which the American intellectuals accepted the challenge of the flung gauntlet and enlisted in the fight.

—Mercedes M. Randall, *Improper Bostonian*: Emily Greene Balch, p. 226.

Serious indeed are the implications of man's present compulsion to congest population and then to solve the consequent problems with gigantic, impersonal mechanisms. *Looming, ubiquitous* are the dangers of prodigality, of valuing change just for its own sake, of destroying the basic elements that give significance to living.

—Richard G. Lillard, *Eden in Jeopardy*, p. vi.

Outside the lounge could now be heard the rhythmic crunch of steel-tipped boots and the bellow of commands.

—David Walder, *The Gift Bearers*, p. 69.

Above the pulp line—but the exact boundaries are impossible to draw—lies the world of erotica, of sexual writing with literary pretensions or genuine claims.

—George Steiner, *Language and Silence*, p. 70.

Catalogs of Modifiers

Here—marked off by dashes in the middle of the sentence—is not just a single isolated modifier, but a whole list of adjectives:

He was my sister Mimi's crazy husband, a mystical child of darkness
—*blatantly ambitious, lovable, impossible, charming, obnoxious, tirelessly active*—a bright, talented, sheepish, tricky, curly-haired, man-child of darkness.

—Joan Baez in *Foreword to Long Time Coming and a Long Time Gone*, by Richard Fariña, p. vii.

What happens after the second dash, however, brings us to the next topic. An opposite technique to the careful placement and demarcation of isolated modifiers is the deliberate piling up of a number of modifiers immediately in front of a headword, as in “*a bright, talented, sheepish, tricky, curly-haired, man-child of darkness*.” It is possible also to crowd adverbs this way, before verbs or, as below, before an adjective:

Even then, there is a risk: Who can be persuaded to come to the grand opening—and closing—of a cinemascopic version of what *really* did happen when the gamier story of what didn't happen is

already a few days old and, in any case, *ever so very much more interesting?*

—William F. Buckley, Jr., *The Unmaking of a Mayor*, p. 27.

Adjectives are far more often handled in this way—usually the single-word forms, sometimes matched by a similar catalog of nouns, as in the last sample below:

Everything he writes is written as an *angry, passionate, generous, fumbling, rebellious, bewildered and bewildering* man.

—Sean O'Faolain, *The Vanishing Hero*, p. 108.

Whereas the truth was, as he alone knew, that the heavens were a *glorious blazing golden limitless* cathedral of unending and eternal light. . . .

—John Knowles, *Indian Summer*, p. 27.

During his four years in the Army Air Force the American people had been represented by the other enlisted men around him, and a more *foul-mouthed, lazy, suspicious, malingering, pessimistic, anemic, low-down* bunch of cruds it would be hard to picture.

—Knowles, p. 8.

Already it has raised storms of controversy, and there are many who believe that these bizarre gatherings have nothing to do with the theater, but are only the *faddish, undisciplined, irresponsible, campy, pretentious*, self-indulgences of a bunch of over-aged beatniks.

—Robert W. Corrigan, "TDR Comment," *Tulane Drama Review*, Summer 1966, p. 18.

Architect Alexander Girard, long a designer of Op-type fabrics and interiors, has extended the vision of another client, Braniff International Airlines, with a *wild hot jazz of multicolored, variegated, piebald, warm, cool, solid, checked, striped, patterned posters, upholsteries, wall and window coverings, graphics*, and then some.

—“Airline Designs for Passengers,” *Progressive Architecture*, March 1966, p. 176.

The result of such insistent modification, such an emphatic welter of description, is often highly charged and emotive. The same result may come from groups of hyphenated modifiers mixing noun and adjective forms:

It is a prose-poetry whose rhythms tend to flaccidity and which sometimes melts into a romantic wash a little too close to the old

lending-library sadistic-sentimental exotic escapism beloved of the dreaming shop-girl.

—Anthony Burgess, *The Novel Now*, p. 97.

Analyzing the comedian's problem in this new business, it seemed to me that the *bizarre-garbed, joke-telling* funster was ogling extinction.

—Fred Allen, *Treadmill to Oblivion*, p. 5.

He loved *hitherto-unthought-of, thereafter-unthinkable* combinations of instruments.

—Randall Jarrell, *Pictures from an Institution*, p. 136.

There is no suggestion, for instance, of recoil—or of distance-keeping—from the *game-eyed, brandy-soaked, flabby-surfaced* Mr. Sleary. . . .

—F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 235.

The importance of a deft and versatile handling of adjectives and adverbs is the lesson to be learned from all but the negative evidence collected in this chapter. When properly chosen and located, these parts of speech are able to clarify, qualify, or intensify an idea, to enlarge and enliven it. They can be arranged around it or piled upon it, bound to it or set free from it—all in any number of productive ways. But they cannot save the idea. If a noun or a verb, say, is ill-chosen, no amount of modification can obscure this initial disaster. If a writer can come up with no better than a vague, uninteresting noun or verb, it does him no good to cloak this imprecision with ready-to-wear adjectives and adverbs. Some words that look vigorous standing on their own are disabled by unnecessary modification. Poorly applied, these “coloring words” can become either garish or murky. But when taken from a sensitive palette and allotted according to the standards of any art—with repetition, variation, and rhythm kept always in mind—they can add immeasurably to the whole prose design, even when they shape a disproportionately large part of it.

Adjectival Styles

The following excerpts demonstrate heavily adjectival, highly colored styles, styles that are nevertheless successful. They are attractive and controlled, colorful but still careful, because their adjectives have all been selected, assigned, and fastened together with constant attention to rhythm, clarity, energy, and impact.

Father Urban, *fifty-four, tall and handsome but a trifle loose in the jowls and red of eye*, smiled and put out his hand.

—J. F. Powers, *Morte d'Urban*, p. 17.

She is a Chicago girl, nineteen years old, gentle, sound in wind and limb, sixteen hands high and not a blemish on her.

—John Fischer, *The Stupidity Problem and Other Harassments*, p. 272.

There is no tragic movement *so swift, so clean-cut, so daring and so terrible* in all of Shakespeare as this of Timon.

—G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 221.

Women's gossiping voices came back to me clearly from childhood. They used to be very *loud and regular—almost mechanical*; and *extraordinarily vehement*, though quite without expression.

—John Holloway, *A London Childhood*, p. 88.

A balance that is *not precarious* and is the result of *innumerable tiny, significant, internal movements*—this is the balance of Milton's Grand Style.

—Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style, last sentence*.

He had a *momentary, scared glimpse* of their faces, *thin and unnaturally long*, with *long, drooping noses* and *drooping mouths* of *half-spectral, half-idiotic solemnity*.

—C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, p. 44.

As she talked of her girlhood, the *sad-eyed, embittered, courageous but snobbish* Kensington woman gave way to a *curiously gauche, yet flirtatious and, above all, extraordinarily adventurous, hopeful person*.

—Angus Wilson, *The Wild Garden*, p. 63.

This triad of alliterating adjectives is itself as “brief” and “breezy” as the subject demands:

In his *brief, bright, breezy* stories, as in his delightful novella, *Snow White*, there is not even that implicit appeal to sanity, to an instinct for survival, which is found in the black humorists.

—Calvin Bedient, “*No Pretense to Coherency*,” *The Nation*, May 27, 1968, p. 703.

Following, again, are some heavier concentrations:

Englishmen regard their sense of humour as a *cosy, comfortable, contemplative, lazy and good-humoured* sort of thing. How comes it therefore that to foreigners the English sense of humour appears *atrabilious and dour*?

—Harold Nicolson, *The English Sense of Humour*, p. 19.

I investigate *fragmentary scattered* ruins, *eons old*, of a lost city of antiquity whose traces extend over a compagna otherwise *empty* under a *clear level* vacancy of *sunset* light. . . . The final sunset of a sort sometimes seen in Canaletto paintings gilds gently *enigmatic ancient* stone, *sere* swards of *coarse modern* grass, and *occasional broken hunched old* trees.

—James Gould Cozzens, *Morning Noon and Night*, last page.

The painter must choose between a *rapid* impression, *fresh and warm and living*, but probably deserving only of a short life, and the *cold, profound, intense* effort of memory, knowledge, and will-power, prolonged perhaps for weeks, from which a masterpiece can alone result.

—Winston S. Churchill, *Painting as a Pastime*, p. 30.

Here are regular adjectives aligned with participial phrases:

There she was, walking down the street along the windowsill, step by step, *stout, safe, confident*, buried in her errands, clutching her handbag, stepping aside from the common women blind and heavy under a week's provisions, prying into the looking-glasses at the doors of furniture shops.

—Dylan Thomas, *Adventures in the Skin Trade*, p. 5.

Here is a rather elevated though frequent adjectival formation, the adjective plus dependent prepositional phrase:

They come to him *murmurous with imaginative overtones, heavy with evocative memories*. . . .

—Lord David Cecil, *The Fine Art of Reading*, p. 282.

It can be used less formally:

Sometimes his face swelled *purple with anger*, and he pounded on the door till he was sobbing with exertion.

—Doris Lessing, *In Pursuit of the English*, p. 173.

Dan was *restless with suppressed belligerence*.

—Lessing, p. 184.

Here is an interesting pattern of repeated adjectives:

It was a *good* peace, that spread. Those were *good* leaves up there, with a *good*, bright sky beyond them. This was a *good* earth beneath my back, soft as a bed, and in all its unexamined depths was a *good* darkness.

—William Golding, *The Pyramid*, p. 56.

The successful fragments in the next two samples, in fact, are nothing but modification structures grouped interestingly around nouns:

Too many words chasing too little feelings, too much dulled general speech for personal things best expressed by shutting up.

—Peter Watkins, “*The Current Cinema*,” *The New Yorker*, July 29, 1967, p. 72.

The thin, delicate, staccato Frenchmen fiddling nervously with their cigarettes, winding themselves up slowly like springs while the others talked, then pouncing into a half second's opening in the conversation with their: “Je suppose que. . .” The small, untidy, worried-looking Spaniards, sombre and tragic, yet somehow like hairdressers. The large, lazy Russians with many wives.

—Christopher Isherwood, *The Memorial*, p. 265.

Adverbial Styles

Through the last large set of adjectival examples, adverbs have often been used to modify the adjectives. They became an important part of the rhythm of these adjectival styles. There are also what might be called adverbial styles, sentences in which much of the content, much of the interest, or perhaps the real punch, ends up with the adverbs.

It was *lightly*, yes. But it was not *briskly*, it was very fast.

—Mark Van Doren, “*The Watchman*,” *Collected Stories*, p. 75.

If he said he had written a fairy-story with a political purpose, we cannot *lightly* suppose he spoke *lightly*.

—C. M. Woodhouse, “*Introduction*,” *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell, p. ix.

The evolution of sense is, *in a sense*, the evolution of nonsense.

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*, p. 33.

He drank *eagerly*, *copiously* The limping earnestness of his speech disappeared; he talked as he drank, *abundantly*.

—Desmond Hall, *I Give You Oscar Wilde*, p. 139.

That means, I take it, that Keats had been trying to write—*in vain*.

—John Middleton Murry, *Keats and Shakespeare*, p. 247.

So one day he *silently and suddenly* killed her.

—D. H. Lawrence, *Etruscan Places*, p. 198.

His death was the direst and the most decisive event *emotionally* of Herman Melville's early life.

—Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville: A Critical Biography*, p. 23.

When the girl spoke it was *briskly and prosaically*.

—*Evelyn Waugh*, *The Loved One*, p. 67.

Lightning spit *all around him*; rain cut *in at his face*; thunder crashed *against his eardrums*. Another bolt of lightning, *closer*. Then another, *closer still*.

Clay looked *up, straight, right up into the sky*.

—*William Goldman*, *Soldier in the Rain*, p. 308.

More and more candidly she had dressed and undressed by her window, *more and more overtly* he had himself leaned out to watch.

—*Conrad Aiken*, *Ushant: An Essay*, p. 15.

It was *always* going to be like this, *always, always*.

—*John Wain*, *A Travelling Woman*, p. 47.

Here, from the same book, a paragraph moves into adverbial fragments:

He stopped *in amazement*. She was laughing. *Not mockingly, or with the effect of covering up other emotions she might otherwise betray. Simply laughing, unaffectedly, from sheer amusement.*

—*Wain*, p. 47.

Overworked Intensifiers and Qualifiers

All the adverbs just gathered live up to the nickname they share with adjectives as “coloring words.” But there is a particular case against a particular kind of adverb. Listen again to a famous writer’s objections:

With regard to unwarinesses that defeat precision, excess is the common substitute for energy. We have it in our semi-academic, too conscious adverbs—awfully, terribly, frightfully, infinitely, tremendously. . . .

—*Marianne Moore*, “*Feeling and Precision*,” *Predilections*, p. 9.

Miss Moore’s objection to these often sloppy intensifiers is a valid one. Here, for instance, energy does seem to have succumbed to excess:

It is obvious that people dwelling upon a treeless and *often absolutely* vegetationless coast would turn to the sea for their food and for other necessities.

—*Ivan T. Sanderson*, *Follow the Whale*, p. 33.

Maybe even here:

If, in the abstract, you set out to draw a picture of the *quintessentially* ideal commander, the perfect type of composite soldier-hero,

it might turn out to be *astonishingly* like MacArthur.

—John Gunther, *Procession*, p. 299.

Qualifiers as well as intensifiers can be overdone:

Cats and dogs are *fairly easily* trained to respond to acoustic stimuli; guinea-pigs require a more complicated training but can also be trained. The historical studies are *most easily* performed on guinea-pigs but could also be done on cats. Vestibular testing is *fairly easily* performed on all these animals in a well-equipped laboratory.

—Andrew Herxheimer, *A Symposium on Drugs and Sensory Functions*, p. 151.

In the case of intensifiers, the excess can at times become a part of the energy in a deliberate, self-conscious heightening of statement, often tinged with irony:

The extant graduate departments of English and American Literature are *fantastically* distinguished by their failure to communicate with each other.

—Don Cameron Allen, *The Ph.D. in English and American Literature*, p. 107.

He was also *superbly and magnificently* vain as well as wise—the combination is commoner than we think when we are young.

—C. P. Snow, “*Rutherford*,” *Variety of Men*, p. 11.

Adverbs as Cohesive Devices

One last use of the adverb remains to be sketched in briefly, before it is taken up in the chapter on Cohesion. Its great mobility makes the adverb a very useful device for holding sentences together. It can go to the head of one, tying it to the one before:

He recognized the feeling. *After that*, he recognized the man.

—Wright Morris, *The Field of Vision*, p. 16.

There! Out it boomed. *First* a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable.

—Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 5.

What happens above, divided by the semicolon, can also happen across separate sentences—the same parallelism of adverbial openers:

There fear stiffened into hatred. *Here* hatred curdled from despair.

—Philip Toynbee, *Prothalamium*, p. 67.

Finally, in this small-scale look at adverbs in their role almost as structural rather than content words, or at least as forms intended to aid in a cohesive structure, here is a string of adverbial phrases directing us through a narrative space:

Their way led *through a wide, thick forest*, in which there was a narrow defile; this was a notorious haunt of bandits, whose habit it was to lie in wait for prey *among the thick bushes that fringed the track*. Here Belisarius prepared an ambush. *On one side of the track* he hid Trajan's troop, *on the other* Thurimuth's; and *behind them*, lining the steep sides of the defile, his army of "spectators," as he called his stake-armed infantry.

—Robert Graves, Count Belisarius, pp. 396–397.

Adjectives in Adverb Roles

It seems as good a way as any to leave this chapter on adjectives and adverbs with a look at one encroaching on the territory of the other. A brief selection will show the informal, sometimes colloquial results of a functional shift that puts adjectives where we would expect adverbs:

The trunk and the branches and the twigs were *terrible* black.

—William Golding, Pincher Martin, p. 177.

They stayed indoors till the colliers were all gone home, till it was *thick* dark, and the street would be deserted.

—D. H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers, p. 76.

It was *full* dark now, but still early. . . .

—James Agee, A Death in the Family, p. 19.

6

Chapter

Prepositions

It must here be observed that most, if not all Prepositions seem originally formed to denote the *Relations of Place*. The reason is, this is that grand *Relation*, which *Bodies* or *natural Substances* maintain at all times one to another, whether they are contiguous or remote, whether in motion, or at rest.

It may be said indeed that in the *Continuity of Place* they form this UNIVERSE or VISIBLE WHOLE, and are made as much ONE by that general Comprehension, as is consistent with their several Natures, and specific Distinctions. Thus it is that we have Prepositions to denote the *contiguous Relation* of Body, as when we say *Caius walked WITH a staff; the Statue stood UPON a pedestal; the River ran OVER a Sand;* others for the *detached Relation*, as when we say, *He is going to Italy; the Sun is risen ABOVE the Hills; these Figs came FROM Turkey.* So as to *Motion* and *Rest*, only with this difference, that *here* the Preposition varies its character with the Verb. Thus if we say, *that Lamp hangs FROM the Ceiling,* the Preposition, *FROM*, assumes a Character of *Quiescence*. But if we say, *that Lamp is falling FROM the Ceiling,* the Preposition in such case assumes a Character of *Motion*. So in Milton,

—*To support uneasie Steps
OVER the burning Marle*—Par. L. I.

Here *OVER* denotes *Motion*. Again

—*He—with looks of cordial Love
Hung OVER her enamour'd*—Par. L. IV

Here *OVER* denotes *Rest*.

But though the original use of Prepositions was to denote the relations of Place, they could not be confined to this Office only. They by degrees extended themselves to Subjects *incorporeal*, and came to denote Relations, as well *intellectual* as *local*. Thus, because in Place he, who is *above*, has commonly the advantage over him, who is *below*, hence we transfer *OVER* and *UNDER* to *Dominion* and *Obedience*; of a King we say, *he ruled OVER his People*; of a

common Soldier, *he served UNDER such a General*. So too we say, *with Thought; without Attention; thinking over a Subject; under Anxiety; from Fear; out of Love; through Jealousy*, etc. All which instances, with many others of like kind, shew that the *first Words* of Men, like their *first Ideas*, had an immediate reference to *sensible Objects*, and that in afterdays, when they began to discern with their *Intellect*, they took those Words, which they found *already made*, and transferred them by metaphor to *intellectual Conceptions*. There is indeed no Method to express new Ideas, but either this of Metaphor, or that of *Coining new Words*, both which have been practised by Philosophers and wise Men, according to the nature, and exigence of the occasion.

—*James Harris, Hermes or A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Universal Grammar, first published 1751. Quoted from the edition of 1771, pp. 266–269.*

The variety of relationships that the English preposition can show, and its relevance to quiescence, motion, and metaphor, are described very well by the eighteenth-century grammarian quoted above. These concepts have been given little attention by recent writers on grammar and style, who, for the most part, have had little to say about the preposition except to reiterate or to ponder at length John Dryden's injunction to avoid ending a sentence with a preposition. On this point, I would say only that it is better to end a sentence with a preposition, to indulge in a sentence fragment, to dangle a modifier now and then, or even to split an infinitive, than to self-consciously emphasize one's purism as in:

It is a thing with which I want nothing to do.

Avoiding a preposition as sentence-ending often involves a writer in “with which” phrases, and the word “which” all by itself can get a writer in enough trouble. One can easily find many sentences from professional writers to testify that good sentences can and do end with prepositions but I shall offer only two before going on to more important topics:

Down below, our carpenters worked at the new leak, and presently called to Tulp to rig the pumps and free her, so that they might know what the new leak amounted *to*.

—*John Masefield, Live and Kicking Ned, p. 113.*

“English,” we think today, is something more than the teaching or the reading of words as words but something less also, less surely, than the teaching of the private life the words came *out of*.

—*Archibald MacLeish, “What Is English?” A Continuing Journey, p. 257.*

The *placement* of a preposition, then, is a matter for individual discretion in a given instance, and the *choice* of preposition is usually a more important concern, at least as regards stylistic effects.

Traditionally, the preposition was classed as one of the parts of speech. Today, it is usually considered as a structural word, one of the most common, and is sometimes grouped with the conjunction as a connective. In any grammar, however, the essential characteristic of the preposition is that it *establishes a relationship*, a connection, *between its object and some other element of the sentence in which it occurs*. The frequency in spoken and written English with which one encounters different prepositional phrases (preposition plus object and optional object modifiers) must therefore be explained by possibilities for variety inherent in this basic definition. For one thing, a preposition can take various sentence elements as its *object*. Some kind of *substantive*, either a noun or pronoun, generally stands as the object of a preposition, as in *at the store*, *with him*, sometimes a possessive noun or pronoun, *at Tiffany's*, *of his*, and sometimes a standard substantive serving a genitive function, as in the chairman *of the board*. Also, though less frequently, a preposition may take as its object a participle, *in looking*, or an adverb, *until now*, or a clause, *under whatever it was*.¹

But the object of the preposition is not the only facet of the basic definition open to great variety. A preposition *relates* its object to other elements in the sentence, and many different *relations* can be defined between any one given object and the rest of a sentence by the use of different prepositions. Harold Whitehall's overall, fivefold division² is quite useful here to distinguish between the various possible relations in the most general terms; examples follow the names given to each basic relation:

Location: Aunt Bert slid way down *in* the seat, resting her head *against* the back, clamping her arms *across* her waist.

—Ralph Tutt, “Family Plots,” *Sewanee Review*, Summer 1966, p. 647.

Direction: We continued *across* the foyer *to* a dreamlike bank of windows, turned left *up* a pale flight of marble steps, left again, *through* two doorways, and *into* the Assembly Room.

—John Knowles, *A Separate Peace*, p. 157.

¹ It is important to note that words commonly thought of as prepositions may often stand alone after a verb as an adverb, as in *leave off*, *go out*, *turn around*, or alone with a noun as an adjective, as in an *off day* and as in the title, *Up the Down Staircase*—or by functional shift, as a verb, “He *upped* the cost,” or as a noun: “There was *no up or down*, no light and no air,”—William Golding, *Pincher Martin*, p. 7.

² *Structural Essentials of English*.

Association: The sleep house usually is a glum place, stale *with* the smell of men and stark *in* the light of two unshaded electric bulbs.

—Truman Capote, “Diamond Guitar,” Breakfast at Tiffany’s, p. 143.

Agency: Perhaps it is natural for a man who has destroyed something to try to restore a balance *by* creating something.

—John Steinbeck, The Winter of Our Discontent, p. 131.

Time: Word had gone round *during* the day that old Major, the prize Widdle White boar, had had a strange dream *on* the previous night and wished to communicate it to the other animals.

—George Orwell, Animal Farm, p. 15.

Still another factor is in part responsible for the great variety of English prepositional phrases. In addition to the numerous possible objects and the ways in which they can be variously related to the sentence that includes them, different types of prepositions exist in each of Whitehall’s generic categories that rank the relation in question along what Whitehall calls the “scale of explicitness.” According to this scale, there are five types of prepositions: monosyllabic *primaries*, like *at*, *in*, *by*, *down*, *through*; *transferred primaries* defining relations other than those for which they were originally intended, as in *at noon*, *in trouble*; *complex* prepositions like *above*, *across*, *after*, *concerning*; *double* prepositions formed from two primaries, as *into*, *upon*, *within*; and *group* prepositions, like *in front of*, *outside of*, *by means of*, and *according to*.

These distinctions are valid enough in themselves, but the concept of the “scale of explicitness” seems an oversimplification. To take a simple example, there is no significant difference in explicitness between *on the table*, *upon the table*, and *on top of the table*. Also, a special word on the “explicitness” of group prepositions is in order. They are often used successfully:

And *on top of* everything else there was always an expression of thoughtful amusement on his candid face.

—William Saroyan, “The Proud Poet,” The Whole Voyald and Other Stories, p. 40.

Two wooden beds stood *in the midst of* a clutter of squarish wooden chairs, their upholstery worn.

—John Espy, The Anniversaries, p. 207.

Sometimes they have a kind of metaphorical “explicitness”:

Little change appeared in subcontracting operations except for a

snapback in plumbing and heating casualties *on the heels of* their considerable improvement in April.

—Rowena Wyatt, “*Business Failures*,” Dun’s Review, July 1966, p. 14.

But, when overused, they quickly lose any real meaning, certainly any explicitness, and their use tends to become merely a stylistic habit common to inexperienced writers. The following sentence, for instance, seems weakened by one such *group preposition* following closely upon another:

For the sake of delineation, montage is constructed primarily *in terms of* photographic elements, while collage is virtually unrestricted in the use of visual components.

—Don Cyr, “*Montage as Visual Synthesis*,” Design, May/June 1966, p. 17.

It is obvious that varying degrees of explicitness characterize the use of the preposition, but this relative explicitness does not always so neatly correlate with the different types of prepositions, primary, transferred, complex, double, and group. The classic example, “*of the people, by the people, for the people*,” for instance, though strikingly explicit, employs only primary prepositions. Explicitness must really be discussed, then, in terms of the particular phrase in question and be recognized to result more from the careful use made of any one of the types of prepositions than from any inevitable result of the decision to employ one particular type. Often, the achievement of explicitness in prose results from a combination of prepositional phrases working together to attain the desired result. In the following two samples, paired prepositions set up a simple rhetorical balance within which they specify by contrast:

The intellectuals can no longer be said to live *beyond* the margins or *within* the crevices of society.

—Irving Howe, “*Radical Questions and the American Intellectual*,” Partisan Review, Spring 1966, p. 180.

Faulkner died as the culture which sustained him was also dying, died *in history*, that is to say, rather than *against* it.

—Leslie A. Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p. 11.

In the following sentences, the explicitness results from a kind of progressive specification, the second prepositional phrase adding information to the first in order to particularize or expand the relation initially established:

Rats stir *in* the weeds, *among* the graves.

—William Styron, Lie Down in Darkness, pp. 327–328.

Our immediate experiences come *to* us, so to say, *through* the refracting medium of the art we like.

—Aldous Huxley, *Literature and Science*, p. 71.

But the fifties are a plateau period, a kind of west wing built out *from* the thirties *toward* the sunset....

—Alan Pryce-Jones, "A Late Transplant," Harper's, August 1966, p. 111.

Another very effective use of prepositions works a kind of shift on this concern for explicitness and establishes a markedly unilateral—if explicitly unilateral—relationship, whose effect, though frequent in prose and often so subtle as to pass for standard usage, is essentially and sometimes strikingly poetic. The examples following display this poetic explicitness in varying degrees:

I lived *to* sounds....

—John Hersey, *A Single Pebble*, p. 18.

The winter wore away, and in the parks the trees burst *into* bud and *into* leaf.

—W. Somerset Maugham, *Of Human Bondage*, p. 685.

And laughing again for joy, he went out of the chapter houses to where the sun piled *into* the open square of the cloister.

—William Golding, *The Spire*, p. 3.

Immense piles of gold flared out in the southeast, heaped in soft, glowing yellow right *up* the sky.

—D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, p. 285.

They stood together high up in the darkness, looking at the lights scattered *on* the night before them, handfuls of glittering points, villages lying high and low *on* the dark, here and there.

—Lawrence, pp. 327-328.

... and he had found the scent of cheap toilet soap desperately sweet *upon* the air.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Absolution," *Babylon Revisited* and Other Stories, p. 136.

The door swung open *on* darkness.

—Penelope Mortimer, *The Bright Prison*, p. 125.

The houses were dark *against* the night, and a little lingering warmth remained in the houses *against* the morning.

—John Steinbeck, *The Moon Is Down*, p. 147.

In one sense, all the above prepositions are what we have discussed as *transferred* from another intended function in a different sort of relation. We might call them the result here of a poetic transference.

Still another transference is possibly more of a *functional shift* from structural to content word, preposition to verbal, resulting in some of the most striking of the preposition's stylistic effects. The English preposition has long carried a latent verbal force and has been used with an emphasis on this by no less a stylist than William Shakespeare in, for example, *The Tempest's* "I shall no more *to sea!*" It is true that in many of the preposition's modern appearances in otherwise verbless clauses, it does not seem so much to carry verbal weight as to have been simply left behind after the omission of the verb *be* or some other verb of being, as in the following examples:

And *for* what? *For* what this agony of concentration? *For* what this hell of effort? *For* what this intense withdrawal from the poverty and squalor of dirty brick and rusty fire escapes, from the raucous cries and violence and never-changing noise? *For* what?

—*Thomas Wolfe, You Can't Go Home Again*, p. 508.

Tie-dye scarves *for* the ladies, *for* the men a home-brewed lemon and licorice and aspirin syrup. . . .

—*Truman Capote, "A Christmas Morning," Breakfast at Tiffany's*, p. 173.

Here are prepositional fragments that only locate. There is no implied movement:

Again shelves *to* the ceiling, filled neatly with gleaming canned and glassed foods, a library for the stomach. *On one side*—counter, cash register, bags, string, and that glory in stainless steel and white enamel, the cold cabinet, in which the compressor whispered to itself.

—*John Steinbeck, The Winter of Our Discontent*, p. 14.

Family lot *on* hill *above* river Sound *amongst* leaves; stubble.

—*John Cheever, The Wapshot Chronicle*, p. 152.

Over the main entrance the words CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and *in* a shield, the World State's motto, COMMUNITY IDENTITY, STABILITY.

—*Aldous Huxley, Brave New World*, p. 1.

Before him, the river and *to* the right, the long grey bridges spanning it—

—*Henry Roth, Call It Sleep*, p. 247.

In other cases, the preposition clearly imparts a verbal force, the *motion* described by James Harris in the epigraph that opens this chapter:

But what could he do about that? *To* the sea! *To* the sea!—What sea?
—*Saul Bellow, Herzog*, p. 34.

But *to* the tombs, *to* the tombs!
—*D. H. Lawrence, Etruscan Places*, p. 12.

Right down the road *to* their own station wagon, where the lights were on.
—*Wright Morris, The Field of Vision*, p. 250.

Back *to* his plan.
—*Garson Kanin, Remembering Mr. Maugham*, p. 47.

A great train, bound for Manchester, drew up. Two doors opened, and *from* one of them, William.
—*D. H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers*, p. 81.

On up Number 58, and the country breaks.
—*Robert Penn Warren, All the King's Men*, p. 2.

The scene changes. We are in Madrid. *Up* a long flight of stairs in a comfortable-looking apartment building; the door opens cautiously and we enter a small, bright room.
—*John Gunther, Procession*, p. 84.

Uphill with broad strength.
—*John Updike, Rabbit, Run*, p. 244.

Out of bed on the carpet with no shoes.
—*William Golding, Pincher Martin*, p. 178.

So many qualities of sound *out of* one hose: so many choral differences *out of* those several hoses that were in earshot. *Out of* any one hose, the almost dead silence of the release, and the short still arch of the separate big drops
—*James Agee, A Death in the Family*, p. 12.

Past a block of big homes, fortresses of cement and brick inset with doorways of stained and beveled glass and windows of potted plants, and then halfway *up* another block, which holds a development built all at once in the Thirties.
—*John Updike, Rabbit, Run*, p. 10.

On with the story. *On with* the story.
—*John Barth, "Author's Note," Lost in the Funhouse, conclusion*, p. x.

The versatile preposition is appropriate and, indeed, necessary in all types of writing. Overuse, then, is hardly an unexpected danger. However, many sentences can be preposition-heavy without seeming particularly awkward. Here is a calculated excess, a deliberate pileup of prepositional phrases:

While Mrs. Kelley slept, hundreds of millions of gallons of rain, part of the fantastic load of water that had been shipped by the hurricane designated as Diane during its voyage up the Atlantic Ocean, were being bailed out on certain hills of northern Connecticut and were washing down them toward Winsted.

—John Hersey, “*Over the Mad River*,” *Here to Stay*, p. 7.

This time with directional phrases rather than *of*-phrases, the same type of congestion appears for a special purpose; movement, progression are unmistakable:

The procession of men and women from the street into the station and down the escalators towards the trains becomes a movement from a world above to an underworld of death.

—Ralph Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel*, p. 258.

All the way home in the taxi and in the lift up to her flat on the seventh floor Mrs. Liebig kept on talking.

—Angus Wilson, “*After the Show*,” *A Bit off the Map and Other Stories*, p. 107.

Heavy concentrations of prepositional phrases can be controlled by successful rhythms:

. . . this was the miracle of the age, and of the succeeding age, and of all ages to come. . . . But there were giants in the earth in those days, and they spoke in the name of the nation, and people followed them.

—Forrest McDonald, *E Pluribus Unum: The Foundation of the American Republic 1776–1790*, *last paragraph*.

When the matter first came up of eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, I consulted with Eve and with the serpent and their consensus seemed to be that it could do no harm and might do a lot of good.

—John Updike, *Assorted Prose*, pp. 45–46.

Following are some less successful passages, extreme examples of embedding, given as little thought as they give pleasure:

There remain cases in which the inadequacies of a conventional orthographic record cannot be put to rights by assumptions drawn

from generalizations *about* the language and dialect *in* which the poem is composed or *from* hypotheses *about* the meaning or the meter *of* the poem.

—Rulon Wells, “Comments on Meter,” Essays on the Language of Literature, ed. Seymour Chatman and Samuel R. Levin, p. 129.

It is my hope that this analysis may play a small part *in* awakening some minds *to* the need *for* a greater scientific effort *on the part of* the United States and her friends *in* the Western Community of Nations.

—Robert W. Prehoda, “Preface,” Designing the Future, *last paragraph.*

My purpose in presenting this paper is twofold: First, I want to unburden myself *of* something *of* a crisis *in* my thinking *about* the uses *of* experimental psychology *in* the study *of* cognition, and second, I want to talk *about* my current interests *in* research.

—James Deese, “Behavior and Fact,” American Psychologist, May 1967, p. 515.

And in the next paragraph of the same article:

It was *in* pursuit *of* an answer *to* a particular question that I first became concerned *about* the purposes and function *of* experimentation *in* psychological research.

From the foreword of a technical book, the four sentences below again illustrate the bumpy rhythm created by prepositional overloading:

General histories and biographical studies of engineers and inventors contribute much breadth of vision and many essential details, but the long sequences of events in particular fields are obscured by the diffusion of attention over large areas, or by concentration on short periods of time. . . .

The history of gear-cutting mechanisms brings into special prominence the convergence of sequences of events that are, at the outset, very loosely associated, or even entirely independent. This phenomenon of convergent synthesis is characteristic of the history of invention in all fields, but it is not always conspicuous. Many writers, too, ignore the phenomenon. . . .

—Abbott Payson Usher, Foreword to History of the Gear-Cutting Machine: A Historical Study in Geometry and Machines by Robert S. Woodbury.

It is easy to identify the problem but hard to solve it. One technique is to use verbs where possible, instead of nouns and prepositions. If one

tries this on the preceding four sentences, they sound a little better, perhaps, but the emphasis is probably not quite what the author wanted:

General histories of technology and biographies of engineers and inventors enlarge the vision and contribute many essential details, but the long sequences of events in particular fields are obscured because the authors diffuse their attention over large areas or concentrate on short periods of time. . . .

The history of gear-cutting mechanisms shows that sequences of events, initially very loosely associated or even entirely independent, often converge. The history of invention shows that this happens in all fields, but it is not always conspicuous, and many writers ignore it.

The preposition *of* in particular seems to contribute to the unevenness of many forewords and prefaces, its overuse probably betraying the author's last-minute rush to get his book off to press. The following two-paragraph sample is perfectly clear, but its rhythm is impaired by *of*'s twenty-six appearances. Although many are irreplaceable, the author or an editor, by attention to this one syntactic detail, could make the passage read more smoothly:

The plan *of* this anthology has emerged from two decades *of* experimentation with that indispensable course which is designed to introduce students to the greatness and variety *of* English literature. A number *of* the editors began with the scattergun survey, which represented almost every notable writer in relatively brief selections; later, like so many *of* our contemporaries, we turned to the intensive teaching *of* selected major writers, considered outside *of* their historical and literary contexts. Each approach proved to have its particular merits and its corresponding defects. The broad survey achieved inclusiveness by dispersion, at the expense *of* proper emphases and *of* study in depth. The close study *of* relatively few writers, on the other hand, was arbitrarily selective, and gave the student few points *of* historical and literary reference; it left him with embarrassing gaps in literary knowledge, very little sense *of* chronology, and almost no experience *of* the way that the works *of* even the most original writers are rooted in tradition and share the characteristic qualities and pre-occupations *of* their age.

The Norton Anthology is designed to provide the texts and materials for a course which will combine the values *of* emphasis and range by presenting major authors in the context *of* the major literary traditions *of* their times. It includes the best and most characteristic writings *of* the great writers—not *of* some, but *of all* the great writers (other than novelists), and in sufficient quantity to allow the instruc-

tor considerable latitude *of* choice while still achieving a study in depth. It also supplies the literary settings *of* the major authors by including copious examples *of* other writers and writings, excellent in themselves and also representative, in each age, *of* the reigning literary forms and the chief movements *of* convention and revolt, tradition and innovation.

—M. H. Abrams, “Preface,” *The Norton Anthology*, p. xxix.

The wide variety of its possible uses—in such diverse phrases as *in spite of*, a kind *of*, the necessity *of*, the idiomatic *of course*, and the indispensable genitive, *of* plus an object to show possession—makes the preposition *of* difficult to avoid even when its effect is discomforting. In the following passage, for instance, only the phrase at the beginning of the second sentence, “specific argument *of* the poem,” could be rewritten using the possessive noun structure, “poem’s specific argument”; yet the frequency of the preposition *of* throughout these sentences produces a decidedly choppy effect:

He might have written much the same poem, admittedly with some differences *of* detail, out *of* his feeling about the age alone. The specific argument *of* the poem has an added poignancy for us as a justification *of* Maud Gonne’s kind *of* life in the face *of* his own suffering, yet the insight it gives might well have derived from mere observation *of* a woman *of* her sort with no relationship to Yeats at all. In fact, *of course*, it comes from the continuous nurturing *of* his feeling for her under the pressure *of* his concerns as a poet, and that is why the problem *of* the exact relationship *of* the poet’s life to his art is easier to define than it is to settle.

—M. L. Rosenthal, “The Poetry of Yeats,” *Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats*, p. xxxi.

On the other hand, at the end of the following example, “*of the wrath of God*” could easily have been edited to “*of God’s wrath*.”

Gin alone, however, she has just pointed out, is often enough quieting in the fullest sense, and the poetic connection between death and intoxication gives a vague rich memory *of* the blood *of* the sacrament and the apocalyptic wine *of* the wrath *of* God.

—William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 237.

This would have altered the intended emphasis and actually rendered the sentence less balanced, less poetic. The author was undoubtedly aware of these considerations, and this example only points to the advisability of paying close attention to the preposition *of* in the editing process, even if it may finally be allowed to remain.

This chapter has touched on some of the problems that careless use

of prepositions can bring, but it will close with a reminder that prepositional phrases are indispensable for workaday service and available for striking metaphorical and poetic effect. Use of the prepositions *as* and *like* in similes is demonstrated in other chapters. Another example follows, along with two additional good sentences that feature prepositional phrases prominently in their design:

Turner nudged its tail with a twig and the fish took off headed due north, crawling, or walking, or doing whatever a catfish does to move from point A to point B on dry land. The fish used its tail *like a sculling oar* to get started, and then utilized its spiny pectoral fins to add speed and keep it on course. It worked the pectoral fins alternately, *like a soldier crawling on the ground with his elbows.*

—Ed Buckow, “*Exotics: New Threat to U.S. Waters*,” Field and Stream, May 1969, p. 18.

The artist, *like the God of the creation*, remains *within or behind or beyond or above* his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 215.

The brown-domed gentleman took off his glasses and, unbending himself, looked *up, up, up at tall, tall, tall Victor, at his blue eyes and reddish-brown hair.*

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*, pp. 103–104.

7 *Chapter*

Conjunctions and Coordination

Beside that there are conjunctions, and a conjunction is not varied but it has a force that need not make any one feel that they are dull. Conjunctions have made themselves live by their work. They work and as they work they live and even when they do not work and in these days they do not always live by work still nevertheless they do live.

—*Gertrude Stein, Lectures in America, p. 213.*

The common conjunctions—*and, but, for, or, nor, yet, and so*—are structural words that *conjoin* the elements of a coordinate structure. They serve as ties to connect similar units—words, phrases, clauses, or even sentences. Because they permit a writer to place like items together, conjunctions help to reduce repetition and, in addition, help to show certain relationships. It is not unusual for a professional writer to use a conjunction as the first word of a sentence, and in that position it contributes to cohesion, just as it does when it links two main or base clauses into a compound sentence.

The term *conjunction* as it is being used here is limited to traditional grammar's subclass of *coordinating conjunctions*. The chapter will consider, in turn, (1) *coordinating conjunctions*, their use and omission, and their relation to items in series; (2) the *correlatives*, sometimes called *correlative conjunctions*—*both . . . and, not (only) . . . but (also), either . . . or, and neither . . . nor*; (3) the *conjunctive adverbs*, sometimes called *sentence connectors*—words like *however, besides, consequently, likewise . . .*—and will conclude with a general topic related to all of these, (4) *coordination*.

It should be pointed out here that such words as *although*, *as*, *since*, *when*, and *because* are not included in the groups discussed in this chapter but are discussed elsewhere under the heading *subordinators*. (See Chapter 8.) It may at first be confusing that *because* and *for* are not grouped together. The distinction is syntactic, not lexical, and is a useful one. *Because* and the other subordinators are able to stand at the beginning of a *dependent* clause that is a sentence opener, but *for* and the other coordinating conjunctions do not operate in this way. Thus, *conjunctions* joining independent clauses characterize what traditionally have been called *compound sentences*; *subordinators* and *relatives* characterize what traditionally have been called *complex sentences*. The label *simple sentence* traditionally has been used to refer to a sentence with only one clause, but it is a misnomer in that it fails to recognize that a sentence with only one clause may be amplified by many nonclausal structures (*reduced* by transformation) in an exceedingly complex—and useful—way.

The joining of ideas in compound structures—placing them side by side, especially without connectors—is sometimes called *parataxis*. This term contrasts with *hypotaxis*, which involves arrangement of ideas in *main* and *subordinate* structures, or *independent* structures and *dependent* ones. Dependent clauses are discussed in Chapter 8.

The Loosely Connected Compound Sentence

The first examples will display the most common conjunction, *and*, in two loosely connected compound sentences. Notice the loose, rapid movement of the conjoined words, phrases, and clauses, in a method of connection best suited to a rather free-flowing narrative style and usually inappropriate to suggest the precise logical relationships and qualifications required in formal writing:

There was a crowd of kids watching the car, *and* the square was hot, *and* the trees were green, *and* the flags hung on their staffs, *and* it was good to get out of the sun *and* under the shade of the arcade that runs all the way around the square.

—Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, p. 94.

She had so little washing to do now that she was all alone, *and* she had got up earlier than usual to get it done, *and* she had got it done earlier than usual *and* then she had hung it out, *and* then . . .

—W. S. Merwin, “Ethel’s Story” from “Three Stories,” *The New Yorker*, July 25, 1970, p. 31.

Later we shall look at other examples of this kind of coordination.

The Omission of Conjunctions

There is another brand of syntactic addition that stops short of even the loose, noncommittal quality of the *and* connector—which gets along, even thrives, without any conjunctions at all. One name for this abstinence, this refraining from conjunctions, is *asyndeton*. Often whole clauses are juxtaposed in this way. Fully independent, they are not attached to one another in any grammatical way, they simply abut against each other, they make contact but are not connected. Sanction their use as a way of building sentences and you mount a full-scale attack on the fortress of the school grammars, from which these infamous “run-ons” have long been banished. “Never join two complete thoughts with just a comma alone; use a conjunction too, or replace both with a semi-colon”: such is the edict, and by it paratactic clauses are forever outlawed. Below we see their judicious use by professional writers:

The streets were empty, the slates shone purple.

—*Sean O'Faolain, I Remember! I Remember!*, p. 18.

The fog had all gone, the wind had risen.

—*C. S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength*, p. 175.

“You give me calm, I give you happiness.”

—*Angus Wilson, The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot*, p. 434.

He did not waste time maturing, he did not make any of the obvious mistakes.

—*Saul Bellow, Dangling Man*, p. 87.

The sun was up, the farm was alive.

—*Evelyn Waugh, The End of the Battle*, p. 258.

We need the weather and the wind, we must wait upon these things, we are dependent on them.

—*Harry Berger, Jr., The Allegorical Temper*, p. 240.

Mind and body do not act upon each other, because they are not each other, they are one.

—*Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy*, p. 176.

The highest good exists, it is unified, it is perfect, it is God.

—*Irwin Edman, “Introduction,” The Consolation of Philosophy*, p. xiv.

Quite often, as is true of these, whether in groups of two or three or more, such clauses are kernel clauses. Minimal utterance seems to invite

minimal connection. Here three abutting clauses appear alongside separate kernels and near-kernels:

We beguile. We make apologies and protestations. *We wonder, we surmise, we conjecture.*

We weave a daisy chain.

—*Huntington Brown, Prose Styles: Five Primary Types*, p. 81.

When the clauses joined in this way are longer, the device may seem clumsier, or at best less appropriate. This is especially true of a style that seems determined to avoid short sentences:

The garden is a place of deep and complete delight, it is joyous and safe and good. . . .

—*Kathleen Williams, Spenser's World of Glass*, p. 105.

He is given to anger and to vengefulness, he has scorned women only to be enthralled by Britomart, he has won the armor of Achilles.

—*Williams*, p. 157.

The fifth book is not altogether a success, perhaps it is not altogether a unified conception. The justice of Isis Church and of the shore where Artagall refutes the giant is not a felt reality throughout the narrative, the potentialities existing in the key passages are not fully exploited elsewhere.

—*Williams*, p. 188.

When the paratactic clauses are appropriate, they can seem particularly so. Their connection often tends to feel rapid, abrupt, thus imparting a sense of urgency or hurry:

She must rush, she must hurry, before it was too late.

—*John Steinbeck, The Winter of Our Discontent*, p. 198.

Then he was up again, running faster than ever, then the dogs were gaining on him again.

—*George Orwell, Animal Farm*, p. 58.

Here the sentence is jarred as abruptly as the reverie it tells about:

Footsteps outside the door jar me from my reverie, I hear white men's voices.

—*William Styron, The Confessions of Nat Turner*, p. 426.

In the next group, the feeling of rapidity becomes that of a quick sequence triggered almost automatically:

They snipped the ribbon in 1915, they popped the cork, Miami Beach was born.

—Norman Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 11.

For Cheever is one of those writers who instinctively deny everything, almost before you've asked it. *The town is not his town, the house is not his house, the symbols are your problem.*

—Wilfred Sheed, "Mr. Saturday, Mr. Monday and Mr. Cheever," *Life Magazine*, April 18, 1967, p. 39.

Then one day she went back to Australia. They exchanged three letters. Six months later Danby had taken up with Adelaide. *She was sweet, she was there.*

—Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream*, p. 18.

His father died, his mother died, there was no money left.

—Murdoch, p. 19.

Here grammar seems to slide forward as easily, as automatically, as the described mechanism:

The last screw came out, the whole lock case slid down, freeing the bolt.

—David Wagoner, *The Escape Artist*, p. 244.

In the next sample, the comma itself marks a brief pause leading directly into repetition:

The bell in the church tower rang three times, paused and rang three times again.

—Evelyn Waugh, *The End of the Battle*, p. 258.

Below we see the leveling effort of parataxis to convey the uneventful:

. . . but nothing ever happened. The waiters had been polite, the drinkers had been polite, the streets were quiet.

—Norman Mailer, *An American Dream*, p. 190.

Here the syntax itself goes "doggedly on":

He ignored this, went doggedly on.

—J. B. Priestley, *The Shapes of Sleep*, p. 214.

The traffic light's abrupt winking succession of red and green is caught by the grammar of the next offering:

It is a myth, the city, the rooms and windows, the steam-spitting streets; for anyone, everyone a different myth, an idol-head with traffic-light eyes winking *a tender green, a cynical red.*

—Truman Capote, “New York,” Local Color, p. 13.

The parataxis that follows does not seem at all fast or abrupt, however. Neither is it uneventful. It is relaxed, the easy rendering of the rhythms of an easy time:

Everyone was beautiful, and gentle, everyone was poor, no one was smart. On summer evenings they danced in the half-light, and when they were tired of dancing they lay down *in the forest, on the beach, on mattresses, on the bare floor.*

—Stephen Spender, “September Journal,” The Partisan Reader, ed. William Phillips and Philip Rahv, p. 397.

The quartet of prepositional phrases above, working in tandem with the abutting clauses of the first sentence, as well as the paratactic structures in the preceding two examples, are *paratactic phrases*, of course, not clauses. Another compound prepositional phrase follows, this time without any of the mildly symbolic effects we have been considering, but still joined paratactically like the last one above:

For all of these are translations into the visible of feelings else blind and inarticulate; and they are translations made *with singular accuracy, with singularly little loss.*

—C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, p. 312.

Here are paratactic noun phrases:

They had no altar, no table, just their laps.

—Michael Novak, “The Underground Church,” The Saturday Evening Post, January 11, 1969, p. 26.

Items in Series

Besides its function in the additive, compound type of sentence development and its omission in certain paratactic constructions, the conjunction also operates in a more particular type of structural connection, the *series*. The common series, the juxtaposition of three or more like elements, is deceptively straightforward and is actually capable of a great many syntactic variations, the most frequent of which either (1) repeat a conjunction between each pair of elements, or (2) omit even the final written conjunction between the last two elements. Both variations produce much the same effect, enforcing the inherent parallelism of the series either by elim-

inating the single unbalanced conjunction or by inserting other conjunctions as additional balanced elements. Thus, such a standard series as in

And almost every tale she had told him was a chronicle of *sickness, death, and sorrow*.

—Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*, p. 46.

does not display so striking a parallelism as the following series, quite similar in content:

Suffering, weakness, death are not, in themselves, tragic; this is common knowledge.

—Elizabeth Sewell, *The Human Metaphor*, p. 138.

The even more common variation in which the conjunction is repeated, results in a smoother construction, less abrupt and clipped, but one whose elements still receive more clear-cut distinction and strong individual emphasis than in the basic single-conjunction series:

In the kitchen they had *grits and grease and side meat and coffee* for breakfast.

—Carson McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, p. 204.

It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the *courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice* which have been the glory of his past.

—William Faulkner, “*The Stockholm Address*,” William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, p. 348.

In the distance the houses were the houses in a Victorian print, *small and precisely drawn and quiet*; only one child a long way off.

—Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair*, p. 27.

As in the last example above, the repetition of the conjunction in a series is very frequently used to separate the elements of a multiple appositive adjective. (See Chapter 11.)

Just as they are used in a series for conscious stylistic effects, conjunctions are also employed in various combinations within short rhetorical patterns, often with a highly stylized and balanced result:

They were *neither citadels nor churches, but* frankly and beautifully office-buildings.¹

—Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*, p. 5.

¹ See subsequent discussion of *correlatives*.—EDITOR

But during his son's time it fell less *and* less into use, *and* slowly *and* imperceptively it lost its jovial *but* stately masculinity. . . .

—William Faulkner, *Sartoris*, p. 59.

Her face was worn *but* her hair was black, *and* her eyes *and* lips were pretty.

—Bernard Malamud, “*The Maid’s Shoes*,” *Idiots First*, p. 153.

Implicit in all this discussion of balance and order achieved through the careful use of conjunctions is the existence of parallelism between the elements of the series or structure in question. Sometimes, however, perhaps with even more striking results, the parallelism of a seemingly balanced construction is deliberately disturbed, and the conjunction is then used to separate unlike words or phrases in the attention-getting absence of the expected parallelism. This is discussed in Chapter 14.

The Correlatives

The conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor* are often combined with and preceded by certain *precoordinators*, respectively *both*, *not*, *either*, *neither*, to form the basic *correlatives* or correlative conjunctions *both . . . and*, *not (only) . . . but (also)*, *either . . . or*, *neither . . . nor*. The use of correlatives to join the members of a coordinate structure establishes a unique relationship between the elements of the structure, as the examples will demonstrate. In all the sample sentences, however, it will be apparent that correlative structures require little syntactic change from those employing simple coordinating conjunctions; with correlatives, the conjunction remains where it would ordinarily occur, between the elements joined, and the precoordinator is placed before the first element. Also, as with simple coordinate structures, a certain parallelism usually exists between the elements of the correlative structure:

He’s *either* got to send that diploma back, *or* get them fifty goats from somewhere.

—William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, p. 81.

One might say *either* that Swinburne’s artistic maturity was attained very early, *or* that his development was prematurely arrested.

—Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry*, p. 332.

From now onwards Animal Farm would engage in trade with the neighboring farms: *not*, of course, for any commercial purpose, *but* simply in order to obtain certain materials which were urgently necessary.

—George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, p. 66.

The parallelism, obviously, need not be heavy-handed or even particularly striking, and may frequently not exist at all. On the other hand, it may be emphasized by a repetition of the correlative structure:

He had *neither* companions *nor* friends, church *nor* creed. [second “neither” understood]

—James Joyce, “A Painful Case,” Dubliners, p. 109.

Or, it may be emphasized by the use of a correlative series introduced by the precoordinator and linked by the repetition of either the precoordinator itself or the conjunction; the example repeats the precoordinator, the repetition of the conjunction being much more common with the *either . . . or, neither . . . nor* correlatives:

The next year this became the dominant activity, or rather passivity, of my army career, *not* fighting, *not* marching, *but* this kind of night-time ricochet; for as it turned out I never got to the war.

—John Knowles, A Separate Peace, p. 130.

In order to define the basic differences between correlatives and simple conjunctions with respect to rhetorical effect, it will be useful to examine the following sample sentence, containing both a simple conjunctive series and a correlative structure:

I have forgotten their names—Jacqueline, I think, *or* else Consuela, *or* Gloria *or* Judy *or* June, and their last names were *either* the melodious names of flowers and months *or* the sterner ones of the great American capitalists whose cousins, if pressed, they would confess themselves to be.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, p. 63.

The first “*or*-series” produces a standard additive progression, one that would not be substantially altered by the removal of one or more elements or the addition of others. On the other hand, in the second part of the example, “*either* the melodious names of flowers and months” makes no sense whatever without the addition of “*or* the sterner ones of the great American capitalists. . . .” The correlative creates an order all its own, one of *logical* progression or inevitability in which the idea introduced by the precoordinator is known to be incomplete and remains in a kind of suspension until finally resolved—that is, until the missing material is supplied as introduced by the conjunction. This quality of the correlative to direct the reader to the intended logical and syntactic conclusion allows its use, even without the ordering effects of a strong parallelism, as a “ready-made” source of control over the arrangement of some rather lengthy and complex structures:

Not only were the furnishings old, intrinsically unlovely, and clotted with memory and sentiment, *but* the room itself in past years had served as the arena for countless hockey and football (tackle as well as "touch") games, and there was scarcely a leg on any piece of furniture that wasn't badly nicked or marred.

—*J. D. Salinger*, *Franny and Zooey*, p. 122.

Not like a man who had been peacefully ill . . . *but* like a man who had been through some solitary furnace experience . . . who *not only* had to face the normal hardship . . . *but* was overtaken by the added and unforeseen handicap . . .

—*William Faulkner*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 32.

Conjunctive Adverbs (or Sentence Connectors)

A number of very common connectives are often grouped together and classified as *conjunctive adverbs*, or *sentence connectors*, so called because they share the qualities of both a coordinating conjunction and a kind of adverbial sentence modifier. The most significant distinction between the conjunction and the conjunctive adverb, however, lies not in the rather vague adverbial quality of the latter, but in its greater syntactic mobility. Coordinating conjunctions are always found between the clauses they connect; the conjunctive adverbs are considerably more flexible, both in placement and effect. For instance, the seeming rigidity and formality of many conjunctive adverbs in stressed position at the first of a sentence can frequently be softened by moving them elsewhere in the sentence. The varying degrees of emphasis and of logical precision achieved by this sort of positional shift point up the dual nature of the conjunctive adverbs as both conjunctions *and* adverbs, both structural and content words. Indeed, they seem to carry some sort of content when they comment on and qualify the relationship of the sentences that, as structural words, it is their outward service only to connect. When used carefully by accomplished writers, then, the conjunctive adverb can be employed with the multiple advantages of subtlety, clarity, and precision, and without the disadvantage, in fiction, of excessive formality.

The following sentences display some common conjunctive adverbs in different syntactic positions:

Invariably, *also*, the latest presents from Ramona's admirers were displayed.

—*Saul Bellow*, *Herzog*, p. 193.

It is, *besides*, far to the west of all direct European influence.

—*William Carlos Williams*, *Selected Essays*, p. 222.

He reflected, *however*, that Mrs. Struthers's Sunday evenings were not like a ball, and that her guests, as if to minimise their delinquency, usually went early.

—*Edith Wharton*, *The Age of Innocence*, p. 155.

Miss Brodie, *however*, had already fastened on Mary Macgregor who was nearest to her.

—*Muriel Spark*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, p. 73.

Indeed, everyone who knew Matt recognized it and all our friends came to sympathize with him and with me and to see how we took our misfortune.

—*Joyce Cary*, *Herself Surprised*, p. 56.

The hopeful attitudes are phenomena, *indeed*, about which we are today somewhat embarrassed: the culture's youthful indiscretions and extravagances.

—*R. W. B. Lewis*, *The American Adam*, p. 195.

Other common conjunctive adverbs include *too*, *hence*, *consequently*, *nevertheless*, *then*, *otherwise*, *on the other hand*, *likewise*, *therefore*, and *similarly*, and many others. Their placement in the sentence, as the examples indicate, is generally a matter of the writer's discretion, but certain standards of punctuation are usually followed; the conjunctive adverb is set off from the rest of the sentence by commas, and, when joining two independent clauses, is preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma. Even the rule requiring the semicolon may be waived by the creative writer, here with the effect of an informal parataxis:

She was willing to die for him, *therefore* could he not live for her?

—*Robert Penn Warren*, *World Enough and Time*, p. 367.

This is a rather hazardous usage for the amateur, however, and even for the professional who has a strong-willed editor.

Overuse, not misuse, is the most frequent error with conjunctive adverbs, and the result is invariably either clumsy or stilted, and usually both. Professional writers, even essayists, are quite sparing in their use of these rather weighty connectives, and their appearance in prose fiction is generally limited to a few of the shorter and more common ones.

Coordination

The process of coordination, simply stated, involves the linking of structures of equal grammatical rank—single words and phrases in elementary compound groups, independent clauses in compound sentences, and

even entire sentences when all but the first are begun with a conjunction. The coordinating conjunctions and the correlatives serve to produce this coordination by joining the grammatically equivalent elements in question.

It is overly simple to describe the conjunctions as coordinators without certain qualifications. Even *and* is not purely a coordinator. Whatever the units it combines, *and* usually indicates an additive relationship, and sometimes it intensifies, or indicates continuous and repeated action, as in: *She talked and talked and talked. We went around and around.* The words *but* and *yet* indicate contrast, opposition, or negation; *so* and *for* show several relationships, among them purpose, cause, result, or inference; *or* and *nor* indicate what might be described as alternation, choice, or opposition. Obviously, conjunctions cannot be considered as empty connecting words, and there is opportunity, which professional writers utilize, for considerable subtlety. Therefore, to assert that the process of coordination has a capacity, not for ranking ideas, but only for connecting those of the same rank is an oversimplification. Admittedly, though, there is usually a sense of *grammatical* balance that characterizes coordination, even if there is a *logical* inequality between the coordinated elements.

The only situations in which the process of coordination seems to combine elements of both grammatically and logically equal rank with significant frequency is at the level of single words and short phrases:

The raisins and almonds and figs and apples and oranges and chocolates and sweets were now passed about the table and Aunt Julia invited all the guests to have either port or sherry.

—James Joyce, "The Dead," Dubliners, p. 201.

The most common conjunction, *and*, is also the most common structure word employed in coordination and is, in fact, the purest coordinator. *And* is also the most common connector for a syntactic arrangement that might be called slack coordination, by which various elements seem to be merely collected rather than strictly coordinated. An example follows in an unusually long sentence where the concern for equal rank is apparently absent and where the ideas conveyed seem grouped in simple temporal succession for the purpose of verbal expedience, undoubtedly the effect intended by the author to suggest a kind of untutored expression:

And he and his father and mother and Catherine got in the front seat and his Grandpa Follet and Aunt Jessie and her baby and Jim-Wilson and Ettie Lou and Aunt Sadie and her baby got in the back seat and Uncle Ralph stood on the running board . . . and that was all there was room for, and . . .

—James Agee, A Death in the Family, p. 171.

The calculated carelessness of this rather arbitrary type of coordination, in the extreme, produces some very striking effects by the juxtaposition of logically disparate elements:

Once upon a time *and* a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road. . . .

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 7.

The room was very full *and* who were they all?

—Gertrude Stein, “*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*,” Selected Writing of Gertrude Stein, p. 12.

Sometimes the linking of disparate syntactic units constitutes a kind of shorthand in which the author tosses in a phrase to perform the task that would seem to demand a clause:

I realized then that I never had forgotten it, *and* a good thing too.

—James Gould Cozzens, “*Something about a Dollar*,” Children and Others, p. 104.

No reader of *Huckleberry Finn* can deny the success of this slack coordination in suggesting a naïve or unsophisticated view of the world as a simple series of mental and physical impressions. Since its use is understandably limited to a very few types of prose, slack coordination may point unintentionally to nothing more than careless thought.

A loose coordinative effect, however, in milder form, characterizes a great deal of common grammatical connection. Naturally, the colloquial ease of the facile coordinations above are a far cry from the strict, highly rhetorical coordination in the next passage, one element balancing neatly its coordinate partner, the result heightening what is by definition an *equality* of rank to the level of a pervasive *symmetry*:

The title sets the theme *and* tells the story. Civilization is disintegrated *and* meaning is disintegrated *and* despair *and* disillusion stalk the waste land of the world. Now Eliot undertook to delineate this disintegration of thoughts *and* things *and* processes by an analogous disintegration of speech *and* technique. Chaos of the world *and* the soul is set forth by the learned *and* calculated chaos of the poem’s method. . . . Men not ignoble have gone down before life in other ages *and* wandered in waste lands *and* taken refuge in some monastery or hermitage *either* of the soul *or* of the body *or* of both.

—Ludwig Lewisohn, *Expression in America*, p. 587.

Yet this formal coordination is itself very rare, and, as a general rule, most prose tends to mediate both extremes by setting up a syntactic order

that integrates the very loose, narrative, almost conversational coordinations with the more literary and polished type. Thus most expert writers, unless they are in search of special extreme effects, try to contain the rambling freedom of one type of coordination with the rigorous balance and precision of the other to produce a controlled coordinative statement. Examples of such middle-of-the-road coordination follow, in structures of varying complexity:

The stains on the ceiling assumed strange shapes, *and* she invented stories around them, *but* after a while she would be sweating with terror or the force of her own imagination, *and* all the time Sister Alfreda sat *and* wordlessly waited the Hour.

—Auberon Waugh, *The Foxglove Saga*, p. 252.

They plummeted a few feet *and* then little parachutes opened *and* drifted small packages silently *and* slowly downward toward the earth, *and* the planes raised their throttles *and* gained altitude, *and* then cut their throttles *and* circled again, *and* more of the little objects plummeted down, *and* then the planes turned *and* flew back in the direction from which they had come.

—John Steinbeck, *The Moon Is Down*, p. 151.

He looked out of his clouded eyes at the faint steady lightning in the east. *But* he calmed himself, *and* took out the heavy maize cakes *and* the tea, *and* put them upon a stone. *And* he gave thanks, *and* broke the cakes *and* ate them, *and* drank of the tea. Then he gave himself over to deep *and* earnest prayer, *and*, after each petition, he raised his eyes *and* looked to the east. *And* the east lightened *and* lightened, till he knew that the time was not far off. *And* when he expected it, he rose to his feet *and* took off his hat *and* laid it down on the earth *and* clasped his hands before him. *And* while he stood there the sun rose in the east.

—Alan Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, p. 277.

The last example above is the next-to-last paragraph in the novel from which it comes and is used very effectively in that position, for much the same reasons that the examples to follow, with coordination both loose and formal in varying degrees and combinations, work well as the closing lines of other novels and stories. There is something of a relaxed quality, sometimes a kind of psychological calm or resolution, in the nature of good coordination that often seems more appropriate than subordination for concluding passages, especially in narrative prose. Coordination is free from the careful weighting, ordering, and evaluating of subordination, and even when a coordinative statement is cast so as to betray a highly con-

scious design, the imposed structuring seems just that—imposed—resulting from poetic rather than analytic attention, implying some sort of aesthetic order or resolution rather than an authentic rendering of the ultimately irresolvable shades of logical distinction in a complex reality. More subordination in the following passages, then, though equally useful elsewhere for an entirely different effect, would destroy the relaxed, slackened quality of the predominant coordination:

He turned out the light *and* went into Jem's room. He would be there all night, *and* he would be there when Jem waked up in the morning.

—Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *closing lines*.

He smiled *and* took her hand *and* pressed it. They got up *and* walked out of the gallery. They stood for a moment at the balustrade *and* looked at Trafalgar Square. Cabs *and* omnibuses hurried to *and* fro, *and* crowds passed, hastening in every direction, *and* the sun was shining.

—W. Somerset Maugham, *Of Human Bondage*, *closing lines*.

. . . But long before that time the lizards had come back upon the rocks, the bees were storing honey from thyme *and* cistus *and* the young people had traded horses for goats *and* sheep *and* cattle *and* pearls for vines with Noah's kingdom *and* they had hounds for hunting *and* to guard their flocks against wolves. But that is no longer the story of Fan and Niss, *but* the history of mankind.

—David Garnett, *Two by Two*, *closing lines*.

And at last I step out into the morning *and* I lock the door behind me. I cross the road *and* drop the keys into the old lady's mailbox. *And* I look up the road, where a few people stand, men *and* women, waiting for the morning bus. They are very vivid beneath the awakening sky, *and* the horizon beyond them is beginning to flame. The morning weighs on my shoulders with the dreadful weight of hope *and* I take the blue envelope which Jacques has sent me *and* tear it slowly into many pieces, watching them dance in the wind, watching the wind carry them away. *Yet*, as I turn *and* begin walking toward the waiting people, the wind blows some of them back on me.

—James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, *closing lines*.

This same effect can be prolonged over several terminal paragraphs:

And Kino drew back his arm *and* flung the pearl with all his might. Kino *and* Juana watch it go, winking *and* glimmering under the

setting sun. They saw the little splash in the distance, *and* they stood side by side watching the place for a long time.

And the pearl settled into the lovely green water *and* dropped toward the bottom. The waving branches of the algae called to it *and* beckoned to it. The lights on its surface were green *and* lovely. It settled down to the sand bottom among the fern-like plants. Above, the surface of the water was a green mirror. *And* the pearl lay on the floor of the sea. A crab scampering over the bottom raised a little cloud of sand, *and* when it settled the pearl was gone.

And the music of the pearl drifted to a whisper *and* disappeared.

—John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*, closing paragraphs.

And seeing it *and* holding to it, he felt a complete bursting *and* astonishment *and* delight that he had at last caught hold of this, *and* after this surely there was nothing else to learn *and* he yielded himself because he was in fact back on Brab *and* he felt the sure sense of his horse's gallop *and* he wanted to gather him up *and* hold him together for the jump, *and* it came to him then that it was a splendid run, a magnificent run, from there to here, *and* opening his eyes wide *and* seeing them there *and* not there, with Ellen up on the Appaloosa, he could hear the excited grating sound of his own breath *and* he drew on everything he had left *and* called out in a voice that shook him, "What a run! What a run!"

And they all lurched out of their poses for an instant *and* he wondered if he had actually spoken, *but* he wanted to laugh because it did not matter, *for* he felt old Brab gathering himself up, *and* Apple was holding level, *and* the two horses launched out in a true thrust of confident power *and* he felt the lifting start of the sailing, soaring, beautifully clean leap.

—John Espey, *The Anniversaries*, closing paragraphs.

Finally, this relaxation of grammatical tensions through an unrigorous loose coordination is not exclusive to fictional prose and can operate successfully in the conclusion of a nonfiction work as a contrast to the more taut and demanding structures of predominantly subordinate sentence patterning:

The south wind blows cold *and* we shall have frost. Slowly the seasons become acceptable. My shadow falls south, *and* east is on my left. Gradually the compass begins to make sense. *Australopithecus africanus* lies buried *not* in limey caves, *but* in my heart *and* your heart, *and* in the black man's down the street. We are Cain's children, all of us. Slowly, ever so slowly, comprehension *and* compassion become possible things, *and* the transparent curtain is gone *and* faces

are no longer strange. Old tides pull at me *and* ancient swells sweep in from forgotten seas *and* support me, *and* I have a lightness, *and* I take my coat because these June nights can be bitter, *and* there is a star in the southern sky, the most magnificent star that I have ever seen, *and* I am beginning to know its name, Alpha Centauri.

—Robert Ardrey, *African Genesis*, closing paragraph.

Chapter 8

Dependent Clauses

Analysis and diagramming became ends in themselves. Students spent month after month learning to distinguish not only between adjectival and adverbial clauses, but between adverbial clauses of time, manner, condition, concession, and a number of other things; and strong stands were taken about whether *while* could be used adversatively, or only temporally. Shibboleths multiplied, and were almost never abandoned. I once traced a rule, illustrated by the same sentence, through thirty grammars published over a period of a hundred and fifty years. No writer admitted that he had taken it from an earlier book, and no writer ever changed the illustration, because the point at issue was so artificial that it was almost impossible to find another sentence that contained it. Unfortunately (if you are curious) a war came along about then and I lost my notes. But perhaps it is just as well I have forgotten the point at issue. Somebody might take it up again.

—L. M. Myers, *The Roots of Modern English*, p. 253.

This chapter will not distinguish between all the kinds of clauses L. M. Myers mentions, and it will not draw on earlier grammars for illustrative sentences. Our concern here, as throughout the book, is not with labels, or with shibboleths, or with artificial decrees about usage, but with the language as it is actually used by good twentieth-century writers. Dozens of labels might be gathered to describe the structures displayed here under the simple heading DEPENDENT CLAUSES. This chapter will distinguish two large categories of dependent clauses and will label them *relative* and *subordinate*. Then it will demonstrate the main positions that these clauses occupy in sentence patterns.

Perhaps three points should be made at the outset. (1) Any sentence, any independent clause that is a statement, may be converted into

a dependent clause and then may be tacked on, or inserted into, another sentence. (2) In any of the kernel sentence positions occupied by nouns, adjectives, or adverbs, a dependent clause may be substituted. In addition, a dependent clause may serve in other positions as either a bound or a free modifier. (3) Prose generally benefits from having the dependent clauses *reduced* where possible, to other structures such as the appositive, the nominative absolute, the infinitive, or the participial phrase.

Relative and Subordinate Clauses

The two italicized words below form a relative clause:

The chapters *that follow* constitute neither an intellectual history of Victorian England nor an ordered survey of Victorian letters.

—*Jerome H. Buckley, The Victorian Temper, p. vii.*

A subordinate clause starts the second sentence here:

But rebellion per se is not a virtue. *If it were*, we would have some heroics on very low levels.

—*Norman Thomas, Great Dissenters, p. 13.*

These are lower limits. They are the shortest possible examples of the two types of *dependent clause*. Any clause, of course, must contain a subject and a predicate. A *relative clause* substitutes a *relative pronoun* (*who*, *which*, *that*)¹ for some corresponding structure in a hypothetical independent clause. In the above two-word sample, the relative pronoun that introduces the clause stands for the subject, and only the verb is needed to complete the clause. There is no substitution in *subordinate clauses*, where a *subordinator* (*because*, *if*, *as*, *while*, *when*, *that . . .*) is added to a complete clause in order to connect it to the main body of the sentence. Yet to qualify at once even this most general definition, consider the next pair of sentences:

I am not alone, then, in feeling guilty *when I read a book I don't have to read*. My friends in one socio-economic stratum seem to have friends in other socio-economic strata *who feel just as dissatisfied the moment the harness is removed from their backs*.

—*Walter Kerr, The Decline of Pleasure, p. 46.*

When and *who* signal a subordinate and a relative clause respectively. The italicized clauses are dependent clauses also, in spite of the absence of a relative pronoun or a subordinator—“*that I don't have to read*,” for instance, and something like “at the moment *when the harness is removed*.”

¹ Or a *relative adverb* (*how*, *where*, *when*, *why*). Some dependent clauses beginning with these words might be classified as either *relative* or *subordinate*. For the present purpose, the label makes little difference.

Subordinate Clauses, Examples

It is the subordinate clause that is particularly open to a great number of variations, some so common as to have replaced the basic grammatical pattern in standard usage, some more unusual:

Yet the voluntary source is almost as rare as *hen's teeth*. [as hen's teeth are]

—*Joseph and Stewart Alsop*, The Reporter's Trade, p. 8.

Come daylight [When daylight has come], the fear vanishes but not the awe or the secret pleasure.

—*Jacques Barzun*, God's Country and Mine, p. 3.

I was almost swept past the subway, *so swiftly were the people milling around on the sidewalk*. [because the people were . . .]

—*John D. Spooner*, The Pheasant-lined Vest of Charlie Freedman, p. 23.

Below, the “just . . . so” frame seems to operate like a correlative structure to link the subordinate clause to the subsequent main clause:

And *just as* the mother feels acutely the slightest criticism of her child, *so any criticism of her book even by the most negligible nitwit gave Virginia acute pain*.

—*Leonard Woolf*, Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919–1939, p. 57.

Instead of the tight, correlative-like structure above, the next sample looks at first almost like parataxis (see Chapter 7). On second thought, it seems more a variant of something like “As he thought more, he raged more”:

The more he thought, the more he raged, aloud and privately.

—*John Updike*, The Same Door, p. 187.

Further examples of the very common left-branching subordination follow, two more kernels and a longer compound subordinate:

While politicians ranted, the army acted.

—*Richard Condon*, An Infinity of Mirrors, p. 49.

As westerns go, this one doesn't.

—“Cinema,” Time, August 2, 1968, p. 64.

If a man cannot write clean English, or if he affects, by calculated dubieties, meanings of which his intelligence is incapable, he deserves no one's serious consideration.

—*Archibald MacLeish*, “‘Why Can't They Say What They Mean?’” To the Young Writer, ed. A. L. Bader, p. 35.

The next very effective right-branching arrangement is capped off neatly by a quick subordinate kernel after a series of nominative absolutes:

They sat there, he leaning back on his elbows, his face tilted upward, eyes closed, somehow more arrogant than ever, *while she read a book.*

—Audrey Callahan Thomas, “*A Winter’s Tale*,” Ten Green Bottles, p. 150.

In the coming passage, subordinate clauses interrupt three sentences in a row with qualifying mid-branches:

Anti-intellectualism, as I hope these pages have made clear, is founded in the democratic institutions and the egalitarian sentiments of this country. The intellectual class, *whether or not it enjoys many of the privileges of an elite,* is of necessity an elite in its manner of thinking and functioning. Up to about 1890, most American intellectuals were rooted in a leisured patrician class which, *whatever its limitations [were] on other counts,* had no difficulty in accepting its own identity as an elite.

—Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*, p. 407.

Relative Clauses, Examples

Whether in first, middle, or final position, a similar variety of location and complexity exists for relative clauses. Like the subordinate examples just collected, relative clauses can range anywhere from kernels to very involved constructions. Relative clauses are perhaps more often bound into the grammatical texture of the main clause without any punctuation, except when there is internal compounding. Two short relative clauses, for example, provide the double subject of the next sentence:

What this man does, and what he is supposed to do, are subjects of great confusion among laymen, ministers, doctors and even psychiatrists themselves, but in broad terms his assignment is clear.

—Richard Lemon, “*Psychiatry: The Uncertain Science*,” The Saturday Evening Post, August 10, 1968, p. 37.

A long relative clause beginning with *that* suspends the main point of the next sample:

I still count the little preamble *that begins as the houselights go down and the footlights glow and goes on to accompany the slow rise of the curtain on the opening scene of Carmen* as the most cunningly contrived passage of descriptive music I have ever heard.

—Charles W. Morton, *It Has Its Charms*, p. 71.

In final compound positions, relative clauses figure importantly in the next two examples:

Colleges insist on graduating students who can't write an intelligible English sentence, who don't speak three words of a foreign language, who have read neither Marx nor Keynes nor Freud nor Joyce, and who never will.

—*Cecelia Holland, "I Don't Trust Anyone under 30,"* The Saturday Evening Post, August 10, 1968, p. 12.

Winston Churchill is, beyond all doubt that statesman *who became the greatest historian*, and that historian *who became the greatest statesman* in the long annals of England.

—*Henry Steele Commager, "The Statesman as Historian,"* Saturday Review, May 18, 1968, p. 26.

The next sentence moves to the right at great length, through a complex formation headed by the relative *who*:

There are still other men of a deeper and more sensitive nature who, in their growing up, introject the laws and mandates of society into their hearts and come in time to feel and accept these acquired notions of right and wrong as native impulses springing out of the depths of their being and, if they are ever tempted to violate these absorbed codes, act as if the sky itself were about to crash upon their heads, as though the very earth were about to swing catastrophically out of its orbit . . .

—*Richard Wright, Savage Holiday*, p. 31.

A reader may feel that this sentence is successful, that it works in spite of its huge relative imbalance. Almost any reader, however, would admit that too many sentences like it in one place would be clumsy, to say the least. There are milder forms of clumsiness, too, for which the relative clause can be held responsible if thoughtlessly used. The two in the following sentence seem arbitrary and awkward, a facile but ill-advised way of stuffing the syntax with extra material:

According to the report, which was adopted in amended form, the Work Group, which was established in April, had adopted as a first model in its programme of work a study of the United States Military Observers. . . .

—*UN Monthly Chronicle, July 1968*, p. 49.

The next is quite a mild form of what Porter G. Perrin calls a “house-that-Jack-built sentence”:²

² *Writer's Guide and Index to English*, p. 790.

The trip began in London, *where* the writer interviewed several African students *who* had fled the Soviet Union *where* they claimed they had suffered all sorts of racial indignities. . . .

—Victor Lasky, “Prologue,” *The Ugly Russian*.

Relatives piled one on the other in this way for too long can easily become annoying. Liable to even worse problems of this sort are *embedded* structures, where the piling of clauses is done internally, one within the other, rather than one after the other:

That women could write poetry and fiction that could command the market the men were forced to admit. . . .

—Fred Lewis Pattee, *The Feminine Fifties*, p. 99.

This single embedding may cause no problems, but take it another step or two, as in the next production, and confusion easily sets in:

That women could write poetry and fiction that could command a market that the men were forced to acknowledge was impressive.

Even when it is neither absurd nor ambiguous, however, this relative embedding, usually far from the patterns of ordinary speech, may well seem overly formal and self-conscious. The successful logic of the following embedded sentence is helped by the comma that sets off the second *which*-clause from the first:

The inner door, *which led to the passage, which in turn led to the storm door*, was beside the stove.

—John Steinbeck, *The Moon Is Down*, p. 122.

The witty use of piled subordinate clauses in this excerpt is effective just because it is a little silly:

One felt that they felt that all they had to do was say, “I’m at Benton,” and their hearer would say, raising his hand: “Enough!”

—Randall Jarrell, *Pictures from an Institution*, p. 105.

Equally an exception to any suggested habits in the use of relative and subordinate clauses is the next complicated offering:

No English scholar has better shown, by what he was even more than by what he wrote, how, in a world that sometimes seems to have forgotten more than it has learnt since Athens fell, the spirit of Socrates can live again.

—F. M. Cornford, *Before and After Socrates*, p. x.

After the first two relative clauses introduced by “what,” “how” next begins a relative clause that itself includes one introduced by “that,” which

in turn includes the two subordinate clauses "it has learnt" and "since Athens fell," and which only after all this lands at the main idea of the sentence. But the complications are functional, and they work very well to suspend for added emphasis the main point of it all.

Ideas in Dependent Clauses

These examples, the good ones and the less fortunate, have displayed just some of the many uses and abuses of dependent clauses. They have also shown that the term *dependent* should be taken only in the grammatical sense. There need be nothing weak or second-rate about relative or subordinate clauses by comparison with the main clauses to which they are attached. To reread the sentence just quoted from Cornford, where everything after the first six words is dependent material, is to see this at once. Only the most dangerously rigid rules would demand a rewriting of this sentence to get its main ideas into its main clause. Yet students are often encouraged, in the abstract, to do roughly this sort of thing, especially in the case of subordinate clauses. Again and again, grammar books counsel beginning writers to think of these clauses as subordinate in more than the grammatical sense. (Since no one seems to understand the name *relative clause*, problems provoked by nomenclature do not arise.) Faced with the evidence, however, who would care to maintain that the important ideas of the following three sentences, for instance, are located in the main clauses, with subordinate ideas relegated to appropriate dependent clauses?

Some observers believe that at the point where these two tendencies converge, the American opera of the future will emerge. Others believe that opera and the popular theater should go their separate ways, lest the result should be an unsatisfactory hybrid. Whatever may be the final outcome, it is certain that there will be much interchange of influences among the various types of musical theater in America.

—*Gilbert Chase, America's Music, p. 633.*

The well-constructed sentence offered next derives its drama, its momentum and impact, from the careful placement and pacing of free modifiers within the long subordinate clause, itself in free modification set off by a comma and introduced by *when*:

And we cannot I think do better than leave him at this moment, when, in a brief interlude of peace, with all his great achievement behind, and nothing before but the weariness the fever and the fret that ended nearly eighteen months later in Severn's arms in Rome, in

this brief space, in the autumn fields around Winchester, for the last time in this world his own free master, he found all his disciplined powers of observation, of imagination, of craftsmanship, combining in one moment of power to produce the most serenely flawless poem in our language, TO AUTUMN:

—M. R. Ridley, Keats's Craftsmanship, p. 289.

These last may be exaggerated examples of the possible subordinate relation of main clauses to their grammatical dependents. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the distinction between main and subordinate is, in general, merely structural, not logical.

Bound and Free Modification

Further, the question of how and where to locate ideas, in free or in bound relationships, suggests a second area of difficulty with dependent clauses, and one aggravated again by many grammar books. Too often, students are asked to use bound modifiers to develop and modify ideas in their sentences, rather than free additions. And too often these bound elements are entire dependent clauses that result, at worst, in painful relative embeddings and heavy subordinate imbalance, or, at best, in a kind of slow, even, unaccented prose without the rhythms of contrast upon which good writing depends. (See Chapter 10.) Once more, as with the bad advice about subordination, it is complexity, variety, and interest that suffer. Bound modifiers tend to make for more difficult reading than do free modifiers. Sentences with many bound modifiers often require the reader to hold in mind long unbroken segments, often difficult to decode. Observe the following passage, constructed mainly with bound modifiers. Among the many types of bound modifiers, including many embedded prepositional phrases, are the alternating relative and subordinate clauses in italics:

This is not just a matter of enlarged responsibility *that is proportionate to the growth of the nation, the intensification of its problems, or its involvement in world affairs at a time when the world has become a single enclosure.* The most bruising single factor today has to do with the prodigious increase in the potency and number of pressure points from within and without the Government. America has always been a nation of multiple pressures; this was part of the original design. The fear *that one man or a small group of men could capture a nation and perpetuate themselves in power* convinced the American Constitution-makers of the need to make the United States Government a pluralistic enterprise. The duties and authority of the Presidency were carefully limited.

The original design did not seek to cripple the Presidency or the Congress or the other sections of government; the main purpose was to make power proportionate to designated authority. *What the Constitution-makers could not anticipate was that within two centuries an imbalance would be created because of vast pressures brought to bear directly on the Presidency.*

—Norman Cousins, “Is the Presidency Manageable?” Saturday Review, April 13, 1968, p. 28.

It is much easier to decode the following passage, which mixes bound and free modifiers and includes among the latter, three relative clauses and two subordinate:

At present we shall represent the literary public by a single sympathetic and informed person, *whom we shall call the critic*. The critic, then, is exposed to a series of impressions from literature, and by responding to these as carefully as possible, he develops, by practice, a skill and flexibility, *for which the traditional term in English is taste*. Taste, *when acquired*, may in turn lead to general theories about the process or products of literature, *if a general theory happens to be the bent of a critic's interest*. The impact of literature on a critic, and the critic's responses to it, make up an area of criticism that is best called rhetorical. Rhetorical criticism in this sense is concerned with the “effects” of literature: it is in other words practical criticism. Reversing the direction of this flow of literature toward the critic gives us the conception of the study of literature as organized by a theory of criticism, *which is what is usually meant by poetics*.

—Northrop Frye, *The Well-Tempered Critic*, pp. 112–113.

Sentence Openers and Inversion

. . . We are still eager to put the climax in the end position, if we can. One place where it is possible, in fact quite easy, is in the positioning of clauses: *After he ate he left the house* answers the question, "What did he do after he ate?"; *He left the house after he ate* answers the question "When did he leave the house?" The climax expression comes last. A nicer example is the "introduction," where we are presenting something for the first time on the mental scene: *Around the corner ran two dogs* brings the dogs into view more effectively than does *Two dogs ran around the corner* . . .

A group of Czech linguists refers to this tendency of many languages to put the known first and the unknown or unexpected last as "sentence perspective."¹ They point out that, in order to communicate the sentence dynamics that has been partially lost by the stiffening of word order, English must resort to other strategems, and these are among the things that give the language its distinctive syntactic appearance.

—Dwight Bolinger, *Aspects of Language*, pp. 119–120.

The Subject as Sentence Opener

Most sentences in English open with the subject, and they move from what is known to what is unknown. This may seem an obvious statement, but it is probably one of the most important grammatical observations to be made about English prose style. In a thousand sentences from

¹ See Jan Firbas, "From Comparative Word-order Studies," *Brno Studies in English* 4.111–122 (1964).

contemporary fiction and nonfiction (a 25-sentence sample from each of 40 authors) I count 756 in which the writer begins with the subject or uses no more than three words preceding it. Francis Christensen found almost the same percentage of subject openers in four thousand sentences; he reports that in the first 200 sentences from selected works of 20 American authors, the writers place something before the subject in less than one-fourth of their sentences (24.47 percent).² He observes further that these writers use almost nothing before the subject except adverbial modifiers (23 sentences in 100); they use verbal groups before only one sentence in 85, and inverted elements before only one in 300, and they open nearly 7 percent of their sentences with a coordinating conjunction such as *and* or *but*.

It would seem that teachers who have been urging their students to “introduce variety” into their sentence openers should stop giving this advice, and students should stop taking it. The better students have always listened courteously and ignored such counsel anyway, perhaps intuitively imitating the literature they read. And, obviously, any pedagogical mandate against opening a sentence with *and* or *but* should be rescinded.

In sentences that begin with the subject, the first word of the subject is most often *the* or some other determiner such as *both*, *such*, *some*, *few*; a demonstrative (*this*, *that*, *these*, *those*), or a possessive (*his*, *her*, *its*, *my*, *your*), all of these often linking the sentence to something that has gone before. A noun phrase functioning as subject frequently includes, besides a determiner, a predeterminer, and adjectives or nouns as modifiers preceding the headword. Both nouns and pronouns when they function as subjects and open the sentence, often immediately establish a link with something that has gone before. The simple coordinating conjunctions—*and*, *but*, *for*, *so*, *or*, *nor*, and *yet*—serve to connect or contrast the new sentence with its predecessors, and to reduce repetition.

The frequency of certain initial words in subject-opened sentences varies with the author and the kind of prose, but the following counts in an essay by D. H. Lawrence are not unusual. Of 439 sentences, 50 open with the word *the*; 34 with *and*; 29 with *but*; 7 with *so*; 7 with *for*, and 3 with *yet*. Longer connectors—conjunctive adverbs such as *consequently*, *nevertheless*, *accordingly*, *in that case*, *likewise*, *therefore*, *similarly*, and so on—appear as the initial word less frequently than the simple coordinators and less frequently in professional prose than in amateur writing. In the Lawrence essay, only 7 instances occur in the 439 sentences; *hence* and *at the same time* each appears twice; *in short*, *for this reason*, and *that is to say* each appears once.

² *Notes toward a New Rhetoric*, pp. 46–47.

Sentence Openers Other than the Subject

No number of samples could demonstrate the relative frequency with which subject-opened sentences occur in good writing, and no accumulation of unhappy deviations from the standard sentence order could prove that openers other than subjects cannot be effective. Indeed, the latter assertion is false and just as misleading as the instruction that diverts students from the use of subject openers. The examples that follow, then, are chosen simply to demonstrate certain kinds of sentence openers, given variations from the normal, and to suggest their use only when there is a reason for it. Francis Christensen recommends, in particular, that teachers might try discouraging verbal groups as openers, except possibly gerund phrases.

VERBALS AS OPENERS

Since the opening verbal modifies before the fact, so to speak, its character is deliberately vague, unresolved, and even suspenseful. But its effect may be merely uncertain and confused, even in professional hands, if it is not employed with the specific intent of holding or suspending the subject-reference up to a point, and then saying something about it. An opening participial construction such as that in the following sentence builds up a syntactic expectation that is denied when the expected subject [he] does not appear. Thus, the participial construction is said to "dangle":

Coming out into the late night and walking round the building with the secretive grating roll of the stony path beneath his steps, the evening throbbed back through him as blood thumps slowly, reliving effort, after exertion.

—Nadine Gordimer, "In the Beginning," *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*, p. 243.

Although sentences like the above occasionally turn up in the work of good writers, for the most part professional writers seem to take care that the intended noun or pronoun is placed next to the participle, as in the examples below. The first two open with gerund phrases, that is, the -ing form of the verb used as object of a preposition:

After having his tea he unpacked and arranged his books; then he sat down and tried to read; but he was depressed.

—W. Somerset Maugham, *Of Human Bondage*, p. 189.

In sketching the emergent fable urged by the critics on American writers, I have largely followed the hopeful line.

—R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam*, p. 90.

In common use are participial modifiers where the present or past participle is used in an adjectival function:

Quickened by this spiritual refreshment, it had a boom.

—Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*, p. 178.

Brought up to command respect, he is often slightly withdrawn and uneasy now that he finds himself in a world where his authority has lately become less and less unquestionable.

—John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, p. 77.

Verbal openers often use the progressive participle:

Sitting down behind many layers of glass in a sort of green leather conservatory, we started to town.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 64.

Slighting to some extent, like his master, the power of action and the dramatic articulation of events to give structure to the novel, Lubbock tended to subordinate everything to the portraiture of great characters.

—Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, p. 69.

Constructions formed from *having* plus a past participle are prevalent in journalistic style and are overused as openers in poorer student prose:

Having seen his long series of pastel paintings last January in a museum exhibition in Rochester, we invited the artist, J. Erwin Porter, to explain how he came to this singular study.

—Norman Kent, “*The Erie Canal: A Record in Pastels by J. Erwin Porter*,” *American Artist*, Summer 1966, p. 46.

Infinitive openers like the one below are far less versatile than the participles; they occur often in relation to something that has preceded, and need not be so carefully guarded against as some of the more tempting participial openers.

But *to tell the truth*, if it had not been for Nick and his socialism I should never have bothered with politics at all.

—William Golding, *Free Fall*, p. 95.

THE NOMINATIVE ABSOLUTE AS OPENER

Similarly, the nominative absolute as opener is a less frequent source of confusion and error, although its unique cumulative effect usually makes it more valuable at the end of a sentence. Since it carries its own subject, any problems of subject-reference disappear:

His black heart beating wildly, he rushed over to his unconscious daughter and brought her to.

—J. D. Salinger, “*The Laughing Man*,” *Nine Stories*, p. 55.

ADVERBIALS AS OPENERS

Adverbial structures, not verbal formulations, are by far the most common of the materials variously chosen by experts to precede their subjects. Adverbial elements traditionally enjoy the most flexibility among syntactic units and can move rather freely to the front of a sentence, whether they are one-word sentence modifiers like *obviously*, *certainly*, *apparently*, or adverbial subordinate clauses like:

While it is true that the good writer creates his audience, and the bad writer creates himself out of the whole cloth of his view of himself as perpetuator of the intellectual status quo, creativity cannot breathe in a total vacuum.

—*Edward Albee, "Creativity and Commitment," Saturday Review, June 4, 1966, p. 26.*

The more common adverbs and adverb phrases of time, place, and manner, exemplified in order in the following sentence, often serve as openers:

Early one morning, under the arc of a lamp, carefully, silently, in smock and rubber gloves, old Doctor Manza grafted a cat's head on to a chicken's trunk.

—*Dylan Thomas, "The Lemon," Adventures in the Skin Trade, p. 120.*

There is often a good deal of logical justification, especially in narrative prose, for knowing the "when, where, how" of an action before discovering other details. At least there is more logic to anticipating a subject with adverbial material than with participial openers in which certain details of action are presented before the subject of this predication is disclosed.

The verbal and adverbial structures so far described, particularly when functioning as sentence modifiers, can appear rather unobtrusively, if not too often, at the first of a sentence. In addition to these, however, certain inverted elements are sometimes used as sentence openers. Most of the previously discussed openers result simply from the placement before the subject of a modification structure, usually adverbial and usually taking the entire sentence as its head. Inverted constructions, on the other hand, actually draw upon the rest of the normal sentence for this opener, lifting it from the complete subject or predicate and from its standard position after the simple subject.

Inversion

We approach an English sentence with certain expectations, conditioned by our long acquaintance with the kernel patterns. We come expect-

ing a subject first, or soon, and next—only then—a predicate. Though we hardly notice this order every time we meet it, we do tend to notice anything that is radically out of place. If we come upon a question, an exclamation, an imperative, we readily exchange our normal expectations for a new set, with which we are also quite familiar. This is automatic. What remains to be sampled are those many other kinds of inversions that are not tied so closely to special meaning or tone, yet are often confronted in every sort of prose. In reading, we may actually fail to note the dislocation. This might well happen, for instance, in the rare case where an inversion actually clarifies.

She called Dolly Dollyheart, but she called Verena That One.

This is certainly better, and reads more smoothly, in the author's chosen syntax, below, which inverts the transitive pattern and places the direct object before the subject to separate it from the objective complement:

Dolly she called Dollyheart, but Verena she called That One.

—Truman Capote, *The Grass Harp*, p. 12.

Far more common are those inversions, not necessarily clearer, which make with their altered grammar some mild change in emphasis. They can be quite unobtrusive. They can pass us quietly by without alerting us to anything out of the ordinary, without calling the least attention to their reconstructed syntax. Some of these seem almost inevitable, the natural way of putting down the idea.

Only when one has lost all curiosity about the future *has one reached* the age to write an autobiography.

—Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning: An Autobiography*, opening sentence.

A man must contrive such happiness as he can. *So must we all. So must we all.* . . .

—Anthony Burgess, *Enderby*, p. 406.

This kind of inversion appears at the start and finish of the next sentence:

Bad as this article was, and time has proved it to be utter nonsense, the second article he wrote was probably even worse, and *why I printed it I don't recall*.

—Charles Angoff, *The Tone of the Twenties*, p. 127.

INVERSION WITH “THERE” AND “IT”

Some of the less obtrusive inversions seem to derive from a kind of formula, like the *there*-transformation:

And instead of the nasty square buildings *there are yet nastier huts*. And instead of the rusty streaks on the concrete, *there is a limitless expanse* of rusty tin roofing.

—John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Triumph*, p. 12.

There was no doubt in his mind now, and he would find a way to win her.

—Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, p. 138.

These inversions may render the sentence so constructed, to some extent, less direct and active, but they permit emphasis on the subject and room to amplify it.

There as sentence opener is followed not only by forms of *be* but by *seemed*, *appeared*, and other verbs, sometimes with a preceding adverb:

Suddenly there appeared in the path ahead of them a rude door put together from stout planks.

—Jean Speiser, *River in the Dark*, p. 16.

In a hole in the ground *there lived a hobbit*.

—J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, opening line.

Others make a second inversion that tampers with the *there*-transformation itself:

Mansions there are—two or three of them—but the majority of the homes are large and inelegant.

—John Barth, *The Floating Opera*, p. 53.

A *there*-transformation is the last in a series of inversions guiding the syntax of the next passage, all of them more or less automatic and unstriking:

Only where publics and leaders are responsive and responsible, *are human affairs in democratic order*, and only when knowledge has public relevance *is this order possible*. Only when mind has an autonomous basis, independent of power, but powerfully related to it, *can it exert its force in the shaping of human affairs*. Such a position is democratically possible only when *there exists a free and knowledgeable public*, to which men of knowledge may address themselves, and to which men of power are truly responsible.

—C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics, and People*, p. 613.

The *it*-inversion is another such formulaic switch in syntax, useful in all types of prose and automatically filling the position of sentence opener with a structural word that enables postponement of the theme:

It is the High Table of Christ Church that we must think of here.

—William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 282.

It is impossible, in the very nature of things, that the purified language of science, or even the richer purified language of literature should ever be adequate to the givenness of the world and of our experience.

This is the most common way of setting down such an idea. Yet here is the way it appears in print:

That the purified language of science, or even the richer purified language of literature should ever be adequate to the givenness of the world and of our experience is, in the very nature of things, impossible.

—*Aldous Huxley, Literature and Science, p. 118.*

The decision to invert was waived in favor of the isolating emphasis that moves, after the front-heaviness of the loaded subject, toward the final negating adjective.

INVERSIONS WITH NEGATIVES

The first of two *there*-transformations below is itself inverted because of the negative opener:

Nor was there any normal forage on the island, since it was inhabited only by fishermen and growers of grapes and there was nothing for the English soldiers to gather except “shreds of vine stalks.”

—*Marchette Chute, Two Gentle Men: The Lives of George Herbert and Robert Herrick, p. 196.*

Other inversions with *nor*:

Nor was this situation confined to the original settlement of the Atlantic seaboard.

—*Albert H. Marckwardt, American English, p. 22.*

Nor is there nearly as much deviation from the etymological meanings of the French borrowings as was true of the American Indian loan words.

—*Marckwardt, p. 37.*

Nor has the process diminished with the years.

—*Marckwardt, p. 84.*

Nor was the tendency to glorify the commonplace limited to the professional and work-a-day world.

—*Marckwardt, p. 117.*

Besides the frequent *nor* opener, other negatives can bring about inversion:

Not in human success, but in human failure, is the essential nobility of man made manifest.

—*G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, p. 49.*

Neither is this the whole truth, for the poet's spirit, tinged by melancholy, is not completely free-moving.

—*Geoffrey H. Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry 1787–1814, p. 6.*

Nowhere, either in verse or prose, does he argue about Ptolemaic or Copernican systems; he used either indifferently or the conflict between the two, for the expression of something else.

—*Joan Bennett, Four Metaphysical Poets, p. 39 [Donne].*

Not till 1609, the year in which he entered the university, did his mother marry again, so that, throughout his childhood and adolescence, and right up to the threshold of manhood, he had been closely and lovingly watched over by a mother who, as we know, was no ordinary woman.

—*Bennett, p. 59 [Herbert].*

OTHER UNOBTRUSIVE INVERSIONS

Some other common and useful inversions that do not call attention to themselves are the subject-verb inversions (or front-shifted auxiliary verb) produced by certain initial prepositional phrases, adverbs, numerals, comparatives, and the like:

Do you know how it is with love? First comes delight: then pain: then fruit.

—*C. S. Lewis, The Pilgrim's Regress, p. 207.*

Thus began his lifelong association with Paris.

—*Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 2.*

More important than most of the dramatic production within the Surrealist movement was the work some of its members produced after they had left, or been expelled from it.

—*Esslin, p. 275.*

Around him sat four or five of the younger guides.

—*Jean Speiser, River in the Dark, p. 39.*

Beyond the edge of town, past tar-covered poor houses and a low hill bare except for fallen electric poles, was the institution, and it sent its delicate and isolated buildings trembling over the gravel and cinder floor of the valley. *From there*, one day in the early spring,

walking with a tree limb as a cane, came Balamir, walking with a shadow and with a step that was not free, to fall under the eye and hand of Madame Snow.

—John Hawkes, *The Cannibal*, p. 3, *opening sentences*.

INVERSIONS FOR EMPHASIS

Emphasis is often well served by inversions of this kind. A common arrangement, for instance, puts adverbial information forward in a sentence and follows it at once with the verb on which it depends, then with the subject:

Into this grey lake plopped the thought, I know that man, don't I?

—Doris Lessing, *Children of Violence*, p. 264.

Opposite him, appeared the well-endowed young woman, smiling too.

—Robert Penn Warren, *Flood*, p. 5.

From the bent old body came a stale sour smell that made her recoil.

—Angus Wilson, *No Laughing Matter*, p. 400.

On a handsome Jacobean sideboard was ranged a double row of bottles and cut-glass decanters and what looked like a silver-plated ice-bucket.

—Kingsley Amis, *The Anti-Death League*, p. 153.

Then in the next street, near a lamp, Tom saw a little car drive up, and *out of it came a fair youth* in a dinner jacket and a girl, even younger and fairer, in a long white dress.

—J. B. Priestley, *It's an Old Country*, p. 27.

Here the collision of adverbial opener and inverted verb brings a small jolt to the start of the sentence:

Then *up jumped* a great fatman in one of the stadiums.

—Thomas Merton, *The Behavior of Titans*, p. 31.

Next, the adverbial structure (a phrase plus an embedded relative clause) introducing the *there*-transformation helps prolong our wait for a subject that at last emerges like the design it names:

Out of the goings-on that ensue there begins to emerge an interesting design.

—Frank Kermode, *Continuities*, p. 225.

Adverbial ideas, below, are carried by a relative clause standing as a front-shifted direct object:

Where the cluster fell, none knew for certain, but on impact it had resolved into separate angry bees.

—John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse*, p. 28.

Direct objects often take this first position:

The turtles he fought in a curious fashion.

—Edmund Wilson, *Memoirs of Hecate County*, p. 4.

Life he saw as a ceaseless and courageous contest.

—Jerry Allen, *The Thunder and the Sunshine: A Biography of Joseph Conrad*, p. 233.

Tradition in the new materials we have not; but *tradition in decoration and of detail* we can recover.

—Hilaire Belloc, *A Conversation with an Angel*, p. 247.

A predicate adjective (or participle) may also open a sentence, with inversion of subject and verb or without it:

Gone are the potted plants, the Christmas cheeses, the toys for the children that were regularly issued by the old Francis Cleary.

—Mary McCarthy, *Cast a Cold Eye*, p. 79.

Fat as a pig he was, and his face was the color of cottage cheese.

—Brian Moore, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, p. 9.

The complement that fills the opening slot may also convey adverbial information:

All in one plane they were, like candelabra.

—Mark Van Doren, “*Mrs. Lancey*,” *Collected Stories, Volume III*, p. 42.

Inversion for the sake of emphasis, however, is usually more effective if the sentence turned around is a somewhat larger structure. Below, the long object-of-a-preposition, coming first, leaves sharp emphasis for the quick disclaimer at the end:

The emotional isolation, the preoccupation with God and themselves, the struggles for freedom, which seem to have possessed many of my friends at the same age, I knew almost nothing of.

—C. P. Snow, *The Search*, p. 24.

Adverbials introduce the next sample. Followed first by the verb, they help postpone the subject for final disclosure:

On the pleasant shore of the French Riviera, about half way between Marseilles and the Italian border, stands a large, proud, rose-colored hotel.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, *opening sentence*.

Secretly, far beneath the visible surface of the island, imprisoned by this watertight cap of rock, lay the purest, sweetest, most copious water in all the land that bordered upon or existed in the great ocean.

—James A. Michener, *Hawaii*, p. 10.

INVERSIONS TO AID AMPLIFICATION

Inversions are also designed to relocate in a more convenient spot the syntactic element that is about to get substantial modification. Adverbial openers are again helpful, leading into the verb while the subject is held for easy amplification at the end:

From far away came the sound of the bugle, *clarified by distance and echoing in the woods with a lost hollow tone*.

—Carson McCullers, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, p. 6.

Through distant streets wandered a timekeeper, *beating on a gong the hours as they fled*.

—John Hersey, *A Single Pebble*, p. 181.

Beneath him was the River Tweed, *a great wide sweep of placid silver, tinted by the low saffron smudge of autumn sunset*. Down the slope of the northern Scottish bank tumbled the town of Tweedside, *its tiled roofs a crazy quilt of pink and yellow, masking the maze of cobbled streets*.

—A. J. Cronin, *The Keys of the Kingdom*, p. 1.

INVERSIONS TO AID COHESION

These adverbial openers also assist another function of the inversion —its use to rearrange ideas for greater cohesion. In the coming pair of excerpts, adverbs precede an inversion of “came” and the respective subjects. In the first passage, this allows the second sentence to follow as close upon the first as the thought suggests. The second passage puts the adverbial units of its two sentences nearest each other for a continuity, a transition, possible only because of inversion in the second sentence.

Emily Caldwell's intellectual pretensions were the first matter of comment and then, what seemed connected, her manner of dress. *Close upon these came* Emily's self-indulgence, a certain affair of strawberry jam bought with relief money.

—Lionel Trilling, *The Middle of the Journey*, p. 69.

*Light fell through the colors of the stained glass beyond the altar.
Through the windows ajar on the side aisle came the sweetness of
blossom, of bruised grass, of river mud.*

—Robert Penn Warren, *Flood*, p. 78.

The inverted grammar below, following the sense, lets the verb precede the postponed subject of the first sentence. In this abnormal position, the subject then makes for an obvious transition, a quick link, to the same subject repeated in the second sentence:

From the age of Britain's greatest internal disorder stand out the life and work of John Milton. His life and work are, like the national setting, disjointed.

—G. Wilson Knight, *Chariot of Wrath*, p. 17.

Here a parallelism of inverted sentences brings about a tighter cohesion as its sequence of adverbial openers follows through the descriptive movement:

Just inside the bleacher entrance to Wrigley Field in Chicago is a sign that warns: "No gambling." On the ramp leading up to the bleacher mezzanine is another sign that warns: "No gambling." At the top of the ramp, patrolling the aisle of the mezzanine is a cop whose presence warns: "No gambling." In the right-center-field bleachers are Stace and Sambo, Jonesy and Zsa-Zsa, Dynamite and The Preacher—all there to sit in the sun and enjoy the National Pastime: gambling on baseball.

—William Barry Furlong, "Out in the Bleachers, Where the Action Is," Harper's, July 1966, p. 49.

INVERSIONS FOR LITERARY EFFECT

These deliberate rearrangements, with syntax deformed for clearer modification or for cohesion, look forward to some of the special uses, more common yet, of the passive transformation. But the inversion's unique contribution to grammar as style often resides slightly apart from this, in the way an inversion may seem to show itself off. True, most of the inversions so far might have slipped past us in context without registering as unusual syntax. Yet there are some whose authors, we cannot help feeling, would be much disappointed if we did not regard the grammatical liberties they had taken. Some inversions simply beg for attention. They are self-conscious, artificial. People do not speak that way, so when a writer writes that way, his inversions have a decidedly literary turn. When the context wants this kind of effect, these "elegant inversions" can be very useful.

They offer a stylistic flair that no other grammatical device is so well equipped to provide. Here are some examples:

They came out on a bare hilltop where stood the dark figure of the ruined windmill.

—D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, p. 327.

An ecstasy of flight made radiant his eyes and wild his breath and tremulous and wild and radiant his windswept limbs.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 169.

So happened the curious visit to Linz.

—James Hilton, *Nothing So Strange*, p. 133.

Over the huts and the roof went the broad moons, and summer came after spring.

—Dylan Thomas, *A Prospect of the Sea*, p. 27.

To every man comes, sooner or later, the great renunciation.

—Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, p. 111.

Many were the unblemished fallacies that the well-educated young man of my generation took with him into a rambunctious world.

—Robert Ardrey, *African Genesis*, p. 11.

"But how pitifully narrow, how almost comically obtuse must appear the man who does so."

—Philip Toynbee, *Prothalamium*, p. 25.

But go you down, past the Quincunx, Amaryllis, as you wind your long way home, and you might see a newly varnished punt, looking bright upon the water of the lake.

—T. H. White, *Mistress Masham's Repose*, p. 255.

The more dramatic inversions often direct particular attention to the out-of-place, front-shifted element, respectively, in the following examples, an appositive noun cluster and a string of adjectives:

A woman once of some height, she is bent small, and the lingering strands of black look dirty in her white hair.

—John Updike, *Rabbit, Run*, p. 111.

Tall, powerful, barefoot, graceful, soundless, Missouri Fever was like a supple black cat as she paraded serenely about the kitchen, the casual flow of her walk beautifully sensuous and haughty.

—Truman Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, p. 54.

The success of the inversions above lies in the peculiar skill with which the author weaves the rest of the sentence into an elaboration of the front-

shifted element. Semantically, such sentences sometimes assume an almost circular pattern, with the *end* of the sentence suggesting an image closely related to the one at the very *beginning*. Additional illustration may be seen in the following sentences. Here the inverted elements have been lifted from the predicate. The first sentence opens with an adverb and verb, and the second with the direct object:

Fantastically whirled the professionals, a young man in sleek evening-clothes and a slim mad girl in emerald silk, with amber hair flung up as jaggedly as flames.

—Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*, p. 144.

Saccharine melodies she played, from memory and in the current mode, that you might hear on any vaudeville stage, and with a shallow skill, a feeling for their oversweet nuances.

—William Faulkner, *Sartoris*, p. 194.

Skill notwithstanding, the ultimate effect of the more striking inversions is to call attention, not to any sense unit within the sentence, but to the self-conscious style itself.

If these stylish inversions happen in an inappropriate context, they can seem gratuitous:

Complained he to Kennedy: "You are being extremely unfair. . . ."

—Time, September 2, 1966, p. 14.

Anywhere, of course, these inversions can be overdone:

In such a context is *understandable* also *his consternation* after having revealed his problem at finding it "treated but to a comparative pooh-pooh. . . ."

—Saul Rosenzweig, "The Ghost of Henry James," Modern Criticism: Theory and Practice, ed. Walter Sutton and Richard Foster, p. 405.

In this setting becomes *intelligible the mooted question* of James's assumption of British citizenship a few months before his death.

—Rosenzweig, p. 412.

Finally, there is a kind of inversion that has to do with the chapter on the passive and will help us into it. This is the inversion chosen mainly, it would seem, to replace the passive voice while retaining its transferred emphasis—an avoidance of the passive that, as we shall see, need not be half so scrupulous as we sometimes hear. There is, however, no more wrong with the next pair of inverted samples than with their passive alternatives. Maintaining normal order at their centers in "we can feel" and "Swift punctures" (rather than the passive "can be felt" and "is punctured by

Swift”), while keeping the same order on either side, forces both into an inversion with front-shifted direct object:

This sense of doom we can feel by simply reading the poem in adequate translation.

—Kenneth Rexroth, “Classics Revisited—IV: Beowulf,” Saturday Review, April 10, 1965, p. 27.

The felicity of the complacent Englishman sitting down in pleasant anticipation to a hearty British breakfast Swift punctures by laying beside his plate, instead of the Tory paper, *A Modest Proposal*.

—W. B. C. Watkins, *Perilous Balance*, p. 1.

Chapter 10

Free Modifiers

Right-Branching, Mid-Branching, and Left-Branching Sentences

The stream of sound is not continuous, but is produced and interpreted (though seldom consciously) as a series of separated word-groups. . . . It is segmented into minor syntactical units, each of which has superimposed upon it a pattern of stress and intonation.

—*Ian A. Gordon, The Movement of English Prose, pp. 19, 21.*

In his study of the historical development of English prose, Ian A. Gordon emphasizes “the characteristic wave-like pattern of English prose” that has persisted throughout its history, and he points to *segmentation* as a feature of spoken English for which one can find evidence from all periods. In speech, the segments are indicated by pitch, stress, and juncture. In writing, the segments are indicated by the arrangement of words in familiar clause and phrase patterns and, at least partially, by punctuation. The reader tends to pause at punctuation marks, and to see as segments or units any word-groups set off from the rest of the sentence by commas, dashes, or parentheses. We do not read and comprehend a word at a time. We read by segments. As we read, we hold certain patterns or parts of patterns in our minds, awaiting their completion. This tendency toward segmentation is a basic resource of English syntax, a resource on which a writer can capitalize. One way is through use of the structures sometimes called *nonrestrictive modifiers* but rechristened more aptly by Francis Christensen as *free modifiers*.

Free modifiers are usually set off from the base clause by commas.

Often they seem to modify the whole clause rather than a single word, and thus they are not necessarily tied to a single location but can be rather freely moved about. Some free modifiers can be attached at the beginning of the clause, or inserted in the middle, or added at its end. They are *segments*, readily comprehended, and flexible as to position, and they consist of an assortment of structures. To illustrate, we shall begin with a base clause, borrowed from a sentence by Ralph Ellison:

I watched him warily.

Base Clause

First, we shall attach a free modifier in front of the clause, that is, to the left of the clause:

Sensing a possible rival, I watched him warily.

Left Branch

Base Clause

The preceding sentence is what we shall refer to as a *left-branching* sentence. Now we shall attach a free modifier as a right branch:

I watched him warily, *wondering who he was.*

Base Clause

Right Branch

The sentence above is a right-branching sentence. Now we shall attach left and right branches at the same time:

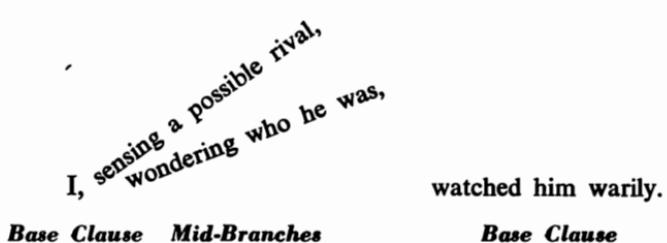
Sensing a possible rival, I watched him warily, *wondering who he was.*

Left Branch

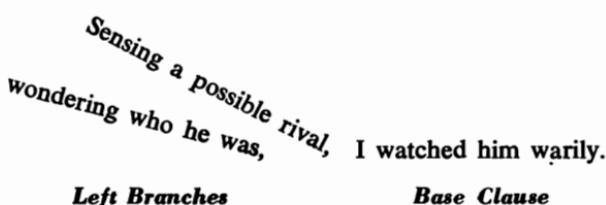
Base Clause

Right Branch

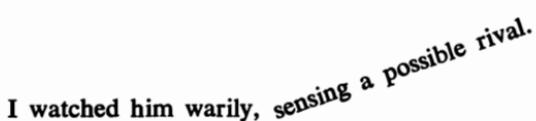
That is the way the author wrote the sentence. It is a base clause, branching in both directions, to the left and to the right. The author *could* have inserted these free modifiers as *mid-branches*, interrupting the base clause. We can see why he chose not to:



Also, the author could have put both branches at the left:



He would have run into possible ambiguity if he had moved the left branch to the right:



The reader could not be sure *who* is sensing a possible rival. Thus, if there is a chance for confusion, as there often is with participial phrases, a branch of this kind should be kept near the noun phrase it refers to. Many other kinds of free modifiers, especially *nominative absolutes*, are more flexible in the number of positions they may occupy.

Before going on to consider, in turn, sentences that are primarily left-branching, mid-branching, or right-branching, we shall look at one more example, a long sentence that branches both to the left and to the right:

During the slow journey from Winton, seated opposite me in the third-class compartment, wearing a shabby grey dress pinned with a large cairngorm brooch, a thin necklet of fur, and a black-winged hat which drooped over her ear, she had gazed out of the window, her head to one side, her lips moving as she maintained a silent yet emotional conversation with herself, from time to time touching the corner of her eye with her handkerchief as though removing a fly.

—A. J. Cronin, *The Green Years*, p. 3.

The branching structure of the sentence is displayed in the representation on the facing page.

The diagram helps to show that each branch is a free modifier and that any or all of the branches might be lopped off without destroying the syntactic completeness of the sentence.

Left-Branching Sentences

Although it is long, Cronin's sentence is fairly easy to decode, and the reader does not get lost in its left branches while searching for the subject of the entire sentence. In contrast, here are two left-branching sentences that are so front-heavy and disturbingly complex that the welcome relief offered by the subject when finally reached is hardly sufficient to justify the ordeal involved in getting there. Actually, the difficulty in the first sample occurs in a front-heavy clause that is the second and much the larger half of a compound sentence. The second sample below has one main clause, to which has been grafted an unusually awkward left branch:

They admired the poetry of previous generations, very rightly, for the taste it left in the head, and, *failing to realize that the process of putting such a taste into a reader's head involves a great deal of work which does not feel like a taste in the head while it is being done, attempting, therefore, to conceive a taste in the head and put it straight on to their paper*, they produced tastes in the head which were in fact blurred, complacent, and unpleasing.

—William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 17.

So, when family-life in Oak Park in that spring of 1909, conspired against the freedom to which I had come to feel every soul entitled and I had no choice would I keep my self-respect, but go out, a voluntary exile, into the uncharted and unknown deprived of legal protection to get my back against the wall and live, if I could, an unconventional life—then I turned to the hill in the Valley as my Grandfather before me had turned to America—as a hope and haven—forgetful for the time being of grandfather's "Isaiah."

—Frank Lloyd Wright, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings*, p. 173.

The problem here is one of modification. We see a disadvantage here of the *left-branching sentence* as opposed to the *cumulative*, and under the latter heading there is much discussion about the logic of elaborating a sentence after the sentence has first been set down, rather than anticipating it with modification structures. In the two examples above, granted, there are many difficulties within the front-heavy section itself that would make

*During the slow journey from Winton
seated opposite me in the . . . compartment*

*she had gazed out of the window
hat . . .
fur . . .
dress . . .*

*wearing a shabby . . .
Left Branches*

Base Clause

Right Branches

*ever turned to one side
her lips moving as she maintained . . .
from time to time touching her eye . . .*

During the slow journey from Winton, seated opposite me in the third-class compartment, wearing a shabby grey dress pinned with a large cairngorm brooch, a thin necklace of fur, and a black-winged hat which drooped over her ear, *she had gazed out of the window*, her head to one side, her lips moving as she maintained a silent yet emotional conversation with herself, from time to time touching the corner of her eye with her handkerchief as though removing a fly.

—A. J. Cronin, *The Green Years*, p. 3.

for difficult reading wherever the section was placed, especially in the case of the second sentence. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that, in general, reading is never impaired by the reader's coming first to the subject of a given sentence and then to its elaboration—by the reader's knowing, literally, *what* the author is talking about. This, however, is only a generalization about stylistic choice, not a general rule for composition: when there is no reason for constructing left-branching sentences—and there certainly are such reasons in cases we shall later discuss—then the normal way to begin is with the subject and its main clause. Not to do so, of course, is only to risk a clumsy sentence, not necessarily to produce one. Some of this risk, in fact, is minimized in the following examples, with the modification bound neatly to the subject by making the entire left branch appositive in the first sentence to a short introductory phrase, and in the remaining two to the subject itself:

With the exception of a three-act sex farce I composed when I was twelve—the action of which occurred aboard an ocean liner, the characters of which were, for the most part, English gentry, and the title of which was, for some reason that escapes me now, *Aliqueen*—with the exception of that, *The Zoo Story* (1958), *The Death of Bessie Smith* and *The Sandbox* (both 1959), are my first three plays.

—Edward Albee, "Preface," *The Zoo Story*, p. 7.

If we were to conceive of Hemingway offering us his heroic choice and his disenchantment with the hollow idealism of modern life in a language which was sufficient to propagate a doctrine but no more than that, which failed to be its own quintessential comment on the modern world and which exposed us to the crude manipulations of ideology without those areas of retirement and indecision and even discordance which are so perfectly re-created for us in the subtle tones and rhythms of Hemingway's best writing—this would approximate Mailer's situation as a novelist.

—Diana Trilling, *Claremont Essays*, p. 201.

Reading over Richard Kain's book on *Ulysses*, *Fabulous Voyager*, reading also Harry Levin's *James Joyce*, and remembering Gilbert, Gorman, the Wordbook, and the rest; the whole clutter of exegesis, adulation, and diatribe (e.g. the 1935 essay by P. E. More): *reading all this* sends the mind astretch on far questions that have to do with the relation of the individual to his society in our time.

—R. P. Blackmur, *Eleven Essays in the European Novel*, p. 27.

In the last sample, specialized punctuation is also used, in addition to the brief appositive repetition of the subject, to make the left branch of the sentence more readable. Punctuation, however, is a specifying, sometimes a rather subtle means of connection, and, again, the problem is that some-

thing is being tacked on to another structural unit not yet in evidence. It is for this reason that some of the unorthodox punctuation in the next quotations seems especially disconcerting:

In the beginning, because the motives which led me to Giovanni's room were so mixed; had so little to do with his hopes and desires and were so deeply a part of my own desperation, I invented in myself a kind of pleasure in playing the housewife after Giovanni had gone to work.

—James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, p. 127.

Yet if we say that Wolfe and Faulkner are both Southerners; and Wolfe illustrates in his own early life some of the cultural ills which Faulkner portrays; and that condemning, and escaping from the South, Wolfe is also, in his moments of error and prejudice, still caught by the web of southern emotionalism which we have noticed in Faulkner's work—here the resemblance stops.

—Maxwell Geismar, *Writers in Crisis*, p. 187.

In Paris, for no reason he was sure of, except that he was tired of the past—tired of the limitations it had imposed upon him; although he had signed the hotel register with his right name, Levin took to calling himself Henry R. Freeman.

—Bernard Malamud, "The Lady of the Lake," *The Magic Barrel*, p. 105.

It should be emphasized that these last samples are in no way offered as samples of bad writing, nor out of context can they really be faulted at all. But try reading them together and the exercise should point up the difficulties of developing a prose style based largely upon such front-heavy constructions.

We will now look at the promised samples of left-branching sentences, front-heavy but not awkward, that have been very well chosen by their authors for specific effects. In all the following there seems to be something in the pattern of thought, something either in the temporal or the logical development of the expressed idea, that invites the delayed disclosure of the left-branching arrangement. The material that comes first seems, indeed, as if it should, and the anticipated material that concludes the sentence provides an almost inevitable kind of climax, often short and effectively to the point:

Now that the sad cycle of boom and bust has been tamed, now that many Americans have the means as well as the wish to diffuse prosperity and amenities throughout the community, the challenges to public policy have taken a new turn.

—Robert Lekachman, *The Age of Keynes*, p. 4.

The afternoon after the night at the tavern, while O's were being taken out of books and out of signs, so that the cw jumped over the mn, and the dish ran away with the spn, and the clockshop became a clkshp, the toymaker a tymaker, Black issued new searching orders.

—James Thurber, *The Wonderful O*, pp. 9–10.

Relieved of Babbitt's bumbling and the soft grunts with which his wife expressed the sympathy she was too experienced to feel and much too experienced not to show, their bedroom settled instantly into impersonality.

—Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*, p. 15.

When a writer begins to be successful, when he begins to soar, outwardly but especially inwardly, then, to save him from infatuation, he needs to be pelted with bitter apples.

—Van Wyck Brooks, *A Chilmark Miscellany*, p. 3.

As the limits of man's physical horizons and experience constantly withdrew, as the flights of his imagination soared and new discoveries shattered the confining walls of outworn theories, as the need grew for a new vocabulary and wider connotations, so, to meet that imperious demand, the gnarled but sound old tree of Latin put forth new shoots and sent its roots still deeper and wider into its sustaining earth.

—Ernest L. Hettich and A. G. C. Maitland, *Latin Fundamentals*, pp. 331–332.

If “one touch of nature makes the whole world kin” does not illuminate reality, if “our little life is rounded with a sleep” does not put life into simple perspective, if the music, the fresh phrasing and the vigorous rhythms do not come alive, Shakespeare is a wordy bore.

—Brooks Atkinson, *Brief Chronicles*, p. 152.

As a forcing ground for self-delusion, self-importance, greed, plagiarism, hypocrisy, vanity, hindsight, malice, treachery, impatience, superstition, sycophancy and fatty degeneration of the moral fibre, the cinema has few equals.

—Frederic Raphael, “Preface,” *Two for the Road*.

Mid-Branching Sentences

The term mid-branching is used here to describe a sentence in which the base clause is interrupted by an insertion of parenthetical, or at least grammatically extraneous, material serving to postpone the grammatical conclusion of the clause. In some mid-branching sentences, the delayed

conclusion creates a kind of suspense, but more often the device serves primarily to allow a variety of expansive materials:

Taking out my pen, I did, *in blue, on a bare patch between two seraphic swirls of lipstick*, dare set my name.

—John Updike, “*Mea Culpa: A Travel Note*,” Assorted Prose by John Updike, p. 221.

However, mid-branching sentences like the one above, interrupted between the auxiliary and the main verb (“did . . . dare set”), are quite rare. More often, the interruption occurs between the subject and the predicate. Indeed, the more extreme forms may seem almost perverse in the demands they make on the attention of the reader, who must hold the necessary grammatical parts in suspension until their completion by others at the end of the sentence and at the same time attempt to assimilate the internal elaboration. As an aid to the reader, the dash is often a useful type of punctuation to provide a kind of visual clarification:

Obviously the experiences of Negroes—slavery, the grueling and continuing fight for full citizenship since emancipation, the stigma of color, the enforced alienation which constantly knifes into our national identification with our country—have not been those of white Americans.

—Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p. 24.

Unlike the left-branching and right-branching (cumulative) sentences, which move elaboration in one direction or the other out from the essential grammatical base, the mid-branching sentence begins and ends with grammatically relevant materials and gathers the modification structures internally. The effect of this arrangement is unique and extremely useful. For instance, if a mid-branching sentence begins with the subject and is then arrested by some inserted elaboration, the motion of thought is accelerated toward those anticipated elements that will complete the idea whose subject has been disclosed. When these appear, the thought is quickly redirected toward the subject in order to bring the entire idea, elaboration included, into focus. The effect, then, is to compress the sentence unit from both ends, to provide a useful tightening of expression appropriate to a highly controlled, logically organized style. This compressive force gives the mid-branching sentence a peculiar density not shared by the looser cumulative sentence, the latter operated on by a kind of centrifugal force, so to speak, that tends to spin its materials out from the center rather than to concentrate them there. Unlike the cumulative sentence, which follows somewhat the pattern of human thought and continues to comment on the base sentence indefinitely by the addition of various modification structures, the mid-branching sentence is ultimately organized before the modification

is begun. It suggests that its author has begun to say what he intends, has interrupted himself to elaborate so far as he feels *in advance* is necessary, and has then added the required grammatical conclusion, all without the need of a cumulative afterthought.

Of course all this, as it reflects a way of thinking, is a matter of calculated stylistic effect, not the inevitable result of a writer's habituated thought processes. It is certainly possible that a given cumulative sentence might be pondered over at much greater length than most mid-branching sentences, or that all the modification in a sentence might be organized and worked over before the writer even decides where in his sentence it is to appear. It is quite easy, for instance, to transfer the elaboration in the following mid-branching sample:

The bronze-trimmed glass doors flashed in and out, and all these little bodies, *redolent of milk and pee, blessed heads of all hues, shapes, the promise of the world to come, in the eyes of the benevolent Herzog, its future good and evil*, hurried in and out.

—Saul Bellow, *Herzog*, p. 334.

Transferred to a final position, it thus creates a cumulative sentence:

The bronze-trimmed glass doors flashed in and out, and all these little bodies hurried in and out, *redolent of milk and pee, blessed heads of all hues, shapes, the promise of the world to come, in the eyes of the benevolent Herzog, its future good and evil*.

The effect is admittedly different, but the process of alteration is simple.

Basic differences aside, however, the mid-branching sentence does share in one of the major advantages of right-branching or cumulative sentences over the left-branching or front-heavy type. The most successful of the left-branching sentences, because they modify before the subject is introduced, are least confusing when the modification is clearly headed by the sentence as a whole and does not demand particular subject reference—that is, when it is a sentence modifier. On the other hand, some of the most effective mid-branching sentences can be expanded internally with structures headed by the element after which the sentence is interrupted. This modification position, since it is following the word or phrase modified, is often filled by appositive noun or adjective clusters, as respectively in the following examples:

Of course it was a hell of a nerve for an instructor with so little experience in a college, *an Easterner not long in the West, until recently a stranger to most of his colleagues*, to ask them to elect *him* head of department.

—Bernard Malamud, *A New Life*, p. 289.

Father Urban, *fifty-four, tall and handsome but a trifle loose in the jowls and red of eye*, smiled and put out his hand.

—J. F. Powers, *Morte d'Urban*, p. 17.

Verb clusters also serve as common sources of expansion, especially when a participle functions as an appositive adjective:

The Grandmother, *muffled* down in the back seat in the corner of the old carryall, in her worn sealskin pelisse, *showing* coffee-brown at the edges, her eyes closed, her hands waving together, had been occupied once more in losing a son, and, as ever, to a girl and a family of which she could not altogether approve.

—Katherine Anne Porter, “*The Old Order*,” *Leaning Tower and Other Stories*, p. 44.

Participles are not the only verbal structures found in this internal position, as seen above in the two absolute constructions, *her eyes closed, her hands waving together*, included as sentence modifiers in the elaborative section.

In the last example above, the final sixteen words of the sentence—“... and, as ever, to a girl and a family of which she could not altogether approve”—while grammatically related to the base sentence, are not actually grammatically essential. We have described the mid-branching sentence as concluding usually with grammatically necessary parts, but in actual practice the mid-branching sentence often receives additional expansion after the base clause. The following mid-branching sentences are carried beyond a grammatical sufficiency by, respectively, a compound predicate, and a subordinate clause:

This audience, though often baffled by difficulties in his thought and manner, as is apparent from the eagerness with which it buys books expounding the poems, has no doubt of his poetic greatness, *and feels a desire to understand more fully both what he says and why he says it the way he does*.

—Helen Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, p. 1.

The lack of team spirit alone, the fact that the Brodie set preferred golf to hockey or netball if they preferred anything at all, were enough to set them apart, *even if they had not dented in the crowns of their hats and tilted them backwards or forwards*.

—Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, p. 36.

Mid-branches often figure in inversions of one sort or another, which tend to suspend the subject and thus to postpone logical completion until late in the sentence. Examples here are of an *it*-inversion and a left-branching sentence with front-shifted adverbial modifiers, both with internal, mid-branching interruptions designated by italics:

It is quite natural and inevitable, then, and only superficially paradoxical, that the neoclassic age, *instead of yielding a harvest of mythological poems*, is almost completely barren, at least of good ones.

—*Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry*, p. 5.

Here at the far end of the hall, through windows exteriorly screened against vandalism, light from outdoors entered the school and, *unable to spread in the viscid, varnished atmosphere*, remained captured, like water in oil, above the entrance.

—*John Updike, The Centaur*, p. 10.

It is often remarked that William Faulkner's style is highly "suspensive," withholding resolutions at almost every level from that of oxymoronic verbal couplings to the overall psychological theme; the mid-branching sentence, of course, is especially appropriate to enforce and amplify this pervasive, calculated "suspensiveness." In the following examples (all from *Absalom, Absalom!*) the elaborative interruptions are italicized and parts of sentences are left out when continued far beyond the end of the essential periodic effect. The elaboration in the first is basically a parenthetical verbal appositive, the parentheses, like the dash mentioned earlier, often used to help clarify the mid-branching structure:

Itself circumambient and enclosed by its effluvium of hell, its aura of unregeneration, it mused (*mused, thought, seemed to possess sentience, as if, though dispossessed of the peace—who was impervious anyhow to fatigue—which she declined to give it, it was still irrevocably outside the scope of her hurt or harm*) with that quality peaceful and now harmless and not even very attentive. . . .

—*William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 13.

The verbal appositive was itself highly elaborated, as is the case with the verbal appositive interruption in the next sample:

He must have said to himself, *must have said when he closed the library door for the last time behind himself that Christmas eve and must have repeated while he and Bon rode side by side through the iron dark of that Christmas morning, away from the house where he had been born and which he would see but one time more and that with the fresh blood of the man who now rode beside him, on his hands: I will believe; I will.*¹

—*Faulkner*, p. 90.

¹ Underscored material following the colon is italicized in the novel.—EDITOR

A noun appositive receives similar secondary expansion in this example:

And no tears, no bereavement this time too, whether or not it was because she had no time to mourn since she ran the store herself now until she found a buyer for it, not keeping it open but carrying the keys to it in her apron pocket, hailed from the kitchen or the garden or even from the field. . . .²

—Faulkner, p. 186.

Right-Branching (Cumulative) Sentences

The distinguishing feature of the *cumulative* or *right-branching* sentence is the accumulation of material after the base clause is grammatically complete. Some of the units which comprise the right-branching structures are of a kind that may serve as free modification and thus may appear at other points in the sentence, especially at the beginning of the sentence. This is not always true, of course, and many cumulative sentences add materials that could never be found before the subject. Nevertheless, much front-shifted material in awkward sentences can often be satisfactorily regrouped, at the other end, in a cumulative arrangement. Compare the following idea, expressed with preceding modification in a front-heavy construction—

The only child of middle-class parents, both English, and themselves born in the grotesquely elongated shadow, which they never rose sufficiently above history to leave, of that monstrous dwarf Queen Victoria, I was born in 1927.

—to the author's own version of it, set forth in a cumulative sentence:

I was born in 1927, the only child of middle-class parents, both English, and themselves born in the grotesquely elongated shadow, which they never rose sufficiently above history to leave, of that monstrous dwarf Queen Victoria.

—John Fowles, *The Magus*, p. 3.

Francis Christensen reminds us that the process of human thought operates by addition, represented in prose by a linear progress of backward-moving modification structures in forward-moving expansions, ramifications of an initial idea gathered as afterthoughts to a grammatically complete base.³ As he says, "The foundation, then, for a generative or productive rhetoric of the sentence is that composition is essentially a process of *addition*." But what is added? Anything and everything? Yes, in fact, but

² This entire sentence appears italicized in the novel.—EDITOR

³ *Notes toward a New Rhetoric*, pp. 4–8.

certain kinds of additions appear most frequently and effectively in rounding out a cumulative sentence, including primarily noun and adjective phrases, verb phrases, and nominative absolutes.

Two samples each of noun and adjective additions follow, their *appositive* characteristics tending to redefine or elaborate the basic idea, to add descriptive rather than narrative materials. Only the head-words of each right branch are italicized:

Nothing would remain at last except the name itself, *itself a legend* beautiful and talismanic, *a sound* of magic and of recollection, *a phrase* of music and of strangeness—*Raintree County*.

—Ross Lockridge, Jr., *Raintree County*, pp. 54–55.

He feels the faded night he left behind in this place like a net of telephone calls and hasty trips, *trails* of tears and *strings* of words, *white worried threads* shuttled through the night and now faded but still existent, *an invisible net* overlaying the steep streets and in whose center he lies secure in his locked windowed hutch.

—John Updike, *Rabbit, Run*, p. 37.

The air was thin and clear, *stringent* with wood smoke and the tang of fallen apples, *sharp* with the hint of early frost.

—A. J. Cronin, *The Keys of the Kingdom*, p. 3.

Scores of millions of years before man had risen from the shores of the ocean to perceive its grandeur and to venture forth upon its turbulent waves, this eternal sea existed, *larger* than any other of the earth's features, *vaster* than the sister oceans combined, *wild, terrifying* in its immensity and *imperative* in its universal role.

—James A. Michener, *Hawaii*, p. 2.

A much stronger narrative or verbal impact is naturally conveyed by the addition of verb phrases, generally present participles producing an ongoing feeling:

Their trim boots prattled as they stood on the steps of the colonnade, *talking* quietly and gaily, *glancing* at the clouds, *holding* their umbrellas at cunning angles against the few last raindrops, *closing* them again, *holding* their skirts demurely.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 216.

She had left him, really, *packing* up suddenly in a cold quiet fury, *stabbing* him with her elbows when he tried to get his arms around her, now and again *cutting* him to the bone with a short sentence expelled through her clenched teeth.

—Katherine Anne Porter, “*That Tree*,” *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*, pp. 95–96.

Past participles, as in the following cumulative sentence, are much less common and carry more of an adjectival than a verbal force:

The life of man is a long march through the night, *surrounded* by invisible foes, *tortured* by weariness and pain. . . .

—Bertrand Russell, “*A Free Man’s Worship*,” Why I Am Not a Christian, p. 115.

Added for either descriptive or narrative purposes, or both, the nominative absolute is prevalent in cumulative sentences and is the chief form of expansion in the next two examples. Because of its unique grammatical independence from the base sentence, the absolute construction is often described as a sentence modifier:

He went to speak to Mrs. Bean, tiny among the pillows, *her small toothless mouth open like an “O,” her skin stretched thin and white over her bones, her huge eye-sockets and eyes in a fixed, infant-like stare, and her sparse white hair short and straggling over her brow.*

—Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori*, p. 173.

On the breast of the slow-flooding river, he was floating with Nell Gaither, who sat in the stern of the boat, *her feet together, her hands on the sides of the boat, her wide bonnet buckling with the breeze that freshened fitfully along the shore.*

—Ross Lockridge, Jr., *Raintree County*, p. 198.

Most cumulative sentences, it should be noted, are not built up by largely or entirely homogeneous additions. The preceding examples were intended to isolate the various types of elaboration, not to imply that they generally occur this way. On the contrary, various combinations of them most often produce a cumulative sentence. The following samples will indicate some of the possible arrangements, composed mainly of noun and verb phrases (NP and VP), nominative absolutes (Abs), and incorporated prepositional phrases (PP), adjective phrases (AP), subordinate clauses (SC), and relative clauses (RC):

The ocean looked dead too, dead gray waves hissing mordantly along the beach (*Abs*), which was gray and dead-looking itself (*RC*).

—John Knowles, *A Separate Peace*, p. 41.

Often, as he talked to Clara Dawes, came that thickening and quickening of his blood, that peculiar concentration in the breast (*NP*), as if something were alive there (*SC*), a new self or a new centre of consciousness (*NP*), warning him that sooner or later he would have to ask one woman or another (*VP*).

—D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, p. 252.

Ben lay upon the bed below them, drenched in light (*VP*), like some enormous insect on a naturalist's table (*PP*), fighting (*VP*), while they looked at him (*SC*), to save with his poor wasted body the life that no one could save for him (*VP*).

—*Thomas Wolfe*, *Look Homeward, Angel*, p. 452.

He could bear to think of her only after she had overpassed the common life of everything and lay in her bed, on her back (*PP*), her narrow heels close together in a painful precision (*Abs*), her face calm (*Abs*), eyes closed (*Abs*), preferably with moonlight falling across her face (*Abs*), her right arm flung back on the pillow (*Abs*), crooked over her head (*VP*), her left arm laid across the mounds of her breasts (*Abs*).

—*Robert Penn Warren*, *The Cave*, p. 11.

Two of the principles discussed by Professor Christensen in connection with the cumulative sentence are “texture” and “levels of generality” or “levels of abstraction,” with the corresponding values of richness and concretion as displayed in the previous sampling. The cumulative sentence, as Christensen recommends it, is a well-rounded statement that moves from a certain degree of abstraction through progressive specification to a level of concrete particulars and precise detail. Thus, for instance, the last two examples above begin simply by announcing that the subject of the base clause is lying in bed and finish their cumulative expansion only after sketching in a rather complete picture of the state of the subject, lending richness and depth of structure to the sentence. These sentences are evenly textured, smooth, and controlled. In the next two examples, on the other hand, the texture, however rich, is somewhat less even. Below, the first and third noun phrases are in apposition to “fire escape,” but the middle noun interrupts to add an appositive restatement of “asphalt” to the first noun phrase:

The little desk at the window was black, rivaling the blackness of his fire escape (*VP*), those rails dipped in asphalt (*NP*), a heavy cosmetic coat of black (*NP*), rails equidistant but appearing according to the rules of perspective (*NP*).

—*Saul Bellow*, *Herzog*, p. 128.

This next example produces an even more general confusion of appositive reference by a disconcerting collection of noun and adjective phrases:

But for five or ten minutes the desert air was nothing to endure, a sport (*NP*), one hundred and ten (*NP*) and going up (*VP*), half-conducive the way the entrance to a sauna is half-conducive (*AP*)—

that heat (*NP*), that desert bake (*NP*), hot as the radiation from a hard-wood fire (*AP*).

—Norman Mailer, *An American Dream*, p. 251.

Smoothness of texture is certainly sacrificed above to the special demands of the two authors, just as “levels of generality” are ignored in the following cumulative sentence. The sentence additions seem to spread out in several directions rather than to narrow down from an initial idea, each expansion deflected further from the base sentence rather than directed back toward it as an additional elaboration:

By the summer term, the girls’ favourite hours were spent unbrainfully in the gymnasium, *swinging about on parallel bars or climbing ropes up to the ceiling, all competing with agile Eunice to heave themselves up by hands, knees, and feet like monkeys climbing a tropical creeper, while the gym teacher, a thin grey-haired little wire, showed them what to do and shouted each order in a broad Scots accent interspersed by her short cough, on account of which she was later sent to a sanatorium in Switzerland.*

—Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, p. 103.

This is not to suggest that these last three sentences are not true *cumulatives*. As indicated earlier, the alternate designation for the kind of syntactic arrangement we have been examining is the *loose* sentence, and they seem, especially the last example, to comply more fully with the implications of this name. Nor, then, are these sentences to be dismissed as inferior prose. It is this type of ultraloose cumulative in which Faulkner delights, for instance, and they are well used elsewhere for various special effects. The only tenable reservation concerning this type of *loose* sentence is that it seems best in nonexpository prose. While the closely textured cumulative is appropriate for all styles and all subjects, the extremely loose sentence has given up enough of its controlled patterning to be troublesome when its function is to contain a complex, logical thought. For example, the implicit parallelism of the following idea seems at cross-purposes with the rambling syntax:

The other two reject it, Rilke as a suffocating irrelevance to true human life and advance, Freud as a relic of infantilism with which, however, under the form of the Judaeo-Christian religion, he wrestles all his life, as Rilke also does rather differently, in his turn.

—Elizabeth Sewell, *The Human Metaphor*, p. 198.

Similarly, the loosened *syntax* in the following sentence does not work well with the subordinating logic by which the *thought* is organized; a tighter syntactic control would have increased clarity and eased reading difficulty:

Instead of this the ruling classes attempt to arrest all social change, lead idle and wasteful lives, obstructing economic progress in the form of technical invention, which, if only it were properly developed, would, by creating unlimited plenty and distributing it scientifically, swiftly ensure the eternal happiness and prosperity of mankind.

—Isaiah Berlin, Karl Marx, p. 75.

If control is loosened above, it seems to have collapsed entirely in the next awkward sample. Here, as in much amateur writing, the sentence is protracted with a string of subordinate clauses that take advantage of none of the cumulative rhythm possible:

Toward the middle of the last century, the work of Clerk Maxwell and of his precursor, Faraday, had attracted the attention of physicists once more to optics, the science of light, which was now regarded as a form of electricity that could be reduced to the mechanics of a curious, rigid, but invisible medium known as the ether, which, at that time, was supposed to permeate the atmosphere, interstellar space and all transparent materials.

—Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, p. 19.

This concept of prose rhythm is very important, and in expository prose is best achieved by the controlled type of cumulative sentence, marked by regularity and balance:

He is the puritan, holding to the tradition of Socrates' cheerful indifference to bodily pleasures, but disposed to mistake this indifference for a rather grim and graceless asceticism.

—F. M. Cornford, *Before and After Socrates*, p. 108.

The kind of mild parallelism of the cumulative additions above can be extended quite effectively, too, over successive expansions:

The other possibility, also a technical one, would lead in the other direction, not toward automatism and large-scale mass production, but in the direction of making printing or its equivalent possible by a more simple and direct method, lending itself to small-scale production and therefore to a larger measure of personal expression.

—Lewis Mumford, *Art and Technics*, p. 77.

On the other hand, many cumulative sentences, equally as good as the last two above but usually found in fiction, have a rambling and elusive rhythm all their own, generated by the very fact of accumulation and capable of being sustained over an entire passage. To choose a most esteemed example, Hemingway is a writer who relies on the cumulative

sentence to stay controlled and artful while sounding perfectly natural and at ease:

The covered seats of the bull-ring had been crowded with people sitting out of the rain watching the concourse of Basque and Navarrais dancers and singers, and afterward the Val Carlos dancers in their costumes danced down the street in the rain, *the drums sounding hollow and damp, and the chiefs of the bands riding ahead on their big, heavy-footed horses, their costumes wet, the horses' coats wet in the rain.* The crowd was in the cafes and the dancers came in, too, and sat, *their tight-wound white legs under the tables, shaking the water from their belled caps, and spreading their red and purple jackets over the chairs to dry.* It was raining hard outside.

—Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, pp. 170–171.

The preceding examples should give some idea of the variety of expression possible with the cumulative sentence, the right-branching sentence, and should provide sufficient evidence that it is invaluable at any level of stylistic sophistication. Indeed, the generative logic of addition upon which it is based, that natural and effortless accumulation that is its definitive feature and its chief recommendation, makes it useful for those specialized prose effects known as *syntactic symbolism*. Much more broadly, the cumulative sentence is a basic tool of professional writers and the very mainstay of modern fiction.

The Appositive

A final definition for the appositive, then, is that it is *ANY structure in ANY function which, in addition to modifying or renaming an antecedent, will also SUBSTITUTE for that antecedent.*

—Orin D. Seright, “On Defining the Appositive,” College Composition and Communication, May 1966.

In most textbooks the term *appositive* has been used to label a noun phrase that closely follows another noun phrase and renames it:

The 17-ton craft, *Proton 4*, is circling the earth every 91.75 minutes.
—The Los Angeles Times, Nov. 17, 1968, p. 1.

So Clarissa, *the beauty of the family*, was married.
—John Dickson Carr, Poison in Jest, p. 22.

The Mojave, *a non-Pueblo tribe of the Southwest*, carried this attitude to great lengths.
—Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture, p. 111.

Today a stubborn disease of poultry—*fowl leukosis*—serves as one of the most useful experimental tools in the investigation of cancer.
—Wilbor O. Wilson, “Poultry Production,” Scientific American, July 1966, p. 57.

In these sentences, the *italicized* noun phrases are appositives, and the noun phrase to which each refers (*The 17-ton craft*, *Clarissa*, *The Mojave*, *a stubborn disease of poultry*) is the *antecedent* or *principal*.

All of these examples are *free-modifying appositives*—sometimes called loose or nonrestrictive appositives—a kind set off from the rest of the sentence, usually by commas or dashes as in the preceding examples but sometimes by parentheses or, at the end of a sentence, by a colon.

Contrasted with this free-modifying, almost parenthetical, appositive is the *close* or *restrictive* appositive noun phrase, not set off by punctuation—expressions such as *the river Thames, the composer Chopin, the volcano Popocatepetl, Frederick the Great, my Aunt Jane*. The close appositive functions with its principal as a single syntactic unit. The free-modifying appositive, the kind to receive most of our attention in this chapter, is a separate syntactic unit, set off by punctuation—a unit that is not tied to a position immediately adjacent to its principal. Like other free modifiers, this kind of appositive often will fit at more than one place in the sentence, and the writer can choose the place where it can be inserted most effectively. This flexibility of placement allows room for the principal to be expanded in additional ways, and it also permits the appositive itself to be expanded at some length, especially if it is placed at the end of the sentence.

The flexibility of the appositive is far greater than that suggested by most textbook examples, or even by the examples I have quoted thus far, for the appositive noun phrase often becomes a framework by which the author not only renames the principal but also defines, exemplifies, clarifies, adds details, emphasizes key words, and enlarges or reduces the focus. It is one of the devices favored by the professional writer, one that contributes to the density of texture that often distinguishes his work from that of an amateur.

Most school texts, as has been noted, view the appositive only as a noun phrase. Before considering additional examples, I should like to mention some broader concepts of the appositive, concepts that come from both the scholarly traditional grammarians and the transformationalists. In the broadest sense, the nature of *apposition* is simply that of related juxtaposition, as indicated by the root of the word itself: *placing* one thing *beside* or *near* another. Used in this sense, the word describes a variety of syntactic structures, including nominative absolutes. Some grammarians have reserved the term for two kinds of structures—(1) noun phrases like those in the examples I have given, and (2) adjectives without a noun, placed adjacent to and usually following the modified noun phrase, and set off by commas or other punctuation:

Father Urban, *fifty-four, tall and handsome but a trifle loose in the jowls and red of eye*, smiled and put out his hand.

—J. F. Powers, *Morte d'Urban*, p. 17.

She is a Chicago girl, *nineteen years old, gentle, sound in wind and limb, sixteen hands high and not a blemish on her*.

—John Fischer, *The Stupidity Problem and Other Harassments*, p. 272.

In these two sentences, the italicized adjectives and other adjectival structures are given the label *appositive*, in contrast to the term *attributive*,

used to describe the closely modifying adjective that precedes the noun, as in the following:

She is a gentle girl . . .

Handsome Father Urban . . .

A still broader definition of the appositive, and perhaps one of the most useful, is the one by Orin D. Seright, quoted at the beginning of this chapter: "ANY structure in ANY function which, in addition to modifying or renaming an antecedent, will also SUBSTITUTE for that antecedent." Thus, an adjective can be in apposition to an adjective, or a prepositional phrase in apposition to a prepositional phrase, or an infinitive in apposition to a noun.

This definition in part coincides with a transformational concept of the appositive, in which the appositive is viewed as a transformation of a predication, with the copula deleted. Thus, underlying the appositive, "Clarissa, the beauty of the family," is the predication, "Clarissa is the beauty of the family." In this view, an appositive could be derived from any predicate complement—predicate noun, predicate adjective, adverbial noun, or prepositional phrase. By functional shift, other word classes and structures also might be labeled appositives.

In this chapter, we shall consider two types of appositives: (1) structures that can *substitute* for the antecedent or principal (in keeping with Seright's definition), and (2) appositive adjectives and other accompanying adjectivals. The second group usually cannot substitute for the antecedent or principal.

The Appositive as Reiteration

Perhaps the noun phrase as appositive is a good place to begin. Certainly it is one of the most frequent and versatile. In one of its very useful forms, not mentioned in most textbooks, the appositive is simply a *reiteration* of the principal. In Francis Christensen's sentence below, the word *devices* is the antecedent or principal, and it is repeated as the appositive:

On nearly every page of this paper I have had to resort to syntactic *devices* to keep them [the noun phrases] within bounds—*devices*, such as this appositive, that are practically unknown to our textbook writers.¹

The repetition of the word *devices* enables the writer to keep the noun

¹ Francis Christensen, "The Problem of Defining a Mature Style," *English Journal* (April 1969), 572–579.

phrase short; he can pause for breath and take a fresh start. He has a new peg on which to hang additional modification.

In Northrop Frye's sentence, quoted below, we see another appositive that is in part a repetition of the principal. Here the principal consists of a pair of prepositional phrases, *by teachers*, *for students*, and the appositive has as its headwords, *by teachers*, *for children*. Instead of repeating *students*, the writer has used a synonym, as is often done in an appositive:

The curriculum is at best, however, a design to be interpreted *by teachers*, *for students*—*by teachers* with varying degrees of ability and insight, *for children* with differing equipment in intelligence and language background.²

Other examples in which the appositive is a repetition of the principal:

The Hobbit belongs to a very small class of books which have nothing in common save that each admits us to *a world* of its own—*a world* that seems to have been going on before we stumbled into it but which, once found by the right reader, becomes indispensable to him.

—London Times Literary Supplement, October 2, 1937, p. 714.

His *rage* passes description—the *sort of rage* that is only seen when rich folk that have more than they can enjoy suddenly lose something that they have long had but have never before used or wanted.

—J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 208.

This was *the generation* whose girls dramatized themselves as flappers, *the generation* that corrupted its elders and eventually overreached itself less through lack of morals than through lack of taste.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, p. 15.

Also from Fitzgerald:

Here is *a jug*, *a beautiful black milk jug*—the dairyman left it years ago when it was cheaper to make your own ice-cream.

—Fitzgerald, p. 61.

All of the foregoing are noun phrase appositives, but the device of repetition is used also with other structures. Below, again from Fitzgerald, the word *open*, a predicate adjective in a nominative absolute, serves as the principal. It is twice repeated in an appositive:

We loved the temperate shapes of Nassau Hall's old brick, and the way it seems still a tribunal of early American ideals, the elm walks

² Quoted by Francis Christensen.

and meadows, the college windows *open* to the spring—*open, open* to everything in life—for a minute.

—Fitzgerald, p. 48.

In the following sentence are two instances of appositives that repeat the principal, the participle *known* and the noun *secret*:

People feel that if the terrible event is *known, fully known*, down to the least detail of who stood where, what this one wore, and what the other one thought, that day in Dallas will then deliver its *secret, the secret* that everyone believes it has, must have.

—James Dickey, *Spinning the Crystal Ball*, p. 2.

The repeated appositive is a very useful device for emphasizing certain words, and for adding details. As Francis Christensen has illustrated, it is one way of keeping those noun phrases short.

Appositive as Synonym—At End of Sentence

We have been looking at sentences in which the appositive has as its headword the same word as the principal. Often the appositive is a *synonym* for the principal. Sometimes the appositive is a more important word semantically than the principal. The base clause may have as its subject a relatively empty word such as “it” or “he,” and the semantic subject of the sentence is developed in an appositive, postponed often to final position in the sentence, permitting generous expansion without interrupting or delaying the basic clause structure:

He lumbered into the city room, *a big guy in his middle twenties, wearing a suit too dark for the season, and the disconsolate frown of a hunter who has seen nothing but warblers all day.*

—James Thurber, “Newspaperman,” *The New Yorker*, January 5, 1952.

Here the principal is the pronoun *he*, and the appositive is the noun cluster that has *guy* as its headword. Obviously in this sentence, as in the preceding examples, the appositive does more than rename; it defines and expands, with successive levels of detail making the picture more precise.

In the following sentence, the base clause has relatively little semantic content. It is an equative clause, in which both the subject *theme* and the predicate nominative *that . . .* are relatively empty words; the appositive (*italicized*) carries most of the message:

The theme is that of all Robin Hood ballads, *the setting of the fair, free, honest forest life against that of the town, the law, and the church.*

—Evelyn Kendrick Wells, *The Ballad Tree*, p. 21.

Often the appositive in final position is in apposition to a principal at the end of the base clause, as in the following sentences:

I had only the presence of mind to hide a single soldier, *a peely-nosed black sepoy wearing a Shriner's fez.*

—Robert Lowell, "91 Revere Street," Life Studies, p. 14.

There's a community of colored at the crossing, *very nice people.*

—John Steinbeck, The Winter of Our Discontent, p. 163.

Taxation is a subject that sorts people into two categories: *those who understand it, and those who do not.*

—The Economist, London, book review, June 4, 1966, p. 1093.

Long-term storage is, in fact, learning: *the process by which information that may be needed again is stored for recall on demand.*

—Lloyd R. Peterson, "Short-Term Memory," Scientific American, July 1966, p. 90.

Final appositives of this kind are relatively easy for students to imitate. And the terminal appositive is an important feature of the right-branching or cumulative sentence, the kind Francis Christensen suggests we should be teaching to our students.

The Inverted Appositive—At the Beginning of the Sentence

Another placement of the appositive, much less frequent in the works of professional writers, is at the beginning of the sentence. Initial appositives, sometimes referred to as *inverted* appositives, are more difficult to use successfully, and we should probably not encourage students to use them. The construction often seems somewhat unnatural. Student journalists and even professional biographers tend to overwork it:

A hardy boy, he was fond of all sports, especially hunting, rowing, and skating.

—Louis Untermeyer, Lives of the Poets, p. 339.

A lonely boy, Coleridge retreated into books—he read *The Arabian Nights* at six—and fed his mind with adventures so wild and fancies so morbid that he often feared the coming of the night.

—Untermeyer, p. 345.

One of the greatest poets, Milton is also one of the least read.

—Untermeyer, p. 189.

The following inverted noun-appositive contains an embedded noun-appositive, a construction that invites confusion even though the writer in this instance rounds out his sentence with considerable dexterity:

Son of an eminent Puritan preacher, the Reverend William Crashaw, Richard Crashaw (1612–1649) inherited so great a passion for theology that it brought him to love the Roman Church which his anti-papist father hated.

—Untermeyer, p. 142.

The same author, however, builds a successful sentence with an elaborate catalog of appositives around the principal *he*, placing the most general member in front of the principal and the others at the end of the base clause:

A truly Byronic figure, he was strikingly handsome and flamboyantly reckless, an aristocrat who lampooned his class, a physically handicapped and psychologically maimed youth who triumphed over every disadvantage, an audacious rebel who loved liberty and could not refuse a folly, a dreamer courting disaster, an irresistible lover, and an irresponsibly shocking genius.

—Untermeyer, p. 383.

Catalogs of appositives are sometimes used in initial position:

Fertility, fecundity, lushness, abundance—these were the hall marks of the New World.

—Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore*, p. 14.

Humility . . . orderliness . . . serenity . . . grace—these are the words with which Herbert has been commonly characterized.

—Louis Untermeyer, *Lives of the Poets*, p. 142.

French haute couture, Mexican folk music, American jazz—this blend of seemingly disparate elements is typical of the invigorating curiosity which has led today's young creative talents to cut through the relatively provincial categorization which once designated a song as “popular,” “folk,” “gospel,” or the most esoteric type, “foreign.”

—John S. Wilson, “*Youth Will Be Heard*,” *House Beautiful*, July 1966, p. 102.

Overcommercialization, overly loud commercials, heavily biased program content, secret changes of station ownerships, or neglect of local news, public affairs, religion or agricultural interests—those are some of the legitimate grounds for opposing the renewal of a broadcaster's three-year license.

—“*How to Be a Turned-on, Tuned-in Citizen*,” *Consumer Reports*, October 1968, p. 535.

Usually such a list of initial appositives is summarized or tied together by the principal—*these, this blend of seemingly disparate elements, those*—and the principal is the subject of the base clause. Such lists of inverted appositives should probably be used sparingly, if at all, by the amateur.

The Appositive in the Middle of the Sentence

We have looked at some appositives in terminal and initial positions; let us turn now to some appositives in *medial* position in the sentence or clause. These are very versatile, and are variously punctuated:

We—*four Snipe sailors*—had been to Martha's Vineyard before and wanted to return, and gradually the idea grew on us that sailing there from Long Island Sound would be a fine way to go.

—Ellen Horan, “Special Report: New England Yachting,” Yachting, July 1966, p. 57.

The first shopgirl we encountered—a barefoot young woman, who was wearing a long blue jersey, belted low on the hips, and a little red skirt, about fourteen inches from top to bottom—apparently mistook us for one of the crew.

—“The Talk of the Town,” The New Yorker, July 23, 1966, p. 23.

Mr. Somervell—a most delightful man, to whom my debt is great—was charged with the duty of teaching the stupidest boys the most disregarded thing—namely, to write mere English.

—Winston Churchill, A Roving Commission: My Early Life, p. 16.

The preceding sentence has both a medial appositive and one at the end of the sentence. A similar effect is seen in the two sentences that follow, the first with a medial appositive, and the second with one at the end of the sentence:

Actually the idea of environmental art—that of a “surround” providing us with numerous sensory stimuli—is not all that new. The concept was well expressed, it could be argued, in the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages—actual mixed-media works that appealed to the senses via lighting effects, music, art, tactile, spatial, and olfactory stimuli.

—Grace Glueck, “The Kinetic Eye: Environmental Art,” House Beautiful, October 1968, p. 137.

Sometimes parentheses are used to set off medial appositives, as in the following:

Switches S3 and S4 are shown in their normal (HOLD) position, from which they are changed only when we wish to read an input voltage.

—Carl David Todd, “*The Poor Man’s Digital Voltmeter*,” *Radio-Electronics, August 1966*, p. 31.

If the input voltage is a sine wave, then we must divide the peak voltage by 1.414 (or multiply it by 0.707) to get the rms value.

—Todd, p. 34.

It also eliminates parallax (*viewing-angle*) error.

—Todd, p. 30.

Casting directors at agencies no longer have to suggest putting a black or a yellow face into a commercial: the demand originates often with the sponsor, and the “story-boards” (*commercial shooting-scripts*) indicate minority-group casting from the inception.

—Robert Lewis Shayon, “*Commercials in Black and White*,” *Saturday Review, October 5, 1968*, p. 48.

Verbs as Appositives

Thus far we have looked mainly at noun phrases as appositives and have considered them in various positions in the sentence. I should like to turn now to other structures and word classes that serve as appositives, first of all, to juxtaposed verbs that are synonymous or subtly different in meaning. Often these appear along with nominal appositives:

Here was this thing, creature, which he had almost seen born you might say, and had seen, *watched*, every day of its life since.

—William Faulkner, *The Town*, p. 283.

Maybe it didn’t take even three years of freedom, immunity from it to learn that perhaps the entire dilemma of man’s condition is because of the ceaseless gabble with which he has surrounded himself, *enclosed himself, insulated himself* from the penalties of his own folly.

—William Faulkner, *The Mansion*, p. 236.

Any one of them might be he, *could be he, might be her landlady’s husband or son . . .*

—William Golding, *Free Fall*, p. 80.

Between the last paragraph and this, just over two and a half months have gone by, *elapsed*.

—J. D. Salinger, Seymour—An Introduction, p. 149.

And she remembered how, time and again, he had given away, “*loaned*,” to the first person who asked him the favor, money or food or things which were desperately needed . . .

—James Agee, *A Death in the Family*, p. 44.

At the time of their encounter she was odd-jobbing in Cornwall—*trimming hedges, digging gardens and so on, travelling from place to place on her motorcycle.*

—Norman R. Baldwin, “Island Cottage,” *The Countryman*, Summer 1966, p. 381.

Adverbial, Adjectival, and Prepositional Phrases as Appositives

A more common appositive and one that draws little attention to itself is the adverbial phrase:

Less than a year later, *on December 15, 1792*, Annette was delivered of a daughter, Ann Caroline, and Wordsworth went back to England to collect funds.

—Louis Untermeyer, *Lives of the Poets*, p. 341.

The church was not very far away, *four blocks up Lenox Avenue, on a corner not far from the hospital.*

—James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, p. 4.

The Grimes family arrived in a body, always a little late, *usually in the middle of Sunday school, which began at nine o'clock.*

—Baldwin, p. 6.

For he remembered how much older she was than he—*eight years . . .*

—Baldwin, p. 142.

Adjectivals, similarly used, attract little notice:

It's cold—*just above freezing everywhere below the surface zones.*

—Clement S. Pepper, “Electronics Puts to Sea,” *Radio-Electronics*, August 1966, p. 27.

Prepositional phrases are frequently used in constructions of this kind:

Just before Race Rocks, *about 15 miles from the finish*, Diamond Head blew out a second spinnaker.

—Yachting, “The Month in Yachting,” July 1966, p. 30.

Donne's mind is the pattern of thought, *of a mind moving from the contemplation of a fact to deduction from a fact and thence to a conclusion.*

—Joan Bennett, *Four Metaphysical Poets*, p. 11.

She was associated in his mind with flame; *with fiery leaves in the autumn, and the fiery sun going down in the evening over the farthest hill, and with the eternal fires of Hell.*

—James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, p. 152.

Clauses as Appositives

An entire clause sometimes functions as an appositive:

The smell of the voodoo lily and other malodorous members of the arum family serves a useful purpose: *it attracts flies and some kinds of scavenger beetles that pollinate the plants.*

—Bastiaan J. D. Meeuse, “*The Voodoo Lily*,” *Scientific American*, July 1966, p. 80.

Frinton has had an appalling press—it has been called “*the snootiest town in Britain*,” “*Nannie Town-on-Sea*,” and “*Westminster Abbey-with-Sand*.”

—Corin Hughes-Stanton, “*Beside the Same Seaside*,” *The Illustrated London News*, August 6, 1966, p. 20.

Modern houseboats being what they are—*sinfully luxurious is what they are*—it ought to be enough to run them lazily around back rivers and bayous. The last thing anybody really needs is a national championship houseboat race.

—Hugh D. Whall, “*A House Is Not a Hot Rod*,” *Sports Illustrated*, July 28, 1969, p. 14.

Enlarging or Narrowing

Most of the appositives I have quoted conform to Orin Seright’s definition: “ANY structure in ANY function which, in addition to modifying or renaming an antecedent, will also SUBSTITUTE for that antecedent.” Although they will indeed *substitute* for their antecedents, it is important to note that these appositives are not semantically *equal* to their antecedents or principals. We have seen that often they define, or add, details. Sometimes, as in the following sentences, the appositive enlarges or narrows the field set up by the principal, designating particular parts or aspects, bringing a subject into clearer focus:

In Viking times Norwegians had no tables as we know them. Men dipped their porridge from a common kettle and ate from wooden trays, *often round ones*, which they held on their knees wherever they chose to sit.

—Janice S. Stewart, *The Folk Arts of Norway*, p. 32.

Outpost of Up-Island is Gay Head, with its precipitous, colorful clay cliffs rising 150 feet to 200 feet above the ocean in a striped array of brilliant color—*red, orange, yellow and brown*.

—Marcia Wiley, “*Special Report: New England Yachting*,” *Yachting*, p. 58.

The essential difference between man and animal is exhibited most clearly by human language, *in particular, by man's ability to form new statements which express new thoughts and which are appropriate to new situations.*

—Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics*, p. 3.

Use of the Appositive Construction to Convey Key Words

Many authors recognize that the appositive is more than a dispensable appendage, tacked on to a main clause. Often, especially in descriptive passages, professional writers place key words in the appositive construction. An example may be seen in the opening paragraphs of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. In the first thirty sentences of what he has called a "Nonfiction Novel," the author sets the scene, moving gradually toward a particular point in time and space. When he reaches this point, in the last two sentences of the introductory section, the author places his key words, not in the base clause, but in an appositive. The climactic words, italicized in the following sentences, are in both instances placed after the base clause, in apposition to the relatively empty word "them."

At the time not a soul in sleeping Holcomb heard them—*four shotgun blasts* that, all told, ended six human lives. But afterward the townspeople, theretofore sufficiently unfearful of each other to seldom trouble to lock their doors, found fantasy re-creating them over and again—*those somber explosions* that stimulated fires of mistrust in the glare of which many old neighbors viewed each other strangely, and as strangers.

—Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*, p. 5.

The appositive thus becomes a dramatic device, one that enables us to delay until the end of a sentence its most momentous words. When Astronaut Neil A. Armstrong descended the ladder from the spaceship *Eagle* and became the first man to set foot on the moon, he captured in a single brief sentence some of the drama of that instant:

That's one small step for a man, *one giant leap for mankind.*

Appositive Adjectives

The appositive commonly used for adding details, as well as drama, is the noun or noun phrase, which often provides additional descriptive material apart from the essential structure of the sentence and serves to expand, qualify, restate, or enforce the word or phrase to which it is in

apposition. We shall look now at certain adjective-headed structures, sometimes called appositives. In their structural isolation, they are like the noun-headed appositives, and they often serve a similar descriptive function. In the following examples the appositive adjectivals occur in terminal or medial position. Less frequently, they occur at the beginning of the sentence.

He was a young farmer, in his late twenties or early thirties, thin as a grasshopper.

—John Hersey, *White Lotus*, p. 317.

Under the changes of weather it may look like marble or like sea water, black as slate in the fog, white as tufa in sunlight.

—Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day*, p. 5.

Such a place the Fallen Angels might have built as a spite to Heaven, dry and sharp, desolate and dangerous, and for me filled with foreboding.

—John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, p. 154.

Far behind the farthest unmoving line of standing starers, a few village women, white and scriptural, move, or seem to glide in the quivering sunlight, serene and unperturbed, about their business.

—Dylan Thomas, *The Beach of Falesá*, p. 64.

Of course, the appositive adjectives and noun-headed appositives often work together quite effectively in the same sentence:

The attitude of rapture in sacred art, the raised and parted hands, the parted lips and eyes as of one about to swoon, became for him an image of the soul in prayer, humiliated and faint before her Creator.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 150.

Even in their absolute immobility, complete as that of the morning, she felt a purpose, a working over something, a direction, an act of creation different from any she had known.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, p. 19.

He was a college man, soft-spoken, somewhat of a settlement house minister doing his best, meek with the punks but used to them, and causing you a sense of regret.

—Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*, p. 287.

All was moonlit, all silver, too beautiful to describe.

—T. H. White, *The Once and Future King*, p. 21.

Vigilant, powdery, odorous and loose-feathered—so that dogs object to take them in their mouths—armoured against pellets by the padding of these feathers, the pigeons coo to one another with true love, nour-

ish their solicitude, and flee from the aggressor with true philosophy—*a race of peace lovers continually caravaning away from the destructive Indian in covered wagons.*

—White, p. 157.

The flexibility and variety of the appositive, amply demonstrated in the isolated sentences used as examples in the preceding discussion, may be appreciated more fully when seen in context. Unmannered, efficient, five appositives fall comfortably into place in the sample below. All are noun-headed except the second, which is adjectival; two are unpunctuated, two are set off by dashes, and one is enclosed in parentheses:

Plants change according to their surroundings in remarkable ways. It is almost impossible to grow the delightful autumn-flowering gorse *Ulex gallii* in gardens, because any but the poorest soil makes it grow out of character—*tall and lanky instead of neat and compact*. But W. Elcock, of Fleet in Hampshire, finds that garden conditions have the opposite effect on a new *Eryngium* (*sea holly*) species he collected on the slopes of the volcano *Popocatepetl* in Mexico. It has a more refined flower under cultivation than in the wild—a *delicate arrangement of petals and fronds like a silver ornament fashioned by a craftsman with infinite patience*.

—John Street, “Here’s Flowers for You,” The Countryman, Summer 1966, p. 362.

The final sample is in a different key, eloquent and personal, an author’s story of his remarkable father. Its generous, unrestrained appositives—nouns, verbs, and prepositional phrases—seem especially appropriate to give “shape and form and color” to the author’s memories:

Someone, *perhaps my mother, perhaps I*, had taken the camera away from him—a *rare occurrence in itself*—and made him stand still for a shot. His face was square and large, with wide-set eyes and a shock of dark hair across his broad forehead. The smile seemed to consume the face, *seemed to be him, rather than part of him*. . . .

For hours I watched those slides that evening, and for the next few days I continued to project and study and take delight in all those images out of my past. They helped create a special picture of my father—*my gossamer memories suddenly given vivid shape and form and color*. . . .

He hated with a passion cities, pavement, signboards—*any foolish thing that man had done that got in the way of how the world was made in the first place*. . . .

His country was vast ranges of mountains, *of dawn making a jagged black line out of distant peaks; of a white lake of tufted clouds*

floating below us as we stood lords of a summit; of a streak of wind-whipped rain racing over the shine of an icy mountain lake; of mist-wrapped mountainsides; of cold blue days when the wind took the few white cloud balls over the mountains like missiles, making the cloud shadows race over the peaks, sudden fleeting eclipses of silver.

—Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr., *My Father's Country*, quoted in *Life Magazine*, July 4, 1970, p. 48.

Interrogative, Imperative, Exclamatory

I feel very strongly about putting questions; it partakes too much of the style of the day of judgment. You start a question, and it's like starting a stone. You sit quietly at the top of the hill; and away the stone goes, starting others.

—*Robert Louis Stevenson, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, p. 10.*

The three common reshapings of the basic sentence pattern carry time-honored labels—*interrogative*, *imperative*, and *exclamatory*. Unlike the basic *declarative* statement, all three in their very nature make special demands. A question calls for an answer, an imperative calls for an action, an exclamation calls for the experiencing of an emotion. The natural habitat for such sentences is the personal letter, but in certain other contexts, both fiction and nonfiction, they can also be used by the skillful writer for particular effect. They can help to set tone, to bring a point into focus, or to emphasize it. They can serve as summary or transition, and they can be arranged in parallel sequences to form a cohesive framework over the space of a paragraph or several paragraphs.

The Interrogative

Robert Louis Stevenson points to two hazards a writer faces in using questions: a question, especially a rhetorical one, may seem to “par-

take too much of the style of the day of judgment," and a question, straightforward or rhetorical, tends to set off another one, or a string of them. These may make the reader impatient and uncomfortable at the author's obvious straining for effect. Many good writers nonetheless do use questions frequently and well.

In the following excerpts from prose fiction, the immediacy of the direct questions imparts a kind of urgency to the narrative, serving to raise the dramatic pitch and to heighten the suspense of the story:

What was the good of yet another delaying lie? He wondered what Wilson had said to her. Could he go on lying week after week, finding some reason of work, of health, of forgetfulness, for avoiding the issue at the altar rail?

—*Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter, p. 246.*

What in the world was happening? Would a squat woman step out and ask the man to please stop? Would he raise his hand to strike her and would she retreat?

—*Joseph Heller, Catch-22, p. 424.*

What, I asked myself, was I frightened of? Thirty-one years old, healthy and whole, married to a fourth husband (why four?) who loved me, with a bodyguard of children (why so many?)—what was I frightened of?

Not of Philpot, surely? Oh no, not in the slightest of Philpot. Of whom, then? Of what?

—*Penelope Mortimer, The Pumpkin Eater, p. 30.*

How would she behave when they were alone together? Would she be gay, pretending she'd forgotten, or had never noticed, the length of time since he last saw her, gaining altitude before she dipped to the attack? Or would she be silent and listless, apparently quite inattentive, forcing him to drag painfully from small-talk through solicitude to craven promises and excuses?

—*Kingsley Amis, Lucky Jim, p. 12.*

It all seemed to him exceptionally clear. What made it clear? Something at the very end of the line. Was that thing Death?

—*Saul Bellow, Herzog, p. 325.*

Did he want just to peep through the myrtles and oleanders at an imagined swimming pool? Did he expect to hear the continuation of Gordon's bravura piece played now in another rendition, by two larger and stronger hands? Would he have crept, pistol in hand, to where a sun-bathing giant lay spread-eagled, a spread eagle of hair on his chest?

—*Vladimir Nabokov, Pale Fire, pp. 178–179.*

Go away? No, anything but that! How could life go on without him? Everyone had gone from her, everyone who mattered except Rhett. He couldn't go. But how could she stop him?

—*Margaret Mitchell, Gone with the Wind, p. 1033.*

Even this type of mild suspense tends to keep a story going, tying loose ends together and focusing attention on the unresolved question at hand. This is also an important fact for nonfiction writers, many of whom recognize its possibilities and use the interior question to pinpoint their topic and to direct the reader toward the answer or answers to be discovered:

Now, in the middle of the twentieth century, what is left of this towering reputation?

—*Kenneth Clark, Ruskin Today, p. xiv.*

. . . exorcism was in no way peripheral, but stood at the heart of his work. How does the church carry on this function today? Or should the church simply forget exorcism?

—*Harvey Cox, The Secular City, p. 149.*

Nashe used them; Lodge used them; did Spenser?

—*Rosamund Tuve, Allegorical Imagery, p. 81.*

Why did a play of the supposedly esoteric avant-garde make so immediate and so deep an impact on an audience of convicts? Because it confronted them with a situation in some ways analogous to their own?

—*Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. xvii.*

Is man innocent? Were we in truth created in the image of God? Are we unique, separate and distinct creatures from animal kind? Did our bodies evolve from the animal world, but not our souls? Is man sovereign? Are babies born good? Is the human fault to be explained successfully in terms of environment? Is man innately noble?

—*Robert Ardrey, African Genesis, pp. 13–14.*

This guiding of the reader toward an anticipated assertion or discussion, in answer to previous interrogation, is often done very directly as an introduction to quoted materials:

Five years she has been married to him, she has had two children by him, she has known a long and important period (important because she is still very young) of domesticity and marital tenderness and motherhood. How does she tell us of these matters?

It concerns the story in hand very little to enter into the further particulars . . .

—*Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel, p. 37.*

In the allegory of "The Voyage," written to the text "Life is the search after the ideal" (as he phrased it), the sailors dedicate their lives to the pursuit of "one fair Vision." But what vision?

For one fair Vision ever fled
Down the waste waters . . .

—Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, p. 294.

Interrogatives are further used to lend that overall unity that a single question provides in titles of articles like William Robert Miller's "Is the Church Obsolete?" (*The American Scholar*, Spring 1967), of chapters like "What Is Minor Poetry?" and "What Is a Classic?" from T. S. Eliot's *On Poetry and Poets*, and of entire volumes like Sartre's *What Is Literature?*

Though it is hardly a problem in titles, there is, however, one difficulty with the type of nonfictional interrogatives we have been surveying. This is the unhappy result of too heavy a concentration of these interrogatives. For one thing, the sense of uncertainty that inevitably attaches to this kind of straightforward question (as opposed to the rhetorical questions that we will investigate later) can actually work to the writer's disadvantage if allowed to define the dominant mood of a given passage. In such a case the accumulation of doubt and uncertainty may tend to undercut the writer's credentials and to undermine the reader's faith in his authority. More likely still it will simply overtax the reader. By its very definition, if it is effective at all, any interrogative formulation demands more of a reader than a declarative. It asks a question and demands an answer, and when it does so over an extended parallel series, as in the next two examples, it can become rather tiring, however well-intentioned its other effects:

Hence the confusion both about the meaning and about the nature of the condition, liberty. Is the man free who suffers no external restraints but can find no employment? Or is he free if the state compels him to participate in a scheme for social security? Is there a gain in freedom if the termination of colonialism simply exchanges foreign for native despots? Are the masses free who choose dictatorship?

Hence also the confusion about the causes and consequences of liberty—whatever the meaning of the term. Are men made happier, wiser, wealthier as a result of having it; or do they seek it in order to attain such goals? Is freedom an aid or a deterrent to economic growth; and, conversely, does material well-being stimulate or impede the quest for it? How is liberty related to the strength of nations and their capacity for survival?

—Oscar and Mary Handlin, *The Dimensions of Liberty*, p. 2.

Does the university have the right to require that faculty members guide student groups and approve their action in inviting off-campus speakers? Does the university have the right to require that one view presented on campus be balanced by another? Does the university have the right to require that questions be allowed at meetings? Does the university have the right to require that faculty members chair meetings? Does the university have the right to decide where in the university a meeting shall be held, thus limiting effectively the size of the audience? Does it have the right to require student groups to pay for police protection, if the off-campus speaker is so controversial that disorder or violence may be feared? Must the university provide loudspeakers for the speaker? May the university deny the most prominent locations on the campus to the speaker?

—Nathan Glazer, “*Student Politics in a Democratic Society*,”
The American Scholar, Spring 1967, p. 204.

Now we come to two very interesting interrogative forms, really two sides of the same rhetorical coin: the *leading question*, which Perry Mason is allowed to ask only of hostile witnesses because it is designed to imply and to elicit the answer it intends, and the *rhetorical question*, which is formed strictly for effect and to which any answer at all would be superfluous. If the device of interrogative guidelines in expository prose is employed to focus our attention and to point it specifically toward the resolution of some question or questions, the *leading question* takes us more directly there. Indeed, it *leads* us straight to this resolution along the length of its own sentence, which itself includes the answer in the form of a negative question of the “Isn’t it so that . . . ?” variety. The *rhetorical question* is what might be called a question after the fact, an announcement that we have arrived at an answer, and a celebration of the fact that to form a question in the face of such unquestionable fact is to do so simply for ironic emphasis. The first group of interrogatives below, then, are *leading questions*, assuming the desired answer and leaving room for little else:

Seymour once said that all we do our whole lives is go from one little piece of Holy Ground to the next. Is he *never* wrong?

—J. D. Salinger—*Seymour—An Introduction*, p. 213.

Does it not, in no small degree, atone for the devaluation of the esthetic symbol in other departments?

—Lewis Mumford, *Art and Technics*, p. 101.

Has not Teiresias, who reads the signs of the birds, said that Oedipus

was guilty? Has not Apollo condemned Oedipus to kill his father?
Is there not a bulk of other evidence to show that this is true?

—*Karl Harshbarger, "Who Killed Laius?" Tulane Drama Review, Summer 1965, p. 122.*

Is it not an argument against the ontological character of courage that it is impossible to attribute courage to large sections of reality and to the essence of all reality? Is courage not a human quality which can be attributed even to higher animals only by analogy but not properly? Does this not decide for the moral against the ontological understanding of courage?

Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be, p. 24.

Had Marilyn Monroe not been enough punished in childhood to insure her against future misfortune?

—*Diana Trilling, "The Death of Marilyn Monroe," Claremont Essays, p. 233.*

The preceding sample has the negative form of a leading question but employs an obvious irony that cannot be answered affirmatively and that therefore relates it, also, to the ironic tone of some of the *rhetorical questions* that follow:

The Spaniards, Hemingway adds, are not preoccupied by death. "It has no fascination for them." Can the writer say as much for himself?

—*Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis, p. 57.*

How could an economic policy have worked better? How could the outcome have been happier? Men long out of work found jobs. Business profits swelled. Overtime supplanted short work weeks.

—*Robert Lekachman, "What's Up with Taxes," The Atlantic, August 1966, p. 65.*

Everyone, Herbert Blau assures us, should be permitted to fail. But a season of failures?

—*Richard Schechner, "TDR Comment," Tulane Drama Review, Fall 1966, p. 21.*

I wonder if it has ever occurred to the poet of our time that his audience prefers his criticism to his poetry because his poetry is lacking in something? Is this possible?

—*Karl Shapiro, In Defense of Ignorance, p. 5.*

But what—what would be more human? Some great force has swallowed up your brother, no reason, he's just gone—why the hell not smash all the windows? Is this a time to be reasonable?

—*Martin Green, "The Image-Maker," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, ed. Henry Anatole Grunwald, p. 283.*

These last forms approximate what M. H. Abrams calls “the usual rhetorical question . . . that won’t take ‘Yes’ for an answer” (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 82). In this, even though it is a characterization that only *usually* applies—see exceptions in the samples here—the rhetorical questions can be contrasted to the earlier leading questions, which can be said incapable of receiving a negative answer. Still, it is the very indifference of the rhetorical question to any answer at all that is its most important characteristic.

The Imperative

Schoolchildren for years have learned about imperatives as “commands” and have diagramed these sentences with the word *you* as an “understood” subject. This is really a rather useful way to discuss imperatives, for it emphasizes the relation of direct address that they set up and suggests in a broader sense their “commanding” nature, a suggestion that good writers of both fiction and nonfiction have been quick to pick up. Indeed the imperative can be quite commanding in continuous prose if used carefully and judiciously: carefully because such a strong form can easily become heavy-handed and awkward, and judiciously because its attention-getting effect derives in no small part from a sparing use among more frequent standard sentences.

For the purpose of organizing the subsequent examples, the types of imperatives discovered most often in prose samples will be divided into five main groups, differing only in emphasis and effect while remaining grammatically equivalent.

1. First are the standard *command* forms, much more common in speech than in writing, and usually translated into the latter with an exclamation point. This group includes such brief sentences as “Beware of the dog!” “Keep off the grass!” “R.S.V.P.” “Carpe diem!” and “Drop dead!” In fiction this type of strong command can be very expressive, imparting a sense of urgency and usually taking a character in the narrative or the narrative voice itself as the “understood you”:

Sometimes I thought, but this *is* your life. *Stop fighting it. Stop fighting.*

—James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, p. 128.

When evening had fallen he left the house and the first touch of the damp dark air and the noise of the door as it closed behind him made ache again his conscience, lulled by prayer and tears. *Confess! Confess!*

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 139.

2. Unlike the above *commands*, the milder *directives* more often occur in essay style, where for some didactic purpose they usually under-

stand the reader as the implicit "you." Again, if sparingly used, these imperatives have a twofold effect, helping to lend grammatical variety to the prose and to bring the reader into a direct relationship with the writer:

Take for illustration the most complete and daring of these cosmologies, the system of Thales' successor, Anaximander, which set the pattern for the Ionian tradition.

—*F. M. Cornford, Before and After Socrates, p. 18.*

Regard yourself in the bathroom mirror.

—*Robert Ardrey, African Genesis, p. 254.*

Behold, then, the so-far-final result of our magnificent technical triumphs in the reproductive arts.

—*Lewis Mumford, Art and Technics, p. 99.*

Notice, in this book, how much a hair-do alone can transform her in person and in mood; also, how much severity is communicated by her profile in contrast with her fullface.

—*Parker Tyler, "The Garbo Image," The Films of Greta Garbo, pp. 9-10.*

A writer like Mailer, who aspires to be something more than an intellectual version of Mickey Spillane, who takes himself seriously and in turn expects us to take him seriously, cannot without self-stultification center a story on so portentous a theme as murder (*think of what novelists like Dostoevsky and Stendahl and Faulkner, among others equally preeminent, have made of this theme!*) and then proceed to evade its multiple consequences in the dimensions of character and fate by means of sheer plot manipulation.

—*Philip Rahv, The Myth and the Powerhouse, pp. 237-238.*

This type of *directive* can also be successfully employed to set off quoted materials. See this in such a simple introductory imperative as the one below:

. . . Consider

But we are old, and . . .

—*William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, p. 95.*

Or, in imperatives following the quoted material:

. . . give to me o
my cruel one.

Compare this poem with almost any of the published poems in which he speaks of his beloved.

—*M. L. Rosenthal, ed., "The Poetry of Yeats," Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats, p. xxviii.*

. . . over her a snow-shower of roses.

Now compare this with the annual twentieth-century Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

—*Harvey Cox, The Secular City, p. 193.*

Or, in directives that flank the quotation to introduce it and to provide a transition from it:

Look at these . . . extracts, two English, two American:

When the gong sounded . . .

. . . as they swapped punches.

Notice how much more knowledgeable the American extracts sound.

—*George Orwell, "Boys' Weeklies," Modern Literary Criticism: Theory and Practice, ed. Walter Sutton and Richard Foster, pp. 532-533.*

3. The third is a less common type of imperative, called here the *formula* or *recipe* (resembling an “add a pinch of this and a pinch of that” expression). These imperatives usually assume an air of scientific certainty, implying a definite action and reaction by which given steps obtain given results; they can therefore be used effectively to underscore the inevitability of a statement:

Call for justice or explanation, and the sea will thunder back its mute clamour.

—*George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy, p. 6.*

Add to these the parade of further commentators and of characters in positions analogous to Jim's, all made available to us by Marlow, and we have a brilliant series of variations upon a theme.

—*Murray Krieger, "Afterword," Lord Jim, p. 314.*

Roughly calculate the mass of public conveyances, taxicabs, buses, private cars and trucks that success will bring to any overgrown village consisting of one hundred thousand to several million people: add half that number of private cars and add, perhaps one twenty-fifth as many delivery machines; add one fiftieth as many buses to displace streetcar tracks and carry children to school; and add unwholesome subways. You will find that. . . .

—*Frank Lloyd Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings, p. 259.*

4. The next class of samples we will call the imperative of *permission*, which employs the verb “let” and which may take as its object the first person singular:

Let me change the subject and say

—*J. D. Salinger, Seymour—An Introduction*, p. 108.

Let me put it like this: When you're up in the corner, private enterprise can make only an economic appeal to the employee.

—*C. Wright Mills, Power, Politics, and People*, p. 143.

Or, more often the first person plural:

Let us turn for a moment to a brief survey of the conditions of modern society.

—*Richard M. Kain, Fabulous Voyager*, p. 8.

Let us begin by comparing the myth with one of the more recent ones being propagated by psychoanalysis.

—*Davis Dunbar McElroy, Existentialism and Modern Literature*, p. 2.

With this view of the problem, let us set beside it an analogous case of conscience in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*.

—*Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function*, p. 117.

Sitting there, let us look again at Marlow to find if years have brought us wisdom or new light. Let Leavis be occasion, not our theme.

—*W. Y. Tindall, from "The Duty of Marlow: Tindall," Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' and the Critics*, ed. *Bruce Harkness*, p. 124.

This second type, really more an imperative of *invitation* than of permission, is a very common device for essay writing; in its facile effort to direct the reader's attention, however, it can be easily overdone. But nonetheless these imperatives can be most effective in very formal style, as in the following sample where "invitation" becomes "injunction" and where the imperatives accumulate in a kind of peroration at the close of the essay:

Be it ours to shed sunshine on their path, to light their sorrows by the balm of sympathy. . . . Let us not weight in grudging scales their merits and demerits, but let us think only of their need let us remember that they are fellow sufferers in the same darkness, actors in the same tragedy with ourselves. And so, when their day is over, when their good and their evil have become eternal by the immortality of the past, be it ours to feel that, where they suffered, where failed, no deed of ours was the cause. . . .

—*Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Religion," Why I Am Not a Christian*, p. 111.

5. The same “let” form is used in our last examples as a kind of heightening device to create the *rhetorical* imperative:

Let him look at it—his beach, perverted now to the tastes of the tasteless. . . .

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, p. 280.

Let the poets and their defenders, he says, refute it if they can, and we shall listen to them with respect.

—Northrop Frye, “*Nature and Homer*,” *Fables of Identity*, p. 41.

Let the wind blow; let the poppy seed itself and the carnation mate with the cabbage. Let the swallow build in the drawing room, and the thistle thrust aside the tiles, and the butterfly sun itself on the faded chintz of the arm chairs. Let the broken glass and the china lie out on the lawn and be tangled over with grass and wild berries.

—Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 208.

This type of imperative often seems to derive from such biblical models as “Let there be light,” and it can produce fine literary prose that is at once both elevated and convincing. Yet, even as a contrast to predominantly indicative sentences, it can be overworked, as in the example below:

Break up the forms and melt the letters back. Let there be no more legends on the earth. Let life live and death die, and let there be no names for sorrowful recollection. Let there be no words for the earth, for love, for life, for death, for beauty and piquant faces.

Let there be no sorrow or recollection of life. Let there be only the river and its odor of fish and flower, let there be the river, the nameless river, flowing from distant summer.¹

—Ross Lockridge, Jr., *Raintree County*, p. 970.

At the beginning of this chapter, we mentioned the role of questions, commands, and exclamations as cohesive devices. Below, the framework of a successful passage is outlined by a series of five parallel imperatives, followed by two exclamatory sentences doing double duty as transitions to the new paragraph and as topic sentences for it:

Consider in this light what seem to be the masterpieces of our time. Consider the poetry of Eliot, Yeats, Valéry, Rilke; the novels of Joyce, Gide, Hemingway, Proust, Mann, Kafka; the plays of Shaw, Pirandello, O’Neill; the music of Stravinsky, Bloch, Bartok, Ravel, Satie, Schoenberg; the paintings of Matisse, Picasso, Roualt, Marin, Hartley; the sculpture of Maillol, Brancusi, Faggi, LaChaise,

¹ And so on through twenty-seven more imperatives on the same page.—EDITOR

Zorach, Archipenko, Moore. Think also, but at another level, not easy to keep in strict parallel, of the architecture of Leviathan: the railway station at Philadelphia, the Pentagon, the skyscrapers, the gasoline stations, the highway systems, the East and West Side highways, apartment houses each a small city, and the interminable multiple dwellings. Think too of the beautiful bridges which connect or traverse eyesores: the Washington Bridge, the Pulaski Skyway. Lastly, for architecture, think of the National Parks, with their boulevards running at mountain peak.

What an expression of an intolerable, disintegrating, irrational world: a doomed world, nevertheless surviving, throwing up value after value with inexhaustible energy but without a principle in sight. And how difficult to understand the arts which throw up the values....

—R. P. Blackmur, “*A Burden for Critics*,” *The Lion and the Honeycomb*, p. 205.

The Exclamatory Sentence

The expletive *I declare!* is as untrue as it is uncolorful. It is a paradox, in fact, and a dull one, because the speaker who claims the declaration is really not declaring at all, but exclaiming. Of course, the grammatical designation of the *exclamatory sentence*, like the *declarative* and the *interrogative*, is familiar to almost everyone, just as almost everyone has his own substitute for *I declare!* Equally familiar are the grammatical fillers or structural words that often announce the exclamation: *What a snob!* *How snobbish!* *Such snobbery!* The first two of these, in complete exclamatory sentences, require an inversion: *She is a snob* and *She is snobbish* become *What a snob she is!* and *How snobbish she is!* This type of sentence, therefore, could also be called the *exclamation inversion*, with any given sentence, if it contains this inversion, not requiring an *exclamation point* to qualify as an exclamation:

He thought: *How beautiful she is.*

—Graham Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, p. 14.

How light the little package was now that it was on the table between them.

—Greene, p. 222.

Nor conversely, does an exclamatory phrase or sentence, if it is closed with an exclamation point, require either the exclamatory filler or the inversion:

“Nought nowhere was never reached”—a ludicrous, but surprisingly pertinent, use of the triple negative! From this cosmic point of view

it is no wonder that Bloom alone should earlier have been compared to a sardine on a bier of bread under the sandwich-bell!

—Richard M. Kain, *Fabulous Voyager*, p. 235.

Of America's "single person" families, five million—roughly forty-five per cent—have total incomes of less than fifteen hundred dollars a year, and thirty per cent exist on less than one thousand dollars a year—less than twenty dollars a week!

—Edward W. Brooke, *The Challenge of Change*, p. 141.

After which, I add on behalf of the rest of us, it might be conceivable to rediscover validly the artifices of language and literature—such far-out notions as grammar, punctuation . . . even characterization! Even *plot*!

—John Barth, "*The Literature of Exhaustion*," *The Atlantic*, August 1967, p. 31.

We are talking, then, more about rhetoric than about grammar, about the effect a construction produces rather than about the manner in which it is constructed. The particular effect in question is emotional emphasis, and, not seeking this emphasis, most essay writers characteristically lack, or regularly conquer, the impulse to exclaim. In prose fiction, too, the exclamation is usually limited to direct quotation. Exclamatory material is no better and no worse than interrogative or declarative; it is simply different, and a quantitative increase in the use of exclamation makes a qualitative difference—whether the resulting quality be desirable or not—in any prose selection, stamping it more obviously than otherwise with the emotions of the author. Look, for example, at the exclamations collected below, varying in form, length, and complexity, and making up less than half the available examples in the single chapter from which they are lifted. Together, since in their context they are very good examples, these exclamations suggest the writer's personal commitment to his material and help to give his prose a lively and engaging flavor:

A magnificent fragment! (p. 191)

How strong a theme this is in our history! (p. 194)

As though, indeed, all the young men of America were crying such phrases to certain other industrial Lords of Creation! (p. 200)

Memory and desire: what power resides in these attributes of the human temperament, and especially when they are denied their realization by the facts of our life! (p. 201)

What insufferable effrontery that Fate should place him among all this new life and not expect him to possess it! (p. 207)

The “Community Guild” theater, the gay and cultured parties Webber attends, the speakeasy society of the twenties whose barred and secret entrance Webber’s Esther so easily penetrates—experiences enough for Wolfe’s young provincial innocent! (p. 211)

How fortunate they were who fought only local corruption, false gentility, or sheer materialism! (p. 218)

To what glorious climax, then, has the provincial hero’s vision of the city’s “whole, glamorous pageantry” brought him! (p. 219)

—Maxwell Geismar, “*Thomas Wolfe*,” *Writers in Crisis*.

Chapter 13

The Passive Transformation

One and the same idea can often be expressed in two different ways, by means of an active, and by means of a passive construction. The English passive is formed with an auxiliary, generally *be*, but often also *get* or *become*, and the second participle: “Tom beats John” (active) and “John was beaten by Tom” mean essentially the same thing and yet they are not in every respect synonymous, and it is therefore not superfluous for a language to have both turns and thus be able to shift the point of view. As a rule the person or thing that is the centre of interest at the moment is made the subject of the sentence, and therefore the verb is in some cases put in the active, in others in the passive.

—*Otto Jespersen, Essentials of English Grammar (one-vol. ed.), p. 120.*

As we know from the second half of its name, the *passive transformation* starts out as something else. It is an active clause that gets systematically worked over, with results that deserve attention in any study devoted to the intersection of grammar and style. As a grammatical event, the passive is as unmistakable as it is widespread; it is sometimes unavoidable, more often just available—and of genuine service. As a contributor to style, however, the passive is often despised—for reasons that need some explaining and, at times, invite objection. On such occasions, examples of the passive at work should provide its own best defense.

What exactly happens to an active form as it is made passive? The process is hypothetical, of course, since no one writes active sentences first in order to transform them. Here are the unwritten active sources for a series of given passives, reconstructed to make clear the changes that take place as a thought moves from active to passive shape:

Strange hallucinations tormented me. →

I was tormented by strange hallucinations.

—Vladimir Nabokov, “*Terra Incognita*,” Nabokov’s Congeries, p. 91.

Being kind makes us kind. →

We are made kind by being kind.

—Eric Hoffer, *The Passionate State of Mind*, p. 77.

The solid shape of a snore interrupted the pictures. →

The pictures were interrupted by the solid shape of a snore.

—William Golding, *Pincher Martin*, p. 30.

A certain watchful innocence marked his round sunburned face. →

His round sunburned face was marked by a certain watchful innocence.

—Carson McCullers, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, p. 2.

A sudden coming of light jeered out Seville’s velvet dark. →

Seville’s velvet dark was jeered out by a sudden coming of light.

—Anthony Burgess, *Enderby*, p. 284.

You will discern its mystical meaning, as in a glass darkly. . . . →

Its mystical meaning will be discerned by you, as in a glass darkly. . . .

—Jan de Hartog, *The Children*, p. 44.

The turnaround of three indicators flashed the most auspicious of Commerce’s signals. . . . →

The most auspicious of Commerce’s signals was flashed by the turnaround of three indicators. . . .

—“Business,” *Time*, May 9, 1969, p. 89.

The direct object of the active structure has become the new subject of the passive, and the original subject is now relocated in the phrase of agency. Here the agent is moved forward for a change in emphasis:

By its multitude of memories memory will be driven to distraction.

—James Gould Cozzens, *Morning Noon and Night*, p. 17.

By the husbands of his wife’s friends, Graham was considered lucky.

—Eric Ambler, *Intrigue*, p. 5.

Here the phrase of agency is compounded:

The order was carried out on the twenty-ninth of November, *not by the public executioner, but by a gravedigger . . .*

—*Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther, p. 123.*

Sometimes the agent is dropped altogether, when it is unknown, well known, or unimportant. Only the passive form makes this economy possible.

A warning should be posted, at this point, as to chronology.

—*John Hersey, The Algiers Motel Incident, p. 264.*

The town was occupied, the defender defeated, and the war finished.

—*John Steinbeck, The Moon Is Down, p. 11.*

This last emphasized word was oddly veered away from, as if the stress on it hadn't been fully intended.

—*J. D. Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 194.*

When present, the agent can also be accompanied by a phrase of instrument, as it is in this double structure:

He was then received into the convent *by the brethren with the kiss of peace* and again admonished *by the prior with the words. . . .*

—*Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther, p. 27.*

More often, though, the phrase of instrument occurs when, as in the previous three samples, the agent is not directly mentioned.

The plays are stuffed like badly made beanbags *with false feeling, false knowledge, false humanity.*

—*Jack Kroll, "Theater of Crisis," Newsweek, May 5, 1969.*

We do not need to hear that the playwright is the agent of this stuffing. Or, here:

Aristotle's psychology is marred *with similar obscurity and vacillation.*

—*Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy, p. 72.*

Who would bother to say, reinstating the agent, that "Aristotle's psychology is marred *by Aristotle* with obscurity and vacillation?"

A secondary result of the passive is the creation of past participles for use in various adjectival slots. Not all adjectives ending in *-ed*, however, are past participles generated in this way. Three below are the prenominal "stained" and "blistered" and the postnominal "exiled"—but it is hard to imagine any active "source" kernel using "outdate" as a transitive verb.

In that kindly light the *stained* and *blistered* paint of the bungalow and the plot of weeds between the veranda and the dry water-hole lost their extreme shabbiness, and the two Englishmen, each in his rocking-chair, each with his whisky and soda and his *outdated* magazine, the counterparts of numberless fellow-countrymen *exiled* in the barbarous regions of the world, shared in the brief illusory rehabilitation.

—*Evelyn Waugh, The Loved One, pp. 7–8.*

Similarly, there is no transitive verb “chest” behind the adjective here, simply formed by adding *-ed* to a noun:

Thus the thin-*chested* comic book readers of both sexes are thoughtfully supplied with both the ends and the means for attaining a spurious brand of maturity.

—*Harvey Cox, The Secular City, p. 200.*

So goes a short description of the passive and its by-products. It all sounds harmless enough. Yet probably no other grammatical phenomenon has come under so much fire from grammarians and teachers of composition alike, on the page and at the podium. The passive transformation is variously accused of being stilted and stuffy, weak and indirect, cold, impersonal, pompous, limp, shrinking, and evasive. To give its critics their due, the passive can, in large doses, be ponderously bad. Still, it is used over and over by the best stylists in prose open to none of the preceding objections. This happens not merely because the passive can be unobjectionable. It can be downright useful, creating varied and effective sentences when relieved by flanking actives.

Motivated only by a taste for variety, though, use of the passive voice can be risky. It has a tendency to betray its motivation.

In these and in other related figures is summed up much of the many-sided significance which the Renaissance saw in the *discordia concors* of love.

—*Kathleen Williams, Spenser's World of Glass, p. 90.*

It is obvious that nothing has been gained except three unnecessary words—no shift of position or emphasis—by writing this idea as above rather than in active form:

These and other related figures sum up much of the many-sided significance. . . .

Even the cause of variety is frustrated if such a passive is repeated, as this writer does later in the same paragraph:

In love and friendship are comprehended some of the most paradoxical aspects of human life. . . .

A construction as distinctive as the passive is best chosen when variety, some grammatical change of pace, is a benefit only incidental to another desired effect. There are, as with other inversions, many other reasons for turning to the passive, including the need for special emphasis or rhythm, for strategic rearrangements of different kinds to aid modification or to increase cohesion, for adjustments in a parallel series, and for certain more thematic effects.

First things first. The most basic result of the passive transformation is a change made in what is emphasized. It is the nature of brief English utterance, such as short kernel patterns, to send the primary stress toward the end of the sentence. It is therefore the nature of the passive to direct this emphasis at the phrase of agent or of instrument, or at both, or, when neither is there, at whatever appears last. To see this shift of emphasis in action, one need only look back to those short samples collected at the start of this chapter. This reversed stress can become quite practical in a somewhat more complex sentence:

The furor these books produced in and around Boston, and above all the angry denunciation aroused by Emerson's "Divinity School Address" of July 15, 1838, were caused *not so much by their general philosophy (which to men like Norton was simply incomprehensible) as by their making clear the corollary that any distinction between Nature and the miraculous was sheer pedantry.*

—Perry Miller, *The American Transcendentalists: Their Prose and Poetry*, p. 105.

The compound phrase of agency, with its correlative frame ("not so much by . . . as by") would have looked especially clumsy at the first of an active sentence. Also, the emphasis it enjoys by coming at the end, as with all passive reorganizations, owes much to our general tendency to fix most firmly in our minds what we are given last.

This matter of passive emphasis is exploited with special point in the next sample, itself recalling a facial emphasis or accentuation:

The thinness of his lips was *emphasized by* a narrow line of dark moustache; it seemed a hard, almost cruel mouth until he smiled, and then an expression of unexpected kindness would irradiate his whole face. The general gauntness of his looks was *accentuated by* the deep sockets from which his eyes looked out, always rather sadly.

—George Woodcock, *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell*, p. 3.

Next, the clipped assertion that follows the charge of loud active verbs uses the passive to stress the quiet, italicized simplicity of the past participle "said":

Do not worry about making your characters shout, intone, exclaim, remark, shriek, reason, holler, or any such thing, unless they are doing it for a reason. All remarks can be *said*.

—*Shirley Jackson, "Notes for a Young Writer," Come Along with Me, p. 239.*

Again, the passive form has allowed a writer to save till the end, for emphasis, the appropriate last word. The fitness of this late stress in the next two sentences is not easy to miss:

Her body, if concealed at all, is concealed by a water lily, a frond, a fern, a bit of moss, or by a sarong—which is a simple garment carrying the implicit promise that it will not long stay in place.

—*E. B. White, The Second Tree from the Corner, p. 108.*

Hemingway's short stories and novels are concerned with the *fundamentals of life, such as death.*

—*Richard Armour, American Lit Relit, p. 152.*

A teasing repetition of “concealed” in the first delays the chain of exotic possible agents. To appreciate the passive in the second, one need only reinstate the active voice. It spoils the joke. Emphasis is all wrong, and the punch is gone.

Emphasis would surely be among the chief casualties if most well-chosen passives were rearranged. The injury sustained below would be a loss of rhythmic emphasis, the upsetting of a syntactic balance that seems to poise the contrast that the paired sentences intend. The symmetry of the passage is achieved by transferring a catalog much like the serial subject of the first sentence to a balancing final position, as an agent of the passive voice, in the second.

In eastern Germany, an inclination to meditation tinged with melancholy, a heightened consciousness of duty and personal sin, and a strong regard for authority and feudal traditions are still alive. Western Germany is characterized by a zest for life, love of the concrete, mobility, rationality, and democracy.

—*Paul Tillich, On the Boundary, p. 14.*

The syntactic mobility that allows the shuffling of word order for new emphasis permits the same kind of transformation to make easy, where it would otherwise be difficult or impossible, a certain plan of modification or expansion. Take this sentence:

For the issues that are concerned have been badly confused, first by polite critics, secondly by echoes that are still with us of that earlier

opposition which talked about art for art's sake in the one decade and about pure art in another.

—Ludwig Lewisohn, “*The Polite Writers*,” Expression in America, p. 59.

With its two successive agents, the second modified by a long relative clause, this idea would not go at all well in the active voice:

For first polite critics, and secondly echoes that are still with us of that earlier opposition which talked about art for art's sake in the one decade and about pure art in another have badly confused the issues that are concerned.

There is a connection here, too, with those strategies of emphasis we had been discussing. For what warrants the selective stress usually landing at the end of a sentence is likely to warrant, also, the major amplification most easily performed from that location. Exceptions occur often, but this generalization does tell us something about the use of the passive. Squeezing in its series of subordinate ideas, and depriving them of their right emphasis in the process, the shape of this sentence is hardly very thoughtful.

A vast economic crisis in the western world, *which led to mass unemployment, the strengthening of violent and reactionary political parties and the consequent threat of a second world war*, ushered in the nineteen thirties.

It makes far more sense as a passive, allowing its right-branching expansions to go forward from their logical starting point, one grammatical thing leading to another like the events described:

The nineteen thirties were ushered in by a vast economic crisis in the western world, *which led to mass unemployment, the strengthening of violent and reactionary political parties and the consequent threat of a second world war*.

—Roy Fuller, “*Poetry: Tradition and Belief*,” The Craft of Letters in England: A Symposium, ed. John Lehmann, p. 81.

One sentence later in the same essay we read:

As has been seen, the poetical terms in which the crisis was to be treated had already been determined.

—Fuller, p. 81.

One might argue against the subordinate passive “As has been seen” in favor of something like “As we have seen,” but there would be no reasonable way of restoring to active form the passive transformation in the

main clause. The four subsequent sentences of the paragraph go on to mention Eliot, Yeats, Hopkins, and Owen, to name these poetical determiners; the passive transformation thus makes a useful link to a discussion about the agents of its own action, and directs toward them a kind of pivotal emphasis.

Here we come to a third area of the passive's use as a syntactic juggler. In addition to its ability to shuffle grammar for emphasis or for ease of modification, it can also adjust structures for the purpose of smoother or clearer transition. The passive transformation thus becomes a device for cohesion. (See Chapter 15.) This can happen, as it does below, even within a single sentence. The example turns on a passive structure that gives due weight to its compound subject and then allows the thought to move logically into a second clause, where the emphasis is wanted:

The way the world is seen, and thus the way men live, is conditioned by what men know about it, *and they know more now than they ever have before.*

—James Dickey, *Babel to Byzantium*, p. 236.

The sentence could scarcely be as effective this way:

What men know about the world, *and they know more now than they ever have before*, conditions the way the world is seen, and thus the way men live.

What was the clincher in the original is here inserted as a passing reminder.

More often than within a single sentence, the passive makes for a quick transition from the sentence in which it occurs to the opener of the sentence that follows. Here two passives placed back to back bring together for emphasis and coherence the agent “vague sense of gratification” and the passive core of the next sentence, “We are gratified. . . .”:

And whether it be genuine disgust, joy, grief, pity, shame or desire—it is accompanied by *a vague sense of gratification*. *We are gratified* by the discovery that we are not all shame and show, that there are elements in our inner make-up as organically our own as the color of our eyes and the shape of our nose.

—Eric Hoffer, *The Passionate State of Mind*, p. 115.

Change to the active voice and the coherent structure falls apart:

A vague sense of gratification accompanies it—whether it be genuine disgust, joy, grief, pity, shame or desire. The discovery that we are not all shame and show, that there are elements in our inner make-up as organically our own as the color of our eyes and the shape of our nose *gratifies us*.

The next passive arrangement allows a quick move from the name of the magazine to the naming of the exact issue:

For an earlier and somewhat more rapidly reported episode in the life of Wendell Holmes as a soldier was first printed in the *Atlantic*. You will find it—if you keep your back numbers handy—in the issue of December 1862.

—*Alexander Woollcott, Long, Long Ago, p. 10.*

In the next longer excerpt, the phrase of agent “by the total lack of any contrivance” turns immediately toward an elaboration of this lack, and acts as a pivot for this coherent description:

There it was, looming ghostly gray and black from the television screens, an improbably, spidery-legged machine, now separated from the command ship and ready to take its occupants down closer to the moon than man had ever been before. The drama of what followed was accented by the total lack of any contrivance. There were the voices of the astronauts, the flat, often laconic drawl of Oklahoma, and the somewhat more cadenced tones of Illinois and California. There were the names of the spacecraft themselves. . . .

—“9.4 Miles to the Moon,” *Newsweek, June 2, 1969, p. 24.*

The shape of the passive transform itself thus helps to shape larger prose areas. We meet it amid other sentences, and its own syntactic order seems to direct us through the larger order of words, helping to make it a unified one. Related to this cohesive function is the use of the passive to make possible a consecutive development of the same subject:

You see, *books* had been happening to me. Now *the books* were cast off back there somewhere in the churn of spray and night behind the propeller.

—*The Langston Hughes Reader, p. 317.*

The subject “books” is able to get our attention at the start of each sentence only because the passive is used for the second.

Now read this contrast between facile and authentic greatness:

People readily call ideas, theories, and engineering feats great; discoveries and exploits—successes, in one word—are great.

Watch the improvement as the author himself makes the first sentence passive, for a contrasting parallelism of subjects and complements:

Ideas, theories, and engineering feats are readily called great; discoveries and exploits—successes, in one word—are great.

—*Walter Kaufmann, The Faith of a Heretic, pp. 343–344.*

Below, the passive again works to sustain a desired subject—"men" or a substituted pronoun—over a series of different predication:

So long as some are strong and some are weak, the weak *will be driven* to the wall. So long as men *are cursed* with the sense of possession, and that I presume is as long as they exist, they will wrest what they can from those powerless to hold it.

—*W. Somerset Maugham, The Summing Up, p. 176.*

Again, a grammatical versatility that includes the coalition of active forms and two passives makes possible successive views of the same subject from different angles. This parallelism of first person openers is just right for the stages of an elaborate self-identification:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass.

—*Ralph Ellison, "Prologue," Invisible Man, opening lines.*

Examples abound, of this and of the passive's other syntactic contributions, in every kind of prose. Every writer, sometime, somewhere, uses the passive transformation, for one of many good reasons. With passives in such tried and proven use, then, why all the adverse publicity? Why did H. W. Fowler, in his classic *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, speak at such annoyed length against "passive disturbances," saying about the "impersonal passive" that, although "reasonable enough in statements made at large," still "when one person is addressing another it often amounts to a pusillanimous shrinking from responsibility" (pp. 439–440)? Or, why should Walker Gibson, in *Tough, Sweet & Stuffy*, his book-length essay on modern American prose style, say that the use of passives, along with an excess of subordination, periodicity, and polysyllabism, characterizes the "Stuffy Style"? Why does Sheridan Baker, in a handbook of style that makes important points about the passive's real value, nevertheless head his entry "Avoid the passive voice" and proceed to complain that it "drones like nothing under the sun, bringing active English to a standstill. It is wordy and unclear. It liquidates and buries the active individual. Our massed and scientific society is so addicted to the passive voice that the individual writer must constantly alert himself against its drowsy, soporific pomp" (*The Complete Stylist*, pp. 94–95). Why does author-scientist Isaac Asimov arraign his fellow scientists for their frequent use of the passive? Here is Asimov's charge:

In dry, stilted phraseology, he [the scientist] describes exactly what he has found, interlarding every statement with a semiwithdrawal in the shape of a qualifying phrase, and then translating the whole into a grammatical construction peculiar to the scientific paper—the Impersonal Passive.

—Isaac Asimov, *From Earth to Heaven*, p. vi.

Asimov explains further in a note on the same page:

As an example of this inspiring form of writing I give you the solemn phrase, “It was earlier demonstrated by the investigator that—” Very few scientists are brave enough to dare to write, “I once showed that—”

—Asimov, p. vi.

Not all scientists write this way, of course. Though it does happen:

It may possibly be thought strange that more has not been said in this book about the modern, very powerful techniques—various forms of chromatography and spectrometry, for example—now *being increasingly applied*, together with useful methods of statistical analysis, by a growing number of investigators to the study of olfaction. The value of all these procedures *should certainly not be underestimated*.

—William McCartney, *Olfaction and Odours: An Osphrésiological Essay*, p. 190.

There is no shrinking from responsibility for their conclusion by the author and his associates named here:

From such measurements made near the superior conjunction of Mercury in 1967, Pettengill, Ash, Melvin L. Stone, Smith, Richard P. Ingalls, Richard A. Brockleman and I concluded that the sun's gravity does decrease the speed of propagation of electromagnetic waves by about the amount predicted by general relativity.

—Irwin I. Shapiro, “*Radar Observations of the Planets*,” *Scientific American*, July 1968, p. 31.

Nor do only scientists write in the manner attacked by Asimov. He exaggerates when he claims that the “Impersonal Passive” is “peculiar to the scientific paper.” More often, in fact, it is found in what we might call committee prose—not addressed by one writer, whatever his occupation, to prospective readers, but by a staff, some official body, an institution, corporation, government agency, or the like, to readers in whom it displays no personal interest. The impersonality, however chilling, is thus an accurate reflection of authorship, impersonal because collective—making a consensus prose for which responsibility would be as hard to fix actually as it is grammatically. This “style” can be just as bad as Walker Gibson implies

when he labels it "scarecrow prose," "officialalese," the rhetoric of "hollow men" (*Tough, Sweet & Stuffy*, pp. 90-101). There is indeed something mysterious and unnerving about the next icy official pronouncements:

It is hereby stipulated that coverage under this policy does not include damage caused in any manner by windstorm to paint or waterproofing material applied to the exterior of the building(s) or structure(s) covered hereunder. The value of paint or waterproofing material, being excluded from the coverage as above stated, shall not be considered in the determination of actual cash value when applying the Co-Insurance Clause applicable to loss from windstorm.

—“Windstorm Exterior Paint and Waterproofing Exclusion Clause,” Michigan Millers Mutual Insurance Company.

A bachelor's degree in a broad program of general education, granted by a college or university of recognized standing, is normally requisite for admission, but is not sufficient of itself. An examination of an applicant's academic record is made to determine whether he has established a strong affirmative case in regard to the character of his general education, and his fitness for graduate work in his proposed subject of study. Letters of recommendation from persons who are in a position to analyze the candidate's abilities and to estimate his promise are given very serious consideration. The results of the Graduate Record Examination are used as a supplementary objective check on the candidate's aptitudes and knowledge. In the consideration of applicants, regard is given to character and promise as well as to scholastic attainment. A personal interview is not required. If a candidate wishes to present himself for an interview or if he wishes to learn further about the program of study, he is welcomed. . . .

—A Graduate School Announcement.

TO ALL REGISTRANTS:

When you report pursuant to this order you will be forwarded to an Armed Forces Examining Station where it will be determined whether you are qualified for military service under current standards. Upon completion of your examination, you will be returned to the place of reporting designated above. It is possible that you may be retained at the Examining Station for more than 1 day for the purpose of further testing or for medical consultation. You will be furnished transportation, and meals and lodging when necessary, from the place of reporting designated above to the Examining Station and return.

—“Order to Report for Armed Forces Physical Examination,” U.S. Selective Service System Form 223.

There can be no doubt about these excerpts being "officialalese," and we can at least respond to them on these grounds—even though we hardly

enjoy reading them. Yet we may still wish to object in the case of the middle one, the announcement from a university, and wonder if it really must sound that way. Surely its composers might have inflicted interested students who read it with less a sense of anonymous cold authority. Without pinpointing responsibility or naming names, it would have been easy enough to substitute an inexact but warming "we" for the unspoken agent of all that momentous paper work, "serious consideration," and decision-making.

This use of the impersonal passive, that frequent irritant by which authors avoid their own mention, mixes with other uninspired passives in the next pair of samples—all the more inert and uninteresting because they are products of a single voice that could have done much better:

The gradual development of its "monolithic" character and the role of terror in maintaining its unity down to Stalin's death *are summarized* in this paper. Then the post-Stalin era, in which elements of Stalinism remained in spite of progressive liberalism, *is discussed*. The limits of the possible in this liberalizaton process *were set* by the Polish and Hungarian revolts. The period *was also marked* by an intensive drive toward collectivization and industrialization.

—*Norman J. G. Pounds, "Fissures in the Eastern European Block," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, July 1967, p. 40.*

It is said that not only do most bacteria die in the water in a matter of hours but the bones of the dead dissolve in it with astonishing speed. (*There is reported* to be a tank of Ganga water at Soron, a town on the right bank of the river, in Uttar Pradesh, in which the bones of the dead dissolve in three days.) *It is also said* that because of the special properties of the water sailors used to prefer a supply of it to a supply of any other drinking water for long voyages.

—*Ved Mehta, "A Reporter at Large: Indian Journal," The New Yorker, June 1, 1968, p. 38.*

When we listen to the voice of Emily Post, however, and hear so much that sounds the same, we must stop a minute to consider:

In other days, when even verbal messages began with the "presenting of compliments," a social note, no matter what its length or purport, *would have been considered* rude unless written in the third person. But as in a communication of any length the difficulty of this form is almost insurmountable—to say nothing of the pedantic effect of its accomplishment—it *is no longer chosen*, aside from the formal invitation, acceptance and regret, except for notes to stores or subordinates. For example. . . .

Letters in the third person *are not signed* because the sender's

name appears in the body of the note and a signature is therefore unnecessary. Sometimes however a business letter *is written* in the third person as to the addressee, but it *is so constructed* that the name of the writer *is not mentioned* and a signature therefore becomes essential. . . .

—*Emily Post, Etiquette, p. 491.*

Is this just flat, or is it strangely fitting? The cultivated audience to whom Miss Post's delicate reminders are addressed, the informed and the initiated, have been refined away, sophisticated almost out of existence. We get a small drama of good manners in which the elite are not forced to perform in their own persons. Only a code of propriety and of right behavior remains, without the actors who so behave. Everything is done, as it is counseled to be done, by indirection. Whatever we may think of the exclusive world defined by the etiquette book, we must admit that the passive grammar has here done it subtle justice.

There is something equally appropriate about the account of Essex below. With the exception of the opening impersonal passive "It will be remembered," the commentator presents us with a series of rapid actions, of orders and imprisonments and inquisitions assailing the defenseless Essex, and later Hayward and Wolfe, and recorded aptly by the passive grammar, with its submerged, threatening agency:

It will be remembered that when Essex made his tempestuous return from Ireland, against the queen's orders, in September of 1599, *he was suspected and remitted* to custody. On November 29, *censure was pronounced* on him in Star Chamber. In March *he was allowed* to return to his own house in charge of Sir Richard Berkeley. In June of 1600 *he was tried before special commissioners, censured, and ordered* to remain a prisoner in his house and not to execute any of his offices. Great *stress was laid* on Hayward's book during these proceedings as evidence of Essex's ambitions and intentions, and in July *Hayward was summoned to court and examined*. Two days later *he was sent* to the Tower of London. The printer Wolfe *was also questioned* and revealed that three weeks after the first printing of Hayward's book, the Archbishop of Canterbury had ordered the dedicatory epistle to Essex *cut out*. All later editions *were burnt* in the Bishop of London's house—to the financial grief of the printer, he complained. *Hayward was again examined.*

—*Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Histories, p. 187.*

Again, this time in a novel, a matter-of-fact reportorial style, terse and objective, uses passives to suggest the impersonal workings of public justice:

In the early summer of 1902 John Barrington Ashley of Coaltown, a small mining center in southern Illinois, was tried for the murder of Breckenridge Lansing, also of Coaltown. He was found guilty and sentenced to death.

—Thornton Wilder, “Prologue,” *The Eighth Day*, p. 3.

Once more, a kind of generalized and impersonal threat is captured by the passive voice with an unwritten agent:

There is more than a germ of truth in the suggestion that in a society where statisticians thrive, liberty and individuality are likely to be emasculated.

—M. J. Moroney, *Facts from Figures*, opening sentence.

With these last four examples we have returned from complaints against the passive to a survey of its useful applications. Here they are not so much syntactic or positional, shifting grammar for emphasis or rhythm, for easy modification, tighter cohesion, or convenient parallel development. Rather they make what might be called thematic capital of the many implications carried by the passive voice. The results are remarkably varied, and a small further sampling will conclude this chapter.

The passive transformation is, to be sure, at the syntactic service of the parallelism that orders the next three sentences:

The ultimate epiphany is withheld, the epiphany of “everything and everywhere” as one and harmonious and meaningful. But it is prophesied in “God’s real name,” as Stephen’s personal destiny is prophesied in his own name “Dedalus.” It is to be found in the labyrinth of language that contains all human revelation vouchsafed by *divine economy*, and to be found by the artist in naming the names.

—Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function*, p. 332.

But, importantly, the agent of the passive goes unstated in the first two sentences, a matter of sacred mystery whose ultimate source is approximated finally in the idea of “divine economy,” which becomes the implicit agent of the whole.

Another version of epiphany, another poetic revelation—with another unannounced agent for this gift of poetic grace—climaxes the next excerpt:

I agree with Frost that a poem planned beforehand never comes off. Real ones appear unexpectedly, and always at a time when the poet is in a so-called state of grace: which means a clear mind, tense

heart, and no worries about fame, money, or other people, but only the excitement of a unique revelation *about to be given*.

—*Robert Graves, "Introduction," Selected Poems of Robert Frost, p. x.*

Something like “divine economy,” or “unique revelation,” is presumably the tacit agent here, too:

He had been called in his early youth and had set out for the city to proclaim the destruction awaiting a world that had abandoned its Saviour.

—*Flannery O'Connor, The Violent Bear It Away, p. 5.*

In the following passage, a superstitious heritage assumes some sort of divine command dating from “the beginning of time” and still the agent behind these strange rules and taboos:

The north and the west and the south are good hunting ground, but *it is forbidden* to go to any of the Dead Places except to search for metal and then he who touches the metal must be a priest or the son of a priest. Afterward, both the man and the metal *must be purified*. There are the rules and the laws; *they are well made*. *It is forbidden* to cross the great river and look upon the place that was the place of the Gods—*this is most strictly forbidden . . . These things are forbidden—they have been forbidden* since the beginning of time.

—*Stephen Vincent Benét, "By the Waters of Babylon," Thirteen O'Clock, p. 3.*

The agents of the next two passives are unexpressed—with an active revision, therefore, not very feasible—simply because they are unknown, one out of sight, the other somewhere in the unspecified future:

Passport kontrol! Somewhere down the train the words were barked.

—*Catherine Drinker Bowen, Adventures of a Biographer, p. 6.*

Like every other writer, Shakespeare *will be forgotten sooner or later*, but it is unlikely that a heavier indictment *will ever be brought against him*.

—*George Orwell, "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool," Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays, p. 52.*

Aside from these matters of agency or its absence, there is another interesting way in which the passive becomes thematic, having to do with the nature of “passivity” itself. In the next sentence, at the end of a long coordinate chain, the active verbs of motion culminate in a single passive

form, emphasized by the following adverb and appropriate to a shift from active to passive conveyance:

They sailed and trailed and flew and raced and drawled and walked and *were carried*, finally, home.

—John Knowles, Indian Summer, p. 4.

The next paired clauses seem almost a study in transformation, analyzing the two sides of the same verbal coin—the contrast between active and passive predication and, in a given case, its moral implications:

It is men tormenting and killing a bull; it is a bull being tormented and killed.

—Max Eastman, Art and the Life of Action, p. 90.

Two near-kernels are now paired in another contrast, this time the humorous juxtaposition of two kinds of death, one active and the other passive:

In New York, I should die of stimulus. In Boston, I should be soothed to death.

—Van Wyck Brooks, A Chilmark Miscellany, p. 9.

Death happens to be the subject, again, of our final two samples, the description of two corpses. In the first, the passive structure renders a sense of action locked into the rigidity of death:

The body lay on the back, the head toward the door. A candlestick *was yet clutched* in the right hand.

—Robert Penn Warren, Wilderness, p. 228.

And last, two active verbs in the compound predicate of the first clause give way to the frozen passivity of the second:

He has taken the old flag and returned to the battlefield, and there, with his banner spread over him, *he is found by peasants*, a frozen corpse.

—Edmund Wilson, O Canada, p. 88.

While a passive transformation is often used to bring a modifier into an adjacent position to the thing modified—one of the positional functions seen before in this chapter—here, instead, the passive separates the appositive “a frozen corpse” from its antecedent pronoun and gets a far more startling effect.

Chapter 14

Parallelism

Although an approach to regular meter in prose is usually undesirable, regularity in the larger design of the sentence can often be a most attractive and effective rhetorical device. A sentence that sounds like a record with a deep scratch across its surface (click, click, click) is disagreeable; but one whose larger elements recognizably match, like the three arches in the facade of a cathedral, gives pleasure. This is the principle that appears in handbooks of composition under the topics “balance” and “parallelism.” The matching of phrase against phrase, clause against clause, lends an unmistakable eloquence to prose. That, indeed, is one of the principal glories of the King James Bible. . . . And, to some extent in reminiscence and imitation of the Bible, English prose all the way down to our own time has tended toward balanced structure for the sake of contrast or antithesis or climax . . .

—Richard D. Altick, Preface to Critical Reading, p. 210.

Parallelism is rather difficult to talk about in an orderly or concise fashion. The scope of the term’s application, including all the various syntactic phenomena that come under its heading or that are used in close conjunction with it, is very broad indeed. Types of parallel structures range from the simplest to the subtlest, the unnoticed to the unmistakable, the barely grammatical to the daringly elaborate. The purpose here will be to sample some of the different types of parallelism, at various stages of complexity and sophistication.

Before it has anything to do with style, parallelism is often a grammatical concern; it is simply required in certain cases where conjunctions are used in the process of compounding. The rules of parallelism insist that only like things, grammatically, can be so joined: *shoes* and *ships* and

sealing wax, all nouns, but not *shoes* and *high-heeled* and *run*, a noun, an adjective, and a verb. The necessity of parallelism normally extends also to phrases and clauses in series.

Deliberate Faulty Parallelism

For particular effects, some professional writers occasionally indulge in deliberate faulty parallelism. We shall begin with a rather extreme instance, in which the author consciously tries for a lax, informal effect:

Here was himself, *young*, *good-looking*, *snappy dresser*, and *making dough*.

—John Steinbeck, *Sweet Thursday*, p. 156.

Few constructions so stridently break the rules. Most, although they appear to add a seemingly unparallel item to a series, really mix grammatically similar elements, differing only enough to get separate, individual emphasis:

Is there any one period of English literature to which we can point as being *fully mature*, *comprehensive*, and *in equilibrium*?

—T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, pp. 55–56.

It is worth while then to produce examples from *Troilus and Criseyde*, as one of the most *leisurely*, *simplest as to imagery*, and *earliest* poems in English literature.

—William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, pp. 57–58.

The strangely shaped glands, and bones, the transparent lungs, the madly dense tangle of cells in the brain hold worlds within worlds; and, *through it all* and *always*, streams the blood.

—Leo Vroman, *Blood*, p. ix.

Religiously, politically, and simply in terms of the characters' efforts to get along with one another, this incongruity is pervasive.

—Frederick C. Crews, E. M. Forster: *The Perils of Humanism*, p. 142.

Prepositional phrases, for the most part, jarred the parallelism of simple adjectives and adverbs in the preceding examples. In the next four, first a past participle and then present participles break the expected parallelism:

But it is, on the contrary, wonderfully *dramatic* and *picturesque* and *cast in heroic mold*.

—Allan Nevins and Henry Steele Commager, “Preface,” *A Pocket History of the United States*, p. vi.

He can be diplomatic and yielding, yet at the same time he is one of the most undiplomatic persons imaginable, often *stubborn*, or *doing something just to see the fireworks*.

—Erich Fromm, *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, p. 118.

Yet *two days ago*, and *remembering* to allow for the time change, no stars fell, no lightning flashed, no premonition ruffled the hairs on the nape of the neck.

—Audrey Callahan Thomas, *Ten Green Bottles*, p. 15.

She is alternately gamin-like, sexy, mischievous, innocent, confident, insouciant, girlish, and *radiating warmth*.

—*Hollywood Bowl program*, *An Evening with Barbra Streisand*, July 9, 1967.

Below, an adjective and an adverbial are paired:

In *Phoenix II* (and perhaps in all his discursive work) the finest example of Lawrence's voice speaking superbly *true* and *at length* is in the Introduction to *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion* by Maurice Magnus.

—Richard Hoggart, "The Voices of Lawrence," *New Statesman*, June 14, 1968, p. 796.

Ellipsis

Parallelism helps to make possible the device of ellipsis, the acceptable removal, because they are understood, of parallel items from a series. Because of the underlying logic of parallelism, the reader can easily fill in the gaps from his own recognition of the common denominator of the series. This shared item can appear at the end of the series, as in the next deliberately strained and unusual example:

My Juvenal and Dante versions are as faithful as I am able or dare or can bear *to be*.

—Robert Lowell, "Note," *Near the Ocean*, p. 9.

Much more often, the common denominator, later understood and removed, comes just as the compounding gets under way. This happens in the next five excerpts, the sentences tightened up considerably by the omission of repetitive material in an elliptical concision made possible only by the parallel arrangement. As above, italics indicate the removed material:

For love *is stronger* than hate, and peace than war.

—Bradford Smith, *A Dangerous Freedom*, p. 362.

The walls of the town, which *is built* on a hill, *are* high, the streets and lanes tortuous and broken, the roads winding.

—Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*, p. 3.

What is wrong with New York? The taxes *are* high, and the means of collecting them barbarous. The cost per person of operating the government of New York *is* \$412. The comparative cost per person of operating Philadelphia *is* \$264; of Chicago, \$293.

—William F. Buckley, Jr., *The Unmaking of a Mayor*, p. 30.

For all the persons with whom I have been concerned *got* what they wanted: Elliott social eminence; Isabel an assured position backed by a substantial fortune in an active and cultured community; Gray a steady and lucrative job, with an office to go to from nine till six every day; Suzanne Rouvier security; Sophie death; and Larry happiness.

—W. Somerset Maugham, *The Razor's Edge*, p. 343.

Thus Bodo *illustrates* peasant life, and an early phase of a typical medieval estate; Marco Polo, Venetian trade with the East; Madame Eglentyne, monastic life; the Ménagier's wife, domestic life in a middle-class home, and medieval ideas about women; Thomas Betson, the wool trade, and the activities of the great English trading company of Merchants of the Staple; and Thomas Paycocke, the cloth industry in East Anglia.

—Eileen Power, *Medieval People*, p. vii.

Another rarer type of grammatical economy is the tricky use of one word for two simultaneous grammatical functions, like "clichés" below, which is a predicate noun for the *be*-verb "are" and a direct object for the transitive "invite":

If these headings are or invite clichés, an inhabitant of our world may believe that they are in continual need of being reaffirmed.

—Douglas Bush, *Engaged and Disengaged*, p. 207.

Extended Parallelism within the Sentence

Parallelism, then, is a grammatical phenomenon before it is a stylistic one. The limits of this distinction are the limits of compounding within the dimensions of a given sentence, for parallelism is never a *requirement* between separate sentences. Often, though, it is carried beyond what is actually mandatory within a single sentence. To exemplify this with a couple of sentences stretched almost to the limit with parallel additions, I offer these:

But they are probably too bleak for the ordinary reader, who may already have been disconcerted by beginning what seems to be an ordinary novel—a love story that does not go quite smoothly but

which one does not expect to be wrecked or the story of a sympathetic sinner who in the end ought to be redeemed—and then finding that there is something not just temporarily but fundamentally and permanently wrong and that matters are getting out of hand, with no hope of escaping disaster.

—*Edmund Wilson, O Canada*, p. 30.

Yet it has long been assumed on the basis of his findings that distributed practice is better than massed practice; that short practice periods are better than long ones; that frequency, recency, and repetition favor the acquisition of knowledge—all this despite the personal experience of countless scholars who have found that they can achieve more when they have a whole day rather than half a day at their disposal, when they are trying to understand the material instead of repeating it by rote, when they have worked through a problem until it is solved, instead of toying with it for periods regularly distributed; and who also know that once understood a problem is mastered for good.

—*Magda B. Arnold, Emotion and Personality*, p. 3.

The framework of the first sentence (“. . . by beginning . . . a love story that . . . but which . . . or the story . . . and then finding that . . . and that . . .”) is sturdily parallel, and yet stylistic consideration does not seem to be a part of the structural plan. Although a reader might well miss the parallelism and even become lost in the first sentence, the parallel structure in the second supports a definite stylistic stress on a careful, clear ordering of its ideas in measured units, with clauses most prominent. In other words, in that one separate sentence there is a parallelism that is not just grammatical, but stylistic as well—defining and framing a structural system that is consciously *balanced*.

Balance and Repetition

Four short examples of balanced configurations, two within and two between sentences, might serve to make clearer the idea of *syntactic balance*:

And he took the pain of it, if not happily, like a martyr, at least willingly, like an heir.

—*Edward Lewis Wallant, The Pawnbroker*, p. 279.

Desirous, she chooses her apéritifs wisely, or content, she enjoys the caviare of potential power.

—*F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tender Is the Night*, p. 291.

James was an artist, however tortured his sentences finally became. Wells was a propagandist, however skillfully he stated his sometimes complex ideas.

—*Myrick Land, The Fine Art of Literary Mayhem, p. 85.*

Marilyn, it may be, was destroyed by her own oversensitive perceptions. Jayne, it must be, was denied by her lack of them the real stardom she hoped for and for which she worked so indefatigably.

—*Charles Champlin, "Jayne Mansfield—Almost a Star," Los Angeles Times, July 3, 1967, IV, p. 11.*

Balance is a term from rhetoric, and the various shadings and implications it contributes to prose style are difficult to discuss or evaluate objectively. Still, its essential characteristics are syntactic, and it builds on a base of grammatical parallelism for which it is a most important complement in the ordering of multiple sentence groups. Facile repetition, the hallmark of elementary parallelism, is not very effective, in itself, as a device for order or cohesion over large verbal areas. It can easily seem applied and artificial. Consider the following:

My thesis is that such a search demands total involvement and maximum awareness, but that man is encapsulated. *By encapsulated I mean* claiming to have the whole of truth when one has only part of it. *By encapsulated I mean* looking at life partially and proceeding to make statements concerning the whole of life. And *by encapsulated I mean* living partially because one's daily activities are based on a world-view or philosophy of life which is meager next to the larger meaning of existence. Thus, this book focuses its attention on the dilemma of contemporary specialism in work. *I mean*, in other words, the outlook that only certain views are correct and that only certain people have the proper background to have these views. *I mean* the narrowing down of vocational tasks brought on by the industrial revolution and resulting in twenty different "experts" making a shoe rather than one master shoemaker. *I mean* the situation in which a person dares not comment "outside his field" and feels he must take a course in electrical engineering before replacing a light bulb. *I mean* those policies which are promulgated as supra-national but are, in fact, nationalistic in intent. *I mean*, in short, the fragmentary ethos of the 20th century.

—*Joseph R. Royce, The Encapsulated Man, p. 2.*

Though there is an attempt to shift the parallelism somewhat by varying the repetitions, there is still something about this passage that detracts from its desired effect, some lack of real balance that makes the

simple repetition seem overdone, yet the functional parallelism insufficient. Notice the difference in the next long samples:

America emerged out of obscurity into history only some four centuries ago. It is the newest of great nations, yet it is in many respects the most interesting. It is interesting because its history recapitulates the history of the race, telescopes the development of social and economic and political institutions. It is interesting because upon it have played most of those great historical forces and factors that have molded the modern world: imperialism, nationalism, immigration, industrialism, science, religion, democracy, and liberty, and because the impact of these forces upon society is more clearly revealed in its history than in the history of other nations. It is interesting because, notwithstanding its youth, it is today the oldest republic and the oldest democracy and lives under the oldest written constitution in the world. It is interesting because, from its earliest beginnings, its people have been conscious of a peculiar destiny, because upon it have been fastened the hopes and aspirations of the human race, and because it has not failed to fulfill that destiny or to justify those hopes.

—Allan Nevins and Henry Steele Commager, “Preface,” *A Pocket History of the United States*, p. v.

I write as a foreigner myself, and I believe that it is the *idea* of America as much as anything that draws us so eagerly to these shores. We want to see for ourselves a country so vast that it has outreached the old conceptions of nationhood. We want to visit the ultimate source of the new Renaissance—not only in science, but in art and architecture, too. We want to know what supreme material power is like when it is translated into cities, homes, recreation—and attitudes. We want to see how we would have made out if we, too, had been freed from so many of the shackles of history and allowed to start all over again.

—James Morris, “*The Year They Discovered America*,” *Venture*, August 1964, p. 38.

In these two descriptions of America, what might have seemed like perfunctory repetition, advertising itself as style, really does convince us as a valid, coherent, logical if not inevitable arrangement. With no recourse to elaborate syntax, the parallelism has simply been made more comprehensive, and so more cohesive, by a balanced pattern of internal clauses, phrases, and words in series, as well as the repeated sentence openers.

The distinction might usefully be made that parallelism is a grammatical term, balance a stylistic one, employing grammar beyond the call of

duty. Not to use parallel syntax when it is required, therefore, is to be wrong; not to use balanced constructions when they are effective is, at worst, to be second-rate. In any case, when effective grammatical parallelism combines with careful balance, the two together provide a means of controlling a long and complex series of thoughts, of ordering them for concision and clarity, and of turning out neat, crisp sentences as part of a closely worked exposition. We have seen this, and we will see further demonstration in the examples that follow, with *italics* to emphasize the parallelism:

Power has to do with whatever decisions men make *about* the arrangements under which they live, and *about* the events which make up the history of their times. Events that are beyond human decision *do happen*; social arrangements *do change* without benefit of explicit decision. But *in so far as* such decisions are made, *the problem* of who is involved in making them is the basic problem of power. *In so far as* they could be made but are not, *the problem* becomes who fails to make them?

—C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics, and People*, p. 23.

Alternation as a Device for Cohesion

The logical *alternation* of subordinate and main clauses in the final sentences of the preceding excerpt is a common way of ordering expository material. A similar alternation happens again below, first in an extended “if-then” pattern, next in separate sentences beginning alternately with “I have attributed” and “Yet.”

If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, *these* have no story or plot to speak of; *if a good play* is judged by subtlety or characterization and motivation, *these* are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; *if a good play* has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, *these* often have neither a beginning nor an end; *if a good play* is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerism of the age in finely observed sketches, *these* seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; *if a good play* relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, *these* often consist of incoherent babblings.

—Martin Esslin, “*Introduction: The Absurdity of the Absurd*,” *The Theatre of the Absurd*, pp. xvii–xviii.

I have attributed the silence of the contemporary revolution to the distractions of our time. Yet so brilliantly is every modern circum-

stance illuminated by the revolution's flares, that the reason seems inadequate. *I have attributed the silence* to the obscurity of such highly specialized scientific findings; yet the even more specialized endeavors of the nuclear physicists have scarcely gone unnoted. *I have attributed the silence* to the newness of the revelations, and lamented an educated generation born too soon. Yet the approximate Class of 1960, thirty years later, emerging from respectable universities as respectably well-educated as were we, has been taught not a whit more.

—Robert Ardrey, *African Genesis*, p. 13.

The “neither-nor” correlatives below produce much the same alternating emphasis, as does the “inwardly-outwardly” contrast that follows, linked with the straight balance of the parallel “now” phrases, establishing a kind of proceeding temporal *rhythm*:

Neither is mind material, answers Spinoza, *nor* is matter mental; *neither* is the brain-process the cause, nor is it the effect, of thought; *nor* are the two processes independent and parallel. For there are not two processes, and there are not two entities; there is but one process, seen *now inwardly* as thought, and *now outwardly* as motion; there is but one entity, seen *now inwardly* as mind, *now outwardly* as matter, but in reality an inextricable mixture and unity of both. Mind and body do not act upon each other, because they are not each other, they are one.

—Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, p. 176.

Rhythm

Here, finally, I have introduced the notion of *prose rhythm* into the discussion of parallelism and balance, not thereby suggesting anything new, but naming at last something that has been successfully present in many of the examples so far. Balance, as I have been discussing it, implies a quantitative measure, something reasonably exact and static. But prose is not static, not meant to be measured but to be read, and balance, when read, becomes rhythm. Certainly this is apparent in the long alternating constructions used as balanced samples, just as it can be seen earlier in this chapter, even in the examples of broken parallelism and ellipsis. Even this kind of imbalance, as another kind of prose arrangement, has its own distinct rhythm, which can be combined with more obvious, regular patterns into larger rhythms, infinite in number.

Rhythm is an unavoidable consideration for any accomplished prose writer, like metrics for the poet, and it is by no means limited to his use of parallelism. There is hardly a chapter in this book to which it is any less

pertinent; wherever one notices and appreciates *grammar as style*, rhythm is likely to be a factor. It results from the way things are put together grammatically: prose structures, like those of poetry, create beat and cadence, syntax becomes rhythm. The subject comes up for discussion at greatest length in this chapter, however, because rhythm is that peculiar quality of parallelism, hard to define or formulate, that helps more than anything else to explain both its practicality and its impact.

CHIASMUS AND PAIRED CONSTRUCTIONS

For some pointed evidence of the rhythms of balance and parallelism, two very special kinds of balanced constructions are useful—*chiasmus* and *paired constructions*, both producing carefully narrowed but pronounced rhythms. Again, like “balance,” *chiasmus* is a term out of the rhetoric books. Looked at in one way, it is almost the opposite of parallelism, at least a kind of inverse parallelism or grammatical “mirror image” in which a brief syntactic pattern is reversed rather than repeated. Examine this sentence:

Scapegoat to vulgarians, the Seer is still a redeemer to freaks.

It includes a parallelism between the opening appositive phrase “scapegoat to vulgarians” and the predicate nominative “redeemer to freaks.” But it actually appears in the source from which it was taken as follows, trading possible parallelism for the more striking rhythm of chiasmus:

Scapegoat to vulgarians, the Seer is still to freaks a redeemer.

—*Ihab Hassan, “Sensitive Outsider vs. Vulgarian,” Salinger, ed. Henry Anatole Grunwald, p. 175.*

Chiasmus is really a form of rhythmic inversion, and in the second example, “It is criticism, not biography” is reversed to become:

Criticism it is, not biography, that must establish the character of that point in mental space-time, determining what is conveyed, what kind of thing is expressed.

—*Francis Noel Lees, “The Keys Are at the Palace,” College English, November 1966, p. 107.*

Balance is a refinement of parallelism with equally weighted elements, and chiasmus is inverted balance with truly symmetrical elements. It is this symmetry that characterizes the sentences collected below, even though some cannot boast of chiasmus in its purest form. Italics are used to focus on the structure of interest:

Not only are they just, they are rational.

—*George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy, p. 4.*

. . . nor was he revived during his own lifetime like Faulkner, nor like Hemingway has he had much of his work handed over to the academicians.

—Richard Walser, Thomas Wolfe, p. 142.

Repetition figures even more interestingly in the next two examples of chiasmus below. In the first, it is a prominent part of the reversal. The second has dispersed its symmetrically repeated elements over quite a large verbal space in order to give a controlling rhythmic pattern to the entire thought:

The synagogues are flaming, and the first step has been taken in that tragic tale of *proscription* and *tallage*, *tallage* and *expulsion* which (it seems) must never end.

—Eileen Power, Medieval People, p. 13.

She could see the white house gleaming welcome to her through the reddening autumn leaves, feel the quiet hush of the country twilight coming down over her like a benediction, feel the dews falling on the acres of green bushes starred with fleecy white, see the raw color of the red earth and the dismal dark beauty of the rolling hills.

—Margaret Mitchell, Gone with the Wind, p. 1003.

It is the habit of some writers, the occasional decision of others, to organize multiple parts of speech into pairs, perhaps suggesting greater control than in a straightforward series, and certainly resulting in a more distinct rhythm. We will call them *paired constructions*:

. . . Art is not permanent and primary, but the flux and the dying is.

—Terence Hawkes, "Shakespeare in Our Time," Yale Review, Summer 1967, p. 566.

Goethe or Keller, Dickens or Meredith, Balzac or Zola told us. . . .

—Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 472.

The final sense we get is of a community of *feeling and reaction* in *infant and adult, elephant and keeper, degraded woman and galvanized man, Darwin and a small American monkey sharing his snuff.*

—Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Tangled Bank, p. 61.

I can lay no claim to the role of *botanist or zoologist, of horticulturist or ornithologist.*

—August Heckscher, "Nature and the City," Natural History, March 1968, p. 6.

One might ponder the melancholy question whether it does *take misfortune and great tension, national agitation and even calamity, to*

arouse and inspire film-makers to *dare* radical leaps ahead and *explode* devastating expressions.

—Bosley Crowther, *The Great Films*, p. 10.

There are *institutions and bureaucracies, political habits and commercial systems—all developed and perfected, proliferated and entrenched, during the course of and in the service of our transportation history just now ended.*

—George Fox Mott, *Transportation Century*, p. 6.

ANTITHESIS

Some of the pairing in these sentences seems rather arbitrary, though it is not necessarily less effective because it does not evolve from the sense of the sentence. Other ideas seem to fall naturally into paired constructions, some above, but especially those that follow the logic of contrast in the coming examples. The next three passages, for instance, though they move toward arbitrary pairs near the end of each (triplets in the third example), do produce paired constructions that assume the natural rhythm of antithesis. Only the antithetical pairs are italicized here:

Moving from the *known to the unknown*, proceeding as we must from *light toward dark*, and into the wild and watery, the untried and unshored, it is noteworthy that we start on Christmas Day.

—Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness*, p. 204.

What rejoiced his heart was the drama of elemental reality: *the clash and the balance, the violence and the evanescence* that are evident in the minds and actions of mankind as they are in landscape and seascape.

—Monroe Wheeler, “Turner,” *Look*, April 5, 1966, p. 46.

Like nature the whale is paradoxically *benign and malevolent, nourishing and destructive*. It is massive, brutal, monolithic, but at the same time protean, erotically beautiful, infinitely variable.

—Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, p. 110.

More examples of these frequent antithetical pairs follow:

Thus, beneath the complex of *ribaldry and sentiment, blasphemy and aspiration, mockery and tenderness*, so strangely compounded, there lies a deeper purpose.

—Richard M. Kain, *Fabulous Voyager*, p. 241.

At once *superstitious and scientific, passionate and rational, political and apolitical, practical and visionary*, Aziz is continually at war with himself.

—Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountains*, pp. 319–320.

At once *materialistic and moral, aggressive and religious, self-satisfied and self-critical*, the middle generation of Victorians enjoyed a special moment in English history.

—David Thomson, *England in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 117.

Much the same effect of close control and alternating rhythm results when the pairs are subject and object of short parallel clauses:

Superstition jostled against religion; languages contended with dialects; physicians competed with quacks; the rabble murdered statesmen.

—Sir George Clark, *The Seventeenth Century*, p. 361.

Or, the same effect is produced when the antithesis is between paired constructions themselves, rather than between the halves of a single pair:

Language is finite and formal; reality is infinite and formless. Order is comic; chaos is tragic.

—John Updike, “*Rhyming Max*,” *Assorted Prose*, p. 200.

Like other balanced constructions, paired constructions are liable to deliberate faulty parallelism. The “fault” can be either grammatical, as at the end of the first example below, where an adjective is matched with a noun, or logical, as in the second, where a kind of shifting antithesis disappoints our expectation that “loneliness” would be contrasted with something like “the company of fellow man”:

... effective satire cannot be written about a world that is silly rather than evil, characters who are *pipsqueaks* rather than *ominous*.

—Irving Howe, “*First Novels: Sweet and Sour*,” *Harper’s*, May 1968, p. 86.

The American novel, too, presents most of the possible situations in the complex relationship of the individual and the group, isolation and society, *loneliness and fellow man*.

—Edwin T. Bowden, *The Dungeon of the Heart*, p. 152.

Yet the antithetical rhythm is still there, of course, and its presence makes it easier to notice the “fault.”

More prolonged antithesis can sustain a similar balanced rhythm, but

usually varies it somewhat to escape a tiring, singsong repetition. The resources of grammatical variety allow the authors of the next two passages an easy rhythm of multiple contrasts without a heavy-handed parallelism:

Marxism, as a doctrine, is a series of paradoxes. It claims to be a science yet regards its truths as transcendental; it upholds the inexorability of change while remaining frozen in its century-old categories; it asserts the conditional nature of all outlooks and claims exemption for its own; it condemns pragmatism but makes success its criterion; it denounces metaphysics while laboring under one of the most metaphysical of all systems.

—*Gordon Leff, The Tyranny of Concepts: A Critique of Marxism, p. 19.*

Or consider Mr. Ramsay: he is a self-dramatizing domestic tyrant, yet he is also admirable as a lone watcher at the frontiers of human ignorance. A detached and lonely philosopher, he nevertheless craves the creative contact of wife and children; grim, yet optimistic; austere, yet fearful for his reputation, petty and selfish, yet capable of losing himself completely in a novel by Scott; aloof, yet he thrives on the simple company and fare of humble fishermen.

—*Norman Friedman, "The Waters of Annihilation: Double Vision in To the Lighthouse," A Journal of English Literary History, Vol. XXII, p. 64.*

SOME VARIED EXAMPLES

Rhythm is not repetition, not parallelism or balance alone. Repetition and variation constitute the dual essence of prose rhythm, as they do of form in music or in painting. The many types of parallel arrangement, of balance and calculated imbalance in phrase and clause, of repetitions and ellipses, pairings, catalogings, and other groupings, assembled together into distinct prose textures, contribute to the unique rhythm of each of the coming excerpts. When the many kinds of parallelism are called into play, when heavy structuring and more relaxed rhythms interchange and merge, the best writing takes on a vast and fluid variety of patterns, only a few of which can be found in these samples:

Clauses and sentences may run on from verse to verse, now in accordance with the metrical pairing, now in opposition to it. Enjambment of this sort varies in frequency and degree from passage to passage and poem to poem.

—*John C. Pope, Seven Old English Poems, p. 99.*

There was something rather "doggy," rather smart, rather acute and shrewd, and something warm, and something slightly contemptible about him.

—*D. H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers, p. 103.*

I want to introduce, I want to describe, I want to distribute mementos, amulets, I want to break out my wallet and pass around snapshots, I want to follow my nose.

—*J. D. Salinger, Seymour—An Introduction, p. 107.*

No longer instinctive, no longer safe and reliable, the transfer of culture, the whole enterprise of education, had become controversial, conscious, constructed: a matter of decision, will, and effort.

—*Bernard Bailyn, Education in the Forming of American Society, p. 48.*

The chief occasions were those of the investiture of an heir, of marriage, and of acquisition and demonstration of religious powers, of mourning, of warfare, and of accident.

—*Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture, p. 201.*

He sat now, staring out at Drowntown, listening to the drone and dip of the bell. The day was clear and the smell of the river was ancient, the sound of the water timeless, tipping the boat as if it were a cradle and Ezra its only child. He cupped his chin on his hand, elbow on his knee, oars trailing in the locks.

—*Sue Grafton, Keziah Dane, p. 207.*

But the horses didn't want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there."

—*E. M. Forster, A Passage to India, conclusion.*

. . . his ancient and eternal dream . . .

Of a quest for the sacred Tree of Life. Of a happy valley and a face of stone—and of the coming of a hero. Of mounds beside the river. Of threaded bones of lovers in the earth. Of shards of battles long ago. Of names upon the land, the fragments of forgotten language. Of beauty risen from the river and seen through rushes at the river's edge. Of the people from whom the hero sprang, the eternal, innocent children of mankind.

—*Ross Lockridge, Jr., Raintree County, p. 984.*

The next offering even parodies the complex and far from lilting rhythms of Ciceronian balance:

For who is there who anything of some significance has apprehended but is conscious that exterior splendour may be the surface of a downward tending lutulent reality or on the contrary anyone so is there inilluminated as not to perceive that as no nature's boon can contend against the bounty of increase so it behoves every most just citizen to become the exhortator and admonisher of his semblables and to tremble lest what had in the past been by the nation excellently commenced might be in the future not with similar excellence accomplished

—James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 383.

In the limited sampling so far, parallelism and its complementary stylistic devices have shown themselves capable of real versatility in arranging all sorts of ideas. The chapter's accompanying discussion has also shown for itself the difficulty of assigning descriptive generalities to the many effects parallelism can achieve. Every parallel or balanced structure is different, and affects us differently. I want to devote the rest of the chapter, concerned until now in suggesting the great range of these effects, to their impressive, often dramatic individuality.

Individuality of Effect

The very simplest parallelism, like the terse imperatives in the section of "recipe prose" below, has a kind of uncluttered economy:

Peel eggplants and cut into one-inch cubes. Cook in a saucepan with a little water for 15 minutes. Drain off the liquid. Heat the oil in a large pot and brown the eggplant cubes lightly on all sides. Add remaining ingredients, cover the pot and simmer for 30 minutes. Serve hot.

—Ruth Schwartz, "Table Talk," Prevention, The Magazine for Better Health, April 1968.

A similarly direct character is found, sometimes with studied and even labored parallelism, in prose less objective than this cookbook style—writing intended to emphasize or convince as well as to communicate:

If that approval is granted, New York will see one more capitulation to what Breuer calls "economic imperatives"; one more victory for real estate interests to whom human beings are for burrowing, not breathing; one more building stuffed into the midtown area already as tight as a jammed-up file; one more blow against what Breuer him-

self dismisses as “urbanistic sentimentality” but others call intelligent, imaginative, courageous and humane city planning.

—*Emily Genauer, “Skyscraper a Blockbuster of Controversy,” L.A. Times Calendar, July 7, 1968, p. 9.*

Commercials are infuriating. They are also irresistible. Commercials are an outrageous nuisance. They are also apt to be better than the programs they interrupt. Commercials are the heavy tribute that the viewer must pay to the sponsor in exchange for often dubious pleasure. They are also an American art form.

—“... *And Now a Word about Commercials,*” *Time, July 12, 1968, p. 55.*

What may seem like overworked parallelism in the *Time* selection can be directed elsewhere at some intentional effect, as in the next passage, which suggests the seemingly tireless itemization of textbook prose. Here the author rehearses those “characteristics of romanticism which the textbooks list” to support his own preceding argument:

The characteristics of romanticism which the textbooks list as if they were arbitrary choices by eccentric artists are merely the embodiment of what I have just said. *As against* poetic diction and “noble” words, the romanticists admitted all words; *as against* the exclusive use of a selected Graeco-Roman mythology, they took in the Celtic and Germanic; *as against* the uniform setting and tone of classical tragedy, they studied and reproduced the observable diversities known as “local color.” *As against* the antique subjects and the set scale of pictorial merits prescribed by the Academy, they took in the whole world, seen and unseen, and the whole range of colors. *As against* the academic rules prohibiting the use of certain chords, tonalities, and modulations, they sought to use and give shape to all manageable combinations of sound. *As against* the assumption that no civilization had existed since the fall of Rome, they rediscovered the Middle Ages and the sixteenth century and made history their dominant avocation. *As against* the provincial belief that Paris and London were the sole centers of human culture, they traveled to such remote places as America and the Near East and earned the name of “exotic” for their pains. *As against* the idea that the products of cosmopolitan sophistication afford the only subjects worth treating, they began to treasure folk literature and folk music and to draw the matter of their art from every class and condition of men. . . .

—*Jacques Barzun, Classic, Romantic and Modern, pp. 59–60.*

The repeated words (“As against . . . they . . .”) frame the parallel sentences in a back-and-forth rhythm that seems almost to echo the events.

Heavy repetition in the next sample sets up a kind of rhythm of persistence, where the returning syntactic pattern imparts the same feeling of stability and endurance that the statement literally conveys:

The vision of science may go unappreciated, *but it is there*. It may be reduced by a plodding soul to mere dots on a photographic plate, *but it is there*. It may be drained of juice and pounded into flat phrases, *but it is there*.

—Isaac Asimov, *From Earth to Heaven*, p. vii.

Parallel structures are used mainly to set off and emphasize an abrupt departure from them in the following paragraphs, the repeated patterns building toward a climax that breaks with the parallelism:

According to the Almanac, Mae West was born in 1893. According to Mae West, Mae West is 28 years old. The Almanac lies.

—Burt Prelutsky, “*At Home with Mae West*,” *West Magazine*, Los Angeles Times, July 14, 1968, p. 4.

The man who thus called upon a saint was later to repudiate the cult of the saints. He who vowed to become a monk was later to renounce monasticism. A loyal son of the Catholic Church, he was later to shatter the structure of medieval Catholicism. A devoted servant of the pope, he was later to identify the popes with Antichrist. For this young man was Martin Luther.

—Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, p. 15.

Below, the fluctuating repetitions collect into a loose pattern from which the last word, in its adjusted meaning rather than its form, is an important displacement:

But we now confront these possibilities as real choices. We *can* provide ourselves with the material basis for a truly human life and also produce enough to help other human beings achieve the same position. We *can* do so, moreover, while simultaneously decentralizing our economic and political institutions, so as to enable us to live at the scale, and in the kinds of relationships with ourselves and each other, appropriate to our nature.

We can no longer take refuge, or seek escape, in the question of whether or not we *can* become truly human.

We *can*.

The question now is whether or not we *will*.

—William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History*, p. 9.

Variations from an expected parallel pattern can have still subtler results. The contrast between an outer and an inner world in the next passage is caught in the syntax itself as the abruptly punctuated series “senescent, disintegrating, despairing,” relaxes instead into the easy coordination of “soft and warm and linen-sheeted”:

Outside 43 Spadina Road the world was senescent, disintegrating, despairing, and everyone was on his way to a breakdown. Inside, it was soft and warm and linen-sheeted, and everyone was in the pink of mental health.

—*Michael Frayn, Against Entropy, p. 46.*

There is a sense of continuity in the balanced accumulations of the next right-branching sentence, controlled by the consecutive participial chain “growing up . . . picking up . . . living on”:

John Dalton lived from 1766 to 1844, *growing up* in a part of England which saw the Industrial Revolution changing every man’s life, *picking up* as his first science the vestiges of the 17th-century scientific revolution, *living on* to see the beginning of the modern concern for science as a responsibility of the makers of public policy.

—*Frank Greenaway, John Dalton and the Atom, p. 1.*

It is simultaneity rather than continuity suggested by the present participles below as they are gathered into the rhythm of all that incessant “*doing*” to imply almost an unnerving monotony:

I remember I could hear the sounds of the appliances turning on and off, those gentle sounds, freezing this, heating that, whirring and spinning, clicking, starting, stopping.

—*Elia Kazan, The Arrangement, p. 136.*

With this last random assortment I have tried to say something specific about specific occurrences of repetition, parallelism, and balance, and to suggest again, even with this closer attention to only a very small selection, the enormous range of possibilities for these syntactic devices. Some of the last examples seem to border on the symbolic, as the term is used in the chapter on “Syntactic Symbolism.” In any event, they join the other samples throughout this discussion in making a good case for the use of parallelism in any kind of writing that aims to be clear, efficient, and forceful.

Chapter 15

Cohesion

. . . and as sentences should follow one another in harmonious sequence, so the paragraphs must fit on to one another like the automatic couplings of railway carriages.

—*Winston Churchill, A Roving Commission: My Early Life,*
pp. 211–212.

Syntax is the way words are put together into sentences. But grammar has more to do with writing than just this. Syntax can also contribute to the way sentences themselves are put together into larger arrangements. It is the extent to which such separate sentences manage to hold together that is measured on the scale of cohesion.

As it is with two phrases or two clauses, probably the most obvious way of joining two sentences is with a simple conjunction, making a direct connection and implying a specific relation. The first excerpts below rely on this use of conjunctions for their cohesion, within individual sentences and between them:

But he did know that he was hearing again the arrow's thud in the helpless flesh, and now he was hearing without pain. *For* death at the hunt's end did not destroy, it was only an exchange of fleeting flesh amid life's permanency. *And* the fleeting flesh murmured in the stewpot on the stove, filling the tent with its savory fragrance, and the new being stirred again under Jacob's hand—this death and living, but without contradiction or negation, a warp and woof of the same inseparable cloth. *For* that was the thing the gods had made.

—*Fred Bodsworth, The Sparrow's Fall, p. 255.*

But as he spoke, the phantom years scrolled up their vision, and only the eyes of Ben burned terribly in darkness, without an answer.

And day came, and the song of waking birds, and the Square, bathed in the young pearl light of morning. *And* a wind stirred lightly in the Square, and, as he looked, Ben, like a fume of smoke, was melted into dawn.

And the angels on Gant's porch were frozen in hard marble silence, and at a distance life awoke, and there was a rattle of lean wheels, a slow clangor of shod hoofs. *And* he heard the whistle wail along the river.

Yet, as he stood for the last time by the angels of his father's porch, it seemed as if the square already were far and lost; *or*, should I say, he was like a man who stands upon a hill above the town he has left, yet does not say "The town is near," but turns his eyes upon the distant soaring ranges.

—*Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward, Angel, pp. 521–522.*

This means of moving from one sentence to the next can produce very direct, commonplace prose, or some that is highly mannered. In either case, or anywhere between, it is essentially a sort of applied, secondary cohesion that is not very closely structural and that merely adds certain key words like *and* or *but* or *yet* at points of juncture.

Just as conjunctions are used in this way to gather a group of sentences into some sort of logical relation, single adverbial connectors can also establish a unity of spatial or temporal order. The first two examples below connect by comparing directions, so to speak, and the third combines this order across space with a now-then scheme:

In front of them was the central valley. *Across the valley*, on the next mountain, dark belted pines climbed toward the sky. *To the right*, the clustered lights of the village spread thinner, becoming a line along the valley floor and finally disappearing in the distance. *Beyond* either end of the valley there was the faint, far glow of lights from larger towns.

—*Timothy Houghton, The First Season, pp. 75–76.*

In this hemisphere, the Organization of American States has already met some limited peacekeeping needs. In the future, it should be able to meet others if they emerge, even though, as in the past, only the members most directly concerned may decide to participate in any given venture. *In Africa*, the Organization of African Unity has already played some part in helping to conciliate disputes. It has not yet developed any peacekeeping capability, but there is no reason to preclude this in years to come.

In East Asia, prospects are shadowed by Viet Nam. But few countries outside of Indochina will be as vulnerable to infiltration as

South Viet Nam—a divided country with a history of colonial and civil war. *Elsewhere* in Southeast Asia local nationalism, reinforced by cooperation among countries of this area, could well prove an effective defense against limited threats to the peace—assuming that these threats have not been magnified by prior communist success in Viet Nam.

—Henry Owen, “*Foreign Policy Premises*,” Foreign Affairs, July 1968, p. 705.

Now, as you watched, you saw another man come slipping through the green trees on the other bank, and then three more. Then, suddenly, as they were out of sight, came the sharp, sudden close clatter of machine guns. With that sound, all the walking around, all the dress rehearsal quality of before the battle, was gone. The boys who had dug shelters for their heads behind the railway bank were right, and, from now on, theirs was the business. From where you stood, you could see them, well protected, waiting stolidly. Tomorrow it would be their turn.

—Ernest Hemingway, “*Bombing of Tortosa*,” By-Line: Ernest Hemingway, ed. William White, pp. 288–289.

Further, there is an actual class of words existing only for the purpose of cohesion and known as *conjunctive adverbs* or *sentence connectors*. Such words as *however*, *therefore*, *moreover*, *nevertheless*, if they are used with accuracy and restraint—as they so often are not—can give a sense of sturdy cohesion to a paragraph.

The techniques of cohesion discussed so far are one-word or short-phrase inserts between sentences. But another different class of cohesive efforts has to do with the more integral linkage possible when like things are being joined. The devices of this kind range from the simplest repetition, synonymy, pronoun substitution, and demonstrative reference to the most complex patterns of parallelism. At the most obvious level, the link in the next sample literally announces its own repetition and return:

Much of the unhappiness, humiliation, misery, and waste of talent in our society is due to the great importance attached to “normal” intellectual brightness on the one hand and the great contempt felt for stupidity on the other. *The word “normal” in the preceding sentence* is important; its significance is spelled out in the sections later in this chapter on why the unorthodox bright are sometimes regarded as stupid.

—Lewis Anthony Dexter, *The Tyranny of Schooling*, p. 18.

A demonstrative, in the example that follows, replaces and carries forward the entire preceding idea:

However cautiously, with whatever reservations, after whatsoever purifications, we must come back to love. *That* alone raises us to the co-operation with the artist which is the sole reason for our aesthetic pilgrimage.

—E. M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 123.

Pronouns and determiners together serve a similar cohesive function here:

One study, conducted by a social anthropologist, collected basic information about the composition of the population moving into the city, *their* ways of life and *their* responses to the changes going on around them. *Another* social project set up a pilot program to help in-migrants build *their own* housing. *Other* investigations looked into the questions of health, nutrition and family-spending patterns. *Still others* surveyed migration characteristics, the attitude of the people towards authority and change and the relative importance *they* attached to various public services and physical improvements. *One of these* inquiries. . . .

—Lloyd Rodwin, “*Ciudad Guayana: A New City*,” *Scientific American*, September 1965, p. 125.

In the following sample, pronouns and demonstratives again render important service to cohesion, but the repeated *with* in the first sentence, and the initial *Yet* in the last sentence also help:

The aloneness *many of us* feel on *this* earth is assuaged, more or less effectively, by the deep and abiding relationships *we* have with *other* human beings—with *our* parents, *our* children, *our* brothers and sisters, *our* wives, husbands, sweethearts, lovers, closest friends. *These* relationships are not always as close as *we* would like *them* to be, and communication is often distressingly difficult. Yet there is always the hope that *each* man and woman who seeks this special warmth will eventually find *it*.

—Albert Rosenfield, “*Challenge to the Miracle of Life*,” *Life Magazine*, June 13, 1969, p. 50.

In the next two excerpts, however, one using pronoun replacement and the other a demonstrative connector, there is something else very interesting happening at the same time:

In this teeming land, child of modern times, father of the future, where mankind is hard at work changing everything within sight or sound, there are two mighty symbols. One is a machine, the bulldozer. The other is a word, Progress.

—Richard G. Lillard, *Eden in Jeopardy*, p. 13.

Through the vivid contrast between the flight of man down the long corridors of time, and the eternal, timeless peace of the great moss-hung oaks, joy is brought into man's suffering. This joy becomes many times greater in Warren's most recent masterpiece

—William Pratt, *The Fugitive Poets*, p. 45.

The first sentence of each selection shifts most of its material into a major left-branch arranged to move toward the end of the sentence the main clause and key transitional words—respectively “symbols” and “joy”—in order to stress and tighten the link with the next sentence. Cohesion is naturally a matter of transition, and a very different kind of transition would result from a rewriting of the last example, for instance:

Joy is brought into man's suffering through the vivid contrast between the flight of man down the long corridors of time, and the eternal, timeless peace of the great moss-hung oaks. This joy becomes many times greater in Warren's most recent masterpiece. . . .

What is now a kind of spaced recapitulation was in the original a pivotal and therefore closer cohesion. The same type of cohesive purpose lies behind the syntax of the next example. Here is the idea set down in one probable arrangement:

Letters name names, by their very form, as well as their occasions. Certainly, it is essential to name names in our corporate society where there is so much bland anonymity, where activity is thwarted, feeling is debauched, and even death is dealt, and yet no single person can be called to task.

Note the improvement in the sentences as the author actually wrote them, the more pertinent and expressive way in which one follows the other:

By their very form, as well as their occasions, letters name names. Certainly, to name names is essential in our corporate society where there is so much bland anonymity, where activity is thwarted, feeling is debauched, and even death is dealt, and yet no single person can be called to task.

—Paul Goodman, “Preface,” *The Society I Live In Is Mine*, p. ix.

Along with the different types of branchings, inversion is often used to move materials into more obvious connection; here the pivotal inversion creates a pattern of chiasmus:

But politics was now *peripheral*. Closer at home was an active social life.

—Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *William Henry Seward*, p. 557.

This calling into the service of cohesion the entire syntax of a sentence, rather than a brief connector, reaches its most fully developed and probably most useful form in the sort of well-chosen parallelism that incorporates other cohesive devices into its structures. Notice in these two passages on Hawthorne how easily the parallel material falls into a clear, coherent organization:

For the man, this meant validating the religious vision of his favorite Christian authors by expressing that vision in the language and concepts of a new age, without committing himself to their religious literalism, their confusion of history and myth. *For the artist, it meant* transforming traditional allegory into a mythopoetic art sometimes close to Bunyan and Spenser, sometimes close to Faulkner, but at its best in an area all its own. *For both man and artist, it meant* devising a way of distinguishing false lights from true by observing their effects in the night. *It meant*, ultimately, correcting the dream in order to conserve it. *Both as man and as artist*, Hawthorne knew how to value the little circle of light in the darkness of human life.

—*Hyatt H. Waggoner, "Arts and Belief," Hawthorne Centenary Essays, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce, p. 195.*

Coverdale can be equated with Hawthorne in many conspicuous ways. *Both* are bachelors and minor authors; *they* are reclusive and believe a degree of solitude essential to them. *They* smoke cigars and drink wine occasionally, read Carlyle and Fourier, and have special fondness for fireplaces. *Their* routine activities are identical, as are their responses: *each* takes pride in the physical labor he does but grows weary of it, in part because it leaves no energy for literary work. *Each* first expects to live permanently in the community, but loses faith in its future and at times looks sardonically back on his earlier hopefulness.

—*Arlin Turner, "Introduction," The Blithedale Romance by Nathaniel Hawthorne, pp. 13–14.*

The parallelism of like things said in like ways in the second sample is related also to another important characteristic of the selection, for the parallelism seems, in a way, generated by the opening “topic sentence” and hangs together more convincingly, perhaps, because of this common source. Much the same effect is achieved in the following sample by moving out from the initial topic sentence:

We live in an era of great inventions. Television sets bring distant scenes into our living rooms. Atomic-powered submarines travel under the polar ice cap. Manned space ships orbit the earth, and rockets travel to the moon. These inventions, products of human

ingenuity, have transformed the character of daily life in the present, and will determine in large measure the shape of the future.

—Irving Adler, *A New Look at Arithmetic*, pp. 3-4.

A brief question starts the next passage moving and draws together the subsequent parallel ideas as partial answers:

What is secularization? The Dutch theologian C. A. van Peursen says it is the deliverance of man “first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language.” It is the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed world-views, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols. It represents what another observer has called the “defatalization of history,” the discovery by man that he has been left with the world on his hands, that he can no longer blame fortune or the future for what he does with it. Secularization is man turning his attention away from worlds beyond and toward this world and this time (*saeculum* = “this present age”). It is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1944 called “man’s coming of age.”

—Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, pp. 1-2.

The cohering parallelism of the next example returns to the topic sentence, reaffirming but qualifying it in a circular and unifying development:

Science is investigation. But if it were only investigation, it would be without fruit, and useless. Henry Cavendish investigated for the mere fun of the thing, and left the world in ignorance of his most important discoveries. Our admiration for his genius is tempered by a certain disapproval; we feel that such a man is selfish and anti-social. *Science is investigation; yes. But it is also, and no less essentially, communication.* But all communication is literature. In one of its aspects, then, science is a branch of literature.

—Aldous Huxley, *The Olive Tree*, p. 56.

Equally distinct and effective is the next approximate repetition that telescopes the second appearance of the parallel series with which the paragraph begins:

The obligation to follow proper *procedures*, the acceptance of *limits*, and the conviction that power was to serve desirable *ends* have formed a triangular configuration of forces within which the increase or decrease of liberty may be assessed. The ultimate criterion is the capacity of men to act, whether through the coercive instruments of government or otherwise. The *procedures*, the *limits*, and the *ends* of their use of power are measures of the extent to which the state

expands their capabilities while still leaving them able to act, if they wish, through other means.

—*Oscar and Mary Handlin*, *The Dimensions of Liberty*, p. 88.

The next interesting variation on the parallel pattern eventually contracts to a single repeated word:

There is much talk of a design in the arras. *Some* are certain they see it. *Some* see what they have been told to see. *Some* remember that they saw it once but have lost it. *Some* are strengthened by seeing a pattern wherein the oppressed and the exploited of the earth are gradually emerging from their bondage. *Some* find strength in the conviction that there is nothing to see. *Some*.

—*Thornton Wilder*, *The Eighth Day*, p. 435.

Transitional words, repetition, parallelism, structures of comparison and contrast, and the other cohesive devices that operate between sentences also work for cohesion in longer passages. Below, the opening of Ernest Hemingway's introduction to *Men at War* shows these devices at work over the space of three paragraphs. Only a few of the key cohesive structures are italicized:

This book will not tell you how to die. Some cheer-leaders of war can always get out a pamphlet *telling* the best way to go through that small but necessary business at the end. . . .

No. This book will not tell you how to die. This book will tell you, though, how *all men* from the earliest times we know have fought and died. *So when you have read it* you will know that there are *no worse* things to be gone through than *men* have been through before.

When you read the account of Saint Louis the IX's Crusade you will see that no expeditionary force can ever have to go through anything *as bad as those men* endured. *We have only to fight as well as the men* who stayed and fought at Shiloh. It is not necessary that *we should fight better*. There can be no such thing as *better*. . . .

—*Ernest Hemingway*, *Men at War*, *introduction*.

The way any piece of writing, from a pair of sentences to a much longer passage, makes us think of it as one piece is a very important aspect of its style. The examples here have been chosen to emphasize grammar's due place in the techniques of such cohesion. Ideas and the words that carry them do not just accidentally fall together into a convincing procession. Cohesion that seems smooth and relaxed is sometimes quite hard to get and is always a matter, partly, of syntactic choices—from the straightforward use of connectors to the most ingenious patterning.

Chapter 16

Syntactic Symbolism *Grammar as Analogue*

He drew forth a phrase from his treasure and spoke it softly to himself:

—A day of dappled seaborne clouds.

The phrase and the day and the scene harmonised in a chord. Words. Was it their colours? He allowed them to glow and fade, hue after hue: sunrise gold, the russet and green of apple orchards, azure of waves, the greyfringed fleece of clouds. No, it was not their colours: it was the poise and balance of the period itself. Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour? Or was it that, being as weak of sight as he was shy of mind, he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of a language manycoloured and richly storied than from the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose?

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,
pp. 166–167.

It is difficult to use the term *symbolism* to mean something exact, and harder still to explain just exactly what is meant. The trouble is in no way alleviated when one coins the term *syntactic symbolism* and proceeds to explain what it means, exactly, and how it differs from received ideas about symbolism in general. Most educated people know roughly what a symbol is and how it works, how it substitutes for a mental concept some physical correlative, how it gives concrete form to an idea, translates the abstract into the tangible, makes visible the invisible. As a literary symbol, of course,

it appears as a function of language. The larger idea, general or abstract or invisible, is symbolized by a verbal formulation, a semantic act of description or simple naming. The *syntactic symbol* operates at one remove, not as a function of language in general but as a particular function of grammar, rendering something nonverbal by a certain suggestive order of words—making legible the illegible. It is grammar as analogue.

As usual in a discussion of any kind of symbolism, it is about time for examples. No one reading a novel or a poem should be surprised to find a bird in flight used as a symbol of natural freedom or instinctive energy, say, or an automobile as a symbol of mechanized life in dehumanizing modern society. Birds and cars appear everywhere in literature, of course, without the burden of this significance, but when the context is developed in which they do have such wider reference, the verbal work of describing or just naming them constitutes the symbol-making act. So far this has nothing to do with syntactic symbolism. The grammar required to communicate a symbolic meaning need not be at all special. “The bird flew away.” “A car drove by.” These are enough *to symbolize* if the context is right. But if there is something about the way the sentences themselves are shaped, the way grammar is organized so that the very act of reading suggests some aspect of what the sentence names or describes, then the grammatical construction might be called a *syntactic symbol*—whether or not (and it would usually not be) the sentence is presenting an actual semantic or literary symbol. The *birds* in the sentence below may not symbolize anything, but the syntax used to record their *flight* does seem to do more than just describe it in some arbitrary way. It is a kind of simulation:

He watched their flight: bird after bird: a dark flash, a swerve, a flash again, a dart aside, a curve, a flutter of wings.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 224.

The abrupt, paratactic structure (see Chapter 7) does seem to reflect somehow the erratic motion of the birds in their darting, curving flight, yet a similar grammatical arrangement, another rapid, veering series, is used to convey the successive jolts of a slight automobile accident in the following passage:

They gripped . . . bump, jump, a swerve, two wheels lifted in the air, brakes on, bump with tree at edge of embankment, standstill.

—E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, p. 88.

Though “a swerve” is actually written into both passages, it would at least be hard to argue that the actions discussed are as similar as the syntax used to discuss them. Grammar is, by nature, more limited than meaning, for it must carry many different meanings. A noun and a transitive verb and an object, for example, form a specific, single structure in

grammar, of which there are millions of examples, all meaning different things. This introduces a major difference between standard *symbolism* and the use of the term in the concept of *syntactic symbolism*. The syntax of a syntactic symbol, where any number of different words can be inserted, is not unique in the way that the meaning of a semantic symbol is, and so syntactic symbols do not persist. They do not represent in one place what the same grammatical formation, however distinctive, might elsewhere suggest. The same grammatical structure may be used dozens of times without any symbolic force at all, and by a single writer, who only once, in a unique place, suddenly finds it possible to suggest something by his grammar.

Unless style is to be a matter of accident, a writer's access to such a discovery depends on his knowledge of the wide range of syntactic possibilities, a fact accounting for the usefulness of this last chapter as a random but rather full review of *Grammar as Style*. Out of the many unique phrasings and syntactic creations that follow as examples, certain familiar structures will emerge. The reader will soon notice that he is seeing, again and again, the basic syntactic units and formulas discussed in earlier chapters applied with care and invention, combined and modified in many ways, often to excellent effect. Kernel sentences or left-, mid-, and right-branching ones are expanded with different kinds of free or bound modification, clauses, nominative absolutes, appositives, and set to various rhythms, some ordered by parallelism and some left irregular, suggesting now one thing, now—with little change in the grammar—something quite different.

Before we turn to these examples, three important facts need clarification. The kind of symbolism displayed here is, again, not the thematic symbolism of the literary emblem, but a grammatical simulation that can be read as one version of what W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., calls a *verbal icon*.¹ It is possible, certainly, that a syntactic symbol might render a scene or an action that contained also a semantic symbol. This is the case in the following passage from D. H. Lawrence, which heaves up its welter of added adjectives, ragged and agitated like the shaking of the moon's image on the water that they describe, and then moves syntactically toward its own composure and rest:

¹ Wimsatt means by his title *The Verbal Icon* more than a mere "bright picture": rather, he intends "a verbal sign which somehow shares the properties of, or resembles, the objects which it denotes" (W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, University of Kentucky, 1954, p. x). This is a very general designation, including far more than syntax. Nearer to the idea of *syntactic symbolism* would be Davie's discussion, though he again writes just about poetry, of "subjective syntax" and "dramatic syntax"—grammar that follows the "form of thought" in the poet's mind and in the mind of some imagined character, respectively (Donald Davie, "Varieties of Poetic Syntax," *Articulate Energy: An Enquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry*, New York, 1955).

Gradually the fragments caught together re-united, heaving, rocking, dancing, falling back as in panic, but working their way home again persistently, making semblance of fleeing away when they had advanced, but always flickering nearer, a little closer to the mark, the cluster growing mysteriously larger and brighter, as gleam after gleam fell in with the whole, until a ragged rose, a distorted, frayed moon was shaking upon the waters again, re-asserted, renewed, trying to recover from its convulsion, to get over the disfigurement and the agitation, to be whole and composed, at peace.

—D. H. Lawrence, “*Moony*,” *Women in Love*, p. 240.

It is not to the point here that the reintegration of the moon’s splintered image becomes the central thematic symbol in this chapter from Lawrence’s novel.

Nor would it matter how often Lawrence tended to write these kinds of sentences, heavily right-branching and elaborate, “heaving, rocking, dancing, falling back as in panic, but working their way home again persistently” This chapter will not deal at all with an author’s habitual style, but with his special use of grammatical icons or syntactic symbols. It is a chapter concerned, for example, only with the way the kind of sentence described above, by borrowing from Lawrence’s own example of the type, can be used to write about something that its own grammar approximates. That Hemingway is thought to write mostly kernel, compound, and clean right-branching sentences, let us say, or Henry James highly subordinating and embedded ones, or Faulkner many mid-branching, suspensive constructions, and that these syntactic preferences have wide implications for their differing responses to the worlds they write about, none of this matters for this chapter, except in those special cases where such characteristic syntax offers itself as peculiarly right for expressing a given idea—except, that is, where it becomes a syntactic sign or symbol.

Nor, thirdly, is this chapter concerned with other than syntactic symbols, with emblems or signs or icons that rely primarily on the devices of poetic diction, metrics, or sound symbolism. These techniques may well appear in prose, but they enlist services other than those of grammar and syntax, and are amply treated in other studies. To take an example, the eight syllables of the two bulky, slow-moving words in the sentence below—“elephantine cumbrosomeness”—themselves encumber the line as if to prove its point, but the grammar that permits this effect is no more special than the pairing of a noun and an adjective:

That system, for all its *elephantine cumbrosomeness*, is also, in the long run, wonderfully adaptable and flexible.

—Stewart Alsop, *The Center*, p. 352.

The effect there is a matter of word length; the analogue is not really syntactic. The next sentence, ordinary enough in its grammar, is also symbolic:

Somewhere a ponderous tower clock slowly dropped a dozen strokes into the gloom.

—James Thurber, *The Wonderful O*, p. 1.

Its thirteen “poetic” *stops* retard the progress of the sentence to produce an aural analogue for the slow, ponderous announcement of the hour. Next, the three sibilants are used to reproduce the very “buzzing” of the flies:

The minute-winning days, like flies, buzz home to death.

—Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel*, p. 3.

With the exception of “buzz” and its obvious sound-symbolism, there is a sense in which even these effects rely on syntax, for they result as much from getting the words in the right order for the desired result as from any individual characteristics of the words themselves, their length or sound. By contrast, the pure onomatopoeia of the word “crunch” creates the verbal mimicry below:

So Ella said, “Yes, ma’am,” and hobbled down the gravel walk, crunch crunch crunch beneath the trees, and was gone.

—William Styron, *Lie Down in Darkness*, p. 121.

This is a “poetic” device, but it happens to operate here with a kind of syntactic symbolism when the suggestive monosyllable “crunch” is ungrammatically tripled to imitate repeated footfalls. The two kinds of symbolism are also at work in the next excerpt, where the assonant squeal of “e’s” makes the sound it describes, climaxing the sense of building danger caught in the incremental grammar of “builds and builds and builds”:

*The camera picks the onlooker up, sits him down hard only two seats away from that subway succubus, and then forces him to sit there with his palms sweating while the danger *builds and builds and builds* like the brain-stabbing squeal of steel wheels in a turning tunnel.*

—“*From Stage to Screen: Murder, Madness & Mom*,” Time, March 3, 1967, p. 99.

Conjunctions are also used to link the repetitions of the next sample, re-creating the spaced effect of an echo:

*His echo, fugitive along the faces of the gorge, called pitifully *back and back and back* to us until it died in the distance.*

—John Hersey, *A Single Pebble*, p. 66.

The same sort of arrangement, with variations, is able to capture the shifting back-and-forth of a reiterated transaction:

You have seen the rotting shell of the house with its sagging portico and scaling walls, its sagging blinds and plank-shuttered windows, set in the middle of the domain which had reverted to the state and had been *bought and sold and bought and sold again and again and again*.

—*William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 213.

A relentless syntax now travesties a weary orchestral drone:

. . . the din, already painful, went somehow up a notch, now almost completely covering the noise from the pit where the band went wearily on with *Over the Rainbow*, over and over, *Over the Rainbow*, over again.

—*William Goldman, "Judy Floats," Esquire, January 1969*, p. 78.

Repetition is, naturally, one of the easiest symbolic effects to create, since it is also a quality of grammatical constructions when they are compounded and repeated, and needs no ingenious translation by the reader from symbol to sense, from syntax to meaning. Writing “This is repetitive and boring” a dozen times or so, for instance, tends to confirm its own accusation. This is unlikely and oversimplified, but it should be clear that such an effect, even much subtler, is not difficult to come by. A sense of the uneventful has very easily been infused into the next satiric statement:

As long as he holds his breath, it will not rain, there will be no rain-drops, no schizoid water wobbling, sideways, straight back, it will be an *even, even, even, even, even, even, even* world.

—*Tom Wolfe, The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, p. 75.

The next humorous production uses idiomatic monotony to parody an empty, hyperbolic rhetoric:

The *show of shows* continues. A murdering mutter of profit and protest suggestingly haunts the *theater of theaters*, but the *curtain of curtains* is conspicuous by its absence. And *over and over* the *stage of stages* monotonously marches our heroine, Industria—carefully presenting to the *audience of audiences* her miraculous cinematographic face which has recently learned to speak.

—*E. E. Cummings, "Miracles and Dreams," E. E. Cummings: A Miscellany Revised*, p. 211.

In the coming pair of excerpts from closely textured fiction, repetitive structures are remembered and themselves repeated later with unusual effect. We read that:

... he was sharing Mr. Ramsay's evening walk *up and down, up and down* the terrace.

—*Virginia Woolf*, To the Lighthouse, p. 12.

And, two pages later, that:

They knew what he liked best—to be for ever walking *up and down, up and down*, with Mr. Ramsay. . . .

—*Woolf*, p. 14.

In the second and more interesting pattern, below, a set of repeating alternations is recorded and then, four pages later, used again in a new but analogous context. An imitative description of a train's roaring in and out of a tunnel creates subliminal syntactic associations that are transferred to the use of this idea as a metaphor for another monotonous routine, the alternation of school terms and vacations "like a train going in and out of tunnels":

He closed his eyes and the train went on, *roaring and then stopping; roaring again, stopping*. It was nice to hear it *roar and stop and then roar out of the tunnel again and then stop*.

—*James Joyce*, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, p. 13.

First came the *vacation and then the next term and then vacation again and then again another term and then again the vacation*. It was like a train going in and out of tunnels and that was like the noise of the boys eating in the refectory when you opened and closed the flaps of the ears. *Term, vacation; tunnel, out; noise, stop*.

—*Joyce*, p. 17.

The symbolic effect of the repetitions in these additional samples hardly needs comment:

He, in his semi-conscious sleep, was vaguely aware of the clatter of the iron on the iron stand, of the faint *thud, thud* on the ironing board.

—*D. H. Lawrence*, Sons and Lovers, p. 66.

Endless cycle, endless birth and death, endless becoming and disappearing . . . Limitless cycle, endless change.

—*James A. Michener*, Hawaii, p. 10.

Sun and moon, sun and moon, time goes.

—*John Updike*, Rabbit, Run, p. 114.

Bats, rats, birds, insects will as soon nest inside a house as out; it is to them a normal growth of the eternal jungle, which alternately produces *houses trees, houses trees*.

—E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, p. 35.

Death could have come in any number of bizarre ways . . . in the coffin of a malfunctioning craft unable to descend that *orbits, orbits, orbits* in the spatial void while power ebbs and life leaks away in slow suffocation.

—Time, February 3, 1967, p. 13.

He was walking three steps backwards and three steps forwards along the gangway which connected the benches. *Three quick steps and turn and three quick steps and turn*, with his eyes on the ceiling.

—C. P. Snow, *The Search*, p. 38.

They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet, *of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of nothing at all*.

—James Agee, *A Death in the Family*, p. 14.

Repetitive effects, however, certainly do not monopolize the possibilities for syntactic symbolism. They have their own individual sort of rhythm, and it is only one of the many that prose can assume. Here, for instance, an uneasy cycle more complex than mere repetition is rendered by a series of paired constructions (see Chapter 11):

Thus the whole cycle of to and fro, big and small, Pigmies or Elves, seeing or dreaming, far and near, joy and fear, this uneasy flux of couplets, alternatives and reversals, is continued. . . .

—Geoffrey Hartman, “*Milton’s Counterplot*,” *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Arthur E. Barker, p. 395.

Parallelism is used not to simulate repetition in the next two sentences, but to suggest other kinds of movement or rhythm, rapid motion and accelerated motion respectively:

Its tone changes with kaleidoscopic rapidity—from irony to pathos to ridicule to poetry.

—Richard M. Kain, *Fabulous Voyager*, p. 240.

The imagery is that of mobile, going things, increasingly passionate and swift—first slow waves, then fitful music leaping, then flames, then racing creatures.

—Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function*, p. 273.

In addition to smooth or continuous motion, broken rhythms can also be reproduced, sometimes with the obvious aid of unusual punctuation.

The uneven, awkward syntax below imparts the same "broken" quality ascribed to the singer's melody:

She sang, in short broken bars, *Rosie O'Grady*.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 244.

This is deliberate, and would not have worked as well if the adverbial phrase had appeared in its expected end-position. Likewise, the strange syntactic contour near the end of the next sentence, mixing adverbs and adjectives and joining them with odd, jerky punctuation, is as awkward as the impeded speech it describes:

As he grew older, Willie learned to use his stammer to give point to a particular word in a sentence, but when he was nervous or distraught his words came out *painfully, slow, and distorted*, and evidently "it was torture to him" also.

—Robin Maugham, *Somerset and All the Maughams*, p. 122.

Many other rhythms are possible, from the facile and smooth to the deliberately jarred, distorted, or stopped. The expanding grammar in each half of the next sample shares in that focusing down, that bringing together, and then the subsequent opening out of which the sentence is an account:

Peace beyond peace, *focussed at first, brought together*, then opening out in a kind of boundless space . . . ; and, *from a single, focal point*, peace expands towards a base immeasurably distant and so wide that its circle is the ground and source of all life. . . .

—Aldous Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza*, p. 422.

The syntax moves oppositely below, toward a kind of grammatical stoppage after a long mid-branch and toward the pivotal moment this provides, the sentence and the story it capsules turning on the word "quit":

Henry Levin, an ambitious, handsome thirty, who walked the floors in Macy's book department wearing a white flower in his lapel, having recently come into a small inheritance, *quit*, and went abroad seeking romance.

—Bernard Malamud, "The Lady of the Lake," *The Magic Barrel*, p. 105.

The isolated adverb "again," oddly set off by commas and then repeated, creates in the next sample another syntactic pivot, about which the sentence swings in a fine grammatical reproduction of the described voices swinging back on silence:

Our voices, curving slowly around the woods, again, again swung back on silence.

—Truman Capote, *The Grass Harp*, p. 51.

A transition or turning point, one abrupt, violent, the other relaxed and gradual, is again the designed impact of the syntax in the next two excerpts:

He saw them, his father and mother, *vader en moeder*, moving gently in this receding polyhedral heart of light carved from dark nature, their bodies transparent, and his mind came to a cliff—*a slip, then a skidding downward plunge.*

—John Updike, *Couples*, p. 16.

A gull, solitary as fear, the only movement in this primeval desolation, rises beside the rail and then wheels and soars high and catches that final light on its wings, *floats for a moment*, and then vanishes.

—Noel Mostert, “The Glorious Great Lakes,” *Holiday, May 1968*, p. 85.

An abrupt transition is acquired below by a hard, sharp emphasis on the series of stops in the second sentence, intended to contrast with the flowing and waving rhythms of the first:

They waved, smiled, wept, they slipped backward, their faces became indistinct, a green water flowed over, their forms were smaller, smaller, still waving. *Abruptly a block of buildings thrust them from view.*

—Ross Lockridge, Jr., *Raintree County*, p. 561.

An abrupt interruption is next telescoped into a single sentence, closing it with an arresting, punctuated emphasis on the single last word, which inversion of the normal adjective-noun order has moved to the end:

The pavements were slick with leavings, mainly cast-off, rotten leaves, flowers, fruit and vegetables which had met with disaster natural and slow, *or abrupt.*

—James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, p. 70.

Prose rhythm is also stopped short in this sample, immobilized:

In a moment the vision faded but she remained where she was, *immobile.*

—Flannery O'Connor, “Revelation,” *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, p. 218.

The same syntactic format, with its isolated terminal word, here a verbal appositive, can be used to reflect a sort of narrowing vision:

Up the gangplank and the vision of the world adjusts itself, *narrows.*

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*, p. 205.

A more complex grammatical narrowing, a kind of flickering out, results from the careful juxtaposition in the first two sentences below of words and phrases of decreasing length, and from the use in the third of those four stressed monosyllables that punctuate the sense of utter extinction:

One soul was lost; a tiny soul: his. It flickered once and went out, forgotten, lost. The end: black cold void waste.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 141.

Similar techniques convey the ideas of the next two sentences with a syntax that seems to match them. In the first, a verbal series unfurls only to fall off at once, and the appositional list of the second appears to wither, diminish, and spend itself grammatically:

The bugle's voice unfurled, shivered, fell.

—Cynthia Ozick, *Trust*, p. 2.

It was all dry: all withered: all spent.

—Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 224.

A syntax of increase can be just as suggestive, here recounting the creation, growth, and reproduction of original life:

The hundreds of millions of years passed and one day a special cell emerged in the pungent broths of the ocean or a lake. It had being; it ate food; it divided and so reproduced. It was alive and it was life.

—Philip Wylie, *The Magic Animal*, p. 22.

Much of the success in these most recent samples is a matter of spacing, of grammatical pacing, of a writer's knowing where he wants his sentence to end up, and when, and how he wants it to get there—by a process of increase or narrowing, or according to some definite and controlled rhythm, like repetition or acceleration. The compound predicates of the next two sentences add another obvious example; the course of the writing takes form as a deliberate verbal sequence that ends appropriately, inevitably, just where it does:

He is born, goes to school, marries, has children, quarrels with his fellows, suffers the same defeats which afflict his contemporaries, and dies.

—Robert Payne, *The Christian Centuries*, p. 391.

If Mrs. Langor is right, then poetry of this kind (for her there is no other kind) presents human feelings as they are born, develop,

gather momentum, branch, sub-divide, coalesce, dwindle, and die away.

—Donald Davie, *Articulate Energy*, p. 85.

The next passage awaits a sound that is finally heard in its second sentence, at the climax of an inverted syntax that delivers the capitalized and onomatopoeic “PLOP!” only after a piling of adjectives to suspend and dramatize its arrival:

He was straining his ears, waiting to hear some sound—a sound that he thought would surely stop the beating of his heart. Then he heard it; there came a distant, definite, soft, crushing yet pulpy: PLOP!

—Richard Wright, *Savage Holiday*, p. 51.

Consider the next craftily paced sentence:

And as it ended, as they sat up in the gloom and prepared to enter ordinary life, suddenly the long drawn strangeness of the morning snapped.

—E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, p. 161.

Holding the verb—the telling of the action—till the very end, and prefacing the main clause with two parallel left-branches creates for the narrated act an analogous grammar of suspension, which subordinates, holds off, and then suddenly snaps into place.

The syntax of the following passage is geared to the quick survey it provides, moving briskly through its summary and then plunging toward its close, as does the book under discussion:

His too was a remarkable book, if only for its scope. Davidson starts with “The Rise of Intelligence” when “man first rose above the brute.” Then he trots briskly through “ancient Turanian,” Semitic, and Aryan education, picks up speed on “civic education” in Judaea, Greece, and Rome, gallops swiftly across Hellenistic, Alexandrian, Patristic, and Muslim education; leaps magnificently over the thorny barriers of scholasticism, the medieval universities, the Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation; and then plunges wildly through the remaining five centuries in sixty-four pages flat.

—Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society*, pp. 6–7.

Once again a sentence ends, symbolically, just where it should. In the last five examples it has been a main clause that moves toward this appropriate close, but the symbolic conclusion might just as well be reached later, with the main clause followed by loose or free material before the end of the sentence. The next five selections work this way. They are

cumulative or right-branching sentences (see Chapter 8) whose symbolic effects are generated by the cadencing of the right-branch toward the fitting close. In the first two, it is clear how the cumulative grammar is able to depict, in order, things laid down and dropped-off:

Keziah Dane was thinking of another kind of morning in another day, *finding peace again for all the anguish she had known, and pride for all the dreams long since laid down.*

—Sue Grafton, *Keziah Dane*, p. 220.

The big studio audience is rapt, *silent as Barbra Streisand softens and rounds the long-held note, stripping the brass from it before she lets it fall, ever so gradually, into a throbbing, eyes-closed, roller-coaster drop-off.*

—Diana Lurie, “*The Tears of Barbra Streisand*,” *Life Magazine*, March 18, 1966, p. 96.

Varied parallelism sets the rhythm for the two right-branching examples that follow, one cadenced to recede, the other to descend.

And I could see the great forward lunge of the horses and the crowd breaking and rolling *back* like a wave, *back*, and screaming and cursing, and some laughing—*back and around and out* into the avenue, stumbling and pushing, as the horses, heads high and bits froth-flecked, went over the curb to land stiff-legged and slide over the cleared walk as upon ice skates and past, carried by the force of the charge, sideways now, legs stiff, sparks flying, to where another crowd looted another store.

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, p. 480.

The dizzying backward rush is imaged grammatically in a sentence that lunges forward by recapitulation, as “*back*” is carried from the main clause into the right-branch and repeated as part of the larger, driving accumulation. In the second, descending example, the large right-branch starts rather emphatically with the strong, punctuated repetition of the prepositional objects, and then suggestively falls off in a slackened syntax that repeats the preposition and adds a new object loosely with a conjunction:

And Giovanni fell—*back into the room, the streets, the world, into the presence and the shadow of death.*

—James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, p. 230.

Below, the repetitions of “*down*” keep the falling tempo:

Then my eyes fell on the bound and cast white mass pointing at me and as it was always to do, it brought me *down* out of Finny's world

of invention, *down* again as I had fallen after awakening that morning, *down* to reality, to the facts.

—John Knowles, *A Separate Peace*, pp. 107–108.

Unlike the previous examples, however, this cumulative sentence does not relax toward its end. The fall here is a reduction to reality, a lowering to hard fact, stressed by the parallelism and concluded when “*down*” is omitted from the last foreshortened phrase.

Perhaps more natural for a right-branching construction, rather than the falling down and back just considered, are the following symbolic effects, which are themselves patterns of expansion, gradation, or accumulation. In the first two, one both left- and right-branching, the other a standard cumulative sentence, syntactic materials accrete to suggest successive geological deposition:

For nearly forty million years, from that extensive rupture in the ocean floor, small amounts of liquid rock seeped out, each forcing its way up through what had escaped before, each contributing some small portion to the accumulation that was building on the floor of the sea.

—James A. Michener, *Hawaii*, p. 4.

The truth is there, ready for you to catch with both mind and heart by contemplating the layers of compressed volcanic ash which alternate with the strata of lava belonging to different geological eras, deposited by succeeding eruption, changing in texture as well as color, dipping into an inky sea to slake with salt and sulphur the thirst of millennia.

—H. C. Brewster, “*Saint Philomena*,” *Sewanee Review*, Summer 1966, p. 573.

In the next two cumulative structures, the grammatical material beyond the base clause is organized into sections set off by commas, each slightly longer than the previous section, those in the first sentence made up of participial phrases and in the second by one such phrase and two large absolute constructions. The grammar is analogous in the first to the graded rise of the water level and in the second to the steady, spreading increments of a concentric expansion:

The water would rise inch by inch, covering the grass and shrubs, covering the trees and houses, covering the monuments and the mountain tops.

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 117.

. . . beyond it, enclosing it, spreads the County, tied by the diverging roads to that center as is the rim to the hub by its spokes, yourself

detached as God Himself for this moment above the cradle of your nativity and of the men and women who made you, the record and chronicle of your native land proffered for your perusal in ring by concentric ring like the ripples on living water above the dreamless slumber of your past. . . .

—William Faulkner, *The Town*, pp. 315–316.

In the next cumulative sentence a double verbal appositive gives the nervous, hurried thrust to a syntactic vector that seems to push beyond grammar's normal limits, dropping required punctuation and adding another rushed verb cluster at the end:

The thing that cried fled forward over those steps because there was no other way to go, was shot forward screaming as into a furnace, as over unimaginable steps that were all that might be borne, were too searing for the refuge of madness, were destructive of the centre.

—William Golding, *Free Fall*, p. 185.

Here we seem to be moving even beyond the grammatical freedom of the loose or cumulative sentence into something like the school grammar's "run-on." In different ways, more or less grammatical, the syntax is symbolically overloaded in the next long excerpts. The first joins the participial overflow of its left-branching opener to the conglomerated subject of its second huge sentence to parody Vassar's supposed "cornucopia overflowing with promises":

Bucolically set in rolling orchard country just outside the town of Poughkeepsie, with the prospect of long walks and rides along curving back roads and cold red apples to bite; framed by two mirrorlike lakes, by a lively off-campus street full of dress shops, antique stores, inns, which were brimming now with parents, brothers, and fiancés, Vassar, still warm and summery, gave the impression of a cornucopia overflowing with promises. The bareheaded Yale boys in roadsters parked outside Taylor Gate; the tall, dazzling girls, upperclassmen, in pale sweaters and skirts, impeccable, with pearls at the throat and stately walks, like goddesses; the vaulted library; the catalogue already marked and starred for courses like Psychology and Philosophy ("The Meaning of Morals, Beauty, Truth, God—open only to freshmen by special permission"); the trolley tracks running past the spiked fence downtown to further shopping, adventure, the railroad station, New York, plays, concerts, night clubs, Fifth Avenue bus rides—all this seemed to foretell four years of a Renaissance lavishness, in an academy that was a Forest of Arden and a Fifth Avenue department store combined.

—Mary McCarthy, "The Vassar Girl," *On the Contrary*, p. 197.

At great length, and with frenzied variety, a grammatical disarray is paraded here to mime and to mock the flood, the fragmentation, and the “hoopla” of architectural research:

Coarse paper; rebellion; grease pencil; imaginative sketch, weird perspectives; publication; exhibition; model; the great architectural critic inventing cinemascopic epigrams; worldwide recognition, lectures, disappearance of rebellion; integration into the system; publicity; books on architecture and urbanism; publicity; radio, television; USA, USSR: FAIA, Bel-Air, La glorie!

That is how ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCH nowadays is born, lives, and dies!

Launched the wrong way; misunderstood; pursued incorrectly; non-existent; worse, some sympathetic ones but not always very smart persuaded that it is successful research by a pseudo-philosophical, half-mathematic and half-literary (but not always shocking) jargon; with accents of simplicity or intellectual supremacy; with a good stock of sophisticated, barbaric and suggestive drawings . . . calling themselves “searchers” or “researchers” forcing their way into the world of worlds; believing that they will improve it by the effect of their abstractions; far from the people, far from themselves . . . showing a frozen future in a few booklets and publicity meetings to which they invite some big wheels . . . who happen also to be purchasing agents . . . making their vision highly commercial.

Hoopla! let's stop the charlatans of research! STOP THE FLOW OF SHINY PHOTOS TO THE ARCHITECTURAL MAGAZINES!

—*Ionel Schein, “A Phenomenology of Research,” Arts and Architecture, August 1966, p. 31.*

The explosion of nouns and noun-modifiers in the next asyntactic performance apes an absurd plethora of the “super-marvelous”:

Bangs manes bouffants beehives Beatle caps butter faces brush-on lashes decal eyes puffy sweaters French thrust bras flailing leather blue jeans stretch pants stretch jeans honeydew bottoms eclair shanks elf boots ballerinas knight slippers, hundreds of them, these flaming little buds, bobbing and screaming, rocketing around inside the Academy of Music Theater underneath the vast old mouldering cherub dome up there—aren't they super-marvelous!

—*Tom Wolfe, The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby, p. 204.*

Unpacked and examined, this rare kind of supersentence can be read as a cluttered repository of its syntactic opposite—the elliptical fragment. But such fragments, even when they come together with others in a single

sentence, do not usually undergo such vast multiple collisions as the one above. Far simpler patterns are the rule. The syntactic format is usually parataxis, where independent units are run together without conjunctive material, sometimes punctuated, sometimes not. The paratactic series below symbolizes the quick shuttling of the passing scene:

They were in town now. *Streets, houses, buildings* shuttled past.
—Ross Lockridge, Jr., Raintree County, p. 872.

Successive disclosures are also imitated by this paratactic sequence:

Past the next tree, past the next stone of a gun breech blasted open like a mushroom, we saw a boot, half a wall, and just beyond, the swamp was filled with bodies that slowly appeared one by one from the black foliage, from the mud, from behind a broken wheel.
—John Hawkes, The Cannibal, pp. 160–161.

Much “like a reel of film spinning backwards in flickering confusion,” the fragmented grammar below unrolls the events so described in a confusion of contact clauses and smaller grammatical units:

Events unrolled themselves then, like a reel of film spinning backwards in flickering confusion. Mrs. Rice, yes, and then this morning, the maid came, last night I drank, I was upset, yes, Mrs. Rice and what she said.

—Brian Moore, The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne, p. 117.

The mimetic status of grammar’s quick, mechanical succession in the next pair of samples is obvious, with the second removing punctuation to increase the sense of fast continuity:

The rubber tongue slows, flops, stops at 7—no, 8.
—John Updike, Olinger Stories, p. 7.

The Japanese slipped forward with his camera, crouched, and took two three four pictures in quick succession.

—Ira Levin, Rosemary’s Baby, p. 245.

Inserted with dashes in a quick parataxis, the phrase “passed swiftly on” moves the last part of the sentence itself swiftly forward to the oncoming fragments that add to and complete it:

The train came on with a clatter Another blast from the whistle, a roar, a gigantic sound; and it seemed to soar into the dusk beyond and above them forever, with a noise, perhaps, like the clatter of the opening of everlasting gates and doors—*passed swiftly on—toward Richmond, the North, the oncoming night.*

—William Styron, Lie Down in Darkness, p. 382.

The erratic motion and noise of another vehicle is simulated here:

A street car raising its iron moan; stopping, belling and starting; stertorous; rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past and past and past, the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks; the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell; rises again, still fainter; fainting, lifting, lifts, faints forgone; forgotten. Now is the night one blue dew.

—James Agee, *A Death in the Family*, p. 13.

The long chain of fragments, after the street car is gone and forgotten and all is quiet, finds its own resolution in the relaxed, smooth row of monosyllables that guides the alliteration and assonance of the last sentence.

Separate kernels, clauses, grouped fragments—a clutter of little grammatical entities—collect in the passage below in a review of what Wolfe calls on his previous page the “wreckage of little things”:

Wind pressed the boughs, the withered leaves were shaking. It was October, but the leaves were shaking. A star was shaking. A light was waking. Wind was quaking. The star was far. The night, the light. The light was bright. A chant, a song, the slow dance of the little things within him.

—Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel*, p. 486.

The parallel structure sets up a rhyming pattern on *shaking*, *waking*, *quaking* and continues it with the “internal rhymes” of *star*, *far* and *night*, *light*, *bright*, simulating a rhythm or incantation before it is actually named as “A chant, a song, the slow dance of the little things. . . .”

The types of aggregate syntax that have preceded have the conspicuous subgrammatical look of the isolated elliptical fragment in a context of fuller utterances. The separate fragment or fragments can be very useful, especially in reproducing something for which the formality, or at least the order and completeness, of standard grammar would be a hindrance. In the contrasting samples below, from the closing lines of two novels, we see portrayed the exhilarating release of energy into action and, oppositely, the subsidence of action into rest and temporary silence:

His hands lift of their own and he feels the wind on his ears even before, his heels hitting heavily on the pavement at first but with an effortless gathering out of a kind of sweet panic growing lighter and quicker and quieter, he runs. *Ah: runs. Runs.*

—John Updike, *Rabbit, Run*, *closing lines*.

As he stretched out, he took a long breath, and then he lay, looking at the mesh of the screen, pulled loose by vines, and listening to the steady scratching of Mrs. Tuttle's broom. He wanted to tell her to sprinkle the floor. She was raising too much dust. In a few minutes he would call down to her, "Damp it down, Mrs. Tuttle. There's water in the sink." But not just yet. At this time he had no messages for anyone. *Nothing. Not a single word.*

—Saul Bellow, Herzog, closing lines.

This next and last fragment, long and complex but still grammatically incomplete, is quite ingenious. Its seventh word is, in fact, "ellipsis," referring here not to a grammatical omission but to a gap or space in time spent in a situation to which the character will never return. But when the sentence talks about "completing that ellipsis" it is doing so on its own, in a participial grammar that relies on something that has gone before and that is understood by the reader in its absence from the given syntax:

For the last time, completing that ellipsis which would contain those entire eighteen years of his life, since Frenchman's Bend and Varner's Crossroads and Varner's store would be one, perhaps *the* one, place to which he would never go again as long as he lived, since win or lose he would certainly not dare to.

—William Faulkner, *The Town*, p. 292.

Prose is linear. It is read and is said to move. It must by nature, therefore, generate a symbolics of spatial or temporal movement widened by its context beyond the limits of the actual sentence read from left to right in so many seconds. In whatever context, the movement may resemble accumulation or attrition, progress or other process, even stasis, or any one of these interrupted, turned, reversed. In space or time or both, it can go in any direction as continuous or repetitive, accelerated or retarded, smooth, halting, or halted. The variety is enormous. As is true about style in general, symbolic results are countless, syntactic means relatively simple and few. This is the nature, the great beauty, of grammar as style. Forms and conventions and rules that seem limited, even limiting, in fact allow a writer in command of them, and one who knows when to transgress against them, to do almost anything. Such a range, it is hoped, has been fairly and instructively sampled in the pages of this book.

It is a similar range that is meant to be suggested by the evidence of this last chapter. Here grammar as style has moved beyond the arbitrary, the sufficient, and is made so appropriate to content that, sharing the very qualities of the content, it is carried to that point where it seems not only right but inevitable. In its usual form, a syntactic symbol is a verbal, syntactic pattern intended to be read for a nonverbal movement or develop-

ment of some kind: language arranged to look like action. In the next group of examples, deliberately saved till now, verbal patterns are used to resemble other verbal patterns. The last writers to be sampled are all, to some extent, critics who are writing about a certain author's style by writing *in* that style, or about a particular experience in reading so as to put their own readers through something like it. Consider these comments on the prose of Jonathan Swift:

Most sentences demonstrate a conscious search for the asymmetrical, an avoidance of forethought, an employment of whatever happens to be at hand. Some sentences which sound most portentous, and bristle with shows of order, simply flow off into an endless linking of unsubordinated members. The unemphatic sentence shows a mode of progression that could be demonstrated as easily from paragraph to paragraph and from section to section.

—Ronald Paulson, Theme and Structure in Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, pp. 25–26.

The critic claims that the careless linking of paragraphs resembles the linking of sentences, and his own sentence summarizing one example of the larger progression is itself "unemphatic," adding "unsubordinated members" with a simulated lack of "forethought" in its own order and rhythm:

The *Tale's* preface, for instance, moves from an explanation of the book's purpose and origin to a discussion of why the preface is not as long as modern prefaces should be, to an explanation of why the author has not attacked other writers, to clues as to how the reader should read the book, to a discussion of satire.

—Paulson, pp. 25–26.

In another stylistic analysis, a critic investigates the metrical accomplishment of the Victorian poet Arthur Hugh Clough:

But the meter is vital in his hands, pulsating with a kind of half-tamed life. It bucks and rears and pants, like a horse not yet consistently docile to its rider's reign and spur and then suddenly for a moment forced into a proud beauty of control. The emphatic drumbeat roll of orthodox accentual hexameters constrains a rigorous fitting of words, both in sense and natural accent, to the pulse of the meter.

—Katharine Chorley, Arthur Hugh Clough: The Uncommitted Mind, p. 149.

The grammatical vitality of the second sentence's lively compounding seems itself to be tamed or controlled at the end. In the third's "emphatic

drumbeat roll of orthodox accentual hexameters," there is an emphasis and rolling accent to these paired syntactic triads that suggest the pulse of the meter they characterize.

In the next excerpt of critical prose, the long left-branch that begins after the semicolon forces the reader, on his way to the main clause, to keep hold of relentless and proliferated language not unlike the style of Henry James that it discusses. Even the main clause boasts the kind of embedded structure, the included clauses, that one might find on almost any page of late James:

Finally, the indirect method of presentation predominates here to the almost complete exclusion of direct statement; and as one grunts and sweats one's way through this most late of Jamesian works, perpetually losing one's way amidst the qualifications and parentheses, struggling to keep a hold on the proliferating subtleties of analysis, the relentlessly sustained metaphors, the tormenting crypto-statements of the elliptical, allusive, digressive dialogues, one has reason to believe that James meant what he said when, in a letter to Hugh Walpole at about this time in reply to some unforgivable question Walpole had asked about *The Ambassadors*, he commented, "How can you say I do anything so foul and abject as to 'state'?"

—*Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, p. 236.

The next selection talks about Faulkner's "queer sentences" as part of an elaborate strategy of "*deliberately withheld meaning*," and it does so in a series of sentences that keep their own ideas in motion with appositive delays "until the dropping into place of the very last syllable" at the end of the paragraph:

. . . these queer sentences . . . parallel in a curious and perhaps inevitable way, and not without aesthetic justification, the whole elaborate method of *deliberately withheld meaning*, of progressive and partial and delayed disclosures, which so often gives the characteristic shape to the novels themselves. It is a persistent offering of obstacles, a calculated system of screens and obtrusions, of confusions and ambiguous interpolations and delays, with one express purpose; and that purpose is simply to keep the form—and the idea—fluid and unfinished, still in motion, as it were, and unknown, until the dropping into place of the very last syllable.

—*Conrad Aiken, "William Faulkner: The Novel as Form," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, p. 138.

And finally:

We judge the poem by what we can take away from it—a vivid sense of the object, a value clarified or affirmed: instead of reading it through, of encountering all the detail of its innermost movement—how it pauses, moves again, hurries, retards, how it spreads out or narrows down, how it offers us a sense of the unexpected, or again of irresistibly completing something that it has begun, of ending just as its self-appointed task is done, not a word sooner or later.

—John Holloway, “Poem as Statement, Poem as Action,” *The Colours of Clarity*, p. 92.

Mr. Holloway has himself managed to give us both prose as “statement” and prose as “action.” His argument contrasts a static notion of poetry as completed meaning, “clarified and affirmed” (notice the grammar of *past* participles), to a more authentic and immediate encounter in reading poetry through, rendered in the present tense by a long right-branching series that “pauses, moves again, hurries, retards” toward its own irresistible end, closing “not a word sooner or later.” Carried beyond simple statement or presentation, syntax begins to symbolize; grammar becomes dramatic.

Critics who report on a syntactic habit of a certain author’s style, or on some other verbal effect, by importing that very characteristic into their own style offer a nice sort of evidence for the conclusion of this chapter and the end of the book. The title-premise of this volume has been that grammar and style are reciprocal concerns—that it can make good sense, and help to make good prose, to think of *grammar as style*. Sixteen chapters have recorded examples of this, on the assumption that good style is learned by emulation of authors who display it. The last five samples were offered, in a way, to validate this assumption. They were not advanced as any kind of proof, of course. It just seems fitting to end with a few critics who show that by studying good prose they have learned not only how to appreciate it but also how to write it.

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Index of Terms

- Abstraction, level of, 156
Abutting clauses, 102–104, 249
Active verb, 14, 15, 22–23, 36, 37, 190
Activity in the sentence, 14–15, 20, 24–40, 56
See also Sentence dynamics
Adjectival, 45
as appositive, 169
created by passives, 191–192
Adjectival style, 79–82
Adjective, 2–4, 9, 10, 55, 69–85, 155
as appositive, 171–174
Adverb, 9, 69–85
Adverbial, 18, 82–83, 136
as appositive, 169
in cohesion, 226–227
mobility of, 72
as sentence opener, 129
Adverbial style, 82–83
Agent, 190–204
Alternation, as cohesive device, 213–214
Analogue, grammar as, 233–254
And, 99–106, 107, 126
Antecedent, 160
Antithesis, 206, 217–219
Aphoristic style, 24
Apposition, nature of, 161–162
See also Appositive
Appositive, 7, 10, 47–49, 154, 160–174
Appositive adjective, 171–174
See also Adjective and Appositive
Articulate Energy (Davie's term), 235, 244
As against, as opener, 222
Asyndeton, 101–104
At once, as opener, 218
Attributive, 161–162

Balance, 206, 210–213, 219, 221
Base-clause, 14, 37, 142–145, 246
See also Clause

Be-pattern, 15–18, 24–28, 29–32
Biblical imitation
with *let*, 185
with parallelism, 206
Both . . . and, 99, 106–108
Bound modifiers, 41, 56, 57–58, 123–124
Branching, 141–159
in cohesion, 229
Bumpy rhythm, with too many prepositional phrases, 95
But, 99, 126, 225–226

Cadence, 214–223, 243–247
Catalogs, 77–79
Chiasmus, 215–217, 229
Clauses
abutting, 102–104
alternation of, 213–214
as appositive, 170
balancing of, 206
base, 14, 37, 142–145
dependent, 116–124
equative, 15–17, 31, 56
relative, 43, 117–122, 195
subordinate, 116–118, 195
Close appositive, 161
Cohesion, 10, 225–232
adverbs in, 84
inversion for, 136–137
passive for, 196–198
Comparison, in cohesion, 226, 232
Complement, 15–19, 41
Compound sentence, 100
Compounds, 45, 46
Compression, in mid-branching sentences, 149–150
Conjunction, 9, 99–115, 225–226
omission of, 101–104
Conjunctive adverbs, 99, 108–109, 226
Contact clause, 249
See also Abutting clause

- Content words, 69
 Coordination, 9, 99, 109–115
 Correlative, 9, 99, 105, 106–108
 Critics' imitative syntax, 252–254
 Cumulative sentence; *see* Left-branching
- Decoding, 123, 124
 Deep structure, 14
 Definition, equative clause for, 26
 Demonstrative, 227–228
 Dependent clauses, 116–124
 Description, 24–26
 Determiner, 126, 228–229
 Dictio, 13
 Direct object, 15, 22, 23, 43
 Divine agent, 203–204
Dramatic syntax (Davie's term), 235
 Dynamics; *see* Sentence dynamics
- Economy, 63
Either . . . or, 99, 106–108
 "Elegant" inversion, 137–139
 Ellipsis, 208–209
 Embedding, 94, 253
 Emblem, literary, not syntactic, 235
 Emphasis
 inversion for, 134–136
 passive for, 193–195
 Equative pattern, 15–17, 31, 56
 Exclamatory, 10, 175, 186–188
- "Faulty" parallelism, 207–208
 Finite verb, 56
For, 99, 126
 Fragment, 46–47, 92, 248–249, 250–251
 Free modifiers, 10, 41, 55, 56, 57–58,
 123–124, 141–159
 Front-heaviness, 144–148, 153
 Function words; *see* Structural words
- Generality, level of, 156
 Gerund, 61–62
 Grammar
 definition of, 1
 relation to style, 1–12
- Hypotaxis, 100
- Icon, 235
If . . . then, 213
 Imitation, 252–254
- See also* the preface of this book and
 the entire companion book, *Gram-
 mar as Style: Exercises in Creativity*
- Imperative, 10, 175, 181–186
 Impersonal passive, 199–203
 Indirect object, 43
 Infinitive, 63–68
 Initial appositive, 165–167
 Intensifiers, 83–84
 Interrogative, 10, 175–181, 231
 Intransitive, 15, 20–22, 24–28, 33–35
 Inversion, 10, 76–77, 125–127, 129–140,
 151–152, 165–167, 229
 Inverted appositive, 165–167
Inwardly . . . outwardly, 214
 Isolated modifiers, 73–76
It inversion, 130–132
- Kernel, 9, 13–40
 as base clause, 37–40
 as syntactic punctuation, 30–36
 as topic sentence, 28–36
- Key words, 171
- Left-branching, 10, 141–148, 229, 253
 Length of sentences, 29, 37
 juxtaposition of long and short, 37
 Level of abstraction, 156
 Level of generality, 156
Like, 18, 43–44, 98
 Linking verb pattern, 15, 18–20, 24–28,
 33
 Long noun phrase with bound modifiers,
 avoidance of, 41, 52–55
 Loose sentence; *see* Right-branching
- Medial appositive, 167–168
 Metaphor, 17–18, 43–44, 89, 98
 Mid-branching, 10, 141–143, 148–153
 Mimetic syntax, 233–254
 Motion, simulated by syntax, 240–251
 Movement of prose, 240–251; *see also*
 Sentence dynamics, Rhythm
- Negatives, in inversion, 132–133
Neither, 133
Neither . . . nor, 99, 106–108, 214
 News, of the sentence, 69, 125, 171
 Nominal style, 53
 Nominative absolute, 7, 10, 50, 128, 151,

- Nonrestrictive; *see* Free modifier
Nor, 99, 132, 216
Not, 133
Not (only) . . . but (also), 99, 106–108, 133, 215
- Noun phrase**, 9, 41–55
 as adverbial, 46
 as appositive, 47–49, 160–168
 in basic positions, 43–44
 with bound modifiers, 52–55
 in cumulative sentence, 155–156
 as fragment, 46–47
 as modifier of other nouns, 45–46
 in nominative absolutes, 50
 in series, 51–52
- Now*, 214
Nowhere, 133
- Objective complement**, 15, 44
Of, 96–97
Officialese, 200–201
Onomatopoeia, 237, 244
Openers; *see* Sentence openers
Or, 99, 107
- Pace**, 240–251
Paired construction, 215–219, 240
Paired sentences, 32, 33
Parallelism, 7, 11, 25, 137, 206–224, 230–232, 245
Parataxis, 100–104, 234, 249
Participle
 isolated, 73–75
 past, 59–61
 present, 57–59
Passive, 10, 11, 139, 189–205
Passivity, thematic, 204–205
Periodic prose, 233
Personal pronouns, 55
Predicate adjective, 15, 17, 19
Predicate nominative, 43
Predicate noun, 15–17, 19
Predication, 14–15
Preposition, 9, 43, 55, 86–98
 in appositives, 169, 173–174
 in cumulative modification, 155
 at end of sentence, 135
 overuse, 94–98
 poetic use, 91
 transferred, 92
 verbal force in, 93
- Prepositional phrase**; *see* Preposition
Principal, 160
Pronoun, 55
 in cohesion, 228–229
Prose rhythm, 215–224, 240–241, 243
- Qualifiers**, 83–84
Questions, 175–181, 231
- Recapitulation**, 61, 245
 of inverted appositives, 146, 166–167
Reiteration, appositive as, 162–164
Relative adverb, 117
Relative clause, 43, 117, 118, 119–122, 155–156, 195
Relative pronoun, 117, 119–124
Repetition, 146, 162–164, 210–213, 216, 227, 231, 232, 236–240, 245
- Restrictive**; *see* Bound modifiers
Restrictive appositive, 161
Rhythm, 215–224, 240–251
Right-branching, 7, 10, 141–145, 153–159, 245–247
- Segmentation**, 141
Sentence connector, 99, 108–109, 227
Sentence dynamics, 24–40, 93, 125, 240–251
Sentence modifier, 41
Sentence opener, 10, 125–129
Sentence patterns, basic, 14–23
Sentence perspective, 125
Sequence, syntax as, 8–9
Series, 105–106, 107
Simile; *see* Metaphor
Slack coordination, 110–111
Slots, 13–14
So, 99, 126
Sound symbolism, 236–237
Stress, in the kernel, 19–20
Structural words, 70
Style
 organic view, 4
 ornamental view, 4
 relation of grammar to, 1–12
Subject, 19, 20, 42
 as sentence opener, 125–127
See also Inversion
Subjective syntax (Davie's term), 235
Subordinate clause, 116–118, 155–157,

- Subordinator, 100, 117–119
Surface structure, 14
Suspensiveness, of mid-branching sentence, 152
Symbol, syntactic, 233–234; *see also* Syntactic symbolism
Synecdoche, 16
Synonym
 appositive as, 164–165
Syntactic symbol, defined, 233–237, 250–251
Syntactic symbolism, 10, 159, 224, 233–254
Syntax, 2, 8
 as sequence, 8–9, 11, 13
Texture, 156–157, 161
- The*, 126
There, 37, 130–132
Topic sentence, 28–29
 in cohesion, 230–231
Transformation, 14
Transition, 35, 242; *see also* Cohesion, Conjunction, Correlative, Inversion, Passive, Sentence Opener
Transitive, 14, 22–23, 24–28, 36
Types, of sentences, 15–23
- Variety, not for its own sake, 126
Verb phrase, 9, 56–68
 as appositive, 168–169
 in cumulative sentence, 155–156
Verbal, as sentence opener, 127–128
Verbal icon (Wimsatt's term), 235

