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Notes Toward A New Rhetoric

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Notes Toward
A New Rhetoric

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9 ESSAYS
FOR TEACHERS

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Contents

Introduction	xi
Preface to the First Edition	xiii
Between Two Worlds	1
A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence	19
A Lesson from Hemingway	39
Sentence Openers	52
A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph	63
In Defense of the Absolute	90
Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Modifiers Again	100
The Problem of Defining a Mature Style	113
The Course in Advanced Composition for Teachers	127

**A
Generative
Rhetoric
of the
Sentence**

We do not have time in our classes to teach everything about the rhetoric of the sentence. I believe in “island hopping,” concentrating on topics where we can produce results and leaving the rest, including the “comma splice” and the “run-on sentence,” to die on the vine. The balanced sentence deserves some attention in discursive writing, and the enormous range of coordinate structures deserves a bit more. The rhythm of good modern prose comes about equally from the multiple-tracking of coordinate constructions and the downshifting and backtracking of free modifiers. But the first comes naturally; the other needs coaxing along.

This coaxing is the clue to the meaning of *generative* in my title. (It is not derived from generative grammar; I used it before I ever heard of Chomsky.) The teacher can use the idea of levels of structure to urge the student to add further levels to what he has already produced so that the structure itself becomes an aid to discovery.

This system of analysis by levels is essentially an application of immediate constituent analysis. IC analysis reveals what goes with what. In such analysis the free modifiers are cut off first. The order in which initial, medial, and final elements are cut off is immaterial, but one might as well start at the beginning. Thus, in sentence 2 below (p.33), the first cut would take off the whole set of initial modifiers. Then the members of a coordinate set are separated and, if the dissection is to be carried out to the ultimate constituents, analyzed one by one in order. In sentence 1, the first cut would come at the end of the base clause, taking off levels 2, 3, and 4 together since they are dependent on one another. Another cut would come at the end of level 2, taking off levels 3 and 4 together since 4 is a modifier of 3. Medial modifiers have to be cut *out* rather than *off*.

• • • • •

If the new grammar is to be brought to bear on composition, it must be brought to bear on the rhetoric of the sentence. We have a workable and teachable, if not a definitive, modern grammar; but we do not have, despite several titles, a modern rhetoric.

In composition courses we do not really teach our captive charges to write better—we merely *expect* them to. And we do not teach them how to write better because we do not know how to teach them to write better. And so we merely go through the motions. Our courses with their tear-out workbooks and four-pound anthologies are elaborate evasions of the real problem. They permit us to put in our time and do almost anything else we'd rather be doing instead of buckling down to the hard work of making a difference in the student's understanding and manipulation of language.

With hundreds of handbooks and rhetorics to draw from, I have never been able to work out a program for teaching the sentence as I find it in the work of contemporary writers. The chapters on the sentence all adduce the traditional rhetorical classification of sentences as loose, balanced, and periodic. But the term *loose* seems to be taken as a pejorative (it sounds immoral); our students, no Bacons or Johnsons, have little occasion for balanced sentences; and some of our worst perversions of style come from the attempt to teach them to write periodic sentences. The traditional grammatical classification of sentences is equally barren. Its use in teaching composition rests on a semantic confusion, equating complexity of structure with complexity of thought and vice versa. But very simple thoughts may call for very complex grammatical constructions. Any moron can say, "I don't know who done it." And some of us might be puzzled to work out the grammar of "All I want is all there is," although any chit can think it and say it and act on it.

The chapters on the sentence all appear to assume that we think naturally in primer sentences, progress naturally to compound sentences, and must be taught to combine the primer sentences into complex sentences and that complex sentences are the mark of maturity. We need a rhetoric of the sentence that will do more than combine the ideas of primer sentences. We need one that will *generate* ideas.

For the foundation of such a generative or productive rhetoric I take the statement from John Erskine, the originator of the Great Books courses, himself a novelist. In the essay "The Craft of Writing" (*Twentieth Century English*, Philosophical Library, 1946) he discusses a principle of the writer's craft which, though known he says to all practitioners, he has never seen discussed in print. The principle is this: "When you write, you make a point, not by subtracting as though you sharpened a pencil, but by adding." We have all been told that the formula for good writing is the concrete noun and the active verb. Yet Erskine says, "What you say is found not in the noun but in what you add to qualify the noun. ... The noun, the verb, and the main clause serve merely as the base on

which meaning will rise. ... The modifier is the essential part of any sentence.” The foundation, then, for a generative or productive rhetoric of the sentence is that composition is essentially a process of *addition*.

But speech is linear, moving in time, and writing moves in linear space, which is analogous to time. When you add a modifier, whether to the noun, the verb, or the main clause, you must add it either before the head or after it. If you add it before the head, the direction of modification can be indicated by an arrow pointing forward; if you add it after, by an arrow pointing backward. Thus we have the second principle of a generative rhetoric—the principle of *direction of modification* or *direction of movement*.

Within the clause there is not much scope for operating with this principle. The positions of the various sorts of close, or restrictive, modifiers are generally fixed and the modifiers are often obligatory—“The man who came to dinner remained till midnight.” Often the only choice is whether to add modifiers. What I have seen of attempts to bring structural grammar to bear on composition usually boils down to the injunction to “load the patterns.” Thus “pattern practice” sets students to accreting sentences like this: “The small boy on the red bicycle who lives with his happy parents on our shady street often coasts down the steep street until he comes to the city park.” This will never do. It has no rhythm and hence no life; it is tone-deaf. It is the seed that will burgeon into gobbledegook. One of the hardest things in writing is to keep the noun clusters and verb clusters short.

It is with modifiers added to the clause—that is, with sentence modifiers—that the principle comes into full play. The typical sentence of modern English, the kind we can best spend our efforts trying to teach, is what we may call the *cumulative sentence*. The main clause, which may or may not have a sentence modifier before it, advances the discussion; but the additions move backward, as in this clause, to modify the statement of the main clause or more often to explicate or exemplify it, so that the sentence has a flowing and ebbing movement, advancing to a new position and then pausing to consolidate it, leaping and lingering as the popular ballad does. The first part of the preceding compound sentence has

one addition, placed within it; the second part has 4 words in the main clause and 49 in the five additions placed after it.

The cumulative sentence is the opposite of the periodic sentence. It does not represent the idea as conceived, pondered over, reshaped, packaged, and delivered cold. It is dynamic rather than static, representing the mind thinking. The main clause (“the additions move backward” above) exhausts the mere fact of the idea; logically, there is nothing more to say. The additions stay with the same idea, probing its bearings and implications, exemplifying it or seeking an analogy or metaphor for it, or reducing it to details. Thus the mere form of the sentence generates ideas. It serves the needs of both the writer and the reader, the writer by compelling him to examine his thought, the reader by letting him into the writer’s thought.

Addition and direction of movement are structural principles. They involve the grammatical character of the sentence. Before going on to other principles, I must say a word about the best grammar as the foundation for rhetoric. I cannot conceive any useful transactions between teacher and students unless they have in common a language for talking about sentences. The best grammar for the present purpose is the grammar that best displays the layers of structure of the English sentence. The best I have found in a textbook is the combination of immediate constituent and transformation grammar in Paul Roberts’s *English Sentences*. Traditional grammar, whether oversimple as in the school tradition or overcomplex as in the scholarly tradition, does not reveal the language as it operates; it leaves everything, to borrow a phrase from Wordsworth, “in disconnection dead and spiritless.” *English Sentences* is oversimplified and it has gaps, but it displays admirably the structures that rhetoric must work with—primarily sentence modifiers, including nonrestrictive relative and subordinate clauses, but, far more important, the array of noun, verb, and adjective clusters. It is paradoxical that Professor Roberts, who has done so much to make the teaching of composition possible, should himself be one of those who think that it cannot be taught. Unlike Ulysses, he does not see any work for Telemachus to work.

Layers of structure, as I have said, is a grammatical concept. To bring in the dimension of meaning, we need a third principle—that of *levels of generality* or *levels of abstraction*. The main or base clause is likely to be stated in general or abstract or plural terms. With the main clause stated, the forward movement of the sentence stops, the writer shifts down to a lower level of generality or abstraction or to singular terms, and goes back over the same ground at this lower level.¹ There is no theoretical limit to the number of structural layers or levels, each² at a lower level of generality, any or all of them compounded, that a speaker or writer may use. For a speaker, listen to Lowell Thomas; for a writer, study William Faulkner. To a single independent clause he may append a page of additions, but usually all clear, all grammatical, once we have learned how to read him. Or, if you prefer, study Hemingway, the master of the simple sentence: “George was coming down in the telemark position, kneeling, one leg forward and bent, the other trailing, his sticks hanging like some insect’s thin legs, kicking up puffs of snow, and finally the whole kneeling, trailing figure coming around in a beautiful right curve, crouching, the legs shot forward and back, the body leaning out against the swing, the sticks accenting the curve like points of light, all in a wild cloud of snow.” Only from the standpoint of school grammar is this a simple sentence.

This brings me to the fourth, and last, principle, that of texture. *Texture* provides a descriptive or evaluative term. If a writer adds to few of his nouns or verbs or main clauses and adds little, the texture may be said to be thin. The style will be plain or bare. The

¹ Cf. Leo Rockas, “Abstract and Concrete Sentences,” *CCC*, May 1963. Rockas describes sentences as abstract or concrete, the abstract implying the concrete and vice versa. Readers and writers, he says, must have the knack of apprehending the concrete in the abstract and the abstract in the concrete. This is true and valuable. I am saying that within a single sentence the writer may present more than one level of generality, translating the abstract into the more concrete in added levels.

² This statement is not quite tenable. Each level helps to make the idea of the base clause more concrete or specific, but each level is not necessarily more concrete or specific than the one immediately above it.

writing of most of our students is thin—even threadbare. But if he adds frequently or much or both, then the texture may be said to be dense or rich. One of the marks of an effective style, especially in narrative, is variety in the texture, the texture varying with the change in pace, the variation in texture producing the change in pace. It is not true, as I have seen it asserted, that fast action calls for short sentences; the action is fast in the sentence by Hemingway above. In our classes, we have to work for greater density and variety in texture and greater concreteness and particularity in what is added.

I have been operating at a fairly high level of generality. Now I must downshift and go over the same points with examples. The most graphic way to exhibit the layers of structure is to indent the word groups of a sentence and to number the levels. The first three sentences illustrate the various positions of the added sentence modifiers—initial, medial, and final. The symbols mark the grammatical character of the additions: SC, subordinate clause; RC, relative clause; NC, noun cluster; VC, verb cluster; A, adjective cluster; A + A, adjective series; Abs, absolute (i.e., a VC with a subject of its own); PP, prepositional phrase. The elements set off on a lower level are marked as sentence modifiers by junctures or punctuation. The examples have been chosen to illustrate the range of constructions used in the lower levels; after the first few they are arranged by the number of levels. The examples could have been drawn from poetry as well as from prose. Those not attributed are by students.

1

- 1 He dipped his hands in the bichloride solution and shook them,
 - 2 a quick shake, (NC)
 - 3 fingers down, (Abs)
 - 4 like the fingers of a pianist above the keys. (PP)
- Sinclair Lewis

2

- 2 Calico-coated, (AC)
 - 2 small-bodied, (AC)
 - 3 with delicate legs and pink faces in which their mismatched eyes rolled wild and subdued, (PP)
- 1 they huddled,
 - 2 gaudy motionless and alert, (A + A)
 - 2 wild as deer, (AC)
 - 2 deadly as rattlesnakes, (AC)
 - 2 quiet as doves. (AC)

William Faulkner

3

- 1 The bird's eye, /, remained fixed upon him;
 - 2/ bright and silly as a sequin (AC)
 - 1 its little bones, /, seemed swooning in his hand.
 - 2/ wrapped ... in a warm padding of feathers (VC)
- Stella Benson

4

- 1 The jockeys sat bowed and relaxed,
- 2 moving a little at the waist with the movement of their horses. (VC)

Katherine Anne Porter

5

- 1 The flame sidled up the match,
- 2 driving a film of moisture and a thin strip of darker grey before it. (VC)

6

- 1 She came among them behind the man,
 - 2 gaunt in the gray shapeless garment and the sunbonnet, (AC)
 - 2 wearing stained canvas gymnasium shoes. (VC)
- Faulkner

7

- 1 The Texan turned to the nearest gatepost and climbed to the top of it,
- 2 his alternate thighs thick and bulging in the tight trousers, (Abs)
- 2 the butt of the pistol catching and losing the sun in pearly gleams. (Abs)

William Faulkner

8

- 1 He could sail for hours,
- 2 searching the blanched grasses below him with his telescopic eyes, (VC)
- 2 gaining height against the wind, (VC)
- 2 descending in mile-long, gently declining swoops when he curved and rode back, (VC)
- 2 never beating a wing. (VC)

Walter Van Tilburg Clark

9

- 1 He stood at the top of the stairs and watched me,
 - 2 I waiting for him to call me up, (Abs)
 - 2 he hesitating to come down, (Abs)
 - 3 his lips nervous with the suggestion of a smile, (Abs)
 - 3 mine asking whether the smile meant come, or go away. (Abs)

10

- 1 They regarded me silently,
 - 2 Brother Jack with a smile that went no deeper than his lips, (Abs)
 - 3 his head cocked to one side, (Abs)
 - 3 studying me with his penetrating eyes; (VC)
 - 2 the other blank-faced, (Abs)
 - 3 looking out of eyes that were meant to reveal nothing and to stir profound uncertainty. (VC)

Ralph Ellison

11

- 1 Joad's lips stretched tight over his long teeth for a moment, and
- 1 he licked his lips,
 - 2 like a dog, (PP)
 - 3 two licks, (NC)
 - 4 one in each direction from the middle. (NC)

John Steinbeck

12

- 1 A small Negro girl develops from the sheet of glare-frosted walk,
- 2 walking barefooted, (VC)
- 3 her bare legs striking and coiling from the hot cement,
(Abs.)
- 4 her feet curling in, (Abs)
- 5 only the outer edges touching. (Abs)

13

- 1 The beach sounds are jazzy,
- 2 percussion fixing the mode— (Abs)
- 3 the surf cracking and booming in the distance, (Abs)
- 3 a little nearer dropped barbells clanking, (Abs)
- 3 steel gym rings, / , ringing, (Abs)
- 4/ flung together, (VC)
- 3 palm fronds rustling above me, (Abs)
- 4 like steel brushes washing over a snare drum,
(PP)
- 3 troupes of sandals splatting and shuffling on the
sandy cement, (Abs)
- 4 their beat varying, (Abs)
- 5 syncopation emerging and disappearing
with changing paces. (Abs)

14

- 1 We all live in two realities:
- 2 one of seeming fixity, (NC)
- 3 with institutions, dogmas, rules of punctuation, and routines,
(PP)
- 4 the calendared and clockwise world of all but futile round
on round; (NC) and
- 2 one of whirling and flying electrons, dreams, and possibilities,
(NC)
- 3 behind the clock. (PP)

Sidney Cox

15

- 1 It was as though someone, somewhere, had touched a lever and shifted gears, and
- 1 the hospital was set for night running,
 - 2 smooth and silent, (A + A)
 - 2 its normal clatter and hum muffled, (Abs)
 - 2 the only sounds heard in the white-walled room distant and unreal: (Abs)
 - 3 a low hum of voices from the nurses' desk, (NC)
 - 4 quickly stifled, (VC)
 - 3 the soft squish of rubber-soled shoes on the tiled corridor, (NC)
 - 3 starched white cloth rustling against itself, (NC) and, outside,
 - 3 the lonesome whine of wind in the country night (NC) and
 - 3 the Kansas dust beating against the windows. (NC)

16

- 1 The swells moved rhythmically toward us,
 - 2 irregularly faceted, (VC)
 - 2 sparkling, (VC)
 - 2 growing taller and more powerful until the shining crest bursts, (VC)
 - 3 a transparent sheet of pale green water spilling over the top, (Abs)
 - 4 breaking into blue-white foam as it cascades down the front of the wave, (VC)
 - 4 piling up in a frothy mound that the diminishing wave pushes up against the pilings, (VC)
 - 5 with a swishsmash, (PP)
 - 4 the foam drifting back, (Abs)
 - 5 like a lace fan opened over the shimmering water as the spent wave returns whispering to the sea. (PP)

The best starting point for a composition unit based on these four principles is with two-level narrative sentences, first with one second-level addition (sentences 4, 5); then with two or more parallel ones (6, 7, 8). Anyone sitting in his room with his eyes closed could write the main clause of most of the examples; the discipline comes with the additions, provided they are based at first on immediate observation, requiring the student to phrase an exact observation in exact language. This can hardly fail to be exciting to a class: it is life, with the variety and complexity of life; the workbook exercise is death. The situation is ideal also for teaching diction—abstract-concrete, general-specific, literal-metaphorical, denotative-connotative. When the sentences begin to come out right, it is time to examine the additions for their grammatical character. From then on the grammar comes to the aid of the writing and the writing reinforces the grammar. One can soon go on to multilevel narrative sentences (1, 9-12, 16) and then to brief narratives of three to six or seven sentences on actions with a beginning, a middle, and an end that can be observed over and over again—beating eggs, making a cut with a power saw, or following a record changer's cycle or a wave's flow and ebb. (Bring the record changer to class.) Description, by contrast, is static, picturing appearance rather than behavior. The constructions to master are the absolute phrase and the noun and adjective clusters (13, 15). Then the descriptive noun cluster must be taught to ride piggyback on the narrative sentence, so that description and narration are interleaved: "In the morning we went out into a new world, a glistening crystal and white world, each skeleton tree, each leafless bush, even the heavy, drooping power lines sheathed in icy crystal." The next step is to develop the sense for variety in texture and change in pace that all good narrative demands.

In the next unit, the same four principles can be applied to the expository paragraph. But this is a subject for another paper.

I want to anticipate two possible objections. One is that the sentences are long. By freshman English standards they are long, but I could have produced far longer ones from works freshmen are expected to read. Of the sentences by students, most were written

as finger exercises in the first few weeks of the course. I try in narrative sentences to push to level after level, not just two or three, but four, five, or six, even more, as far as the students' powers of observation will take them. I want them to become sentence acrobats to dazzle by their syntactic dexterity. I'd rather have to deal with hyperemia than anemia. I want to add my voice to that of James Coleman (*CCC*, December 1962) deploring our concentration on the plain style.

The other objection is that my examples are mainly descriptive and narrative—and today in freshman English we teach only exposition. I deplore this limitation as much as I deplore our limitation to the plain style. Both are a sign that we have sold our proper heritage for a pot of message. In permitting them, the English department undercuts its own discipline. Even if our goal is only utilitarian prose, we can teach diction and sentence structure far more effectively through a few controlled exercises in description and narration than we can by starting right off with exposition (Theme One, 500 words, precipitates *all* the problems of writing). There is no problem of invention; the student has something to communicate—his immediate sense impressions, which can stand a bit of exercising. The material is not already verbalized—he has to match language to sense impressions. His acuteness in observation and in choice of words can be judged by fairly objective standards—is the sound of a bottle of milk being set down on a concrete step suggested better by *clink* or *clank* or *clunk*? In the examples, study the diction for its accuracy, rising at times to the truly imaginative. Study the use of metaphor, of comparison. This verbal virtuosity and syntactical ingenuity can be made to carry over into expository writing.

But this is still utilitarian. What I am proposing carries over of itself into the study of literature. It makes the student a better reader of literature. It helps him thread the syntactical mazes of much mature writing, and it gives him insight into that elusive thing we call style. Last year a student told of rereading a book by her favorite author, Willa Cather, and of realizing for the first time *why* she liked reading her: she could understand and appreciate the style. For some students, moreover, such writing makes life more

interesting—as well as giving them a way to share their interest with others. When they learn how to put concrete details into a sentence, they begin to look at life with more alertness. If it is liberal education we are concerned with, it is just possible that these things are more important than anything we can achieve when we set our sights on the plain style in expository prose.

I want to conclude with a historical note. My thesis in this paragraph is that modern prose, like modern poetry, has more in common with the seventeenth than with the eighteenth century and that we fail largely because we are operating from an eighteenth century base. The shift from the complex to the cumulative sentence is more profound than it seems. It goes deep in grammar, requiring a shift from the subordinate clause (the staple of our trade) to the cluster and the absolute (so little understood as to go almost unnoticed in our textbooks). And I have only lately come to see that this shift has historical implications. The cumulative sentence is the modern form of the loose sentence that characterized the anti-Ciceronian movement in the seventeenth century. This movement, according to Morris W. Croll³, began with Montaigne and Bacon and continued with such men as Donne, Browne, Taylor, Pascal. To Montaigne, its art was the art of being natural; to Pascal, its eloquence was the eloquence that mocks formal eloquence; to Bacon, it presented knowledge so that it could be examined, not so that it must be accepted.

But the Senecan amble was banished from England when “the direct sensuous apprehension of thought” (T. S. Eliot’s words) gave way to Cartesian reason or intellect. The consequences of this shift in sensibility are well summarized by Croll:

³ “The Baroque Style in Prose,” *Studies in English Philology: A Miscellany in Honor of Frederick Klaeber* (1929), reprinted in *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm: Essays* by Morris W. Croll (1966) and A. M. Witherspoon and F. J. Warnke, *Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry*, 2nd ed. (1963). I have borrowed from Croll in my description of the cumulative sentence.

To this mode of thought we are to trace almost all the features of modern literary education and criticism, or at least of what we should have called modern a generation ago: the study of the precise meaning of words; the reference to dictionaries as literary authorities; the study of the sentence as a logical unit alone; the careful circumscription of its limits and the gradual reduction of its length; ...⁴ the attempt to reduce grammar to an exact science; the idea that forms of speech are always either correct or incorrect; the complete subjection of the laws of motion and expression in style to the laws of logic and standardization—in short, the triumph, during two centuries, of grammatical over rhetorical ideas. (*Style, Rhetoric and Rhythm*, p. 232)

Here is a seven-point scale any teacher of composition can use to take stock. He can find whether he is based in the eighteenth century or in the twentieth and whether he is consistent—completely either an ancient or a modern—or is just a crazy mixed-up kid.

• • • • •

I have asserted that “syntactical ingenuity” can best be developed in narrative-descriptive writing and that it can be made to carry over into discursive writing. The count made for the article on sentence openers included all sentence modifiers—or free modifiers, as I prefer to call them. In the total number of free modifiers, the 2000 word samples were almost identical—1545 in the fiction and 1519 in the nonfiction, roughly one in three sentences out of four. But they differ in position:

Nonfiction	initial	575	medial	492	final	452
Fiction	initial	404	medial	329	final	812

⁴ The omitted item concerns punctuation and is not relevant here. In using this scale, note the phrase “what we should have called modern a generation ago” and remember that Croll was writing in 1929.

And they differ in some of the grammatical kinds used in the final position:

Nonfiction	NC	123	VC	63	Abs	9
Fiction	NC	131	VC	218	Abs	108

Thus the differences are not in the structures used, only in the position and in the frequency of the various kinds of structures. It will be well to look at a few more sentences of discursive prose.

17

- 1 His [Hemingway's] characters, / , wander through the ruins of Babel,
 - 2/ expatriates for the most part, (NC)
 - 2 smattering many tongues (VC) and
 - 2 speaking a demotic version of their own. (VC)

Harry Levin

18

- 1 From literal to figurative is one range that a word may take:
 - 2 from *foot* of a person to *foot* of a mountain, (PP)
 - 3 a substituted or metaphoric use. (NC)
- 1 From concrete to abstract is another range:
 - 2 from *foot* to *extremity*, (PP)
 - 3 stressing one of the abstract characteristics of *foot*, (VC)
 - 4 a contrast for which the terms *image* and *symbol* as distinguished from *concept* are also used. (NC)

Josephine Miles

19

- 2 Going back to his [Hemingway's] work in 1944, (VC)
- 1 you perceive his kinship with a wholly different group of novelists,
 - 2 let us say with Poe and Hawthorne and Melville: (PP)
 - 3 the haunted and nocturnal writers, (NC)
 - 3 the men who dealt in images that were symbols of an inner world. (NC)

Malcolm Cowley

20

- 1 Even her style in it is transitional and momentous,
- 2 a matter of echoing and reminiscing effects, and of little clarion notes of surprise and prophecy here and there; (NC)
- 3 befitting that time of life which has been called the old age of youth and the youth of old age, (AC or VC)
- 4 a time fraught with heartache and youthful tension. (NC)

Glenway Wescott, of Colette's *Break of Day*

21

- 2 Aglow with splendor and consequence, (AC)
- 1 he [Sterne] rejoined his wife and daughter,
- 2 whom he presently transferred to his new parsonage at Coxwold, (RC)
- 3 an old and rambling house, (NC)
- 4 full of irregular, comfortable rooms, (AC)
- 4 situated on the edge of the moors, (VC)
- 5 in a neighborhood much healthier than the marshy lands of Sutton. (PP)

Peter Quennell

22

- 1 It is with the coming of man that a vast hole seems to open in nature,
- 2 a vast black whirlpool spinning faster and faster, (NC)
- 3 consuming flesh, stones, soil, minerals, (VC)
- 3 sucking down the lightning, (VC)
- 3 wrenching power from the atom, (VC)
- 4 until the ancient sounds of nature are drowned out in the cacophony of something which is no longer nature, (SC)
- 5 something instead which is loose and knocking at the world's heart, (NC)
- 5 something demonic and no longer planned—(NC)
- 6 escaped, it may be—(VC)

6 spewed out of nature, (VC)
 6 contending in a final giant's game
 against its master. (VC)

Loren Eiseley

The structures used in prose are necessarily the structures used in poetry, necessarily because prose and poetry use the same language. Poets may take more liberties with the grammar than prose writers are likely to do; but their departures from the norm must all be understood by reference to the norm. Since poets, like the writers of narrative, work more by association than by logical connection, their sentences are likely to have similar structures. They seem to know the values of the cumulative sentence.

The first example here consists of the first two stanzas of "The Meadow Mouse"; the slashes mark the line ends. The other example constitutes the last four of the five stanzas of "The Motive for Metaphor." It shows well how structural analysis of the sentence reveals the tactics of a difficult poem.

23

- 1 In a shoebox stuffed in an old nylon stocking/ Sleeps the baby mouse I found in the meadow, /
- 2 Where he trembled and shook beneath a stick / Till I caught him up by the tail and brought him in, / (RC)
- 3 Cradled in my hand, / (VC)
- 3 a little quaker, (NC)
- 4 the whole body of him trembling, / (Abs)
- 3 His absurd whiskers sticking out like a cartoon mouse, / (Abs)
- 3 His feet like small leaves, / (Abs)
- 4 Little lizard-feet, / (NC)
- 4 Whitish and spread wide when he tried to struggle away, / (AC)
- 5 Wriggling like a minuscule puppy. (VC)
- 1 Now he's eaten his three kinds of cheese and drunk from his bottle-cap watering trough— /
- 2 So much he just lies in one corner, / (AC)

- 3 His tail curled under him, (Abs)
- 3 his belly big / As his head, (Abs)
- 3 His bat-like ears / Twitching, (Abs)
- 4 tilting toward the least sound. (VC)

Theodore Roethke

24

- 2 In the same way, (PP)
- 1 you were happy in spring,
- 2 with the half colors of quarter-things, (PP)
- 3 The slightly brighter sky, (NC)
- 3 the melting clouds, (NC)
- 3 the single bird, (NC)
- 3 the obscure moon—(NC)
- 4 The obscure moon lighting an obscure world of things that would never be quite expressed, (NC)
- 5 where you yourself were never quite yourself and did not want nor have to be, (RC)
- 6 desiring the exhilarations of changes: (VC)
- 7 the motive for metaphor, (NC)
- 6 shrinking from the weight of primary noon, (VC)
- 7 the ABC of being, (NC)
- 7 the ruddy temper, (NC)
- 7 the hammer of red and blue, (NC)
- 7 the hard sound—(NC)
- 8 steel against intimation—(NC)
- 7 the sharp flash, (NC)
- 7 the vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X. (NC)

Wallace Stevens

These essays led to the famous Christensen Method of writing.

Notes Toward A New Rhetoric

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