

And he will often divide and balance his syntax, too, exactly to fit the information offered.

### Main assertion #1

|                                |                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| All the <i>Gallinae</i> parade |                     |
| (qualification)                | and walk gracefully |
| (qualification)                | and run nimbly      |

### Main assertion #2

|                  |                        |
|------------------|------------------------|
| (Contrast to #1) | but fly                |
| (qualification)  | with difficulty        |
| (qualification)  | and in a straight line |

The prose does not openly diagram the information but it leads the reader's eye and ear in that direction.

White writes both a noun style and a verb style, then, and balances the two. And the balance shows in the parallelism and contrast that devolve from it. 'Bird-flies-thus' becomes a central backbone for the passage, a principal pattern then varied to give the list an interest it would otherwise lack. Push this basic form – noun-verb-qualification – in the opposite direction and you end up outside the range of prose altogether, in the world of chart and graph. In such a world noun and verb are converted into the horizontal and vertical coordinates and the qualification comes from the reader's relating the two. This interpretive eye, as we shall see later, is evoked by more than one kind of prose.

The noun style dominates workaday prose in our time. Elsewhere, I've called this dominant style 'The Official Style' because it is the language of bureaucracy, but it might just as easily be called 'The Academic Style' because it supplies the main stylistic models for the social sciences, many of the physical sciences, and, in various sub-styles, the current characteristic argot of the humanities as well. To find one's place in today's prose world, nothing is more fundamental than marking this style, and its opposite, the verb style, as principal patterns, main stylistic choices with very different behavioral consequences.

It will be interesting to learn how this basic pairing between static and dynamic works out in the digital expressive space. There, as we shall explore in the concluding chapter, everything moves. Volatility not stasis supplies the dominant tonality. On the computer screen, all nouns are read as temporary printouts of verbs, all still images as still-frames of a pre-existent film. Print fixes things. That has been its great glory and great advantage. Compile a definitive edition of a text, as the Renaissance Humanists sought to do, and it is fixed, canonical, for ever. Print is for the record; it *is* the record. Noun styles fare well here. The central value is the *concept*. If you add voice, though, and if, as seems so often to happen in digital expression, *actions* dominate concepts, the noun style may fare less well. We'll see.

## Chapter 2

# Parataxis and Hypotaxis

A STYLE'S CHARACTERISTIC MANNER of connecting its elements provides an easy way to recognize it. Whatever units a writer chooses to work with – phrases, clauses, or complete sentences – he or she must relate them equally or unequally. He or she can tell us how they are related – A caused B, B came after A – and thus subordinate one to the other, by cause, time, or whatever, or can simply juxtapose them and leave the relationship up to us.

When Caesar wrote 'I came; I saw; I conquered' (*Veni, vidi, vici*) he was leaving a great deal up to us. We were to infer that, for Caesar, diagnosing the situation ('I saw') and defeating the enemy ('I conquered') were no more difficult than simply appearing on the scene ('I came'). He boasts without seeming to by putting three different kinds of action on the same syntactic level. This syntactic democracy is called *parataxis*. If Caesar had written instead, 'Since it was I who arrived, and I who saw how the land lay, the victory followed as a matter of course,' he would have said outright what the tight-lipped 'came-saw-conquered' formula only invites us to say about him.

The second formulation is *hypotaxis*. Hypotaxis lets us know how things rank, what derives from what. If Caesar had, like a later conqueror of France, Dwight Eisenhower, written a hypotactic, less intensely egotistical prose, he might have said something like, 'Since I got there early and soon saw what ought to be done, why, shucks, it was easy to conquer France.' Both paratactic and hypotactic styles can work in complex ways but the principle remains the same. Is the ranking done for us (hypotaxis) or left up to us (parataxis)?

Perhaps the most consistent, philosophically reasoned paratactic style in our time has been written by Ernest Hemingway. Here is the famous tight-lipped syntactic reserve:

Now in the fall the trees were all bare and the roads were muddy. I rode to Gorizia from Udine on a camion. We passed other camions on the road and I looked at the country. The mulberry trees were bare and the fields were brown. There were wet dead leaves on the road from the rows of bare trees and men were working on the road, tamping stone in the ruts from



piles of crushed stone along the side of the road between the trees. We saw the town with a mist over it that cut off the mountains. We crossed the river and I saw that it was running high. It had been raining in the mountains. We came into the town past the factories and then the houses and villas. We came into the town past the factories and then the houses and villas and I saw that many more houses had been hit. On a narrow street we passed a British Red Cross ambulance. The driver wore a cap and his face was thin and very tanned. I did not know him. I got down from the camion in the big square in front of the Town Mayor's house, the driver handed down my rucksack and I put it on and swung on the two musettes and walked to our villa. It did not feel like a homecoming.

(*A Farewell to Arms*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929)

Although the passage includes a complex sentence or two, the basic pattern emerges from the alternation of simple and compound ones. 'I did X and I did Y.' No causal relationships are spelled out even when they scream to be:

We crossed the river and I saw that it was running high. It had been raining in the mountains.

The obvious 'Because it had been raining in the mountains, the river was running high,' Hemingway declines to elaborate. When a syntactic pattern becomes so pronounced as this, we suspect that the syntax has become allegorical, has come to be about connection, about a refusal to subordinate. The narrator here registers things passively, as they impinge upon his consciousness. He refuses, the syntax suggests, to make complex, unequal connections, to relate, to explain X in terms of Y. Instead, only the simplest, and at best temporal, relationship: X and Y, or, first X and then Y. When you feel a style making this allegorical appeal, it helps to diagram the pattern speaking to us, highlight it while downplaying the other elements.

Now in the fall the trees were all bare  
I rode to Gorizia from Udine on a camion  
We passed other camions on the road  
The mulberry trees were bare  
There were wet dead leaves  
on the road from the spore of bare trees  
and the roads were muddy.  
and I looked at the country  
and the fields were brown.  
and men were working on the road.

tamping stones in the runs from piles of crushed stone along the side of the road between the trees.

We saw the town with a mist over it that cut off the mountains.

We crossed the river

and I saw that it was running high.

It had been raining in the mountains.

We came into the town

past the factories and then the houses and villas

and I saw that many more houses had been hit.

On a narrow street we passed a British Red Cross ambulance.

The driver wore a cap

and his face was thin and very tanned.

I did not know him.

I got down from the camion in the big square in front of the Town Mayor's house,

the driver handed down my rucksack

and I put it on  
and swung on the two musettes  
and walked to our villa.

It did not feel like a homecoming.

The chart dramatizes a basic seesaw rhythm. The 'and' connection runs through it like a backbone. This Hemingway hero does not reflect on the world he passes through; he notes and endures it. The chart also illuminates some other stylistic elements. On the left side of the chart, description ('Now in the fall the trees were all bare') alternates with action ('I rode to Gorizia'). We noticed in the last chapter that every style possesses an inner logic. A basic decision - for a noun style, a verb style, or here for parataxis - encourages subsidiary elements to follow. Parataxis most obviously encourages *anaphora*, a pattern of similar sentence-openings. Here there are three basic ones, the 'I + verb formula, the 'We' + verb formula, and the 'noun + was' formula:

I rode to Gorizia  
I looked at the country  
I saw that it was running high  
I saw that many more houses  
I did not know him  
I got down from the camion  
I put it on

and

We passed other camions  
We saw the town  
We crossed the river  
We came into the town  
We passed a British Red Cross ambulance



and

The trees *were* all bare  
 The roads *were* muddy  
 The mulberry trees *were* bare  
 The fields *were* brown  
 There *were* wet dead leaves  
 Men *were* working  
 It *was* running high  
 It *had been* raining  
 His face *was* thin  
 It *did not* feel like a homecoming.

A series of short phrases or clauses equalized by parataxis seems almost to invite these repetitive openings. We are reminded, on the one hand, of Scripture's ritual iterations – a list of 'Thou shalt *nots*' or '*begats*.' On the other hand, the humble laundry list comes to mind. When you think of it, ordinary workaday prose is often taken up with lists. They represent parataxis par excellence. Hemingway here draws on both resemblances, sacred and mundane. We feel the parataxis to be emotionally charged, deliberately held in check and understated, as in Scripture. But we also feel the dry breath of empty lists, of an exhausted and passive narrator who can *list* the countryside he passes through but feels too exhausted to understand it, and to suggest this understanding through subordination.

The list mentality shows in the verbs, too, forms of 'to be' more often than not. Things simply are or he simply looks at them. And when they 'are,' we have the prepositional-phrase strings we saw in the last chapter as devolving from 'to be':

There *were* wet dead leaves  
     on the road  
     from the rows  
     of bare trees  
 and men *were* working  
     on the road, tamping stone  
     in the ruts  
     from piles  
     of crushed stone  
     along the side  
     of the road  
     between the trees.

These prepositional-phrase strings, as we've noticed earlier, can be extremely monotonous. ('Monotonous' can be a neutral descriptive term – one-toned – but notice how easily it falls over into evaluation?) Here the basic paratactic rhythm, the syntactic democracy, seems to flow into them and subsume them into the basic pattern. As a result, we don't notice them so much.

The insistent parataxis of this passage illustrates yet another tendency inherent in paratactic styles, the movement toward verse. Often, printing such a style as verse almost makes it into verse. Verse-making is not quite that easy, to be sure, but the disconnected, syntactically equal units gravitate in this direction, Scripture again a familiar example. It is often said that a paratactic style is easier to write than a hypotactic one, that it comes more naturally. Hemingway's prose suggests that this may be too simple. There is, of course, the Shakespearean Mrs Quickly example, a garrulous old biddy you hear on the bus: 'And then I says to Fred, I says . . . and he says and so I says . . .' But parataxis can be a contrived, patterned, self-conscious style, one whose syntax can carry, as we have seen, an allegorical meaning of its own. It is easy to write a laundry list, but not so easy to write like Hemingway without falling into parody. Try it.

The 'and' pattern Hemingway used introduces another pair of basic terms – *asyndeton* and *polysyndeton*. An asyndetic style does without connectors. (That is just what the Greek means – 'without connections'.) A polysyndetic style makes a great many connections. You need both terms to pin down Hemingway's parataxis because he seems basically asyndetic and only symbolically polysyndetic. The 'and' connector is emphasized but it is almost the only one. Its very poverty intensifies the *asyndetic* world, a world where connections cannot be made.

Chronicle history provides the most obvious example of a polysyndetic style: first A happened *and* then B *and* then C, and so on. Here is a famous piece of chronicle polysyndeton, Malory's description of the truce broken by the accidental drawing of a sword and of King Arthur's subsequent fight with Mordred. I've emphasized the connectors:

*And* so they met as their appointment was, *and* were agreed *and* accorded thoroughly. *And* wine was set, *and* they drank together. Right so came out an adder of a little heath bush, *and* it stung a knight in the foot. *And* so when the knight felt him so stung, he looked down *and* saw the adder; *and* anon he drew his sword to slay the adder, *and* thought no other harm. *And* when the host on both parts saw that sword drawn, then they blew trumpets and horns, *and* shouted grimly, *and* so both hosts dressed them together. *And* King Arthur took his horse *and* said, 'Alas, this unhappy day!' *and* so rode to his party, *and* Sir Mordred in like wise.

*And* never since was there a more dolefull battle in no Christian land, for there was but rushing and riding, thrusting and striking, *and* many a grim word was there spoken of one to another, *and* many a deadly stroke.



But ever King Arthur rode throughout the battle many times *and* did full nobly, as a noble King should do, *and* at all times he fainted never. *And* Sir Mordred did his duty that day *and* put himself in great peril.

*And* thus they fought all the long day, *and* never stinted until the noble knights were laid to the cold earth. *And* ever they fought still until it was near night, *and by then* was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the earth. *Then* was King Arthur wrathful out of measure, *when* he saw his people so slain from him . . . *Then* King Arthur looked about *and* was aware where stood Sir Mordred leaning upon his sword among a great heap of dead men.

'*Now*, give me my spear,' said King Arthur unto Sir Lucan, 'for yonder I have espied the traitor that this woe hath wrought . . . ' *Then* the King got his spear in both his hands, *and* ran toward Sir Mordred, crying and saying,

'Traitor, now is thy death-day come!'

*And when* Sir Mordred saw King Arthur he ran unto him with his sword drawn in his hand, *and* there King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield, with a foin of his spear, throughout the body more than a fathom. *And when* Sir Mordred felt that he had his death's wound he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the burr of King Arthur's spear, *and right so* he smote his father, King Arthur, with his sword, holding it in both his hands, upon the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the outer membrane of the brain. *And* therewith Mordred dashed down stark dead to the earth.

(Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*,  
New York: Bramhall House, 1962)

The 'and-then' pattern comes across in silent reading as more monotonous than it does when the passage is read aloud. A good storyteller can convert such ritual 'and's and 'then's into pauses or rests, some long and some short, which punctuate his narrative and build suspense. The polysyndetic pattern, simple as it is, in skilled hands turns into a performative advantage, a discretionary opportunity to slow down the narrative or speed it up, to color it with intonation or pregnant pause. Try reading the passage aloud. You can, by coming down hard on the 'and's, reduce the passage to a maddening monotony, or you can syncopate them out almost completely. Malory is not alone in claiming this flexibility. The connectors – *and*, *then*, *but*, *however* – often work in a polysyndetic style as much rhythmically as syntactically, telling the voice where to rise or fall, hurry up, or go slow. When, as with Malory, the connector is a simple repeated one – 'and' – we often feel echoing the ritual harp beat of oral epic, a basic mensuration against which the improvising poet juxtaposes his ever-changing inventions.

Dickens provides us with an equally famous example of the opposite pattern, *asyndeton*, when he begins *Bleak House*:

LONDON. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better – splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foothold at street corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe, of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all around them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.

Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongy fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before the time – as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.

The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation – Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

(*Bleak House*, New York: Penguin, 1977)

Here the syntax imitates the saccades – the discontinuous leaps – which the eye makes in surveying a scene. The eye can move, and the fog, but very little else. An asyndetic style is often, as here, paratactic as well, and the anaphora which



parataxis often brings with it occurs here, too. Not only all those sentences beginning with 'fog' but the less obvious pattern of noun + qualifier: 'smoke lowering,' 'dogs indistinguishable,' 'foot-passengers jostling,' 'gas looming.' Sometimes Dickens uses an ending pattern, too, as in:

|                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| The raw afternoon | is rawest and      |
| the dense fog     | is densest and     |
| the muddy streets | are muddiest . . . |

A similar-ending pattern like this is called *epanaphora*. Dickens also uses homoioteleuton, the pattern of similar endings in *rawest*, *densest*, *muddiest*. Dickens breaks the asyndetic pattern in a carefully strategic, climactic way. We get a verb rather than a participle in the *Megalosaurus* analogy, but it comes in what is still a dependent clause; we get another in 'if this day ever broke' but again separated parenthetically from the main movement – all those paratactic, asyndetic participles. We hunger for an independent verb but get none until the last two paragraphs. In them, Dickens constructs a very elaborate rhetorical climax. The persistent asyndeton has created a ritualistic repetition, and when we finally come to a finite verb, it occurs in the parallel clauses we have just seen. Look at them again:

|                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| The raw afternoon | is rawest, and     |
| the dense fog     | is densest, and    |
| the muddy streets | are muddiest . . . |

The isocolon both summarizes the three images Dickens builds upon – rawness, mud, fog – and begins a climactic structure that ends with High Court of Chancery. The second stage again uses isocolon.

|   |           |                           |
|---|-----------|---------------------------|
|   | near that | leaden-headed old         |
|   |           | obstruction,              |
| appropriate ornament for the threshold of a |           | leaden-headed old         |
|   |           | corporation – Temple Bar. |

The third, now with a connective 'And,' begins with yet another repetition, one where the weight of connection shifts from conjunction to preposition:

|             |                            |
|-------------|----------------------------|
|             | Temple Bar.                |
| And hard by | Temple Bar,                |
| in          | Lincoln's Inn Hall,        |
| at          | the very heart of the fog, |
| sits        | the Lord High Chancellor   |
| in his      | High Court of Chancery.    |

Plenty of connectives here. Dickens has reserved the polysyndeton for a climactic paragraph. This opening section of *Bleak House* resembles, in its almost formulaic, climactic repetitions, the high-style openings of classical epic. And basic to this elevated opening stands the calculated juxtaposition of asyndeton and polysyndeton.

A polysyndetic prose is often a hypotactic one. Parataxis, as with Hemingway, can be either asyndetic or the opposite. Hypotaxis, however, most often goes with polysyndeton. Using a classic combination of these two patterns, Lord Brougham spoke to the House of Lords during the second reading of the Reform Bill of 1832:

My Lords, – I feel that I owe some apology to your lordships for standing in the way of any noble lords who wish to address you: but after much deliberation, and after consulting with several of my noble friends on both sides of the House, it did appear to us, as I am sure it will to your lordships, desirable, on many grounds, that the debate should be brought to a close this night; and I thought I could not better contribute to that end than by taking the present opportunity of addressing you. Indeed, I had scarcely any choice. I am urged on by the anxiety I feel on this mighty subject, which is so great, that I should hardly have been able to delay the expression of my opinion much longer; if I had, I feel assured that I must have lost the power to address you. This solicitude is not, I can assure your lordships, diminished by my recollection of the great talents and brilliant exertions of those by whom I have been preceded in the discussion, and the consciousness of the difficulties with which I have to contend in following such men. It is a deep sense of these difficulties that induces me to call for your patient indulgence. For although not unused to meet public bodies, nay, constantly in the habit, during many years, of presenting myself before great assemblies of various kinds, yet I do solemnly assure you, that I never, until this moment, felt what deep responsibility may rest on a member of the legislature in addressing either of its houses. And if I, now standing with your lordships on the brink of the most momentous decision that ever human assembly came to, at any period of the world, and seeking to arrest you, whilst it is yet time, in that position, could, by any divination of the future, have foreseen in my earliest years, that I should live to appear here, and to act as your adviser, on a question of such awful importance, not only to yourselves, but to your remotest posterity, I should have devoted every day and every hour of that life to preparing myself for the task which I now almost sink under, – gathering from the monuments of ancient experience the lessons of wisdom which might guide our course at the present hour, – looking abroad on our own times, and these not uneventful, to check, by practice, the application of those lessons, – chastening



myself, and sinking within me every infirmity of temper, every waywardness of disposition, which might by possibility impede the discharge of this most solemn duty: – but, above all, eradicating from my mind everything that, by any accident, could interrupt the most perfect candour and impartiality of judgment. (Cheers)

Such a style seems, above all, *ranked*: first-rank statements, second-rank elaborations, third-rank qualifications. Again, a diagram which exaggerates these relationships a little makes them easier to see.

| Rank #1             | Rank #2  | Rank #3  |
|---------------------|--|--|
| I feel              | that I owe some apology  | to your Lordships<br>for standing<br>in the way<br>of any noble lords who<br>wish to address you |
|                     | but after much deliberation<br>and after consulting  | with several<br>of my noble friends<br>on both sides<br>of the House<br>to your Lordships        |
| it did appear to us | as I am sure it will<br>desirable  | on many grounds  |
| I thought           | that the debate should be<br>brought to a close<br>I could not better<br>contribute<br>than by taking the present<br>opportunity | this night and<br>to that end<br>of addressing you.  |

The *-taxis* of hypotaxis comes from the Greek word for drawing up ranks in battle and the diagram does just this, shows the elements of the sentence drawn up one under another. A sentence like this may obviously be broken down in other ways. Here I've cut across both syntactical and rhythmic units to emphasize the essential hypotaxis, the 'ranking under.' Other strong patterns, though, work in it too. Look, for example, at the paratactic anaphora in this sentence:

Indeed, I **had** scarcely any choice.  
I **am** urged on by the anxiety  
I **feel** on this mighty subject  
which is so great that

I **should** hardly have been able to delay the expression of  
my opinion much longer  
if I **had**  
I **feel** assured that  
I **must** have lost the power to address you

Again, a chorus-like ritualistic repetition combined with list-making.

Students of style have long referred to the similarities of phrasing and structure which Brougham uses – for example the participles 'standing,' 'seeking,' 'gathering,' 'looking,' 'chastening,' 'sinking,' 'eradicating' – as examples of 'parallel construction.' Since in normal print they become horizontally parallel rarely and by accident, it must have been our intuitive awareness of the vertical axis which has kept this puzzling and seemingly inapplicable term in circulation.

We so much take for granted reading as horizontal movement that we have trouble seeing what charting so often emphasizes: the vertical coordinate upon which so much depends in prose style. A hypotactic style encourages you to read from top to bottom as well as from left to right. Here is a passage from a Memorial Day speech by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

If you have been in line, ordered simply to wait and to do nothing, and have watched the enemy bring their guns to bear upon you down a gentle slope, have seen the puff of the firing, have felt the burst of the spherical case-shot as it came toward you, have heard and seen the shrieking fragments go tearing through your company, and have known that the next or the next shot carries your fate; if you have advanced in line and have seen ahead of you the spot which you must pass where the rifle bullets are striking; if you have ridden by night at a walk toward the blue line of fire at the dead angle of Spottsylvania, where for twenty-four hours the soldiers were fighting on the two sides of an earthwork, and in the morning the dead and dying lay piled in a row six deep, and as you rode have heard the bullets splashing in the mud and earth about you; if you have been on the picket-line at night in a black and unknown wood, have heard the spat of the bullets upon the trees, and as you moved have felt your foot slip upon a dead man's body; if you have had a blind fierce gallop against the enemy, with your blood up and a pace that left no time for fear – if, in short, as some, I hope many, who hear me, have known, you have known the vicissitudes of terror and of triumph in war, you know that there is such a thing as the faith I spoke of.

(Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr, *The Soldier's Faith. An Address Delivered on Memorial Day, May 30, 1895, at a Meeting Called by the Graduating Class of Harvard University*, in *The Essential Holmes*, edited with introduction by Richard A. Posner, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 87)



Look at how the vertical coordinates organize the passage:

**If you have been** in line,  
 ordered simply to wait and to do nothing,  
 and **have watched** the enemy bring their guns to bear upon you down a gentle slope,  
     **have seen** the puff of the firing,  
     **have felt** the burst of the spherical case-shot as it came toward you,  
     **have heard and seen** the shrieking fragments go tearing through your company,  
 and **have known** that the next or the next shot carries your fate;  
**if you have advanced** in line  
     and **have seen** ahead of you the spot which you must pass  
     where the rifle bullets are striking;  
**if you have ridden** by night at a walk toward the blue line of fire at the dead angle of Spottsylvania,  
     where for twenty-four hours the soldiers were fighting on the two sides of an earthwork,  
     and in the morning the dead and dying lay piled in a row six deep,  
 and **as you rode**  
     **have heard** the bullets splashing in the mud and earth about you;  
**if you have been** on the picket-line at night in a black and unknown wood,  
     **have heard** the spat of the bullets upon the trees,  
 and **as you moved**  
     **have felt** your foot slip upon a dead man's body;  
**if you have had** a blind fierce gallop against the enemy,  
     with your blood up and a pace that left no time for fear

– if, in short, as **some, I hope many**, who hear me, **have known**, **you have known** the vicissitudes of terror and of triumph in war, **you know** that there is such a thing as the faith I spoke of.

Holmes, a thrice-wounded officer of the Twentieth Massachusetts Volunteers, knew whereof he spoke, certainly. The passage is drawn up like lines of battle, 'If' clauses (the *protasis*) that one has to pass one-by-one before reaching the 'Then' clause (the *apodosis*). The 'syntax' is, in the literal sense of the Greek, a line of battle. The sentence, as I've diagrammed it, seems to map a series of Civil War skirmish lines. This is hypotactic arrangement for certain. Yet notice the paratactic interludes. They are not so clear as they might be, because the 'and's have been left out. Put them back in, and you see the pattern right away:

**[and]** ordered simply to wait and to do nothing,  
**and have watched** the enemy bring their guns to bear upon you down a gentle slope,  
**[and]** **have seen** the puff of the firing,  
**[and]** **have felt** the burst of the spherical case-shot as it came toward you,  
**[and]** **have heard and seen** the shrieking fragments go tearing through your company,  
**and have known** that the next or the next shot carries your fate;  
**and have seen** ahead of you the spot which you must pass  
     where the rifle bullets are striking;  
**and** in the morning the dead and dying lay piled in a row six deep,  
**and as you rode have heard** the bullets splashing in the mud and earth about you;  
**[and]** **have heard** the spat of the bullets upon the trees, and **as you moved**  
**[and]** **have felt** your foot slip upon a dead man's body

Holmes sets up a hypotactic framework and then, within it, he embeds layers of parataxis. The battlefield map is clear; within it, you just confront one thing after another, making such sense of them as you can.

We've found that basic stylistic decisions like parataxis or hypotaxis bring with them their own inner logic, a set of subsidiary patterns following naturally from the main one. Maybe we can talk about something like an *outer* logic too, a natural relationship between a fundamental stylistic decision and the reality it seeks to describe. In the Hemingway passage the coincidence was perfect. But it always is for fiction, since fiction, inasmuch as it is fiction, creates the reality it describes. Because nonfictional prose describes a reality external to itself, other issues arise, issues of *decorum* (suitability of style to subject) and sincerity. What terms like decorum and sincerity mean we'll be considering later on, but we can begin to focus them a little by looking at an unusual kind of parataxis, the 'school style' of textbooks.

Here is a page from a third-grade textbook:

### Pittsburgh Needs New Workers

As steel mills grew bigger, they needed more workers. But they needed a different kind of worker. The small mills had needed skilled workers. The big new mills needed unskilled workers, too.

The steel companies sent men to Eastern Europe to hire unskilled workers. Thousands of them came to Pittsburgh to work in the mills.

Most of the people who worked in the mills were crowded together. They lived in broken-down houses. They walked on dirty streets. And they breathed smoke and soot from the factories and mills. They called



Pittsburgh the 'smoky city.' But they put up with it. Those dirty industries gave them an income.

### Pittsburgh Has Hard Times

Trouble came to our country in the 1930s. Factories were producing more goods than people could afford to buy. Some factories had to slow down. Some just closed. Thousands of people lost their jobs. The demand for steel dropped. Pittsburgh suffered more than many other cities did. Seven out of every ten workers there had jobs in the steel industry.

### America Goes to War

America entered World War II in 1941. The Army, Navy, and Air Force needed supplies. They needed guns, tanks, planes, and ships. These supplies were all made from steel.

Once again, the steel mills worked day and night. The people of Pittsburgh were back at work, earning high wages.

At the end of the war, the demand for steel was still high. But other cities had steel mills. During the war, they had found cheaper sources of power than coal. And after the war, they bought scrap metal which could be melted down to make steel products. Pittsburgh now needed new industries.

A special case, obviously. A style adapted to third-graders. The adaptation, though, seems less in vocabulary or concept than in *syntax*, the premise being that third-graders are too young to understand subordination. True or not, what of our adult response? How, for example, would an adult version (unless the word 'adult' has been destroyed by the pornographers) of the first paragraph read?

#### Original

As steel mills grew bigger, they needed more workers. But they needed a different kind of worker. The small mills had needed skilled workers. The big new mills needed unskilled workers, too.

#### Revision

As steel mills grew bigger, they needed more workers, but a different kind of worker, unskilled rather than skilled.

Or the second:

#### Original

The steel companies sent men to Eastern Europe to hire unskilled workers.

Thousands of them came to Pittsburgh to work in the mills.

#### Revision

The steel companies sent men to Eastern Europe to hire thousands of unskilled workers for the Pittsburgh mills.

Or a third passage later on?

#### Original

Factories were producing more goods than people could afford to buy. Some factories had to slow down. Some just closed.

#### Revision

Because factories were producing more goods than people could afford to buy, some factories had to slow down and others to close.

In each case, the third-grade parataxis hides a causal relation which finds its natural adult expression in hypotactic subordination. For the adult reader, the style seems to work against its own inner logic. Against its outer logic, too, since a social history like this one builds on causality and to leave it out, as parataxis by its nature does, sets style and subject at loggerheads. Parataxis, as we've seen, leaves connections – causal, temporal, whatever – up to the reader. Child psychologists may think parataxis the natural language of childhood – I don't know – but it seems odd to leave connection-making up to the minds least equipped to make connections. For adults, certainly, such prose seems fake, duplicitous. The argument says one thing, the syntax another.

Here is another passage, this time from a sixth-grade text. Presumably, if parataxis is the natural syntax of childhood, we would expect more hypotaxis here.

Groups that wanted the jetport had to think about all this when they looked for a place to build. They decided on an area just north of Everglades National Park. Then they had to get their plan approved by county, state, and federal governments.

Other groups, however, did not want the jetport built near Everglades National Park. They said the jetport would harm the plants and animals. The park is a wildlife refuge, which means that no one can hunt the animals or damage the plants in it. People can go there to enjoy the beauty of the park and to see many kinds of rare birds and trees.

What might happen to the park if the jetport were built near it? The animals and plants of the park must have fresh, unpolluted water. The



water source for the park is outside the park boundaries, in the swamps and marshes north and west of the planned jetport. The pollution from the jets and from chemicals used at the jetport would pollute the water flowing into the park. And the roar of the jets would badly frighten birds and other animals.

### Pressure and Conflict

Conservations groups were very worried. These groups are interested in preserving the natural beauty of the environment. They did not want the park ruined. Some conservation groups opposing the jetport site were local or state groups. But national conservation groups were concerned, too.

Everglades is a national park – all the people of the United States own it. As an American citizen, you share in owning all the national parks. As one of the owners of the Everglades National Park, you could let the government know how you feel about the plan to build a jetport near your park. You could write your Representative and Senator to tell them how you feel. If a great many people contact them, will they pay more attention? Why do you think so?

There is a little more subordination ('when they looked for,' 'which means that') but not much. And the parataxis that remains often seems, as in the third-grade example, to fragment sentences that naturally belong together:

#### Sixth-grade version

Some conservation groups opposing the jetport site were local or state groups.

But national conservation groups were concerned, too.

#### Adult version

National conservation groups, as well as local and state ones, opposed the jetport site.

Or the second and third sentences:

#### Sixth-grade version

They decided on an area just north of Everglades National Park. Then they had to get their plan approved by county, state, and federal governments.

#### Adult version

After they had decided on an area just north of Everglades National Park,

they had to get their plan approved by county, state, and federal governments.

Is it only this artificial parataxis that makes the passage seem so fake? Or the simplistic diction and word repetition? Or the spelling out of much that for an adult audience would have been left unsaid? Could you rewrite the passage in a mature style which sixth-graders still could understand? If you have a sixth-grader handy, try it.

Here's a final textbook example, this time for grades nine to twelve:

### The Romans Built on Greek Culture

The roots of Western civilization can be traced to the blend of Greek and Roman culture, known as *classical culture*, that flourished during the *Pax Romana*. The Romans admired Hellenic culture and borrowed widely from the Greeks. In the process, certain elements of the culture were changed. For example, Roman sculpture became more lifelike than the Greek; Roman architecture, more elaborate. In addition, the Romans themselves made many contributions of their own that, when added to the Greek heritage, helped form a truly Greco-Roman culture. Perhaps the greatest single achievement of the Romans was the creation of a body of laws suitable for governing a world state.

**Roman law held the peoples of the empire together.** In modern-day Italy, France, Spain, and Latin America, law codes based on Roman legal principles are still in use. Law in the modern English-speaking countries was also greatly influenced by Roman law.

Roman law developed from the Laws of the Twelve Tables – those written laws won by the plebeians so that they would know how they would be ruled. As Rome expanded, laws governing noncitizens were added. The decisions of different magistrates in the provinces were kept, and these *legal interpretations* helped other judges decide cases. Sometimes, the existing laws of a conquered place influenced the magistrate's decision. In this way, local rules and customs became a part of the larger body of Roman law. Roman laws became international, particularly the laws dealing with commerce. When Augustus was emperor, professional law schools were established to teach the law. Later, in the 6th century A.D., Justinian, emperor of the eastern empire, had this huge body of laws *codified*, that is, organized into a system that could more easily be used.

**The Latin language was a lasting gift to civilization.** The Romans spoke a language called Latin. It is one of the Indo-European languages, as are German, Slavic, Greek, and Sanskrit. The Romans did not develop writing until the 7th century B.C., when they adopted an alphabet used



by the Etruscans. Writing with an alphabet is much easier than writing with picture forms, as in Chinese, the oldest system of writing still in use. Today, the so-called Roman alphabet is the most widely used alphabet in the world.

During the years of Roman civilization, two forms of Latin developed. One was literary Latin, the form used in writing. The second was the *vernacular* [vər nak' yə lər], or simplified, spoken language used in people's everyday dealings with each other. Literary Latin continued to be more formal and is highly prized for its logic and exactness.

Yes, a few changes, but still unmistakably the paratactic school style, the textbook style a modern student can spot at a hundred yards. Again, spelling out the obvious. 'The Romans spoke a language called Latin' rather than 'The Romans spoke Latin,' or rather than nothing at all. Again, the childlike habit of repeating words, here especially 'law.' And defining 'codified' and the pronunciation key for 'vernacular' further identify textbook prose. Again style contradicts subject. But the most childlike element must be the impossibly high level of generalization. This creates the passage's central childish tone, and the parataxis reinforces it. Complex issues like these demand subordination.

This last passage aims at an audience of young adults. If we suppose that third-graders cannot detect this fake parataxis, can we make the same supposition for high school kids? Surely just the opposite. Their powers to detect stylistic falsity, in all kinds of behavior, will never be greater than in adolescence. Stylistic conformity sometimes seems their primary interest. And yet their connection with books, with the very act of reading, comes through a kind of prose false since the third grade. Their books still talk baby talk. In this sense we can speak of a prose style as fake, insincere. Parataxis itself can be called 'bad' here because it has been used to keep children from growing up, to keep twelfth-graders reading like ninth-graders so that, in the self-expanding way of bureaucrats, there will have to be a thirteenth grade, and a fourteenth.

Whether a paratactic style is more 'natural,' in the sense of coming earlier in our evolutionary history, we'll have to learn from the anthropologists. What has happened with textbook parataxis, however, poses a different problem. Parataxis has been assumed to be more 'natural,' 'childlike,' than hypotaxis, and a particular pedagogy built on that assumption. The assumption may be false and the pedagogy debilitating but the larger moral taught should be that stylistic patterns are always being taken as allegorical, as 'naturally' pointing to one thing or another. Sometimes we can find 'nature' in such a conclusion, as when we said that parataxis is not a suitable vehicle for describing social causality; sometimes, however, we find only an arbitrary assumption. And it is hard to tell which is which.

Hypotaxis and parataxis take a new turn on the computer screen. There, fixed linear text – the conventional printed book – has come to be seen as hier-

archical, a top-down management of conceptual thinking which works everything out for the reader and asks only assent. Against this stands the characteristic *modus operandi* of digital text – hypertext. In hypertext, the linearity is broken by links to other related, analogous, passages or sites which invite the reader to become involved, *makes* connections rather than just observing them. Such thinking is interactive rather than passive.

So, at least, goes the conventional wisdom. In practice, as we are already finding, it doesn't always work out this way. Analogy has always played counterpoint to hierarchy; we have always thought out problems unmethodically, analogically, and then put them into logical form for public consumption.

And, however we yearn for 'horizontal management,' the egalitarian push downward of decision-making which we see across the whole landscape of work, we humans are a deeply hierarchical primate. Our whole method of thinking is rootedly hierarchical.

Still, it does seem possible to say that hypertext is *paratactic*, works by putting things next to each other and letting the reader make the most of the juxtaposition. Hypotactic habits of mind – the desire to rank, order, build carefully from evidence to conclusion – seem to run all athwart to hypertexts. Yet, in the three-dimensional space of digital text, as we shall see in 'What's Next for Text?', hierarchy seems to return as a natural attribute of text floating in a bottomless three-dimensional space. The counterpoint between hypotaxis and parataxis, all this is to say, is playing itself out in new ways. The terms, though, and the ways of making meaning to which they point, remain fundamental. *Connectives*, equal and unequal, provide a revealing way to probe prose in the digital writing space.



## Chapter 3

# The Periodic Style and the Running Style

OUT OF THE PARATAXIS-HYPOTAXIS exposition emerges the fundamental pairing for prose style, periodic style and running style. 'Periodic' is one of those traditional but confusing terms we ought to throw away but can't. Etymologically, 'periodos' (περίοδος) means 'a way around,' 'a circuit,' a racetrack turning. A 'periodic sentence' must then have something to do with such a meaning. It doesn't. By Aristotle's time, it seems to have meant what we mean by 'sentence,' a unit, with a beginning, middle and end, small enough to be read as a single unit (*Rhetoric*, III.9). Not much help, this, an etymology for 'periodic sentence' that comes down to 'sentence sentence.' It could apply to anything from 'Ouch!' to the Gettysburg Address. Whatever we decide a periodic style means for English prose, it has nothing to do with περίοδος.

The 'running' in 'running style' manages to be even more loose and baggy a term than 'periodic.' It has an Aristotelian source, too – he talks about the *lexis eiromene* (λέξις εἰρομένη) or strung-together style – but happily the Greek term has stayed out of English. If the periodic style is basically hypotactic, the running style is basically paratactic, incremental, shapeless. It just goes on. Not much help either, this definition. It could point to almost anything not, well, not periodic. And has.

But terms like these don't stay in circulation unless they point to *something*. And these two terms point to something fundamental, a basic difference in how one human intelligence presents itself to another. I can show you my mind in two ways, in present time and in the past. In present time, you see the machine in all its giddy unsplendor as it lurches from crisis to crisis, first tripping over one argument then bumping into another, unbalanced and unsymmetrical and unhandy, now mulling over and thinking through a point, alternating argument with pronouncement, often – to use the unflattering but apposite cliché – finding out what the mind thinks by seeing what the hand writes.

To imitate thus the mind in real-time interaction with the world is to write in some form of running style. The serial syntax registers the first thing first and then the second thing second, simple chronological sequence always calling the

tune and beating the tempo. Such a syntax models the mind in the act of coping with the world. The coping is all small-scale, minute-to-minute tactics, not seasonal grand strategy. There is no time to reflect on grand strategy; the reader goes on patrol with the writer, sharing immediate dangers and present perplexities. Things happen as they want to, not as we would have them. Circumstances call the tune.

The periodic style reverses all this. The mind shows itself after it has reasoned on the event; after it has sorted by concept and categorized by size; after it has imposed on the temporal flow the shapes through which that flow takes on a beginning, a middle and an end. The periodic stylist works with balance, antithesis, parallelism and careful patterns of repetition; all these dramatize a mind which has dominated experience and reworked it to its liking. It is tempting to say that the periodic style humanizes time and we can say this, so long as we remember that to 'go with the flow' is as human as to oppose it, that humankind's bewilderment before raw event is as characteristic as the will to impose order on it.

Styles in prose are like styles in gardens. The periodic style resembles the vast formal garden of a Baroque palace, all balanced squares and parallel paths. The land is rearranged in ways that the visual cortex can easily sort out. The running style, on the other hand, is like the informal garden which shapes nature without seeming to. Nature is not dominated and reformed but simply helped on the way it wanted to go anyway. We can wander – since there is no beginning, middle and end – but again without fear of getting lost. (Thus we might say, anticipating our discussion of electronic text, that 'hypertext' is a kind of running style, in that we wander among the many links, go out on an intellectual patrol into the dangerous territory of new and unexpected ideas.)

Periodic style and running style, then, point to two basic ways the mind relates itself to time and hence to human experience. But just because these patterns are so basic they can be realized in many different verbal forms. The terms 'periodic style' and 'running style' are thus bound to remain imprecise. But each does bring with it basic verbal patterns we can see and describe, and they do have a dynamic relationship we can trace. Let's look at some examples, first of the two styles and then of their relationship.

The best definition of 'periodic sentence' I know is also the simplest. The great classicist H. J. Rose in his *A Handbook of Latin Literature* (London: Methuen, 1936) called it 'the long and frequently involved type of sentence, needing skill to handle it properly, in which the construction begun with the first word is not completed until the last.' 'Construction' here we'll take to mean sense as well as syntax. In a periodic sentence, things don't fall into place until the last minute, and when they do, they do with a snap, an emphatic climax. The juggler catches all the pieces, and takes the applause. In a periodic style, sometimes the periodism is contained in a single grammatical



sentence and sometimes it runs over into a larger unit, but the architecture is the same whatever the scale. When it is large, and more than one sentence is involved, the construction is usually called a *period*. H. J. Rose himself could build a beautiful period, as when he described the younger Seneca. After a brief introductory flourish ('Of his works the writer finds it hard to judge fairly, owing to the loathing which his personality excites') comes this salvo:

That a man in exile should flatter basely those who have power to recall him is understandable; Ovid did as much. That a prime minister in difficult times should show himself neither heroic nor self-consistent is no more than is to be expected of the vast majority of statesmen. That the influential adviser of an impressionable and unbalanced young prince should allow his master's favors to take the form of making him prodigiously wealthy is not remarkable; we may discount the tales of Seneca using extortion to add to his riches. That, having flattered, he should bespatter with abuse the object of his sometime adoration is certainly not commendable, but shows no deep depravity, merely a desire to swim with the current. That, being the most popular author of the day and master of an eloquence calculated to make the worst case appear passable, he should frame an elaborate justification of a matricide, may be passed over as one of the hard necessities of his position; but when the man who has done and is doing all this takes the tone of a rigid moralist and a seeker after uncompromising virtue, preaching, from his palace, simplicity and the plainest living with almost the unction of a St. Francis praising Holy Poverty, refusing all knowledge that does not tend to edification, and proclaiming, in verse worthy of a better man than Nero's hack, that the true king is he who fears nothing and desires nothing, the gorge of the reader rises and he turns for relief to some one who either made his life fit his doctrine or, if he behaved unworthily of the best that was in him, at least laid no claim to be a spiritual guide.

Longer than one sentence, technically, but we could fix that up with semicolons. And it doesn't matter whether the period stretches over one sentence or several. The main thing is the suspension, both of syntax and sense, until the end. The basic design looks like this:

- A. a) *That* a man in exile . . . is understandable;  
     a1) Ovid did as much.  
     b) *That* a prime minister in difficult times . . . is no more than  
     b1) the vast majority of statesmen.

- c) *That* the influential adviser . . . is not remarkable;  
     c1) we may discount the tales of Seneca  
     using extortion.  
     d) *That*, having flattered, . . . is certainly not commendable  
     d1) but shows no deep depravity.  
     e) *That*, being the most popular . . . may be passed over  
     e1) hard necessities of his position

#### B. *but when*

the man who has done and is doing all of this takes the tone of a rigid moralist and a seeker after uncompromising virtue,

*preaching* from his palace . . .

*refusing* all knowledge that . . .

*proclaiming* in verse worthy . . .

#### THE GORGE OF THE READER RISES

and he turns for relief to someone who

*either* made his life fit his doctrine

*or* if he behaved unworthily of the best that was in him, at least laid no claim to be a spiritual guide.

What fun to watch this balancing act! The secret of a periodic structure is *pacing*, slowly building up steam for a thundering climax like THE GORGE OF THE READER RISES. If the secret is *pacing*, the center is drama, the suspense as the syntactical spring is wound tighter and tighter and finally – ah, got him! – released. Rose has, as his first movement, set up an antiphonal chorus, first a *that* statement (a), then the balancing qualification (a1). Then, after five of these antiphons (the pattern shifts slightly at e1), the second movement begins with *but when*, and continues through three long parallel phrases depending on present participles which refer back to 'the man.' Then the climax. Then a coda which lets us back down gradually to ordinary utterance.

At last, some tangible ingredients for a 'periodic' style:

1. *suspension*, over a number of complex statements;
2. *parallelism* of phrases and clauses – all those 'That's and later the three participles;
3. *balance*, the antiphonal chorus;
4. *climax*, the final thrust that nails Seneca to the wall.

And to these we must add a last quality that exudes from periodic structure, *virtuoso display*. Rose does not just hack his man down. He fences him into pieces *con brio*.

When a style falls so easily as this does into a two-dimensional diagrammatic form, stretching itself out on the page so that the information reaching the eye



coincides perfectly with the rhythms reaching the ear, you begin to wonder whether the diagrammatic layout might be more suitable than the conventional linear one to what is said and how. The linear layout, after all, has always been dictated by a shortage of white space. The printer packed in words like a modern airliner packs in the cattlepersons, jammed together in dense rows from margin to margin. For electronic text, however, white space is free. No need for tourist-class discomfort. It may be that, in the electronic environment, the periodic style will re-establish itself again as the natural and equipotential rival of the hypertextual running style.

With the basic pattern before us, look at a passage where suspension works differently. It comes from a seventeenth-century collection of religious meditations by William Drummond.

## A Reverie on Death

Having often and diverse times, when I had given myself to rest in the quiet solitariness of the night, found my imagination troubled with a confused fear, or sorrow or horror, which, interrupting sleep, did astonish my senses, and rouse me all appalled, and transported in a sudden agony and amazedness: of such an unaccustomed perturbation not knowing, not being able to dive into any apparent cause, carried away with the stream of my then doubting thoughts, I began to ascribe it to that secret foreknowledge and presaging power of the prophetic mind, and to interpret such an agony to be to the spirit, as a sudden faintness and universal weariness useth to be to the body, a sign of following sickness; or as winter lightnings, earthquakes, and monsters are to commonwealths and great cities, harbingers of wretched events, and emblems of their sudden destinies.

Hereupon, not thinking it strange, if whatsoever is human should befall me, knowing how Providence overcomes grief, and discountenances crosses; and that, as we should not despair in evils which may happen to us, we should not be too confident, nor lean much to those goods we enjoy; I began to turn over in my remembrance all that could afflict miserable mortality, and to forecast everything which could beget gloomy and sad apprehensions, and with a mask of horror show itself to human eyes; till in the end, as by unities and points mathematicians are brought to great numbers and huge greatness, after many fantastical glances of the woes of mankind, and those incumbrances which follow upon life, I was brought to think, and with amazement, on the last of human terrors, or (as one termed it) the last of all dreadful and terrible evils, Death.

(from Henry Craik, *English Prose Selections*, vol. 1,  
London, 1893, p. 227)

Both sentences are built around a core which has been opened at many points and parentheses inserted. The first sentence core: 'Having found my imagination troubled, I began to ascribe it to secret foreknowledge and to interpret it as a sign of following sickness.' The second, a little harder to extract: 'Hereupon I began to turn over in my remembrance all that could afflict miserable mortality, till I was brought to think on Death.' This skeleton sentence, stretched and tensioned by three parentheses, creates suspension, but one different in shape and rhythm from H. J. Rose's period. Rose signals his skeleton with those 'that's and parallel participles. Here, the skeleton lies buried in the parenthetical interruptions. The style extends itself outward from its core (in our diagram, the left edge) by parenthetical extensions. Its internal logic wants to qualify and extend, and it does so on several levels. Do you notice, first, how every noun attracts a qualifying adjective: 'quiet solitariness,' 'confused fear,' 'sudden agony,' 'apparent cause,' 'doubting thoughts,' 'secret foreknowledge,' 'sudden faintness,' 'universal weariness,' and so on? Above this works a polysyndetic 'and' pattern of additional specification:

often – **and** diverse times  
astonish my senses – **and** rouse me all appalled  
**and** transported  
secret foreknowledge – **and** presaging power

and so on. The prepositional phrases work in the same way, adding parenthetical specification. So 'given myself to rest' is qualified by 'in the quiet solitariness,' and this in turn further specified by 'of the night.' In the H. J. Rose period, the lower ranks of the sentence all present themselves as thought out beforehand. Not here – just the opposite. The parenthetical qualifications seem *ex tempore*, seem to follow a mind in the act of meditating, of exploring possibilities. Parallelism ('to be to the spirit'; 'to be to the body,' for example) is played down, not up. Imbalance, not balance, establishes the dominant pattern. Try reading the passage aloud. We don't know when to raise the pitch of the voice, or how high, to indicate all those parentheses within parentheses. The syntax gives you no visual clues – no parallelism, no antiphonal chorus.

The second sentence-paragraph, its suspension arranged exactly as in the first, starts with a word that leaves the sense hovering – 'Hereupon' – then moves to an 'I began' in mid-sentence which has its sense completed, in turn, in a climactic 'Death.' And the two sentences work as a single unit, too, stretching from the first word, 'Having,' to the last word, 'Death.' 'Death' works strongly as a climax, the end of the meditation as it is the end of life. Or is it an *anticlimax*? Notice that last parenthesis – '(as one termed it)' – just before 'Death.' It seems to deflate the whole climax, to suggest that Death is not the most terrible of evils. We only *think* so to scare ourselves by dwelling upon it. The twistings and turnings of the syntax represent twistings and turnings of the mind, tergiversations that



Having often (and diverse times,) when I had given myself to rest found my imagination troubled

which, (interrupting sleep,)

(in the quiet solitariness of the night,)  
(with a confused fear,  
or sorrow  
or horror,)

did astonish my senses,  
and rouse me all appalled,

(and transported) (in a sudden agony and amazedness)

of such an unaccustomed perturbation not knowing,

not being able to dive into any apparent cause,  
carried away (with the stream of my then doubting thoughts)

I began

to ascribe it to that secret foreknowledge

and presaging power of the prophetic mind, and

to interpret such an agony to be

to the spirit, (as a sudden faintness and universal weariness useth to be to the body,)

a sign of following sickness; or

(as winter lightnings, earthquakes, and monsters are to commonwealths and great cities)

harbingers of wretched events, (and emblems of their sudden destinies.)

Hereupon,

(1)

not thinking it strange, if whatsoever is human should befall me,

(2)

knowing how Providence overcomes grief, and

discourtenances crosses; and

(3) (3a)

(knowing) that, as we should not despair in evils which may happen to us,

(3b)

we should not be too confident,

(3c)

nor lean much to those goods we enjoy;

I began

(1)

to turn over in my remembrance all that could afflict miserable mortality, and

(2)

to forecast everything which could beget gloomy and sad apprehensions, and  
with a mask of horror show itself to human eyes;

till

(1)

in the end, as by unities and points mathematicians are brought to great numbers and huge greatness,

(2)

after many fantastical glances of the woes of mankind,

and those incumbrances which follow upon life,

I was brought to think, and with amazement, on

the last of human terrors, or (as one termed it)

(2)

the last of all dreadful and terrible evils,

Death.



are ironical or unnecessary vexations man offers to himself. How does this irony affect how we analyze the style? The style has become self-consciously allegorical, modeled a mind tending to run away with itself, trap itself in its own convolutions. This 'running' we may tentatively put down as one of the meanings of the 'running' style, a following of the mind as it worries a problem through. To the extent that Drummond is ironical here the passage (to answer the question just asked) comes to be *about* the running style, about the traps, in sense and syntax, the mind sets for itself.

In Drummond, then, we see the basic suspension and climax of the period, but with internal elements that begin to liquefy, to run. The liquefaction goes further, the nascent internal logic of suspended running style grows more pronounced, in the later style of Henry James. James, as William Allen White wrote in his *Autobiography*, seemed to speak the same way: 'He talked, as he wrote, in long involved sentences with a little murmur – mum-mum-mum – standing for parentheses, and with those rhetorical hooks he seemed to be poking about his mind, fumbling through the whole basket of his conversational vocabulary, to find the exact word, which he used in talking about most ordinary matters. He seemed to create with those parentheses.' Here is a passage from *The Wings of the Dove* creaking with parentheses. See what White was talking about?

It was really a matter of nerves; it was exactly because he was nervous that he *could* go straight; yet if that condition should increase he must surely go wild. He was walking, in short, on a high ridge, steep down on either side, where the proprieties – once he could face at all remaining there – reduced themselves to his keeping his head. It was Kate who had so perched him, and there came up for him at moments, as he found himself planting one foot exactly before another, a sensible sharpness of irony as to her management of him. It wasn't that she had put him in danger – to be in real danger with her would have had another quality. There glowed for him in fact a kind of rage for what he was not having; an exasperation, a resentment, begotten truly by the very impatience of desire, in respect to his postponed and relegated, his so extremely manipulated state. It was beautifully done of her, but what was the real meaning of it unless that he was perpetually bent to her will? His idea from the first, from the very first of his knowing her, had been to be, as the French called it, *bon prince* with her, mindful of the good humour and generosity, the contempt, in the matter of confidence, for small outlays and small savings, that belonged to the man who wasn't generally afraid. There were things enough, goodness knew – for it was the moral of his plight – that he couldn't afford; but what had had a charm for him if not the notion of living handsomely, to make up for it, in another way of not at all events reading the romance of his existence in a cheap edition. All he had originally felt in her came back to him, was indeed actually as present as ever – how he had admired and

envied what he called to himself her direct talent for life, as distinguished from his own, a poor weak thing of the occasion, amateurishly patched up; only it irritated him the more that this was exactly what was now, ever so characteristically, standing out in her.

It was thanks to her direct talent for life, verily, that he was just where he was, and that was above all just *how* he was. The proof of a decent reaction in him against so much passivity was, with no great richness, that he at least knew – knew, that is, how he was, and how little he liked it as a thing accepted in mere helplessness. He was, for the moment, wistful – that above all described it; that was so large a part of the force that, as the autumn afternoon closed in, kept him, on his traghetto, positively throbbing with his question. His question connected itself, even while he stood, with his special smothered soreness, his sense almost of shame; and the soreness and the shame were less as he let himself, with the help of the conditions about him, regard it as serious. It was born, for that matter, partly of those conditions, those conditions that Kate had so almost insolently braved, had been willing without a pang, to see him ridiculously – ridiculously so far as just complacently – exposed to. How little it could be complacently he was to feel with the last thoroughness before he had moved from his point of vantage.

(Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, New York: Penguin, 1974)

Everything exfoliates from the central strategy of parenthetical qualification. So much qualification has come into play, however, that the large central suspension has snapped. In its place, James uses a pattern of almost ritualistic repetition, of compulsive anaphora. The dominant sentence-beginning and phrase-beginning pattern looks like this:

It was really a matter of nerves . . .  
 it was exactly because . . .  
 He was walking . . .  
 It was Kate who had . . .  
 It wasn't that she . . .  
 what he was not having . . .  
 It was beautifully done . . .  
 what was the real meaning . . .  
 he was perpetually . . .  
 his idea *had been* to be as the French call it . . .  
 There were things enough . . .  
 it was the moral of . . .  
 It was thanks to her . . .  
 where he was . . .  
 that he was . . .



how he was . . .  
 how he was and how little . . .  
 He was for the moment . . .  
 that was so large a part . . .  
 It was born . . .

And I've left several derivative forms out! Still, compulsive ritualistic repetition, as mannered and self-conscious a style as English affords. But instead of never repeating the phrase that keeps us suspended, James repeats constantly.

We may have surprised here a general rule for style. Stuff a style so full of parentheses that the hypotactic suspension breaks, and you return to extreme parataxis. Instead of repeating nothing, keeping everything up in the air, you repeat everything. And repeat it as a kind of internal summary, a reminder of where you are. The parenthesis strategy gets redoubled, expanded, into restatement and repetition. I'll chart first the obvious parentheses and then the repetitions and restatements.

Parentheses: It will be simplest here if I just add them where appropriate. Notice that James, to soften the parenthetical appearance of the style, never uses ( ) in this passage. Again, I'm bearing down on the parenthetical strategy, exaggerating it to make it show.

It was (really) a matter of nerves; it was (exactly) because he was nervous that he could go straight; yet (if that condition should increase) he must surely go wild. He was walking, (in short,) on a high ridge, (steep down on either side,) where the proprieties – (once he could face at all remaining there) – reduced themselves to his keeping his head. It was Kate who had so perched him, and there came up for him at moments, (as he found himself planting one foot exactly before another,) a sensible sharpness of irony as to her management of him. It wasn't that she had put him in danger – (to be in real danger with her would have had another quality). There glowed for him (in fact) a kind of rage for what he was not having; an exasperation, a resentment, begotten truly by the very impatience of desire, in respect to his postponed and relegated, (his so extremely manipulated) state. It was beautifully done of her, but what was the real meaning of it unless that he was perpetually bent to her will? His idea from the first, (from the very first) of his knowing her, had been to be, (as the French call it,) *bon prince* with her, mindful of the good humour and generosity, the contempt (in the matter of confidence,) for small outlays and small savings, that belonged to the man who wasn't generally afraid. There were things enough (goodness knew) – (for it was the moral of his plight) – that he couldn't afford; but what had had a charm for him if not the notion of living handsomely, (to make up for it,) in another way of not (at all events) reading the romance of his existence in a cheap edition. All he had originally felt in her

came back to him, (was indeed actually as present as ever) – how he had admired and envied (what he called to himself) her direct talent for life, as distinguished from his own, a poor weak thing of the occasion, amateurishly patched up; only it irritated him the more that this was exactly what was now, (ever so characteristically,) standing out in her.

It was thanks to her direct talent for life, (verily,) that he was just where he was, and that he was (above all) just how he was. The proof of a decent reaction in him against so much passivity was, (with no great richness,) that he at least knew – (knew, (that is,)) how he was, and how little he liked it as a thing accepted in mere helplessness. He was, (for the moment,) wistful – (that (above all) described it); that was so large a part of the force that, (as the autumn afternoon closed in,) kept him, (on his *traghetto*,) positively throbbing with his question. His question connected itself, (even while he stood,) with his special smothered soreness, his sense almost of shame; and the soreness and the shame were less as he let himself, (with the help of the conditions about him,) regard it as serious. It was born, (for that matter) partly of the conditions, (those conditions that Kate had (so almost insolently) braved), had been willing, (without a pang,) to see him ridiculously – (ridiculously (so far as just complacently)) – exposed to. How little it could be complacently, he was to feel with the last thoroughness before he had moved from his point of vantage.

The dominant seesaw rhythm models the hesitation about what, in fact, it is (or was) that constitutes the passage's central theme. Again, the style has become allegorical, a style about the hesitation and qualification it creates.

(A parenthesis about parentheticality: It is interesting to pause for a moment and speculate about how parenthetical interruption might work in the electronic expressive field. Might the parenthesis simply flash briefly at us, emerge from the main field of assertions briefly and then vanish? Asking ourselves about alternatives to the ( ) parenthetical marks makes us ask just what those now-so-familiar marks really mean. I'll return to this later, when we consider electronic text.)

Word repetition intensifies this basic parenthetical pattern. We have already seen the starring 'it was' anaphora. Now the supporting cast:

matter of nerves  
 he was nervous

go straight  
 go wild

in danger  
 in real danger



from the first  
from the very first

small outlays  
small savings

her direct talent for life  
her direct talent for life

his special smothered soreness, his sense almost of shame  
the soreness and shame

the conditions  
those conditions

see his ridiculously  
ridiculously so far as

just complacently  
could be complacently

Some of these repetitions are isocolons, equal in length and structure, and so could be called parallel, but the parallelism doesn't strike us. The small-scale repetition comes across instead. James uses a periodic style, then, only on a smaller scale: 'his postponed and relegated, his so extremely manipulated state.' No large-scale suspensions; no big climax. The liquefaction we saw beginning in Drummond here takes a turn toward parataxis, back, oddly enough, toward Hemingway. It can continue this way, toward discrete self-contained units, or it can liquefy more, become entirely an affair of hesitant stops, starts and requalifications.

Here is an example of this second direction, by that master of hesitant stops and starts, Laurence Sterne:

—Mr. *Shandy*, my father, Sir, would see nothing in the light in which others placed it;—he placed things in his own light;—he would weigh nothing in common scales;—no,—he was too refined a researcher to lay open to so gross an imposition.—To come at the exact weight of things in the scientific steel-yard, the fulcrum, he would say, should be almost invisible, to avoid all friction from popular tenets;—without this the minutiae of philosophy, which should always turn the balance, will have no weight at all.—Knowledge, like matter, he would affirm, was divisible *in infinitum*;—that the grains and scruples were as much a part of it, as the gravitation of the whole world.—In a word, he would say, error was error,—no matter where it fell,—whether in a fraction,—

or a pound,—'twas alike fatal to truth, and she was kept down at the bottom of her well as inevitably by a mistake in the dust of a butterfly's wing,—as in the disk of the sun, the moon, and all the stars of heaven put together.

(*Tristram Shandy*, Bk. II, Chap. XIX.  
Ed. James Aiken Work, New York: Odyssey Press, 1940)

'Tis the voice of improvisation itself, writing one word and trusting to God Almighty for the next. The running style, one would think, just running on. The famous Shandean dash punctuating a madcap flight between random observations. Yet, subtract the dashes and the interpolations and see what you get.

Mr. *Shandy* would see nothing in the light in which others placed it;  
**he placed** things in his own light;  
**he would weigh** nothing in common scales;  
**he was too refined** a researcher to lay open to so gross an imposition.

There is a kind of climax, here, in the three phrases of increasing length, tied together by the *anaphora* built upon 'he.' The principle of construction is the venerable rhetorical device of *amplification*, the variation to a single point by restatement. The argument develops in equally orthodox fashion.

#### *Necessary condition*

To come at the exact weight of things in the scientific steel-yard, the fulcrum should be almost invisible, to avoid all friction from popular tenets.

#### *Result without/with this condition obtaining*

Without this, the minutiae of philosophy, which should always turn the balance, will have no weight at all.

#### *Governing generalization*

Knowledge, like matter, was divisible *in infinitum*;

#### *Amplifying restatements of this generalization*

The grains and scruples were as much a part of it, as the gravitation of the whole world.

Error was error, no matter where it fell.

'twas alike fatal to truth



*Climactic personification of argument*

She was kept down at the bottom of her well as inevitably by a mistake in the dust of a butterfly's wing, as in the disk of the sun, the moon, and all the stars of heaven put together.

This sequence is not really *periodic*, but it does proceed through a series of methodical statements and restatements of the main point. It is conceptual argument of a perfectly ordinary kind – and, though Sterne could never have predicted it, highly topical as well! The argument – and it is not easy to follow – if I may be permitted a Shandean dash – states, through a series of variations, what students of nonlinear systems call ‘sensitivity to initial conditions,’ or ‘the butterfly effect’ (a butterfly’s wings in Australia, suitably amplified by the chaotic forces of nature, change the weather in Newfoundland). Walter Shandy, Tristram’s father, emerges as a careful, orthodox, methodical rhetorician. Sterne overlays and interrupts this traditional argument with a series of convulsive lurches which really do embody the running style. It catalyzes the traditional set of assertions, and the power of the style emerges from the catalysis. It *pretends* to improvisation and thoughtless haste that did not preside over its actual creation.

Here, by extreme contrast, is a prose passage that really does emerge from an improvisational absence of mind. It opens a book about, of all things, language and style.

This book is an attempt at an exercise in linguistics. The purpose of writing it is to try to discover a set of linguistic principles which might be used for an examination of what is called *style* in the use of English. That there is or can be any such concept as that of style in the use of language is an intuition which the student of linguistics can theorize about in at least two ways.

(A. E. Darbyshire, *A Grammar of Style*, London: Andrew Deutsch, 1971)

We will not follow the author into these two ways, having already a taste of the prose sufficiently large for purposes of contrast. It proceeds to think aloud, with no self-consciousness about the shape of the thought. A string of concepts glued together by prepositions and an *is* now and then, it just cranks out concepts. Look at it.

This book *is* an attempt  
at an exercise  
in linguistics.

The purpose of writing it *is*  
to try  
to discover a set of linguistic principles which might be used

for an examination  
of what is called *style*  
in the use  
of English.

That there *is* or can be  
any such concept  
as that  
of style  
in the use  
of language  
*is* an intuition  
which the student  
of linguistics can theorize about  
in at least two ways.

This is a genuine running style, of a certain sort. It just runs on, shapeless and lifeless. The oscillation between sense and shape, between looking *through* a style to its conceptual argument and looking *at* the shape of its prose, has here never even gotten started. Here is a writer, it proclaims, who has no sense of style, however much he or she will discuss that concept hereafter.

Here – welcome relief – is another piece of prose altogether. It comes from a letter by Janet Flanner to her friend Natalia Danesi Murray. (Janet Flanner wrote, for nearly half a century, the famous *New Yorker* ‘Letter from Paris’ signed ‘Genêt’.) Edmund Wilson once called Janet Flanner ‘the supreme commander of the English sentence in her time,’ and one sees some of that skill here, in a letter written in a hurry, which runs from point to point, as happens in a private letter when one’s syntactic defenses are down, and yet which seems instinctive with rhythm, emphasis, turn of wit, and climax.

Darling,

. . . I am glad you like the Modern Art Musée piece’s writing. I worked very hard on it. Those big shows take hours to synthesize. I hope my little Profile in the Letter next week on *Le Monde* turns out all right. I spent this morning there in the *Monde* office with Nathalie Sarraute’s daughter who is second on theater criticism, very nice young woman who gave me lots of stuff. I did not tell her this. Yesterday I went to *L’Express*’s office archives to hunt up and buy the copy which had a big piece on *Le Monde* written several years back by Françoise Giroud, who had been Servan-Schreiber’s lover, for whom he left his wife, then left her six months ago to marry a de Fouquières girl twenty years old. The woman in charge of *les collections* said, ‘It will be very difficult to find Mme. Giroud’s piece because we no



longer have her name on our file.' I said, astounded, 'But for years she wrote some of *Express*'s pieces.'

She saw she had let the cat out of the bag, so said hastily, 'Well, we have just started our morgue here this month. We are very far behind,' and pointed to all the old *Express* copies in the corner on the floor which still awaited classifying. How shocking! Servan-Schreiber fired her from the paper, had a staff meeting to tell the staff she no longer belonged, and now her name is not on file as having written major articles. Well, sex is a wonderful force in strength at least.

Last week, I saw a citation from some English priest of the eighteenth century who worked in a leper colony and was so horrified to see those mutilated creatures still coupling that he remarked, 'Sometimes I think that God was not in a serious mood when he invented sex!'

(*Darlinghissima: Letters to a Friend*, edited by Natalia Murray, New York: Random House, 1985)

A report on events: 'I am glad,' 'I worked,' 'I hope,' 'I spent.' Following from one event to another. As we often do with those closest to us, we allow our syntax to agglutinate, the ideas to come out as they occur to us:

Yesterday I went to *L'Express*'s office archives to hunt up and buy the copy which had a big piece on *Le Monde* written several years back by Françoise Giroud, who had been Servan-Schreiber's lover, for whom he left his wife, then left her six months ago to marry a de Fouquières girl twenty years old.

But pointed exchanges of dialogue follow, and there are short sentences that bring the rhythm up short: 'I did not tell her this' / 'How shocking!' And a conclusion emerging from the whole: 'Well, sex is a wonderful force in strength at least.' And then the leper-colony anecdote that feeds back on the previous passage. No single pattern predominates and the whole is animated by verbs. The 'running style' covers a great deal of ground.

We've been proceeding ahistorically in *Analyzing Prose*. But, to help chart this wide territory which developed in opposition to the periodic style, I want to put it into an historical context. When, at the end of the Renaissance (beginning in England, say, about 1575), a reaction set in against periodic structure as the ideal sentence shape, the ensuing revolution took place under the banner of science. The new prose style would more accurately reflect the world as it really was, not as it had been stuffed into the orderly and balanced mini-drama of the periodic sentence. As it worked out, nature as it really was came to be described in three different styles, all of them thought to be 'anti-Ciceronian,' that is, anti-periodic.

The first we have already been discussing as the 'running style.' It tried to reflect the mind in the process of thinking by using connectives that did not subordinate but simply added on. We've looked at some examples, including Sterne's style in *Tristram Shandy*, which (although it came in the middle of the next century) can serve as a defining case. Pressed far enough in this direction, a running style becomes the stream-of-consciousness used by Joyce or Faulkner.

The second attempt to reflect nature resulted in a compressed, aphoristic style often called the 'curt' style, or sometimes the 'pointed style,' or sometimes the 'clipped style,' or sometimes the 'exploded period.' Let's look at an 'exploded period' first. The Ciceronian period built toward a climactic conclusion. The 'exploded period' does just the opposite. It offers the conclusion, in a compressed form up front, and then offers random comments about it, seemingly as they occur to the mind of the writer reflecting on the central truth just stated. Here's an example from 'Of Marriage and the Single Life,' an essay by Francis Bacon (1561-1626).

He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to Fortune, for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief. Certainly the best works and of greatest merit for the public have proceeded from the unmarried or childless men, which both in affection and means have married and endowed the public. Yet it were great reason that those that have children should have greatest care of future times, unto which they know they must transmit their dearest pledges. Some there are who though they lead a single life, yet their thoughts do end with themselves and account future times impertinences. Nay, there are some other that account wife and children but as bills of charges. Nay more, there are some foolish rich covetous men that take a pride in having no children, because they may be thought so much the richer.

First, the now-famous theme:

He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to Fortune,

Then the variations. First, a qualification of the main theme, generated by employing a central device of this style - antithesis:

for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief.

Then the first reflection:

Certainly the best works and of greatest merit for the public have proceeded from the unmarried or childless men, which both in affection and means have married and endowed the public.



This outrageous 'certainty' is amplified by three pairings which categorize in more detail: 'unmarried or childless men,' 'affections and means,' and 'married and endowed.' Then a statement of the opposite case, making a larger antithesis:

Yet it were great reason that those that have children should have greatest care of future times, unto which they know they must transmit their dearest pledges.

Then three further reflections on childlessness, each building on the previous one, just as we do when thinking out a problem in conversation:

Some there are who though they lead a single life, yet their thoughts do end with themselves and account future times impertinences.

Nay, there are some other that account wife and children but as bills of charges.

Nay more, there are some foolish rich covetous men that take a pride in having no children, because they may be thought so much the richer.

No climax at the end; no sign the whole chain of reasoning had been thought out beforehand; somewhat abrupt transitions ('Some there are,' 'Nay, there are,' 'Nay more'), several antithetical contrasts, the whole built on a single, pointed and condensed moral reflection. It is from this last characteristic that the name 'pointed style' comes. The 'point' is the condensed, pithy, often proverbial and always memorable statement of a general truth. Often, though not always, it builds on paradox and antithesis. 'Period,' in such a 'collapsed period' can mean only a long sentence. There is nothing 'periodic' about it.

The third attempt to reflect nature was by a deliberately plain, unmetaphorical, set of discreet statements. Puritan preachers adopted this style, as did natural scientists. A contemporary sermon on short prayers defined the ideal: 'In Brevity of Speech a Man does not speak so much Words, as Things; Things in their precise and naked Truth; and stripped of their Rhetorical Mask and their Fallacious Gloss.' (How, though, does one speak a thing?) If the running style tried to be faithful to the realities of the mind, for the scientist the C-B-S style tried to be faithful to the realities of the external world. For the Puritan preacher, it tried to be faithful to the equally certain world of God's Word. From this effort stems the modern scientific style, rich in passives and forms of 'to be,' which just tells us how the world is. From this effort also stem all the modern English translations of the Bible, translations trying to strip away the rhetorical layerings of the King James Version to find the plain truth beneath. This hunger for plain, unself-conscious language was not, of course, invented by natural science or Puritan faith. Shakespeare, in his early play about style, *Love's Labour's Lost*, calls

this the hunger for 'russet yeas and honest kersey noes.' Here is a passage in which Jesus speaks in russet yeas and honest kersey noes, from Matthew 5, in the plain language of the *New English Bible*:

Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to complete. I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law until all that must happen has happened.

You can't get much plainer than this. Here we have come upon the headwaters of the C-B-S river of Clarity, Brevity, and Sincerity which forms our dominant theory of prose style today. We might call this simply 'the plain style.'

OK. Three 'return-to-nature' styles, which we shall call the running style, the pointed style, the plain style.<sup>1</sup> Of the three, we might want to argue that the pointed style provides the clearest formal opposite to the periodic. The periodic style provides a formula for studied amplification; the pointed style provides a formula for studied condensation. How this condensation works requires an example, and again I've chosen a passage from Bacon, from the short essay 'Of Studies.'

Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of business. . . . To spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules is the humor of a scholar. They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience, for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need [pruning] by study; and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded

<sup>1</sup> You might want to know that they have other names. For reasons too tedious to recount, the first two of these three are sometimes grouped together into something called the 'Attic' or the 'Senecan' style. Seneca's prose of oracular condensation did serve, at the end of the English Renaissance, as a rallying point for those who opposed the periodic style of Cicero. It was built, though, on the well-dramatized antithetical brevity of the 'point' which we've just illustrated in Bacon much more than on any tendencies to ramble on.

Just to keep the record straight, there were two Senecas, father and son. The father, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, was an historian of rhetoric. He was born in Corduba, Spain, c. 55 BC and lived to c. 37 AD. He left a series of typical rhetoric-school speeches given by famous declaimers and reconstructed from memory; they are usually called the *Controversiae* and the *Suasoriae*. He admired the periodic style of Cicero but wrote a more terse style himself, one which looks forward to the 'Senecan' style of his son, the philosopher of the same name. It was the Younger Seneca (c. 4 BC to 65 AD) who attracted H. D. Rose's wrath, and from whose philosophical style the name 'Senecan' derives. In addition to amassing a great deal of Stoic philosophy, he amassed a great deal of money, and for a considerable time, as a power behind the throne, a great deal of political influence too. He was involved in, or framed into, one plot too many and forced to commit suicide in 65 AD.



in by experience. Crafty men condemn studies; simple men admire them; and wise men use them, for they teach not their own use, but that is a wisdom without them and above them, won by observation. Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider . . . Histories make men wise, poets witty, the mathematics subtle, natural philosophy deep, moral, grave, logic and rhetoric able to contend.

Let's see what the structure looks like, sentence by sentence:

Studies serve for delight,  
for ornament,  
and for ability.

A tricolon, but building to no climax. The verb 'serve' is used once and then assumed twice: [serve] for ornament, [serve] for ability. This kind of ellipsis is called *zeugma*; one verb serves for a series of objects. It creates, obviously enough, a dramatized compression. If you expand the *zeugma*, you get simply three parallel sentences, isocolon.

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Their chief use for delight | is in privateness and retiring;                      |
| for ornament,               | is in discourse;                                     |
| and for ability,            | is in the judgment and disposition of business . . . |

Again, a three-part structure. Again similarity in phrasing and structure. Here, though, the element eliminated after the first statement is the subject, 'Their chief use.' So, with the compression unpacked:

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Their chief use for delight        | is in privateness and retiring;                      |
| [Their chief use] for ornament,    | is in discourse;                                     |
| and [Their chief use] for ability, | is in the judgment and disposition of business . . . |

Then another tricolon:

|  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| To spend too much time in studies      | is sloth;                  |
| to use them too much for ornament      | is affectation;            |
| to make judgment wholly by their rules | is the humor of a scholar. |

Same pattern here but each element a little longer than the last. A similar opening pattern ('To spend,' 'to use,' 'to make judgment'), a similar ending pattern ('is sloth,' 'is affectation,' 'is the humor . . .'). No ellipsis. By this point, a

basic pattern has been established. We might call it the 'Beatitudes' pattern ('Blessed are the . . . for they . . .,' etc.). It is the usual pattern for offering oracular wisdom.

They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience,

for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need pruning by study;

and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large,  
except they be bounded in by experience.

Three elements of increasing length again. A series of discrete pronouncements, the second and third repeating and expanding the sentiment of the first. All three build on the same antithesis: nature vs. experience. Notice the word repetitions: perfect/perfected; natural/natural; experience/experience.

|              |                  |
|--------------|------------------|
| Crafty men   | condemn studies; |
| simple men   | admire them;     |
| and wise men | use them,        |

Again, a three-element isocolon. Notice how a vertical current runs through the passage? 'Crafty,' 'simple,' and 'wise' are drawn together in a tripartite contrast; likewise with 'condemn,' 'admire,' 'use.' Do the three elements build to a climax? What relation do we establish between them? This is left to the reader. When we compare and contrast them, we compress the three statements ever closer. They say different things but their similarity of form makes them more memorable, more proverbial. Next, an explanation for the paradoxicality of the three:

for they teach not their own use,  
but that is a wisdom without them and above them,  
won by observation.

Three-part isocolon, followed by a moral reflection, also three-part, that grows out of them, and explains them. Knowledge is one thing; how to use it is something else, something that you must bring to study from outside it. The connection between the tricolon and what follows after 'for' is subtle: it is because studies bring not the wisdom to use them that they are so differently viewed by crafty, simple, and wise men. Here, the ellipsis, and hence the compression, is one of argument, not nouns or verbs.



Read not to contradict and confute,  
nor to believe and take for granted,  
nor to find talk and discourse,  
but to weigh and consider . . .

Again, isocolon, coupled with what in the Renaissance was called a doublet: 'contradict and confute' / 'believe and take for granted' / 'talk and discourse.' Here the need for a 'Beatitudes' rhythm dictates expansion, not compression. Against this pattern, we insert 'read' elliptically in the second and third elements. Here, there are four elements (*tetracolon*) and the fourth element supplies a climax. What follows depends on an extended elliptical compression.

|                     |                             |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Histories           | make men wise,              |
| poets               | [make men] witty,           |
| the mathematics     | [makes men] subtle,         |
| natural philosophy  | [makes men] deep,           |
| moral [philosophy], | [makes men] grave,          |
| logic and rhetoric  | [make men] able to contend. |

A strong repetitive isocolon pattern: A 'makes men' B. Sentences like this have, as the diagram shows, a strong vertical structure which counterweights the linear alignment of conventional print. It might help to think of the pure running style as horizontal, this pithy proverbial style as vertical, and a periodic style as part-taking of both.

A list of nouns at the beginning:

Histories  
poets  
mathematics  
natural philosophy  
moral [philosophy]  
logic and rhetoric

A list of adjectives at the end:

wise  
witty  
subtle  
deep  
moral  
able to contend.

The brevity of such a list draws into itself still further by omitting the verb, the 'makes men,' after its first statement. Given the initial model, we can supply it ourselves. (Ellipsis again.) But, actually, we do *not* fully supply it. That is how ellipsis works. We *don't* fully supply the missing verb; it hovers in between 'poets' and 'witty,' between 'mathematics' and 'subtle,' without actually coming to ground. If this were an electronic text, we would call such active participation of the reader 'interactive,' and we could make 'makes men' flicker into and out of sight to indicate that we were supplying it to the text, that it was implied but not stated. Because the verb is left up to us, and we can imagine it without supplying it on the page, the noun and adjective draw closer together into a causal unity: poets/witty, mathematics/subtle, moral/grave. You can almost feel the magnetism attracting the two words together, once the pattern has been set up. Brevity, to work in prose style, must always invoke what has been left out, *remind* us of it.

The pointed style chose to emphasize brevity, then, but a well-dramatized brevity, not a transparent and unself-conscious one. We might remember here that every stylistic reformation has been made in the name of 'nature' or 'fact.' The old style, whichever it is, must be called artificial, self-conscious, more interested in words than matter; the new style, whichever it is, natural and unpremeditated, aiming only to give us the facts. Yet the more you kick artifice out the front door, the more it creeps around to the back. Bacon's style here is hardly without pattern. It tries as hard to be 'brief,' and to make that brevity visible, as the periodic style yearns to be, and to seem, comprehensive.

Prose styles rarely come in pure forms, 'purity' being usually a tacit assumption to ignore complications for the sake of analysis. Maybe examples of *mixed styles* will make the patterns easier to see. Here's a balanced combination of plain and running styles, a sixteenth-century lament (well before the stylistic revolution we have just been describing) on the woes of inflation. It comes from Hugh Latimer's masterly sermon, 'Decay of the Yeomanry.'

My father was a yeoman and had no lands of his own, only he had a farm of three or four pound by year at the uttermost, and hereupon he tilled so much as kept half a dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep; and my mother milked thirty kine. He was able, and did find the king a harness, with himself and his horse, while he came to the place that he should receive the king's wages. I can remember that I buckled his harness when he went unto Blackheath field. He kept me to school or else I had not been able to have preached before the king's majesty now. He married my sisters with five pound, or twenty nobles apiece, so that he brought them up in godliness and fear of God. He kept hospitality for his poor neighbours, and some alms he gave to the poor. And all this he did of the said farm, where he that now hath it payeth sixteen pound by year or more, and is not able to do anything for his prince, for himself, nor for his children, or give a cup of drink to the poor.



Latimer's prose is usually thought to typify homegrown English vernacular prose, coming from a time before the tight patterns we've just seen in Bacon. But can we not see a kind of 'point' here too, as it perfectly combines focus on particular discrete statements with the easy associative movement from subject to subject. It doesn't *look like* a formal prose and it doesn't *sound like* one either, and yet it hangs on a very clear trellis of parallel phrases and pronoun repetitions. Running styles can have clear internal structures. See how it breaks out:

My father                was a yeoman  
and                        had no lands of his own,  
only                      **he** had a farm of three or four pound by year at  
                              the uttermost,  
                    and hereupon **he** tilled so much as kept half a dozen men.  
                    **He** had walk for a hundred sheep; and  
my mother milked thirty kine.  
                    **He** was able, and did find the king a harness,  
                    with **himself** and his horse,  
                    while **he** came to the place  
                    that **he** should receive the king's wages.  
**I** can remember that **I** buckled **his** harness  
                    when **he** went unto Blackheath field.  
                    **He** kept **me** to school or else **I** had not been  
                    able to have  
preached before the king's majesty now.  
                    **He** married **my** sisters with five pound, or  
                    twenty nobles  
apiece, so that **he** brought them up in godliness and fear of  
God.  
                    **He** kept hospitality for **his** poor neighbors,  
and some alms **he** gave to the poor.  
And all this **he** did of the said farm,  
                    where **he** that now hath it payeth sixteen pound by year  
                    or more,  
                    and is not able to do anything  
                    for **his** prince,  
                    for **himself**,  
nor for **his** children,  
                    or give a cup of drink to the poor.

A pattern not too different from the 'Beatitudes' one we have observed in Bacon. Running styles often create such internal patterns; they provide a counterweight to the looseness of their syntactical relationships. Once we put a style in one category, we should not shut our eyes to other patterns we may find in it.

As a final exercise, let's put to work our accumulated analytical powers on a style which, though hardly complex or difficult to describe, does not fall entirely into any one of the stylistic categories we have been discussing. It seems rather to move from one to the other as needed, creating from this eclecticism a definite stylistic signature. It is an informal obituary for Edward Villiers by the great nineteenth-century diarist Charles Fulke Greville:

November 7th [1843]. – Last night came intelligence from Nice that Edward Villiers was dead. He went there in a hopeless state, was worse after his arrival; then an abscess in his lungs broke, which gave a momentary gleam of hope, but he expired very soon after. I had great regard for him, and he deserved it. He was a man little known of the world in general, shy, reserved to strangers, cold and rather austere in his manners, and being very short-sighted, made people think he meant to slight them when he had no such intention. He was not fitted to bustle into public notice, and such ambition as he had was not of the noisy and ostentatious kind. But no man was more beloved by his family and friends, and none could be more agreeable in any society when he was completely at his ease. He was most warm-hearted and affectionate, sincere, obliging, disinterested, unselfish, and of scrupulous integrity, by which I mean integrity in the largest sense, not merely that which shrinks from doing a dishonourable or questionable action, but which habitually refers to conscientious principles in every transaction of life. He viewed things with the eye of a philosopher, and aimed at establishing a perfect consistency between his theory and his practice. He had a remarkably acute and searching intellect, with habits of patient investigation and mature deliberation; his soul was animated by ardent aspirations after the improvement and the happiness of mankind, and he abhorred injustice and oppression in all their shapes and disguises with an honest intensity which produced something of a morbid sentiment in his mind, and sometimes betrayed him into mistaken impressions and erroneous conclusions. The expansive benevolence of his moral sentiments powerfully influenced his political opinions, and his deep sympathy with the poor not only rendered him inexorably severe to the vices of the rich, but made him regard with aversion and distrust the aristocratic elements of our institutions, and rendered him an ardent promoter of the most extensive schemes of progressive reform. But while he clung with inflexible constancy to his own opinions, no man was more tolerant of the opinion of others. In conversation he was animated, brilliant, amusing, and profound, bringing sincerity, single-mindedness, and knowledge to bear upon every discussion. His life, though short, uneventful, and retired, was passed in the contemplation of subjects of the highest interest and worthiest to occupy the thoughts of a good and wise man, and the few intimacies he cultivated



were with congenial minds, estimable for their moral excellence or distinguished by their intellectual qualities and attainments. The world at large will never know what virtues and talents have been prematurely snatched away from it, for those only who have seen Edward Villiers in the unrestraint and unreserve of domestic familiarity can appreciate the charm of his disposition and the vigor of his understanding. No stranger would have divined that under that cold and grave exterior there lay concealed an exquisite sensibility, the most ardent affections, and a mind fertile in every good and noble quality. To the relations and friends, who were devotedly attached to him, the loss is irreparable and will long be deplored, and the only consolation which offers itself is to be found in the circumstances of his end. He was surrounded by kind and affectionate friends, and expired in the arms of a wife whose conduct he himself described to have been that of a heroine as well as an angel. He was in possession of all his faculties, and was free from bodily pain. He died with the cheerfulness of a philosopher, and the resignation of a Christian, happy, devout, and hopeful, and joyfully contemplating death in an assured faith of a resurrection from the dead.

(Charles C. F. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV, and Queen Victoria*, ed. Henry Reeve, 8 vols., London: Longmans, Green, 1888, Vol. 5, Second Part, pp. 212-14)

Greville's diary entry begins with a statement plain enough to please any Puritan divine or modern scientist.

— Last night came intelligence from Nice that Edward Villiers was dead.

Next a description of the event as it happened, in a running style.

He went there in a hopeless state, was worse after his arrival; then an abscess in his lungs broke, which gave a momentary gleam of hope, but he expired very soon after.

Then a compound statement in the Hemingway manner.

I had great regard for him, and he deserved it.

We might think of this passage as an 'exploded period' of the sort discussed earlier. In such a framework, this would be the summary conclusion which comes first, the concise 'point' which the following eulogy elaborates. It also establishes the basic syntactic and rhythmic pattern for the whole passage: compound statement.

He was a man little known of the world in general, shy, reserved to strangers, cold and rather austere in his manners, and being very short-sighted, made people think he meant to slight them when he had no such intention.

Back to the running style here, moving from manners to eyesight and back to manners in no special or climactic order. Notice, working against this running shape, the basic compound structure: 'He was a man . . . and being very short-sighted . . .'

He was not fitted to bustle into public notice, and such ambition as he had was not of the noisy and ostentatious kind.

Compound statement again. And then followed by an expanded version of the same. I've put the expansions in ( )s.

But no man was more beloved (by his family and friends,) and none could be more agreeable (in any society when he was completely at his ease.)

Then a running style sentence which moves from attribute to attribute.

He was most warm-hearted and affectionate, sincere, obliging, disinterested, unselfish, and of scrupulous integrity, by which I mean integrity in the largest sense, not merely that which shrinks from doing a dishonourable or questionable action, but which habitually refers to conscientious principles in every transaction of life.

Another expanded compound construction.

He viewed things with the eye of a philosopher, and aimed at establishing a perfect consistency between his theory and his practice.

The running/compound alternation continues with a running style that mediates first on mind and then on soul.

He had a remarkably acute and searching intellect, with habits of patient investigation and mature deliberation; his soul was animated by ardent aspirations after the improvement and the happiness of mankind, and he abhorred injustice and oppression in all their shapes and disguises with an honest intensity which produced something of a morbid sentiment in his mind, and sometimes betrayed him into mistaken impressions and erroneous conclusions.



In the sentence which follows, the running and the compound patterns seem balanced: X, Y + elaborations, and Z.

The expansive benevolence of his moral sentiments powerfully influenced his political opinions,

and his deep sympathy with the poor not only rendered him inexorably severe to the vices of the rich, but made him regard with aversion and distrust the aristocratic elements of our institutions,

and rendered him an ardent promoter of the most extensive schemes of progressive reform.

Then a combination of isocolon and chiasmus, antithetical habits which remind us of a pointed style:

But while he clung with inflexible constancy to his own opinions, no man was more tolerant of the opinion of others.

Isocolon: inflexible constancy to his own opinions  
more tolerant of the opinion of others

|           |          |           |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
|           | A        | B         |
| Chiasmus: | his own  | opinions  |
|           | B        | A         |
|           | opinions | of others |

Then a running list of attributes:

In conversation he was animated, brilliant, amusing, and profound, bringing sincerity, single-mindedness, and knowledge to bear upon every discussion.

Then a sentence with clear balanced elements, climactic tricolon ('short, uneventful, and retired') that move toward a periodic style. Yet the basic compound pattern persists, but expanded so that the style seems to 'run.'

His life, though short, uneventful, and retired, was passed in the contemplation of subjects of the highest interest and worthiest to occupy the thoughts of a good and wise man, and the few intimacies he cultivated were with congenial minds, estimable for their moral excellence or distinguished by their intellectual qualities and attainments.

Then the compound pattern reasserts itself:

The world at large will never know what virtues and talents have been prematurely snatched away from it, for those only who have seen Edward Villiers in the unrestraint and unreserve of domestic familiarity can appreciate the charm of his disposition and the vigor of his understanding.

Then a climactic tricolon:

No stranger would have divined that under that cold and grave exterior there lay concealed an exquisite sensibility, the most ardent affections, and a mind fertile in every good and noble quality.

Then we return to following events as they happen, as a running style seeks to do, but here realized in a series of compound constructions:

To the relations and friends, who were devotedly attached to him, the loss is irreparable and will long be deplored, and the only consolation which offers itself is to be found in the circumstances of his end. He was surrounded by kind and affectionate friends, and expired in the arms of a wife whose conduct he himself supposed to have been that of a heroine as well as an angel. He was in possession of all his faculties, and was free from bodily pain.

Then a climactic sentence which might allow us to think of the whole passage as indeed an 'exploded period' of the sort usually described as a running style; the passage had begun with notice of the death; it ends with the death itself and the resurrection which Villiers believed would follow it.

He died with the cheerfulness of a philosopher, and the resignation of a Christian, happy, devout, and hopeful, and joyfully contemplating death in an assured faith of a resurrection from the dead.

In prose behavior, no more than in any other kind, do we often find the pure case, the crystalline form. Rather, as here, we're perpetually committed to a chain of circular interpretation to analyze a mixed case. We take an admittedly vague term and use it to analyze a style. The analysis feeds back on, enriches and expands, our sense of what the term means. So much so, sometimes, that we need a new term. That term in its turn is tested against prose experience and refined as an analytical tool. The more experience we have in doing this, the more likely the circle of interpretation will become an upward spiral in which analytical terms allow us to see more in a particular style and the uniqueness of that particular style tells us more about the verbal richness that the term would point to.



Descriptive analysis, then, although a more straightforward affair than rendering value judgments, hardly lends itself to the impersonal objectivity of the chemistry laboratory. Even when considering fundamental terms as we've done in this chapter, analyzing prose remains always a fully human activity which enlists all our powers of thinking, feeling and intuiting. That is why analysis will always remain inexact – but also why it remains so much fun.

We might, in conclusion, draw an analogy with the noun/verb style distinction considered earlier. We can reason that the periodic style, like the noun style, shows thought to be static, organized into its component parts and then flash-frozen; the running style, like the verb style, shows behavior still in progress, happening in the present, not the past. The contrast often proves a fruitful one but it ought not to lead us to ignore the powerful internal dynamics the period can generate. If you add enough internal qualifications and parenthetical interruptions, it turns into a running style. The running style seems more naturally to represent the moody reflections of the private life. If, however, it is pervaded, as Greville's is, by a need for compound pairing and balance, for syntactic regularity, it takes a turn toward the periodic, and even, in spots, toward antithetical compression or 'point.' Clearly 'periodic' and 'running' are two defining extremes within which the need to express action and stasis, emotion and concept, compression and expansion, finds many answerable prose patterns.

## Chapter 4

# Styles Seen

THE HYPOTACTIC PERIOD, with its internal parentheses, balanced phrasing and climactic resolution, stops time to let a reader take in the complete pattern. Periodic symmetry, as the diagramming shows, appeals to the eye. The paratactic running style does not exploit the orienting power of the eye to the same degree. This basic difference suggests that verbal style does have a visual component, that some styles, or parts of styles, are meant to be seen. Prose, that is, can be iconic as well as symbolic. This iconic element sometimes creates context and sometimes becomes content. In either case it can be extremely powerful. And yet, unless we're trained to notice, it often works like a pair of eyeglasses, seen through and not noticed, but enabling us to see. Prose is supposed to be the kind of writing where such tricks are just not done. But if you look, you can often find them.

The most obvious, and hence usually least noticed, visual elements in prose are typographical conventions. And of these, the most obvious – obviously – is the difference between verse and prose. Look at this passage:

One stands almost grateful, in the freezing air, to feel mildly alive, shovelling some earth into the broken ground while new fields lie all around, fallow, awaiting spring or summer plowings, or the jackhammers of deep winter again, to blossom in white tombstones. It is too cold and too late in the year to pluck a handful of grass and mutter of grass and dust. Up toward the eastern horizon the highway – down toward the low, grayish hills westward – runs out in a broad, constantly extending band whose traffic, even in this clear air sighs rather than roaring. The cold spade drops its dirt into earth's dry, ungrateful trough.

A typical piece of what the Germans call *kunstprosa* (art prose) and we would call 'poetic' prose. A 'poetic' topic too, this Hamlet-like gravedigger's mood. A running style, without any particular shape except for an oddly discordant 'down toward the low, grayish hills,' which seems to clash with the 'Up toward the eastern horizon' beginning the sentence. The 'blossom in white tombstone'