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The Punctator's World: A Discursion (Part Nine)

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The Punctator's World: A Discursion

BY GWEN G. ROBINSON

PART IX

STIRRINGS OF RETREAT: 1900 TO MIDCENTURY

In this section we reach the start of the twentieth-century telecommunication boom. Radios and telephones made tempting alternatives to books and letters, for they could instantly relay the sound of a human voice. As their efficiency and affordability increased, so they insinuated their way into the traditional domain of print. In the century's first decades, while the established literary artist was still reeling out his thoughts in long, involved fin de siècle sentences, a maverick impulse was developing. The short sharp language of the voice was gaining critical approval for the page. Being robustly straightforward, it required fewer puncts to shape its contours.

THE PENDULUM of taste was on the turn. Once again, the complicated *Say it all* was yielding to a plainer *Say it straight.* To appreciate better the modern aspects of these two age-old, rival styles (once called *Asian* and *Attic* by classical erudites), let us quickly review their development. The story confounds expectations in several ways.

In the long heyday of Asian preeminence—from Gorgias, to Cicero, and through the Renaissance—written language was both loquacious and adorned with euphuistic imagery, rhythms, and alliterations to please the listening ear. As silent reading moved towards eventual public literacy, however, Asianists began to redirect their attentions from ornament to structure, from considerations of ear-tantalizing, euphuistic figures to the bones of grammar, which are the eye's best friend in the comprehension of involved and discursive sentences. Meanwhile, Atticists simply soldiered on in the tracks of their forebears. Greatly boosted by the Enlightenment as well as by Wordsworth, they continued to pare their sentences in the manner once urged by Alexandria's librarian Callimachus and Seneca the Elder. Striving for 'real meaning' (and to express it when possible in terse, insightful aphorisms), they made their claim on the intellect. Their brief statements readily exposed the underlying grammar and

Gwen G. Robinson was editor of the *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* from 1983 to 1992. She continues to pursue her own research and writing.

I wish to thank Dr. Henry Eisner for his encouragement, insights, and advice during the writing of these pages. —G. G. R.

thus not only rendered difficult concepts easier to understand, but in time became useful to popularize all materials. Attic writing is comfortably harvested by eye or ear.

Galileo Galilei, in the space of one book, produced examples of both styles. The preface to "Sidereus Nuncius," dedicated to his patron The Most Serene Cosimo II de' Medici, is Asian and couched in high-flown imagery, alliteration (not so apparent in translation), commonplaces, and rhythmic repetitions.

> Indeed, the Maker of the stars himself has seemed by clear indications to direct that I assign to these new planets Your Highness's famous name in preference to all others. For just as these stars, like children worthy of their sire, never leave the side of Jupiter by any appreciable distance, so (as indeed who does not know?) clemency, kindness of heart, gentleness of manner, splendour of royal blood, nobility in public affairs, and excellency of authority and rule have all fixed their abode and habitation in Your Highness. . . .

That done, Galileo picks up his Attic quill and tackles the actual treatise. The manner of exposition changes entirely. One senses that Galileo's pen is moving more slowly, that his efforts are towards transmuting difficult mental images into the plainest possible language.

> The most easterly star was seven minutes from Jupiter and thirty seconds from its neighbor; the western one was two minutes away from Jupiter. The end stars were very bright and were larger than that in the middle, which appeared very small. The most easterly star appeared a little elevated toward the north from the straight line through the other planets and Jupiter.[1]

By the twentieth century, literary fashion could no longer tolerate hyperbolic rhetoric like that of Galileo's preface. Walter Pater's experiments in syntactic and semantic flexuosity had exhausted the mystique of grandiose periodic sentences.[2] The new crop of Asian-inspired writers would be less garrulous. Three factors instructed their shift towards

1. Galileo Galilei, "Sidereus Nuncius", from *The Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. and ed. Stillman Drake (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), 24–5, 56.

2. See "The Punctator's World: A Discursion (Part Eight)", *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 29 (1994). A *period* is a full circuit of words that fleshes out what was once termed 'a complete thought'.

brevity. Foremost was the growing dominance of science: not only in theoretical discovery (particularly in physics and chemistry), but also in practical areas: medicine, engineering, and household invention. It seemed a certainty that science, by feeling its way from truth to truth, would in time demystify the universe. In the glow of this expectation, ambitious students turned in increasing numbers to join the ranks of questing fact seekers, whose habits of communication were necessarily to the point. Expository discourse, being devoted to reason and clarity, encourages the suppression of all that is not objectively relevant.

Another factor evolved within the humanist camp, where yearnings for originality (fallout from nineteenth-century romanticism) were inciting rebellion amongst the Muses. However architecturally complete and aesthetically sound those old, rhetorical, Ciceronian periods may have seemed, they were too contrived for the rush of twentieth-century passions. Strong feelings dilate more freely in structures that align with speech.[3]

Finally, the increase of unvarnished statement owed much to the accomplishments of democracy, particularly in America, where mass-produced books (as well as Fords) were giving the common man a chance to enjoy life at a rate that his forebears could not have imagined. Public education and libraries had long ago brought literature within reach of people on farms, in factories and remote townships—people who were not at ease with the leisured articulations of aristocrats and intellectuals, but whose lives were nevertheless rich in self-esteem. Joe Average in his home on the outskirts of metropolitan sophistication preferred his own kind of talk and though he respected bookish folk to a degree, he in no way regarded 'clever talk' as the mark of a man's worth. The emerging consensus that ordinary language made a creditable conveyance for literature was well in keeping with the levelings of society and recent public experience: across-the-board, government-financed, high-school education; two world wars; and the depression. Commercial publishers were quick to exploit the trend. Thus, as the volume and speed of communication stepped up, as society became homogenized and mobility increased, so did sentences become shorter. Though they could still incorporate numerous ideas and range over many lines on the printed page, it is fair to

3. D. Sperber and D. Wilson, "Rhetoric and Relevance" (140–1); and J. Bender and D. E. Wellbery, "Rhetoricality: On the Modernist Return of Rhetoric" (3–20), *The Ends of Rhetoric*, ed. John Bender and David E. Wellbery (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990).

say that, generally, by 1950, the treatment of many ideas within a single sentence was on the wane.

* * *

The incompatibility of the elaborate (Asian) and plain (Attic) styles—their two distinct methods of transmitting meaning and sensation—has fueled debate over two and a half millennia of writing history. Which is more artistic? truer to the mind and nature of man? Which better informs? These questions have never been resolved, but thanks to the Asian's gradual acceptance of logic, the two styles have become less obviously at daggers drawn. No longer dominated by the historical Rhetoric with its apparatus of rules and tools, the heir to rhetorical gush is today best recognized by his sentence structuring skills and a modest bias for complexity. No longer the mesmeric cantor that his ancestors were, he celebrates 'truth' over music, and to that end keeps himself up to date with the 'literate' sciences: psychology, sociology, politics, and philosophy.

Surprising it is that the Asian, once a specialist in Mellifluous Persuasion, should transmogrify into an eye-and-grammar man. Nevertheless, it has proved a good move, insuring for the twentieth century a continuing interest in compositional inventiveness. The Asian's syntactic agility nowadays boasts a poise amongst words, a superior intellectuality that outclasses the pithy truths for which the traditional plain style had long been famous. Being word-crafty and subtle, the Asianist is not willing to leave to chance what is difficult to say. Usurping the Atticist's claims to reason, he supports his effects with causes. Though he likes to attach a contingency to whatever he has just said, he is cautious not to trespass on his reader's patience. His most salient twentieth-century specialty is the conjuring up of simultaneity: that feel for the present tense that comes when the subjective self confronts objective reality. An Asianist is concerned to master time, to stretch space, and to justify the psychological rub that drives his characters into action. In our speeded-up world the success of such aspirations hinges on precision of language: on pronominal exactness, well-placed anaphoric signals, unambiguous verb governances, well-reasoned adverbial connectives, and interior pointing that aids comprehension and does not slow the tempo. Though an Asianist's sentences may from time to time still bloat,[4] they will be nothing to what his forebears used to serve up.

The success of contemporary euphuistic intricacy *depends* (in a way

4. Though rarely to compete with a Miltonian 400-worder.

that neither its prototype Asian used to, nor speech ever did) on the sovereignty of grammar and syntax and the clarity of punctuation. Now that the classical formulae are out of fashion, euphuists can no longer work on automatic pilot. If only to prune the unneeded from over-expanded sentences, they are obliged to think. The drive for explicit eye-gatherable clarity has forced the traditional, arranged-to-delight-the-ear, 'rhetorical' euphuism into a tight U-turn. Logic, its age-old demon, now propels it.

For all these reasons we had better rethink our terms. Let us then call our present-day descendant of Asian extravagance a 'complectist', and his output 'complected'.[5] As for his straight-shooting Attic counterpart, his style henceforth in this discussion will be known as 'plain' or 'direct', and he himself a 'plaindealer'.

The crafted multiformity of a twentieth-century complected sentence can be difficult for those who have not been prepared to appreciate its distinctions or admire its sinuosity. The laconic plaindealers are more popularly accessible. Disposed to intrude less, they invite the reader to imagine the unsaid according to his own lights, and in this way they touch some responsive chord in nearly everyone. Whether it is for the sake of clarity or poetic impact, or even because he does not wish to risk his income against the unlikely attention span of his readership, the direct-style writer drops all dispensable supplements and runs straight for the posts. Informed by the 'sincerity' of speech, he advocates an economy of words, uncomplicated grammar, and conventional vocabulary—a composite of aims that dispels the need for strong punctuational adjustment. The more his written sentences approach the intuitional speed and brevity of spoken ones, the more the points will disappear.[6] An artful fellow, he has not changed much over the years, except perhaps to *appear* less artful.

* * *

In the opening years of the twentieth century, both styles lived side by side. As the plain style grew more acceptable to the public, so its wordier cousin became more like it, more muscled than sprawling. Parenthetical interruptions to the steady development of an idea, distant referents, em-

5. From late-Latin *complectere*, meaning *entwine, plait, embrace, interweave*.

6. J. D. Logan, *Quantitative Punctuation* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1907), 7–9. The best literature of the day, says Mr. Logan [disdaining the flexible dash], seldom makes use of more than two structural points, i.e., the comma and the period. Whereas the lengthy sentences of Samuel Johnson, De Quincey, and Pater require a full battery of points, the styles of Emerson and Lincoln need only very few.

beddings of phrase within phrase and clause within clause, far-flung boundaries of verb dominion—all of these inherited euphuistic pirouettes were being judged afresh in terms of whether they slowed the pace or impeded a quick comprehension. And always, it seemed that they did.

Thus, by the late 1940s, the clausal modifications and interjections that once bulged the midsections of fin de siècle sentences had shrunk significantly, both in size and in number. They were either abbreviated, transformed to surface-structure modifiers, discarded, or adjoined to the governing idea with conjunctions and pronouns (like train cars to an engine), so that forward impetus, at least, might keep the reader going. The mind can more comfortably comprehend sentence segments when they are in close order than when they are distantly separated, or internally differentiated, that is, couched one within the other, like onion rings. *This is the malt that the rat that the cat that the dog worried killed ate* is difficult to process, because of the effort required to remember which of the stacked-up verbs at the end goes with which of the stacked-up noun subjects at the beginning. *This is the dog that worried the cat that killed the rat that ate the malt* is easier to take in on account of the closer groupings of related components.[7] Furthermore, in this latter sentence, the concatenation of clauses moves to predictable rhythm. Historically, Asian euphuists were the masters of rhythm. Stupid stuff, said the Attics: *Why not just say what you mean?* Surprisingly, in view of contemporary antieuphuistic tendencies, cognitive science and linguistics laboratories are reconsidering rhythm as a viable imparter of meaning, useful in transporting "seemingly constitutive, semantic incoherence toward semantic precision".[8] There is a fundamental tension, it would appear, between the phenomenon of rhythm and the dimension of meaning.

With rhythm or without, under ordinary circumstances our short-term memories can handle at a blow only about seven (plus or minus two) chunks of information—typically a telephone number.[9] This inconvenient constraint limits how much of a partially processed spoken sentence we can comfortably retain in our heads. Those seven or so chunks can be

7. Marvin Minsky, *The Society of Mind* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1985), 160.

8. H. U. Gumbrecht, "Rhythm and Meaning", in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, trans. William Whobrey (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 171.

9. There are all kinds of support for this thesis. Cf. G. A. Miller, "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information", *Psychology Revue* 63 (1956): 81–97; also Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct* (New York: William Morrow, 1994), 201.

more easily dealt with, and even increased, when they are laid out on the page for the eye to study. Visual systems (which are not so bound to time as are aural ones) can support more simultaneous operating processes than ear-oriented language systems can.[10] However, one must remember that all verbal constructs are physiologically oral in their orientation. The mind, which can move like lightening through whole atmospheres of mundane experience, is obliged to slow when the desire comes to extrapolate from its adventures and remodel the segments into words.

Words, which are usually thought of as liberating, do in fact constrain, by delimiting the spaciousness and speed of thinking. In the privacy of our intellects, they evolve out of silent, mental imagery.[11] Upon seeing an object, for example, one quickly converts the perception into a short, unbreached word group—"green, stalked, cool", perhaps, for a tree; or "busy, furry, zig-zag", perhaps, for a squirrel. These formulating word groups can be immediately reorganized for parsible surface comprehensibility, and again, if wanted, into full-blown literary sentences—each step demanding more skill and more effort. An analysis of the relationship of one perception to another, or of both to the perceiver (with possible accompanying reflections on the hierarchy of their importance), requires even more labor on the part of the word-smith, although all of these aspects might immediately have been obvious in the silence of his mind. Once he has managed to convert what he can of his ideas into verbal constructs, he will note that they are more easily assimilated by recipient ear or eye when he presents them in forms close to their compact, early stages—that is, before social, rhetorical, traditional, artistic, or intellectual remodelings can interfere. By doing what comes naturally, plaindealers have assured themselves a prosperous future. Vying complectists can no longer stray far from the basic rules.

* * *

10. Minsky, *The Society of Mind*, 160.

11. Jacob A. Arlow, M. D., in "Fantasy, Memory, and Reality Testing", *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 38 (1969): 28–51, tells us that some eighty percent of learning is effected through vision. Dreams are almost exclusively visual in nature: the closer a thought is to unconscious instinctual tendencies (said Freud), "the greater the possibility that it will be represented mentally in a visual form". Some neuroscientists are conjecturing that our grammatical concepts and ability to speak have grown out of expanded visual areas of the human cortex. See Jo Ann C. Gutin, "A Brain That Talks", *Discover.* June 1996, 83–90. See also Minsky, *Society of Mind*, 269.

In England, where stylistic invention was likely to be regulated by classical Latinate syntactic habit,[12] sentence structures during the first half of the twentieth century remained more durably complex than compound or simple. Yet even there, a crumbling was in process. On the down-to-earth frontier of the English Language Diaspora (most notably, in Australia, Canada, and the United States), disintegration was faster, and writers who wrote for the general public in those far-flung places increasingly deployed full stops to break up logjammed sentence parts. While commas and dashes performed the remaining essentials, semicolons and colons became rarer. Generally, internal stopping became less needed for the exfoliation of meaning or the enhancement of nuance.

Also hastening punctuation's midcentury retreat was the fact that the reading public had grown very deft at processing text. Ubiquitous print had so settled the customs of written language that average readers could on their own more easily anticipate the contours of an unfolding sentence. For college graduates the conventional book had become as easy to read as breathing the air. By midcentury almost anyone could gather up prepositional phrases and short introductory clauses without instruction from commas. In such an environment punctators could somewhat relax.

Despite these frontline shifts to simplicity, conservative schoolmasters of this transition period kept young scholars at their drills, preparing them to appreciate, and even to emulate, the circuitous statements found in 'great books'. The ability to parse a sentence, to spell correctly, and to plant one's semicolons and parentheses with confidence were still obligatory sophistications for ambitious youths. Pointing made them think. The knowledge that a comma would be beneficial in proclaiming nonrestrictive clauses or in disambiguating 'the laughable' from 'the intended' remained as essential as ever. School texts from these early years provide an amplitude of pedagogical injunction on all these matters.

Monomaniac punctators will always be thankful for the practical influence of the Fowler brothers, who more or less took the world by storm in 1906 with *The King's English*, of which approximately one-fifth is devoted to the subtleties of punctuation. Revised three times and reprinted again and again, it is to this day a classic mainstay on the desks of writers. The following excerpt comes from the section on independent sentences.

> Among the signs that more particularly betray the uneducated writer is inability to see when a comma is not a sufficient stop. . . .

12. Classical Latin is generally believed to have been exclusively a literary and scholarly language. Common discourse was far less pyramidical.

> It is roughly true that grammatically independent sentences should be parted by at least a semicolon; but in the first place there are very large exceptions to this; and secondly, the writer who really knows a grammatically independent sentence when he sees it is hardly in need of instruction; . . . [It] may be of some assistance to remark that a sentence joined to the previous one by a coordinating conjunction is grammatically independent, as well as one not joined to it at all. But the difference between a coordinating and a subordinating conjunction is itself in English rather fine. Every one can see that 'I will not try; it is dangerous' is two independent sentences—independent in grammar, though not in thought. But it is a harder saying that 'I will not try, for it is dangerous' is also two sentences, while 'I will not try, because it is dangerous' is one only. The reason is that *for* coordinates, and *because* subordinates; instead of giving lists, which would probably be incomplete, of the two kinds of conjunction, we mention that a subordinating conjunction may be known from the other kind by its being possible to place it and its clause before the previous sentence instead of after, without destroying the sense; we can say 'Because it is dangerous, I will not try', but not 'For it is dangerous, I will not try'.[13]

At the death of his younger brother, H. W. Fowler continued alone. In 1926 he put out *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, a second classic for the archives of correct usage. He regretted that in this volume he had no room for a treatise on punctuation, a subject, he felt, that was generally understood. Nevertheless, under his entry "Stops" he manages some ten columns of detail.

In 1925 Harold Herd prefaced his *Everybody's Guide to Punctuation* as follows:

> The passing of the more formal style of prose has been accompanied by the discarding of those rules of punctuation which checked the flow of expression. Stops are now rarely suffered to cramp the writer's ideas; the reader is spared the jolts and jerks of mechanical pointing.[14]

13. H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, *The King's English* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), 263.

14. Harold Herd, *Everybody's Guide to Punctuation* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1925), 7.

Even so, Mr. Herd insisted on appropriate behavior for the colons, semicolons, and commas. He informs us that colons "denote a more abrupt pause" than is marked by the semicolon. Thus, in the following sentence,

> Thank you for your suggestions: they strike the right note

the break is more compelling than in:

> His record commends him; his personality repels.

By adopting old-fashioned temporal terms (previously used for oral renderings of text), Herd ignores that relationship of meanings between sentence parts that must decide the specifics of divisions for silent modern reading. His switch from oral to visual points of view fuses the two separate physiological activities and confounds his reader. Herd was not the only school-text grammarian of his period to play this game.

Mr. Herd approves of commas for adverbial, explanatory, and interruptive phrases: *however*, *furthermore*, *on the whole*, *of course*, *the report proceeded*, etc. That we often slur our syllables in speech is a fact unremarked upon as he exhorts us to comma off our vocatives. "Nosir", we are counseled, must be written: "No, Sir". As for the unfortunate full stop and what exactly it might be trying to terminate, Mr. Herd is at a loss to say. Use it "at the end of every sentence"[15] is the best advice that he can muster.

Generally, as grammatical-rhetorical tensions amongst the points became more acknowledged, so the waffling Herds of the world declined in number. A. E. Lovell's little book, *Punctuation as a Means of Expression* (1932), for example, graciously accommodated both logic and feeling.

> Man's mentality will find expression in coherent thought and in consequent coherent language, but his emotions will give colour to his sentences.[16]

Mr. Lovell recognizes that since the same stop-system has the double function of handling both the grammatical-logical and the rhetorical-emotional, each phase in turn will have its own emphasis. That emphasis will vary with different subjects of discourse and with different individu-

15. Herd, *Everybody's Guide*, 21–9.

16. A. E. Lovell, *Punctuation as a Means of Expression* (London, New York: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd., 1932), 27. Mr. Lovell, M.A., was the director of education for the City and County Borough of Chester, in England.

als. Rhetorical punctuation (being the carrier of emotion and hence of authorial personality) should ride on the crest of the logical, *for underlying grammatical structures must never be violated.* Lovell admits that it is no simple matter for words to express one's meaning "beyond a doubt or cavil"; to which he adds (quite rightly) that one can more exactly convey one's meaning in speech sounds than in writing.[17]

* * *

While texts wholly made up of short sentences could fascinate avant-garde experimentalists and satisfy the intellects of ordinary folk, they were initially rather looked down upon by the graduates of conservative establishments. Those ladies and gentlemen were devoted to complexity amongst their sentences. Educated to read within the traditional boundaries, they approved the advice of old-fashioned textbook pundits and were quite at home with chaotic clusters of nonsubstantive clauses and their tumbling litters of commas and colons. Made confident by learned instruction, these aristocrats of the written word remained the upholders of received punctorial custom.

In tracking the trends of this period, it is elucidating (though admittedly unscientific) to apply the 'complected vs. plaindealing' distinction to prominent writers. The following samples come from both sides of the fence, with the emphasis on the ambitious complectists, whose goals are more difficult to isolate. In the late 1800s their stellar exemplar had been the Paterian sentence, whose complex syntax, we remember, only secondhandedly recalled the structures of speech and whose manifold contortions were better assimilated by eye than ear.

Henry James (1843–1916) is close in time as well as inclination to the inspiration of his style. A reader must be vigilant to gather in the syntactical, almost anarchic, idiosyncrasies of his technique. Like Pater, James attempts the full scene (including the multifarious reactions of the informing observer to the observed object itself). Like Pater, he tries to resolve the incompatibility of instant sensation with the exigencies of time-ridden language—a notable Asian impulse. James' hesitancies and skips of focus portray a highly aware consciousness experiencing the variousness of life. As his sentence structures peck round and round an idea, so they reveal copious ranges of subliminal possibility.

James' approach is ostensibly optical, though better perceived as a puri-

17. Lovell, *Punctuation*, 29–31.

fied form of orality that favors plenitude over the jabs of speech. Speech, which is generally delivered within the bounds of an 'understood' context, tends to be incomplete. It encourages the "Ya know what I mean?" syndrome. Amongst talkers verbs can be dropped; and gestures and facial expressions allowed to fill in. Denied the sympathy that is standardly established by physical confrontation, writers must express themselves more fully than speakers, for there will be no recourse to repair once the utterance has escaped the writer's jurisdiction. Everything necessary to the wanted impact must be solidly on the paper, to enable the reading eye to discern the relationship of peripheral to mainstream, and thus clinch the total experience without drowning. In a scene of flashing insights, new assessments, and readjusting attention, the reader relies on punctuation to demark grammatical constituents so that he can know what attaches to what, and thereby gain the sense. With the points in place to restrain the flying components, a Jamesian statement can, in fact, be read aloud with success. The following excerpt, from James' "Preface to *The Ambassadors*", was written ca. 1907, by which time his habit was to compose his lines while pacing the room and dictating to his secretary—an oral mode, to be sure, with splendiferous potential when recommitted to the voice.[18] Though his writing bore the stamp of literariness—so full of commas and dashes and parentheses—James found his words and settled his rhythms in concentrated ear-to-brain coordination. In the following excerpt James is describing how the germ of his story first came to him.

> A friend had repeated to me, with great appreciation, a thing or two *said* to him by a man of distinction, much his senior, and to which a sense akin to that of Strether's melancholy eloquence might be imputed—*said* as chance would have, and so easily might, in Paris, and in a charming old garden attached to a house of art, and on a Sunday afternoon of summer, many persons of great interest being present.[19] (Italics added.)

A long sentence, but a controlled one. Despite the dislocation of normal structure, it provides an ample sweep of information, however inspecific. To achieve his airy mix of chance with practical importance, James staged his 'action' in a venue as nebulous as a Monet water garden, and

18. Austin Warren, "Symbolic Imagery", in *Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 123–4.

19. Henry James, "Preface to *The Ambassadors*", *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 308.

peopled it with faceless, genteel beings on a leisurely Sunday afternoon—all very offhand. Syntactically, this site description is attached as a coda to the primary statement by means of a dash followed by the anaphoric second "said". Crafted to offset the so-wispy action of the opening lines from all the buzz of circumambient conditions, this appendage was *not* implanted in the core of the sentence's architecture. James deliberately rejected an onion construct. Instead, he built up his narrative and then attached to it (with every appearance of afterthought) the attendant atmosphere.

By uniting the two halves of his statement, James has kept the incident intact and projected its unbroken mass onto the canvas of our attention. The divisive dash relieves the phrasal build-up (those serial glimpses of the overarching idea) and responds to the natural capabilities of linear (that is, uninflected) English. The two-sided structure of the sentence (which heralds a continuing tendency to open up text) stands witness to the shift away from fin de siècle custom (and indeed James' frequent custom as well) of enfolding all relevant materials within the heart of a 'complete' utterance.[20] From here, it is not a long jump to Robert Louis Stevenson's chains of conjoined sentences.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1886–1925), in keeping with his times and education, was also very much given to complective preoccupations: How can one wrap a 'complete thought' in a single sentence? How can it be done without harming that sense of intuitive mental velocity? Stevenson's answer renders his writings far simpler to the modern eye than does James'. Although he too snowballs ideas into paragraphic statements, he augments their accessibility by parceling them up into short subject-verb-predicates and stringing them one to the other by means of punctuation—most saliently, semicolons. Both in manuscript and in print, his work is full of their sharp drama.

> Style is synthetic; and the artist, seeking, so to speak, a peg to plait about, takes up at once two or more elements or two or more views of the subject in hand; combines, implicates, and contrasts them; and while, in one sense, he was merely seeking an occasion for the necessary knot, he will be found, in the other, to

20. Passionate punctators will appreciate a second glance at Pater's anaphoric "apprehension" in "The Punctator's World: A Discursion (Part Eight)", 101–2.

have greatly enriched the meaning, or to have transacted the work of two sentences in the space of one.[21]

In the same year that James was describing his epiphanic haze-in-the-garden, Stevenson was uniting scraps of pictorial detail into full narrative statements that simply raced along. In *Kidnapped* we find, amongst similar hundreds, the following whole-scene sentence in which the heel-to-toe fragments induce the exhilarating sensation of covering lots of ground in no time at all. The semicolons in fact mark off complete sentences, both simple and compound. Had Stevenson ignored the unifying aspects of the selected passage and divided each step of it with a full stop instead, he would have verged into plaindealing. Since onion-ringing and simultaneous authorial commentary slow down suspenseful action, modern heroes (if they wish to be successful) must face their perils in conventional time.

> With that he got upon his feet, took off his hat, and prayed a little while aloud, and in affecting terms, for a young man setting out into the world; then suddenly took me in his arms and embraced me very hard; then held me at arm's length, looking at me with his face all working with sorrow; and then whipped about, and crying good-bye to me, set off backward by the way that we had come at a sort of jogging run.[22]

We turn now to an archplaindealer, a sprinter whose speed on the page is hard to beat. In *The Rainbow* (1915), *D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930)* flatly opposed, both in form and in content, almost every principle of the fin de siècle code. His tale nips along at a fast pace, generally in short, persistently sequential SVP-formatted sentences that at times are separated only by commas—commas being notorious tools for shoveling text behind one. Though Lawrence's directness of manner may succor the reader on a rush-hour subway, it can sorely detract from the fine-tuned pleasures of a belletrist.

> They made a line of footprints across the garden, he left a flat snowprint of his hand on the wall as he vaulted over, they traced the snow across the churchyard.[23]

21. Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Elements of Style", *Essays in the Art of Writing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1912), 12.
22. Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 5.
23. D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (New York: Random House, 1944?), 146.

Complex and compound sentences keep their heads low in Lawrence's *Rainbow*, leaving the burden of delivery to short simple structures. Both the récit and the mental life of his characters are couched in them. In descriptive scenes, where excitement is not building, their unrelenting presence reinforces the spareness of his style. Only the occasional comma infiltrates the parade of full stops. Each sentence stabs its naked idea into the reader's imagination, but is rarely so bonded to its mates as to efface the sense of their separateness. The process (which is so undemanding of semantic or syntactic skills, yet so in tune with the linearity of English and the natural brevity of human 'mentalese') makes Lawrence's writing easy to absorb. Although its quickness might simulate that of speech, it lacks the flow of spoken rhythms, and remains in fact insistently unalive.

> It was a beautiful sunny day for the wedding, a muddy earth but a bright sky. They had three cabs and two big closed-in vehicles. Everybody crowded in the parlour in excitement. Ann was still upstairs. Her father kept taking a nip of brandy. He was handsome in his black coat and grey trousers. His voice was hearty but troubled. His wife came down in dark grey silk with lace, and a touch of peacock-blue in her bonnet. Her little body was very sure and definite. Brangwen was thankful she was there, to sustain him among all these people.[24]

Now comes a taste of Lawrence the critic. In the following sentences he has chosen to magnify (almost caricaturize) the habits of speech—its necessary repetitiveness, its reliance on pronouns, and lack of finish. In the example beneath, each full stop encloses a thought so brief, so slim and slight, that there is room within only for vital content, which is, of course, the paramount consideration of a plaindealer.

> The world doesn't fear a new idea. It can pigeon-hole any idea. But it can't pigeon-hole a real new experience. It can only dodge. The world is a great dodger, and the Americans the greatest. Because they dodge their very own selves.[25]

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) shared her years of birth and death with James Joyce. Though they were both in the lineage of Walter Pater and Henry

24. D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, 123.

25. D. H. Lawrence, "The Spirit of Place", *20th Century Criticism*, ed. David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 122.

James and of the era when the Freudian ego and id were still big news, their manner of expression showed no mutual influence whatsoever. We read in Virginia Woolf's diaries and letters that she did not admire *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and more than that, was repelled by *Ulysses* (whose manuscript The Hogarth Press turned down in 1919), despite T. S. Eliot's gallant praise of it.[26] Yet Woolf's and Joyce's technical concerns overlapped. Both were pursuing effective ways to portray the simultaneous interplay of subjective and objective experience.

Woolf's récit is conveyed by conventional (sometimes elaborate) structures whose dense, time-ridden clumps are lightened from time to time by shafts of present-tense, stream-of-consciousness musings. Her two modes work well in their interchange, not only for the variety of rhythm that they generate, but also for their mix of intellectual feat with less contorted exercise. Generally, Woolf builds her interiorizations out of simple, short, but fully structured sentences that drive as a total towards serious, in-depth, psychological portrayal, and on those grounds (despite their apparent simplicity), must be classed as complectist.

To the Lighthouse (1927) offers a rich source of illustration. The following series of unadorned sequential frames evokes a sense of overhearing the private mind-talk of Mr. Ramsay. It teaches us that he is both a lonely man yet dependent on society as well. The segmented language projects a kind of nervous vitality as it pokes nostalgically at landscape specifics, then gathers for the climax. Whereas Henry James might have packed the whole passage into a single, thoroughbred Asian-complected, multipunctuated sentence, and R. L. Stevenson might have separated the various threads with semicolons before plaiting them around his peg, Woolf has improved the sensation of kaleidoscopic simultaneity by fragmenting the lot into ministructures and pumping them at the reader straight from Mr. Ramsay's brain. By fullstopping the jagged thoughts of a single, activated mind, Woolf essentially offers an alternative to the extended, all-revealing Asian sentence. The meandering quality of the piece belies its conceptual unity as well as the importance of its insight into character.

26. Letter to Clive Bell of 24 July 1917, from *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nicolson and Trautmann, vol. 2 (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 167. It was not only Woolf's personal dislike of *Ulysses* that obliged The Hogarth Press to turn the book down, but also its legally doubtful 'directness of language' and the problems of length—so much type to be set by hand (pp. 242–3). See also, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Bell and McNeillie, vol. 2 (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 67, 199.

> That was the country he liked best, over there; those sandhills dwindling away into darkness. One could walk all day without meeting a soul. There was not a house scarcely, not a single village for miles on end. One could worry things out alone. There were little sandy beaches where no one had been since the beginning of time. The seals sat up and looked at you. It sometimes seemed to him that in a little house out there, alone—he broke off sighing. He had no right. The father of eight children—he reminded himself. And he would have been a beast and a cur to wish a single thing altered. Andrew would be a better man than he had been. Prue would be a beauty, her mother said. They would stem the flood a bit. That was a good bit of work on the whole—his eight children.[27]

As Woolf's focus shifts to gain distance over the interplay of plural consciences and the setting in which they are reacting to one another, so her sentences lengthen. In the following instance, after another burst of simple statements representing interior musing (*he reflecteds* and *she wondereds*), the movement sweeps into more extensive views of totality. Notice how Mrs. Ramsay's flighty, classically female, mental responses to the reality that she is *seeing* are woven into the vaguer, cognitive cloth of what she is *thinking* great men must be like. Notice also the second and third anaphoric *thens* (italics added) that reintroduce the basic grammatical structure, as had Henry James' *said*.

> But then, Mrs. Ramsay, though instantly taking his side against all the silly Giddingses in the world, then, she thought, intimating by a little pressure on his arm that he walked up hill too fast for her, and she must stop for a moment to see whether those were fresh molehills on the bank, then, she thought, stooping down to look, a great mind like his must be different in every way from ours. All the great men she had ever known, she thought, deciding that a rabbit must have got in, were like that, and it was good for young men (though the atmosphere of lecture-rooms was stuffy and depressing to her beyond endurance almost) simply to hear him, simply to look at him. But without shooting rabbits, how was one to keep them down? she wondered. It might be a rabbit; it might be a mole.[28]

27. Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (New York: Random House, 1937), 105–6.
28. Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, 108.

In the next selection Woolf almost totally reverts to prototypical complectedness. After hopping in and out of other people's minds, she now stands back to view with authorial omniscience the subtleties of the Ramsay marital relationship. Her prolonged and inclusive sentence, with all its twists and turns, its psychological nuances and hints of the past in description of the present, relies for its success on copious punctuation. Commas and dashes allow her restive attentions to cohere as a whole, more in the manner of James than Cicero—that is, more linearly, and with an air of insouciance. The midsentence semicolon dominates the entirety: it both separates the interior *she* from the exterior *he* and brings the fact of their duality into unified focus.

> But through the crepuscular wills of their intimacy, for they were drawing together, involuntarily, coming side by side, quite close, she could feel his mind like a raised hand shadowing her mind; and he was beginning, now that her thoughts took a turn he disliked—towards this "pessimism" as he called it—to fidget, though he said nothing, raising his hand to his forehead, twisting a lock of hair, letting it fall again.[29]

The prose of *James Joyce (1882–1941)*, when compared to the seemingly mild experiments of Virginia Woolf, smacked of rampant iconoclasm. Though his sentence structures were mostly simple, his attention to the antics of the mind and the sparkling insights that he continuously projected verify a complective intent. Founded upon Walter Pater with a dash of Newman, he was "a purely literary writer" (T. S. Eliot, as reported in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, page 203: see footnote 26). Joyce's narrative technique made little use of authorial commentary for moving along his story. By the time of writing *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce had learned to manipulate language for those "aspects of internal experience not usually languaged" in as authentic a way as anybody has ever achieved.[30] The finished *Ulysses* was so admirable a piece of work that it "showed up the futility of all the English styles" and "destroyed the whole of the 19th Century" (T. S. Eliot).[31] It was *the* book, according to many—though not all, certainly not Woolf, who hated

29. Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, 184.

30. Anthony Burgess, *Joysprick* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1973), 84.

31. Virginia Woolf, *Diary*, 202–3. See also: Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 528.

Joyce's ill-bred lack of restraint. Indeed, fin de siècle eclecticism had nothing on Joyce. He mixed gutter language and frank physicality with Latinisms, with liturgical, musical, literary, classical, and Biblical references, and energized the lot with wordplay and the euphuistic ploys he had learned in his Jesuitical youth. His word choice and speech tempos showed an acute sensitivity to psychological and physiological reflexes. More than his forebears or peers, it would seem, he applied his sensitive ear to the tune of talk, and put this knowledge to use.[32]

For the foregrounding of character subjectivity, Joyce went beyond the authorial puppeteering that had been James' and was still Virginia Woolf's method of portraying the mental activities of protagonists. Joyce was in search of a truer semblance of what goes on in the mind, some representational form by which he might equate verbal with nonverbal materials—specifically, those fleeting, inchoate, interior responses to external actuality—and found his answer in the simulation of free direct thought. Joyce's interior monologues are unmediated by reportorial signals, i.e., *he mused*, *he pondered*, and so on. The thought processes of Joycean heroes are left untouched. They bubble up freely to mingle with the narrative surface, forming a two-way (sometimes confusing) churn of random associations, chains of visual images and perceptions, displacements of past, present, and future, along with abrupt topic shifts that relate the world to the characters and the characters to the world.[33] To conjure up the mind's dynamic play both in dialogue and in its intuitive response to reality, Joyce couched his language in strings of short sentences and full-stopped sentence parts. Since words cannot give a candid imprint of what lies deep, internalized, and primary in the human brain, Joyce's artistry (like all artistry) is necessarily flawed. Nevertheless, the interior monologues of his characters Bloom and Stephen represent a genuine technical advance in the externalization of the internal for fictional purposes.[34]

And for all this, to what use did Joyce put punctuation? Perhaps most distracting for his contemporary readership was his implantation of the single initial dash in the margin to replace the customary dual (begin and end) quotation marks. The device lent itself to a melding of voices—the voice of the récit with the voices of character.[35] Most relevant to our in-

32. Katie Wales, *The Language of Joyce* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 34–8.

33. Wales, *Language of Joyce*, 72–3.

34. Anthony Burgess, *Joysprick* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1973), 59. Also, see Ellmann, *Joyce*, 528: in time Joyce himself came to regard interior monologue as a stylization, rather than a total exposition, of consciousness.

35. Ellmann, *Joyce*, 353.

terests are the Joycean rhythms—the rhythms of word groups with their intervals of silence. The full stops that pay out lengths of reverie and chat are thoroughly relevant to the development of Bloom's character. Their placement suggests a natural lack of fluency: a thinking pace that is measured and deliberative. When, occasionally, commas are used to pick up the speed of his mental verbiage, they confirm the sense of syntactical confusion. The short spurts, couched in down-to-earth vocabulary, evoke a grammatically unsophisticated mind-style, a mix of low culture with spirited curiosity, wherein lie the unique characteristics of Bloom. In contrast, Stephen's monologues convey incisive yet expansive thinking. His sentences are more 'complete', their parts more coherently connected and (when Joyce allows it) subordinated.[36] These signals of intellectuality, which are in Stephen's case united with a vocabulary that is highly educated, poetic, and literarily allusive, elicit the sound of a very distinct personality. As for the narrator's infrequent voice, it guides the day's progress in longer, fully-formed and standardly punctuated, and sometimes complex sentences, whose pace identifies a more disengaged tone.[37]

For the triumphant concluding scene of Molly's mental drift, Joyce eliminated all pointing and foreign-word accent marks.[38] Woman's gush, in his unflattering view, was breathless and syntactically undifferentiated, which—judging from extant letters of the uneducated females of his time, most especially Joyce's wife—it certainly was.[39] In any case, Molly's slumbrous continuum of verbiage pours forth in a visual disorder that supports her idiosyncracies of character.[40]

> . . . and he so quiet and mild with his tingating zither can you ever be up to men the way it takes them lovely stuff in that blue suit he had on and stylish tie and socks with the skyblue silk things on them hes certainly welloff I know by the cut his clothes

36. See Burgess, *Joysprick*, 79. "Joyce will always avoid a subordinate clause if he can."

37. Wales, *Language of Joyce*, 78–9.

38. Ellmann, *Joyce*, 562.

39. Brenda Maddox provides numerous examples of Nora's unpunctuated letters in *Nora: The Real Life of Molly Bloom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988).

40. By punctuating a section of this tract, Anthony Burgess demonstrates that it is the unorthodoxy of its unpunctuated appearance that made the piece so avant-garde. Dickens had more briefly attempted the same effect in *Little Dorrit*. Though Molly's syntax does get garbled, jamming sentences into sentences, "on the whole the presentation of her thoughts is orderly, even literary"—in truth, an ideally long letter from his wife Nora. See *Joysprick*, pp. 58, 59.

have and his heavy watch but he was like a perfect devil for a few minutes after he came back with the stoppress tearing up the tickets and swearing blazes because he lost 20 quid he said he lost over that outsider that . . .[41]

* * *

With its rules so settled and its users so agile and confident, punctuation was ripe for the ultimate experiments. During this first half of the twentieth century the most revolutionary manipulator of text was the poet *E. E. Cummings (1894–1962)*. One cannot discuss punctuation's full bag of tricks without coming to terms with his ideas. Cummings' poetry can be difficult to read. It is marked by grammar shifts, word invention, and typographic sculpting. Most eye-catching of all is the punctuation that he used to effect mixes of physical sensation and intellectual insight at the time of their being. His technique pushes the envelope of the Pater-James founding ambition and surpasses even Joyce in creating the feel of immediacy. Cummings' later poems require formidable attention to expose their layered intricacies.

In the following example the poet sees a bird flying across the sun's face. That is all. But in order to capture *for the voice* the manifold aspects fired by that fleeting experience—its synthesis of psychic and physical response—we must first sort out *with our eyes* his novel use of parentheses, commas, capital letters, word splits, empty lines, and hyphens, and readjust our expectations to accept an absolute lack of periods. Despite the slim profile of a Cummings poem, there is always a lot going on. Herewith is No. 46, from *No Thanks* [Poems 1923–1954].

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swi(
       across!gold's

rouNdly
          )ftblac
kl(ness)y

a-motion-upo-nmotio-n
```

41. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1942), 734.

Less?
        thE
(against
is
)Swi

mming

(w-a)s
bIr
d,

Noteworthy is that terminating comma.

But let us look closely at what is going on, for it is interesting to spot what is gained by such recasting of convention. Though the meaning of the poem very much depends on the printed page, yet it cannot be gathered by visual means alone. The first lines register the poet's impression of something-swiftly-and-blackly-moving-across-the-sun's-gold-roundness. The opening word *swift* is broken by parentheses and obliged to hold its finish in abeyance. While the inner ear is remembering the *swi* sound, the eye is sent searching for the final *ft* to complete it. Thus, the sun's very face is mingled with the poet's stuttering amazement (expressed by the "!" and the jerking line with its capital N and strangely positioned ending parenthesis), and the combination embedded midbird, so to speak. Once understood, this layered image radiates a dramatic sense of simultaneity. And now the black-winged silhouette is in motion against a brilliant, unmoving object, but no! That was the poet's first thought. The "-uponmotio-n/Less?" indicates a query of perception, as he recalls that all planets are moving. And so, mortal-bird-speed overlays a speed that is timeless and to the poet immeasurable. The agitated self-interruptions are remindful of hesitancy and astonishment, of confusion at how best to construe the value of what he is seeing. Verbalization seems impossible. The poet is in fact almost speechless and can suggest only (in severely limited language) the most primary qualities of his experience: speed, direction, color, and shape. The last eight, more syntactical lines, beginning with "thE", attempt an adjustment to his opening, as his mind calms and re-sorts the event. We now have "Against" in place of "across" and "Swi/mming" instead of "swi/ft". But quandary remains. The whole of the statement has ended with a comma, like the tail of a "bIrd" (with the "I" emphasizing Cummings himself and the last line with its single "d"

suggesting "death").[42] Periods, or final stops, signal death. Commas, however, are life-giving in that they suggest continuation. Thus is the poem left unresolved, to flutter off lamely into the future.

What have such visual vagaries achieved? Certainly something. The placement of points and the skips and raggedness of the lines suggest startled intakes of breath and cultivate a sense of aliveness, of the electrical quickness of a mind as it stalks meaning through thickets of possibility. Art, if it means anything, Cummings wrote, means "to be intensely alive". The first glance at a Cummings poem jolts the eye. The typographical arrangements are vexing to the uninitiated. A huge effort is demanded to make the squiggles and deformities settle to their job, which is the evocation of their oral counterparts. Then bingo! Cummings' entire fact—the simultaneous presence of Physical Event and Human Response—is on the page without a sign of wilt, brought to life, if you will, so that the experience for the reader remains forever in the process of *actually happening*.[43] Cummings' punctuational inventiveness gives him an unbreakable grip on the oral rendition of his poems. If one honors every typographical symbol while reading the poem aloud, a stunning, *but fixed*, variety of nuance is aroused. The reader, slavishly tracking each to-be-deciphered signal, has no leeway to add anything of his own response.

Interesting on this subject are the comments of Laura Riding and Robert Graves on the pointing differences between E. E. Cummings and William Shakespeare. Riding and Graves favor the earlier, freer, more elusive punctuation of Shakespeare's time over stricter modern styles that disallow "the eternal difficulties that make poems immortal". A more lax punctuation permits "the variety of meanings [Shakespeare] actually intends". On that count they are wary of Cummings' excessive typographical focus and the heavy punctuation that clamps his poems into definition. No future emendation will ever play false with a Cummings intention, they complain. No one will ever argue about alternative meanings to what he has written. Punctuation of this strong stamp merely shows "how difficult it is for . . . any poet to stabilize a poem once and for all". Also, noticeably, it suggests Cummings' concern that unaided imaginations could not reach his heights of awareness.

42. Barry A. Marks, *E. E. Cummings* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), 104–7.

43. Charles Norman, *E. E. Cummings: The Magic-Maker* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), 129, 166–7.

> Punctuation marks in Mr. Cummings' poetry are the bolts and axles that make the poem a methodic and fool-proof piece of machinery requiring common-sense for its operation rather than imagination.[44]

We should note at this point that despite his abstruse word-combinations, Cummings' poetic vocabulary remains down to earth, plaindealing, simple. It is his mastery of time that shoots him into the Asian-complected ethers.

In *Eimi* (1933), a travel diary of his visit to Russia, Cummings applied his poetic punctuation techniques to prose, though less intrusively—a blessing for which even the most avid punctator must be grateful. Paragraphs in *Eimi* frequently end with white space only, instead of full stops. Commas, colons, semicolons, and parentheses are strangely planted dead-center in the space allowed them and their use is often unconventional. Nevertheless, a retrievable oral immediacy has been created. Every signal, be it point or word, is freighted with meaning. Cummings' lines teem with thought-inducing neologisms and juxtapositions of words that fire off heterogeneous, even conflicting, ideas. It should be noted that the following single sentence (with its strangely adjoined "Where.") constitutes an entire paragraph. The ellipses are part of the text and do not represent a missing portion.

> & now(now alone , infinitely alone among all unalone lonelinesses)I'm through this very small parkless strolling ; in the hot darkness. . . 3 gypsy children together,3 little girls in bright rags , earning kopeks : 1 claps while 2 wobble—a comrade-man gives , a comrade-almost-pretty-non-man gives ; an earnest scrawny comrade-unman questions abruptly the wobbleclap trio and clapper immediately sidles off(immediately follow the little chubbier dirtier and littlest chubbiest dirtiest wobblers)and the how littlest utters 1—not to be measured—gesture of scorn , and the onlookers(except scrawny)laugh ; nudge. . .& I pass the Metropole Hotel , I round the forepart of that large parkless and I emerge ; to climb a steepish street,into an oval,past L's M and the "internationale"-striking tower(to my right : incredibly a near

44. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, "William Shakespeare and E. E. Cummings: Study in Original Punctuation and Spelling", in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1928), 74–7.

sector of moon!)and the Arabian Nights cathedral ; on whose steps 2 coiffed crones dream. . .& past joking astroll man-and-nonman almost-lovers & down to the left through emptily dark soiled streets & back through very small(same almost-pretty-comrade-nonman ; she's talking now with the comrade-man-giver)park & past this dolled up Oreye-entully scornful miss all swathed in blue veils & up Petrovka to a corner. Where[45]

Ezra Pound (1885–1972) classed *Eimi* alongside Joyce's *Ulysses* and Wyndham Lewis's *The Apes of God* as a landmark book of the period. He especially praised *Eimi* for its punctuational technique, which, while difficult, was "necessary to the subject". Its intervention enabled a "precisely PERSONAL direct perception" to be put down without falsification on paper. Pound elaborates his thinking on these matters in *If This Be Treason*, a selection of radio talks given in wartime Italy and printed up later from original typed drafts by Olga Rudge. She prefaces her little gathering with the comment that "No cuts, corrections or changes have been made", a point which becomes more interesting as one takes note of Pound's own erratic use of virgules to mark pauses (for oral reading) that are not taken care of by commas and full stops.

now mr cummings writes PROSE whereof every word tells its story and I myself made an error first time I tried to read him/ tried to read him too fast, got impatient/ no use approchin him that way/ got to read slow/ more on one page, than on two pages of most authors . . . . You CAN skip in some authors/ you cannot in cummings skip one word . . .
Second point is his parenthesis; are his parentheses/ Well old H. J. [Henry James] worried his european readers to death by his parentheses/ they were an american habit/ they mean something to us and for us/ as Americans.
they mean something more than the one track mind/ but they do NOT imply deviation or lack of direction/ they are a desperate attempt no not an attempt a *device* to avoid leaving out something NEEDED, some part of the statement needed to set down, to register the direction and meaning/[46]

* * *

45. E. E. Cummings, *Eimi* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1933), 182.
46. Ezra Pound, *If This Be Treason*, ed. Olga Rudge (Siena, Italy: Tip. Nuova, 1948), 13.

After the fireworks of Joyce and Cummings, we turn to George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway. Both wrote fables of plaindealing temper that won the hearts of adults everywhere.

In his 'fairy story' *Animal Farm, George Orwell (1903–1950)* used restrained, unemotional language with graceful simplicity. Typically, in the entire 103-word paragraph below, there are no colons or semicolons. The seven sentences are brief and varied, but complete; and their components require only five commas:

> Three days later Mollie disappeared. For some weeks nothing was known of her whereabouts, then the pigeons reported that they had seen her on the other side of Willingdon. She was between the shafts of a smart dogcart painted red and black, which was standing outside a public-house. A fat red-faced man in check breeches and gaiters, who looked like a publican, was stroking her nose and feeding her with sugar. Her coat was newly clipped and she wore a scarlet ribbon round her forelock. She appeared to be enjoying herself, so the pigeons said. None of the animals ever mentioned Mollie again.[47]

In his essays, Orwell emerged as the champion that he was. He delivered his ideas, which were always assured, in straight talk leavened with dramatic accelerations. His longer sentences, despite their penchant for fast tempo and sequentiality, are shaped with a wonderful periodicity that delights the ear even as it informs the mind. The overall effect of Orwellian style is one of speed, liveliness, of a voice guided by an ear that knows what it wants to hear. As our sample will show, Orwell measured his rhythms to suit the content of his language. They drive the paragraph to a climactic flourish that does not battle with the logic of his argument. Who is this wise and elegant man? No dancing Asianist, for sure. The following passage on Kipling's death progresses from point to point with summary wit. The piece was first published in the *New English Weekly*, 23 January 1936.

> Rudyard Kipling was the only popular English writer of this century who was not at the same time a thoroughly bad writer. His popularity was, of course, essentially middle-class. In the average middle-class family before the War, especially in Anglo-Indian families, he had a prestige that is not even approached by any

47. George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: Signet Classics, 1964), 52.

> writer of today. He was a sort of household god with whom one grew up and whom one took for granted whether one liked him or whether one did not. For my own part I worshipped Kipling at thirteen, loathed him at seventeen, enjoyed him at twenty, despised him at twenty-five, and now again rather admire him. The one thing that was never possible, if one had read him at all, was to forget him.[48]

Nineteen Eighty-four, Orwell's last novel (written more or less on his deathbed), is again straightforwardly told. In this book he rarely attempts to develop the thought processes of his characters, for complected introspection is not Orwell's meat. He unfolds his story in an easy variation of sentence lengths that keep the reader pulsing along with the protagonist's responses to difficult experience. In her assessment of Orwell's style, Victoria Wedgewood had this to say: "The debasement of language, and the consequent deterioration of thought had become by the end of his life of the first importance to Orwell" and thus a main theme in *Nineteen Eighty-four*. He was not interested in grammar, the preservation of obsolescent words, nor the subtle shapes of sentences. "He was interested . . . in meaning and was profoundly disturbed by the growth of meaningless phrases and by the use of language not to convey but to conceal meaning."[49] In this respect Orwell seems almost classically Attic. But while that, he was also versatile. He could (and did) complect when occasion demanded and even arranged his terse phrases to the outmoded music of euphuism. His prose still appeals for its ring of honesty, its lucidity, and its subdued yet persistent play of tempo and form with sound argument and lively attack. George Orwell, we think, is the grandest bird in our plain-dealing aviary.

Though grittier in style and far less precise, *Ernest Hemingway (1898–1961)* also exercised a huge influence on readers and writers of his time. His years with the *Kansas City Star* had taught him the expedience of brevity. His view was essentially this: that any written account—be it reportorial or fictional—made more forceful impact when the language was stark,

48. George Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol. 1 (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 159.

49. C. V. Wedgewood, in *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Jeffrey Meyers (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 311.

shorn of cliché and literary conceit. Then might the reader relive it as though it were his own. Ornament for Hemingway was intrusive. "Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over."[50] To which one must point out that the undeviating plot of *The Old Man and The Sea* encouraged an intrusive use of the *and* connective[51]—a device more suggestive of mortar than brick. Nevertheless, the story is strong. From their beds of childlike sentence structures, the unmodified visual images—fish, bow, stern, thwart, etc.—strike the reader's consciousness like hard-edged objects, inducing sensations remindful of 'mentalese'.

> He made the fish fast to bow and stern and to the middle thwart. He [the fish, that is] was so big it was like lashing a much bigger skiff alongside. He [the old man] cut a piece of line and tied the fish's lower jaw against his bill so his mouth would not open and they would sail as cleanly as possible. Then he stepped the mast and, with the stick that was his gaff and with his boom rigged, the patched sail drew, the boat began to move, and half lying in the stern he sailed south-west.[52]

Hemingway's novel *For Whom The Bell Tolls* (1940) was written in a mix of long narrative sentences and the staccato elements that had become by then the customary conveyances for a character's mental processes. In the first sentence of the following excerpt, note the simple use of *just then* and *as* to coordinate time frames. These (along with *when*, *while*, and *suddenly*, and a tendency towards the present participle) are the too frequent tools that Hemingway brings to the problem of describing two simultaneous happenings. His ambiguous *and*s (which often substitute for punctuation) can be taken as marking time sequences (i.e., FIRST THIS AND THEN THAT: *She paid the money and put the bread in her basket*) or simultaneous action (THIS WHILE THAT: *He stood on the balcony and waved*). As for interior dialogue: it comes in the usual rush, either short, full-stopped sentences or elongated, *and*-bound ones, erratically punctuated. The predictability of Hemingway's syntax being supreme, we do not too much notice the absence of standard commas in the following ex-

50. Jeffery Meyers, *Hemingway: A Biography* (London and New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 24, 74–5.

51. Also interesting: in the selected passage, there are seven commas for 92 words (as opposed to Orwell's five for 103).

52. Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and The Sea* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 107–8.

ample, after the *exploding whirr* phrase and the opening *if* and *when* clauses. Indeed, one could say that Hemingway's prose is no bulwark against Wedgewood's "debasement of language" and "consequent deterioration of thought". In the following instance, the mental imagery is strong on specificity but unsatisfying psychologically. Though Hemingway seeks to stretch time and space, his simplistic stratagems and essentially unsubtle language declare his allegiance to the plain style.

> Just then, as kneedeep in the gorse he climbed the steep slope that led to the Republican lines, a partridge flew up from under his feet, exploding in a whirr of wingbeats in the dark and he felt a sudden breath-stopping fright. It is the suddenness, he thought. How can they move their wings that fast? She must be nesting now. I probably trod close to the eggs. If there were not this war I would tie a handkerchief to the bush and come back in the day-time and search out the nest and I could take the eggs and put them under a setting hen and when they hatched we would have little partridges in the poultry yard and I would watch them grow and, when they were grown, I'd use them for callers. I wouldn't blind them because they would be tame. Or do you suppose they would fly off? Probably. Then I would have to blind them.[53]

* * *

If nothing else, our handful of excerpts is proof that some sort of literary skirmish was kicking up dust during the first half of the twentieth century. As one by one the big guns of complected experiment were dismantled, so the plaindealing hordes took the field. Writers who could feed their impulses into uncomplicated, speech-driven word strings were rewarded with sales and fame. The trend was self-fueling. The more that authors simplified for public popularity, the more infantilized the public became—and more demanding of simplicity. If this formula plays itself out, authors will one day be struggling to spell the phonemic overtones of grunts.

Hope for literature's future lies in reversing that swing of the pendulum, which itself so well represents the dual aspects of human nature, with its in-built tensions and passion for change. It is surprising that civilization

53. Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), 366–7.

(so benign a concept!) has caused and affirmed the growth of our physiological and psychological bivalence. As knowledge accumulated through history, overwhelming the mind with 'facts', so codification of detail was required. Answering this need came the invention of catalogues, indexes, divisions of scholarly subjects, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and so on. Bit by bit were we pressed to separate concept from emotion, and objective truths from subjective ones—in short, to divide ourselves in two.

As we have noted before, the world of writing is a silent one, dependent on the eye and conducive to the mental processes of reasoning, study, and contemplation. It is our eyes that measure the distance between us and what we focus on, and in that way teach us of things that are not us. Eyes deal in particulars and so position us in real space. They ennable us to emerge from our harum-scarum, primary-process, excitable, self-centered egos and to view the airier spaces of a reality furnished with other things and other people. Complex, ideational materials are best assimilated from the page, where words *hold still* so that the eye, unrushed by the passage of time, can retrieve and dispatch them to the cerebral mechanisms for logical and conceptual thinking.

While acknowledging the wonders of the eye, we must not forget that the words of all written utterances are programmed by the precepts of speech—the inherent means of human sociability. Successful transmission of speech depends not only on mouth but ear. Aural perceptions are closely bound to rhythm and bodily movement, and are especially susceptible to emotional response. Scientists recognize that "there is a closer relation between hearing and emotional arousal than there is between seeing and emotional arousal".[54] Indeed, so agile are ears in social participation, in sensing and anticipating someone else's displeasure or desire, that once a context has been established, they can convert broken bits of talk—loose floating nouns and verbs and phrases—into assimilable information.[55] Voice sounds lie at the core of our memories, carrying with them intimations of life in the womb, the rhythm of maternal heartbeat and breathing, and thereafter motherly warmth and cooings, from which we learn not only the phonetics of our native language but the outlines of its syntax and the give and take of dialogue.[56]

54. Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 9, 26.

55. Imitated speech sounds can also inform the ear, as is attested by a violin's mimicry of voice intonation, and a drum's simulation of talk rhythms. See Storr, *Music and the Mind*, 12.

56. Storr, *Music and the Mind*, 23. Also helpful on this topic have been: Justin D. Call, M.D., "Some Prelinguistic Aspects of Language Development", *Journal of the American*

All verbalization, even the written kind, is radically a cry—that is, a word (or string of words) emitted from the innermost interior of a person and causing that focus of vitality to invade another's. Once the receiving ear has tracked that cry, it will be understood;[57] for grammar (our database of sound and meaning correspondences) is shared by both speaker and listener—the lag between speaker's mouth and listener's mind being remarkably short: that is, about a syllable or two, around half a second.[58] It is in this way, through the speaking mouth and the receiving ear that we are built to know each other and to satisfy "that emotional need for communication with other human beings which is prior to the need for conveying objective information or exchanging ideas."[59] Like the pings of bell birds, our 'cries' carry news of our whereabouts and aliveness—and beseech the same from our friends.

Writing has no such natural intensity. The more it relates to the voice, the more sensuously thrilling it becomes—and easier to understand. While ears and tongues are miraculous indeed, miraculous too—and compelling—is our ability to reason. Thus, in the arena of literature, the tug between long-phrased, eye-dominated, intellectual control and short-phrased, ear-guided, sociable spontaneity favors first one part of us and then the other, reflecting the dual forces in our human makeup: crafty logic and impulsive emotion. That is the crux of the matter. Twentieth-century reading habits are approving the ear side of our physiological equation and manipulating its heightened-sensation component very frankly. The seeker of whamming impacts and socioemotional instant-intake indulges a hazardous temptation: that is, the abuse of his reasoning powers. For aural-immediacy, by its very nature, tears textual tissue into simple, ever simpler structures *even when that tissue is conceptually of a single piece*. Language, thus shredded, smacks of convivial chatter—of birdcall communication. Though it can stir us up right smartly, it does little to invite hard concentration. One might almost ask: Is it good for us?

Historically, during literature's long reign in the civilized world, punc-

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Psychoanalytic Association 28 (1980): 259–89; and Annick Doeff, Ph.D., Henry Eisner, M.D., and Margaret Moore, M.S.W., "Anaclitic Depression, Speech Disorders, and Mental Retardation: A Continuum" (paper presented at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry Research Retreat, October 1986).

57. Walter J. Ong, "A Dialectic of Aural and Objective Correlatives" (1958), *20th Century Literary Criticism*, ed. David Lodge (London, New York: Longman, 1972), 499–501.

58. Pinker, *Language Instinct*, 195–7.

59. Storr, *Music and the Mind*, 16.

tuation has grown to broker for bicephalous mankind. Punctuation has dealt effectively with rhythms to evoke the sound of the voice; and it has put order into text by differentiating complex grammatical structures so that the peculiar quality of aural reality might better transmit to a visual plane. What does the future hold for our commas and colons and dashes now, we wonder, in this straight-talk environment that is so impatient of long thoughts? Perhaps the conventions of print and the surviving bastions of education will keep the points secure until that time comes when the piecemeal and the commonplace have bored everyone to transfixion. Then may complectists get off their knees once again, and challenge the public with eloquence.