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Creative Writing

FOR ADVANCED COLLEGE CLASSES

CREATIVE WRITING

For Advanced College Classes

REVISED EDITION

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by

GEORGE G. WILLIAMS

The Rice Institute



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

New York

CREATIVE WRITING FOR ADVANCED COLLEGE CLASSES,
REVISED EDITION

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Printed in the United States of America

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49 East 33rd Street, New York 16, N. Y.

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Library of Congress catalog card number: 54-7330

Dedicated to Virginia M. Williams

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Preface to the First Edition

One can think of a dozen helpful and beautifully written books on English style by masters of the English language; but unfortunately none of them is suitable in method or in purpose for use in the average college classroom. On the other hand, one can think of a hundred excellent and really indispensable handbooks of English grammar, English usage, and English rhetoric; but unfortunately none of them is of much value to people aspiring to literary levels higher than those of mere clarity and correctness. The first kind must always be the study and delight of mature writers; the second kind, the study if not the delight of immature writers. But one can hardly recall a textbook of composition written exclusively for people in the intermediate stage between immaturity and maturity.

This book is intended to supply the lack; it is written for people who know most of what is to be learned from the handbooks, but who do not yet know how to create literature.

The book consists of three parts. Part I is a discussion of certain principles which apply to creative writing of any sort. Part II is a discussion of principles which apply to exposition; and Part III, of principles which apply to fiction. This work is, therefore, both a generalized study of the methods of creative writing, and a particularized study of the most important types of creative writing.

It has been in the author's mind that Part I and the first three chapters of Part II should fill the needs of the first semester in a full year-course in advanced writing, and that the rest of the book should fill the needs of the second semester. Yet all the parts are so independent of one another that any part could serve as a text for a course lasting only one term; and at the same time, other parts could serve as private study for individuals interested in writing for other purposes than the attainment of a college credit.

All but two or three of the sets of Exercises in the volume are

creative rather than critical. That is, they demand that the student produce something from his own mind or imagination, instead of merely examining and appreciating what others have written. Many more Exercises are included than can possibly be completed in a year. But it was thought that a superfluity which would allow both the instructor and the student wide liberty of choice would be preferable to a paucity which would force both the instructor and the student into deadening formalism.

And now about the point of view from which the book is written. Though the author believes that no important point discussed in the average correspondence course for professional fiction writers has been omitted from this book, the author's purpose has not been to discuss writing from the professional viewpoint. On the other hand, everything said in this book may be of real value to the student who intends to become a professional. The only difference, consequently, between this book and the books for professionals is in the spirit of approach.

Writing (the author believes) is valuable for its own sake. Every individual feels passing through him during every waking hour a thousand half-comprehended ideas, half-created characters, half-felt emotions, half-seen visions, half-heard melodies of language, half-constructed fabrics of fancy. The non-writing person allows all these to pass unheeded through the hazy background of his consciousness, and to be lost at last in a welter of immediate desires, common sensations, and material expediencies. But the writer clutches at them, halts their flight, and contemplates them until they materialize into the permanent actuality of words on paper. In doing this, the writer has transformed immateriality into materiality, the transitory into the enduring, the subconscious into the conscious, and the illusory into the real. And in doing this, the writer creates for himself the value of a stable, indubitable, and complete experience of mind and heart, where before there had existed only a drifting, dim, and embryonic vision.

Writing, then, is not to be regarded as a mere means of making a living, or even of transferring ideas from one person to another. Writing is a means by which the individual *grows*—by which he

passes intellectually and spiritually from a realm of nebulous suggestion into a realm of valid experience. Accordingly, writing may be a direct instrument of education—where education is conceived as a means whereby the individual realizes his highest intellectual and spiritual potentialities. Every piece of original writing completed adds to the personality of the writer some intellectual or spiritual reality which was not there previously; and every piece done as well as it possibly can be done adds a still finer intellectual or spiritual reality.

Since writing can have for the student a very real educative value, an educational institution such as a college ought to look on writing as an instrument of education primarily, and as a contemplated profession for the college student only secondarily. At any rate, the author of this book looks upon writing in such a way, and has approached his task in the spirit of an educator rather than in the spirit of a professional literary adviser.

I should be more than ungrateful if I did not acknowledge my indebtedness for many ideas to such authors as Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, President William Trufant Foster, Professor Brander Matthews, and Messrs. William Archer, Clayton Hamilton, and Joseph Wood Krutch. I am indebted also to many publishers through whose generosity I have been able to use copyrighted material in illustrative passages throughout this book. More specific acknowledgments to these publishers are made at proper places in the text itself.

GEORGE G. WILLIAMS

Preface to the Revised Edition

The first edition of *Creative Writing* was written twenty years ago by a young man. The revised edition has been written by a middle-aged man. The revised edition ought to be a better book; that is to say, the author ought to have learned something in twenty years. He hopes he has. He hopes this revised edition shows the results of twenty additional years of living, of learning, of teaching, and of writing.

It must be confessed that the middle-aged man has been keenly interested in watching himself at work on the young man's book. The middle-aged man has found, strangely, that the young man was more conservative than he. For example, the young man's book did not officially recognize Thomas Wolfe, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, or Virginia Woolf, and their contributions to English style. The older man is more liberal. For though he is still firm in the opinion that the student writer's best teachers are Defoe, Swift, Fielding, Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, Hardy, Conrad, Galsworthy, Hawthorne, Poe, and James, he thinks that some of the more recent writers are indispensable too. Neither the old writing nor the new is sufficient; both are essential.

Another fault (as it seems now to the older man) that the young man had was a certain authoritarianism and arbitrariness. He knew precisely what was right and what was wrong—and that was that! The older man sees the world in less stark lights and shadows; he thinks writing is governed by some extremely subtle and complex laws. If, in trying to express these laws in the revised edition, the older man has made the book a little more complex, and even a little more difficult, he cannot help it.

Revising the book has been not only an experience in self-criticism, but also a rather sad lesson in the transitoriness of human

institutions and human fame. The Depression loomed large in the 1930's, and the social and political phenomena accompanying it seemed so permanent that references to them were made as casually as references to the sun and the moon. Moreover, names familiar to every freshman then (Joffre, Arthur Brisbane, Rollo Brown, Elsie Robinson, Octavus Roy Cohen, Frank Colby, among others) would be meaningless to most modern college seniors. What now seems to be one of the most astounding remarks in the previous edition was that the historical novel is no longer popular! But that was written before *Anthony Adverse* and *Gone with the Wind* altered the history of fiction.

The really major changes in this revised edition, however, have not been made because of either the young man's errors twenty years ago, or developments in the world at large. All in all, the older man is not ashamed of what the younger man did—is rather proud of it, to tell the truth. The really major changes are due to the fact that, in twenty years, a man does not necessarily learn *better*, but he learns *more*. This book is both a bigger book and a richer book than the other; it contains much that was not even mentioned in the early book, and it augments much that was discussed there.

Some actual statistics may be interesting. The older book contained 100 sections; this one contains 133. Though about half of the old sections remain substantially as they were, only about a dozen of them remain unaltered in any way. Only one of the old sets of Exercises at the ends of chapters remains unchanged; seven others remain substantially as they were; all the others have been changed; and several new ones have been added.

The long and very important first chapter of the book has been almost completely rewritten; so has the chapter on Argumentation. All the other chapters in the first two parts of the book have been extensively revised in the interest of clarity, brevity, or completeness. But the main revision has been in the last part—"The Writing of Fiction." Ninety per cent of this part is new.

Throughout the revised edition the writer's intention has been to polish the expression, to clarify the exposition, to excise unessentials, to widen the coverage, to improve the Exercises, and, above all, to

bring the discussion of fiction into line with modern ideals and realities.

The writer would like to take this occasion to thank the many teachers of writing in hundreds of American colleges and universities who have used the old edition of this book during the last twenty years. He is grateful to them; and he has tried to show his gratitude by working hard to make this revised edition a better book than the old one.

GEORGE G. WILLIAMS

The Rice Institute
January, 1954

PART ONE

Writing

CHAPTER I

Fundamental Principles

First, a word of advice about the most fundamental principle of all. Students often enter writing courses with the illusion that they require nothing more than a driving urge and an undetermined amount of inspiration in order to create quite acceptable articles, stories, plays, and novels. It is true that both an urge and an inspiration are essential. But they are not enough. A person may have an urge to heal the sick, another to impart knowledge, or a third to defend the unfortunate, and all three may have a considerable amount of inspiration. But a physician who has not undergone a very thorough and painstaking training is a quack, a teacher who has never studied is a charlatan, and a lawyer who has never read law is a shyster. Likewise, a writer who has not thoroughly studied the art he professes to practice is on the way to ending as a mere hack.

Most of the great writers of the past, you will say, never took a college course in advanced writing—and didn't they do all right by themselves? To be sure. They never took a college course in advanced writing, but they learned independently all that such a course contains—and more, too. All great writers have studied their art intensively, and have had a consuming interest, theoretical as well as practical, in it all their lives. Indeed, scores of them (from Sir Philip Sidney and Ben Jonson right down to Thomas Hardy, Henry James, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, Ellen Glasgow, and T. S. Eliot) have written extensively on the techniques and principles of writing. A college course in advanced writing is only a short cut to what a writer must learn for himself in any event. It conveys in a few months what a self-educating writer must take years to learn. The present writer remembers making to Joyce Cary, the

celebrated English novelist, one of those deprecating and insincere remarks that people do make about their own professions: "After all, one can't really teach people how to write." Mr. Cary pounced upon the remark immediately. "Oh, yes one can!" he exclaimed, and then proceeded to give the author a brief and persuasive lecture on the value of college courses in writing!

But if a student is going to be *taught* how to write, he must be willing to *learn* how to write. He must resolve to learn techniques and principles just as a surgeon, no matter how gifted he may be, must learn to tie knots, or an English teacher must learn the difference between a verb and a noun, or a lawyer must learn the minutiae of legal forms and court procedure.

The present writer once had a student who, after hearing lengthy and probably tiresome counsel about the details of sentence formation and compositional structure, asked a bit indulgently, like a person who has consented to be deceived by a ventriloquist: "But surely you don't expect *us* to go to all that trouble with *our* writing?" The answer is an emphatic Yes. There is no other way to be a good writer. Furthermore, as a matter of plain fact, it is in the practice of the actual art (or, if one prefers, the craft) of writing that the writer avoids succumbing eventually to the boredom of his work, and giving it up for the more interesting employment of selling hosiery. His enjoyment, like the enjoyment of a painter, a sculptor, a dancer, a singer, or an actor, derives chiefly from the *processes* of his art—from the planning, the constructing, the joining, the polishing, the exercise of skill, the conquest of problems arising with every sentence, the dexterous juggling of all the elements that go to make good writing: words, sentences, sounds, associations, ideas, arrangements, spaces, divisions, continuity, suppressions, intensifications, and all the rest. Anyone who hopes or expects to write a great deal in his life must learn as much as he can about his art—all its methods, devices, and even tricks—and then try to apply it to every word, phrase, clause, and sentence that he writes. That is the only way in which he can endure to be a confirmed writer. When he has done this, writing will not be something to be avoided, but something eternally seductive and irresistible.

Much of this and the next few chapters is devoted to the structure of sentences. The student who has his eye on the far goal of articles, stories, plays, and novels must not scorn sentences any more than the golfer aiming at the green far away can afford to scorn the precise position of every finger on the club, the bend of the back, the position of the head, and the rhythm of the swing. Like threads of different colors fed into a loom, sentence elements will rush into the writer's mind—not to be jumbled together by chance, and to emerge as a formless collection of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences—but to be assorted, assembled, and re-assembled, and to emerge as an attractive and original pattern, the most attractive and original pattern possible. The writer must consider every sentence a special problem, and must experiment with it, cast it and recast it in his mind or on paper, take time, consider it as a solitary unit and as a part of the whole, return to it again and again if necessary, and leave it at last only when he is thoroughly satisfied. Yes, the teacher of writing does expect his students to "go to all that trouble."

The present chapter recapitulates a few very old principles of composition. Doubtless the reader has heard them time and time again. A thing worth saying once, however, is worth saying more than once. The constant reiteration of these principles in books about writing indicates their importance.

1. THE END POSITION. *The most important word or idea in a sentence, a paragraph, or a whole composition should come at the end.*

Because readers are always more than usually alert when they know that a conclusion approaches, a writer should use his most vigorous and telling details last. Not only are readers psychologically conditioned to waking up and fixing their attention near the end of a piece of writing, but also they are conditioned by modern habits of composition and publication. Nowadays, readers of scientific articles turn almost automatically to the end of the articles to learn the main point; readers of modern poems expect the last line to be the key-line; readers of modern stories look to the last few sentences for clarification of some emotional or philosophical implication in the narrative. It is true that requirements of clarity, coherence,

or euphony sometimes prevent strict application of this principle; and once in a while the writer will deliberately flout the principle for the sake of variety, or in order to have a weak or falling close that will be consistent with a certain mood. Nevertheless, the principle is sound; a writer should avoid having his sentences, his paragraphs, his chapters, or his articles and stories dwindle off into final insignificance.

a. *In Sentence Elements.* As a rule, weakly subordinate or parenthetical elements in a sentence should not come last. For example, the sentence just written, as well as the present sentence, would be intolerable if "as a rule" or "for example" came at the end. A very common offender of this law is the participial phrase dragging along at the end, as in the sentence, "These handsome birds are quite numerous on the coast, gathering often in groups of fifty to a hundred." This sentence runs downhill from the main clause. It would be better if it ran uphill; the participial phrase should come first. Dependent clauses, being less structurally weak than participial phrases, may often come last. Yet sentences like, "We could hear him shouting though we could not see him," and, "You will want to set down your impressions on paper as soon as you possibly can," would be stronger with the dependent clause at the beginning instead of the end. Both these sentences offend in another way: except for "possibly," the last four or five words in both are completely colorless. Placing the dependent clauses at the beginning would have, therefore, an additional virtue; it would make the sentences end with stronger words. Just to illustrate a typical process of sentence-forming, suppose we experiment a little further with the second sentence quoted.

Even with the dependent clause at the beginning, the sentence would end with an insignificant prepositional phrase far removed from the word it modifies. Placing the phrase nearer the word it modifies would make it sound a little awkward: "You will want to set down on paper your impressions." Perhaps, then, we could let the phrase remain where it is, or perhaps we could change the wording slightly to make the entire sentence read: "As soon as you possibly can, you will write down your impressions." But whatever we decide

to do with the sentence, we ought not to be content with it until we have tested it in all its possible forms. Slapping a sentence down just as it comes to us, and leaving it that way, may chance to result in a good sentence, but more probably it will result in a dull, weak sentence.

b. *In Larger Elements.* Paragraphs, sections, chapters, and whole compositions may not invariably lend themselves to application of the present principle. Logical, chronological, or transitional considerations take precedence, and may interfere. Nevertheless, a writer should do what he can to apply the principle, and at least he can keep from violating it too flagrantly. For example, he will avoid having mere transitional sentences at the end of a paragraph; he will place them at the beginning of the next paragraph, or will reserve them for entirely separate paragraphs. He will not ramble on, saying nothing much, at the end of a chapter or a section after he has already made his point. He will not suddenly toss into the conclusion of his work some mere statement or suggestion of a new idea that he does not have time to develop properly. He will not use so much of his allotted space in developing minor ideas in the first part of a paper that he is compelled to rush through and inadequately develop the ideas in the latter part of the paper. To speak positively instead of negatively: (1) he will arrange his details, examples, or ideas in paragraph, section, chapter, or whole composition so that the most important and incontrovertible comes last; or (2) he may round out his discussion by a renewed statement of the main idea or point; or (3) he may bluntly summarize the matters he has discussed or the points he has made.

2. SUSPENSE. *An important idea hinted at in the beginning but reserved for the end makes for suspense.*

Suspense in writing as in life is created by three things: a hint, a wait, and a fulfillment. The hint may be either an open statement or a vague suggestion that something important will presently happen; or it may be a situation that, in its very nature, is certain to result in an important outcome—like a war, or a serious illness, or the approach of final examinations. Suspense catches the reader's attention, and then holds his interest by the implicit promise of an

impending result of some significance. Suspense is often that unsuspected quality that makes some writing vivid and nervous instead of dull and weak. Suspense is the opposite of surprise, and is a more effective instrument; for surprise lasts but an instant, does not hold the reader for more than a minute or two, and immediately becomes only a memory—whereas suspense may last, and hold the reader's intense interest, throughout even the hours or days required for the reading of a long novel.

The principle of building up suspense by withholding an important idea to the end is allied to the first principle discussed above. But the two principles differ materially; the first one does not require the initial hint, but this one does. For example, the following sentence creates no suspense even though it places the important idea at the end: "*The Essay on Man* is Pope's most philosophic work; *The Rape of the Lock* is his most poetic." In contrast, the following sentence creates excellent suspense: "Pope's most poetic work is neither the philosophic *Essay on Man,* nor the descriptive *Windsor Forest,* nor the satirical *Dunciad*—but *The Rape of the Lock.*"

a. *In Sentence Elements.* The sentence just quoted creates suspense by means of *a series of negatives* implying that a positive will appear shortly. Sometimes suspense may be created by means of *a series of items obviously moving toward a climax,* as in the following sentence: "He longed for an education; he made plans to obtain one; he saved his money; he sacrificed his pleasures; he endured privations—and then, at the age of twenty, he was killed in Korea." In such a sentence, suspense builds up as each clause succeeds another. Sometimes a mere *periodic sentence* creates suspense; thus, a sentence like, "The speeding automobile whirled around the corner on two wheels, and with a terrifying scream of rubber tires on pavement," is much less suspenseful than this: "On two wheels, and with a terrifying scream of rubber tires on pavement, the speeding automobile whirled around the corner." We might include most, or all, of these devices under a heading like *lengthy suspended grammatical structure.* Shelley's famous conclusion of *Prometheus Unbound* is a perfect model for this kind of suspense:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
  To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
  Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

b. *In Larger Elements.* Many devices for creating suspense, especially in narrative writing, could be mentioned, and some will be discussed at length in the third part of this book. Two or three elementary devices are worth a few words here. A writer may create suspense by a *definite statement* that something very important is to be said later on—like this: "In the story that follows, I shall tell you how John Jones died, and then returned to life." Or like this: "After we have examined and discarded some patently false solutions of our problem, I shall tell you what seems to me the only true and satisfactory solution." Such advance notices make the reader know for certain that he is waiting for something important; they put him in a state of suspense.

Sometimes the mere *brief enumeration of topics* the writer intends to discuss will make the reader aware that he is waiting for something important. For example, a writer might say, "In this paper I wish to discuss, first, the historical background of our present difficulty; next, the immediate reasons why the difficulty has suddenly grown so tremendous; and finally, the most practicable means by which we can extricate ourselves from the difficulty." A statement like this creates an almost unconscious, but genuine, suspense in the reader. Even a bare statement such as, "I wish to discuss three points in this paper," will keep the reader alert and forward-looking through Points One and Two. All that is required for suspense is a hint, a wait, and a fulfillment.

A well-matched *conflict* always makes for suspense. Even when the main purpose of a writer is not to attack anybody else's doctrines,

bu to give new information or to elucidate an original idea, the writer may often profit by deliberately creating a conflict at the beginning of his exposition. He may do this by referring to mistakes that other people have made, or by outlining opinions with which he says he differs.

3. CLIMAX. *Details, examples, and ideas should be arranged in the order of climax.*

The order of climax is the order of steadily increasing importance. This principle applies to a series of related or roughly parallel items that are usually three or more in number. The items may be details of a description or exposition, examples and illustrations of an exposition or argument, or lists of causes, effects, and reasons. The principle demands that the least important of these be presented first, the next most important next, and the most important of all last. As in the old family portrait, the order of composition should be the stairstep order—beginning with insignificant two-year-old Willie, and ascending head over head to the supreme head of William, Senior.

a. *In Sentence Elements.* This principle applies to words, phrases, and clauses within a sentence. Thus, Burke wrote of "regicide, parricide, and sacrilege"; the words would have a very different tone if they were arranged as "sacrilege, parricide, and regicide." Lee's famous characterization of Washington—"First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen"—proceeding as it does from point to point in order of climax, is a skillful expression of a fine thought. But read in the reverse order, it becomes merely tawdry. These examples of words and phrases illustrate a principle that should be carried over (where logic, chronology, and coherence permit) to clauses and clusters of sentences. It should be stressed here that the writer himself has the responsibility of determining the relative importance of his various items, and of arranging them according to his own standards. Burke's series of words quoted above are arranged as a religious man and a lover of political freedom would arrange them; a fanatical royalist would have reversed the order. The point is that ideas do not necessarily impose a certain

form of expression on the writer; the writer imposes the form on the ideas.

Sometimes, as has already been hinted, a writer must disregard the order of climax. Logic, chronology, and coherence come first. Euphony is another consideration, as in a series like "God, home, and native land," where the reverse order would be almost a tongue-twister. Or sometimes subtle considerations of courtesy or precedence (particularly in phrases originating long ago in times when precedence was more important than today) determine the order—as in "king, queen, and nobles," or "men, women, and children." It is quite possible that the last word in the series "love, honor, and obey" would not have been struck from the modern marriage ritual had it not stood out so prominently by being last!

b. *In Larger Elements.* Where other considerations are not involved, the principle of climax should apply to sentences within a paragraph, to paragraphs within a part, and to major parts within a whole composition.

Some of the old popular ballads, with their device of "incremental repetition," perfectly illustrate this principle. In "Edward," for example, successive stanzas have the hero saying, first, that he has killed his hawk, then that he has killed his horse, and last that he has killed his father. Or consider a paragraph from Sir John Mandeville's *Travels* (ca. 1400). The first sentence in his first paragraph about the land of Prester John mentions a sea of sand and gravel; the next asserts that this sea has waves and tides; the next that the sea is bordered by mysterious lands unknown to man; and the last that the sea, though it has no water, has "plenty of good fishes." Here each marvel is more marvelous than the preceding.

In the whole group of paragraphs describing the land of Prester John, the order of climax is maintained within the paragraphs themselves. The first paragraph describes the sea of sand and gravel; the next tells of a river running precious stones; the third tells of the fabulous plants and animals of that land; the fourth tells of the unimaginably gorgeous equipment of Prester John's army; and finally, and most glorious of all, a paragraph describes the incredi-

ble riches of Prester John's city and palace. Everything is arranged in climactic order. Moreover, Mandeville's entire book observes the same order. Starting with the fairly ordinary Balkan area, it proceeds to the more remarkable Near East, then to the still more extraordinary Middle East, then to the wonderful Far East, and finally to the utterly fantastic land of Prester John.

4. PROPORTION. *Ideas should occupy space in direct proportion to their importance.*

The principle of proportion should be considered both as an injunction and as a command. Unimportant ideas must not be treated at length, and important ideas must be treated at length. The elaboration of unimportant ideas leads to wordiness, triviality, and tiresomeness; the slighting of important ideas leads to disappointment of the reader, apparent pointlessness, and seeming lack of discrimination on the part of the writer. Ordinarily, the important part of a discussion should be developed with special amplitude; the important character in a story should be introduced with special privileges of space; the important action of a narrative should be recounted with special elaborateness of detail. Even when the temptation is to be brief, the writer should deliberately proceed with his amplifying. Brevity has its virtues, but also its vices.

The only time when the rule may be suspended is when a writer wishes to avail himself of the device of contrast, and so expresses an important idea with notable terseness. "Jesus wept." The simple statement, so noticeably short, contrasts so powerfully with the magnitude of the sentiment that the verse is effective. Such effective brevity, however, can be employed only on special occasions. When it is used too often as a rhetorical device, it looks affected. Furthermore, it can never be effective unless it has the added advantages of position, climax, isolation, or extraordinary dignity of occasion. It should be remembered that even Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, with its marvelous brevity of phrase, fell completely flat when it was originally delivered. It was too short to make much impression on the audience. If Lincoln had not been martyred soon afterward, and if the address were not read today isolated from the circum-

stances of its delivery, it is quite possible that unimpressed Americans would have allowed it to disappear into that limbo reserved for most public addresses.

a. *In Sentence Elements.* Whether by accident or not, the most important phrase in Lee's eulogy of Washington quoted already—"First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen"—not only occurs at the summit of the climax, but also occupies more space than both the other phrases together. The whole expression was purposely designed, one could almost believe, to be immortal. Though exceptions are plentiful, it is ordinarily true that, if we wish a phrase or a sentence to make an impression, we must deliberately develop it until it occupies an amount of space proportionate to its importance. There is nothing wrong with a phrase like "bare winter trees"—but nobody would remember it. Yet everybody remembers Shakespeare's

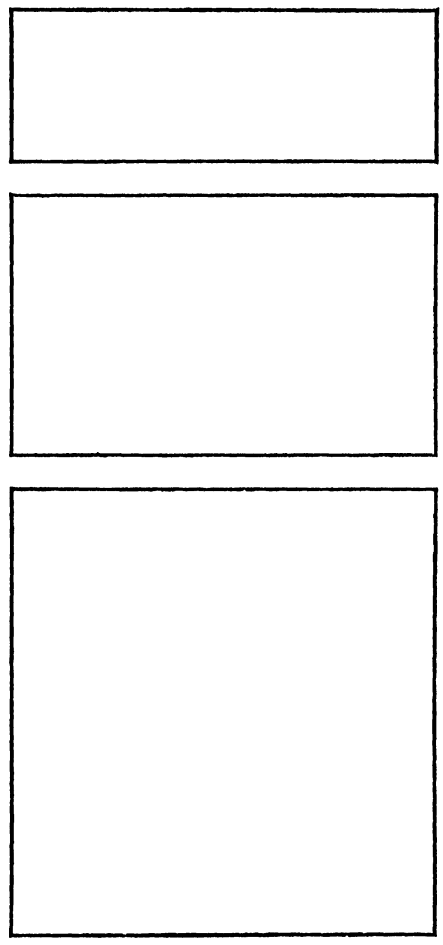
> yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

Maupassant, in describing the death of his "Old Maid," could have been content to write, "Her hands and fingers moved nervously." But what he actually wrote was, "A ray of sunlight fell on the bed, lighting up the hands which moved nervously, opening and shutting without ceasing. The fingers moved as if a thought animated them, as if they would signify something, indicate some idea, obey some intelligence." Maupassant enlarged upon a single detail here because he wanted to be certain that the reader was impressed.

b. *In Larger Elements.* Roughly speaking, the number of words in a paragraph, or the number of paragraphs, devoted to any idea should be proportionate to its importance. Thus, in Mandeville's description of Prester John's land, referred to above, the part on the waterless sea occupies 131 words; the part on the river of precious stones, 104 words; the part on the strange plants and animals, 228 words; the part on the army, 255 words; and the part on the palace, 336 words. Each part (except the second) has space proportionate to its importance. As a matter of fact, ideas often attain importance

in the reader's mind in direct proportion to the space given them. An idea that a writer does not wish the reader to consider of major importance will be discussed in only a little space, and an idea that he wishes the reader to consider very important will be given much space. The complaints of students about instructors who ask weighty examination questions on matters barely touched in class are quite justified.

If we combine the present principle with the principle of climax, we may express the result diagrammatically as follows:



The average composition should look like this. *The least important ideas come first, and require the least amount of space; the more important ideas come later, and require a greater amount of space.*

5. STRUCTURE. *Important ideas should be expressed in important structures; unimportant ideas should be expressed in unimportant structures.*

Importance of structure is relative. A paragraph is more important than a sentence, a sentence than an independent clause, an inde-

pendent clause than a dependent clause, a dependent clause than a phrase, and a phrase than a word. An idea expressed in one of the lower structures may be made to assume a higher importance in the reader's mind by being given a higher structure; and, conversely, an idea expressed in one of the higher structures may lose importance if expressed in a lower structure.

a. *In Sentence Elements.* If a writer wishes to emphasize an idea he raises its structure. Thus, instead of using a single descriptive word, as in "a memorable day," he could use a phrase: "a day to be long remembered." Or he could elevate the phrase to the rank of a dependent clause: "It was a day which will be long remembered." Or he could elevate the dependent clause to the rank of an independent clause: "The day at length arrived, and it will be long remembered." Or he could elevate the independent clause to the rank of a sentence: "The day at length arrived. It will be long remembered." The writer has to decide for himself whether he wishes to call special attention to any idea, and how much attention—he has to make up his mind, and then act accordingly. As Humpty-Dumpty said, it is merely a question of who shall be master, the writer or the sentences that he creates.

b. *In Larger Elements.* The next rank above a sentence is a paragraph. An idea expressed as a paragraph (whether in one sentence or more than one) assumes a special importance in the reader's mind. Writing during the First World War, John Galsworthy uses this device; he gives special significance to an idea by reserving for it an entire paragraph:

> He who ever gives a thought to the life of man at large, to his miseries and disappointments, to the waste and cruelty of existence, will remember that if American or Briton fail in this climb, there can but be for us both, and for all other peoples, a hideous slip, a swift and fearful fall into an abyss, whence all shall be to begin over again.
>
> We shall not fail—neither ourselves, nor each other. Our comradeship will endure.[1]

Most paragraphs contain more sentences than the one or two in the example just quoted; but the fundamental principle that an

[1] From John Galsworthy's lecture on *American and Briton.* Reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

idea expressed as a paragraph assumes special importance remains the same. Furthermore, an idea that requires several paragraphs assumes a still larger significance in the reader's mind. —But here we move over into the field of proportion, a topic that has already been discussed.

6. REPETITION. *Repetition serves many purposes of emphasis, unity, clarity, coherence, and all-round effectiveness.*

The reason repetition is effective is that no reader is wide-awake, alert, and critical at every instant. For any of a number of reasons he may miss the entire significance of the writing. But if each important point is repeated again and again, the reader is certain to get it at one or another of the repetitions. This, then, is the chief value of repetition—it makes the reader know the writer's principal thought, and keep it in mind.

a. *In Sentence Elements.* Repetition of the elements composing sentences may involve words, ideas, or structures. In the following discussion, these three will be considered in that order.

(1) Much repetition is for the sake of *intensification.* We often repeat words in speech, as when we cry, "Quick! Quick! Quick!" or "Stop! Stop! Stop!" Poetry and song are filled with repetitions of words:

> I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree.

> Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
> And a merry old soul was he.

> Why weep ye by the tide, ladie?
> Why weep ye by the tide?

In prose writing, it must be confessed, repetition of words is seldom used for purposes of intensifying an impression. Once in a while it is most effective, as when Katherine Mansfield describes a young girl at a dance: "But in one minute, in one turn, her feet glided, glided"—or when Chekhov describes the sleepy little maid: "She is as sleepy as before, fearfully sleepy!" If the device is used too often in prose, it sounds affected.

Much more common in prose is the repetition of ideas for the sake

of intensification. A large portion of the Bible consists of repetitions for the purpose of intensification. The following five-fold repetition is a good example:

> The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill.

Hawthorne uses the device in this sentence about "The Ambitious Guest": "He had traveled far and alone; his whole life, indeed, had been a solitary path; for, with the lofty caution of his nature, he had kept himself apart from those who might otherwise have been his companions."

Even more common than repeated ideas in prose are repeated structures. The passage just quoted from the Bible illustrates this kind of repetition as well as repetition of ideas. Macaulay's much-admired indictment of Charles I illustrates repetition of structure, but not entirely of idea:

> We charge him with having broken his coronation oath; and we are told that he kept his marriage vow! We accuse him of having given up his people to the merciless inflictions of the most hot-headed and hard-hearted of prelates; and the defense is that he took his little son on his knee and kissed him! We censure him for having violated the articles of the Petition of Right, after having, for good and valuable consideration, promised to observe them; and we are informed that he was accustomed to hear prayers at six o'clock in the morning!

For some obscure psychological reason, rhythmic structural repetitions such as these have the effect of intensifying the reader's emotions. It is for this reason that poetry, which is largely "an overflow of powerful feeling," has long been framed in repetitive structural patterns of meter and stanza.

(2) Repetition may give *unity* to the reader's impressions by continually recalling to his mind the topic under discussion. The following paragraph from Matthew Arnold shows how unity may be obtained by repetition of words. Here the constant reiteration of "humane letters" and "engage the emotions" can leave no doubt in the reader's mind about Arnold's main point—it is that "humane letters engage the emotions":

The need of *humane letters,* as they are truly called, because they serve the paramount desire in men that good should be ever present to them,—the need of *humane letters* to establish a relation between the new conceptions, and our instinct for beauty, our instinct for conduct, is only the more visible. The Middle Ages could do without *humane letters,* as it could do without the study of nature, because it supposed knowledge was made to *engage its emotions* so powerfully. Grant that the supposed knowledge disappears, its power of being made to *engage the emotions* will of course disappear along with it,—but the *emotions* themselves, and their claim to be *engaged* and satisfied, will remain. Now if we find by experience that *humane letters* have an undeniable power of *engaging the emotions,* the importance of *humane letters* in a man's training becomes not less, but greater, in proportion to the success of modern science in extirpating what it calls "medieval thinking."

The repetition of an idea, rather than of words, for the sake of unity is so close to repetition for the sake of intensification that distinguishing between the two is hardly possible or necessary. But here is a passage from Addison (*Spectator, No. 81*) that seems to repeat only for the sake of unification; Addison is saying that woman's place is in the home.

As our English women excel those of all nations in beauty, they should endeavor to outshine them in all other accomplishments proper to the sex, and to distinguish themselves as tender mothers, and faithful wives, rather than as furious partisans. Female virtues are of a domestic turn. The family is the proper province for private women to shine in.

The repetition of structure in order to lend unity to many diverse ideas is a commonplace of rhetoric. It is like putting an army of many men into uniform in order to make them seem one organized body instead of a disorganized rabble. An excellent example of a diverse mass of ideas assuming a phenomenal unity through similarity of structure occurs in the stanza from Shelley quoted earlier. Here is an example in prose from Dr. Johnson's make-believe diary of a young lady (*Rambler, No. 191*):

I have so many things to do, so many orders to give to the milliner, so many alterations to make in my clothes, so many visitants' names to read over, so many invitations to accept or refuse, so many cards to write, and

so many fashions to consider, that I am lost in confusion, forced at last to let in company or step into my chair, and leave half my affairs to the direction of my maid.

The long sentence, despite its welter of unrelated ideas, achieves unity by a deliberate repetition of structure.

(3) Repetition of words may make for *clarity*. Sometimes the clarity involved is a simple matter of grammatical reference—as in this time-honored example from Freshman English: "If raw milk disagrees with the baby, boil it." Obviously, the repetition of "milk" is necessary for clarity. On a slightly higher plane, repetition of words sometimes helps indicate the connections and relationships of sentences, or helps the reader follow smoothly the progress and development of the writer's thought. This use of repetition is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Finally, word repetition may actually be necessary for the reader to understand what the writer is trying to say. Note, for example, how often words are repeated in the following passage by Ralph Barton Perry: "President Cleveland once remarked, as everyone knows, 'It is a condition, and not a theory, that confronts us.' I do not remember what condition it was that confronted us; but the practical man is always confronted by a condition. I shall suggest presently that every condition does in truth involve a theory; but if so, the practical man ignores it. His practicality lies in confining himself to finding an act which will meet the condition."

To see how valuable a part repetition of diction plays in this paragraph, we have only to rewrite the paragraph, omitting all repetition: "President Cleveland once remarked, as everyone knows, 'It is a condition, and not a theory, that confronts us.' I do not remember what circumstance it was that faced us; but the practical man always finds some situation before him. I shall suggest presently that every occasion does in truth involve a general principle; but if so, the man of action ignores it. His worldly wisdom lies in confining himself to finding out a deed which will meet the affair in hand." Whereas the original paragraph was quite clear, and the relationships of all its sentences with one another clear, the garbled paragraph is difficult to understand as a whole, and the relationships of

its sentences are difficult to grasp at one reading, or even two or three readings.

Repetition of ideas for the sake of clarity is often desirable, or even necessary. A very large percentage of most non-narrative writing consists of saying the same thing over and over again in different words. In the following passage, note how many times Steele (in *Tatler, No. 25*) makes the point that duelers are not really honorable men:

> As the matter at present stands, it is not to-do handsome actions denominates a man of honor; it is enough if he dares to defend ill ones. Thus you often see a common sharper in competition with a gentleman of the first rank; though all mankind is convinced that a fighting gamester is only a pickpocket with the courage of a highwayman. One cannot with any patience reflect on the unaccountable jumble of persons and things in this town and nation; which occasions very frequently that a brave man falls by a hand below that of a common hangman.

If the reader seeks further examples of repetition for the sake of clarity, he need only look about him: a large part of this book, and particularly of this section, shows how often at least one writer repeats his ideas for the sake of clarity. It is a habit that the student writer should acquire as soon as possible.

One cautionary remark is due before we leave the topic of repetition in sentence elements. Words to be often repeated must be important words. Repetition of unimportant words sounds awkward and amateurish, as in the following sentences written by freshmen:

> In *Ivanhoe,* and *also* several other novels, Scott writes about the Middle Ages; but he writes *also* about the eighteenth century.

> From the square where the courthouse *stands,* one can look up and see a church *standing* on each of the three hills that *stand* above the village.

> The *players* themselves voted to *play* one post-season game.

b. *In Larger Elements.* Outright word-for-word repetition of larger elements (paragraphs, sections, chapters) for the sake of clarity is virtually unknown in prose. Repetition of ideas, however, is common. It involves repeated statements, in different words, of

the same idea. Almost any convenient well-written book will illustrate this practice. The first five paragraphs in the third chapter of Mr. Bernard Muddiman's *The Men of the Nineties* begin with the following sentences:

(1) One endeavors to remember some one or two outstanding novels written by one of the writers of this group. It must be at once admitted, one fails to recall a great novel.

(2) None of the men of the nineties (as I have defined them) produced a great novel.

(3) But so far as English fiction alone is concerned, it cannot be said that the men of the nineties produced work of a very high order.

(4) Indeed, if the name of a good English novel by one of them is demanded, it will be singularly difficult to suggest a title.

(5) In the face of this strange dearth of novels in this school, one cannot help asking the reasons that engendered it.[2]

When a reader has thus faced this idea five times in five successive paragraphs, he is pretty clear about the main idea of Mr. Muddiman's third chapter. Repetition keeps the reader constantly reminded of the subject.

Repetition of structure is useful for creating both unity and clarity. Almost any textbook that one cares to examine, as well as most other non-narrative books and most good essays or articles, consists of several series of corresponding, or parallel, structures. Paragraphs will correspond to paragraphs by having similarly worded topic sentences, similarly arranged illustrative material, or numerical headings written down as figures or suggested by words like "first," "next," "a third," and so on. Chapters will correspond to chapters in general structures; thus, in the first book that lies handy—Edward A. Ross's *Social Control*—Chapters II to V have these headings: "The Role of Sympathy," "The Role of Sociability," "The Role of the Sense of Justice," "The Role of Individual Reaction." It is a manifest effort to create unity and clarity by a repetition of general structure and

[2] Mr. Muddiman's sentences quoted here, as well as farther on in this book, are used by permission of the publishers, G. P. Putnam's Sons.

approach in the four chapters. Finally, parts may correspond to parts, as in this same book. Part I is titled "The Grounds of Control," Part II "The Means of Control," and Part III "The System of Control"—another manifest effort to achieve unity and clarity by repetition.

At this point, it might be well for us to sum up what has been said in this rather long section. We have seen that repetition of words, ideas, or structures may intensify a concept or feeling; or give unity to apparently independent elements of composition; or clarify (and clarify the interrelationships of) complex or involved ideas and elements of composition. As a rule, the repetition of words intensifies, unites, or clarifies minor elements of composition such as phrases, clauses, and sentences. The repetition of ideas intensifies, unites, or clarifies larger elements such as groups of sentences, entire paragraphs, or groups of paragraphs. And the repetition of structure intensifies, unites, or clarifies all elements of composition from mere phrases up to entire books.

Poetry, with its many repetitions of metrical feet, line-lengths, rhymes, rhythms, and stanzaic forms, has been defined as patterned language. Repetition as it has been discussed in this chapter (and as it will be discussed later in the chapter called "Beauty of Style") is patterned prose. To be able to create patterns of language is to be an artist (or at least a skilled craftsman) with the tools of the writer's profession. Indeed, it is *almost* possible to determine a writer's total skill by measuring his ability to use repetition, and yet to avoid monotony. The writer who has something to say should repeat it boldly and often. Let him choose key words and play upon them; let him voice his main ideas again and again, now in the same words, now in different; let him weld together seeming incompatibles by forcing them to assume similar structures; let him at every opportunity avail himself of the many and fascinating complexities of patterned language.

7. CONTRAST. *Contrasts attract attention and make permanent impressions.*

Frederic Taber Cooper, an important critic early in this century, once wrote: "No matter what art or craft we practise, whether it be

the painting of landscapes, or building of bridges, the decoration of tea-cups or the writing of novels, we cannot hope for fine results without invoking the aid of contrast—the dash of red to give tone and harmony to the greens and blues of nature, the touch of pathos that adds a deeper meaning to the sparkle of comedy, the grave-digger's jests that intensify the tragedy of Ophelia's death." Contrast gives accent, vividness, color to writing; it keeps writing from being monotonous and dull. Yet contrast seldom comes easily and unconsciously to any writer. It comes, for the most part, only with deliberate thought and self-conscious creation.

a. *In Sentence Elements.* Contrasts may involve *tricks of printing,* like italics, capitals, or very small type in the midst of ordinary type, large spaces containing only a few words, and so on.

Or contrasts may involve mere *length of sentences or of paragraphs.* A short sentence in the midst of long ones, or after long ones, attracts attention to itself. "He was told to lead his men forward at any cost, to overrun the enemy positions, to occupy the wooded hill, and to prepare for the counterattack. All this he did." This short last sentence stands out prominently because of the contrast between its shortness and the length of the preceding sentence. Short paragraphs consisting of a single sentence, or of a few brief sentences, or even of a single fragmentary sentence, have a similar effect. Examples of such paragraphs have already been quoted in another section of this chapter.

Contrasts in length, however, constitute only the very simplest of contrasts. In addition, rhetorical questions occurring in the midst of declarative sentences; sudden learned words in the midst of familiar diction, or sudden words of doubtful respectability in the midst of formal diction; sudden inversions or unlooked-for twistings-about of sentence elements in the midst of plain straightforward writing; words which have certain almost invariable connotations, but which may be used in a literal and absolute sense—these are some of the devices of contrast.

b. *In Larger Elements.* Many effective contrasts involve *subject matter, mood, or (in fiction) personalities of characters.* Hamlet's scene with his mother, in which he demands that she "Look here,

upon this picture, and on this," is so memorable because the two kings appear as such contrasting personalities. Byron's description of the night before Waterloo in *Childe Harold* is one of the great purple patches of literature because it presents a contrast between the warmth, gaiety, light, and love-making of the Duchess of Richmond's ball, and the terror, darkness, and grief of war. Dickens uses the trick of contrast over and over again: the simultaneous deaths of Dora and Dora's lap dog; the death of Paul Dombey in the dark and desolate house on a lovely day when the outside world is full of sunshine and birds' songs—these are but two examples. Shakespeare uses contrast with unapproachable humor in the scene between the superstitious and verbose Glendower and the practical-minded, blunt Hotspur. Indeed, the technique of the Shakespearian play nearly always involves contrasting personalities for the principal characters. The hesitating Hamlet on the one hand, and the vigorous Laertes on the other; the traitorous Macbeth and the loyal Macduff; the passionate Antony and the level-headed Octavius; the strong-minded, manly Henry V and the weak, effeminate Dauphin; the etherealized Ariel and the beastly Caliban—and so on.

The student should deliberately examine his subject before he ever sets pen to paper, and ask himself wherein he can employ contrasts. Is he writing a paper on the present federal administration? Certain contrasts inevitably present themselves—social and economic conditions before and since the inauguration of this administration.

Is he writing an essay on cats? The contrast between the habits and the personalities of cats, and the habits and personalities of dogs will better characterize cats than will pages of description or analysis.

Is he writing a story with a naïve and gentle girl as the heroine? A contrasting character, worldly wise and hard, will bring out and intensify the character of the heroine.

Since few writers would hit upon such contrasts by instinct, *the student may well make it a rule never to do any piece of writing without first carefully examining the possibilities for contrast inherent in his subject.*

8. INTEREST. *By deliberately employing certain well-known devices, a writer may heighten the interest of his work.*

Again, it should be stressed that devices for gaining interest do not always come easily and naturally to the writer. While he is planning his work, while he is writing it, and even after he has written it, he must deliberately explore means of making it more readable. Of course, one of the best guarantees of interesting work is an interesting personality. No mere textbook on creative writing can tell the student how to be an interesting personality. All that the textbook can do about this problem is to tell the student to be his real self—that is, to try to find within himself the essential individual who has been muffled under layer after layer of conventional verbiage, conventional ways of looking at life, conventional reactions to life, conventional patterns of education—and to be daring enough to introduce this essential individual into his writing. Even so, however, interesting personalities sometimes write dully. They must work hard and scheme intelligently to make their work interesting.

a. *In Sentence Elements.* Perhaps this subsection should be prefaced by the remark that the advice given here may often be utilized (as amendment, revision, or insertion) *after* a piece of writing is finished.

Periodic sentences or sentences having suspense, as described early in this chapter, are often more readable, more nervous, than loose or rambling sentences. Fairly short sentences (averaging about 20 words in length), if not more interesting, are at least more readable than very long sentences (averaging over 30 words). The devices of contrast in sentence elements, as outlined in the preceding section, create interesting style. Parallel structure, if it is not overdone, is always attractive. Transposition of words out of their normal grammatical order (a device discussed more fully in the next chapter) makes for freshness of style; so does the use of vowel patterns and consonant patterns, to be discussed later on in the chapter "Beauty of Style." Figures of speech are always helpful; they too will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. In order to emphasize by repetition (as well as to anticipate the next paragraph) the present writer invites the attention of the reader to the following quota-

tions: "Variety is the spice of life" (Cowper); "Variety is the soul of pleasure" (Aphra Behn); "The great source of pleasure is variety" (Dr. Johnson); "Variety is the source of joy below" (Gay); "Variety: that is my motto" (La Fontaine); "The one rule is to be infinitely various" (Stevenson, in particular reference to the art of writing). Nothing makes for dull writing quite so much as monotony, and nothing makes for lively writing quite so much as variety.

One other device for creating interest is *quotation,* which will be commented upon at some length here because it will not be discussed elsewhere in this book. When writers are very young, mistrusting their own judgment, they quote at length and with frequency; when they are a little older, they are so afraid of appearing unoriginal that they hesitate to quote anything. Both extremes are deplorable. Too much quotation sounds timid and immature, or (which is worse) pedantic; but no quotation at all may leave a composition with too little variety. Most readers tire of the same style extended through page after page, for no matter how various and rich a style it may be, it is bound to possess a certain inescapable sameness of tone which will at last weary the reader. Quotations inserted occasionally relieve this sameness and postpone the inevitable weariness. Sometimes quotations may come spontaneously to the writer while he is in the act of composing; but usually they come only after deliberate and laborious search when the act of composing is over. Accordingly, when he has made the first draft of almost any kind of writing except fiction, a writer might well make a practice of running through some of the published literature on similar subjects to find passages that express some of his own ideas, and then insert these passages into his own work or substitute them for his own words.[3] For example, a traveler describing scenes in Europe might go, to take the first authors that come to mind, to Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey,* Byron's *Childe Harold,* or Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad;* a student of socialism in America could hardly refrain from quoting from Norman Thomas, Henry George, or Eugene

[3] This advice does not apply, of course, to writing which is a record of research done, or which is in any other way statistical, factual, or informative. It applies only to original creative writing which is imaginative or reflective.

Debs; and an essayist writing on the social life of insects would certainly quote from Fabre, Maeterlinck, Wheeler, and even Virgil.

While we are on this subject, we may pause to mention a few sources always good for quotations. There are, of course, the standard collections of selected quotations such as may be found in any good library. But possibly the most usable sources are the works of epigrammatists and maxim writers such as Oscar Wilde, Samuel Butler (of the *Notebooks*), Bernard Shaw, Carlyle, La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, La Bruyère, Poor Richard, Alexander Pope, Bacon, and Theophrastus. Likewise, most of the great classics contain lines suitable to almost any worthwhile thought. An hour's paging through Shakespeare, Tennyson, Milton, Virgil, or any good anthology of lyric poetry of any time or country will uncover a dozen lines seemingly penned for no other purpose than to be quoted. A special word should be said for the King James Bible. It is extraordinarily rich in quotable passages of all sorts—the straightforward earnestness of Paul, the bitter pessimism of Ecclesiastes, the sober business counsel of the Proverbs, the ecstatic imagery of the Psalms, the sensuous rapture of the Song of Songs, and the vivid epithets and flashing anger of Isaiah. No other book has had so profound an influence on English style and language; and no other book can give a writer more quotations, concrete and powerful, and filled with connotations that are rooted fast in the traditions and the spirit of the Anglo-Saxon.

Quotations should not be used ostentatiously. In general, except for purely expository purposes, they should be short; that is, they should seldom be more than a couple of sentences in length, and they may often be incorporated as clauses or phrases within the writer's own sentences. The phrase, "As So-and-so says—or puts it —or remarks," should be avoided.

Even the lowest of us may have high ideals; or as Oscar Wilde says, "All of us are in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."

This sounds formal and affected because the quotation is too obviously inserted to impress the reader. It would sound better if it went:

When Oscar Wilde said that "all of us are in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars," he meant that even the lowest of us may have high ideals.

When the language of a quotation is obviously Biblical, Shakespearian, Miltonic, or Burnsian, or when the quotation is familiar, the source from which it is taken ought not to be mentioned. To write, "As Shakespeare says, 'All the world's a stage' "; or, "As St. Paul puts it, 'These three remain, faith, hope, and charity' "; or, "As the old proverb has it, 'Honesty is the best policy' "; or, "In the words of Burns, 'My heart is weary, fu' o' care' "—to write thus is to insult the reader. The quotations themselves tell their origins.

b. *In Larger Elements.* A primary way to be interesting is to use perennially interesting subjects—like sex, religion, murders, executions, disasters, evidences of rationality in animals, relics of past ages, cures for common diseases, methods of making money, morbid aspects of human nature, and similar subjects which we need not trouble to catalogue here.

Another obvious, but altogether different, means of giving interest is the *setting up of an opposing idea* to overthrow. Readers like a contest. That is, they had rather see something disproved than proved; something attacked rather than something created. A writer may cater to these combative instincts of his readers without descending to the level of cheap politicians. He can be vigorous, virile, and aggressive without being ignoble. He can prove even while he disproves; he can create even while he attacks. And he can succeed in being interesting where a more timid writer would be dull.

No writer can be interesting if he gives the impression of being exhausted at the end of his work. How to avoid finishing like a child's toy which has run down and is teetering feebly to a close is a problem that should exercise every writer. The solution of the problem differs with every composition. But the solution frequently lies in the application of principles discussed earlier in this chapter: arranging ideas in the order of climax, giving scant attention to unimportant ideas, and using a wealth of details to back up generalizations. An old but still effective trick is to say occasionally such things as, "This is not the place to dwell on that subject," or "Time and space will not

allow me to deal with that question now," and so on. Remarks like these persuade the reader that the writer has depths beyond those exposed, and so tantalize the reader with the lure of the unknown.

A fifth very common way of giving interest is by means of *humor and a feeling of good humor* pervading much of the composition. Communists would be much more successful if more of them had a sense of humor, and socialism might be the reigning system if all socialists were good-natured. Intensity of passion, righteousness of cause, and intelligence of outlook all have their effect at times; but for persuasiveness and interestingness, they do not compare with humor. A writer may try to prove the soundness of an argument; but if he can create a laugh, he will not be asked to prove anything. He may try to show that what he has to say is so important that no one can afford to ignore it; but if he can create a laugh, he will have readers who will take the importance of his argument for granted.

What has just been said is particularly true in America; it need not be true in other countries. But in any country, writing which shows good taste by being urbane and tolerant, yet firm; which shows open-mindedness by being good-humored and dispassionate, yet sincere; which shows consideration for others by avoiding violence and extremes, yet remaining shrewd and witty—such writing is interesting anywhere in the world.

Other devices for gaining interest are not so obvious as those just mentioned. Some which may require special planning of structure or special methods of development are these: progression, the appeal to self-interest, analogy, and illustration.

To consider the first of these: We have all seen the lecturer who, as he reads his discourse to an audience and finishes each page, slips that page back under his manuscript. The audience perceives no diminution in the thickness of the manuscript; it feels that no progress is being made; and it despairs. Like an audience, *the reader must be made to feel that he is actually getting somewhere.* Nobody likes to read page after page of solid prose unbroken by mechanical devices indicating progression—paragraphs, divisions, chapters, parts. Everyone likes the feeling of accomplishment that comes with the end of one paragraph and the beginning of a new one—or of a

division, or chapter, or part, or book. Everyone likes to feel that he is getting somewhere, not merely plowing on endlessly and pointlessly through page after page of writing.

In various ways (besides the mechanical devices of division just mentioned) can a reader be made to feel that he is progressing. The simplest way is for the writer to announce at intervals, throughout the composition, just how much ground has been covered, and just how much yet remains to be explored. This sort of announcement may be made in so many words, like, "We have considered so-and-so; it remains for us to study such-and-such." Or it may be implied by numbers, as when, for example, a writer says, "In the first place," and "Next," and "Thirdly," and "A fourth point," and "Finally." With such an orderly system of announcement, the reader is certain to get a definite sense of progression, and to feel that the writer is covering ground toward the attainment of a definite end.

A second way to interest a reader is to *show how a subject may be of real and immediate concern* to him. For instance, people are ordinarily not much interested in local politics until they discover that their water bills have suddenly increased by about fifty per cent, and that the bad stretch of street in their block goes unrepaired; they are not much interested in plague epidemics until they discover a case of smallpox in the school which their children attend; and they are not much interested in subversive plots until they discover that a bomb has been found under the bus in which they commute every day. When a writer can make distinct contacts such as these between his abstract subject and his reader's self-interest, two-thirds of the work of being interesting is done.

A third source of interest involving the structure of a composition is the use of *analogy*. An analogy is a figure of speech chiefly differing from a simile in being an elaborate comparison between two things like each other in many respects instead of merely one. Besides being a variation from literal, straightforward statement, an analogy may be interesting for various reasons.

(a) It may attract the reader's interest by drawing a parallel between conditions that concern the reader and conditions that do not concern him For instance, a reader may not have the slightest in-

terest in the economic problems of England following the Industrial Revolution, but if the reader is made to see those problems as analogous to our own problems, he may become amazingly interested in the economic history of England.

(b) Moreover, analogies may serve to convert the abstract into the concrete. Let us take an example: "There is no doubt that contact with the things that they do not understand is to many minds distinctly disagreeable." This abstract statement is not particularly significant or memorable. But Frank Colby, the author, converts it into a strikingly concrete analogy by adding, "A dog not only prefers a customary and unpleasant odor; he hates a good one. A perfume pricks his nose, gives a wrench to his dog nature, perhaps tends to 'undermine those moral principles' without which dog 'society cannot exist.' " This concrete expression is obviously far more interesting than the abstraction.

(c) An analogy may be interesting because it clarifies or simplifies an intricate argument or an involved description. The complex tangle of knotted theological doctrines about the Roman Catholic purgatory may be cut through at once by the simple analogy, "Purgatory is a kind of waiting room or antechamber to heaven." The complicated map of Greece can be presented clearly in a brief analogy: "Greece is shaped like a three-fingered hand with a great gash almost cutting the palm in two below the thumb." Such short cuts engage the reader's interest not only because they are imaginative, but also because they give the reader the triumphant feeling of having got along famously—of having mastered a difficult situation at a single stroke.

A fourth way in which a composition may be made interesting is by the use of *concrete examples* and *specific illustrations.* Nothing keeps a reader's interest quite so well as development through particular details of an abstract generalization. Instead of the vague statement, "Jim began to associate with bad companions," how much more vigorous is the particularization, "Jim began to associate with the boys who gathered at Fatty's Hamburger Joint—young toughs like Butch Lewis, Red Mattson, and Pug Hammond." Instead of the generalized, "All Americans are alike," how much more

effective is the particularization made by a Frenchman: "Americans are all alike. Their meals are alike, their homes are alike, their cars are alike, their tastes in magazines and moving pictures are alike, their sentimentalities about dogs are alike, their very habits of love-making are alike." And instead of the vague, "The children were noisy at the Saturday morning theater party," how much more interesting is this particularization made by a student:

> The noise did not issue from the screen. It was inherent in the audience. There were shouts, exhortations, and vocal commands to the cowboy-hero that must have reached him at his home in Hollywood. There were wails, groans, screams as of voodoo victims, and the keening of fanatical cultists. There were whistles, stomps, exploding popcorn bags, cowbells, and now and again the soft "plop" of an overwrought mother giving up and dropping gently to the floor.

The development of a general idea by means of examples and illustrations requires observation, memory of fact, and imagination. It is not surprising, therefore, that the usual run of writers and speakers employ in their compositions only abstract generalizations. They have not observed life carefully enough to know it; instead they know only the laws of their personal creed. They have not been interested enough in life to remember what it is like; instead they remember only that they believe a certain thing. They have not imagination enough to create, or re-create, a vivid life in which their reader or their listener can participate; instead they give out only dry summaries of an intellectual system. A writer who wishes to avoid both weakness and dullness cannot neglect to expand on his generalizations by means of examples and illustrations. No other device of composition is so convincing or so vivifying.

EXERCISES

1. The end.

   Perhaps your instructor will bring some freshman themes to class, and allow you to look through them for examples of sentences with good endings or bad endings. Here are some poor sentences taken from freshman themes; try to improve them:

a. She tossed her blonde hair back over her shoulder with one quick movement of her head.

b. Many students in my class think that they have learned an enormous amount while they have been in college during the last four months.

c. His leadership is friendly and effective, though it is not the kind of leadership a military man would show.

d. Readers who have no specific interest, or very broad interests, are always glad to see *Time* on the newsstands, knowing that something odd or interesting will be in the magazine somewhere.

e. Serious friction between Sir Hyde Parker and Lord Nelson developed shortly. Parker seemed to dislike Nelson from the beginning.

f. Most of us never stop to think how difficult it is to build one of the bridges that we cross daily.

g. The modern writer must use new tactics of composition just as the modern mechanic must use new kinds of tools.

h. It seems doubtful whether I shall get to finish my college education because of the critical international situation.

i. My mother's beautiful grey hair is one among many things that I admire about her.

j. A new development is the stream of consciousness method that became popular in the 1920's and 1930's.

Make each of the following groups of ideas into a single sentence having a strong ending. Remember that you yourself must decide which of the ideas listed is of paramount importance:

Example:

Hannibal was forced to adopt the dangerous expedient of marching through Europe.
He was planning to attack Rome.
Carthage had lost control of the sea.

Because Carthage had lost control of the sea, Hannibal was forced, in attacking Rome, to adopt the dangerous expedient of marching through Europe.

a. The weakfish is commonly called a trout.
   It is a salt-water fish.
   It is extremely popular with fishermen.

b. My first four months in college have been beneficial.
   No other four months of my life have been nearly so beneficial.
   I feel certain of this.

c. I have been in college three years.
I have taken an almost completely technical course.
This is not the best course.
d. Women profit by attending a coeducational college.
They learn to compete with men.
They learn how men think and act.
This is essentially a man's world.
e. I have developed systematic habits of study.
I never had such habits before I entered college.
f. She was an energetic, independent woman.
She had a keen intellect.
She over-disciplined her children.
g. The reactionary is a person who has never grown up.
He feels it necessary to depend upon tradition and authority.
He fears to be independent.
h. Maya civilizations had periodic fluctuations of success and failure.
The fluctuations are associated with climatic changes.
No primitive people could keep a tropical jungle at bay.
i. Rousseau knew that he had many weaknesses.
He tried to blame society for them.
He attacked civilization.
j. Spender's verse sometimes suffers from imprecision.
It contains no cheap stylistic trickery.
It offers no easy political solutions to man's problems.

What would be the best way to end

a. A review of the arguments for (or against) universal military training in the United States.
b. An account of Spanish cruelties in the New World.
c. A campaign speech for a political candidate.
d. An essay on Schopenhauer's philosophy.
e. An article on the wild birds of your county.

2. Suspense.

Make each of the following groups of ideas into a sentence having good suspense:

a. His daughter fell ill.
She died.
He was rich.
b. Dante was melancholy.
His melancholy came from within him.
He did not want to be melancholy.

His melancholy was not due to caprice.
It was not a product of external circumstances.

c. Unemployment is our outstanding problem.
It troubles the workers.
It agitates the government.
It is the ruination of employers.

d. Deliver us from fire.
From sword.
From sudden death.

e. Knowledge got except by working is all hypothetical.
It is a thing to be argued about.
It is a thing floating in the clouds.

f. Many young men left this country in 1918.
They went to Europe.
Thousands died in battle.

g. It was always his deepest desire to go to college.
But first he wanted to finish high school.
He wanted to pay his own way through college, too.

h. Dishonesty and crime are increasing.
The police are as competent as ever.
The public as a whole is worse.

i. He died in the spring.
It was at about the time the first swallow arrived.

j. The ideals of the American people have changed greatly in the last twenty years.
The cheap car is responsible.
Yet there has been little real cultural progress.

Write a beginning which would create suspense in each of the following:

a. A story about a man who deserted his wife.
b. An account of some tour you have made.
c. An account of a hunting trip.
d. An account of the methods by which cancer may be cured.
e. A series of paragraphs on the most important persons in your town.
f. A character sketch of an absent-minded man.

3. Climax.

a. In the sentences you have made above, have you kept in mind the principle of climax?

b. Arrange the sentences in the following paragraphs in climactic

order, and study the climactic order within several of the individual sentences:

1. Man's breath is fatal to his fellows. 2. Men are devoured by our towns. 3. The more they are massed together, the more corrupt they become. 4. Of all creatures man is least fitted to live in herds. 5. Men are not made to be crowded together in ant-hills, but scattered over the earth to till it. 6. Disease and vice are the sure results of overcrowded cities. 7. Huddled together like sheep, men would very soon die.

—Jean Jacques Rousseau: A garbled paragraph from *Emile* (1762).

1. The minds of men were gradually reduced to the same level, the fire of genius was extinguished, and even the military spirit evaporated. 2. The natives of Europe were brave and robust. 3. The most aspiring spirits resorted to the court or standard of the emperors; and the deserted provinces, deprived of political strength or union, insensibly sunk into the languid indifference of public life. 4. The long peace, and the uniform government of the Romans, introduced a slow and secret poison into the vitals of the empire. 5. Spain, Gaul, Britain, and Illyricum supplied the legions with excellent soldiers, and constituted the real strength of the monarchy. 6. The posterity of their boldest leaders was contented with the rank of citizens and subjects. 7. They received laws and governors from the will of their sovereign, and trusted for their defense to a mercenary army. 8. Their personal valor remained, but they no longer possessed that public courage which is nourished by the love of independence, the sense of national honor, the presence of danger, and the habit of command.

—Edward Gibbon: A garbled paragraph from *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776).

Topics for several paragraphs are listed in each of the groups below. Tell how the arrangement of these paragraphs would vary according to your own purpose:

a. The Greeks believed that evil was due to inherent imperfection in reality.
   The Hebrews attributed both good and evil to the will of God.
   Zoroastrians saw evil as a cosmic principle at war with God.
   Buddhists thought that evil was inherent in selfhood.
b. Oil is the largest single industry in Venezuela.
   The development of the steel industry is beginning.
   Factories for making rubber tires and tubes have opened.
   Cattle-raising has long been a major industry in Venezuela.
c. The student makes requests through his instructor.
   The instructor, through the head of his department.

The head of a department, through the president.
The president, to the board of trustees.

d. He is a sensitive and accomplished stylist.
His storytelling ability is unquestioned.
He has deep sympathy for human suffering.
He understands human character.

e. Some people think in terms of absolutes and ideals.
Others think in terms of actual facts.
Others think in terms of the relation of facts to one another.
Others think in terms of the relation of facts to absolutes and ideals.

4. Proportion.

a. Do the sentences you have written or corrected in the previous exercises conform to the laws of proportion?

b. Revise the following sentences according to the laws of proportion so as to make the important idea in each really seem important:

After an absence of ten years, he returned to his native city, and found that his mother was dead.

The year moved on to an unusually warm March.

The many critics of our present age would have us believe that science threatens civilization.

She made a loving and devoted mother, though she was so nervous that she sometimes scolded the children when their faults should have been overlooked.

The roads are still very poor in country regions where horses are used, especially on hills.

c. Write one paragraph about three people who have influenced your life. Make one of the three seem more important than the others. Next, write two additional paragraphs, in each of which a different one of the trio is made to seem most important. As nearly as possible, use the same materials in all three paragraphs.

d. Suppose you were writing a story with this theme: "People who break social conventions always make themselves unhappy." Which parts of the story would you enlarge upon if you were writing for a serious magazine interested in real literature? If you were writing for a cheap newspaper-serial syndicate? If you were writing for a religious magazine?

5. Structure.

a. Look over the groups of sentences listed in the preceding exercises, and try to determine which sentences should be developed into

paragraphs. Could the ideas suggested in several sentences be combined in one paragraph? Do your decisions about the sentences that should be developed into paragraphs harmonize with your decisions about position, climax, and proportion?

b. See also the Exercises for Sections 2–3 of Chapter II.

6. Repetition.

a. Study the repetitions of words for intensification in some book of the Bible—say Ecclesiastes I, III, and IV; and then try to enlarge in a similar way on two or three of the Proverbs of Solomon—say those in Chapter XII.

b. Write three or four sentences repeating the idea (not the words) of each of the following sentences:

There was no water in that land.
The man was insane.
The girl was beautiful.
It rained all day.
The desk was untidy.

c. Take some paragraph from a freshman theme that your instructor has brought to class (or from some old theme of your own) and recast it so as to give it parallel structures throughout.

d. Rewrite the following paragraph so as to have key-words appearing throughout:

We have now arrived at one consideration which must always limit frankness in literature, namely, the standard of contemporary taste. The modesty that hesitates to align itself with this criterion is a shortcoming. But if we are content with this consideration alone, our scale of judgment becomes purely historical; we are left with a sliding scale that readjusts itself to every new epoch. We feel at once that we need, besides the shifting standard just mentioned, some fixed unit of judgment that never varies. Neither the popular preferences of the brawling Restoration period, nor those of the prudish Victorian age are satisfactory.

—Arthur Waugh: A garbled paragraph from an essay on "Reticence in Literature."

e. How many times has the main idea been repeated in the paragraph just quoted? Try to make the paragraph more effective by putting more of its sentences into parallel structure.

f. Rewrite some freshman theme (or some old theme of your own, or some passage from a book or magazine) so as to make it about twice as long by means of repeating its ideas in different words.

g. Suppose you were writing an article on "The Different Sections

of My Home Town." What parallel divisions would you make if you were writing as an architect? As a social worker? As a historian? As a man wanting to establish a retail business? As a public health worker?

7. Contrast.

a. Read a story by some good writer, and carefully analyze all the lesser and larger elements of contrast it contains.

b. Study the contrasts in the following passage from Dr. Johnson's life of Addison. Write a criticism in Dr. Johnson's manner of the style of some other author. If you wish, rewrite your criticism, using other devices of contrast involving the length of sentences, rhetorical questions, inversions, unusual words, etc.

His prose is the model of the middle style; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not groveling; pure without scrupulosity, and exact without apparent elaboration; always equable, and always easy, without glowing words or pointed sentences. Addison never deviates from his track to snatch a grace; he seeks no ambitious ornaments, and tries no hazardous innovations. His page is always luminous, but never blazes in unexpected splendor. What he attempted, he performed; he is never feeble, and he did not wish to be energetic; he is never rapid, and he never stagnates. His sentences have neither studied amplitude, nor affected brevity; his periods, though not diligently rounded, are voluble and easy. Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.

c. Write paragraphs defining the following by means of contrast:

Pleasant weather.
An interesting lecturer.
A career.
An old person.
The typical college student.

d. Develop elements of contrast in the plot, character, and setting of the following suggested stories:

A young woman loves a man of whom her family disapproves, marries him, and then finds that her family was right.

A doting mother brings up a daughter with the ideal of denying her nothing. When the child grows up, and the mother cannot possibly satisfy all demands, the child begins to hate the mother.

A young college couple plan to elope after a dance. But during

the course of the dance, the girl meets another interesting young man. She refuses to elope.

An artist wishes to paint a perfect madonna. But he finds that his idea of what she should be changes so fast that he can never paint her.

A rich man loses his money, is not contented to remain merely well-to-do, strives frantically to regain his wealth, and finally commits a crime for the sake of a fortune.

8. Interest.

a. To find out what subjects are inherently interesting to people, let the members of the class keep a list of items in a week's reading (of newspapers, magazines, and books) which interest them individually. At the end of the week, the items may be read out, and classified on the blackboard by the instructor.

b. How could you make essays on the following purely expository subjects have a somewhat belligerent tone:

Raising Corn (cotton, wheat, rice, zinnias, petunias, collie dogs, canaries, hogs, race horses, etc.).

On Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen.

My First Play (opera, circus, concert, etc.).

"It is not enough to do good; one must do it in the right way."

The Man of One Idea.

The Average Man.

National Politics in the 1920's.

The End of Victorianism in America.

Television and our National Culture.

The War to End War.

Types of Hotels.

The Small College or the Large University?

Humor.

Modern Biography.

Why Masefield Is (or Is Not) to Be Regarded as the Poet of the Common Man.

c. Review the work of the most important modern narrative-writers to determine how frequently they use the device of attacking something. Consider especially the work of Shaw, Wells, Galsworthy, Aldous Huxley, Anatole France, Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, and John Steinbeck. To what extent does the season's most popular play or novel use the device? How could you use it in a story—

About a college professor.

About a college girl.

About a far-western town.
About some foreign or distant locality you know.
About mothers of grown children.
About owners of small businesses.

d. Write short essays on some local, national, or campus abuse—first, in an earnest, serious style; then in a burlesque style like that of some early American humorist (Josh Billings, Artemus Ward, Will Rogers); then in an urbanely satirical style like that of James Thurber, Robert Benchley, certain essays in the *New Yorker,* Addison (*Spectator Nos. 13, 112, 275, 281*); then in a brutally ironic style like that of Swift (in the later books of *Gulliver's Travels*). Which essay does your instructor like best?

e. Try to interest the reader in the subjects listed in *b* by engaging his self-interest.

f. Explain the following abstractions by means of concrete analogies:

Communism.
Inflation.
Education.
The effect of the atomic bomb on our characters.
The place of religion in our public life.

g. Clarify the following complexities by means of analogies:

The way a camera (helicopter, piston of a gasoline engine, the valve of a tire, a dose of Epsom salts) works.
The Federal Reserve System.
The respiratory (circulatory) system.
Bringing up a child.
Teaching a class.

h. Write a paragraph giving examples and illustrations of the following:

So-and-so is a typical college student.
Culture has no place in contemporary American life.
The dominant trait of my personality is ———.
I am disillusioned about college.
Kipling epitomizes British imperialism.

CHAPTER II

Rationality in Style

The word "style," like the words "religion," "goodness," and "patriotism," implies a vague, hazy sort of excellence which most of us would have a hard time accurately defining. But we are certain that no writing can be really good, or interesting, or worth-while without *style.* The cigarette advertisement has style (after its fashion); the classified advertisement has none. The newspaper account of the latest natural disaster has style; the schedule of radio programs has none. Gibbon's History of Rome has style; a mathematics textbook has none. Style, in a word, is that virtue in writing which makes it more than merely comprehensible.

I wanted to see a movie. It was an Academy Award picture. It was being shown at the Rialto. So I went to town this morning and saw the show.

We can understand such writing easily enough. But it has no style. Between writing like that, and the writing of people like Conrad, Faulkner, and Hemingway are a thousand intermediate stages. The very uppermost of these stages are probably reserved for people who have a special talent and sensitivity beyond what mere training and advice can do for them. But training and advice can help any intelligent person clamber from the lower stages of writing to the general region of the upper stages. This chapter and the four that follow are intended to give advice and foster training that will hasten the ascent.

The heading of this chapter is somewhat ambiguous. It means that the chapter will try to tell how meaning and structure should supplement each other—how a rational correspondence should exist between the thing said and the method in which it is said, to the

end that it be said as clearly and as logically as possible, and that it convey the exact meaning and shade of meaning the writer desires.

1. CONTROL. The first requirement of all is that the writer have a rational understanding of what he wishes to say. That is, he cannot afford to write even a single sentence without first asking himself, What is the most important idea, emotion, or image I wish to convey in this sentence? He must pick out the one word he wishes to emphasize, the one phrase he wishes to plant in the mind of his reader, the one clause which he wishes to make linger and ferment. Probably more elementary faults of style are due to the failure of writers to weigh and properly evaluate their own ideas than to any other weakness. For if the writer himself has not decided which of his ideas is the most valuable, how can the reader decide? Rational, discriminating, judicious thinking is the first habit a writer should acquire. Without it, he is only a babbler.

A student writes:

> There are types of students who go through college on the reputations which they received at the first of the year because they did extra-hard work then, though they do very little later on.

The writer has not evaluated his own thoughts here. One thought is that students go through college on reputations received early in the year; another thought is that these students worked hard for their reputations; and a third thought is that these same students do little work later on. Which of these ideas is most important? The writer had not decided, and the reader does not know. Accordingly, the sentence, though comprehensible, is flabby and styleless. Other examples follow:

> Mrs. Rhymes had on an old pair of cotton gloves, and had evidently been puttering among the ferns and azalea bushes.

> Surely you are not in sympathy with those people who raise one of their own kind to prominence and then hurl muck at their own creations, as we know some of our city politicians have been doing in the present campaign.

> We had expected him to live, but he died.

I had been vaccinated and was immune to the smallpox which was sweeping through the city; so I had felt safe, and had come there on a business trip.

These sentences are all grammatically correct; they are not necessarily ununified; they are not incoherent. But in no sentence has the writer made a plain and definite choice of the most important idea in the sentence. In any one of them he might choose any one of several ideas as the most important, and construct a new and better sentence in any one of several ways. The choice never forces itself on the writer; but rather, the writer must always force his own choice on the sentence. This means that he shall have enough strength of intellect to make a decision, render judgment, and do execution on every idea that comes to him. If he fails to discriminate, he has failed in the very first step toward acquiring a rational style.

Having decided what is the most important idea in the sentence, he must let that idea control the sentence by appearing in a *dominant structure*. He must show the reader that this idea is dominant, and that he intended it to be dominant. Let us look at the last of the faulty sentences quoted above. As it now stands, no dominating idea controls it. He can use his own discretion, therefore, in deciding which of the four ideas is really the most important, and can frame four different sentences accordingly:

Though smallpox was sweeping through the city to which I had come on a business trip, I, having been vaccinated, felt immune.

I felt immune to the smallpox sweeping through the city to which I had come on a business trip, for I had been vaccinated.

Since I had been vaccinated and felt immune to the smallpox which was sweeping through the city, I had come there on a business trip.

Though I myself had been vaccinated and felt immune, an epidemic of smallpox was sweeping through the city to which I had come on a business trip.

Each of these sentences has a different meaning, a different implication from the others; each puts forward a different idea as the controlling and dominant element in the sentence. Which of the four

sentences the writer shall use depends entirely on his own judgment as to which of the four ideas he desires to impress most strongly on his readers.

Whenever a writer is confronted by such a multiplicity of choices, he should cast his vote for one of them, make his decision for better or for worse, and then stick to his decision. If he cannot decide which of his ideas is most important, he should do one of three things: not write the sentence, or write two or three sentences instead of one, or use a balanced or parallel structure.

2. STRUCTURE. A balanced or parallel structure is one in which the writer has considered two or more ideas to be of equal importance, has believed they supplement one another, and has expressed their equality and their supplementariness by placing them in similar structures within one sentence. The sentence just written was molded into three parallel structures because each of the three ideas expressed is of equal importance with the other two, and each forms only one portion of a complete idea. If they had not been of equal value, they would not have had the same structure; and if they had not been portions of the same idea, they would not have been put in the same sentence.

We may call it a rule, therefore, that *ideas of equal thought-value deserve structures of equal value, and ideas of unequal thought-value deserve structures of unequal value.* The ascending order of structure-value is this: word, phrase, clause, sentence, and paragraph. The following sentences illustrate all these stages but the last:

1. Word: I saw *armless* men and *legless* men.
2. Phrase: I saw men *without arms* and men *without legs.*
3. Clause: I saw men *who had no arms,* and men *who had no legs.*
4. Sentence: *I saw armless men. And I saw legless men.*

Since the ideas of "armlessness" and "leglessness" are equal in thought-value, the following sentences with unequal structure-values would be absurd:

I saw armless men, and men who had no legs.
I saw men who had no arms, and men without legs.

In these last two sentences, equal ideas are given unequal structures. But a more common offense is that in which unequal ideas are given equal structures. It is more common because so many inexperienced writers have the habit of stringing together a hodgepodge of ideas by means of "ands" and "buts." One of the sentences quoted in the preceding section illustrates this fault:

Mrs. Rhymes had on an old pair of cotton gloves, and had evidently been puttering among the ferns and azalea bushes.

The two clauses are certainly not of equal thought-value; and yet in this sentence they have the same kind of structure. Such incongruity is irrational.

The following sentences have the same weakness:

He stepped off the curb without looking, and was struck and killed by a passing car.

Here stepping off a curb, and being killed, are made to seem of equal importance.

The sun may shine tomorrow, and then we can go horseback riding.

Many people have no aim in life, and move in a circle which gets nowhere.

His mind was in a turmoil, so he decided to get drunk.

All these sentences can be improved by judicious subordination:

Mrs. Rhymes, with an old pair of cotton gloves on her hands, had evidently been puttering among the ferns and azalea bushes.

Stepping off the curb without looking, he was struck and killed by a passing car.

If the sun shines tomorrow, we can go horseback riding.

Many people, having no aim in life, move in a circle which gets nowhere.

Since his mind was in a turmoil, he decided to get drunk.

It will be noted that in each of these corrected sentences, the subordinate idea originally expressed in an independent clause has been re-expressed in a prepositional phrase, a participial phrase, or a dependent clause. That is, the structure-value has been reduced to correspond with the minor thought-values.

Sometimes, however, a writer finds it necessary to do the opposite —that is, to make an important idea really *seem* important. The writer accomplishes this feat by raising words to the rank of phrases, phrases to dependent clauses, dependent clauses to independent clauses, and independent clauses to sentences. An example follows:

Thompson was a *much-traveled* man.
Thompson was a man *of many travels.*
Thompson was a man *who had traveled much.*
Thompson, who was the man for us, *had traveled much.*
Thompson was the man. *He had traveled much.*

This deliberate heightening of an idea's importance requires more self-conscious artistry than does the proper subordination spoken of above. This heightening is a positive search for excellence; the other is merely a negative avoidance of error.

3. POSITION. The most important positions in any element of composition are the beginning and the end. Reason requires, therefore, that (whenever clarity permits) we place our most important words, phrases, clauses, or ideas in one of these positions. The negative of this requirement, perhaps it is useless to say, is that we should avoid placing unimportant words, phrases, clauses, or ideas in the two important positions in the sentence.

a. *The Beginning.* Sentences should seldom or never begin with words like "however," "also," "then too," and the like. But some laws supersede other laws. The law of clarity always comes first; other laws are secondary. Moreover, no rule should become a fetish. A certain fastidious student used to shudder at the very thought of beginning any sentence with "the" or "a." His instinct was right; but his practice was perverted.

b. *The End.* Even more important than the beginning is the end of a sentence. If the reader will turn back a few pages to the sentence concerning smallpox, vaccination, and immunity, he will see

that each of the corrected versions, except the last, ends with the principal clause and the principal idea in the sentence. In Section 2, likewise, each of the improved sentences ends with the principal clause and the principal idea. The practice illustrated in these sentences is, in general, safe. The important clause and the important idea should come at the end of the sentence. But like all other practices, it may be carried too far. It may become an obsession with the writer, and it may lead to monotony of style. Furthermore, it is not adapted to writing of a leisurely gait and a familiar tone. It is best adapted to exposition aiming at absolute clarity, and to argumentation aiming at conviction.

Yet no sentence should ever end with a tailing off into insignficant words and ideas:

Most of us would refuse to read more than a few sentences of it.

The gift of prophecy was also assigned to him.

The last two words in these sentences are flat and insipid.

The habit, which most untrained writers have, of placing a participial phrase or a dependent clause at the end of a sentence was mentioned in the previous chapter. Here are some further examples of these offenses:

Her voice failed, being broken by sobs.

He died yesterday, having been sick only a week.

He took to begging, being on the verge of starvation.

She raised her hands in prayer to Neptune as she stood by the sea.

He would not answer, though I rang the bell several times.

I know, of course, that the drawing is offered only as a very slight and rapid sketch, and that it is impossible, even for a Rembrandt, to draw accurately when he is in a hurry, but there is a formlessness in some important parts of this sketch (the hands, for instance) which makes it almost without interest for me.

(This last sentence is almost a model of what a sentence should not be.) All these sentences are irrational because they indicate by

means of subordinate structures that certain ideas are subordinate, and yet they place these subordinate ideas and structures in the prominent position in the sentences. A writer of such sentences is like a strawberry packer who would go to the trouble of culling out inferior stock, and would then pile this inferior stock at the top of the basket for prospective customers to see. The writer should be like a real berry-packer; he should carefully choose the best of his stock, and then pile it in the most conspicuous place—at the end of the sentence. If he has a word to emphasize, or a phrase, or a clause, or an idea, he should juggle the grammatical elements, manipulate the sentence-parts, rearrange the word-group, so as to make the important word, phrase, clause, or idea drop neatly into the prominent place. In a ballet dance, the chorus marches, wheels, converges, retreats, interlaces in a hundred gyrations; but always the star dancer appears in the prominent place. Good writing is like that. It coils, turns, pauses, retreats, converges—and always the important element appears magically at the supreme position.

Note how each member of the following pairs conveys a different feeling:

They found him drunk in the street.
They found him in the street, drunk.

Queen Victoria walked ahead of us.
Ahead of us walked Queen Victoria.

The tiger now had him by the throat.
The tiger had him by the throat now.

I went from the hotel to my train.
I went to the train from my hotel.

In these sentences, different end-words produce altogether different effects.

c. *Transposition.* Words or phrases transposed from their normal place in a sentence usually gain in emphasis. This rule holds good except in sentences where transposition would take a word away from the end-position.

Before continuing with this discussion, perhaps we had better see

just what the normal sentence order is. The following sentence illustrates the elemental order:

The good man kindly gave the book to me.

(a) Subject, preceded by adjective.
(b) Verb, preceded by adverb.
(c) Object.
(d) Indirect object.

This elemental order has a few additional complexities which deserve mention:

The man in gray talked in a high voice.

(a) Subject, followed by adjective phrase.
(b) Verb, followed by adverbial phrase.

This order holds for adjective and adverbial clauses as well as phrases:

The man who lived down the street talked when he had the chance.

These examples show the fundamental orders. As for the order in more complicated sentences, the reader can more safely rely on his instinct for the language than on his memory of half-a-dozen special rules.

All this has been a digression. The main point is that *attention can be focused on a word in a sentence if that word is placed out of its natural order.* The italics in the following sentences indicate words out of their natural order:

Everywhere in the darkness, I saw men lying about, *dead.*

Patiently, he listened.

The sunshine, *cold and bright,* offered no sympathy.

Last of all these marching thousands *rode Napoleon.*

All day were the birds loud in my garden.

Among these visions wandered *my spirit.*

The last sentence is almost bad. So much distortion looks artful and insincere. Indeed, a writer must use the device of transposition

with the most discreet caution. He should reserve it for those occasions when he "would be very fine." There it is effective. But if he uses it every time he has the opportunity to do so, it soon tarnishes and looks cheap. How poor would be these verses from Ecclesiastes if they were distorted by transposition in the following way:

> Of all the labor which under the sun he taketh, what hath a man the profit? Into the sea run the rivers all; and yet full is not the sea.

On the other hand, how effective are these examples of transposition from the same book:

> For in much wisdom is much grief.
> In the day of prosperity, be joyful.
> He by his wisdom delivered the city.
> All things have I seen in the days of my vanity.

The reader should notice in passing that the transpositions in the first two examples are designed to place important words in the important end-position, rather than to attract attention to themselves. In the last two examples, however, the transpositions are designed to emphasize the words transposed. Unless transposition can serve one of these two purposes, it is not worth while for its own sake. One other purpose, however, it may serve; and that is to make transitions from sentence to sentence more smooth.[1]

4. CONTINUITY. A piece of writing has continuity if the connections between its elements are tight and snug—if each part is locked hard and fast to its neighboring parts. Continuity is not always a virtue. It implies a strictly logical procedure, and it hints of an intellect controlled by rationality. Obviously, therefore, too strict continuity is out of place in writing which attempts to seem spontaneously emotional and unstudiedly sincere. It precludes a quick, nervous, energetic style. Often it gives writing clarity at the sacrifice of strength. Furthermore, the tendency of modern writing is analytic rather than synthetic; that is, modern writing is coming more and more to consist of an accumulation of units rather than a nexus of parts. And finally, an unbroken continuity is likely to weary the reader.

[1] The last three sentences contain transposed elements. The reader may care to analyze their function and criticize their effectiveness.

On the other hand, even in our generation of hasty readers and impatient thinkers, some people demand logical writing instead of nervous writing, and some subjects require rational consideration instead of emotional contemplation. Moreover, writing in which no strong controlling intellect is apparent throughout never has been, and probably never will be, for a long time appealing. Even Shelley (to take the first example that comes to mind), who is the most purely lyric of the great English poets, felt the control of intellect. An analysis of such lyrics as the "Ode to the West Wind," "The Skylark," and "The Cloud" will reveal an amazingly solid and supple intellectual structure underlying the airiness of the poems. It is true, too, that the most powerful radicals and convincing innovators are those who know the ways of conservatism. Nearly every worth-while modernistic painter has had an early stage of conventionality, and nearly every modern stylist has had his period of conservatism. It can probably do nobody any harm, therefore, to learn a little about the conservative style of writing—for writing with smoothness of continuity *is* conservative.

a. *Continuity of Ideas.* Continuity depends, first of all, on the larger structure of the composition. In narration, it depends on a simple following of the time sequence. In description, it depends on the arrangement of details. In exposition, it depends on the arrangement of ideas. We shall discuss only the last of these three forms here.

It cannot be too often repeated that the easiest way to give smooth continuity to style is to have a clear and rational structure in the composition as a whole. When the parts of the composition are so thought out and arranged that each part leads logically and inevitably to the succeeding part, a writer will have little trouble in giving continuity to his style.

There are, however, a few devices which help the writer achieve this continuity. Some of these concern the continuity of ideas; some the continuity of paragraphs; and some the continuity of sentences.

As for the first of these, the adoption of a certain order of procedure—and adherence to it—is the simplest and most effective. For example, there may be an order of procedure altogether chrono-

logical; or the order may be from a general idea to particular illustrations of it; or it may be from the particular illustrations to the general idea governing them; or it may be from simple toward more and more complex ideas; or it may be from known or admitted facts toward unknown or disputed facts; or it may be from an enumeration of points that are to be considered to an elaboration of each of those points in turn. Which method the writer adopts will depend upon his subject. But once he has chosen his method, he ought to stick to it pretty closely throughout his work. If he does so, he will find the minor problems of continuity much easier to solve, and the reader will find the composition much pleasanter to follow.

b. *Continuity Between Paragraphs.* A more mechanical consideration is that of continuity between paragraphs. The device most commonly used to effect this continuity is the *transitional sentence,* that is, a sentence which points both forward and back—forward toward the new paragraph, and back toward the preceding paragraph. This paragraph begins with a transitional sentence. The words "a more" indicate that something has preceded; the rest of the sentence suggests the nature of the new paragraph. The second paragraph in this section also begins with a transitional sentence.[2]

A second device is the insertion of a short *transitional paragraph* between two important paragraphs. Like the transitional sentence, the transitional paragraph hints at something that has gone before, and indicates the general outline of what is to follow. The fifth paragraph in this section is a transitional paragraph; so is the paragraph beginning on the next line.

c. *Continuity Within the Paragraph.* More varied than the devices which make for continuity between paragraphs are those which make for continuity within the paragraph—that is, for continuity between sentences.

The first of these is the use of *transitional words.* In looking over the present section, one would find that the transitional words already used are "therefore," "furthermore," "that is," "finally," "on

[2] Occasionally the transitional sentence comes at the *end* of a paragraph instead of at the beginning; but this type is uncommon, for it places an unimportant idea in the important end-position of the paragraph.

the other hand," "moreover," "too," "accordingly," and "however." This makes a sizable list, which may be supplemented from the following paragraph.

Somewhat akin to transitional words is the use of *pronoun references* in one sentence to nouns in a preceding sentence. The pronouns thus form a rational link between the two sentences. By way of illustration, the paragraph just above begins, "The first of *these*" —with *these* referring to a noun in the preceding sentence. And the first paragraph in this section contains several "it's" referring to nouns in the preceding sentence. A better example follows:

> The Pleiads were daughters of Atlas, and nymphs of Diana's train. One day Orion saw *them* and became enamored and pursued *them*. In *their* distress *they* prayed to the gods to change *their* form, and Jupiter turned *them* into pigeons, and then made *them* a constellation in the sky. Though *their* number was seven, only six stars are visible, for Electra, one of *them*, it is said, left her place.

The reader conceives these four sentences as a large unit, quite unconscious of the subtle device which cements them.

A little different is the trick of *repeating in one sentence important words of the preceding sentence.* An example, also from Bulfinch, follows:

> The story of the Iliad ends with *the death of Hector,* and it is from the Odyssey and other poems that we learn the fate of the other heroes. After *the death of Hector,* Troy did not immediately fall, but receiving aid from new *allies* still continued its resistance. One of these *allies* was Memnon, the Æthiopian prince, whose story we have already told. Another was *Penthesilea,* queen of the Amazons. . . . *Penthesilea* slew many of the bravest warriors, but was at last slain by Achilles. But when *the hero* bent over his fallen foe, and contemplated her beauty, youth, and valor, he bitterly regretted his victory. Thersites, an insolent brawler and demagogue, ridiculed his grief, and was in consequence slain by *the hero.*[3]

Such a weaving together of sentences becomes an even stronger union when the repeated words are brought close to each other by transposition. In the passage just quoted, for example, there would

[3] The passages quoted are taken from chaps. xxvi and xxviii of Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable,* 1855.

be a closer weave if the author had transposed his link-words in some such fashion as the following:

> It is from the Odyssey and later poems that we learn the fate of the other heroes, for the story of the Iliad ends with *the death of Hector.* After *the death of Hector,* Troy did not immediately fall, but continued its resistance with aid received from new *allies.* One of these *allies* was Memnon . . . etc.

This revised version carries the thought swiftly from sentence to sentence with hardly a break. Bulfinch, however, had so simple a theme that he needed no such powerful coupler to fasten his sentences together, and so he dispensed with it. But in compositions where the idea is knotty and the coherence difficult, it is an extremely useful device.

The repetition of a word from sentence to sentence may couple together pairs of sentences. But it does not link together all the sentences in a paragraph. This latter feat is accomplished when *one word is repeated from sentence to sentence throughout the paragraph.* This repeated word (or phrase) becomes a distinctive brand burned on each sentence, and identifies that sentence as belonging to the particular herd of sentences which go together to make up a paragraph. We have spoken of this device in a preceding chapter, but it will bear further illustration here. The following paragraph from Matthew Arnold offers good examples not only of key-words but of other devices of continuity already mentioned; the key-words are capitalized, and the other transitional words are italicized:

> This culture is more interesting and more far-reaching than that other, which is founded solely on the scientific ardor for knowing. But it needs times of faith and ardor, times when the *intellectual horizon* is opening and widening all around us to flourish in. And is not the close and bounded *intellectual horizon* within which we have long lived and moved now lifted up, and are not new lights finding free *passage* to shine *in upon us?* For a long time there was no *passage* for *them* to make their way *in upon us,* and then it was of no use to think of adapting the world's action to *them.* Where was the hope of making REASON AND THE WILL OF GOD prevail among people who had a *routine* which they had christened REASON AND THE WILL OF GOD, in which they were inextricably bound, and beyond which they had no power of looking? But now the

iron force of adhesion to the old *routine*—social, political, religious—has *wonderfully yielded;* the *iron force* of *exclusion of all which is new* has *wonderfully yielded.* The danger now is, not that people should obstinately refuse to allow anything but their old *routine* to pass for REASON AND THE WILL OF GOD, but either that they should allow some novelty or other to pass for these too easily, or else that they should underrate the importance of them altogether, and think it enough to follow action for its own sake, without troubling themselves to make REASON AND THE WILL OF GOD prevail therein. Now, then, is the moment for culture to be of service, culture which believes in making REASON AND THE WILL OF GOD prevail, believes in perfection, is the study and pursuit of perfection, and is no longer debarred by a rigid invincible *exclusion of whatever is new,* from getting acceptance for its ideas, simply because they are new.

One final device by which continuity may be obtained, though it too has already been mentioned, will be discussed here. It is *parallel structure*—the expression of diverse ideas in so similar a form that they have a seeming relation. The parallel structure may be quite complex—like a telescope with a tube within a tube within a tube. Thus, parallel words may occur in parallel phrases, which may occur in parallel clauses, which may occur in parallel sentences. In the eighteenth century the device often took the form of antithesis; it was revived in the late nineteenth century as a means of unifying a sometimes impressionistic, highly individualistic prose. Here is a passage from Henley (1890); note its multiple parallelisms:

Essayists, like poets, are born and not made, and for one worth remembering the world is confronted with a hundred not worth reading. Your true essayist is in a literary sense the friend of everybody. . . . He must be personal, or his hearers can feel no manner of interest in him. He must be candid and sincere, or his readers presently see through him. He must have learned to think for himself and to consider his surroundings with an eye that is both kindly and observant, or they straightway find his company unprofitable. He should have fancy, or his starveling propositions will perish for lack of metaphor and the tropes and figures needed to vitalize a truism. He does well to have humor, for humor makes men brothers, and is perhaps more influential in an essay than in most places else. He will find a little wit both servicable to himself and comfortable to his readers. For wisdom, it is not absolutely necessary that he have it.

With this we may leave the discussion of rationality in style. The whole subject demands only a clear understanding of just what one wishes to say, a clear knowledge of a few mechanical principles, and a little care in applying the principles.

EXERCISES

1. Control.

   Organize each of the following groups of ideas into a sentence with one of the elements in the controlling structure; then organize the same ideas into another sentence with a different element as the controlling structure; and so on with each idea listed:

   a. He read out to me the scheme of another book.
      He had been ill.
      He had laid the scheme aside long ago.
   b. His past came back to him in pictures.
      His boyhood returned first of all.
      He saw again his old home.
   c. The sweat broke out upon his forehead.
      A sudden truth had come to him.
      He knew that he hated this woman.
   d. I desired to mix with the crowd.
      I longed to listen to the life-throbs of the world.
      I went back to the city.
   e. We choose traits from many imperfect individuals.
      These we put together.
      Thus we form an ideal.
      We are like painters or sculptors.

2. Structure. See the following exercise.

3. Position.

   Recast the following sentences so as to make thought-value and structure-value consistent. Where clarity permits, put the important idea in the end-position.

   a. All the student's financial affairs are handled by his parents; therefore, the student is relieved of all financial responsibility.

   b. Virtually cast into a new world and thrown on his own resources, the student overdraws his allowance at the bank once or twice, thus learning the virtues of economy.

   c. These are vivid principles such as are remembered and applied throughout the life of the student.

d. When a horse is in the process of jumping over a fence, he brings his hind feet forward.

e. He is a man who is endowed with abilities of an extraordinary nature.

f. He was a good rider, but he could not stay on that horse.

g. Very often when I was a child I would slip into the bathroom, where I would occupy myself watching my father perform the morning ritual of shaving.

h. Dr. Pinkham is not really tall; but he is thin, and his thinness causes him to look taller than he is.

i. I finished college having a grossly exaggerated sense of my own importance.

j. The sandwiches were ordered, and they were soon placed before us by the waiter.

k. On our way to town we paused in the city park, which was glowing with dahlias, chrysanthemums, and purple gay-feathers.

l. Uncle Ned appears to be heart-broken, but he gives that impression at every funeral, and so no one pays any attention to him.

m. He looked over the side of the plane, only to see people scattering in all directions, or looking anxiously up, as if they feared the worst.

n. My brother is a wearer of a fraternity emblem, and I myself hope to be, like him, a member of a fraternity; yet I must admit that I am not entirely in favor of fraternities.

o. As yet his belief in himself has not proved to be a confidence which has been misplaced.

Experiment with transpositions in the following sentences, and study the different effects you obtain:

a. There is no such music in all the range of English verse, seek where you will, as there is in Swinburne.

b. As yet the great art of self-embellishment is for us Englishmen but in its infancy.

c. They added a musical note to my joyous mood.

d. The first rule for a good style is that the author should have something valuable to say.

e. I swung from place to place in happy, lightsome mood, blithe as a fairy prince in quest of adventures.

4. Continuity.

a. What arrangement of ideas would you adopt to gain continuity of idea in compositions on the following subjects:

The Negro in modern literature.

The American Punitive Expedition into Mexico in 1916.
How to play football.
Communism in America.
The meaning of recent economic developments in America.
Types of sailing vessels.
Types of students.

b. Write transitional sentences or paragraphs to connect the paragraphs suggested by each of the topic sentences in the following groups:

(1) Creative intelligence requires for its full realization a mature civilization.

We have disproved the romantic delusion of the free creative savage.

Primitive society was not all bad.

Primitive man had a grasp of some of our elemental truths.

(2) The average man thinks only about his daily business.

The Greeks discovered a world-order, a "cosmos."

Within the framework of their "cosmos" the Greeks discovered abstract science.

The Greeks did not discover natural science.

(3) The art of the novel is a young art.

The novel has taken its place among the arts.

The young novelist of today has enormous chances.

The novelist must beware of his chief enemy—the excessive admiration of people without taste.

(4) Most plays now produced by the commercial theatre are trash.

The first object of every play producer is to make money.

It is said that the public likes trash.

The public taste for good music and good art is increasing.

(5) The world about us contains individual things.

It is easy to define *individuality.*

It is not easy to describe *an individual.*

c. Give continuity to the sentences in the following paragraph by using as many transitional devices as you can. Combine sentences if you wish:

Only one circumstance induces us to notice this most unpleasant book. The author evidently has ability to do better. He does not write with much skill. The writer does not seem to understand the poor people whom he describes. He does not sympathize with them. He has sharp eyes for details. He does

not penetrate the superficial dirt of toil and poverty. He grossly exaggerates the vices of the poor. We cannot accept his characters as typical. One thing he has done beyond all doubt. Rough and inartistic, the novelist has used violent color and the blackest of black shadows. He has succeeded in drawing a figure who sticks with painful reality in the memory. Liza is a factory girl of eighteen, who lived in a Lambeth slum. The portrait of this girl is complete and strong. Her ghost refuses to be laid. The writer has achieved much.

—Garbled paragraph from a review of Somerset Maugham's *Liza of Lambeth,* in *Literature,* November 6, 1897.

d. Write a paragraph on some subject suggested in the exercises at the end of Chapter I. Use a key-word throughout the paragraph. Or try to rewrite the garbled paragraph just above so that it will have a key-word.

e. Try to give the sentences in the garbled paragraph above, or in some paragraph that you have previously written, as many parallel structures as possible.

CHAPTER III

Vigor in Style

Smoothness, beauty, and vigor are all terms of approval. But they are not the same thing, for a piece of writing may have any one of the three without having the others. Indeed, the presence of the last may often exclude the others. In the following delightful passage, Stevenson has adopted the smooth and easy style of the familiar essayist which, though not languid, would certainly never be described as essentially vigorous and forceful:

And what would it be to grow old? For, after a certain distance, every step we take in life we find the ice growing thinner below our feet, and all around us and behind us we see our contemporaries going through. By the time a man gets well into the seventies, his continued existence is a mere miracle; and when he lays his old bones in bed for the night, there is an overwhelming probability that he will never see the day. Do the old men mind it, as a matter of fact? Why, no. They were never the merrier; they have their grog at night, and tell the raciest stories; they hear of the death of people about their own age, or even younger, not as if it was a grisly warning, but with a simple childlike pleasure at having outlived someone else; and when a draught might puff them out like a guttering candle, or a bit of a stumble shatter them like so much glass, their old hearts keep sound and unaffrighted, and they go on, bubbling with laughter, through years of man's age compared to which the valley at Balaclava was as safe and peaceful as a village cricket-green on Sunday. It may fairly be questioned (if we look to the peril only) whether it was a much more daring feat for Curtius to plunge into the gulf, than for any old gentleman of ninety to doff his clothes and clamber into bed.[1]

Compare this graceful passage with a paragraph from Carlyle:

All true Work is sacred; in all true Work, were it but true hand-labor, there is something of divineness. Labor, wide as the Earth, has its summit

[1] From "Æs Triplex," in the volume *Virginibus Puerisque*. Reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

in Heaven. Sweat of the brow; and up from that to sweat of the brain, sweat of the heart; which includes all Kepler calculations, Newton meditations, all Sciences, all spoken Epics, all acted Heroisms, Martyrdoms,—up to that "Agony of blood sweat," which all men have called divine! O brother, if this is not "worship," then I say, the more pity for worship; for this is the noblest thing yet discovered under God's sky. Who art thou that complainest of thy life of toil? Complain not. Look up, my wearied brother; see thy fellow Workmen there, in God's Eternity; surviving there, they alone surviving: sacred Band of the Immortals, Celestial Bodyguard of the Empire of Mankind. Even in the weak Human Memory they survive so long, as saints, as heroes, as gods; they alone surviving; peopling, they alone, the unmeasured solitudes of Time! To thee Heaven, though severe, is *not* unkind; Heaven is kind,—as a noble Mother; as that Spartan Mother, saying while she gave her son his shield, "With it, my son, or upon it!" Thou too shall return *home* in honor, doubt it not,—if in the battle thou keep thy shield!

How vigorous, how energetic it is! Rude, uncouth, and inelegant, yet it burns with strength and vehemence. But Carlyle did not always write thus, as a study of some of his letters and of his earlier work will show.

Many a time, likewise, every writer must choose between two types of style. Patrick Henry did not invariably use the Give-me-liberty-or-give-me-death style; and Theodore Roosevelt could pen quaint little epistles to his children. The style to be used depends, of course, on the subject. A description of a tropical hurricane would require one sort of style; a description of Lake Placid in the moonlight would require another. A speech demanding war would require one sort of style; a funeral oration on a sweet old lady would require another. An argument in favor of scientific as opposed to liberal education would require one sort of style; an essay on the pleasures of fishing would require another.

Indeed, there are as many styles as there are kinds of subjects. To catalogue them would be both impossible and useless. Yet we may quite profitably study the elements of writing which contribute toward making, on the one hand, for vigor of style, and, on the other, for beauty of style. We shall begin with the first.

1. INTELLECTUAL VIGOR. In a way, the two words just written look absurd in a book of advice about writing. For advice, however good,

cannot create intellectual vigor in anybody. A cynic would say, as a matter of fact, that a writer who has any intellectual vigor needs no advice. Perhaps the cynic would be right. We have all seen beautiful girls who would be beautiful under any conditions, and need no artificial make-up or professional advice to help them. Nevertheless, even these beauties look their *best* under certain favorable (and frequently quite artificial) conditions. Moreover, we have seen girls who are not beautiful unless they have certain advantages of dress, light, or make-up, but who are undeniably beautiful when they have these advantages. Advice about intellectual vigor of style is like advice about beauty. A few writers do not need it; most writers can profit by it; and some writers would be nothing without it.

a. *Labored Intellectuality.* It is paradoxical and unjust, but laboriousness of style often conveys a stronger impression of intellectual vigor than does ease of style. Laboriousness consisting of inversions, transpositions, difficult structures, relationships not easily grasped, long or involved sentences, superfine discriminations, parenthetical explanations—all of these have a tremendous effect on a large body of readers. True, they sometimes hide poverty of idea and muddiness of intellect; yet they do have a legitimate use among shrewd or crafty authors. In mock-serious writing, they create a humorous incongruity between actual triviality of idea and the apparently intellectual style. In public life, they make simple facts appear important when policy demands that they appear so, or they take the edge off truths which would cut sharply if not framed laboriously. And they impress the class of people who must be impressed sometimes, but who cannot be impressed by honest simplicity.

The following paragraph from Cabell's foreword to his *Figures of Earth* shows how a skillful writer may deliberately employ a labored, mock-serious style to create an effect of sententiousness:

> To you (whom I take to be as familiar with the Manuelian cycle of romance as is any person now alive) it has for some while appeared, I know, a not uncurious circumstance that in the *Key to the Popular Tales of Poictesme* there should have been included so little directly relative to Manuel himself. No reader of the *Popular Tales* (as I recall your saying at

the Alum when we talked over, among so many other matters, this monumental book) can fail to note that always Don Manuel looms obscurely in the background, somewhat as do King Arthur and white-bearded Charlemagne in their several cycles, dispensing justice and bestowing rewards, and generally arranging the future, for the survivors of the outcome of stories which more intimately concern themselves with Anavalt and Coth and Holden, or even with Sclaug and Thragnar, than with the liege-lord of Poictesme.[2]

This next paragraph, taken from an editorial in the daily paper, garbs a few simple truths in a highly laborious style:

The resignation of Judge L——— affords a revelation of the unwisdom of the legislature in making an excessive reduction in the salaries of members of the judiciary. Rejecting the advice of prominent members of the bar of the State, of many other responsible citizens, and of most of the newspapers, the last session of the legislature cut the compensation of judges to such an extent that it was inevitable many of the abler judges would leave the service of the State. Unfortunately, Judge L——— is one of those who find it impossible to make the financial sacrifice that is required of judiciary members who serve under the new schedule of salaries.

This could be translated:

Judge L———'s resignation shows the unwisdom of the legislature in reducing the salaries of judges. Rejecting the advice of prominent lawyers, other responsible citizens, and most newspapers of the State, the legislature cut salaries of judges so sharply that withdrawal by many of the abler judges became inevitable. Unfortunately, Judge L——— was one of the judges who could not afford to serve under the reduced salary schedule.

The first version contains 111 words; the second, 67 words—a reduction of 40 per cent. The editor who wrote the first version was excusable only because he wanted to make his editorial sound as important as possible to people who cared little for style.

Unfortunately, the following sentences, though amusing, are serious examples of the way in which facts are often concealed by an elaborately intellectual style: "Conditions now prevailing prevent us from giving a favorable reply to your request" (equals, *No*); "In the face of bitter enemy resistance, our ground forces made con-

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siderable gains" (equals, *We advanced slightly*); "In a frenzied suicide attack of massed thousands, the enemy was able to penetrate our lines a few hundred yards" (equals, *They advanced slightly*); "Our rapidly advancing forces seized two major rail centers" (equals, *We took two towns*); "Our advance patrols penetrated two enemy villages, and returned safely to our lines" (equals, *They retook them*).

To call the passages quoted above vigorous writing would be false, and to call them intellectual would be flattering. But they do have a spurious sort of intellectuality that deceives a certain type of reader. And the kind of writing they represent is worth knowing about if only for the sake of its being avoided.

Yet in their deliberate shamming of intellectual vigor, they are, perhaps, superior to the writing which is so intellectual as to be incomprehensible. For instance, the abstruse intellectuality of the following passage, taken from a public lecture by a philosophy professor, is inexcusable:

> That which is given at any moment is a perceptual perspective with an organism at the focus or center. The perspective called "mine" is mine only in virtue of the fact that the body called "mine" is, although only one factor among others, the focal factor of the perspective. It is the focal factor because even though at times the body is not given (as when we are said not to be self-conscious but absorbed in the "objective world") it can easily be "recovered," and because while the body varies with the other factors of the perspective, the other factors of the perspective seem to vary in an even greater degree with changes in the body.

When the reader of good intelligence cannot quickly understand what a writer is talking about, it is the writer's fault. If the reader must ponder, wonder, reread, and then at last remain in doubt, the writing is bad.

b. *True Intellectuality.* Leaving this false or deceiving sort of intellectuality, we may pass on to a kind of style which shows an authentic intellectual vigor. Description of this style is difficult, and advice about how to achieve it almost futile. A seed catalogue I pick up is definitely non-intellectual in style:

> The popularity this plant has gained in the short time since its introduction is simply marvelous. It is one of the finest decorative plants ever

introduced. It grows rapidly under all conditions, and its inexpensiveness places it within the reach of everyone. The plant has often been called "Fountain Fern" on account of its gracefully drooping habit. It has matured fronds that often attain a length of four feet.

Nobody can justly complain about the clarity and the simplicity of this passage. It serves its purpose of conveying information, and it is in keeping with its lowly position in the world of letters. But nobody would think of it as having an intellectually vigorous style. Let us analyze it to try to discover what characteristics it has, and what it lacks.

In idea, it is concrete rather than abstract; it states simple, unoriginal facts of observation such as anybody might make; it really *develops* no idea; it gives no independent opinions; it draws no inferences and makes no generalizations from presented data; it delves into none of the complexities of idea which might suggest themselves; and it deals with obviously unimportant ideas.

In structure, its sentences are short; only two sentences are complex; and one sentence is compound only by having two unrelated ideas joined by the ever useful "and." It has no transitional devices, no transpositions, no parallel structures indicating a synthetical intelligence at work, no variety of structure suggesting variety of idea.

Now contrast the passage from the seed catalogue with the following paragraph from Matthew Arnold:

I am going to ask whether the present movement for ousting letters from their old predominance in education, and for transferring the predominance in education to the natural sciences, whether this brisk and flourishing movement ought to prevail, and whether it is likely in the end it really will prevail. An objection may be raised which I will anticipate. My own studies have been almost wholly in letters, and my visits to the field of the natural sciences have been very slight and inadequate, although those sciences have always strongly moved my curiosity. A man of letters, it will perhaps be said, is not competent to discuss the comparative merits of letters and natural science as means of education. To this objection, I reply, first of all, that his incompetence, if he attempts the discussion but is really incompetent for it, will be abundantly visible; nobody will be taken in; he will have plenty of sharp observers and critics who will save mankind from that danger. But the line I am going to follow is, as you will soon discover, so extremely simple, that perhaps it may be fol-

lowed without failure even by one who for a more ambitious line of discussion would be quite incompetent.

It sounds original because it expresses personal opinions and personal experience. The first personal pronoun or adjective is used no less than seven times in the passage, and, in addition, it is implied in all the sentences about "a man of letters." The ideas presented are not mere concrete records of observation, but are ideas involving generalizations about facts. They are ideas with many complex facets of which the author is aware, and which he is willing to develop. And they are ideas of wide importance because they involve the thought and the conduct of great masses of human beings.

In structure, the sentences are long enough to avoid seeming childish: they average thirty-four words in length, whereas the sentences from the seed catalogue averaged only fourteen words. In the entire passage, there is no simple sentence, and no sentence compounded of only two simple independent clauses joined by "and." Throughout there are inversions for the sake of clarity, interpolations for the sake of completeness, and transitional devices for the sake of continuity. In a word, the author seems aware in the passage of the involved complexities, the many different points of view, the subtle significances which surround ideas. The world to him is not a lesson in the obvious. Moreover, he suggests the variety and complexity of the world by the variety and complexity of his sentence-elements; yet he shows the power of his intellect by fusing these various aspects of the world into a coherent and unified piece of writing.

This kind of style, however, is not the only kind that is intellectually vigorous. As a matter of fact, whether for good or for ill, this kind of style is seldom used nowadays in writing for the general public. It is used in writing intended for specialists—the "new" critics, modern philosophers, psychologists, and specialized scholars.

Another kind of vigorously intellectual style involves the use of *antithetical structure* offering mutually opposing views of the same idea. This device nearly always gives to writing a touch of sober strength, of rationality, of unhurried power. It shows a mind well balanced, unprejudiced, and unsparing. Dr. Johnson, the dominating

figure of the Age of Reason, the ponderous philosopher whose opinions were like the heavy hand of law on a hundred years of literature—Dr. Johnson seldom penned a line which contained no judiciously balanced antithetical structure. Paragraph after paragraph unwinds in the manner of the following criticism of Dryden:

> Criticism, either didactic or defensive, occupies almost all his prose, except those pages he has devoted to his patrons; but none of his prefaces were ever thought tedious. They have not the formality of a settled style, in which the first half of the sentence betrays the other. The clauses are never balanced, nor the periods modeled; every word seems to drop by chance, though it falls into its proper place. Nothing is cold or languid; the whole is airy, animated, and vigorous; what is little is gay, what is great is splendid. He may be thought to mention himself too frequently; but, while he forces himself upon our esteem, we cannot refuse him to stand high in his own. Everything is excused by the play of images and the sprightliness of expression. Though all is easy, nothing is feeble; though all seems careless, there is nothing harsh; and though since his earlier works more than a century has passed, they have nothing yet uncouth or obsolete.

This kind of writing is hardly to be imitated on a large scale; it is neither spontaneous, nor emotional, nor imaginative. But it is powerful. Nobody reading it can suspect the writer of having a weak intellect or undigested opinions. And one has only to contrast it with any book review in the Sunday newspaper to see why Dr. Johnson is immortal, and the reviewer is not.

So far we have dealt with the studied and elaborate sentence structure of vigorous intellect. But, on the other hand, a vigorously intellectual style may be just the opposite in its simplicity from the complex passages quoted above. When a writer is sure that his ideas in themselves are powerful, he need have only a *direct, straightforward style* which pounds away at the reader with simple, powerful logic, and simple, powerful facts.

> Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned to one another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospi-

tality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

In this passage from Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* is so much meat, so much weight of idea and power of logic that the writing needs no subtlety of style, no complexity of structure, no variety of form to give it vigor.

In this next (a letter from the anonymous Junius to Sir William Draper, who had taken it upon himself to reply to Junius's attacks on political abuses of the day) strength of idea and of feeling likewise makes superfluous any style but the most straight and hard-hitting:

25. September, 1769.

SIR,

After so long an interval, I did not expect to see the debate revived between us. My answer to your last letter shall be short; for I write to you with reluctance, and I hope we shall now conclude our correspondence for ever.

Had you been originally and without provocation attacked by an anonymous writer, you would have some right to demand his name. But in this cause you are a volunteer. You engaged in it with the unpremeditated gallantry of a soldier. You were content to set your name in opposition to a man, who would probably continue in concealment. You understood the terms upon which we were to correspond, and gave at least a tacit consent to them. After voluntarily attacking me under the character of Junius, what possible right have you to know me under any other? . . .

You cannot but know that the republication of my letters was no more than a catchpenny contrivance of a printer, in which it was impossible I should be concerned, and for which I am in no way answerable. At the same time I wish you to understand that if I do not take the trouble of reprinting these papers, it is not from any fear of giving offense to Sir William Draper.

Your remarks upon a signature, adopted merely for distinction, are unworthy of notice; but when you tell me I have submitted to be called a liar and a coward, I must ask you in my turn, whether you seriously think it any way incumbent on me to take notice of the silly invectives of every simpleton, who writes in a news-paper; and what opinion you would have conceived of my discretion, if I had suffered myself to be the dupe of so shallow an artifice? . . .

JUNIUS

These, then, are the two styles which may be justly said to have intellectual vigor. One style is involved, the other direct; one is complex, the other simple; one is subtle, the other forceful; one is studied and various, the other plain and uniform. One expresses ideas important for their originality, for their discriminating perception, for their keen intuitiveness, for their nice logic. The other expresses ideas important for their sincerity, for their open clarity, for their blunt power, for their obvious truth. One is the result of an astute mind at work on difficult and intricate problems; the other is the result of a strong mind at work on elemental truths.

2. EMOTIONAL VIGOR. In real life we convey ideas to one another by means of words, and we convey emotions not merely by means of words, but also of gestures, tones of the voice, expressions of the face, movements of the body sometimes quite unconscious. But in writing, we must convey emotions to one another by means of words alone. To accomplish this, we have, first of all, to convince the reader that we ourselves feel emotion. For people are like a herd of animals: fright, curiosity, or anger on the part of one is conveyed subtly to the whole herd. All that is necessary is that the herd be aware of the emotional state of one of its members.

The first business, therefore, of a writer who wishes to make his reader have an emotion, is to make the reader feel that the writer has the emotion. It is not sufficient that the writer merely *have* the emotion; he must make readers believe he has it, and thus *convey* the emotion to them. The devices by which readers are made to believe that the writer feels emotion are so varied that they can be discussed in only the most general way. It is obvious, however, that all emotions may be divided into two groups: those which are not in harmony with the intellect, and those which are aided and abetted

by the intellect. Thus, a man may be so angry at an automobile engine that he could strike it with a hammer. That is a feeling not in harmony with the intellect. On the other hand, the man may be angry at an example of injustice and oppression in his daily life, and he may find that the more he weighs and considers the condition intellectually, the angrier he becomes. Here his feeling harmonizes with intellect, and grows the more powerful for intellectual influence.

a. *Uncontrolled Emotion.* To convince the reader that the writer feels uncontrolled emotion, a writer would use certain forms of expression that he would not use in trying to convey the other sort of emotion. For instance, he would not employ long, involved sentences, elaborate sentence structures, devices for effecting smooth continuity, and so on. His writing would be rough, breathless, exclamatory—sentences short or incomplete, relation between sentences obscure, transition from sentence to sentence, idea to idea, and image to image abrupt and unplanned. This sort of violent incoherence is Carlyle's chief trick in writing. The following paragraph, chosen almost at random, is an excellent example of his vigorously emotional style. The semicolons and colons in the passage help deceive the reader's eye; but they have actually the effect of periods, as reading the passage aloud will prove:

> No *Dilettantism* in this Mahomet; it is a business of Reprobation and Salvation with him, of Time and Eternity: he is in deadly earnest about it! Dilettantism, hypothesis, speculation, a kind of amateur-search for Truth, toying and coquetting with Truth: this is the sorest sin. The root of all other imaginable sins. It consists in the heart and soul of the man never having been *open* to the Truth;—"living in vain show." Such a man not only utters and produces falsehoods, but *is* himself a falsehood. The rational moral principle, spark of the Divinity, is sunk deep in him, in quiet paralysis of life-death. The very falsehoods of Mahomet are truer than the truths of such a man. He is the insincere man: smooth-polished, respectable in some times and places: inoffensive, says nothing harsh to anybody; most *cleanly*,—just as carbonic acid is, which is death and poison.

Ruskin has a passage of similar emotional incoherence which, except that it is more subdued, might have been written by Carlyle:

Their labor, their sorrow, and their death. Mark the three. Labor: by sea and land, in field and city, at forge and furnace, at helm and plough. No pastoral indolence nor classic pride shall stand between him and the troubling of the world; still less between him and the toil of his country, —blind, tormented, unwearied, marvellous England.

Also their Sorrow: Ruin of all their glorious work, passing away of their thoughts and their honor, mirage of pleasure, FALLACY OF HOPE; gathering of weed on temple step; gaining of wave on deserted strand; weeping of the mother for the children, desolate by her breathless first-born in the streets of the city, desolate by her last sons slain, among the beasts of the field.

And their Death. That old Greek question again;—yet unanswered. The unconquerable spectre still flitting among the forest trees at twilight; rising ribbed out of the sea-sand;—white, a strange Aphrodite,—out of the sea-foam; stretching its gray, cloven wings among the clouds; turning the light of their sunsets into blood.

The short, sharp style of Dr. Johnson in his letter to Macpherson is another example of the same sort of emotionally vigorous writing:

I received your foolish and impudent letter. Any violence offered me I shall do my best to repel; and what I cannot do for myself, the law shall do for me. I hope I shall never be deterred from detecting what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian.

What would you have me retract? I thought your book an imposture; I think it an imposture still. For this opinion I have given my reasons to the public, which I here dare you to refute. Your rage I defy. Your abilities, since your Homer, are not so formidable; and what I hear of your morals inclines me to pay regard not to what you shall say, but to what you shall prove. You may print this if you will.

This sort of writing is not common anywhere except in short passages. Carlyle, indeed, is the only important English writer who consistently used it on a grand scale. But it is an extremely useful piece of equipment for a writer to have available when he needs it.

b. *Governed Emotion.* Much more frequent than the style represented in these passages is emotional writing showing a strict harmony between feeling and intellect. This harmony manifests itself in two ways—in pattern and in imagery.

(1) *Pattern* consists, essentially, of repeats. One line (thus: /) does not make a pattern; nor do two different kinds of lines (thus:

—/). But a series of similar lines repeated (thus: /////) makes pattern. Likewise, a series of similar structures, sounds, or accents makes a pattern in sentences.

For some psychological reason too complex to be discussed here, the human mind under emotional strain tends to express itself in patterns, usually of sounds. The simple beat of tom-toms, the keenings of Celtic women over their dead, the waving of garments, the repetition of exclamations, the steps of a dance—and so on up to the complex repeats and rhythms of meter, alliteration, and rhyme in poetry—all these are patterns in which human emotion expresses itself. In prose, these patterns consist of rhythms (which will be discussed more fully later), parallel structures, and repetitions.

Hebrew poetry consists of parallel structures expressing over and over again different aspects of the same idea. Since much of the Bible is poetry, much of it is made up of such parallelisms. For example:

> Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength.
>
> Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.
>
> The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters.
>
> The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.
>
> The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

This trick of repetition is carried over into the prose parts of the Bible. Paul writes:

> Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
>
> And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge: and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.
>
> And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.
>
> Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

It is natural for writers laboring under a strong emotion which is at the same time validated by intellect to speak in these patterned structures; but it is particularly true that writers of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, whose style has been influenced for centuries by the King James Bible, resort continually to this style. Hardly a paragraph from any great English stylist is free of it, and seldom any great emotional moment is without it.

The passage from Junius, quoted above, is an example of powerful emotion formulating itself into parallel structure. And the following from Huxley is an excellent example of a style manifesting in its complex and long-sustained elements a genuine intellectual vigor, and at the same time manifesting in its patterned structures an extraordinary emotional vigor:

The improver of natural knowledge absolutely refuses to acknowledge authority, as such. For him, scepticism is the highest of duties; blind faith the one unpardonable sin. And it cannot be otherwise, for every great advance in natural knowledge has involved the absolute rejection of authority, the cherishing of the keenest scepticism, the annihilation of the spirit of blind faith; and the most ardent votary of science holds his firmest convictions, not because the men he most venerates hold them; not because their verity is testified by portents and wonders; but because his experience teaches him that whenever he chooses to bring these convictions into contact with their primary source, Nature—whenever he thinks fit to test them by appealing to experiment and to observation—Nature will confirm them. The man of science has learned to believe in justification, not by faith, but by verification.

Very similar is Dr. Johnson's letter to Chesterfield, which should be contrasted with the letter to Macpherson already quoted. The last two paragraphs of the Chesterfield letter follow:

Is not a Patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take

of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity, not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the Publick should consider me as owing that to a Patron, which Providence has enabled me to do for myself.

Having carried on my work thus far with so little obligation to any favourer of learning, I shall not be disappointed though I should conclude it, if less be possible, with less; for I have long wakened from that dream of hope, in which I once boasted myself with so much exultation,

My Lord,
Your Lordship's most humble,
Most obedient servant.

This next, from Ruskin, almost too long to quote, is a magnificent example of an intricately intellectual style which flames with emotion. It shows that the two types of vigorous writing—intellectual and emotional—need not be mutually exclusive:

Stand upon the peak of some isolated mountain at daybreak, when the night mists first rise from off the plains, and watch their white and lake-like fields, as they float in level bays and winding gulfs about the islanded summits of the lower hills, untouched yet by more than dawn, colder and more quiet than a windless sea under the moon of midnight, watch when the first sunbeam is sent upon the silver channels, how the foam of their undulating surfaces parts and passes away, and down under their depths the glittering city and green pasture lie like Atlantis, between the white paths of winding rivers; the flakes of light falling every moment faster and broader among the starry spires, as the wreathed surges break and vanish above them, and the confused crests and ridges of the dark hills shorten their gray shadows upon the plain. . . . Wait a little longer, and you shall see those scattered mists rallying in the ravines, and floating up towards you, along the winding valleys, till they crouch in quiet masses, iridescent with the morning light, upon the broad breasts of the higher hills, whose leagues of massy undulation will melt back and back into that robe of material light, until they fade away, lost in its lustre, to appear again above, in serene heaven, like a wild, bright, impossible dream, foundationless and inaccessible, their very bases vanishing in the unsubstantial and mocking blue of the deep lake below. . . . Wait yet a little longer, and you shall see those mists gather themselves into white towers, and stand like fortresses along the promontories, massy and motionless, only piled with every instant higher and higher into the sky, and casting longer shadows athwart the rocks.

(2) It is to be noted that one source of emotion in this passage is its *imagery.* Indeed, it is characteristic of human beings not only to create patterns of sound or form in times of emotion, but also to vision forth images. Notice how, in the following extract from Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," the adventurer's imagination is vivified by a sudden emotion:

> Burningly it came on me all at once,
> This was the place! those two hills on the right,
> Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
> While on the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,
> Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,
> After a life spent training for the sight! . . .
>
> Not see? because of night perhaps?—why, day
> Came back for that! before it left,
> The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
> The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,
> Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—
> "Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!"
>
> Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled
> Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears,
> Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—
> How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
> And such was fortunate, yet each of old
> Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.
>
> There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, met
> To view the last of me, a living frame
> For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
> I saw them and I knew them all.

Most of Whitman's poetry is a catalogue of images envisioned in moments of emotion. Here is an example from "A Song of Joys":

> O the joy of my spirit—it is uncaged—it darts like lightning!
> It is not enough to have this globe or a certain time,
> I will have thousands of globes and all time.
>
> O the engineer's joys! to go with a locomotive!
> To hear the hiss of steam, the merry shriek, the steam-whistle,
> the laughing locomotive!
> To push with resistless way and speed off in the distance.

O the gleesome saunter over fields and hillsides!
The leaves and flowers of the commonest weeds, the moist fresh stillness of the woods,
The exquisite smell of the earth at daybreak, and all through the forenoon! . . .

O to have life henceforth a poem of new joys!

In the well-known Twenty-third Psalm, note the wealth of imagery that pours from a mind undergoing emotion:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

The characteristic of these passages is not so much completeness and accuracy of observation, as it is *richness of imagination.* Not one completely developed picture appears, but a teeming variety of pictures which follow, one after the other, in rapid procession. The truly emotional mind seldom lingers on one subject and describes it meticulously, detail by detail. Such a mind leaps, rather, from one object to another, vivifying each in a bold flash of imagination, suggesting each with a single phrase or epithet, and then passing on quickly so that in the end a score of images flash in and out of the mind of the reader.

These images are often figurative. The imagination is not content to restrict itself to the presentation of pictures as they exist, but transforms the pictures into something different, and yet similar. This ability to transform, this facility in creating a multitude of comparisons, this high emotion which sees resemblances where the commonplace mind sees only separate and distinct existences—this is the trait in a writer which makes for the highest poetry and the most

stirring prose. Francis Thompson, the mystic poet, is remembered chiefly for the daring leap of his imagination which marks breath-taking resemblances between objects never before spoken of in the same breath. Thus, in his poetry, God becomes a hound pursuing his quarry; a poppy is a "yawn of fire"; the poet's thought runs "before the hooves of sunrise"; and the setting sun becomes a "globed yellow grape" which Evening "bursts against her stained mouth."

Good prose writers use figurative language much more than the average person believes. Following is a paragraph from Washington Irving, with the figures in italics:

Whoever has made a voyage up the Hudson must remember the Kaatskill mountains. They are a *dismembered branch* of the great Appalachian *family,* and are seen away to the west of the river, *swelling* up to a *noble* height, and *lording* it over the surrounding country. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed, every hour of the day, produces some change in the *magical* hues and shapes of these mountains, and they are regarded by all the good wives, far and near, as *perfect barometers.* When the weather is fair and settled, they are *clothed* in blue and purple, and *print* their bold outlines on the clear evening sky; but sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a *hood* of gray vapors about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will *glow and light up like a crown of glory.*

This next simple piece of description (from Stevenson) indicates a mind vividly alive and strenuously alert to catch and translate every image in nature:

While I was thus delaying, a *gush* of steady wind, *as long as a heavy sigh, poured* direct out of the *quarter* of the morning. It was cold, and set me sneezing. The trees near at hand *tossed their black plumes* in its passage; and I could see the thin distant *spires* of pine along the edge of the hill rock slightly to and fro against the *golden* east. Ten minutes after, the sunlight *spread at a gallop* along the hillside, *scattering* shadows and sparkles, and the day had come completely.[3]

In this next, by H. M. Tomlinson, the scene described excites a vigorous emotion which manifests itself in picturesque figures of speech:

[3] From *Travels with a Donkey* (1879). Reprinted here by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

The berg rose out of the level forest by the river, and to Colet it was anomalous. It was an isolated mass of white limestone, a lofty *island* in the *ocean* of jungle. Its pale cliffs *fell* sheer to the *green billows*. Its summit was flat, but was so near to the clouds that its trees were but a dark *undulating strip*. Its *walls*, when glimpses from below through breaks in the *roof* of the forest could be found, appeared to overhang, but there were *scarves* and *girdles* of green on their *bare ribs*. An eagle soaring athwart its loftier crags *was a drifting mote*. Stalactites were pendent before the black *portholes* of caves in *upper stories, like corbels over the outlooks of a castle of the sagas*. If the number of those dark apertures meant anything, then the berg was hollow, was *honeycombed* with cavities. This enormity was not inviting, even in a morning light; not in such a land as that. The unexplored *dungeons* of such a *castle* might hide anything.[4]

With this we shall leave the problem of emotional vigor in writing. Abrupt and incoherent writing, patterned writing, profuse images, original and vivid figures of speech—these are the best indications of emotional vigor in writing.

EXERCISES

1. Intellectual Vigor.

   a. Write in an intellectually laborious style a mock-serious account of some trivial campus or local happening.

   In the same kind of style, write a serious account of the same happening. Try to make it seem of genuine importance.

   Suppose you are the editor of your college newspaper. You wish to make a sharp criticism of some campus occurrence or custom, but you do not wish to offend anyone. By means of an editorial written in an intellectual style, accomplish your purpose.

   b. Write an essay on some subject which has many purely reflective rather than merely informational complexities, and which will demand much original thinking on your part. Try to do justice to the complexities by developing them properly in a mature and thoughtful style. Choose such subjects as the following:

      What have we a right to believe?
      An examination of the philosophy of optimism.
      Culture and a democracy.

[4] From chap. xxxi of *Gallions Reach* (1927). Reprinted here by permission of the publishers, Harper & Brothers.

The nature of man.
Property.
Must the right triumph?
A new economic plan.
What is art?
Tragedy and the tragic.
Comedy and the comic.
What one loses in going to college.
Education as an end in itself.
If I could educate a boy (or girl) as I wished.

Write paragraphs composed of antithetical sentences on the following subjects:

Undergraduate enthusiasms.
The evils of examinations.
Dangers of business success.
Americanism.
The lecture method of instruction.

Choose any of the subjects given in this set of Exercises, crystallize your opinion about it into a short thesis sentence, and then write a theme on the subject. Use a straightforward, terse, pounding style in which you express elemental truths simply.

2. Emotional Vigor.

a. Write two emotional paragraphs on each of the following topics. In one paragraph, try to give the impression that emotion is beyond intellectual control, and, in the other, that emotion is in harmony with the intellect:

A description of the death of some friend or relative.

A description of a flood, a fire, a windstorm, or some other natural disaster.

An account of some battle which figures in the history of your state.

An argument against some political abuse now agitating your section of the country.

A characterization of a favorite historical (or contemporary or fictional) hero.

b. Employing series of images, portray emotionally each of the following:

Trees after a rain.
The coming of winter.
The geological history of your home state.
The song of a street musician.

The grief of an animal over the death of her young.

The grief of a wife over the death of her husband.

The delight of a convalescent walking in the woods (or along the seashore or over a meadow) for the first time after a long and dangerous illness.

The love of a timid girl for some man whom she regards as a hero.

The hatred of a petty employee for his foreman.

The fear of discovery on the part of a murderer.

CHAPTER IV

Vigor in Style (Continued)

3. VIGOR OF WORDING. We have spoken of the way in which involved and closely woven sentence structure, blunt and straightforward sentence structure, abrupt and exclamatory sentence structure, and patterned sentence structure make for intellectual and emotional vigor. It remains now for us to examine the smaller elements of composition to discover how they, too, may contribute toward a vigorous style.

a. *Brevity.* One of the first principles a writer ought to remember is the principle of *brevity.* In general, it is a sound doctrine which demands the greatest number of ideas in the shortest space. This does not mean that writing should be sketchy, incomplete, or hasty. Important ideas deserve to be elaborated, dwelt on, and discussed fully. The doctrine means merely that, however many ideas enter into a composition, the statement of each of them should consume as little space as possible.

The disease of wordiness has two quite different forms. One shows a general swelling involving the entire organism of the composition, and the other shows only small local abnormalities in the individual members of the composition-body. The first is easily detected and, in most patients, easily cured; the other is insidious and hard to cure.

(1) The first kind has two symptoms: the *bookishly artificial use of unnecessarily long words,* and the deliberate use of too many words. Sometimes one of these symptoms predominates over the other, and sometimes both are pronounced. Dr. Johnson's famous revision of his remark about a certain comedy "which had not wit enough to keep it sweet" is a good example of the first symptom. Dr. Johnson corrected himself: "A play which does not possess

enough vitality to preserve it from putrefaction." The fault here is not too many words, but too many syllables. At another time the Doctor assured a "little thick, short-legged" printer's devil: "When you consider with how little mental power and corporeal labour a printer can get a guinea a week, it is a very desirable occupation for you." Boswell has the same habit of profuse syllabification:

> However confident of the rectitude of his own mind, Johnson may have felt sincere uneasiness that his conduct should be erroneously imputed to unworthy motives, by good men; and that the influence of his valuable writings should on that account be in any degree obstructed or lessened.

This sort of wordiness is seldom seen nowadays except where its purpose is humorous—cheaply humorous, most often. O. Henry's use of long words, however, for a humorous effect is extraordinarily adroit:

> Mrs. Hopkins was like a thousand others. The auriferous tooth, the sedentary disposition, the Sunday afternoon wanderlust, the draught upon the delicatessen store for home-made comforts, the furor for department store marked-down sales, the feeling of superiority to the lady in the third-floor front who wore genuine ostrich tips and had two names over her bell, the mucilaginous hours during which she remained glued to the window sill, the vigilant avoidance of the instalment man, the tireless patronage of the acoustics of the dumbwaiter shaft—all the attributes of the Gotham flat-dweller.[1]

Much more common is the other symptom, but much harder to describe. It is the stiff-starched, *now-I-take-my-pen-in-hand style;* the padded style of the student who feels that he must be scholarly and formal in his writing; the patronizingly careful style of textbook writers; the stiffly personal style of prefaces; the painfully impersonal style of learned articles; the gravely sententious style of editorials. In a word, it is a style affected by writers too much aware of the seriousness of their missions, and too eager to make other people likewise aware. As Dr. Johnson said, it is a style which tries to appear dignified by walking on tiptoe.

> At some time in life [a freshman theme begins] we all stop for a mo-

[1] From *The Voice of the City,* by O. Henry, copyright, 1904, by Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

ment and ask ourselves what this world of ours really is, what its true meaning may be, and toward what unknown destiny it is tending. From that moment, we become aware that we are philosophers in the deeper sense of the word.

Another freshman puts it:

What is the meaning of life? When I am asked this all-important question, I do not make some visible motion with my arms or body, but I search the invisible recesses of my mind.

Another more oratorical youngster ends his theme:

Give these United States today a man of Washington's integrity, Lincoln's will, and Wilson's perseverance, and he will guide us out of the pit into which we have fallen, and peace and prosperity will reign supreme.

Probably the best way to correct all these examples of wordiness is to cross them out entirely. They say the obvious, and use too many words to say it in.

A little different is the next, the beginning of the preface to a freshman composition book by two great American scholars:

With the student in an attitude of confidence in the worth of his own thinking and of eagerness to learn the methods by which his thought can be conveyed to others in words, the problem of teaching the use of English reduces to the balancing of constructive practice over against the corrective drill necessary to eradicate the bad habits due to foreign birth, defective training, or indifference.

This formal sentence may be re-rendered:

When the student believes his own thinking is valuable, and is eager to learn how to convey his thoughts to others in words, teaching him the use of English becomes merely a problem of balancing constructive practice against drills necessary to correct bad habits due to foreign birth, defective training, or indifference.

The original sentence contained 67 words, the altered one only 52—a saving of 22 per cent.

A group of three English instructors wrote this for the benefit of freshmen:

It is often necessary for a writer, in the course of preparing a composition, to obtain information from books, periodicals, or other publica-

tions. When such sources are used by the writer, the fact must be made clear to the reader, and this is done by a system of reference called *documentation.*

A less formidably textbookish statement would be:

In preparing a composition, a writer must often obtain information from books, periodicals, or other publications. When he does so, he should tell the reader so by a system of reference called *documentation.*

The original passage contained 51 words, the revised 33—a saving of 35 per cent.

A scholarly paper which I have at hand starts off:

The average Elizabethan saw in astrology a subject which for the most part was incomprehensible to him. He believed in the efficacy of the stars to foretell human events to those who could read them, but he did not understand by what means these matters were discovered.

The passage might be rewritten like this:

To the average Elizabethan, astrology was mostly incomprehensible. He believed the stars could foretell human events to the initiated, but he did not understand how.

The original passage contained 47 words, the revised 25—a saving of almost 50 per cent.

(2) These examples, together with the excerpt from an editorial quoted in the previous chapter, are enough to show how the conscious desire for a stiff-starched tone results in wordiness. But another kind of wordiness creeps with malign ingenuity into even the most informal writing. It is a *wordiness due to grammatical construction* rather than to downright bombast. For example, a writer may use a long dependent clause or a long phrase where a short phrase or a single word might express his meaning quite as well, and be briefer.

"I watched the man as he swam across the river," might be rewritten, "I watched the man swim across the river," or, "I watched the man swimming across the river."

"A quality which he lacks is politeness," might be rendered, "He lacks politeness."

"Cosmic rays constitute a phenomenon which no one has yet been

able to understand," might be rendered, "No one has yet been able to understand cosmic rays."

"He is a man whom no one should trust," might be rendered, "He is an untrustworthy man," or, "He is untrustworthy."

"Lincoln was a man endowed by nature with extraordinary abilities," might be rendered, "Lincoln was a man of extraordinary natural abilities," or, "Lincoln had extraordinary natural abilities."

"Men who have no principles should not be chosen to fill positions in the legislative halls of this nation," might be reduced to, "Unprincipled men should not be elected to Congress."

This sort of wordiness is extremely common in the work of young writers, for young writers have not learned to give each sentence that last instant of observation and consideration without which a concise style is impossible.

Even the practiced writer may sometimes neglect this last instant's survey, and may as a result construct such a sentence as this, found in an excellent textbook on writing:

> But the break with convention being touched upon here is not an extreme one.

The sentence would be much better if it read:

> But the break with convention touched upon here is not extreme.

Further on in the same book is an almost identical lapse: "A style which is distinguished by exactness in the meaning of words used is evidently an economical one."

The word "one" is the source of many an offense against brevity. In the following sentences, it might profitably be omitted:

> That horse is the most beautiful *one* here.

> He is a man whom you can trust and *one* whom you can believe.

> The farm which he owns is a large *one*.

> The term "hurricane" is used when the storm is *one* of marked intensity.

> The question of states' rights *is one which* still troubles the country.

Another frequent offender is "there is" or "there are." Naturally there are times (as in this sentence) when no other word or structure could convey the same shade of meaning or perform the same function. In the following sentence, for example, any revision to omit "there is" would give the sentence a different implication:

There is no doubt that Sylvester's concept of verse was much influenced by that of Poe.

But in other sentences the form makes for wordiness:

There are many palaces which are as beautiful as this.

There are many good writers who have used slang.

There were two men killed in the wreck.

Five minutes ago there were no clouds in the sky.

There were several books which had to be read carefully.

There is one thing to be remembered.

"Up" misused is a famous offender against brevity. Though it is indispensable in such expressions as "speak up," "wash up," "touch up," and a few others, it is an unnecessary tag in sentences like "Wind up the clock," "Drink your milk up," "He slipped up on the ice," "Hurry up with your examination," "I met up with him today," and many others.

The passive voice sometimes results in wordiness. Many teachers of composition have an almost unreasoning horror of this voice, not only because it is wordy, but because it is psychologically weak. Yet the passive voice is useful. It discriminates between an important receiver and an unimportant agent, as, "My brother was shot by a highwayman." It helps an author be impersonal in a work (such as this book) where openly personal opinions would sound too much like personal prejudices. It draws the reader's attention from the personal equation to the concrete fact, as when a scientist writes, "It

was found that this serum halted the disease," instead of, "I found that this serum halted the disease." It keeps statements indefinite where definiteness is impossible, as, "Nagging wives may be blamed for many domestic troubles," or "This type of bird has been noted in nearly all parts of the world." It enables writers to say things which prudence or ignorance would prevent their saying in the active voice, as, "College football has been commercialized in this state." But notwithstanding these excuses for the passive voice, it is too often weak and wordy.

The theme of the play is artistically developed by the young author.

If this read,

The young author develops the theme of the play artistically.

the sentence would be 16 per cent shorter. Moreover, it would be direct and pointed instead of circuitous. In most of the following sentences, the active voice would be briefer, and in all of them it would be stronger:

Passive: A great game was played by both sides.
Active: Both sides played a great game.
Passive: When the passive voice is shunned, a few words are usually saved.
Active: Shunning the passive voice usually saves a few words.
Passive: As soon as the trench was abandoned by our troops, it was taken over by the enemy.
Active: As soon as our troops abandoned the trench, the enemy took it over.
Passive: The automobile was driven into the shade of a tree which had been chosen as the picnic site.
Active: We drove the automobile into the shade of a tree which we had chosen as the picnic site.

In all but the last example from two to four words are saved. In the last example, the active voice is obviously more effective than the passive.

b. *Apologies.* The passive is indirect; and indirect writing of any sort is weak. When a writer has something to say, he should say it (unless he has excellent reasons for doing otherwise) as directly as

possible. He should avoid halfway statements, apologies, and palliatives.

He should not say, "She *seemed* to dance like a woodland fairy," but, "She danced like a woodland fairy."

He should not say, "My head *seemed* to be bursting," but, "My head was bursting."

He should not say, "He was, *if I may use the term,* a man of destiny," but, "He was a man of destiny."

He should not say, "*It looked as if* the fountains of heaven had opened," but, "The fountains of heaven had opened."

He should not say, "His life hung, *so to speak,* by a thread," but, "His life hung by a thread."

c. *Static Verbs.* These expressions are weak because they hint at an indecisive and somewhat timid nature in the writer. A few words, however, are weak in themselves. One of them is the verb "to be" in its various forms. A writer should not say, "Here is a field," but, "Here lies—or stretches—or extends a field." He should not say, "Here is a building," but, "Here stands—or towers—or squats—or huddles a building." He should not say, "Here is a path," but, "Here runs—or winds—or wriggles a path." In other words, whenever a writer can gracefully avoid the static "is" in favor of a more active verb, he should do so.

d. *Vague Words.* Another offender is "very." The word has been used so much to intensify other words that it has lost its own strength. Nowadays, indeed, "He is a good man," is a stronger statement than, "He is a very good man." "It was a delightful party," is stronger than, "It was a very delightful party." And, "This is an interesting book," is stronger than, "This is a very interesting book."

"Great" is the next culprit on the list. It is not descriptive, not exact, not concrete. "A great door" tells us nothing about the door; "a great storm" does not make us visualize the storm; "a great event" does not distinguish the event in any particular way; "a great bargain" does not tell us whether the price is $4.98 or $4.90; "a great undertaking" does not tell us whether it is a worth-while undertaking, or a difficult undertaking, or an undertaking too big for the

man who begins it; "a great number of people" does not tell us whether the number was five hundred or five thousand.

"Wonderful," "nice," and "splendid" are three old offenders who have been escaping the gallows erected by judges of writing for the last fifty years. They have been used so much that they have lost their original meanings. Observe: "He is a wonderful/nice/splendid man." "It is wonderful/nice/splendid weather." "We had a wonderful/nice/splendid time." "This is a wonderful/nice/splendid cake you have cooked." "It is very wonderful/nice/splendid of you." It makes no difference which of the three one uses, or in what connection one uses them. Words that mean so many things mean nothing.

e. *Hackneyed and Trite Words.* This brings us to the problems of hackneyed phrases and jargon. Any good handbook of freshman English will give a list of the more common hackneyed or trite terms which a writer should avoid. Many of them are included in the following piece of doggerel:

When will we cease to write in books
Of murmuring, gurgling, twisting brooks,
Of winds that sigh and moan and beat,
Of the beautiful maiden's dainty feet,
Of crowds that surge and wagons that clatter,
Of waters that swirl and birds that chatter,
Of his firm jaw and his modest ties,
Of her sunlit hair and her heavenly eyes,
Of fleeting clouds that fleck the sky,
Of loves that wait but never die,
Of lips that tremble and quiver and curl,
Of bosoms that heave, and teeth like pearl,
Of engines that puff and throb and groan,
Of the villain's hiss, and his low, tense tone,
Of the dying sun's last flickering beam,
Of the pale moon's mellow, tender gleam?
—When, my friend? When the universe is dead,
When the brooks are dry, or gone instead,
When the sun doesn't shine and the moon doesn't show.
There you have it, my friend—and now you know.

This list contains others likely to escape detection:

along these lines
artistic temperament
brilliant career
captain of industry
close to nature
come in contact with
deadly earnest
depths of despair
discreet silence
dominant issue
dull thud
each and every
equal to the occasion
evolutionary process
familiar landmark
fiber of his being
force of circumstances
harked back
heart's content
in great profusion
iron constitution
last analysis
last but not least
myriad lights
of the earth earthy
Old South
paramount issue
passed away
picturesque scene
powers that be
profound silence
promising future
proud possessor
ruling passion
sea of faces
self-made man
simple life
skeleton in the closet
snow-capped mountains
soul of honor
struggle for existence
student body
suddenly
thunderous applause
true meaning of the word
untoward incident
vast concourse
venture a suggestion
walk of life
wrapped in mystery
wrought havoc

f. *Jargon.* Jargon is a form of speech a little different from anything we have yet encountered. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, in his book, *The Art of Writing*, has a chapter on jargon which is the prototype of what all essays on the subject should be. If the reader has not seen this shrewd and whimsical study of Quiller-Couch's, he should look it up in the library and read it at once. What will be said here is only a pale and vapid summary of what Quiller-Couch has said supremely well.

The jargoneer dislikes to say things directly. In the eighteenth century he would not call a fish a fish, but the "scaly breed" or the "finny tribe." He would not call sheep, sheep, but the "gentle tribe"

or the "fleecy kine." He would not say, "The flowers are blooming," but, "Blushing Flora paints th' enamel'd ground." And on one fearful occasion, he would not call snow, snow, but "wooly rain"! Nowadays the jargoneer resorts to circumlocutions and euphemisms. *Near* is *in the environs of;* being *born* is *first saw the light of day; dying* is *passing away; no* is *in the negative; several years* is *over a period of years; good weather* is *favorable climatic conditions; studied hard* is *pursued his studies with great diligence; love* is *amorous advances; grew up* is *reached man's estate*—and so forth, and so forth.

Thus, we could say of a young man: "He first saw the light of day in the environs of New York. After pursuing his studies with great diligence over a period of years in the educational institutions of the metropolis, he reached man's estate, and shortly thereafter began making amorous advances to a member of the opposite sex. Though she long turned a deaf ear to his proposals, or answered them in the negative, she at last yielded, being under the spell of the favorable climatic conditions of spring. Forthwith the happy pair entered into the state of matrimony, and lived for a considerable period of years in a state of connubial bliss, though at last our hero's better half passed away."

Special groups of "vague, wooly, abstract nouns" are mentioned in the following warnings by Quiller-Couch: "Whenever in your reading you come across one of these words, *case, instance, character, nature, condition, persuasion, degree*—whenever in writing your pen betrays you to one or another of them—pull yourself up and take thought. . . . Train your suspicions to bristle up whenever you come upon *'as regards,' 'with regard to,' 'in respect of,' 'in connection with,' 'according as to whether.'* " The following sentences illustrate these examples of jargon, together with a revision of the objectionable phrases:

In case it rains, we shall not go.
If it rains, we shall not go.

In the first instance, I must speak to you of, etc.
First, I must speak to you of, etc.

A book of this character (or nature) is useless.
A book like this is useless.

The condition of his health forbids his removal.
His bad health forbids his removal.

Our Mohammedan friend worshiped with others of like persuasion.
Our Mohammedan friend worshiped with other Mohammedans.

He assented with some degree of reluctance.
He assented reluctantly.

As regards his honesty, I am not at all doubtful.
I do not doubt his honesty.

In connection with (or with regard to, or in respect to) your last offer, we cannot just now accept.
We cannot just now accept your last offer.

We shall employ him or not according as to whether he answers the questions correctly.
We shall employ him if he answers the questions correctly.

One other sort of jargon which Quiller-Couch discusses is Elegant Variation, that is, a squeamishness about the repetition of words already used. For example, the school symbol of the local university is an owl. When the sports editor of the local paper describes a football game in which the team of this university participates, we hear in successive sentences of the "home team," the "Owl gridsters," the "feathered flock," the "feathered warriors," the "doughty Owlmen," and so on, with all the adjectives switched about to go with other nouns and carry on the elegant variation *ad infinitum.* In many a theme the death of some individual becomes "this unhappy event," "his unexpected demise," "his untimely end," "this shocking occurrence," and whatever else the ingenuity of the author may contrive to circumvent (as he would call it) the Grim Reaper. Such elegant variation looks self-conscious, as if a writer were too timid to use the same word twice, or too eager to show the resources of his vocabulary.

This section has consisted, up to now, of admonitions about what

a writer should not do. From this point on, the section will consist of more positive advice about what a writer should do to attain vigor of wording.

g. *Specific Words.* The elementary rule, Prefer the specific to the general word, is still sound. Instead of, "The birds were loud in the trees," write, "The jays were screaming among the pines." Instead of, "Flowers were blooming everywhere," write, "Red gaillardias and yellow cosmos glowed over the whole prairie." Instead of, "The many kinds of books scattered about showed the diversity of his interests," write, "Gibbon's History on the desk, a volume on electricity lying open on the lounge, and a shelfful of modern novels showed the diversity of his interests."

h. *The Exact Word.* The other elementary rule, Choose the exact word, is equally sound. Walter Pater regarded the language as an immense hoard of treasure to which writers resort for words. In this accumulated hoard is hidden one word for every purpose, and only one word. All others besides the one are mere makeshifts with which no self-respecting writer could be content. Thus, if one is *pleased* with something, he may put it that he is *delighted, charmed, gladdened, warmed, rejoiced, taken, captivated, fascinated, enchanted, enraptured, transported, bewitched, ravished, satisfied, gratified, tickled, regaled, refreshed, enlivened, attracted, allured, stimulated,* or *interested* by the thing. Which of the store to choose, the writer's meaning must determine. To give another example, people move in other ways besides by mere *walking* or *running.* They may *travel, journey, flit, migrate, perambulate, circumambulate, tour, peregrinate, wander, roam, range, prowl, rove, ramble, stroll, saunter, gad about, patrol, march, step, tread, pace, plod, promenade, trudge, tramp, stalk, stride, strut, stump,* or *toddle.* Nor should an author rest until he has chosen the one word in all these which suits the meaning he has in mind. Note how different are the meanings and the feelings conveyed by the following sentences:

He sauntered into the room.
He strutted into the room.
He stalked into the room.
He stumped into the room.

He journeyed about the country.
He flitted about the country.
He prowled about the country.
He tramped about the country.

A word always exists to match a thought, and nearly always to match a feeling. It is the writer's business to seek out this matching word as if it were a lost piece in a jigsaw puzzle. No other word is so satisfactory; no other word makes *quite* so perfect a fit.

i. *Short and Saxon Words.* These two elementary rules about the specific word and the exact word are beyond stricture. But one or two other rules often quoted should be brought before the bar of good judgment and retried. The first of these is, Prefer the Saxon word to the Latin—together with its companion, Prefer the short word to the long. These precepts we should take with reservations. A simple, direct, and swift style, dealing with simple, clear, and nimble ideas, quite obviously demands a vocabulary much sharper and quicker than does a more elaborate style dealing with involved, heterogeneous, and deliberate ideas.[2] Furthermore, long Latin words give to writing a sonorous dignity never attainable by the crisp Anglo-Saxon. How inferior is Tyndale's pure English translation, "I am the again-rising and the life," to the Latinized, "I am the resurrection and the life!" And how poor would be the following much-quoted and well-loved passage from St. Paul if all the italicized Latin words were replaced by their English equivalents:

Who shall *separate* us from the love of *Christ?* shall *tribulation,* or *distress,* or *persecution,* or *famine,* or nakedness, or *peril,* or sword?

As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are *accounted* as sheep for the slaughter.

Nay, in all these things we are more than *conquerors* through him that loved us.

For I am *persuaded,* that neither death, nor life, nor *angels,* nor *principalities,* nor *powers,* nor things *present,* nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other *creature,* shall be *able* to *separate* us from the love of God, which is *in Christ Jesus* our Lord.

[2] In this very sentence, notice how (without conscious design by the author) the two contrasting ideas have shaped themselves into two contrasting modes of diction. On the one hand, "simple," "direct," "swift," "clear," "nimble," "sharp," and "quick"; on the other hand, "elaborate," "involved," "heterogeneous," and "deliberate."

Representative passages show that the following use words of one syllable to the extent indicated:

Somerset Maugham	75%
Katherine Mansfield	74%
John Galsworthy	70%
Willa Cather	69%
Sinclair Lewis	78%
Thomas B. Macaulay	70%
R. L. Stevenson	71%
Charles Dickens	73%
Walter Pater	65%
Matthew Arnold	66%
The daily newspaper	61%
This book	68%

Narrative writing usually has the largest number of monosyllables; expositions of processes next; descriptions of sight-images next; descriptions of sound-images next; and expositions of ideas least. Modern writers tend to use more monosyllables than did the writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The figures just given show what a large percentage of modern English writing consists of monosyllables. Indeed, when other things are equal—when cadence, sonority, and euphony are not concerned; when complex and abstract ideas are not involved; when a stately, formal, dignified tone is not required; when no relief from a long succession of short words is necessary—when all these provisos are made, the short and Saxon words are to be preferred to the long and Latin words. Thus, in the old humorous examples, "I must go home," is better than, "I consider it necessary that I retire to my domicile." And, "I think he is a good man," is better than, "I am convinced of the rectitude of his principles."

Sometimes (as in the paragraph from O. Henry already quoted) a rare or sesquipedalian word will break the sameness of monosyllabic and commonplace diction. Perhaps Shakespeare had this effect in mind when he wrote these three dull lines, and then finished off with the amazing fourth line:

> What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine.

The eighteenth-century critics made it a rule that no regular line of poetry should consist of monosyllables alone; and Pope illustrated the fault thus:

And ten low words oft creep in one dull line.

Like many other eighteenth-century rules of writing, this went in the right direction, but went too far. "The one rule," said Stevenson in a famous passage, "is to be infinitely various." Too many short words, too many long words, too many Saxon words, too many Latin words—all are bad.

j. *Division of Labor.* One of the commonly recommended means toward variety is what is called "division of labor." That is, the adjective should not bear the larger part of the burden of meaning and emotion in the sentence. Nouns and verbs are the backbone and the sinew of the language: they should carry the chief weight; and the adjective may often be transmuted, for the sake of strength as well as variety, into an adverb. All this does not mean that we ought to shun adjectives altogether, for adjectives have an indispensable place in all good writing. But we ought to be wary of using adjectives to the exclusion or the subordination of other parts of speech. Mark Twain gave the excellent advice years ago, "When in doubt, omit the adjective." And Emerson counseled, "Let the noun be self-sufficient" (using an adjective, be it noted, in the sentence). These precepts will raise many a dubious sentence into respectability, and many a weak sentence into sound health. "He was an enormous man" has not the vigor of "He was a monster of a man." "The flashing guns were visible in the darkness" has not the vigor of "The guns were flashing visibly in the darkness." "The breeze became fresh" has not the vigor of "The breeze freshened." And "A cheerless wind was blowing" has not the vigor of "A wind blew cheerlessly."

k. *Coinages.* Another means toward variety not accounted for in Pater's conservative scheme is the coining of new words and new compounds. The outright coining of absolutely new words can never proceed on a grand scale except for the purposes of out-

landish, gargantuan humor such as that in Rabelais. Even there, however, it gives vigor to the writing. But in general, a sober writer coins words for their onomatopœic or their tonal effect. "Slurp!" "Blip!" "Tonk!" "Pfitt!"—these and their verb-forms are examples of onomatopœic coinage. On the other hand, "He went *galumphing* down the street" is chiefly intended to give to the action a certain feeling. And so with, "The wind wheemed eerily through the forest." Or, "He woozled me out of five dollars." Such coinages have an undeniable flavor of originality, an atmosphere of vigor; and though they can never be used abundantly, they are often worth the trouble it takes to make them.

Another sort of coinage which we may mention in passing is the deliberate creation of new words to fit new ideas, new inventions, or new discoveries. These words differ from the preceding in having legitimate root-words, generally Latin or Greek. Often they fill a want or an absolute need. The automobile, the airplane, and the radio, for example, have brought into the language hundreds of new words naming new objects such as *carburetor, magneto, heterodyne,* and *autogiro.* Biology and psychology have brought new words naming new ideas and processes such as *patroclinous, phenotype, introvert, libido,* and *schizophrenia.* Physics and chemistry have an entire vocabulary incomprehensible to the uninitiated. And a few trademarks or trade names have supplied new and now reputable words—for example, *mercurochrome, vaseline, fabrikoid, masonite,* and *cellophane.* With all such words we can have no complaint. But the impudence of high-pressure advertising and the eagerness of a certain kind of scientist to invent long hard words to replace old easy ones—these we should resist. *Realtor, groceteria, healthatorium, dactylogram, macrograph,* and *radiogoniometer,* to mention a few examples, are without excuse.

1. *Compounds.* A more important source of new words lies in the combination of old words. Such combinations or compounds are characteristic of Teutonic languages, and are in the best line of English tradition. The introductory ten lines of Beowulf contain these combinations: *spear-Danes, yore-days, people-kings, mead-settle, tore-away, little-owning, honor-worth, every-one, dwellers-*

around, and *whale-road.* A single scene from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* yields *virgin-knot, sour-eyed, lass-lorn, pole-clipped, rocky-hard, grass-plot, many-coloured, honey-drops, short-grassed, dove-drawn, bed-right, waspish-headed, marriage-blessing, ever-harmless, sickle-men, rye-straw, cloud-capped, red-hot, calf-like, filthy-mantled, foot-licker,* and *pinch-spotted.* A page of John Galsworthy has *sub-golden, silver-coloured, silvery-necked, high-collared, red-coated, sword-hilt, week-end-run-to,* and *dark-lashed.* Nearly all these last, however, are compounded of adjectives, which are not to be compared in vigor with noun compounds such as those from Beowulf and Shakespeare.

The chief value of both sorts of compounds is their brevity and their freshness. Thus, in Galsworthy, "with dark lashes" would be neither so short nor so original as "dark-lashed." The same would be true of "one willing to lick another's feet" instead of "foot-licker" as Shakespeare wrote it, or "spotted from the effect of pinches" instead of "pinch-spotted." "The window glass covered with a mist from his breath" is inferior to "the breath-misted window glass"; "a man who often sits on his lawn" is more commonplace than "a confirmed lawn-sitter"; "with lips drawn in" is a less notable phrase than "in-drawn lips"; and "people who live on a farm" is longer than "farm-dwellers."

m. *Original Meanings.* To people who know a "little Latin and less Greek," the use of words in their original etymological sense may be a source of extraordinarily vigorous diction. In English, words attach to themselves through the centuries an incrustation of acquired meanings which writers conventionally accept; yet the core of the word, the original meaning at the center of the conventional meanings, still persists as a vague contour apparent in spite of the incrustation. If a writer can unearth this original meaning, he can present his readers with words elemental and powerful. When Shakespeare refers to the ghost of Hamlet's father as "the extravagant and erring spirit," he is getting back to the elementals of words. He does not mean a "spendthrift and sinful spirit" but a "strayed and wandering spirit." In a good dictionary, the original meaning of a word is given either in the etymological note or in the

definition of the word. By referring to these places, we may construct sentences such as the following:

The castle was a towering *fabric* of stone.
Damp spirits overcame him.
I shall *keep* the Christmas holiday.
A *vagrant* wisteria vine climbed over the porch.
He came from a *gentle* family.
He proved himself a truly *Laconic* warrior.

n. *New Uses.* But the chief source of fresh and vigorous diction lies in the new uses of words. For example, we are accustomed to see the word *plump* used with definite material objects; but Kipling applies it to an action in "plump obeisances." We are accustomed to see the word *staring* used with *eyes;* but J. B. Priestley says, "She talked in a kind of idle, staring voice." We are accustomed to see the word *blur* used with images of sight; but de la Roche writes, "The music became by degrees blurred."

The attainment of this freshness of diction is not easy. It comes from the same almost philosophic spirit from which comes the power to make figures of speech—that is, the mind which sees similarities in things which to the average mind are quite different. When Conrad describes a swimmer immersed "in a greenish cadaverous glow," he recognizes the similarity between two things so unlike as a swimmer and a corpse; when Poe speaks of "thy hyacinth hair," he recognizes the similarity between the curls on a woman's head and the curls of hyacinth petals; and when Wilbur Daniel Steele writes of "little houses scrambling up the length" of a street, he recognizes the similarity between houses and living things. Not quite so obviously, but just as surely, a writer who says, "She was one of those *frankly* sanctimonious persons," is employing a word usually associated with something very different from sanctimoniousness. Jane Austen has a similar description: "He possessed a countenance of strong, natural, sterling *insignificance.*" When O. Henry says, "The girl *penetrated* the restaurant to some retreat in its rear," he uses a word associated with solids because he sees the likeness between the crowded restaurant with its thickly aromatic atmosphere, and a material substance. When Conrad says

that light "fell from above on the heads of the three men, and they were *fiercely* distinct in the half-light," he sees the likeness between distinct vision and strong passion. And when Ellen Glasgow writes of "eyes fixed in a pathetic *groping* stare," she sees the likeness between searching eyes and searching hands.

To perceive likenesses in things different, to apply to one idea or image words most frequently used with another—this may require a certain quick, almost mystical intuition which every writer may not possess. But almost every writer has at least a spark of intuition; and by proper care, one may fan the spark into quite a warm blaze. At any rate, one can try. He can avoid saying "green grass," and say instead "poisonous grass," or "pallid grass," or "delicious grass," or "cheerful grass." He can avoid saying "blue sky," and say instead "livid sky," or "purple sky," or "dead sky," or "living sky," or "brazen sky," or "hovering sky," or "huddling sky," or "still sky," or "weary sky," or "glad sky." And he can vivify such a commonplace statement as "He glanced toward her" by saying instead, "His glance slid toward her—or slipped toward her—or rushed toward her—or wandered toward her—or bounded toward her."

So far, everything which has been said about style in this book has been advice which any intelligent person with some capacity for taking pains might follow. But what is to be said in the next two parts of this discussion of style is not advice which anybody or everybody can follow. Indeed, much of it is not even advice. It is merely an analysis of some of the elements which create the vague abstractions "personality" and "beauty" in style. Some writers will find the analysis useful for their own writing; others will not.

EXERCISES

3. Vigor of Wording.

a. Make the wording of the following sentences more vigorous. In addition, change the structure wherever it is weak. Explain all changes you make:

(1) We come to college with the expectation of being able to increase our practical knowledge to such an extent that we shall be able to make a living for ourselves.

(2) We may taste of many things in college, and thus acquire a wonderful fund of knowledge which, in our future life, will help us to understand the world and to enjoy it.

(3) We make judgments in the same manner in which the business man makes his.

(4) It is not the circumstance that we have a college education, or willingness, or ability, or personality, or any other one quality that assures success for us; but it seems to be a happy combination of all these qualities.

(5) We must not permit the importance which attaches itself to one phase of college life to overshadow the possibilities which are encompassed within the other.

(6) The plays that college students have assigned to them as required reading are read very hurriedly, and with the one idea in mind that an examination is to be passed.

(7) My first day at college was one of wonderful surprises and great disillusionments.

(8) The professor was a young man of seemingly athletic build. His eyes were bright and his manner was alert. The splendid character of this man was a great influence over all with whom he came in contact.

(9) He at once instituted an inquiry through the advertising columns of the daily paper in order that he might learn something of the whereabouts of his missing son.

(10) He was very glad to part with a large portion of his savings in order that his son might be able to train himself in the profession of law.

(11) The prisoner is charged with murder in connection with the killing of Q. R. Bronson in a holdup which is known to have occurred on November 10.

(12) There is a considerable portion of the population which still harbors suspicion concerning the nature of the American banking business.

(13) Although marriage ceremonies and funerals seem to be entirely different things, they are similar in many respects.

(14) He thought that he could not remember having spent such a wonderful evening.

(15) The walk was postponed, but only after the promise of one for the next evening was given to him.

(16) The morning dawned clear and bright; in fact, it suffices to say that it was a typical Palm Beach morning.

(17) The moonlight reflected on her hair made her resemble a goddess.

(18) He was very much attracted to this beautiful young lady who seemed to exert something of a spell over him, though he felt that he was powerless to do anything about it.

(19) But alas! A rude awakening from a dream of splendor lay before him.

(20) There might be a few people who would pretend to be his friend as long as he had money.

(21) This nest is rather different from most I have seen, as it appears to be much more bulky than is usually the case.

(22) It would be audacious of me to appear to speak with authority on the more technical aspects of the printer's profession.

(23) Mr. D. believes the model to prove it possible to build a yacht to the limits of the length to which sheet aluminum of the correct quality can be rolled, without any cross-seams whatsoever on the hull.

(24) Mrs. Van Kosh had an utter horror of physical punishment in any capacity.

(25) She insisted that persuasion was the most efficient, cultured, and humane manner in which a child should be reared.

(26) Standing there, he presented an appearance that reminded one of a fish.

(27) In rescuing the unfortunate canine and bearing it off with me to my home, I succeeded in smothering all apprehensions as to family reactions relative to what they would invariably term an additional nuisance.

(28) There is a new color called Briar Brown, which is a dark, rich shade of brown, and which is very attractive, to say the least.

(29) In Coleridge's case a boy of truly extraordinary qualities was father to one of the most remarkable of men.

(30) Sedate, composed, and courteous, she presented a wide contrast to her little brother.

(31) He was a large man who had hair which was the color of a carrot; but though he was grotesque in appearance, he was, I think, almost the kindest man I have ever known.

(32) Throughout my high school career, I selected subjects that gave promise of preparing me for college; and in those subjects I tried to stand out in scholastic rating—that is, I studied a great deal.

(33) When he came out into the light, I could see that he was very tall; but the dark eyes appeared to have a sinister light in them, and seemed to be able to see right through me.

(34) Sophistication and poise (both of them qualities essential for beauty) are evident in her entire bearing.

(35) The physical aspects of this great educational institution are in keeping with its scholastic attainments.

b. Make the diction of the following sentences more specific:

(1) The child was pleased by the many Christmas presents.

(2) It was an untidy room.

(3) Bright colors were to be seen everywhere at the game.

(4) The entire village disliked seeing its minister wear shabby clothes.

(5) His whole appearance was grotesque.

c. Find a more exact word for each of the italicized words in the following sentences:

(1) I heard a heavy body *fall* to the floor of the apartment above us.

(2) The puppy *came* toward us.

(3) The sun *went down* behind the palm trees.

(4) I heard the child *crying* again.

(5) He is a *wonderful* man; it is a *wonderful* book; I had a *wonderful* time.

d. Write a paragraph on each member of the following groups of subjects, and then compare the number of Latin words in one paragraph with the number in the other:

(1) The necessity for internationalism.
The necessity for nationalism.

(2) The death of an old country grandmother.
The death of a great warrior or statesman.

(3) The love of Paris for Helen.
The love of a high school boy for a girl.

(4) A criticism of some ultra-modern painting.
A criticism of a painting by one of the old masters.

e. Make adjectives bear less of the burden in the following descriptive passages:

A small, cowering boy of ten stood before a huge man who held a long leather whip in his hand. An ugly scowl was on the man's swarthy face as he leaned toward the small boy with a threatening attitude.

An old and tottering man was trying to pick his feeble way along the crowded street. His shaking hand would now and then touch a wall for support; and now and then he would pause as if he were afraid to go farther through the dangerous traffic. "Can I help you, mister?" a shrill voice cried as a ragged urchin ran toward the old man. Taking the trembling hand in a close grip, the boy led the old man across the street, and left him safe on the other side. This kind act showed that, for all his ragged clothes, the little boy was at heart gentlemanly.

f. Substitute compound words for phrases in the following sentences:

(1) He entered the gate to the field.

(2) The chickens had littered the earth with the rubbish they had scratched up.

(3) He moved off down the road leading to the mill.

(4) He wore a black mustache which was cropped short.

(5) He came into full view on the slope of the hill.

(6) Daffodils grew in boxes at the windows.

(7) The farm was about a mile from the edge of the wood.

(8) We passed two outlandish vessels with high sterns.

(9) The owner of the boat came toward us.

(10) He rode a horse marked with sweat.

g. Write sentences in which you use the following words in their original meanings:

concur	artful	eager
capital	trivial	indifferent
apprehend	character	countenance
insinuate	prevent	quick
fond	virtue	conceit
infantry	nominate	accost

h. Try to find more notable words for the following ideas:

full face	windy day
puffy face	green trees
blue eyes	thick foliage
bright eyes	clear stream
rosy cheeks	high mountain
full lips	rolling country
weak chin	shady path
strong jaw	bright sunlight
receding forehead	sweet song
bald head	swaying vines

i. In a good thesaurus find ten synonyms for each of the following words. List the synonyms, and make sentences that will contain at least three of them:

light
dark
transparent
color
colorless
white
black
gray

brown
red
green
yellow
blue
purple
orange
variegated

loud
faint
discordant
musical

hot
cold

high
low

soft
hard

dry
wet

sweet
sour

fragrant
fetid

fast
slow

CHAPTER V

Beauty of Style

Beauty is that which gratifies the eye or the ear independently of other considerations. But since writing (exclusive of good penmanship or good printing) consists of ugly black wriggly figures spread across white pages, it cannot gratify the eye as a beautiful image. Accordingly, writing which is beautiful must symbolize sounds gratifying to the ear. In this sense, therefore, we shall discuss beauty in style. It means beautiful sound, pleasing sound, in writing. Moreover, it ought to involve, and it shall involve in our discussion, fitness of sound to sense.

In the following pages we shall discuss beauty under three heads: beauty of pure sounds, beauty of patterned sounds, and beauty of rhythm.

1. PURE SOUNDS. In some way, and for some reason, a few sounds have come to please, and a few to displease, most English-speaking people, irrespective of meaning or context.

a. *Beautiful Sounds and Ugly Sounds.* Among the vowels, *a* as in *arm*, *o* as in *ode*, *oo* as in *moon*, and the two *u* sounds in *tuneful* are the most pleasing. Close behind come *a* as in *ale*, *e* as in *be*, and *i* as in *white* and *ill*. Positively displeasing are the *aw* sound in *all*, *ou* (or *ow*) as in *out*, *u* as in *up*, *a* as in *fat*, and perhaps *e* as in *well*. *Oi* seems displeasing sounded alone or in certain combinations; but words like *voice* and *loyal* are not ugly.

The consonants may probably be arranged something like this in descending order:

Beautiful: *l, m, n, r, v, s, d.*
Negative: *t, f, w, y.*
Ugly: *k, b, p, h, g, j, z.*

This order is only approximate, it would differ with different individuals. But in a list made out by a score of people, the first half-a-dozen sounds here given would probably appear first in one order or another on all lists. An Italian musician pointing out the beauty of the English language gave as an example of perfect beauty the words "cellar door"; Poe thought *v* was the most beautiful letter, and he said that the saddest words in the language were "no more." In his famous poem he used with tremendous effect the word "nevermore." In all the phrases quoted, the beautiful *l's, m's, n's, r's,* and one *s,* together with the long *o's,* occur again and again.

S and *d,* however, are problems. They seem to be beautiful when they occur alone, but are ugly when prominently repeated in successive words. Likewise all the negative letters and their partners (mentioned below) become ugly if too much repeated. Indeed, a sentence in which the number of consonants is disproportionately large is rough, no matter what the consonants may be:

> Midst thickest mists and stiffest frosts,
> With strongest fists and stoutest boasts,
> He thrusts his fists against the posts,
> And still insists he sees the ghosts.

Moreover, some consonants sound so much alike that a reader must be careful to pronounce them very distinctly when he finds one of them at the end of a word, and another at the beginning of the next word. Such pairs make unpleasant reading. They are *b* and *p; d* and *t; f* and *v; g* and *k; m* and *n; s* and *z.* To be added to the list is any consonant repeated from the end of one word to the beginning of the next word, as "deep places." Some ugly sentences showing the *liaison* (as it is called) of pairs of consonants follow:

The big king kicked Tim.

A plain man must drink good tea.

Hop up behind his sister.

Pop broke glass on market days.

The next few quotations illustrate the beautiful and the ugly effects produced by certain letters:

Fat black bucks in a barrel-house room[1]

This is an ugly-sounding line. Notice the flat *a's* and the flat *u*, the *b's*, the *k's*, the *h*, the *f*, the ugly *ou* in *house*. *Room* is the only beautiful word in the line.

This next is from that now-neglected master of word-music, Tennyson:

O, hark, O, hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar,
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying;
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

Notice how the long *o's*, the *i's*, and the *n's*, *l's*, and *r's* echo and reëcho through the lines; and how every ugly sound (like *h*, *k*, *g*, and *p*) is immediately modulated by a following beautiful sound. The single exception is "how."

Shakespeare's early and poor play, the *Comedy of Errors*, has lines such as these:

Back, slave, or I will break thy pate across.

Hence, prating peasant, and fetch thy master home.

If I last in this service, you must case me in leather.

It would make a man as mad as a buck to be so bought and sold.

Turning to prose, we find this in Kipling: "shrimp-pink prisoners of war bathing." Not quite so bad is, "The shutter of the room next mine was attacked, flung back." Carlyle writes, "Thus your Actual Aristocracy have got discriminated into Two Classes," and, "The Ant lays-up Accumulation of Capital, and has, for aught I know, a Bank of Antland." Here is a sentence from Galsworthy, with the

[1] In the original poem, the word is "wine-barrel" instead of "barrel-house"; the latter word is the first in the next line.

purely unpleasant sounds capitalized, and the unpleasant repetitions or *liaisons* italicized:

HiS *KicKS* And *CrowS* And sPlAsHingS H*Ad* *t*he Joy of a gn*At*'S d*Ance* or a J*AcKdAw*'s G*AmBols*.

But it should be remembered that the sense or the feeling of a passage may often demand ugly sounds. The sentence just quoted from Galsworthy (in which the bathing of an infant is described) would be absurd if it were dignified and beautiful; and the line from Lindsay's *Congo* ("Fat black bucks," etc.) is purposely ugly because the author tries to create an unpleasant reaction in the reader. The following from Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur* is likewise purposely harsh for its onomatopœic effect:

> Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves
> And barren chasms, and all to left and right
> The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based
> His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
> Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels.

b. *Feeling and Letter-sounds.* Not only are certain sounds beautiful or ugly in themselves, but certain sounds convey certain feelings.

O, especially long *o*, gives sonorousness, solemnity, power, and often mournfulness to words.

I, especially long *i*, gives a feeling of quick brightness, delight, and happiness.

A as in *fate* often has about it a feeling of lazy deliberation, or stateliness, or undeviating straightness, or weight.

Long *e* usually implies feeling keen rather than powerful.

Long *u* and long *oo* make a tuneful, crooning sound that is soothing, smooth, and curative.

Short *a*, *e*, and *u* are dull words, heavy, flat, platitudinous, and sometimes depressing. They occur in words like *wet blanket*, *mud*, *smut*, *fat*, *nap*, and *death*.

The Biblical sentence, "Arise, shine, for the light has come, and the glory of the Lord is upon thee," is a perfect example of joyous long *i's* which grow into the more solemn emotion of the long

o's, which in turn end with a hint of excited feeling in the long *e.*

"Give ye ear and hear my voice; hearken and hear my speech." This, with its long *e's,* almost screams at its reader. The next verse, however, at once mounts into true solemnity: "Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? Doth he open and break the clods of his ground?"

Some consonants have definite emotional connotations, or excite definite feelings or ideas. The long-drawn *m* and *n,* for example, bring about in the sound-progression a momentary suspension which is lulling and soothing. Tennyson uses these letters, together with long *o,* most skillfully in "The Lotos-Eaters":

> "Courage!" he said, and pointed toward the land,
> "This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon."
> In the afternoon they came unto a land
> In which it seemed always afternoon.
> All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
> Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
> Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;
> And, like a downward smoke, the slender stream
> Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

R with long vowels creates a calm, clear music, as in this stanza from "The Lady of Shalott":

> Only reapers reaping early
> In among the bearded barley,
> Heard a song that echoed cheerly
> From the river winding clearly,
> Down to towered Camelot;
> And by the moon the reaper weary,
> Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
> Listening, whispers, " 'Tis the fairy
> Lady of Shalott."

But with a profusion of other consonants, *r* becomes harsh and rasping—as in the lines from *Morte d'Arthur* already quoted.

L is liquid, light, translucent; it is pale like twilight; it is soft like the glow of a pearl. In his descriptions of the sea, Conrad invariably calls on this letter to assist him, as in this:

I saw it suddenly flicker and stream out on the flagstaff. The Red Ensign! In the pellucid, colorless atmosphere of that southern land, the livid islets, the sea of pale, glassy blue under the pale, glassy sky of that cold sunrise, it was, as far as the eye could reach, the only spot of ardent color.[2]

S is a swift and agile letter if it is not bound up with long vowels. Thus, Tennyson's "So strode he back slow to the wounded king," is slow and deliberate because of the long *o's* which impede the flow of the *s's*. But Pope's lines,

> Not so when swift Camilla scours the plain,
> Flies o'er the unbending corn or skims along the main,

show the *s* in its true nature. The old tongue-twister, "She sells sea-shells by the seashore," is all the more difficult to say because the *s's* invite—indeed, almost compel—hasty utterance. If the line were slowed up by long *o's*, we should not be tempted to say it fast, and should find it no more difficult than Tennyson's line quoted above. Thus: "Sol soaks so-and-so's in soapsuds."

B, *t*, and *p* give an impression of abruptness—of a chopped-off sound, an idea bitten through, a sentence pat and proper.

G, *h*, and *j* are ordinarily regarded as rough, savage letters with none of the refinement of *l*, *m*, *n*, and *r*. A look into a thesaurus shows all these words with *g's* and *h's* as synonyms of *horrible: ugly, homely, misshapen, shapeless, hard, hard-visaged, haggard, grim, ghastly, ghostly, gristly, gruesome, ungainly, gross, hulking, horrid,* and *hideous*.

Poe's poem, "The Bells," is a deliberate exercise in letter-sounds and letter-feelings which the reader may study with profit.

In the following experiment, notice how the sense and the feeling change with the changing of dominant letters:

With *o:* A bullet moaned slowly across the hollow.
With *i:* A bullet trilled swiftly from cliff to cliff.
With *e:* A bullet screeched fiercely, deep in the ravine.
With *a:* A bullet wailed past the face of the palisade.
With *n:* A bullet sang along the canyon between pinnacles of stone.

[2] From *A Personal Record,* by Joseph Conrad, copyright, 1912, by Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

With *r:* A bullet from far off rang its clarion through the gorge.
With *l:* A bullet leapt lightly across the valley.
With *s:* A bullet sped swiftly from side to side of the abyss.
With *b, f, p,* and *t:* A bullet cleft the space between lip and lip of the gulf.
With *g, h,* and *j:* A bullet hurtled savagely from jagged crag to crag.

So far, we have dealt with pure sounds as units, irrespective of their relation to the sentence as a whole. In the next section, we shall examine them as they appear in the sentence itself.

2. PATTERNED SOUNDS. The essence of pattern is repeat. A single beat of a tom-tom is not a pattern, but a series of similar beats is; one soldier in uniform is not a pattern, but a whole squadron is; one row of corn is not a pattern, but a field of rows is.

These primitive types of patterns, however, consisting as they do of mere repeats, soon grow monotonous to the eye or ear. To be permanently gratifying, therefore, a pattern must have variety, change, relief from sameness; and yet all the while it must maintain its identity as a system of repeats. Good sentences have this variety within sound-patterns. One sound repeats itself over and over, and yet just before it becomes monotonous, this sound gives way to another. Then, after a bit, the first sound may be taken up again, carried on, blended with the second, made a part of the special pattern formed by the second, and eventually wrought into a harmony.

Within the sentence, only those sounds which occur in accented syllables and in important words form a part of the sound-pattern. But the very fact of repetition gives importance to sounds which would be ignored if they were not repeated. Any sound, therefore, repeated several times becomes a part of the sound-pattern almost independently of its accentuation or sense-importance.

a. *Vowel-Patterns.* A sentence already quoted is a good example of simple vowel-pattern:

Arise, shine, for thy light has come,
..i.....i.....i..i.....u...
and the glory of the Lord is upon thee.
.....o.....o.....o.....e

Expressed symbolically, according to the rhythmical balance of the sentence, the pattern looks like this:

i i i i u
o o o e

In this next, as in the preceding, only accented vowels are noted:

Or ever the silver cord be loosed,
. . . e . . . . . i . . . . . aw . . . . . u . . . . .

or the golden bowl be broken,
. . . . . o . . . . . o . . . . . o . . . .

or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,
. . . . . i . . . . . o . . . . . ow . . . . .

or the wheel broken at the cistern.
. . . . . e . . . . o . . . . . i . . . . .

The pattern of it may be expressed thus:

e i aw u
o o o
i o ow
e o i

Observe the beautiful weaving back and forth of the dominating *o* (with the kindred open *aw* and *ow*) and the less emphatic *e's* that gradually reach a climax in *wheel;* and observe the minor *i* sound reappearing in all the components but one.

One more example from the Bible:

Intreat me not to leave thee,
. . . . e . . . . e . . o . . . . . e . . . . . e .

or to return from following after thee:
. . . . . u . . . . u . . . o . o . . . . . a . . . . . . e . .

for whither thou goest, I will go;
. . . . . i . . . . . ow . . . o . . . i . . . i . . . o . .

and where thou lodgest, I will lodge.
. . . . . a . . . . ow . o . . . . . i . . . i . . . o . . . .

This, with its open *ow* and *o* sounds, is approximately as follows:

e e o e e
u u o o a e
i ow o — i i o
a ow o — i i o

The entire passage is a pattern of three elements—*e*, *o*, and *i*—with *u* and *a* as discords. Notice, moreover, the additional pattern in the last two elements of the passage.

Here is a sentence from a modern writer, Joseph Conrad:

He is the war-lord
..e.....aw..aw

who sends his battalions
..u..e.....a.a....

to the assault of our shores.
u.....a..aw....ow...o...

There may be some questions as to whether the passage is divided correctly; but the interplay of *aw's* and *a's* is obvious. The last element of the sentence forms a perfect conclusion by repeating the two dominant elements, and then shifting subtly to the related open sounds of *ow* and *o*.

One more example will reveal additional complexities of these vowel-patterns:

Oh, moonlit night of Africa,
o.....u..i...i.....a.....

and orchard by those wild sea-banks
.....aw.....i....o....i....e...a...

where once Dido stood.[3]
...a...u.....i.o...u....

Exclusive of alliteration, which can become obvious and tiresome, there is no better way to get music in prose than by the use of vowel-patterns such as those analyzed. Their intricate interweaving, or counterpoint, makes the beauty of language.

[3] From Andrew Lang's *Adventures among Books*. Quoted by W. E. Williams in *Plain Prose*, Longmans, Green and Company, 1929, p. 110.

b. *Consonant-patterns.* It is true that consonants can be molded into patterns quite as complex; but except for a few consonants and a few simple patterns, consonant-patterns have little real effect on the reader. He usually sees them as mere repetitions of a unit without relation and without variety. Furthermore, except with three or four consonants (*m, n, l,* and sometimes *r*), these repetitions become displeasing before they have worked themselves into a notable pattern. About the best a writer can do, therefore, after he has made the simple consonant-patterns, is to be content with repeating consonants only for the psychological effects already mentioned. He should leave most of the business of pattern-making to the vowels.

Some consonants can be worked into pleasing arrangements of repeats. In the stanzas from "The Lady of Shalott" and "The Lotos-Eaters" we have seen how the repetition of *r, m,* and *n* gives real pleasure. And in a passage from Conrad we have seen *l* used pleasingly. Moreover, these repeats are not merely alliterative; they weave at random in and out of the syllables. This next passage of prose, from Kipling, illustrates the musical use of the same four letters. It begins with *l* and *r,* passes on to *m* and *n,* and concludes with *r* once more. (The vowels make a pattern of *o's* and *i's.*)

The night had closed in rain, and rolling clouds blotted out the lights of the villages in the valley . . . The monkeys sung sorrowfully to each other as they hunted dry roots in the fern-draped trees.

But (omitting these four) consonants can usually be felt as patterned only when they are alliterative. Furthermore, if the alliteration involves more than two or three syllables, it is nearly always distinctly unpleasant to the reader.

The sentence lacks a proper proportion of parts.

The water washed the watchdog away.

Girls gain their growth less gradually than boys.

All these sentences sound bad.

The best sort of alliteration for prose is that which is an intricate crisscross of sound that is felt rather than intellectually perceived.

Let us see it working out in verse and then in prose. Swinburne, that master of patterned language, writes:

*Th*ere go *th*e *l*oves *th*at *w*ither,
*Th*e old *l*oves *w*ith *w*earier *w*ings;
And *a*ll *d*ead years *d*raw *th*ither,
And *a*ll *d*isastrous *th*ings.

The pattern is

Th th l th w
Th l w w w
a d d th
a d th

In the following passage from Pater's *Marius the Epicurean,* note how *s* and *m* are the primary alliterative elements, and how alliterations of *l, f,* and *h* weave like three threads in and out of the fundamental pattern:

So, *l*ittle by *l*ittle, they *s*tole upon the *h*eart of their *s*ister. She, *m*eanwhile, bids the *l*yre to *s*ound for their de*l*ight, and the *p*laying is *h*eard: *s*he bids the *p*ipes to *m*ove, the choir to *s*ing, and the *m*usic and the *s*inging come invisibly, *s*oothing the *m*ind of the *l*istener with *s*weetest *m*odulation. Yet not even thereby was their *m*alice put to *s*leep: once *m*ore they *s*eek to know what *m*anner of *h*usband *s*he *h*as, and *wh*ence that *s*eed. And P*s*yche, *s*imple over*m*uch, *f*orgetful of *h*er *f*irst *s*tory, answers, "*M*y *h*usband *c*omes *f*rom a *f*ar *c*ountry, trading *f*or great *s*ums. *H*e is already of *m*iddle age, with *wh*itening *l*ocks."

In the following highly rhetorical passage from Ruskin, the reader should notice how the first half of the first sentence is dominated by a constantly recurring *w;* how the second half is dominated by couplets or triplets of alliteration (*b, b, b; p, p; l, l, l*); and how the two halves are woven together by the *f* and *k* sounds repeated at intervals throughout the sentence. The next sentence follows the same scheme, with variations. The first half is dominated by *s;* the second half is dominated by groups of other alliterations (*g, g, g; b, b, b, b; r, r, r, r; b, b*); and the two halves are woven together by the *l* sound repeated at intervals throughout the sentence:

And then you *w*ill hear the sudden rush of the a*w*akened *w*ind, and you *w*ill see those *w*atch-towers of vapor swept a*w*ay *f*rom their *f*ounda-

tions, and *w*aving *c*urtains of opaque rain let down to the valleys, swinging from the *b*urdened *c*louds in *b*lack *b*ending *f*ringes, or *p*acing in *p*ale *c*olumns *a*long the *l*ake-*l*evel, *g*razing its surface into *f*oam as they *g*o. And then, as the *s*un *s*inks, you *s*hall *s*ee the *s*torm drift for an instant from off the hills, *l*eaving their *b*road *s*ides *s*moking and *l*oaded yet with *s*now-white, torn, *s*team-*l*ike *r*ags of capricious vapor, now *g*one, now *g*athered *a*gain; while the *s*mouldering *s*un *s*eeming not far away, *b*ut *b*urning like a red-hot *b*all *b*eside you, and as if you could *r*each it, plunges through the *r*ushing wind and *r*olling cloud with headlong fall, as if it meant to *r*ise no more, dyeing all the air a*b*out it with *b*lood.

To summarize all this about patterned sounds:

Prominently repeated vowel-sounds (interspersed occasionally with variant vowel-sounds) constitute the easiest, and often the most effective kind of sound patterns.

L, m, n, or *r* prominently repeated make easy and effective sound-patterns.

The other consonants seldom make noticeable or pleasing sound-patterns unless they occur in alliterations. These alliterations themselves are not pleasing unless they occur in the intricate crisscross formations described above.

c. *Rhyme.* One other subject remains to be discussed, though briefly. It is *rhyme.* We may say at once without any hesitation that rhyme has no regular place in prose. It usually looks like an accidental error made by an unskilled writer; and sometimes it looks like cheap sensationalism. Yet once in a while rhyme is effective. It may be onomatopœic, as in Bierce's "a grumble of drums," and in such phrases as "a growling, howling pack of dogs," "a sputtering, stuttering, frightened little boy," "rushing through the bushes," "chattering about matters of no consequence," "lapping at the platter" (approximate rhyme), "wailing in the jail-house," and so on. Or it may sometimes, in this day of advertising and political slogans, make a catchy phrase which will draw attention and perhaps be memorable: "gangsters shooting and looting in the cities," "lovers sighing and crying in the parks," "people wailing and railing against fate," "politicians snug in their offices and smug in their conceit," "portraits of office-seekers staring and glaring from every billboard," "the smart, tart bright young people," and so on.

Up to this point, we have discussed only letter-sounds and word-sounds as units or repeated units. We have not discussed the larger groupings of words, the blocks made up of many different syllables forming complex bursts of sound and related harmoniously to other such groups. Our next section will deal with such sound-clusters.

3. RHYTHM. The problem of prose rhythm has been the subject of some studies in physics, many studies in psychology, and countless studies in rhetoric. But probably no writer has ever been able to satisfy anybody but himself with his analysis of prose rhythm. Accordingly, it will be extraordinary if the following paragraphs seem to the reader at all correct or helpful. The chief virtue that the author would claim for them is that they add another point of view, another method of analysis, to those already known. Through synthesizing the various points of view, through picking up a hint here and following a suggestion there, somebody may sometime come to a real understanding of prose rhythm. Till that time, all suggestions, hints, and points of view of whatever kind will be valuable.

Rhythm in prose is not rhyme; it is not meter (which is a regular succession of alternating accented and unaccented syllables); it is not mere parallel structure (like *I came, I saw, I conquered*); it is not groups of sounds having the same number of syllables; it is not patterns of vowel-sounds and consonant-sounds. Rhythm is like ocean waves breaking on the shore. No two waves are alike; the sounds made by no two waves are alike; and the intervals between no two waves are the same. Yet a rhythm exists in the beating of the surf; and the rhythm changes with changes in the tide and weather.

a. *Rhythm as a Sound Wave.* The essence of rhythm, like that of pattern, is repeat, although the repeated units need not be identical. Moreover, the repeat consists of two elements instead of one. The wave comes in, and it goes out; comes in, goes out; comes in, goes out. Sounds rise and fall; rise and fall; rise and fall. A sentence with rhythm rises to a crest of sound, pauses, and then falls, only to be followed by another such rise and fall, rise and fall.

the sea;
run into yet the sea
All the rivers is not full.

come,
the rivers thither
from whence they return
Unto the place again.

of labor;
are full man cannot
All things utter it.

with seeing,
is not satisfied nor the ear
The eye filled with hearing.

been,
which hath it is that
The thing which shall be;

done,
which is it is that which
And that shall be done.

Notice in the passage just quoted that the rise to the crest and the fall away from it are of about the same length; and that each of the different crests, from beginning of rise to end of fall, is about the same length as each of the others. Contrast the passage with a piece of non-rhythmic prose such as the following. Writing such as this conveys information clearly, but it is not beautiful.

today,
throughout India due to
were reported monsoon storms.
and heavy property damage
Hundreds of deaths

were homeless.
of families
Thousands

over a cliff.
a train was thrown
In southern India

was buried
of fifteen when a house
a wedding party collapsed.
In the United Provinces

reported
Most deaths were caused
by similar
accidents.

We need not follow punctuation (always variable and often arbitrary) in analyzing passages into sound waves. Sometimes several sound waves may occur in a single sentence, as in the Biblical passage already quoted. On the other hand, one sound wave may involve more than one sentence:

We were in an ecstasy. // We were possessed.

The sun was glorious in the sky. // The sky was of a blue unspeakable.

A great deal of steam! // The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing day! // That was the cloth.

b. *Rhythm as Balanced Sound.* So far, we have been speaking of the larger rhythmic unit as a wave. Suppose, now, that we abandon that figure, and speak of it as a balance of sound. As in poetry there are the strophe and antistrophe, the stanza and the refrain, the word and its rhyme, so in prose there are sound-units which cry aloud for other sound-units to complete them. In a word, many a sentence-element demands another balancing sentence-element before the sentence as a whole can be satisfying.

Various forces within one sentence-element may impose the necessity of a corresponding sentence-element for the sake of completion.

Grammatical structure is one of the forces:

Though I wanted to go, . . .

If he speaks to me, . . .

When he was writing this book, . . .

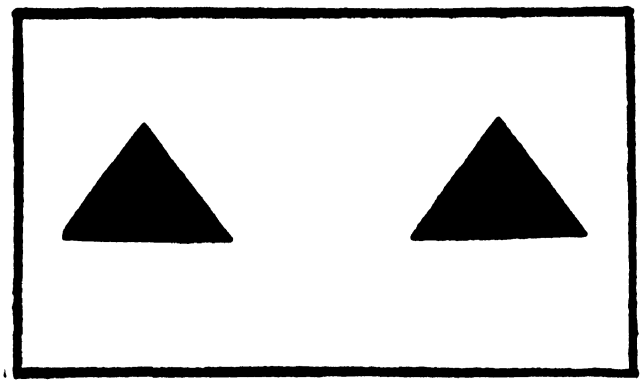


FIG. 1

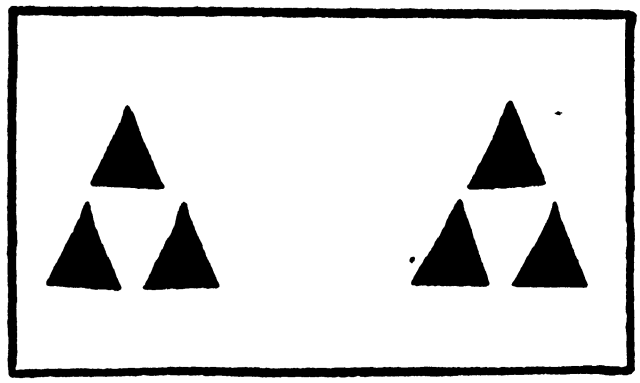


FIG. 2

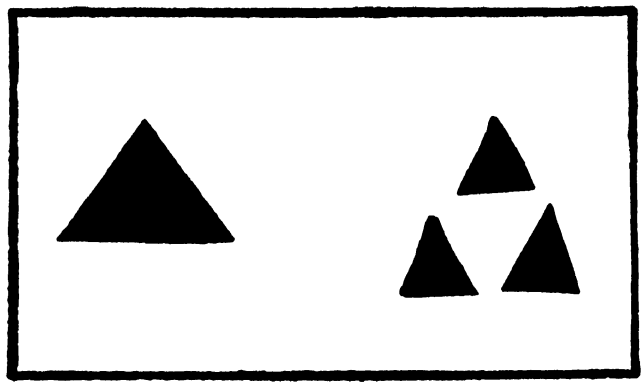


FIG. 3

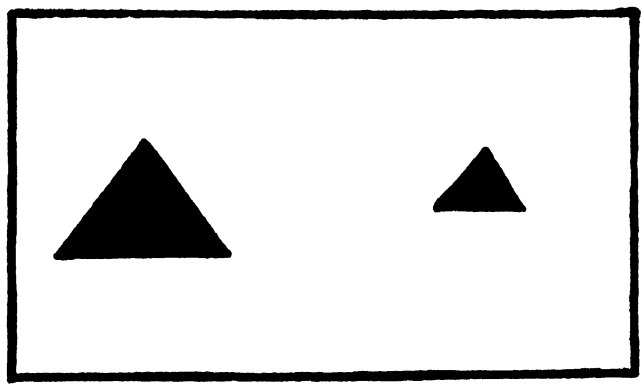


FIG. 4

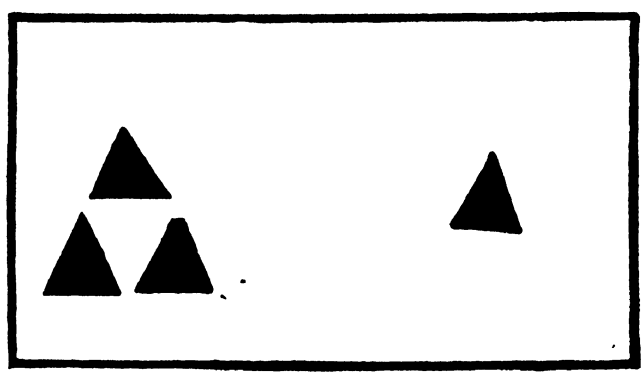


FIG. 5

All these sentence-elements demand by their structure an answering element.

Furthermore, a certain *rhythm in preceding sentences* may point to a like rhythm in subsequent sentences. Thus:

> He tried five or six professions in turn without success. He applied for ordination; but as he applied in scarlet clothes, he was speedily turned out of the episcopal palace. He then became tutor in an opulent family, but soon quitted his situation in consequence of a dispute about play. Then he determined to emigrate to America. . . .

The last sentence cannot possibly remain thus without a completing clause. The rest of the passage has imposed a certain rhythm on the entire paragraph which the last sentence cannot ignore.

c. *Types of Balance.* But to get back to our fundamental point. Rhythm involves a balancing of sound-groups. Now, balance does not mean symmetry. Balance, indeed, does not necessarily require that both elements have the same general structure. The sketches (Figs. 1 and 2) show a balance between identical parts. But such a balance is primitive and crude. The next sketch (Fig. 3) shows a balance made up of one heavy mass and three light masses. This balance is more complex and more interesting than the others. The final sketches (Figs. 4 and 5) show what any artist knows—that well-isolated small objects balance a large object or a group of objects. This is the most interesting of all balance-combinations.

These are the fundamental types of balance. All other types are but variations of these. In sentences, sound-elements of different lengths take the place of the figures in the drawings. Otherwise the principles of balance are the same in both pictorial and literary art. It should be clearly understood, however, that since spatial isolation is not usually possible in writing, it is replaced by weight of meaning. Thus a short sound-element must have a powerful significance before it can balance a long one, or before it can balance several sound-elements.

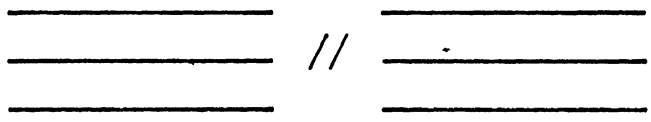
Examples of the various types of balance follow, along with a graphical analysis of each:

(1) Two sound-elements of the same length balance each other.



Stolen waters are sweet, // but bread eaten in secret is pleasant.
Hatred stirreth up strifes: // but love covereth all sins.
He is my brother,// but I do not love him.

(2) Several sound-elements may balance several other sound-elements of the same length:

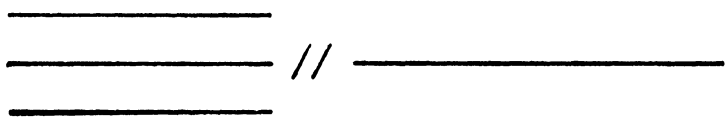


He that hath pity on the poor / lendeth unto the Lord: // and that which he hath given / will He pay him back again.

Then said the princes / and all the people / unto the priests / and unto the prophets: // This man is not worthy to die: / for he hath spoken to us / in the name of the Lord / our God.

Such as it [Milton's character] was when, / on the eve of great events, / he returned from his travels, / in the prime of health and manly beauty, / loaded with literary distinctions, / and glowing with patriotic hopes // —such it continued to be when, / after having experienced every calamity / which is incident to our nature, / old, poor, sightless, and disgraced, / he returned to his hovel / to die.

(3) One long sound-element will balance several short sound-elements. (The long element may come last, as shown, or first.)



Wrath is cruel, / and anger is outrageous; // but who is able to stand before envy?

What shall we say then to these things? // If God is for us, / who is against us?

Neither blindness, / nor gout, / nor age, / nor penury, / nor domestic afflictions, / nor political disappointments, / nor abuse, / nor proscription, / nor neglect, // had power to disturb his sedate and majestic patience.

(4) Occasionally one short sound-element, weighty in its meaning, will balance a longer element:

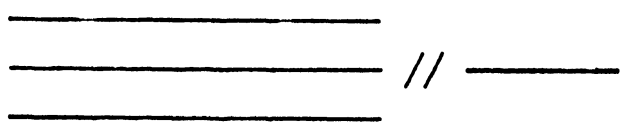


He labored long and faithfully, // but failed.

The first man is of the earth, // earthy.

A philosopher might admire so noble a conception; // but not the crowd.

(5) A short sound-element may balance several other sound-elements of any length—provided the short one expresses a more weighty idea than the others, and (most often) comes at the important end-position of the sentence:



I tell you further, / and this fact you may receive trustfully, / that his sensibility to human affliction and distress / was no less keen / than even his sense for natural beauty // —heartsight deep as eyesight.

We shall attempt to speak of them, / as we have spoken of their antagonists, // with perfect candor.

Be not deceived: // evil communications / corrupt good manners.

Till I come, // give attendance to reading, / to exhortation, / to doctrine.

All these illustrations are sufficient to show the general nature of balance in prose. These general principles, however, are subject to infinite variations. Balanced elements may fall within larger balanced elements; and a whole paragraph may consist of a complex interweaving of balance within balance. The following paragraph from Huxley, for example, is one large rhythmic unit:

If these ideas be destined, / as I believe they are, // to be more and more firmly established / as the world grows older;

if that spirit be fated, / as I believe it is, // to extend itself into all departments of human thought / and to become coextensive with the range of knowledge;

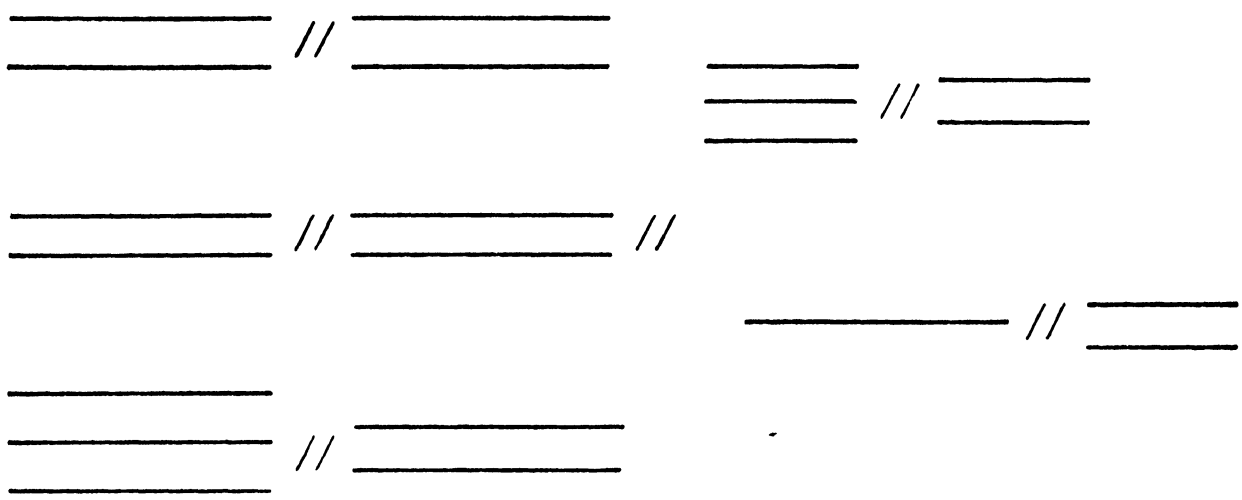
if, as our race approaches its maturity, / it discovers, / as I believe it will, // that there is but one kind of knowledge / and but one method of acquiring it;

//

then we, / who are still children, / may justly feel it our highest duty // to recognize the advisableness / of improving natural knowledge,

and so to aid ourselves and our successors // in our course toward the noble goal / which lies before mankind.

Graphically analyzed, the passage would look like this:



The distinctiveness of a writer's style, the prevailing temper, form, and sound which make him what he is, issues, for the most part, from the rhythms which he adopts. It may be a simple rhythm of parallel and antithetical structures composed of two, four, or six sound elements, as in entire books of the King James Bible. Or it may be the complex symphonies of Ruskin, Newman, and Pater.

d. *Harmony of Rhythm and Idea or Feeling.* But whatever the rhythm they use, good writers fit it to the sense of their work. Simple and plain ideas demand simple and obvious rhythms; involved and difficult ideas demand involved and intricate rhythms. Moreover, letter-sounds must harmonize with the rhythm and with the idea. Certain subjects require certain letter-sounds for their proper transference to the reader; and both subjects and letter-sounds require certain tempos of rhythm. A funeral oration, for example, would not have sprightly *i*-sounds nor would it have a quick and tripping rhythm; instead, it would be filled with long *o*-sounds, and would fall into a slow, stately tempo full of long periods, long sound-elements, and large groupings of well-balanced parts. One would not say in the oration, "He died of angina"; but, "Having long suffered an acute affection of the heart, he at last succumbed to his ailment." (Of course, this second version is wordy; but its rhythm is right—it means right. That a child may understand.) Of a boxing-match, on the other hand, no one would seriously write, "During an encounter notable for its rapidity as well as for its vigor, the present holder of the championship title suc-

ceeded in decisively conquering the challenger"; but one would write, "In a hard, fast match the champion knocked out the challenger."

The whole purpose of rhythm, from the beat of the Zulu's tom-tom to the measures of Shakespeare's blank verse, is to create some sort of *feeling* in the listener. Feeling expresses itself in pattern (for rhythm is but a pattern); and pattern, in turn, rouses feeling. The whole business of a writer, therefore, if he wishes to make his reader feel, is to formulate a rhythm which will be consistent with the ideas conveyed by words and the feeling stimulated by word-sounds.

EXERCISES

1. Pure Sounds.

a. Write two short descriptions on each subject suggested below. Try to fill the first description with pleasant, and the second with unpleasant, sounds.

The traffic passing your home at a certain hour.

A touchdown made by your school, and one made by the opposing school.

A conference with a professor.

Food on the table ready to be eaten.

A crowd at a bathing beach.

An automobile ride through a hilly country.

A modernistic picture you have seen.

A dog sleeping in the sun.

Children playing in the street.

A large person dancing.

b. Experiment with the different emotional effects you can obtain by changing the letter-elements of the sentences below. Alter the meanings slightly whenever you wish.

The old lady was sitting up in bed.

The cat was crying to be admitted.

A bird was singing beautifully from a nearby bush.

He is always complaining about his troubles.

You can always find him reading a book in the library.

2. Patterned Sounds.

a. By describing different kinds of winds at different seasons of the year, try to make the following kinds of vowel-patterns:

With long *a.*
With long *e.*
With *i.*
With *o.*
With *oo* as in *moon.*
Do the same with descriptions of different cloud effects.
Do the same with the different expressions a child's face assumes as the child passes through different emotional states.
Do the same with different incidents in a football game.

b. Using whichever of the consonants *l, m, n,* or *r* seems most suitable, write short, patterned descriptions of the following:

An opal.
An emerald.
A clear winter night.
A spring morning.
Dawn.
A cat stalking a bird.
A woman singing her baby to sleep.
Morning services in a country church.

c. Using a subject suggested in any of the Exercises of this book, try to construct a few paragraphs having pleasing alliterative patterns such as that in the passage by Ruskin quoted in the text above.

3. Rhythm.

a. Read aloud long passages from the King James Bible, Macaulay, Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe. Try to find the rhythm in each group of sentences you read, and try to express this rhythm with your voice until you get the "feel" of rhythm.

b. With the purpose of getting appropriate rhythmic effects, write

A somewhat poetic description of the movement of the planets and other heavenly bodies through space.
A description of the movement of traffic as seen from a tall building.
A character sketch of a dignified old scholar.
A character sketch of an energetic and mentally powerful figure.
An account of a train trip taken at night.
A short essay on Lincoln's place in history.

A short essay on Augustus Cæsar's place in history.

A short emotional argument against child labor.

A short emotional argument in favor of universal military training.

GENERAL EXERCISES ON STYLE

Improve the following sentences or passages, and explain your changes:

1. That man is spiritless who mildly sinks into senility merely because he believes he is irrevocably growing old when the years slip by, for he should know that youth is merely a mental state.

2. His hair was curly, and two small locks stood above his forehead like the horns of a faun. He was seated at the soda fountain waiting for his order, and he ran his fingers through his hair.

3. In desiring to go to college I had an ideal to attain, and in order that I might not fail before I reached the goal, I prepared myself.

4. The same punishment which in one age and country is effective may, in another age or country, be wholly without effect.

5. We received an unusually long "town-permission" in order to see O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* because it lasted from two-thirty in the afternoon until six; then a forty-five-minute intermission was given for dinner, and the play was over at ten.

6. However, his coma was soon broken into by the grinding of the steel wheels of the streetcar.

7. Thorsen was happy: he was going to die, and he had found a strange beauty in death.

8. The crowd was quiet, disdaining even the small whisperings and rustlings often attendant where people gather together in groups.

9. In the light of the torches he was strangely impressive. Wisps of light danced about his white hair with a curious effect.

10. He was praying, his voice mingling with the sounds of river and wind, and then winging upward to Him by whom words were heard before they were spoken.

11. In the shadows at the old man's feet I perceived a cripple, and I realized that the prayers were for him, and there came to me a startling thought.

12. Individual prayers sprang up among the crowd, and often these rumbling undertones were broken by loud shouts of "Amen!"

13. The sufferer trembled as he listened to the whispering of the figure in white, and then he did something that he had never done before—he rose from where he lay, and walked.

14. Already I was the possessor of one dog of sorts.

15. That evening the two hunters met in the cabin, and a discussion of the day's luck followed.

16. Both in England and in the United States constant efforts are being made by many people to reduce the number of capital offenses.

17. The power of the state over the life of law-breakers should be exercised with great discretion. The offender's age, the country, and the state of society should be taken into consideration, and punishment should be delivered accordingly.

18. It may be added that the Scriptures clearly recognize and justify the infliction of capital punishment in certain cases.

19. His mother was conscientious, thoughtful, and did her best to quell her unruly offspring.

20. Neither of these opportunities is taken advantage of in high school.

21. All types of psychological devices had been lavished on Wee Willie without the slightest trace of improvement in him.

22. Afterward, his habit of fibbing became annoying, even exasperating, as he neared his fifth birthday.

23. Choking and sputtering, he overturned Marjorie's salad, broke his tea glass, and almost blinded Mr. Rover with his spluttering, enjoying himself immensely.

24. Dave's thoughts were evidently far from his situation, and a peculiar expression stole over his features.

25. As far back as I can remember, I have always had an intense dislike for them.

26. I had just received my report card, but I was very disappointed to find that I had made no better than a D in my English. At first I thought that there must be some mistake; so I averaged my grades and found that the grade was correct.

27. In personally diagnosing myself, I believe that of my traits and characteristics, both good and bad, the outstanding one is selfconsciousness.

28. Science has greatly increased our power of affecting the lives of distant people, without increasing our sympathy for them.

29. The qualities which produce a man of great eminence in some one field of endeavor are such as might often be undesirable if they were universally distributed.

30. The creed of efficiency for its own sake has become somewhat discredited in Europe since the War, which would never have taken place if the western nations had been slightly more indolent.

31. He fed red corn to the hogs bred on the farm, and stored the white corn in his barn.

32. The summer evening was closed, and Janet, just when her longer stay might have occasioned suspicion and inquiry in that jealous house-

hold, returned to Cumnor Place, and hastened to the apartment in which she had left her lady.

33. But it soon appeared that fate intended to turn the incident which he had so gloried in into the cause of his utter ruin.

34. Somewhat to his surprise, the countess said nothing further on the subject, which left Wayland under the disagreeable uncertainty whether or no she had formed any plan for her own future proceedings, as he knew her situation demanded circumspection, although he was but imperfectly acquainted with all its peculiarities.

35. The throng and confusion was of a gay and cheerful character, however.

36. Whenever the senses are impinged on by external objects, whether by the rays of light reflected from them, or by effluxes of their finer particles, there results a correspondent motion of the innermost and subtlest organs. This motion constitutes a representation, and there remains an impression of the same, or a certain disposition to repeat the same motion.

37. In the application of these principles to purposes of practical criticism as employed in the appraisal of works more or less imperfect, I have endeavored to discover what the qualities in a poem are, which may be deemed promises and specific symptoms of poetic power, as distinguished from general talent determined to poetic composition by accidental motives, by an act of the will, rather than by the inspiration of a genial and productive nature.

38. On the night of his arrival in London, Alexander went immediately to the hotel on the Embankment at which he always stopped, and in the lobby he was accosted by an old acquaintance, Maurice Mainhall, who fell upon him with effusive cordiality, and indicated a willingness to dine with him.

39. Henri was very poor, his clothes were torn and dirty and his shoes full of holes, but Sophie felt proud to be with him, although usually she would have been much put out by such things; for several years she had not followed the fashions, but she had always been scrupulously clean in herself and her linen.

40. Miss B., who suffered much from gastric catarrh, had saved a little money out of her dress allowance, and driven from the house by her mother's ill-treatment, went to study in Cracow.

41. She finds her way here by the same creative process by which our feet find the familiar way home on a dark night by accounting for themselves for roots and rocks which we have never noticed by day.

42. We think that it is possible that when these novels written by Miss Cather have little left in them but historical interest, there will still be readers who will find in the three brief novels we have already men-

tioned and in one long one some flashes of truth about men and women that is universal.

43. When the show was over, they strolled over to the drug-store to procure a Coca-cola.

44. He checked himself abruptly, throwing up his hands in what seemed to be a convulsive gesture.

45. Smith, who had by this time made his sales-connection, swallowed the pride which contrasted so strangely—yet not, after all, unusually—with his lack of chin, and went to see his father and his older sister, who were the last of his close relatives.

46. There she stayed, not happy, and yet not unhappy, making some friends, until she was eighteen, and had graduated with honors, making up for lost time with a vengeance which astonished her teachers, filling in the gaps with a fortitude and determination which won her admiration, and taking a tremendous interest in chemistry.

47. Inflation is among the many subjects mentioned about which I disclaim any pretension to real comprehension.

48. Perhaps the greatest danger which is involved in the growing assumption of power by the federal government is the possibility that when rugged individuality has been eliminated as a vital factor in our life the indomitable fighting spirit that made America what she is today may also have been crushed to earth, so that instead of the old do-or-die initiative we may continue to pass the buck in placid resignation.

49. Poor thing! It seemed to be an effort for her to move; her pink, checked gingham dress seemed to make her appear fatter than she really was, and her sunbonnet made her head look too large for her.

50. The statement just made is in accordance with the known facts. Something must be done about the industrial situation which confronts us today. The fate of the nations hangs in the balance; we cannot afford to delay action any further. Everything depends on the willingness of the citizens of this great nation to pull together in one concerted effort to set the wheels of prosperity spinning once more.

CHAPTER VI

Personality in Style

This part of the discussion on style will be short because the subject is vague, and because good advice about how to acquire personality in style is about as useless as good advice about how to acquire it in real life. The only thing really worth stating is that all writing pretending to literary merit *should* have personality. But what is personality? The dictionary says that it is "that which constitutes distinction of person." This helps a little, for it implies that personality in style is individuality; it is what distinguishes one author's work from another's, and gives to each work of one author a certain unity which brands it as distinct.

What constitutes this distinction, however, is another problem. When we look about at our friends and acquaintances, we find ourselves classifying them as *straightforward, earnest, sincere, idealistic, emotional, nervous, changeable, melancholy, sophisticated, excitable, stupid, clever, brilliant,* and so on. We classify them according to their morals, their intelligence, and their emotions. But the first of these three standards is obviously useless in our investigation of personality in style; for though a writer or his thoughts may be virtuous or wicked, his style cannot be. We have left, therefore, the two categories of intelligence and emotion.

1. INTELLECTUAL PERSONALITY. Concerning the first of these, something has already been said in the section on rationality in style; accordingly, little remains to be mentioned here. One of the most important items contributing to intelligence of personality in style is the presence of an *objective* in every piece of writing. That is to say, every piece of writing should have a central thought, a fundamental idea, a unified theme around which all the other thoughts in the writing are grouped, and toward which they all point. Writing

which has no such central objective is certain to convey the impression of a maundering, flaccid intellect which allows itself to talk on and on without point or purpose. Furthermore, this objective must be made clear to the reader by means of repetitions, summaries, references, and proportional lengths of discussion; for if the objective is not obvious to the reader, having an objective is useless.

Next, every non-fictional composition of any length should be divided into *a few major parts.* Readers cannot and will not follow long, unbroken discussions. But these parts should not be divided and redivided into a vast number of interrelated subdivisions which confuse the reader and make him lose the main objective or the main divisions of the composition. Such dismemberment of ideas is a German habit foreign to the best English tradition. Superfine distinctions and complicated analyses indicate a careful but not a brilliant personality.

As a kind of transition between intelligent personality and emotional personality in style, the value of *impartiality* may be mentioned. Unpracticed writers are likely to think that the most telling criticism and the most powerful satire consist of slashing adjectives, forceful epithets, and scathing denunciations hurled with passionate vigor against the thing attacked. But practiced writers know that no criticism and no satire is effective unless it sounds coolly impartial. Accordingly, practiced writers are always careful to mention a few good traits of their victims. The practiced writer says, "No one ever doubts that Mr. Hoover was as honest as the day is long, sincere, hard-working, and business-like. BUT . . ." Or, "No one ever doubts that Mr. Roosevelt was vigorous, progressive, courageous, and earnest. BUT . . ." And the concession that each man has many real virtues only makes the criticism that follows seem the more calmly judicious, and therefore the more tellingly hurtful. Even if the writer believes that the object of attack has no virtues at all, he should not say so, but should rack his brain to discover some plausible excellence with which to drape the victim. Furthermore, two or three words like "unutterably stupid," "idiotic bungler," "nincompoop," "blockhead," "lunatic," and so on, will undo the effect of entire pages of seemingly impartial writing. They are

the cloven hoof showing an essentially passionate rather than intellectual personality.

2. EMOTIONAL PERSONALITY. This brings us to emotion in the personality of style. *Emotion,* however, is a vague word. As used here, it means general disposition, habit of spirit, temperament. The emotion which appears in a style may be of a thousand sorts: *violent* in Carlyle; *playful* and *whimsical* in Charles Lamb; *genial* and *bantering* in Arnold Bennett; *exaggeratedly humorous* in Mark Twain; *austerely but passionately logical* in Matthew Arnold; *enthusiastic but careful* in T. H. Huxley; *graceful, familiar,* and *well-bred* in Stevenson; *painstaking, plain,* and *sincere* in Defoe.

Different subjects and different audiences may demand a variety of personalities at different times from the same author. A socialist talking to a group of miners would have a style flaring with indignation; talking to a board of mediation, he would have a forceful, logical style; talking to an audience made up from the general public, he would have a persuasive, good-humored style; and writing a book about the economic condition of the poorer classes, he might have a sympathetic, compassionate, warm-hearted style. Which style he adopts depends entirely on his judgment of the fitness of things.

Before setting pen to paper, a writer ought to decide quite methodically what personality he intends to adopt in his contemplated work. Doing so is not admitting duplicity or insincerity. Dickens could write half-a-dozen books like the *Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield,* and then adopt an entirely new manner in the *Tale of Two Cities;* Scott could write the swashbuckling *Ivanhoe* and the tender character study, *Heart of Midlothian;* Poe could write the Gothic study in madness and the supernatural, *The Fall of the House of Usher,* and then turn to a "story of ratiocination" like *The Gold Bug;* and George Eliot could write realistic studies of English village life such as *Silas Marner* and *Adam Bede,* and then turn to an historical novel of the Italian Renaissance, *Romola.* Different subjects and different occasions demand different styles.

A writer should deliberately adopt a style which seems to him to fit the subject, the occasion, and his own purpose. If his purpose is to ridicule chivalry, he will adopt one style; if it is to glorify

chivalry, he will adopt another. If his purpose is to write a delightful essay on raising vegetables, he will adopt one style; if it is to give information about raising vegetables, he will adopt another. If his purpose is to write a thrilling account of a Civil War battle, he will adopt one style; if it is to criticize the strategy employed by General McClellan, he will adopt another. His writing personality will shift like a windmill with every change of the wind; and, like a windmill, it can do valuable work only if it is able to shift.

One caution must be voiced. Some writers are versatile enough to possess many writing personalities; some can have only two or three; and some can have but one. By experimenting, every writer should determine which personalities serve him best, and which make him ridiculous (or worse). Those which he can assume convincingly are, of course, those which he should adopt. The others he should attempt only for his own private edification. Just here it is that teachers and advisers may be of genuine assistance. They may give a writer impartial judgment on his different personalities. They may tell him to preserve and develop one, reform another, and do immediate execution on a third. Counsel such as this is almost indispensable. Literary groups give it among themselves; composition classes encourage it; teachers and personal advisers should take it as their chief business.

The very first duty of a writer of anything but textbooks is to develop some sort of personality in his style. Without it he will not be read; with it, and even with little else besides, he will be read by even very wise people.

CHAPTER VII

Imagery

1. ART. From the hundreds of definitions of art which have been written, the definition which seems best, and which is certainly the most useful for our present purposes, is that of the Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce. To Croce, art is "intuition." That is to say, art is "'vision,' 'contemplation,' 'imagination,' 'fancy,' 'figurations,' 'representations,' and so on."

Art is derived from the artist's power to conceive and bring forth images. These images are not an accumulation of parts; they are not a series; they are not a group of interdependent organs. But each image is a *oneness, a totality,* a *nexus* of parts. It is an *intuition* conceived and brought forth perfect. When we see a man, we do not see an accumulation of arms, legs, ears, hands, feet, and so on; we see a *man.* Art is like that. The artist conceives images complete, and (if he is a true artist) he conveys them to other people complete.

These two principles—imagination and completeness—are the bone and sinew of art. Historical fiction differs from history in that the one makes the reader *see* the past, and the other makes him *know* it. Architecture differs from mere construction in that one makes an observer *see* a building as an image, and the other makes him *know* it as something to be used. Painting differs from photography in that one creates a *unified image,* while the other creates a *collection of unselected images.*

Art need not be beautiful; it need not teach a lesson; it need not be true or untrue; it need not be moral or immoral; it need not be useful or non-useful; it need not be realistic or unrealistic. That which is perceived as a complete and unified image—merely that is art.

With this conception of art as intuition, or perfectly conceived image, Croce includes another idea. It is that the real source of the image is feeling; that, indeed, the image is but a symbol of feeling—that *art is feeling made image.* Suppose we give a concrete illustration. The neighbor owns a police dog. To me the dog is a useless, noisy, meddlesome animal; to the neighbor he is a joyous, faithful, courageous friend; to the casual passerby he is a dangerous and detestable creature who may bite unoffending strangers without provocation. The three of us, therefore, if we described the dog or painted a picture of him, would create three quite different images. Our individual feeling about the dog would determine what he would look like in our artistic efforts.

In the same way, the Middle Ages, for example, may be imaginatively conceived as dashing and adventurous (as in Sir Walter Scott), superstitious and ridiculous (as in Mark Twain), gentle and beautiful (as in Maurice Hewlitt), or mysterious and supernatural (as in Cabell). A story of the South may be romantic and gallant (in Thomas N. Page) or sordid and ugly (in William Faulkner). Negro life may be gently humorous (in Joel Chandler Harris), grimly tragic (in Richard Wright), or broadly farcical (in Roark Bradford). Feeling alone determines what the image is to be.

2. KINDS OF IMAGES. We have been speaking of images as if all of them were pictures. And as a matter of fact, the great majority of images do appeal to the sense of sight by being made up of details of color, form, and motion. Yet other sorts of images are equally the material of art—images of sound, of taste, of touch, of smell, of temperature, of sensations in the vital organs and in the muscles. Except for images of sound, most of the list seldom play a part in writing. They deserve attention not only because they are neglected, but because when they *are* used, they are generally effective.

An appeal to the senses is the only way to create images. Mere factual knowledge is worse than nothing so far as art is concerned. To say that a building faces south; that its reception hall is forty-five feet long and twenty-two feet wide; that the hall contains three tables and fourteen chairs—this means nothing at all to one

looking for artistic writing. And no more does it mean anything that a man is about five feet and ten inches tall; that he weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds; that his eyes are blue and his hair dark. Such exact details are not imaginative. They are scientific. They have no place in artistic writing.

3. IMAGINATIVE WORDS. Some words, or patterns of words, make pleasing or suggestive sound-images irrespective of their meaning. But since we have already spoken of these sound-images made by words, we must confine ourselves here to the images involved in the accepted meanings of certain words. That is, we must talk of words that recall sense impressions.

a. *Concrete Words.* It is an old principle that concrete words are preferable to abstract. They are preferable because they are imaginative.

"It was autumn," is not so imaginative as, "The last of the leaves were falling, and the earth was spread with brown and gold."

"The sun rose," is not so imaginative as, "The red and swollen sun lifted itself over the eastern wall."

"In winter," is not so imaginative as, "When icicles hang by the wall."

The entire Bible, a book of precept, philosophy, and theology, where, of all places, one might expect teeming abstractions, is instead a treasure-house of concrete imagery.

"Wickedness is vain," becomes, "He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity."

"The froward shall have many hardships," becomes, "Thorns and stones are in the way of the froward."

"Life is better than death," becomes, "A living dog is better than a dead lion."

"There shall be peacefulness," becomes, "The lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and a little child shall lead them."

"They shall have no decent burial," becomes, "And their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of heaven, and to the beasts of the earth."

In every good writer there is a similar urge to transform the abstract into the concrete. Hardly a bald, factual statement exists but

it can be dignified and vivified by concrete imaginative expression. The simple fact that it is dawn becomes in *Hamlet:*

> The morn in russet mantle clad
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.

In the same play, the simple fact that the player was much affected becomes concrete:

> All his visage wann'd,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in 's aspect,
> A broken voice.

Nor does Hamlet say, "Who insults me?" but

> Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
> Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
> Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie i' the throat
> As deep as to the lungs, who does me this?

Stevenson does not say, "Death makes life lonely for the living," but, "There are empty chairs, solitary walks, and single beds at night."

Irving does not say, "It grew darker in Westminster Abbey," but, "The chapels and aisles grew darker and darker. The effigies of the kings faded into shadows; the marble figures of the monuments assumed strange shapes in the uncertain light; the evening breeze crept through the aisles into the cold breath of the grave."

b. *Polysymbolic Words.* All words symbolize something; but some words symbolize several things. Naturally, a writer's meaning becomes richer if he can substitute the latter sort of word for words that symbolize only one object, idea, or emotion. The following is a list intended to suggest the possibilities of such substitutions. In the list, the first of each pair of words appeals to one sense only; the second word appeals to several senses.

Black ..... sight
Pitchy ..... sight and touch

White ..... sight
Snowy ..... sight and temperature

Gray ..... sight
Leaden ..... sight and weight

Sticky ..... touch
Mucilagenous ..... touch and sight

Sore ..... touch
Raw ..... touch and sight

Hot ..... temperature
Fiery ..... temperature and sight

Soft ..... touch
Cottony ..... touch and sight

Weep ..... sight
Sob ..... sight, sound, and motion

Cut ..... sight
Chop ..... sight, sound, and motion

c. *Atmospheric Words.* These words with their complex imagery are close kin to the next sort of words we shall consider, namely, words with atmosphere. To indicate what is meant by "atmosphere," we have only to recall the old joke about the foreign gentleman who complimented the American woman: "What a lovely hide you have!" *Hide* was just what the gentleman meant; but the atmosphere of the word is wrong: no lady would endure it. In the same way, we cannot write (as in the old example), "The lady held a lily in her fist," though that is what she did. We cannot write, "George III went crazy," but must say, "George III became insane." We cannot write, "Heifetz is one of the world's greatest fiddlers," but must say, "Heifetz is one of the world's greatest violinists." These illustrations explain *atmosphere* very well. It is the aura which surrounds a word, the associations linked to it, the ideas, images, and emotions which come to the reader when he chances on the word.

The business of the writer is not merely to avoid such ludicrous errors as those mentioned above, but to find words which will enrich his meaning by adding clusters of appropriate images to his words. Thus, to use an example already mentioned in another connection, the sentence, "She lay between white sheets," tells the reader merely

that the linen was clean. But if it reads, "She lay between snowy sheets," it tells the reader that the sheets are cool as well as clean.

To the sick man, the wrinkles in the bedclothes looked enormous.

To the sick man, the wrinkles in the bedclothes looked mountainous.

The last word has associations of vast irregularities spread over wide spaces, of laborious travel, of unfeeling ruggedness. Since these words fit the sick man's conception, the word *mountainous* enriches the simple idea of bigness.

He moistened the sick man's face with a damp cloth.

He swabbed the sick man's face with a soggy rag.

The first sentence does the sick man a kindness; the second abuses him. "Swab" is associated with mops roughly handled; "soggy," with solids left too long in questionable liquids; and "rag," with casual salvaging from dirty clothes.

Keats writes, "I set her on my pacing steed." Suppose he had substituted the plain word "horse" for "steed." How different would have been the effect. Sir Walter Scott writes, "He mounted his charger." What if he had written "pony" instead?

Shakespeare begins a sonnet:

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

The word "choirs" calls up far more images than the word itself actually signifies. It calls up a picture of the entire abbey ruined and desolate, with a winter wind wailing through it.

Diction such as this means more than it says. It makes use not only of the reader's knowledge of word-significance, but also of his experiences, his reading, his emotions, his imaginings. It is like music which calls a thousand pictures to mind, though each picture may be only half-perceived and half-comprehended. Tennyson had this kind of diction in mind when he wrote of Virgil's poetry:

All the charm of all the Muses often flowering in a lonely word.

d. *Figures of Speech.* Figures of speech, like the reflections in a lake, interest us, somehow, even more than the realities themselves. It is a human characteristic to find pleasure in recognizing similarities. We like to see imitations and miniatures; we like toys and dolls and mannikins; we like to note how well the imitation resembles the real. This trait it is which makes us think on looking at a picture, "How like reality!" and on looking at a landscape, "How like a picture!" It makes us think of a story, "How like real life!" and of an incident in real life, "How like a story!" This pleasure which we derive from the recognition of similarities makes us always interested in figures of speech. For instance, we may not be at all interested in an ordinary drop of water, or in a lamp globe. But when someone says, "The lamp globe clung to the ceiling like a heavy drop of water just ready to plump down to the floor," we take notice. We may not be interested in either ladies' veils or flies. But when someone says, "The veil over the woman's face was like a spider's web with black flies caught in it here and there," we take notice. And we may not be interested in either church choirs or dead boughs. But when someone writes, "Boughs that shake against the cold, Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang," we take notice.

This demonstration of an essential unity in objects unlike in most respects stimulates the imagination, and gives the reader an opportunity to exercise the faculty for recognition already mentioned. The recognition may not involve mere pictorial images, as in the three examples just given.

(a) It may involve the recognition in inanimate objects of attributes essentially human, as in, "No longer mourn for me than thou shalt hear The *surly sullen bell*"; or, "He carried a sort of suitcase made of imitation leather which had long since grown too tired to keep up the illusion."

(b) It may involve the recognition in abstract ideas of concrete processes, as in, "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days"; or, "Silence shall fall like dew"; or, "Goodness and mercy shall follow me."

(c) It may involve the recognition of an object or of a process from the mention of a word that suggests the object or the process,

as in, "The scepter of Egypt shall pass away"; "Cold steel will solve the problem"; "The house of Judah shall perish"; "He keeps the finest stable in the county"; "He that lives by the sword shall die by the sword"; "The machine he drives is the handsomest in the city"; "The whole country was in arms." The difficulty with most of these last, however, is that one must be acquainted with them in order to understand them; yet if one is already acquainted with them, one finds them trite.

The use of figures of speech can be abused. A writer, especially a writer of prose, may produce so many figures that his work sounds affected; or (a much more common fault) he may make comparisons so far-fetched that his work seems strained. An example of such strained figurative writing in verse is this by John Davidson:

> The windows, Argus-eyed with knotted panes
> That under heavy brows of roses blink
> Blind guard, have never wept, with hailstones stung.
> No antique, gnarled, and wrinkled round wood porch
> Whiskered with hollyhocks in this old thorpe
> Has ever felt the razor of the east.

All these figures, fanciful as they may be, sound forced and unnatural, as if the poet were trying hard to be poetic, as if he were going out of his way to be metaphoric.

A third abuse of figures is the over-elaboration of comparisons. How much better would the following vivid metaphor of Davidson's have been if the last phrase had been omitted. The poet is describing a battle scene between the Scotch and the English:

> Now they are hand to hand!
> How short a front! How close! They're sewn together
> With steel cross-stitches, halbert over sword,
> Spear across lance, *and death the purfled seam!*

Addison severely criticizes Cowley for similar over-elaborations of metaphor. Poets, he says, have often "taken an advantage from the doubtful meaning of the word fire, to make an infinite number of witticisms":

> Cowley observing the cold regard of his mistress's eyes, and at the same time their power of producing love in him, considers them as

burning-glasses made of ice; and finding himself able to live in the greatest extremities of love, concludes the torrid zone to be habitable. When his mistress has read his letter written in juice of lemon, by holding it to the fire, he desires her to read it over a second time by love's flames. When she weeps, he wishes it were inward heat that distilled those drops from the limbec. When she is absent, he is beyond eighty, that is, thirty degrees nearer the pole than when she is with him. His ambitious love is a fire that naturally mounts upwards; his happy love is the beams of heaven, and his unhappy love flames of hell. When it does not let him sleep, it is a flame that sends up no smoke; when it is opposed by counsel and advice, it is a fire that rages the more by the winds blowing upon it.

When the freshman wrote the following, he also was guilty of tiresome over-elaboration:

Life is a game of bridge in which luck is always trumps. [If he had left off here, he would have had an interesting metaphor, but he dragged out the comparison.] The suits are the different parts of our career, Spades being our profession, Diamonds being material fortunes, Hearts being our loves, and Clubs being our power to overcome opposition. The ace in each suit is our natural ability; the king is our education or training; the queen is the wife or mother who helps us; and the jack is our closest friend. The other cards are merely our acquaintances. In the game, we are matched against other people who have different gifts from those of ours, and who try to gain what we gain. Our business is to know our own strength and the strength of others, and to play our cards wisely. We try to get what we can by means of the small cards, and guard our more important cards closely to keep others from overcoming them with their superior gifts.

And so on. Much of this is ingenious, but it soon grows boresome.

A fourth kind of fault sometimes accompanying the use of figurative language is the mixed metaphor. Probably few people would say, as did the freshman, "I may be up a tree; but I will fight to the last ditch." Nor would few people correct the mixed metaphor, "He went drifting down the sands of time on flowery beds of ease," as did the freshman, who made it read, "He went drifting down the sands of time on an oasis." But Oscar Wilde can write:

> To think of that grand living after death
> In beast and bird and flower, when this cup,
> Being filled too full of spirit, bursts for breath.

We may possibly believe that a cup could be filled to the bursting point, instead of overflowing; but we cannot believe that it would burst for breath. Wilde writes elsewhere of the grave,

> Ah! sweet indeed to rest within the womb
> Of Earth, great mother of eternal sleep.

He forgets here that a womb has no relation to a tomb—except to rhyme with it in the next line.

4. IMAGINATIVE DETAILS. The subject matter of the artist is not the general, as it is with the scientist, but the particular; not the class, but the individual. He is not to make us see what horses look like, but what *a* horse looks like—and *a* man, *a* train-coach, *a* lawn, *a* bird. Maupassant tells how Flaubert trained him to observe a cab horse until he found how that one horse differed from fifty other cab horses, and then to express in words the distinctive details of that particular horse. Finding distinctive and imaginative details should be the chief business of any artist.

a. *Familiar Details.* The details need not be garnered from remote or visionary places, or from marvelous and romantic happenings. In general, they are more pleasing if they come from the realm of the commonplace and the familiar.

> For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
> First when we see them painted, things we have passed
> Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see.

Such images as the following, familiar as our own hand, delight us:

She put down the dish, wiped her palm along the side of her hip, and shook hands with the visitor.

Fantastically, as if ghosts were eating, she heard only the clinking of spoons touching glasses, and the low clatter of forks against plates; but no voices.

Putting his thumb to the side of his nose, and leaning far forward at the waist, he blew with a loud, fluid snort.

As she ascended the stairs before him, he noticed her cheap cotton stockings with tiny bits of lint sticking out all over them.

I watched her buy a package of gum, open the end of the cerise wax-paper wrapper, and extract a flat stick.

In preparing lemons for the tea, she first carefully sliced off the pithy nipple at the end of each lemon.

b. *Unfamiliar Details.* Even when we are describing objects or scenes unfamiliar to the reader, we must translate them into terms of the familiar. Thus, Kipling gives us:

Now and again a spot of almost boiling water would fall on the dust with a flop of a frog.

Willa Cather speaks of "the horny backbones of mountains," and describes sunset on the desert thus:

The scattered mesa tops, red with the afterglow, one by one lost their light, like candles going out.

In one sentence Ruskin pictures "the heaving mountains rolling against [the sunrise] like waves of a wild sea"; glaciers blazing in the sunlight "like mighty serpents with scales of fire"; and the "whole heaven one scarlet canopy . . . interwoven with a roof of waving flame."

All these figures make us perceive images beyond our experience by recalling to us images within our experience. Much image-making proceeds in this way.

c. *Incongruous Details.* The matter of old images in new connections deserves further comment. We may call up particularly vivid images by means of an incongruity between details as they usually occur and as they appear in some newly imagined situation. Homer, for example, describes one of his warriors as having forgotten his whip when he drove out in his chariot, and belaboring the horses with the butt of his spear. The *incongruity between the object and its use* makes the incident highly visual. Similar descriptions follow:

The carpenter took up a sharp wood-chisel, and proceeded to pare his nails.

As he sat in the chair, he bent over and scratched his shin with a ruler.

His arms piled full of books, Dr. Watson gave directions to the librarian, pointing here and there with his chin.

She stood at the kitchen table vigorously rolling out biscuit dough with a short length of iron pipe.

Sometimes an *incongruity of environment* creates visual images:

The tops of a dozen parked automobiles showed above the parapet on the roof of a six-story building.

A large yellow butterfly had drifted into the room through an open window, and was hovering over a vase of cut-flowers at the visitor's elbow.

The burro stood motionless, with head down and lower lip drooping, full in the blazing sunlight; two or three panting chickens had taken refuge in the shadow of his body.

An *incongruity between the object and the thing of which it is made* may serve the purposes of visualization:

The front gate was merely the ornamental head-piece of an iron bed swung by one side to a fence post.

The sideboards of the Negro yard-man's small wagon were two green Venetian blinds placed on edge.

The Negro chief had a pierced lower lip through which he had stuck a new yellow pencil stolen from the white men's camp.

He wore a finger ring of braided hair.

The types of details mentioned in this section do not by any means exhaust the possibilities of the imagination. Far from it! They constitute some of the most vivid types of details, but, after all, they are only suggestive. They are guideposts to imagery, not the entire kingdom.

5. IMAGINATIVE CONSTRUCTION. Often a writer can construct complete images only by the use of several details, not just one like those mentioned above. What these details shall be, and what the writer's method of presenting them, depends entirely on the purpose of the writer. His first duty, therefore, in trying to create a full and unified

image is to ask himself what his purpose is in presenting the image to the reader.

a. *Purpose in Imaginative Writing.* The imaginative writer's purpose is always one of the following: to paint a picture, to convey an idea, or to convey or rouse a feeling. Most of the details cited in the last section attempted *to paint pictures.* This next, a longer description from Flaubert's *Salambo,* does the same:

> The heavy mill-stones were revolving in the dust, two cones of porphyry laid one upon the other, the upper, which had a funnel, being turned upon the lower by means of strong bars which men pushed with their breasts and arms, while others were yoked to them and pulled. The friction of the straps had caused purulent sores about their arm-pits, such as are seen on asses' withers; and the ends of the limp black rags which barely covered their loins hung down and flapped against their hocks like long tails. Their eyes were red, the shackles clanked about their feet, and all their breasts rose and fell in unison. They were muzzled to prevent them from eating the meal, and their hands were enclosed in gauntlets without fingers so that they could not pick it up.

But some descriptions are meant *to convey an idea.* Shakespeare, in the following song, does not mean to paint a picture, but to convey an idea of winter's cold by appealing to several senses:

> When icicles hang by the wall,
> And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
> And Tom bears logs into the hall,
> And milk comes frozen home in pail,
> When blood is nipped and ways be foul,
> Then nightly sings the staring owl,
> Tu-whit, to-who,
> A merry note,
> While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.
>
> When all aloud the wind doth blow,
> And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
> And birds sit brooding in the snow,
> And Marian's nose looks red and raw,
> When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,
> Then nightly sings the staring owl,
> Tu-whit, to-who,
> A merry note,
> While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

This next, from George Eliot, is also intended to convey an idea of quietness on Sunday morning:

You might have known it was Sunday if you had only waked up in the farmyard. The cocks and hens seemed to know it, and made only crooning subdued noises; the very bull-dog looked less savage, as if he would have been satisfied with a smaller bite than usual. The sunshine seemed to call all things to rest and not to labour; it was asleep itself on the moss-grown cow-shed; on the group of white ducks nestling together with their bills tucked under their wings; on the old black sow stretched languidly on the straw, while her largest young one found an excellent spring-bed on his mother's fat ribs; and Alick, the shepherd, in his new smock-frock, taking an uneasy siesta, half-sitting, half-standing on the granary steps.

And this next, from Keats, does not attempt to give a picture of autumn—a thing manifestly impossible—but to convey an idea of what autumn does:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
  Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
  With fruits the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,
  And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
    To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
  And still more, later flowers for the bees,
  Until they think warm summer days will never cease,
    For Summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells.

The third purpose an imaginative writer may have, *to convey or rouse a feeling*, is often intermingled with the other two. Thus, both the George Eliot paragraph and the Keats stanza just quoted are probably intended as much to awaken a feeling of peace and lassitude in the reader as to convey an idea. The following passage from Daudet, however, is written only with the purpose of conveying a feeling of sadness; it gives only the vaguest sort of picture:

The little Dauphin is ill; the little Dauphin is dying. In all the churches of the kingdom the Holy Sacrament remains exposed night and day, and great tapers burn, for the recovery of the royal child. The streets of the

old capital are sad and silent, the bells ring no more, the carriages slacken their pace. . . . All the castle is in a flutter. Chamberlains and major-domos run up and down the marble stair-ways. The galleries are full of pages and courtiers in silken apparel, who hurry from one group to another, begging in low tones for news. Upon the wide perrons the maids of honor, in tears, exchange low courtesies and wipe their eyes with daintily embroidered handkerchiefs.[1]

This next, from *The Tempest,* likewise tries to rouse a feeling rather than convey a clear-cut image:

> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air;
> And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

Much imaginative writing, however, is concerned with both pure imagery and feeling. Poe, for instance, is famous for his passages which create pictures, and at the same time rouse emotions:

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. . . . I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant, eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul.

Irving's description of evening in Westminster Abbey, already quoted, is another excellent example of imagery created and feeling roused in the same passage; and the first three stanzas of Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" are another.

[1] From Alphonse Daudet's "The Death of the Dauphin," in *Pastels in Prose,* copyright, 1890 and 1918, by Harper & Brothers. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

b. *Selection of Details.* Now, suppose a writer has determined definitely the purpose he has in mind in creating an image; his next step is to decide just which details of the image he is to use. Obviously he cannot possibly use every detail; for if he did, he might, like Agassiz's student, spend days describing a three-inch fish, or write an encyclopedia on what he sees in walking across the campus. He must select, and select rigorously. Selection is so vital a business to the artist that it has given rise to many an aphorism—that "art is but selection"; that a piece of art "is to be judged less by what it contains than by what it does not contain"; and that "the genius of the artist consists in his knowing what to leave out."

If, for example, the artist is trying to give an *idea* that the weather is very cold, he will not tell the reader that the cattle are tucked away snug and content in their barn, and that people are cozy on the warm hearthstone. If he is trying to give a *feeling* of sadness, he will not tell about the private balls, the parties, the gaiety, and the love-making which will occur no matter how many Dauphins die. And if he is a criminal lawyer trying to paint a *picture* of a murder, he will paint it far differently from the way the district attorney paints a picture of the same murder.

In all these descriptions, nobody is necessarily falsifying details; but each is selecting certain details and omitting others. A man may be a regular church attendant, he may be charitable, he may be a good husband and a kind father, he may have friends among the most honest people in his city—but he may falsify accounts in the bank of which he is president. A cold morning may be brisk and cheerful weather to some people, and it may be bitterly hard to others. The Negro yard-man may be a subject of humor to some people, and a subject of tragedy to others. Seldom can any writer paint things just as they would appear to the scientist, to the camera, or to the impartial observer. Nearly always the image created depends on the writer's selection of certain details which affect him, and which, he hopes, will affect the reader, and on the omission of certain other details. And his selections and omissions depend altogether on his purpose.

This does not mean that the writer should give the impression of

being biased or purposeful. Quite the contrary! The reader must never be allowed even to think that other details exist, or that the writer is not being scrupulously exact in his description. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the entire responsibility for the image, the idea, or the feeling conveyed rests squarely in the writer's hands. What the image, the idea, or the feeling shall be depnds on him, and not on what he is describing.

c. *Arrangement of Details.* Up to this point, we have seen that the fundamental requirement for good imagery is a certain purpose on the part of the writer, which purpose guides him in the selection of details. Furthermore, his purpose sometimes guides him in the arrangement of details after he has selected them. Thus, if his purpose is merely to convey an *idea* that a day is cold or hot, that a family lives in squalid surroundings, that a room looks neat, that a certain street corner is busy, or other such ideas, he need do no more than give a series of details selected for the purpose in mind and arranged more or less at random. Shakespeare's winter song, Keats's stanza on autumn, and Eliot's description of a Sunday morning (all quoted above) are examples of such random arrangement of details.

The same sort of random arrangement, with usually a more careful effort toward climax, is common in description the purpose of which is to rouse *emotion.*

But when the writer's purpose is to paint a *picture,* he can seldom resort to a mere series of details and depend on their cumulative effect. Instead, he must arrange his details with such care that the reader will receive a unified and complete image that will satisfy Croce's definition of *intuition.*

(1) *If the subject of description is changing, or if the author's point of view is changing,* the chronological order of arrangement of details is usually best. The description of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, of a tide coming in, of a boat race, of a prize fight, of a football game, of the emotion one feels during a battle, of inward sensations one has when he takes opium, of bodily pains—the description of all such changing subjects must almost necessarily begin with the first thing that happens, and proceed to the next, and the next, and so on to the end.

Similarly, a description of what one sees during a walk down the street, or an automobile ride into the country, or a canoe trip down the river, or a tour abroad—such descriptions of objects observed while the writer's point of view changes must almost necessarily begin with the first thing that happens, and proceed to the next, and the next, and so on.

(2) Describing *changeless objects from a motionless point of view* requires a more elaborate technique in the arrangement of details. Various objects require different methods. But most of the methods may be included under one of two sorts of possible arrangements: details as they are arranged in space, and details as they are observed.

As for the first of these—objects may be described according to their arrangement in *perspective*. For example, I may describe the lawn I see directly under my window, then the hedge on the far side of the lawn, then the street beyond the hedge, then the patch of woods beyond the street, then the houses beyond the woods, and then the fields beyond the houses stretching away to the horizon. Thus I should proceed from the nearest objects to those successively farther and farther away. Or I may reverse the process, begin at the horizon and work inward toward the lawn beneath my window. It makes little difference which method I follow as long as I stick to the order I have adopted.

Somewhat similar to perspective description is description of details according to their *arrangement in space regardless of perspective*. In describing a room, for instance, I may begin with objects on my right as I enter, and then proceed all around the room until I have made a complete circle back to the objects on my left. Or in describing a man, I may begin with his head and work downward to his feet. In this method, too, an order once adopted ought not to be changed without a warning to the reader.

Now about the other method of arranging changeless objects observed from a motionless point of view. *Details may be presented as they are observed.* For example, a person pictured as coming from the darkness into a brightly lighted room would not notice at first a book lying on a small table over in the corner of the room. Instead,

dazzled for a moment, he would see only bright lights and people; he would observe next the larger pieces of furniture, the rugs, and the hangings; then he would become aware of more subdued colors here and there, and of smaller objects in the room; and finally he might perceive the book on the table. The same sort of gradual accommodation of vision would occur if the person went from light into darkness, or if he suddenly struck a light or extinguished one. The writer must accommodate his arrangement of details to the stages of accommodation which the person's eyes undergo.

But even where there is no change of light, an observer ordinarily sees certain aspects of an object before he sees others. Usually, he first gets a general impression, forms a large, vague image, and later on fills in his outline with particular details. Accordingly, a writer should usually follow this arrangement in his work by *proceeding from the description of general details to the description of particular details.* If he is describing a man, he says something about "a short fat man" (the general impression) and then adds details about "rolls of fat overhanging his collar," "a deep crease running around his wrist between hand and arm," "little dimples on each knuckle," and so on (the particular details). He says of a house, "a brick cottage of the English type" (general impression) and then adds something about "steep gables," "small-paned, casement windows," "a beam of timber over the door," and so on (particular details).

Often the general image may be given first as a *type image.* For example, a type *form* might be "a horseshoe-shaped bend in the river," "an L-shaped house," "an enormous round man." A type *color* might be "a village of red roofs and white walls," "a hillside rainbow-colored with flowers," "the chartreuse green of the shallow sea." A type *movement* might be "rotation," "undulation," "oscillation," "convergence," "divergence," "descent," "ascent." A type *sound* might be "clatter," "hum," "murmur," "roar," "swish," "ring."

Finding the type image in the other common senses requires a little knowledge of physiology. The vaguely defined sense of *touch* is limited to distinguishing between the following sensations: soft or hard, smooth or rough, sharp or blunt, wet or dry, large or small, adherent or non-adherent, resistant or non-resistant, heavy or light,

thick or thin, hot or cold, moving or resting. But we frequently use figurative words to express type images of touch: *velvety, silky, icy, syrupy, glassy,* and so on.

The type images that we can make from the sense of *smell* are said to be confined to the following odors: spicy, flowery, fruity, resinous, burnt, and foul. But here again we are likely to use comparisons to express the image.

All images of *taste* are composed of salt, sour, sweet, or bitter. To these, however, may be added irritants or caustics such as peppery or burning; textures such as greasy, soft, tough; humidity, or relative dryness or moistness; and temperature.

In expressing type images of any class, we often find it useful to bring in figures of speech, as in some of the examples already given: *L-shaped, rainbow-colored,* and *silky.*

It is only after he has given his type image that the writer faces the problem of filling in with particular details. George Eliot writes, for example, "If ever a girl looked as if she had been made of roses, that girl was Hetty in her Sunday hat and frock." There is the general picture. Details of the girl's rose-likeness follow:

> For her hat was trimmed with pink, and her frock had pink spots, sprinkled on a white ground. There was nothing but pink and white about her, except in her dark hair and eyes and her little buckled shoes.

Maupassant describes his Two Little Soldiers: "Being little and thin, they looked quite lost in their coats, which were too big and too long." There is the general picture. The author goes on to present particular details arranged in the descending order from the large and noticeable to the small and inconspicuous:

> The sleeves hung down over their hands, and they were much bothered by their enormous red breeches, which compelled them to walk wide. Under their stiff, high shakos their faces seemed like mere nothings—two poor, hollow Breton faces, simple in an almost animal simplicity, and with blue eyes that were gentle and calm.[2]

J. B. Priestley writes, "Miss Potter had a sleek, almost electroplated blonde head." This detail describes Miss Potter's general appear-

[2] From "Little Soldier" in *The Odd Number,* copyright, 1889 and 1917, by Harper & Brothers. Reprinted here by permission of the publishers.

ance; we know at once that she is a blonde. Moreover, it is the first of a series of details presented according to their arrangement in space—from the head downward:

No eyebrows; very round blue eyes; a button of a nose, so small and heavily powdered that it resembled the chalked end of a billiard cue; and a mouth that was a perpetual crimson circle of faint astonishment. The upper half of her, her neck and shoulders and the thin arms ending so curiously in little dumpy hands, was poor; but her legs were really beautiful.[3]

These three paragraphs of description are enough to suggest the varied possibilities of arrangement of details after the type image is presented. Rules to cover all images are out of the question; the writer must decide for himself what method he is to follow. Yet he will find it nearly always safe to begin with the large and the general, and to proceed, by any method that seems fit, to the small and the particular. This is a good working principle.

Nowadays, numerous details and elaborate descriptions of characters in the Sir-Walter-Scott manner are out of fashion. Consequently, many writers content themselves with presenting only *the general type image, followed immediately by one or two short, vividly imaginative, particular images.* Arnold Bennett presents M. Chirac:

Now a fragile, short young Frenchman, with an extremely pale face ending in a thin black imperial, appeared at the entrance.

A little more elaborately, in *Great Expectations,* Dickens describes Mrs. Joe Gargery:

She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles.

And Stevenson uses the same method here:

In the dock, the centre of men's eyes, there stood a whey-coloured, misbegotten caitiff, Duncan Jopp, on trial for his life. . . . He kept his head bowed and his hands clutched on the rail; his hair dropped in his eyes, and at times he flung it back; and now he glanced about the audi-

[3] From *The Good Companions,* copyright, 1929, by Harper & Brothers. Reprinted here by permission of the publishers.

ence in a sudden fellness of terror, and now looked in the face of his judge and gulped.[4]

6. INTERPRETATIVE DESCRIPTION. The pure image, the way a thing looks, is not always sufficient. Croce's definition of art, if we recall it, has it that art is feeling made image—image symbolizing feeling. This definition is perfectly sound, for the best imaginative writing passes beyond pure description to interpretative description. That is, to description not only of the external appearance of objects, but also to the implications which the writer feels lie behind the surface. In passages quoted above, the writers read into details of their characters "faint astonishment," "animal simplicity," "irritable tension," "cold fire," and "fellness of terror." And daily people speak of a "weak chin," a "malicious smile," and a "brutal mouth." Even inanimate objects or natural scenes may be rendered interpretatively: the writer may read into his subject whatever he thinks it means, as George Eliot, in the description of Sunday morning already quoted, read peacefulness into farmyard objects, and as Poe, in the beginning paragraphs of *The Fall of the House of Usher,* read nameless terror and desolation into scenes along the way. What the interpretation shall be depends, of course, on the personal feeling and the personal judgment of the writer: to one person, a mouth may look "brutal"—to another, "affectionate"; to one person a smile may look "malicious"—to another, "mischievous." But all this brings us back to where we started: the picture any reader receives from an imaginative description depends entirely on the writer's purpose, idea, and feeling in constructing the description.

EXERCISES

1. Art.

a. By writing a few sentences on five of the following subjects, try to see how many descriptive details you can include and yet give a unified impression. Fifteen is a considerable number.

An old lady.

A man's (woman's) bedroom.

[4] From *Weir of Hermiston,* chap. iii. Reprinted here by permission of the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

Your classroom.
Small boats tied up at wharves along a riverside.
A view from a hilltop.
A cloud effect.
A house.
A forest early in the morning or late in the evening.
A city street at some particular hour of the day.
A beach.

b. Do the descriptions you have just written convey any feeling? If not, rewrite them in such a way as to make them convey feeling. Rewrite one description several times so as to make it convey a different feeling with each revision, but do not add more details.

2. Kinds of Images.

Write a description of your breakfast this morning in terms of the following senses:

Taste.
Smell.
Temperature.
Sound (include sounds made by yourself and by others at the table).

3. Imaginative Words.

a. Express concretely the following abstract statements:

It was in the middle of summer.
He is lazy.
I feel gloomy.
The wind is blowing.
He walked rapidly.
She is a silly little thing.
I dislike everything about him.
The good life is not an easy life.
He began to take a pride in his appearance.
The entire nation was distressed about his death.

b. Find a polysymbolic word or phrase for each of the italicized words in the following sentences:

Her face was *pale.*
His eyes were *hard.*
The jewels *shone* in the darkness.
He *put* the book on the table.
He looked out on the *soft* green of new leaves.
A *cold* wind was blowing.

The axeman *cut* off the victim's head.
He *passed* me hurriedly.
He marched *stiffly,* like a toy soldier.
He *drank* tea and *ate* cookies.
He *turned* the pages rapidly.
He *held out* a *cold* hand.
The roof *fell* in.

c. Explain the connotations of the italicized words or phrases in the following passage:

> To her right, she saw the *shattered array* of a dying cornfield. The stalks *leaned stiffly* at *infinite* angles, *fluttering tattered* brown *pennants* in the wind. She gave a melancholy shudder as she *stared* at the corn-rows: this same field, only two months past, had been *gloriously* green, flaunting its *plumed* tassels like *cloth of gold.* Then it had been *heavy* and *pregnant* with imminent *fertility,* but now it was the *graveyard* of summer. Life had *departed* from the field.
>
> M. G. Williams

d. Use each of the following words in a figure of speech in a sentence:

watchman	cloy	adorn	opulence
patrolman	glut	garnish	affluence
sentinel	gorge	whitewash	competence
sentry	sate	bedizen	riches

penurious
destitute
impecunious
beggared

4. Imaginative Details.

a. During the course of about two weeks, accumulate from your observation a list of forty familiar details like those quoted in Section 4 above.

b. Examine the descriptions you wrote under Sections 1 and 2 above to determine where you might have used figures of speech effectively. Try to invent figures of speech which could be applied to details in the descriptions.

c. During the course of two weeks accumulate from your observation a list of forty details which are imaginative because of some incongruity.

5. Imaginative Construction.

a. Write three separate descriptive paragraphs about one of the following topics. In the first paragraph, try to paint a picture; in the second, try to convey an idea; and in the last, try to rouse a feeling.

An impatient, pushing crowd.
A hot summer day.
The home of a country relative.
A business office.
A horse (dog, cat, parrot).
A preacher in the pulpit.
A teacher before the class.

b. By selecting different details, rewrite the descriptive paragraph you have just done so as to have it convey an opposite idea; an opposite feeling.

Look about the classroom. What details would you select to suggest that it is efficiently constructed and arranged? Inefficiently constructed and arranged? Cheerful? Cheerless?

Do the same for some view of the campus and its buildings.

c. List fifteen or twenty details which you can see from your window. Now (supposing that your purpose is to give a picture of the scene) arrange these details in all the orders suggested in the text above.

Do the same for the details which you can see from the window of a train passing through a plains country; or a farming country; or a mountainous country; or a flat marshy country; or a forest country.

Express in a sentence the type-form of each of the following:

A tree you know.
A flower.
Your favorite chair.
A strange bird in the zoo.
A building on the campus.
A lamp.
A town seen from an elevation.
An unusual breed of dog.

Express in a sentence the type-movement of each of the following:

An odd manner of walking which you have noticed.
The way a cat walks; runs; creeps.
The way a fly beats against a window pane.
The way a mathematics teacher writes a formula on the blackboard.

The way someone gets out of bed in the morning.
The way an orchestra leader calls for a softening of the music.

Express in a sentence the type-sounds of the next ten noises you hear.

Tell in a sentence how each of the following feels to your touch:

Different articles of your clothing.
Leaves of different plants.
The ground on a cold day; on a warm day; on a wet day.
A bunch of keys.
A bird which you hold in your hand.
A dog's head when you pat it.
The steering wheel of an automobile as you drive.
An electric light switch as you snap it on or off.
A thin rug as you step on it.

Try to express the type-smells and the type-tastes of each article of food you can recall having eaten during the last day or two. Distinguish carefully between the two types of details. In addition, list and describe the next ten smells you notice.

If the class is not too large, the instructor may let each member come to the front of the room, one person at a time, and read for two or three minutes while the rest of the class writes a thumb-nail description of the reader in the manner suggested in Section 5 above.

6. Interpretative Description.

Enlarge two of the descriptions just written into longer, interpretative descriptions.

Write an interpretative description of one of the following:

An automobile.
A street.
A house.
A scene in nature.
A river.
An animal (cat, dog, horse, fish, bird, etc.).

PART TWO

The Writing of Exposition

CHAPTER VIII

The Nature of Exposition

1. DEFINITION. In trying to distinguish between exposition and other forms of writing, we may well parody Coleridge's famous sentence distinguishing between poetry and science: Exposition is that species of prose composition which is opposed to works of narration and description by proposing for its immediate object truth, not pleasure. That is, exposition conveys ideas for the sake of *instructing* the reader, not for the sake of *pleasing* him by emotional stimulation or imagination.

To be sure, exposition may avail itself of narration and description, and may try to stimulate emotion and imagination in the reader; but all this will be auxiliary to the main purpose of instruction. It will not exist for its own sake. For instance, a plain factual history of, say, England under the Hanovers will consist of quite as much narrative as any novel; yet the history will be narrative not for the sake of any pleasurable emotion it stirs in the reader, but for the sake of the instruction it gives him. And an account of the way a cotton gin or a cider press works may be almost pure description—the gleam of metal, the revolution of wheels, the meshing of cogs, the motions of the workmen; but the description will exist primarily to give the reader instruction, not merely to please his fancy by means of vivid imagery.

2. THE FIELD OF EXPOSITION. An enormous proportion of all writing is expository. So vast, indeed, is the field of exposition that any attempt merely to outline it is certain to fail. Exposition includes news items, news articles, special features, editorials, and advertisements; it includes magazine articles, book reviews, accounts of travel, descriptions of places in the day's news, and descriptions of social conditions; it includes political speeches, funeral orations,

sermons, classroom lectures, and a large part of all conversation about people and opinions; it includes textbooks, reference books, compilations of statistics, criticisms, histories, and biographies; it includes laboratory directions, reports of experiments or observations, building specifications, auditors' reports, and business letters. Even poetry, when it becomes philosophic, is likely to be expository; and those portions of fiction which analyze character, explain motives, and describe situations are likewise expository.

3. THE USES OF EXPOSITION. The definition of exposition has already implied its use. Exposition is used to instruct. But instruction may be of three sorts. First, it may be instruction in facts; second, it may be instruction in the meaning of facts; and third, it may be instruction in a certain intellectual or emotional point of view.

By way of illustration, suppose a writer tells the number of battle casualties in the First World War, the value of property destroyed in the line of battle, the money spent by all nations conducting the war, and the money spent on pensions, hospitals, and reconstruction since the war. And suppose that, at the same time, he records the amount of profits made by certain businesses in the war, the wages made by workers supporting the combatants, the money made by American citizens supplying armies with food and clothing, and the millions in interest received by American financiers from foreign debtors. If the writer does nothing more than this, he will be merely giving instruction in facts.

But suppose he goes on to interpret his facts. He balances accounts; he shows how apparent assets are actual liabilities; he explains that even nations which profited most by the war during the 1920's went almost bankrupt in the 1930's. His logical and impersonal conclusion, then, may be that the war was unprofitable to all concerned.

And now suppose he goes on to argue from the evidence he has educed and interpreted that all wars are not only murderous, but ruinous. He condemns wars from both the humane and the economic standpoints, and he tries to persuade his readers not to listen to vendors of war. In doing this, he is giving instruction in a certain intellectual and emotional point of view; he is not merely giving

facts and trying to interpret them impartially. He is trying to influence opinion and inspire action. Mere facts and their clarification no longer satisfy him. He has become an *agitator* in the literal sense of the word—an individual attempting to stimulate others by instructing them in his own point of view.

4. THE REQUIREMENTS OF EXPOSITION. Though instruction and not pleasure is the immediate purpose of exposition, a writer should not feel altogether relieved of the responsibility of trying to be interesting. Of course, some essays in exposition need no virtues except clarity and conciseness. On the other hand, all expositions are not mathematics textbooks, building specifications, and scientific articles on the chemistry of insect blood. Some expositions are book reviews, art criticisms, biography, histories of literature, articles on current social problems, philosophical or moral essays, sermons, public lectures, accounts of true adventure, essays on natural history, and character sketches. These expositions require some other virtues besides clarity and conciseness: they require to be interesting.

a. Macaulay censures the historian whose only object is to assemble facts: "While our historians are practicing all the arts of controversy, they miserably neglect the art of narration, the art of interesting the affections and presenting pictures to the imagination." This art of *interesting* need not be hostile to truth (as Macaulay goes on to show). Furthermore, history which has made use of this art will be read and will exercise influence while quite as scholarly, but less interesting, books will be neglected.

> That a writer may produce these effects [Macaulay continues] without violating truth is sufficiently proved by many excellent biographical works. The immense popularity which well-written books of this kind have acquired deserves the serious consideration of historians. Voltaire's *Charles the Twelfth,* Marmontel's *Memoirs,* Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* Southey's account of Nelson, are perused with delight by the most frivolous and indolent. Whenever any tolerable book of the same description makes its appearance, the circulating libraries are mobbed; the book societies are in commotion; the new novel lies uncut; the magazines and newspapers fill their columns with extracts. In the meantime, histories of great empires, written by men of eminent ability, lie unread on the shelves of ostentatious libraries.

Macaulay's own devices for achieving interest in this very essay are worth study. In the paragraph just quoted, he assumes the aggressive, controversial tone which is so much more effective than mere abstract statement; he gives examples of the sort of history which he approves; he uses a set of hammering parallel structures; he states the popularity of well-written biographies in terms of vivid images; and he concludes with a powerful contrast.

In succeeding paragraphs he uses paradoxes: "A history in which every particular incident may be true may on the whole be false." Blunt, hard statements: "No past event has any intrinsic importance." Rhetorical questions: If Lord Clarendon had done so-and-so, "Would not his work in that case have been more interesting? Would it not have been more accurate?" Similes: The merely factual historian is like a "gnat mounted on an elephant, and laying down theories as to the whole internal structure of the vast animal, from the phenomena of the hide." Metaphors: "The upper current of society presents no certain criterion by which we can judge of the direction in which the under current flows." Analogies: "The effect of historical reading is, in many respects, analogous to that produced by foreign travel"—and then an elaboration of the analogy through several hundred words. References to or indirect quotations from other authors: Bishop Watson, Sir Walter Scott, Hume, Tacitus, Lord Clarendon. And throughout the essay full lists of specific details are presented to support every large generalization.

All these devices, together with those mentioned in the first chapter of this book, the student may well employ to make his own work interesting. Occasionally these devices come naturally; but more frequently they hide away and must be sought out by conscious effort. Being interesting without effort is a gift of few people.

b. Being interesting is a requirement of all but the most coldly scientific sorts of exposition. But being *clear* is a requirement of all exposition. Exposition that is not clear is like a clergyman without morals or a teacher without learning. Endeavoring to clarify, it lacks clarity; and pretending to instruct, it confuses. Poetry may be obscure, description may be incomplete or only suggestive, and narrative may be the record of happenings the reader does not under-

stand. But exposition can afford to leave no dark corners in the reader's mind, or to trouble the reader with no unexplained ideas and half-suggested facts. Exposition must be lucid, logical, complete; it must leave the reader with more knowledge, greater understanding, or new ways of looking at an issue. It must be so constructed that it has a clear meaning as a whole, and that each part of it has a clear meaning in relation to the whole and in relation to every other part. Lacking in either this general or this specific clarity, the exposition is, in some measure at least, a failure.

5. THE SOURCES OF EXPOSITION. To attain clarity in his exposition, a writer must have, first of all, knowledge about his subject. Like Frank Buck or any other world-traveler or adventurer, he may have gained his knowledge from personal experience; like Maeterlinck or Fabre, he may have gained it from long and careful observation; like Boswell or Trelawney, he may have gained it from associating with others; like Kittredge and Lowes, he may have gained it from reading; like Plato and Locke, he may have gained it from pure thought operating on rather obvious phenomena; or like Darwin, William James, and Spengler, he may have gained it from several of these processes working together.

a. Most young students are inclined to distrust their own *experiences* as possible sources of subject matter. Asked to write an exposition, a college youth who has worked during three vacations in a small factory which manufactures fishing tackle will invariably propose to write about "Buddhism in China"; and a college girl who works in a local library will believe that she must write about "The Case against the Sugar Tariff." The youth will not realize that he can be more original and interesting, and can convey more valuable information about the manufacture of fishing tackle than any other subject he might choose; and the girl will not believe that her inside knowledge of the way her library functions will be more interesting and valuable to readers than anything she could find out about tariffs. No intelligent person has reached the age of eighteen without having acquired some special knowledge about something. The giddiest flirt could write entrancingly on "How to Attract Men"; the slowest farm boy could write informatively on "How to Care for

Milk Cows"; the most hurried New Yorker could write interestingly about "Subways as a Passenger Knows Them"; and the most child-like freshman could write a revolutionary exposition on "What I Think of My Parents." One of the very first lessons a writer should learn, therefore, is this: Value personal experience.

b. Careful *observation* and accurate recording of details observed makes worth-while exposition. The play of a child, the motions of a pole-vaulter, the behavior of a robin looking for worms, the typography of a book, the structure of a blossom—simple things such as these, if observed closely, can be the subjects of endless, and yet extraordinarily interesting exposition. All of us have seen cats begging for attention by rubbing about people's legs; but how many of us have observed this common occurrence with the minute attention that Darwin shows in the following paragraph?

> Let us now look at a cat in a directly opposite frame of mind, whilst feeling affectionate and caressing her master. . . . She now stands upright with her back slightly arched, which makes the hair appear rather rough, but it does not bristle; her tail, instead of being extended and lashed from side to side, is held quite stiff and perpendicularly upwards; her ears are erect and pointed; her mouth is closed; and she rubs against her master with a purr instead of a growl.

In another place Darwin describes the act of weeping:

> The corrugators of the brow (*corrugators supercilii*) seem to be the first muscles to contract; and these draw the eyebrows downwards and inwards towards the base of the nose, causing vertical furrows, that is a frown, to appear between the eyebrows; at the same time they cause the disappearance of the transverse wrinkles across the forehead. The orbicular muscles contract almost simultaneously with the corrugators, and produce wrinkles all round the eyes. . . . Lastly, the pyramidal muscles of the nose contract; and these draw the eyebrows and the skin of the forehead still lower down, producing short transverse wrinkles across the base of the nose. . . . When these muscles are strongly contracted, those running to the upper lip likewise contract and raise the upper lip. . . . The raising of the upper lip draws upwards the flesh of the upper parts of the cheeks, and produces a strongly marked fold on each cheek—the naso-labial fold,—which runs from near the wings of the nostrils to the corners of the mouth and below them. . . . As the upper lip is much drawn up during the act of screaming, in the manner just explained, the

depressor muscles of the angles of the mouth are strongly contracted in order to keep the mouth widely open, so that a full volume of sound may be poured forth. The action of these opposing muscles, above and below, tends to give to the mouth an oblong, almost squarish outline. . . . An excellent observer, in describing a baby crying whilst being fed, says, "it made its mouth like a square, and let the porridge run out at all four corners."

These passages describe what all of us could see if we would only observe; yet despite their commonplaceness of subject, they are both interesting and informative.

c. Contemplation of one's *associates* may furnish material for half-a-dozen kinds of exposition. The simple character sketch may grow out of long observation of a roommate, a professor, a janitor, a classmate, or any other individual of no greater importance. Indeed, it frequently happens that the most fascinating subjects for character sketches are those unobtrusive mouse-like people who so often are the bodily framework for a maze of tangled "complexes" and psychoses.

The religious youth who is troubled by scientific theories he has learned in college; the student leader who seeks popularity at the cost of independence; the pretty freshman girl who is in a flutter of amazed delight because the campus hero likes her; the girl who assumes the airs of a countess, though we know she does housework to pay her way through college; the handsome elderly lady on the faculty who has never married; the awkward, gesticulating, timid young professor in the foreign language department—such people are interesting in themselves. A mere presentation of them as they reveal their personalities to their associates would make valuable exposition.

Even more valuable would be exposition attempting to show how heredity, early environment, education, certain crucial experiences, and certain significant people have worked together to fashion a character into the individual we know.

Yet the exposition derived from one's associations may concern no one individual. Instead, it may attempt to give the reader an understanding of some racial or social group with which the author is

familiar. What are the racial-cultural traits of the German, the Jew, the American Negro, the Japanese, the Southerner, or the New Englander? What are the ideas and the thought-channels of the common sailor, the American banker, the middle-western farmer, the college student, the adolescent boy, or the high school girl? A well-considered exposition attempting to answer any of these questions would be both interesting and valuable.

The sort of exposition derived from personal associations may take a wider field than even a racial or a social group. It may develop a generalization which the student has constructed out of his knowledge of all humanity—a generalization which approaches a philosophy of life. "Most men are fundamentally honest"; "Young people are usually sad"; "The way to a woman's heart is to make her laugh"; "Women are always dissatisfied"—these are typical generalizations which may result from observation of people.

d. *Reading* is an ever fruitful source of material. Term themes in courses of history, literature, economics, and philosophy are usually typical expositions derived from the writer's acquaintance with other authors. The aim of such expositions is primarily to give information to people who have not the time or the opportunity to investigate as thoroughly as the writer can. Accordingly, fullness of information within certain specified limits, and clarity of expression are the chief things to be desired in this sort of exposition.

At the same time, the writer should remember that mere summaries or paraphrases, though these have a place in exposition, are seldom adequate in themselves for the proper explication of sources. Selection, from sometimes numerous possibilities, of sources to summarize or paraphrase, decisions as to which sources deserve the fullest treatment and the greatest amount of space, weighing of authorities, judgments on seemingly contradictory or conflicting sources, organization and arrangement of material—all this requires initiative and originality on the writer's part. He cannot be a mere parrot; he must practically always contribute something of himself. His exposition, consequently, though composed of materials taken from other writers and though often designed to give purely objec-

tive knowledge, will almost inevitably reflect the individual author's own personality. It will cover old materials; yet in its standards, its interpretations, its objective, and its purpose it will be, and it ought to be, a new contribution to recorded knowledge.[1]

e. Some of the very best and most useful exposition ever written has come from *original thought* about well-known facts. Most of the philosophers, from Plato to Bergson, have built intricate and fascinating intellectual systems on the basis of information common to all educated men. Burke impressed upon two or three generations his theories about beauty, though he had less experience with beauty than thousands of people who have walked through the corridors of the Metropolitan Museum a couple of times; Rousseau wrote a classic in the literature of education, though he had less concrete information about his subject than any college senior who expects to become a teacher; and Jefferson has influenced the destiny of a nation for a century and a half, though he probably knew less about history than any half-a-dozen college professors you know. These men were great because they thought—because they could draw inferences, judge conditions, and construct general laws from commonplace facts of no consequence to people less thoughtful.

Too much reading and too little thinking often suffocates the creative principle. Most good writers have been wide readers; but reading is no substitute for thought. A little knowledge well used is far more valuable than much knowledge never put to work. Schopenhauer, in his volume called *Chips and Scraps,* has an energetic essay on this very subject. He deserves to be quoted at some length:

> Much reading deprives the mind of all elasticity; it is like keeping a spring continually under pressure. The safest way of having no thoughts of one's own is to take up a book every moment one has nothing else to do. It is this practice which explains why erudition makes most men more

[1] The collecting of data on bibliographic cards, the use of footnotes and bibliography, the conventional symbols and abbreviations employed in footnotes and bibliography, and the most acceptable form and arrangement for footnotes and bibliography—these are matters of importance. Most of the handbooks and rhetorics used nowadays in freshman English courses contain information about such things. Consequently, they will not be studied in the present work. The student is referred to his freshman handbook instead.

stupid and silly than they are by nature, and prevents their writings obtaining any measure of success. They remain, in Pope's words:

> Forever reading, never to be read! . . .

Reading is nothing more than a substitute for thought of one's own. It means putting the mind into leading strings. The multitude of books serves only to show how many false paths there are, and how widely astray a man may wander if he follows any of them. But he who is guided by his genius, he who thinks for himself, who thinks spontaneously and accurately, possesses the only compass by which he can steer aright. A man should read only when his own thoughts stagnate at their source, which will happen often enough even with the best of minds. On the other hand, to take up a book for the purpose of scaring away one's own original thoughts is a sin against the Holy Spirit. It is like running away from nature to look at a museum of dried plants or gaze at a landscape in copper-plate.

f. The final source of exposition—that is, *a compound of all the sources previously mentioned*—doubtless produces more influential work than any of the others. We ask a writer not only to think, but to know what has already been written on his subject, and to have special knowledge gained from experiment or observation, from personal associations, or from personal experience. In a word, we ask him to have both a wide knowledge and a special knowledge of his subject, and in addition we like to see him organize his knowledge into a coherent system having a place in the larger system of things. If, for example, someone writes about coal strikes in America during the last fifteen years, we expect him to have read much on the subject, observed much, and (if possible) experienced much and known people connected with the strikes. Furthermore, we expect him to have thought about the strikes long enough to show us how they have fitted into the general social and economic scheme during the last fifteen years, and how they have influenced the present and may influence the future. We want learning in our writer, special knowledge, and a power to theorize. If he has only the first, he is a pedant; if he has only the second, he is a technical expert; and if he has only the last, he is likely to be a windbag.

An hour or two spent reading the articles in any of the better-class general periodicals will show how true it is that our best-known contemporary writers derive their materials from all the sources indicated. The learning may be neither esoteric nor all-inclusive; the special knowledge may be accidental; and the power to theorize may be limited. But if the three of them are used for all they are worth—if they are forced to yield up every droplet of expository attar they contain, they may be brewed into a really valuable piece of writing.

How good an essay may be constructed from fairly commonplace material many a good author demonstrates every month in the better-class magazines mentioned above. Analysis of an example will clarify this statement. In an excellent article called "The Humble Female," which appeared in *Harper's* some time ago, Agnes Rogers employs only the following information or theories:

General Information:

Women were "emancipated" during the early twentieth century.

Yet few women occupy high positions in business or in politics.

The typical modern woman works a while before she marries; then she marries and has a small family; then she has to find some other occupation when she is in her forties; she never becomes an invaluable grandmother, as in previous ages.

Special Information:

Example of a woman banker who was more efficient than a man.

A woman became Treasurer of the United States.

Example of a woman who avoided jobs where she had to make decisions.

The writer has found, in talking with many college girls, that most young women lack self-confidence.

Mrs. Roosevelt and Senator Margaret Smith did well in public life.

Two examples of modern men having "glamour-beyond-fifty."

Thirty percent of the nation's labor force are women.

All but nine of the census report's 451 job classifications are open to women. Even the Harvard Medical School finally opened its doors to women.

Quotations or paraphrases from three previous writers.

Theories:

Women do not value themselves enough because

a. They, like the modern man, want security.

b. Labor-saving devices deprive them of the dignity of being housewives on a professional scale.

c. They have heard and read so much about the obligations of the modern woman that they are bewildered.

d. They want to be liked by men.

The way to make women less humble is for

a. Women to think of themselves as people, not women.

b. Women not to consider that all is lost when youth is gone.

c. Women not to think that marriage automatically ensures an idyllic existence.

d. Men not to be jealous of successful business or professional women who happen to be their wives.

The average observant person knows all the general information used here; he could substitute personal information of his own quite as pointed as some of that listed as "Special Information," and he could discover other statistical or quotable items as useful as these by an hour's research among the periodical indexes and files of old magazines and newspapers; and he could think up theories quite as valid as those outlined here. In short, though general information, special information, and private theories have gone into this article, none of the three is so profound or so esoteric as to discourage emulation. Almost any thoughtful and practiced writer could produce an equally good article.

EXERCISES

1. Definition.

a. Write paragraphs describing three of the following in an expository style; then write other paragraphs describing the same three in a non-expository style:

Some bird or some dog.
The house you live in.
A restaurant you know.
A friend.
A classroom.
A piece of furniture.
A view of the campus.

b. Select three brief news items from the daily paper, and retell them in a non-expository style.

2. The Field of Exposition.

3. The Uses of Exposition.

Explain briefly how you could write three different expositions having three different uses about each of the following subjects:

The manners of college students.
Football and college finance.
The last ten movies I have seen.
Conservation measures enacted recently by the federal administration.
Bird life on the campus.
Getting a book from the library.
The freshman's problems of adjustment.
The pre-medical (pre-law) course in college.
The English courses at this college.
Tuition and fees at this college.

4. The Requirements of Exposition.

a. Take some unsatisfactory exposition you have written, or let your instructor give you some poor expository theme one of his freshmen has written, or select a particularly uninteresting page in a history or philosophy textbook—and convert it into interesting exposition by using the devices mentioned in the foregoing discussion. Do not change the fundamental ideas expressed in the original work.

b. In planning an exposition on "The Political Situation in My Home Town," suppose you think of the ideas mentioned below. Show how each of these in turn might be made the unifying idea of ten different expositions, and show how all the other ideas could be related to this central one:

1. The town is small.
2. The leading political faction is a group of merchants on X Street.
3. There is a demagogic political boss.
4. The liquor (or gambling) vote is influential.
5. Municipal funds have been used to help the trade of the leading faction.
6. The best-paved and best-lighted street is X Street.
7. The mayor of the town is a tool of the boss and of the leading faction.
8. There is some jealousy between the boss and the leading faction.
9. There has been corruption in the granting of contracts, in

the appointment of officials, and in the administration of the law.

10. The reform element is divided into two groups, one of which wants merely a transfer of power to itself, while the other wants actual reform.

5. The Sources of Exposition.

a. Make a list of the experiences which have given you considerable knowledge about certain subjects. If you wish, or if your instructor suggests it, write an exposition on one of these subjects.

b. Write a paragraph or so describing in detail the appearance and the movements of three of the following:

Your father driving a car.
A professor giving a lecture.
Your dog greeting you when you return home.
A fish moving about an aquarium for a few minutes.
A baby just learning to walk.
A baby amusing itself playing on the floor.
Your mother as she makes a bed.
A friend eating a sandwich; eating ice cream; drinking; playing bridge.
An insect on a plant.
A sparrow struggling with a large tangle of straw.

c. Make a list of expository subjects that could be derived from your knowledge of people. Try to include subjects of each type mentioned in Section 5, Part *c*, of the text. Write expositions on any of these subjects that your instructor thinks promising.

(d. The individual interests or the special tasks of every student must determine the kind of exposition the student may create from reading other writers.)

e. Write a thoughtful and interesting exposition in which you try to answer one of the following questions:

What is sentimentality?
What is art?
What is tragedy?
What is the difference between a radical and a liberal?
What is a proper attitude toward sex?
When is a man (or a woman) educated?
Of what value are novels?
Of what value is poetry?
What should be the chief ideal of every nation?
How should we let tradition affect us?

f. Write an exposition on one of the following topics; include general information, personal information, and individual theories:

Changes in American political philosophy since 1950.
A recent episode of international misunderstanding.
Modern comedy.
College humor.
Victorianism in your college.
The drift of modern high school education.
How your college differs from another in the state.
Your own moral standards and those of your mother (or father).
American poetry since 1945.

CHAPTER IX

The Types of Exposition

The previous chapter discussed the nature of exposition. The present chapter describes some specific types of exposition. All the more important types are considered except argumentation, for which an entire chapter is reserved later in the book.

I. The Familiar Essay

Calling the familiar essay exposition is almost an insult. But because it states ideas instead of creating images or relating actions, it is close kin to exposition.

The familiar essay states ideas; but these ideas are frequently trivial and always personal. They convey little objective instruction, and they constitute no philosophic systems. Usually, indeed, the ideas in a familiar essay are not expounded in sober earnestness and must not be taken too seriously. Consequently, the familiar essay is a form of writing so fluid and imponderable as almost to defy analysis. Moreover, advice about how to write it is futile. An hour with Charles Lamb, Stephen Leacock, Max Beerbohm, or Christopher Morley will teach anyone more about the familiar essay than will a month with a textbook composition.

In style this kind of essay is familiar, but not commonplace or vulgar; in structure it is formless, but not incoherent or chaotic; in method it may be illogical, but it is never clumsy or stupid. The familiar essayist writes about anything—nylon stockings, German kings, or life in Alaska; but he is seldom in earnest about any of them. He is well bred, chatty, gossipy; sympathetic, but often satirical; good-humored, but sometimes cynical; he is never solemn. He is genuinely interested in everything, but he takes nothing seriously —himself least of all. He may write about serious subjects, but he

will write in a whimsical style. Or he may write about trivial subjects, but he will write in a mock-serious style. He is informal and paradoxical—irresponsible and amused—urbane and playful—shrewd and irrepressible. And yet all the while he may be filled with quiet emotion and tender sentiment. He is the intelligent and cultured man off parade. He laughs good-naturedly at the world and at himself, and asks only that the world laugh with him. If, sometimes, a tear lurks behind the laugh, it is a hidden tear which finds no expression save in a little sigh.

In Edinburgh in 1863 Alexander Smith wrote about the familiar essayist in a style which may well be a model for the style of all familiar essays:

> The essayist plays with his subject, now in whimsical, now in grave, now in melancholy mood. He lies upon the idle grassy bank, like Jacques, letting the world flow past him, and from this thing and the other he extracts his mirth and his moralities. His main gift is an eye to discover the suggestiveness of common things; to find a sermon in the most unpromising texts. Beyond the vital hint, the first step, his discourses are not beholden to their titles. Let him take up the most trivial subject, and it will lead him away to the great questions over which the serious imagination loves to brood—fortune, mutability, death—just as inevitably as the runnel, trickling among the summer hills, on which the sheep are bleating, leads you to the sea; or as, turning down the first street you come to in the city, you are led finally, albeit by many an intricacy, out into the open country, with its waste places and its woods, where you are lost in a sense of strangeness and solitariness. The world is to the meditative man what the mulberry plant is to the silkworm. The essay-writer has no lack of subject-matter. He has the day that is passing over his head; and, if unsatisfied with that, he has the world's six thousand years to depasture his gay or serious humour upon. I idle away my time here, and I am finding new subjects every hour. Everything I see or hear is an essay in bud. The world is everywhere whispering essays, and one need only be the world's amanuensis. The proverbial expression which last evening the clown dropped as he trudged homeward to supper, the light of the setting sun on his face, expands before me to a dozen pages. The coffin of the pauper, which today I saw carried carelessly along, is as good a subject as the funeral procession of an emperor. . . . Two rustic lovers, whispering between the darkening hedges, are as potent to project my mind into the tender passion as if I had seen Romeo touch the cheek of Juliet in the moonlight garden. Seeing a curly-headed child asleep in the sunshine

before a cottage-door is sufficient excuse for a discourse on childhood; quite as good as if I had seen infant Cain asleep in the lap of Eve with Adam looking on. A lark cannot rise to heaven without raising as many thoughts as there are notes in its song. Dawn cannot pour its white light on my village without starting from their dim lair a hundred reminiscences; nor can sunset burn above yonder trees in the west without attracting to itself the melancholy of a lifetime.

II. Exposition of Events

1. *Diaries and Journals* are much the same thing. Strictly speaking, however, a diary is entirely personal; it records matters that center about the writer. A journal, on the other hand, need not be altogether personal; it may be chiefly concerned with external matters, like the daily progress of a ship, the regular meetings of a legislative body, the adventures and discoveries of an expedition, the course of a scientific investigation, and so on.

The basic requirements of a journal are few. They are merely honesty, completeness, and clarity. But, of course, there is no law against a journal's having a pleasing style, good narrative structure, interesting character delineation, vivid description, shrewd criticism, and original comment.

A good diary is nearly related to the familiar essay. It is not a mere listing of a day's events: "Had lunch at Margaret's house today. Went to see a movie afterward—Roland Rogers in *Their Only Hour*. Got home at about 5 P.M.—just in time to receive a telephone call from Jack. Made a date with him for the Saturday night dance. Called Alice after dinner and talked about Jack. Studied French till 11:15." Such a diary is of no interest to anyone but the writer, and will not interest even the writer after six months. A good diary reveals one's emotional and intellectual reactions to daily affairs; it describes scenes and recalls images; it sketches and analyzes characters; it tells little stories or anecdotes; it voices criticisms of books, plays, ideas, and people; it records the writer's current philosophical and religious opinions; it pictures social life; it reflects history.

Keeping a diary is good practice for the writer. It will get him into the habit of writing something every day; it will train him to perceive worth-while material in common life; it will make him

observe his surroundings more carefully, and value his own passing thoughts and feelings more highly; it will give him a kind of rough quarry from which he can mine material for more polished work later on; and, in after years, it will be peculiarly fascinating to himself and to his grandchildren. People still read with delight the diaries of Pepys and Boswell, and with intense interest the diaries of Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells. It is a form of writing that never is outdated.

2. *History* is narrative exposition; its chief purpose is to instruct; its chief requirements are thoroughness, accuracy, and clarity.

a. *History of an event* deals with *one* episode—like a traffic accident, a great explosion, an assassination, a single battle, a single day or a minor action within a battle, and so on.

b. *History of a period* deals with many episodes happening over a certain length of time—like the 1930's, the Victorian Age, the Renaissance, and so on. Since recording *every* detail about such periods is physically impossible, the historian must select details. His selection depends upon what he considers important. Thus all such history is actually interpretative. Good historians keep this fact in mind, or actually emphasize it; they do not merely list indiscriminate past events without regard for their significance in a general interpretation of history.

c. *Topical history* deals with special historical subjects that may cut across several chronological periods, and are purposely isolated from other subjects. Examples would be histories of the honor system at your college, wedding customs, Unitarianism, the British labor movement, the British Parliament, the woman suffrage movement in America, Franklin Roosevelt's administrations, the Second World War, and the like.

d. What we may call *folk history* is altogether different. Its purpose is not to give readers a clearer understanding of large events but, rather, to show readers how our ancestors lived, thought, worked, and died; to reveal potentialities of human nature that we moderns could never have dreamed of; to satisfy a normal human curiosity about other human beings who were once alive. Such history need be only true and interesting. Without attempting inter-

pretation and evaluation, it may recount stirring events, or depict fascinating characters, or tell of curious or unusual customs or incidents. The more vividly all this is done, the better is the history. Factual truth alone may not always suffice. Imagination, understanding of human nature, story-telling power, an eye for effect, and a keen sensitivity to the strange or romantic—these the writer needs in addition to strict historical accuracy. Acquiring them is largely a matter of wide and tolerant reading. And what reading cannot supply, nature must.

3. *Biography* may be of either the institutional or the folk type. That is, it may tell the story of a man's life as it affected his times and the times which came after him; or it may tell the story of his life for its own sake—for the intrinsic interest of himself and of the things he did. Older biographies were, most commonly, of the former sort; but modern biographies, yielding to the contemporary interest in psychology (and, perhaps, making concessions to modern sensationalism), have drifted toward the personal. This new desire to understand historical personages as *people,* men and women undergoing altogether human emotions and having altogether human weaknesses, is certainly praiseworthy. It has revitalized biography and brought about a new conception of history; moreover, it has raised the craft of biography into an art demanding the creative imagination of a novelist as well as the accuracy of the historian. As long as it retains this accuracy, the new art deserves all the popularity it has attained. Nevertheless, personal fancy, elaborate reconstructions of possible conversations, and bold imaging forth of personally invented scenes have no place in sound biography. These belong to fiction, not to exposition.

No biography should be a mere running comment on events chronologically arranged. Instead, it should have a definite objective, a unifying idea, around which all the events arrange themselves according to a pattern. The pattern is the biographer's own contribution to the work. To one biographer, Napoleon was a selfish, cold-blooded egoist; to another, he was a dreamer who visioned for himself an Asiatic empire of which Europe was to be only a province; and to another, he was an unhappy man who found in activity

a compensation for youthful frustration and disappointed love. Each biographer uses the same facts; but because each has used a different pattern, each has created a different Napoleon.

Before setting pen to paper in writing a biography, the student should acquire by reading or by personal investigation as much information as possible about his subject. After this, the next step should be assimilation and meditation. For a time, the prospective writer should leave off research and devote himself to the task of expressing in words the dominant trait of his subject's character and the main pattern of his life. When this step has been taken, and not until then, comes the writing of the biography. This third step is now comparatively easy. All that the writer need do is to select from his previously gathered information facts and anecdotes which illustrate or prove the fundamental idea, and then present them in a more or less chronological order. A little additional investigation may be necessary, or a little explanation of seemingly contradictory facts; but the real work of writing a biography is done when the second step mentioned above is taken.

4. *Anecdote* is one of the chief instruments of biography. It may be a short account of some small incident, or it may be a bit of information about someone's personal habits. For example, the story of how Coleridge lectured an hour and a half on a subject he did not know until the man who introduced him announced the subject to the audience—this is an anecdote of a particular incident. And the information that Dr. Johnson used to touch every post as he walked down the street—this is an anecdote of personal habit.

But both sorts of anecdotes serve one purpose: They reveal character. They tell us something (not always to be expressed in words) about personalities; and they tell it more forcefully and memorably than could any amount of abstract analysis. Everyone who has read Macaulay or Boswell can recall a dozen anecdotes about Dr. Johnson; but who can recall many actual facts about him? When was he born; where was he born; when did he leave Oxford; when did he come to London; when did he die?

Not all anecdotes, however, are personal. Some reveal the characteristics of races, classes, or professions. The stories about the two

Irishmen, about the Scotsman, about the traveling salesman, about the absent-minded professor are all anecdotes intended to depict the typical traits of certain groups. The scope of the anecdote may be even wider. It may reveal traits typical of a people, of an age in history, of human beings in general—or of dogs, or of parrots, or of ants. The anecdote about the medieval French bishop who tried in ecclesiastical court and burned for sorcery a rooster which had laid an egg reveals to us more about the medieval mind than could columns of statistics. And the stories telling how feminine mourners (some with onions in their handkerchiefs) filed past the bier of the dead actor Rudolph Valentino reveal to us as much about human sentimentality as does a tabloid.

The requirements of a good anecdote are these: that it reveal some characteristic of individuals, groups, or species; that it be short; and that, if possible, the incident told be curious, humorous, or emotional.

5. The *True-Experience Narrative* is expository when its chief purpose is to give information. Yet this kind of narrative nearly always has the other purposes of exciting the reader's emotions and of pleasing by means of a skillful plot. Parkman's *The Oregon Trail,* Theodore Roosevelt's book on his African adventure, Tomlinson's *The Sea and the Jungle,* magazine accounts of explorations, hunting caribou in Alaska, catching trout in Colorado—these are narratives of true experience.

The first requisite for such narratives is that they be convincing. For no matter how interesting or exciting they are, they defeat their primary purpose if they do not sound true. To help him achieve this convincingness, a writer may use some of the following devices:

He will write in a direct, simple style instead of in a studied or elaborate style.

He will shun almost every temptation to be impressive by means of intensifying words or emotional details.

He will avoid trying to create artificial effects in climax, suspense, description, and alleged humor.

He will be wary of making statements hard to be believed; and when he does make them, he will explain them carefully.

If he is writing in the first person, he will minimize his own exploits and praise those of his companions.

He will give many specific (even though unnecessary) details about the weather, the route followed, the equipment taken, and so forth.

In addition to making his work convincing, the writer of true-experience narrative must make it interesting. His chief source of interest will be, of course, the inherent interest of his subject matter. Yet a few other sources of interest are worth mentioning.

Careful accounts of the emotional reactions of people under unusual strains are interesting. So are details of ingenious ways by which individuals circumvent difficulties; so are descriptions of unfamiliar ways of living or thinking among certain peoples; so are characterizations and descriptions of typical people. Judicious, non-spectacular use of suspense (see the last chapter of this book) will heighten the interest of a narrative. And organizing the narrative around a central figure will contribute a human interest to what might otherwise be too impersonal. This central figure need not be the most important person in the story, but some relatively insignificant individual such as the cook, the guide, a villainous native, or even a dog. Returning again and again to detail the actions and reactions of this individual creates a certain artistic unity which many narratives of true experience lack.

6. Closely related to the narrative of true experience is the *Narrative of Travel.* The writer of this latter sort of narrative tells not what has happened on one occasion (as does the writer of the true-experience narrative) but what exists permanently—that is, what other people would find if they went to the same places. Thus the narrative of travel borders on the true-experience narrative at one side, and on description or factual exposition at the other.

Articles in the *National Geographic Magazine,* the journals we keep when we go to Europe, the letters we write home when we are visiting in other places, the tales we tell when we come home from a journey—all these are travel narratives. They acquire interest through the writer's use of much the same devices as those mentioned in the previous section. And they lose interest when they

become a mere list of dates and geographic names, or a mere collection of statistical facts about mileage, the height of buildings, the names of monuments seen, and the manufacturing resources of places visited.

The first rule for the travel writer is that he make his reader *see*. The reader must see landscapes, buildings, streets, crowds. But most especially, he must see people—their national physiognomy, their costume, their gestures, their daily familiar habits of life.

Not only must the reader see people; he must know about them as well. He must know their religions and superstitions, their customs and education, their hopes and desires. In a word, he must know how their thinking differs from his, how their understanding of the world differs from his, how their ways of getting a living differ from his, and how their attitude and actions toward other people differ from his.

And finally, giving the history of places visited makes travel narrative interesting. The most unspectacular hillside in Pennsylvania becomes an object of reverent emotion if it so happens that the Battle of Gettysburg was fought there; and the most commonplace rock on the Massachusetts coast becomes an object of veneration if it so happens that the Pilgrim Fathers first landed on it.

7. One final type of expository narrative we may discuss very briefly. It is the *News Story*. Entire books have been written about this kind of narrative, but we must dismiss it briefly here. Different times, different places, and different editorial policies determine the length, the elaboration, the style, and the mood of every story. But once these forces have done their work, there remains a certain form which the news story usually assumes.

The story gives the gist of the whole narrative in the first two or three sentences of the first paragraph. These sentences are called the *lead*. The next group of sentences (usually three or four) restates the narrative in fuller detail. The next group (even longer than the second) amplifies the story still further. And still other groups continue the process still further.

The reasons for this structure of the news story are three: (a) so that the reader who is in a hurry, or who is not especially inter-

ested, can find out essentially what happened without having to read more than the first two or three sentences of the story; (b) so that the story can be logically cut off at almost any point if space requirements demand its abbreviation; and (c) so that the work of headline writers on the news staff may be facilitated.

III. Exposition of Fact

All narrative expositions are expositions of fact, but the reverse of this statement is not true. Many expositions convey information about things which do not change in time or place, and which, therefore, are not narratives. It is these non-narrative expositions of fact which we shall study here.

1. *Definition* is both a method and a type of exposition. As a type it is common and important. Indeed, it is actually the most important of all forms. If we can only get readers to accept our definitions, we can get them to believe and do almost anything. If we can get them to accept our definition of *right,* say, we can get them to risk their lives and do murder on bloody battlefields. More arguments, disagreements, and misunderstandings in contemporary life result from confused definitions than from any other type of thought; and more philosophies, criticisms, creeds, and codes of action depend on certain definitions than on any amount of sound reasoning. Were the agricultural policies initiated by President Roosevelt in 1933 and 1934 *communistic?* Does the Republican party stand for pure *Americanism?* When is a person *immoral?* Is a certain novel *realistic?* Is it *sentimental?*—On the way we define any of these terms may depend results of large consequence.

2. *Descriptive Exposition* differs from imaginative description in not attempting to give the reader a unified image, to make him *see* the thing described. Imaginative description is synthetic: it builds up an image in the reader's mind. Descriptive exposition is analytic: it records the details which constitute the subject under inspection. Moreover, descriptive exposition need not concern merely concrete objects, but may involve abstract conditions. Indeed, descriptive exposition may be defined as *writing which gives informative details about any thing, fact, or condition which exists, has existed, or may exist.*

a. *Concrete expository description* gives concrete details about either specific things or typical things.

(1) The description of *specific things* may be some such piece of writing as a set of building specifications, notes on the identifying marks of a certain criminal, an architect's description of the White House, a social worker's description of living conditions in a mining town, a surgeon's report on an autopsy, or any other collection of concrete details about specific things.

(2) The description of a *typical thing* may be a naturalist's description of a new species of bird, an architect's description of the Tudor manor-house, a psychologist's description of the mental traits that distinguish the schizophrenic type, a doctor's description of the symptoms which characterize a certain disease, or any other collection of concrete details about typical things.

b. *Abstract expository description* likewise gives information about specific things or typical things.

(1) The *specific things* described may be either concrete or abstract; but the description itself deals with abstract traits of the subject. Thus it may be a character sketch of a certain individual (not a description of his physical appearance); or a set of statistics on living conditions in a mining town (not a physical description of those conditions). It may include descriptions of such things as specific organizations (like the United States government), economic surveys of agricultural conditions in Iowa, outlines of a proposed policy or philosophy, and similar collections of abstract details about specific things.

(2) The *typical things* are described in abstract terms. A law describes a type of case which shall be considered an infraction, or describes typical actions that shall constitute legality. The abstract description of typical things may have such titles as these: "The Introvert," "The Criminal Mind," "The Music of the Future," "The Spirit of American Poetry," and "Democracy in the Twentieth Century"—all of them indicating that the exposition so entitled is a collection of abstract details about typical things.

c. *Classification* comes under the heading of expository description. But once a writer adopts the method of classification and

divides his subject into its parts, he proceeds in one of the ways noted above—that is, with either concrete or abstract expository description. Classification is discussed at some length in Section 3 of the next chapter.

3. *Exposition of a Process* is what we write when we give directions or tell how something acts or works. It is close kin to both narrative and descriptive exposition. But it differs from the former in concentrating on method rather than on actual events, and from the latter in emphasizing the time element rather than static conditions. Thus an exposition on "How Dr. M. Performed a Cerebral Operation" will be a narrative; yet the chief interest will be in the methods Dr. M. employed. At the same time, the exposition will use descriptive details; but the chief interest will not be in one phase of the operation, but in all phases serially connected.

Expositions of a process usually have titles that begin with "How." They may involve concrete processes like "How to Make Chicken Dumplings"; or abstract processes like "How We Think." They may involve future processes like "How the Next War Will Be Conducted"; or past or present processes like "How the United Nations Operates" or "How Penicillin Was Discovered." And they may involve specific processes like "How Saipan Was Taken"; or typical processes like "How Cotton is Ginned."

Sometimes a typical process is made specific by the writer's choosing a single individual of the type, and following this individual through the entire process. For example, the last title given above could be made specific in some such way as this: "What Happens to a Boll of Cotton."

IV. Exposition of Opinion

Opinions may be about general laws of life or nature, or about specific things.

1. *Expositions of Opinions about General Laws.*—These include reflective or meditative essays such as Emerson's; philosophical speculations such as Locke's; discourses on abstract principles of human nature and human life such as Montaigne's; and essays giving advice on the conduct of life such as Bacon's. Representative titles by

the writers mentioned are "Self-Reliance," "Poetry," "On the Nature of Human Understanding," "Friendship," "Love," and "Of Great Place." Many of the cheap pocket magazines today, and many popular "peace-of-mind" books contain expositions of this type; and magazines of the better sort frequently contain articles expressing opinions about general laws. Two or three old copies of *Harper's Magazine* and the *Atlantic Monthly* contain these articles: "Less Money and More Life," "The Tragic Fallacy," "Is America a Christian Country?" "The Creative Spirit and the Church," and "The American Way." But most magazine articles belong to the next group to be discussed.

2. *Expositions of Opinions About Specific Conditions, Facts, or Things.*—a. *Specific conditions* often elicit an expression of opinion. A lawyer has noted the cruelty and injustice of the "third degree" as practiced in America, and, writing in *Scribner's,* expresses his opinion about the condition in an article called "The American Inquisition." In the same magazine Howard Mumford Jones gives his opinion about life in the South in an essay called "On Leaving the South." Similar essays in other magazines are "Why Literature Declines," "The Curse of Leisure," "Compulsory Chapel" (all in the *Atlantic*), "The Great God Football," "Our Passion for Lawmaking," "Is Sleep a Vicious Habit?" and "Is Japan Going Democratic?" (all in *Harper's*). These articles express their authors' opinions about certain conditions.

b. Sometimes an author expresses an opinion about *specific facts.* Scientific and scholarly articles are often of this sort. Some representative titles will illustrate what the group is like: "The Origin of the Longbow," "The Dating of Shenstone's Letters," "Thomas Mann's Indebtedness to Scandinavia," "The Relation Between the York and Townley Plays," and "Emerson's Theory and Practice of Poetry."

Many of these articles present new facts, and all express opinions about facts old and new. Their chief merit lies not in the interestingness, originality, and wisdom of their ideas, but in the amount and quality of evidence they can muster to support a certain opin-

ion. Style, which counts for everything in the other expositions of opinion, counts for nothing here. All that matters is clarity, factual truth, and logical inference.

c. A not-quite-so-pedestrian sort of exposition giving opinions about *specific things* is criticism. We may criticize the opinions or criticize the works of other people. When we do the former, we use as measuring sticks those methods of detecting fallacies which are outlined in a succeeding chapter; when we do the latter, we use as measuring sticks certain standards peculiar to the type of work under inspection.

Other people's works may be classified into two sorts: artistic and non-artistic. Since non-artistic work (unless it be the pointless labor of an idiot) is always done for some use or purpose, we must criticize it according to the standards of its particular use or purpose. Accordingly, we cannot very well generalize about such criticism. Every use or purpose has its own standards, which often have no relation to the standards of other uses or purposes—as, for example, the use or purpose of a hairbrush has no relation to the use or purpose of a plow. We must confine our discussion, then, to the criticism which deals with works of art.

Just what art is may itself be a subject for exposition of opinion; and whether a certain piece of work is artistic or not may very well be a question for criticism. But we usually understand by the term art such things as sculpture, architecture, music, dancing, acting, painting, costumery; and style, structure, and imagination in writing. Generalizing about such diverse things in a short space is no easy task; but two or three generalizations we *can* make.

The first is that criticism should be *appreciation* in the literal sense of that word; that is, criticism should be a process of weighing, estimating, and setting a value on a piece of work. It should tell both the good and the bad; it should tell wherein the work succeeds and wherein it fails in its efforts to be good art; it should give credit where credit is due, and fix blame where blame is due. Criticism should never be mere fault-finding, and never mere extolling. Nothing is so bad that it has not in it some good, and nothing is so good

that it has not in it some bad. It is the business of the critic to see impartially both the good and the bad, and to remember that, in art, a very little good may outweigh a great deal of bad.

The next generalization is that we must criticize the artist not on the basis of what he has tried to do, but on the basis of his success or lack of success in trying to do it. This means that we cannot justly criticize a writer, say, for writing novels instead of short stories, for being an essayist instead of a playwright, or for being a romanticist instead of a realist. To be sure, we may, as individuals, praise or deplore the writer's purpose; but as impartial critics, we have no business doing so. If a writer wishes to write a detective story, we must judge his work as a detective story, and not condemn it for failing to be a serious novel. Or if a musician wishes to compose an opera, we must judge his work as an opera, and not condemn it for failing to be a popular song.

The final generalization is that criticism is never mere arbitrary personal opinion. The fact that a critic likes or dislikes a piece of art has no more to do with criticism than the fact that he likes or dislikes strawberries. We may like to read the comic strips and dislike to read Sir Walter Scott; but who would say that our like or dislike here has anything to do with the artistic merit of the two types of work? We know that Sir Walter Scott's novels are greater than the comic strips. Criticism is based on certain standards. What these standards are may be difficult to say; but, in general, they are the characteristics possessed in common by works which have appealed to what are considered the best-qualified judges in many places over a great length of time.

Let us say that Chaucer's writing has characteristics A, B, and C.
Shakespeare's has A, D, and E.
Congreve's has A, F, and G.
Fielding's has A, H, and I.
Smollett's has A, J, and K.

These writers have had the universal appeal just mentioned. They have many traits which differentiate them from one another, and yet all have one trait in common—A (perhaps it is the power to create convincing characters). We may presume, then, that A is a

characteristic of all universally appealing literature (though, of course, such literature may have many other characteristics).

Turning to the new work which we are about to criticize, we ask, "Does it have characteristic A?" If it has, we may feel safe in saying that this piece of work promises to be universally appealing—that it is *great.* If it has not characteristic A, we may feel equally safe in saying that this particular work gives no promise of being universally appealing—of being *great.* In other words, we use the writers who have been universally appealing in the past as touchstones by which to estimate the work we are trying to criticize now.

All this means that the best critic of art must be widely read and experienced. He must know the art of the past, understand its characteristics, and be able to make comparisons. He cannot be merely an individual with a personal opinion.

This conception of criticism leaves room for originality at two points. First, the critic may have an original opinion as to what common trait the great art of the past possesses. He may think, for example, that Chaucer, Shakespeare, Congreve, Fielding, and Smollett possess in common not A (the ability to create convincing characters) but X (a certain shrewd way of looking at life).

Second, the critic may have an original opinion as to whether or not this work he is criticizing really possesses A (or X). Some people may think it does; others may disagree.

But this conception of criticism has one weakness: It does not leave room for absolutely original genius. A new artist (James Joyce, for instance) may appear with a work having some trait never before seen in works of that particular kind. The orthodox critic would be quite justified in condemning this new work; and yet it might happen that the new trait it possessed would turn out to be universally appealing ever afterward. The orthodox critic, therefore, would find himself altogether wrong in his judgment. But despite this weakness, criticism should remain what we have said—judgment based on a knowledge and an understanding of the past. Absolutely original artistic elements appear daily, but few of them have any but a daily appeal. The critic will be right ninety-nine times out of a hundred in refusing to recognize them as lasting. On

the other hand, if he does have wisdom enough to recognize them, and time proves he is right, the critic takes his place among the highest critical geniuses. Which chance the young critic should take —being right ninety-nine per cent of the time, or perhaps being a critical genius—let his own self-esteem determine.

In writing a criticism (as of a book, a play, a motion picture, a painting, or a statue) the critic should let himself be governed by a few elemental principles.

(1) Remembering that he is writing to give information, he should tell something of the nature of the work—its length or size, its type (whether novel or drama, landscape painting or portrait, bronze or marble), its place of production or present location, its date, and any other such information as may be helpful.

(2) Next, he should give a few facts about the artist (or author), especially if the latter is relatively unknown, or if a knowledge of some details of his life and personality may help the reader to a better understanding of the work and the criticism. For instance, a review of a book by Thomas Mann would be incomplete without some mention of his nationality, and a criticism of a Gauguin painting would be unfair unless it revealed that Gauguin worked in the brilliant sunlight of the South Seas.

(3) The critic should tell what the work he is criticizing is about, that is, he should give its subject. *Ivanhoe* is about Richard I and England in the Norman-Saxon period; *Strange Interlude* is about a neurotic woman who required four men to make her life complete; Rembrandt's *The Nightwatch* portrays a party of soldiers issuing from a gateway; and Cellini's *Perseus* shows the hero just after he has slain Medusa. To say what a book is about does not mean that the critic should actually summarize it. And yet a summary may often be desirable. In a class report, a talk before a literary club, or a comprehensive lecture a summary is almost necessary. But in a book review intended for publication, and, in a way, intended as an advertisement for the book, a complete summary is hardly fair to the author. About all the reviewer should permit himself (unless the book is an unusually important work by an unusually important author) is a very brief sketch of plot and characters.

(4) After he has said what the work is about, the critic should probably tell its central theme (if it has one). That is, he should tell what philosophy, point of view, or criticism of life appears in the work. Thus the critic would say of most of Hardy's novels that the theme is the helplessness of human beings in the grip of an Immanent Will working by means of chance and coincidence to their destruction. Often a picture has such a theme, and most sculpture of the Rodin tradition has it. To take a single example, the theme (shall we call it) of Rodin's *The Thinker* is, doubtless, that man, crude and earthy as he is, yet strives to think out the mystery of life, and because he is crude and earthy, never succeeds.

(5) When the theme of the work has been told, the method in which the theme and subject are handled deserves attention. Here (if the work is a book) the style is analyzed, the characters are studied, the interestingness and the probability of the plot are criticized, the *genre* to which the book belongs is made evident, and any further opinions of the critic are enlarged upon. If the work belongs to another one of the arts (such as painting or sculpture), its composition, its technical method, and its "school" require comment. This part of the criticism is more fully and elaborately treated than any other. It is here that the writer applies those standards of criticism mentioned above, and exercises such judgment and originality as he possesses.

(6) Finally, the work is located in relation to other work by the same author; its importance as a contribution to its type is estimated; its place in the development of certain artistic movements is fixed; and, last of all, a brief summarizing evaluation is presented.

Probably not one criticism in fifty follows the procedure here outlined. The order of parts is changed; entire parts are omitted; certain parts are given preponderant amounts of space; and certain other parts are abbreviated almost to nothingness. Nevertheless, the elements of most good critical articles remain about as outlined. The following review (by Theodore Purdy, Jr.), which appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature* some time ago is a good example of what the ideal review should be:

(1) Bibliographic facts:

AXELLE. By PIERRE BENOÎT. Dial. 1930, $2.50.

(2) Information about the author:

The stories of Pierre Benoît have been best-sellers in France for many years. No railway book-stall is complete without "le nouveau Benoît," and his success has only been equalled by the rapidity of his production and the variety of his subjects. "Königsmark" and "L'Atlantide" have had their thousands of readers and their millions in the world's movie audiences,—the latter, in fact, had an almost unexcelled popularity as an adventure novel, reviving the Jules Verne tradition. "Axelle" is one of the Benoît's later and less popular books, the post-war history of a war-prisoner's romance with a fair enemy. In a prison camp near Königsberg the French sergeant Dumaine meets and falls in love (after appropriate ponderings and hesitations) with a local chatelaine, Fräulein Mirrbach. In the gloomy castle of Reichendorf in which she lives the Frenchman seems to enjoy unusual liberty of entry while against a background of warlike alarums the drama of these two pawns in an international struggle is played out to its obvious conclusion.

(3) What the book is about, with summary:

(4) The theme of the book:

M. Benoît's book is more notable for its broad viewpoint and bold admission that in spite of propaganda to the contrary the German nation may have contained a few exceptional individuals worthy to rank as human beings, than for any great literary merit. It is written in a straightforward, serviceable style, and some of its descriptions of prison camp life seem authentic, though the melodramatic character of the Prussian general is in the old traditions. Not an important book, nor a particularly interesting one, it yet serves to class its author among the rapidly increasing party in France which tends to advocate a wary, but quite definite, *rapprochement* with Germany.[1]

(5) The artistic method of the book:

(6) Orientation of the book:

[1] Reprinted here by permission of *The Saturday Review of Literature.*

EXERCISES

I. The Familiar Essay

Make a list of ten subjects suitable for familiar essays. How many subjects can you find by looking about you at this moment? Tell the type of style you might adopt for each essay (as jocose, mock-serious, whimsical, sad, genteel, simple and restrained, familiar and chatty, etc.).

II. Exposition of Events

1. Diaries and Journals.

   Keep a diary four days a week for at least two weeks.

   If any of your classes is conducted as a general discussion, keep a journal of proceedings for a few days.

2. History.

   List important events in your life about which you might write a detailed history; or list specific events in the history of your state about which you would like to do research.

   Do a little research to find the characteristic way in which the following interpret history: Arnold Toynbee; Charles and Mary Beard; Frederick J. Turner; Edward Channing; Max Weber; Oswald Spengler; Louis M. Hacker; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.; Richard Henry Tawney.

   Do research for a short history of one of the following: some campus periodical or organization; your immediate family for three generations; fashions in women's dress since 1910; the body of the automobile; the Boston Bull Terrier; American domestic architecture since 1900; the last session of Congress; the game of bridge.

   Write a short history of one of the following:

   A brief period in the early days of your native town; of your college; of your family; of your school career; of your first love affair.

   Imagine you could translate yourself to any previous century. Write a rather long history on one of the following topics:

   A year with Cæsar; Alfred the Great; William the Conqueror; Frederick Barbarossa; Edward III; Cromwell; Captain John Smith; William Bradford; General Sherman; General Lee.

3. Biography.

   Write a "modern" biography of one of the following:

   King John of England; Edmund Spenser; Chaucer; Sir Philip Sidney; Christopher Marlowe; Ben Jonson; James II; James Thom-

son; Horace Walpole; William Blake; Jane Austen; Patrick Henry; Poe; Ambrose Bierce.

4. Anecdote.

Find, and write down to hand in, two anecdotes about each of five persons selected from those named in the two exercises above. Tell what characteristics of the persons each anecdote illustrates.

5. The True-Experience Narrative.

Write a rather long account of some true experience you have had, or some acquaintance has told you about. Be prepared to tell what devices you have employed to make the narrative convincing and interesting.

6. The Narrative of Travel.

If you have made any extensive journey, imagine yourself repeating it. Write a letter home (or an article for the home-town newspaper, or an entry in your journal) telling about the trip itself. Then write again, telling what you have done and found at the end of the trip.

7. The News Story.

Bring to class a copy of the local or campus newspaper. Analyze several of the news stories to discover whether they are constructed properly. If any seem faulty, try to find whether there is any justification for their being so.

III. Exposition of Facts

1. Definition.

Write paragraphs defining five of these terms:

Americanism.
Culture.
A gentleman.
Love.
Religion.
Socialism.
Democracy.
Progress.
Tolerance.
Morality.
Modernism (in art).
Romanticism (in literature).
Victorianism.
Idealism.

2. Descriptive Exposition.

a. Write short concrete expository descriptions of three of the following pairs:

An oak tree you know—oak trees.
Your cat—cats.
The architecture of your home—the type of architecture to which your home belongs.

Your home town—the type of town to which it belongs.
A person you know—the physical type to which he belongs.
A picture by a certain artist—the type of picture usually painted by the same artist.

b. Write short abstract descriptions of three of the following:

The mentality of children about ten years of age.
A character sketch of an acquaintance.
Life in any small town (large town; the country).
Life in the dormitories of your college.
The administrative organization of your college.
The inferiority complex.
Hemingway's philosophy.
The emotional effects produced by music.
The stock market situation this month.

c. Write an exposition in which you classify the members belonging to any of the groups mentioned in the exercises for Section 3, above.

3. Exposition of a Process.

Write an exposition on one of the following subjects. Show how you might individualize the general processes suggested:

How the phonograph works.
How to study poetry.
How to study a picture.
How presidential candidates are nominated.
How the President is elected.
How a certain laboratory experiment is performed.
How the Atlantic was first spanned by air.
How the Germans were defeated in Africa.
How to plan and serve a dinner.

IV. Exposition of Opinion

1. Opinions about General Laws.

Write an exposition on one of the following topics:

What have we a right to believe?
Why men fight.
The art of living.
The new morality.
Living one's own life.
Fear.
How is freedom possible?

Prayer.
Love as a philosophy of life.
Can we afford to be rational?

2. Opinions about Conditions, Facts, or Things.

a. Write an exposition about one of the following topics, which refer to general conditions:

Why the people elected President Roosevelt in 1932; in 1936; in 1940; in 1944.

Organized labor thirty years ago and today.

Why home is no longer the center of young people's social life.

Good manners and the college student.

Tendencies in this year's fiction (drama, motion pictures, poetry).

b. Write an exposition about one of the following topics, which refer to specific facts:

Is pure mathematics a cultural subject?

Should college students be regular church members and attendants? (Movie-goers? Sports enthusiasts?)

Why do birds migrate?

Is smoking injurious to the health?

What was the nature of Cowper's mental derangement?

c. Write criticisms of some book, picture, example of architecture, and piece of sculpture with which you are acquainted.

CHAPTER X

The Methods of Exposition

In this chapter we shall discuss some of the most useful ways by which information may be conveyed, ideas clarified, or opinions influenced. Not every method here mentioned may be employed in every kind of exposition; on the other hand, certain kinds of exposition may employ several of these methods.

1. The *Chronological Method* is used when we record events in the order of their occurrence in time. Obviously it is useless in expositions about static conditions where events occur neither to the writer nor to the thing written about. Just as obviously it is the simplest and most logical method for most expositions concerned with changes occurring in place or time or form.[1]

Changes depicted in the chronological order may be of two types: (a) unique and (b) habitual. For example, if I am telling about the events of, say, Gladstone's life, I am dealing with events which have happened only once and will never happen again. But if I am telling how Golden Plovers migrate up the interior of North America in spring, and then return to South America in autumn by an overseas route from southeastern Canada, I am dealing with events which occur habitually. In other words, though I am using the chronological method in both narratives, the first employs the

[1] It should be added here that this method (often combined with the descriptive method discussed below) is the one we frequently employ in portraying cause-to-effect sequences. A cause and its effect do not often exist simultaneously, and even when they do we cannot write about them simultaneously. Consequently, writing which shows a cause acting to produce an effect later in time is actually narrative writing. At the same time the descriptive method may enter into the composition by the writer's depicting the nature of the cause and of the effect. For example, if we describe how a dog barks at a cat and the latter runs up a tree, we shall be portraying a cause-to-effect sequence by means of the chronological method, and at the same time we shall be using the descriptive method.

method of *particularized narration,* and the second *generalized narration.*

2. The *Descriptive Method* may be used with either static or changing events. It is the method employed when we wish to give facts (size, color, weight, etc.) about the physical appearance or the construction of things. It differs from the imaginative method by not attempting to make the reader *see* the subject; it gives him information about the subject so that he may recognize it if he does see it. Like the chronological method, the descriptive method may be of two sorts: (a) description of particular things like a lost dog, a table to be built, a house to be recognized, or a man wanted for murder; and (b) description of general types like collie dogs, Queen Anne tables, gothic buildings, and Cherokee Indians. That is, the descriptive method may take the form of either *particularized description* or *generalized description.*

3. The *Method of Classification* involves the division of general concepts (concrete or abstract) into particular groups. Each of the preceding sections of this chapter, for example, resorts to the method of classification by dividing each of the general methods into an *a* and a *b* part. Cæsar begins his *Commentaries* with the famous declaration that "All Gaul is divided into three parts," and then proceeds to describe each part in turn. Edmund Gosse writes of Swinburne's lyrics, "We may well divide them into two large classes: those belonging to a pre-Christian and those belonging to a Christian age." And the old proverb classifies great men in the familiar way: "Some men are born great; some achieve greatness; and some have greatness thrust upon them."

The classification may be broad or detailed. For example, Gosse's classification just quoted is extremely broad; and the classification of expository methods in this chapter is rather detailed. But as long as the classification is *complete* enough to include every member of the group under examination, we need not complain.

We should be critical, however, of classifications which have no *unified basis of division.* If Gosse had divided Swinburne's lyrics into those belonging to a pre-Christian era and those written in anapestic tetrameter, his classification would have been absurd. The

basis for division would not have been unified. The same would have been true if the maker of the proverb had said, "Some men are born great; some achieve greatness; and some go to Europe."

Nobody ever commits quite such ridiculous blunders as these except for a humorous effect. But young writers have been known to divide college students into the groups: "bookish, intelligent, friendly, and socially inclined." Having no unified basis for his classification, the writer who made this division of college students did not form them into mutually exclusive groups. A college student may belong to any one of the four groups mentioned, and yet belong to all the others as well. Such non-unified standards of classification are fatal to clear exposition.

4. *Definition* is a fourth method of exposition. A formal definition states, first, the general class to which a thing belongs; and, second, the way in which it is distinguished from all other members of that class. A *hawk,* by way of illustration, is "any of a family of diurnal birds of prey—excepting eagles and vultures." A *laundress* is "a woman—whose employment is washing clothes."

Yet definition in this strict sense is not so common as a kind which is definition only by a liberal extension of the word's meaning. To tell the nature of a thing (like a razor or a political philosophy)—to tell what its appearance is, what it does, what it resembles, what it stands for in our minds (as a razor stands for shaving, and Fascism for a dictator)—this is to define. Some of the forms this kind of definition may take are briefly discussed in the following paragraphs.

a. *Synonyms* are used to define many simple words, especially verbs. *To mourn,* for example, is defined thus: "To grieve for; lament; deplore; bewail." And *to plague* is defined thus: "To vex; harass; torment; distress; annoy; tantalize; trouble."

b. *Examples* may be used as a means of definition. Thus *ungulate* is defined in Webster's *Dictionary* as "any of a group consisting of the hoofed mammals, as the ruminants, swine, horses, tapirs, rhinoceros, elephants, and conies." And *republic* may be defined by reference to the United States, France, Ireland, Italy, and the Spanish-American countries.

c. An *enumeration of its qualities* may define an object or a con-

dition. A *greyhound* is a "slender dog, remarkable for swiftness and keen sight." Shakespeare defines Silvia by telling her qualities:

> Who is Silvia, what is she,
> That all our swains commend her?
> Holy, fair, and wise is she;
> The heaven such grace did lend her,
> That she might admirèd be.

And Ruskin thinks that people tell what they are by showing what they like:

> Go out into the street and ask the first man or woman you meet what their "taste" is, and if they answer candidly, you know them, body and soul. "You, my friend in the rags, with the unsteady gait, what do *you* like?" "A pipe and a quartern of gin." I know you. "You, good woman, with the quick step and tidy bonnet, what do you like?" "A swept hearth and a clean tea-table, and my husband opposite me, and a baby at my breast." Good, I know you also. "You, little girl with the golden hair and the soft eyes, what do you like?" "My canary and a run among the wood hyacinths." "You, little boy with the dirty hands and the low forehead, what do you like?" "A shy at the sparrows, and a game at pitch farthing." Good; we know them all now. What more need we ask?

d. A thing may be defined according to its *work or uses.* A *bed* is "an article of furniture to sleep or rest in or on." A *ladybug* is "a small, roundish, often brightly colored [enumeration of qualities] beetle, mostly feeding on insects and insects' eggs." A *lady-killer* is "a man who captivates, or has the reputation of fascinating women." H. W. Garrod makes these offhand definitions: A good book is one which "addresses a large part of its appeal to imagination and emotion"; and "the best critic of books, in the long run, is the man who brings to the study of them a large charity."

e. Definition may be by means of an *historical survey.* No one can define the Constitution of England without an elaborate survey of history; and no one can define socialism without tracing it clear back to Marx. *Lager beer* (a name derived from the German word *lager,* a storehouse) is "so called from its being stored several months before use." And the words *extrovert, introvert,* and *libido* mean nothing to us unless we have a knowledge of Jung and Freud.

5. Strictly speaking, *Comparison and Contrast* may be used as means to define. But since they involve other elements than those belonging absolutely to the thing defined, they are treated here as a separate expository method.

We may best define communism by showing how it differs from democracy; we may best portray political conditions in Wisconsin by showing how they differ from political conditions in other states; we may best tell something of President Franklin Roosevelt's policies by showing how they differed from those of President Hoover and Truman. On the other hand, we may explain certain things by showing how they resemble other things. We may best describe English rooks by comparing them to American crows or grackles; we may best describe the government of Mexico by comparing it to our own government; and we may best describe the Argentine Pampas by comparing them to our own Great Plains.

6. *Analogy* is close kin to comparison. Indeed, it *is* comparison. But it is comparison between things not at all related in their fundamental natures, and yet parallel in many of their forms or activities. Thus a comparison between communism and socialism would not be an analogy, but a comparison between communism and a colony of ants would be. The purpose of analogy, like that of comparison, is to express the unknown in terms of the known, the obscure in terms of the clear, and the complex in terms of the simple. For accomplishing this purpose the analogy is a highly useful and interesting device; but if the analogy violates its fundamental purpose by becoming long, elaborate, and complicated, it is worse than useless. This caution is voiced because even experienced writers frequently abuse the analogy by overdevelopment. Carried away by their imagination, they wander into mazes of comparison that leave the reader confused and breathless.

7. *Presentation of Authority* is a method used often, but seldom exclusively, in exposition. By using this method, the writer does one of two things: He either renounces personal views in favor of the views of some authority, or else substantiates and supports personal views by reference to authority. The method is extremely useful because it gives the weight of important names or convincing

workers to an unknown or inexperienced writer's work, because it gives the weight of numbers to a single writer's work, and because it shows that the writer is not ignorant. The method may take any of the following forms:

a. The simplest is *quotation.* Here the writer actually quotes what his authorities have said. By doing so, he has the very words of his authority (not mere interpretation) to vouch for an idea expressed. Quotation lends an interesting variety of style to a piece of writing, and, if properly selected, may be more effective than anything the writer himself can say. Yet no exposition should be a mere patchwork of other people's words. If it is, the reader is certain to think the writer a pedantic or timid soul who has not the courage of his convictions; and if the reader is a professor and the writer a student, the reader at once concludes that the writer has been padding the paper to avoid labor. In general, no more than one-fifth of an exposition, at the very most, should consist of direct quotation from other authors.

b. In place of quotation the writer may substitute *paraphrase.* A paraphrase renders the *sense* of a passage. It may, therefore, be either longer or shorter than the original, in the same or in a different language, and in similar or in different words. A paraphrase may amplify a terse or cryptic statement by expressing it in more familiar terms, or by giving brief illustrations that will clarify its meaning.

Thus the proverb, "Never look a gift-horse in the mouth," may be paraphrased, "Do not be too critical of things you receive free. For instance, if someone gives you a ride in his automobile, don't find fault with the way the motor works." Here the original passage has been amplified, and has been illustrated by an example more understandable than the original to a modern generation unacquainted with horses.

Sometimes the authority has written in a foreign language. If so, the writer who wishes to use the authority must either translate him directly (with a note, if the passage is vital, to the effect that the quotation is a personally translated version), or may para-

phrase him in English. Such a paraphrase as this, however, is more likely to be a summary than a strict paraphrase.

Sometimes a paraphrase may use words much like those in the original passage. The proverb just quoted, for example, may be paraphrased, "Never look into the mouth to discover the age and value of a horse that has been given to you." But, in general, a paraphrase should avoid the phraseology of the original passage. Suppose the original passage read like this:

> Radical critics of the American press are fond of saying that journalism is not, and under existing conditions cannot be, a profession. They point out that the American newspaper editor is usually only the hired employee of the owner, and that the ultimate authority always rests with the latter.

And suppose the student paraphrases the passage:

> Radical critics of the American press say that journalism is not and cannot be a profession. They say that the newspaper editor is only an employee of the owner, with whom the ultimate authority rests.

This paraphrase is unfair to the original authority. It is made up almost entirely of his very words, and yet it purports to be an original paraphrase. The revised passage should be set in quotation marks with a row of dots to indicate omitted words. Or else it should be reworked to look something like this:

> Radical critics say that since practically every newspaper editor in America derives all his authority from the owner of his paper, journalism is not and cannot at present be a profession.

As a rule, more than three or four important words (not articles, prepositions, conjunctions, etc.) quoted in the sequence of their occurrence in an original passage ought to be enclosed in quotation marks.

c. The *summary* differs from the paraphrase in purpose. Where the paraphrase merely tries to give the sense of a passage, the summary tries to give the sense in a briefer form than that of the original. Moreover, a paraphrase is always the re-rendering of a mere passage, whereas a summary may be a brief statement of the funda-

mental meaning of an entire volume. A writer paraphrases a paragraph and summarizes a chapter or a book.

A summary, therefore, requires more originality on the part of a writer than does a paraphrase. It requires discrimination, selection, judgment about what the original writer considered important, and a power to retain the original emphasis within a smaller compass. The writer who summarizes must discriminate between what is essential and what unessential; he must select from a number of subsidiary ideas and facts only those cardinal ones for which he has space; he must decide which ideas or facts were most important in the original authority's mind, and which render the most representative picture of that mind; and then he must express all this in a properly related and proportioned summary which may be a hundred times shorter than the original work.

To do all this, a writer should first read through the work to be summarized in order to find out and express in words its central thesis. He should then try to find out the half-a-dozen or so main divisions of the work, and express their significance in a sentence for each one. And finally he should supplement this bare outline with as many subsidiary ideas as he has room for. His summary, then, will be little more than a series of points supporting a central idea.

d. *Interpretation* demands even more originality of a writer, and involves a greater responsibility. The number of lawsuits brought to the courts annually, and the number of religious disputes among Christians for the last five centuries show how serious and vital the matter of interpretation may be. Yet despite all the money spent and all the lives lost in support of certain interpretations, few would-be interpreters really possess the interpreter's spirit. Too often they are concerned with twisting the meaning of their authority into something that will harmonize with their own desires. They do not try to enter sympathetically into the sense and spirit of an authority in order to find the absolute truth about that authority.

A truly honorable interpreter studies the personal conditions under which his authority wrote, finds out everything needful about the period and the place in which the authority worked, correlates

different works by the same authority, and tries to discover what motives inspired him—what biases he had, what limitations of knowledge he possessed, what fundamental desires he worked to satisfy. Having done all this, and having resolved to keep an impartial point of view, the would-be interpreter may venture to undertake his task. He need not fear that his interpretation will lack originality. If it is the result of personal research and independent thinking, it cannot help being original—for the simple reason that no two human beings see and think alike. All he need fear is that the interpretation will not be fair to the original author.

We have now discussed four ways in which exposition by the presentation of authority may be written. Need we add that honesty and consideration for others require that all use of authorities be documented? Formal expositions require copious footnotes and complete bibliographies; less formal expositions require at least an acknowledgment in a foreword or in the text itself.

8. We may develop exposition by the *Method of Illustration.* Suppose a lecturer says, "The American dollar is worth less today than it was in 1935." His audience looks blank. And the lecturer adds, "Let me illustrate. In 1935 you could buy bread at five cents a loaf and milk at six cents a quart. Today you pay for these articles fifteen and twenty-two cents. That is what I mean when I say the dollar is worth less." The lecturer has used the method of illustration.

To employ this method is merely to take the advice already given for another purpose: "Convert the abstract into the concrete, and the general into the specific." An illustration makes clear a vague or complex idea; it shows how a theory works, or how a general law applies to specific facts. This *clarifying* function of illustration distinguishes it from the closely related method to be discussed next.

9. The *Use of Examples* is one of the most interesting, convincing, and informative of the methods of exposition. Sometimes it overlaps the method just discussed. That is, examples may be used to give clarity to general ideas; yet examples, properly speaking, are merely specific instances. They are subheads under a large division. But

the distinction between illustration and example is largely academic; most writers use both terms almost interchangeably.

The following passage illustrates the method:

> No general strike has ever been even partly successful in this country or in any other. In 1919 the Seattle general strike, the first experienced in the United States, officially collapsed on its fifth day under the weight of its own inefficiency. In the same year the Winnipeg general strike, which lasted six weeks, ended in riots, arrests, and trials for seditious conspiracy, with none of the aims of the strike accomplished. Great Britain's general strike of 1926 lasted thirteen days, and ended in failure because the general public co-operated against organized labor. The great general strike in Sweden in 1909 likewise failed because public sentiment and public co-operation aligned themselves against the strikers.

The writer here does not resort to examples to clarify a statement, for his original generalization is perfectly clear. Instead, he resorts to examples as a means of *amplifying* a statement which might otherwise have been unimpressively brief. Or perhaps he resorts to them as a means of *proving* his original statement, or as a means of *lending interest* to a generalized statement, or as a means of *conveying more specific knowledge.*

Examples may serve any of these four purposes of exposition. But to do so, they must necessarily be either (a) single examples thoroughly representative of many others like them, or else (b) numerous examples which are all relatively short.

The single example must contain within itself the plain and obvious proof that it is really representative. By way of illustration, a single beetle of a certain species is plainly and obviously representative of all beetles of that species; when we have found out about the structure of this one beetle, we have found out about the structure of its entire species.

Numerous examples ought to be individually short. A long illustration may be read patiently—but not a series of long examples. If they are individually long, they overshadow the main idea to which each should be subordinate.

As a rule, numerous short examples are preferable to a single long representative example. When their number is scanty, exam-

ples do not contribute to interest or variety, or prove much, or amplify greatly, or convey much knowledge.

10. Exposition by the *Use of Details* is allied to the preceding method; but it is more closely allied to definition by enumeration of qualities and to expository description. If I say that a bed has springs, mattress, a headpiece, a footpiece, linens, and a coverlet, I am defining it, describing it, and (at the same time) giving details about it. Or if I say that a man is handsome, and then go on to mention certain features (eyes, nose, mouth, and hair) which make him handsome, I am describing him, and yet at the same time I am giving details about him.

Often, however, details are neither definitive nor descriptive. They merely give more and more information. Mrs. Malaprop's famous speech on feminine education illustrates this use of detail. We could find, perhaps, a more solemn illustrative passage, but never one more charming in diction:

> Observe me, Sir Anthony.—I would by no means wish a daughter of mine to be a progeny of learning; I don't think so much learning becomes a young woman; for instance—I would never let her meddle with Greek, or Hebrew, or Algebra, or Simony, or Fluxions, or Paradoxes, or such inflammatory branches of learning—neither would it be necessary for her to handle any of your mathematical, astronomical, diabolical instruments;—but, Sir Anthony, I would send her at nine years old to a boarding-school, in order to learn a little ingenuity and artifice.—Then, Sir, she should have a supercilious knowledge in accounts;—and as she grew up, I would have her instructed in geometry, that she might know something of the contagious countries;—but above all, Sir Anthony, she should be mistress of orthodoxy, that she might not mis-spell, and mis-pronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do; and likewise that she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying.—This, Sir Anthony, is what I would have a woman know;—and I don't think there is a superstitious article in it.

Much (one almost says *most*) exposition adopts the method of using details. A writer blocks off a certain area to be filled, and then, by means of detail, proceeds to fill it; he determines the general divisions of his composition, and then, by means of giving additional information about each, elaborates on his outline. This

is the method of most textbooks, most newspaper stories, most encyclopedias, most histories—in fact, all types of exposition devoted to giving absolute factual information rather than arguments or inferences.

11. Every lecturer and every textbook writer ought to make liberal use of the *Method of Repetition* in exposition. Without being cynical, one may aver that a lecturer may depend upon having the attention of only about one-third of his audience at any time; and a textbook writer may depend upon having about the same proportion of attentive readers at any paragraph. (This estimate takes no account, of course, of that ten per cent in any audience or any group of readers who never do listen and never are alert.) Accordingly, lecturers and writers should repeat at least their important ideas three times. Such repetition is a recognized method of exposition. It helps to inform, to clarify, and to convince—and that is all we can expect of any exposition.

As we have already seen in the chapters on style, repetition may involve words and phrases. Just now, however, we are concerned with the repetition of ideas as a means of developing exposition. As with repeated words, repeated ideas serve to *intensify* and to *clarify* writing. When, in the course of his funeral oration, Shakespeare's Mark Antony repeats six times in fifty lines the ironical phrase, "Brutus is an honourable man," he repeats in order to intensify. In the following passage from William Hazlitt's essay, "On Going a Journey," repetition serves to clarify. Each sentence repeats the idea expressed in the first sentence, and yet each sentence adds details which help the reader understand more clearly the basic idea in the passage:

> It seems that we can think of but one place at a time. The canvas of the fancy is but of a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects on it, they immediately efface every other. . . . The landscape bares its bosom to the enraptured eye, we take our fill of it, and seem as if we would form no other image of beauty or grandeur. We pass on, and think no more of it: the horizon that shuts it from our sight also blots it from our memory like a dream. In travelling through a wild barren country I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like what I see of it. In the country we forget

the town, and in town we despise the country. . . . All that part of the map that we do not see before us is blank.

Repetition of ideas may serve one purpose in addition to those served by the repetition of words. It may *amplify*. When a writer wishes to stress an idea, he cannot usually afford to state it in a short space. Taking advantage of the law of proportion, he will so enlarge upon his idea that the reader cannot avoid being impressed. In the following passage, H. G. Wells (having classified men into those who look toward the past and those who look toward the future) says that most people belong to neither of the types he has named. He repeats the idea three times in four sentences—all for the sake of giving it an amount of space proportional to its importance:

Now I do not wish to suggest that the great mass of people belong to either of these two types. Indeed, I speak of them as two distinct and distinguishable types mainly for convenience and in order to accentuate their distinction. There are probably very few people who brood constantly upon the past without any thought of the future at all, and there are probably scarcely any who live and think consistently in relation to the future. The great mass of people occupy an intermediate position between these extremes.

Naturally the method of repetition may be limited in its application: one cannot say something and then keep on repeating it throughout an entire composition. But it is a method too little used by inexperienced writers. As an old professor once remarked, "A thing worth saying once is worth saying twice." That is an aphorism which every young writer ought to remember.

12. We may write exposition by means of showing a *Cause-and-Effect Relationship* between facts. We may begin with the fact as a cause, and proceed to show the effect it has or may have; or we may begin with a fact as an effect, and work backward to show its probable cause. In the first of the following passages, Alfred Russel Wallace uses the cause-to-effect method to explain why the sky is blue, and in the second he uses the effect-to-cause method to explain why certain parts of the sky are not blue.

We have seen that the air near the earth's surface is full of rather coarse particles which reflect all the rays, and which therefore produce no one color. But higher up the particles necessarily become smaller and smaller, since the comparatively rare atmosphere will only support the very smallest and lightest. These exist throughout a great thickness of air, perhaps from one mile to ten miles high or even more, and blue or violet rays being reflected from the innumerable particles in this great mass of air, which is nearly uniform in all parts of the world as regards the presence of minute dust particles, produces the constant and nearly uniform tint we call sky-blue.

If we look at the sky on a perfectly fine summer's day, we shall find that the blue color is the most pure and intense overhead, and when looking high up in a direction opposite to the sun. Near the horizon it is always less bright, while in the region immediately round the sun it is more or less yellow. The reason for this is that near the horizon we look through a very great thickness of the lower atmosphere, which is full of the larger dust particles reflecting white light, and this dilutes the pure blue of the higher atmosphere seen beyond. And in the vicinity of the sun a good deal of the blue light is reflected back into space by the finer dust, thus giving a yellowish tinge to that which reaches us reflected chiefly from the coarse dust of the lower atmosphere.

The logic of these two passages is unassailable (so far as one who is no physicist can tell) because each step of the reasoning is based firmly on demonstrable fact. Sometimes, however, the line between demonstrable fact and mere presumption is exceedingly hard to draw. Sir Oliver Lodge, a great physicist, believes that spirit-people are demonstrable facts; Professor Robert Andrews Millikan, an equally great physicist, believes that they are not. How, then, are we to use the idea of spirit-people to discover logical causes, or to argue toward logical effects? The answer is that we must rely on inferences. These we shall examine in another chapter.

EXERCISES

1. The Chronological Method.

Tell how you could use the chronological method in expositions on the following subjects:

The manufacture of brooms.
The high school curriculum.
Scenery along the Hudson.
Social measures enacted recently by the federal government.

The British novel in the twentieth century.
The natural history of the pelican.
The exhibits in a certain museum.
Living conditions on B Street.
Bee-culture.

2. The Descriptive Method.

In three expository paragraphs describe three of the following as individuals, and at the same time as representatives of types:

One of your professors.
A friend of foreign extraction.
A railway conductor.
A prominent building in your town.
A small residence in your neighborhood.
A street you know.
A tree you know.
A classroom.
Your dog or cat.

3. The Method of Classification.

Name several bases of classification which you could use in dividing each of the following into classes:

College students.
Preachers.
Small cars.
Dogs.
Popular magazines.
Sports in your college.
Native trees.
Dwelling houses.

4. Definition.

Define each of the following in at least three of the ways mentioned in the text:

A dictator.
A lover.
Sentimentality.
A Middle-Westerner.
College spirit.
The one-hundred-percent American.
The Democratic party.
The English long bow.
A tabloid newspaper.
A good detective story.

5. Comparison and Contrast.

Suggest comparisons and contrasts that might be used in expositions on the following subjects:

Charity.
Art.
Poetry.
Communism.
Fear.
The ideal student.
Rembrandt's art.
Dickens's characters.
Psychology as a science.
American imperialism.

6. Analogy.

See Exercise 7e and 7f of Chapter I.

7. The Presentation of Authority.

a. Paraphrase the following:

Error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.—Jefferson.

Ill doings breed ill thinkings.—Roger Ascham.

The Phylosopher teacheth a disputative vertue.—Sir Philip Sidney.

A man that is young in years may be old in hours.—Sir Francis Bacon.

Without an outlet for political initiative, men lose their social vigor and their interest in public affairs.—Bertrand Russell.

b. Write summaries of the following:

One of Bacon's essays.
One of Lamb's essays.
Gray's "Elegy."
Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale."
Arnold's "Literature and Science."

c. Give your interpretation of the following:

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.—*Proverbs* xxvi, 4–5.

But Nature, which is the Time-vesture of God, and reveals Him to the wise, hides Him from the foolish.—Carlyle.

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

—Wordsworth.

"Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a heaven in hell's despair."

So sung a little clod of clay,
Trodden with the cattle's feet,

But a pebble of the brook
Warbled out these metres meet:

"Love seeketh only self to please,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a hell in heaven's despite."

—William Blake.

8. The Method of Illustration.

Explain each of the following topics by means of an illustration:

Why the United States went to war in Korea.

Why England retains a king.

What some domestic policy of the United States government has meant to poor people; to rich people; to the middle class.

Why men have more (or less) artistic originality than women.

Why like seeks like.

9. The Use of Examples.

Develop the following ideas (or their negatives) by means of examples:

Our House of Representatives is unworthy of a great people.

The legislative and the executive branches of our government live lives antagonistic to each other.

American women are spoiled, and American men have spoiled them.

Interest in a subject is derived from knowledge of that subject.

Most salesmen are high in the scale of integrity.

Among the examples you have just mentioned, which seem to be representative enough to stand alone?

What are the functions of the other examples—to amplify, to prove, to lend interest, or to convey new knowledge?

10. The Use of Details.

Develop the following ideas by the use of details:

The first rule, then, for a good style is that the author have something to say.—Schopenhauer.

A sentence should read as if its author, had he held a plough instead of a pen, could have drawn a furrow deep and straight to the end.—Thoreau.

The first duty of the writer is to make the path easy for the reader.—Brander Matthews.

Logic compels us to throw our meaning into distinct propositions, and our reasonings into distinct steps.—John Stuart Mill.

If your language be jargon, your intellect, if not your whole character, will almost certainly correspond.—Quiller-Couch.

11. The Method of Repetition.

a. See the Exercises for Chapter I, Section 6.

b. By means of repetition, amplify each of the following statements into a single paragraph:

No law can be sacred to me but that of my own nature. —Emerson.

Either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another.—Plato.

The more confidence a man has in himself, and the more thoroughly he is fortified by virtue and wisdom, so that he is in need of no one . . . the more noteworthy is he for the friendships which he seeks.—Cicero.

Education is the instruction of the intellect in the laws of Nature, under which name I include not merely things and their forces, but men and their ways.—Huxley.

It is certain, to begin with, that the narrowest trade or professional training does something more for a man than to make him a skillful practical tool—it makes him also a judge of other men's skill.—William James.

12. The Method of Cause-and-Effect Relationships.

In the following pairs of phrases, the first member is a cause and the second an effect. Plan short expositions in which you move, first, from cause to effect, and then from effect back to cause.

Harsh parents—dishonest children.
Indulgent parents—selfish children.
Indifferent voters—corrupt officeholders.
Prosperous times—indifferent voters.
Prosperous times—religious indifference.
Religious indifference—corrupt officeholders.

CHAPTER XI

Argumentation

Argumentation is a form of exposition. Like other exposition, it gives instruction in facts, in the meaning of facts, or in certain intellectual or emotional points of view. To accomplish its purpose, it must convince readers both of the rightness of certain facts, interpretations, or points of view, and of the wrongness of others. Its nature is thus both positive and negative. Since other chapters in this book deal with the positive aspects of exposition, this chapter deals mostly with the negative aspects—that is, means of refuting other people's arguments.

1. THE FALLACY OF RATIONALIZATION. Let us comment briefly here on the psychological source of most fallacies. The greatest deceptions practiced by most people are self-deceptions. A college student may sincerely believe that his college is the best in his state; but he believes it not because he has investigated and compared, but only because it is his own college. A patriot may believe that his own national anthem is the most beautiful of all national anthems —not because he is a competent musical critic, but because the anthem is his own. A boy may believe his dog the most intelligent, most loyal, best-natured dog on the street—not because he has carefully compared all dogs on the street, but because his dog is his. Student, patriot, and boy are *rationalizing.* They find grounds for believing what they want to believe. Likewise, when an American cattle-raiser argues (quite sincerely) that government's placing a ceiling on meat prices, or lowering tariffs on Argentine meat, is un-American, communistic, and dangerous to the nation's economic structure—he is very likely to be rationalizing. On the other hand, when the city consumer argues (equally sincerely) that government's *not* putting a ceiling on meat prices, and *not* lowering tariffs

on Argentine beef is a sellout to the vested interests, capitalism at its worst, and greedy isolationism—he too is very probably rationalizing. Unfortunately, not much can be done about refuting such fallacies. All that the writer can do is to point out how self-interest distorts judgment . . . and to try to avoid rationalizing in his own mind.

2. FALLACIES DUE TO DICTION. Mr. A. E. Mander, in the first chapter of his *Logic for the Millions* (1947), clearly analyzes certain fallacies that are due to verbal confusions.

a. Confusion, or seemingly invalid argument, may result from an actual *misunderstanding of the words used.* Thus *Time* magazine once graphically described a smoky torchlight procession through blacked-out wartime London. The incident seemed very odd—until one remembered that what Englishmen call *torches,* Americans call *flashlights.* Obviously, *Time's* London correspondent had cabled news of the incident, using the word *torches;* then the American rewrite man, not knowing the British meaning of the word, and wishing to do some vivid reporting, manufactured the rest. Many words have different meanings or implications in different English-speaking countries; and many words mean very different things to different people in the same English-speaking country. Thus, the word *passion* to a religious person means suffering; to a psychologist, it implies strong emotion; to many people, it implies sexual desire. To a linguist, *romance* means "derived from the Latin language"; to a literary historian it may mean "a tale of adventure, particularly one written in the Middle Ages"; and to a schoolgirl it means love.

Sometimes, indeed, the most violent disputes and what may seem to be the most perilous fallacies develop because different people understand good English words differently. Is a certain economic measure *socialistic?* Is a certain point of view *communistic?* Does a certain college give its students a *good education?* What is the *American* way of life? Is a certain action of an individual or of a state *moral?* Probably no two people understand any of these words in exactly the same way; and some people understand them in diametrically opposed ways. The first thing to establish in any

argument is a precise definition of the principal terms to be used. And the first point to be examined in criticizing any argument is the writer's use of certain terms.

b. What Mr. Mander calls *unfinished terms* (usually adjectives) are another source of confusion and fallacy in argument. "Is English A a better course than English B?" Better for what or for whom? The word *better* cannot be made to stand alone without further explanation. "What good will this course do me?" Good in what way—financial, moral, intellectual, recreational, technical, professional, academic, or what? "It is dangerous to change horses in midstream." Dangerous to whom? Precisely what danger is involved? "Life in communistic Russia would be intolerable." Intolerable to whom—to Russian laborers, or American millionaires, or South African Negroes, or Chinese communists? "Conditions have much improved." Improved for whom? For what groups? For what nations? In relation to what? Precisely how? "The lower classes produce too many children." In what way are they low? They are low in relation to what, or to whom? How many is "too many"? Too many children for what, or for whom, or in relation to what? An extraordinarily large part of all the talk one hears everywhere nowadays about politics, economics, and international relations involves use of unfinished terms by people who cannot or will not think problems through to the end.

c. *Colored terms* constitute a third source of confusion and fallacy. Words colored by associations have come into practical use on every side in this day of the advertiser and the publicity man. Editorialists, columnists, feature-writers, commentators on the radio, and politicians have not been slow to learn the ways of these words. To see how devastating an effect the colored word may have, let us manufacture some shocking examples:

Jesus wept.
Jesus blubbered.

Jesus took his disciples apart and said unto them. . . .
Jesus went into a huddle with his gang, and harangued them. . . .

Suffer the little children to come unto me.
Let the little brats come in.

Anyone who wishes to see this sort of writing at its best (or worst) has only to read the political and international columns of this nation's most popular newsmagazine. Almost any common idea can be expressed in terms colored to make the naive and unsuspecting reader feel exactly what the writer wants him to feel—without the reader's ever being aware that he is being subtly influenced. Thus we can speak of a "well-meaning man" or a "goody-goody man"; of a "good and faithful servant" or a "time-serving flunkey"; of a "firm expression on his countenance" or a "hard look on his face"; of "the people" or "the mob"; of "freedom" or "license"; of "desperate courage" or "fanatical resistance"; of a "smile" or a "smirk"; of "eating heartily" or "cramming gluttonously." Every reader and writer should learn to recognize such terms in other people's expositions, and (if he wishes to beat the modern world at its own game) to use them in his own arguments.

3. INFERENCE. Logic, in its essence, is based altogether on inference. We speak to a person in the same room, and infer that he will hear; we write a sentence, and infer that other people will understand what we mean; we read in the newspaper that the Congress has passed a bill, and we infer that it is true. All these are simple, direct inferences. But sometimes we lengthen the step between demonstrable fact and conclusion. We look about our room for a book, do not find it, and infer that we have left it at the college; we see our friend dressing in his best clothes after dinner, and infer that he is going out for the evening; we notice that another friend is sneezing and sniffling, and infer that he has a cold.

Any inference may be wrong. That is why it is only an inference. The person in the same room with us may be so absorbed in reading that he will not hear us; the sentence we write may be unintelligible to others; and the newspaper account of the action of the Congress may be false. Likewise, we may have lost our book on the way over from the college; our friend may be dressing to receive a caller; and the other friend may be sneezing and sniffling because the pepper-shaker emptied itself in his plate at dinner. Any inference may be wrong—yet we spend our lives making inferences.

a. We make them on the strength of *evidence*. Now, evidence

is of two sorts: evidence from *authority,* and evidence from *experience.* The first is what other people tell us, and the second is what we observe or experience for ourselves. Reading in the newspaper or listening to someone talk about a murder is obtaining evidence from authority; seeing the murder is obtaining evidence from experience.

If we merely present the evidence we have obtained, we are writing exposition according to the method of description or the method of presenting authority. But if, in addition to presenting the evidence, we try to decide for ourselves and others just who committed the murder, why he committed it, and whether or not he was justified in the deed, we are using the method of inference. We are making inferences, and we hope other people who read or listen to us will make the same inferences.

We move from evidence to inference along either of two roads. The first is called induction, the second deduction.

b. We use *inductive reasoning* when we collect a certain amount of evidence from authority or from experience, and then make an inference based on our evidence. This is the scientific method of reasoning.

Suppose the President of the nation is confronted with an undesirable economic situation in the country. Wishing to remedy it, he begins collecting evidence. He accumulates statistics, he makes comparisons, he learns what various authorities believe, he investigates what other nations have done to relieve similar situations, and he studies the effect certain remedies have had in the past. Then he makes an inference: he decides that a certain governmental policy will relieve the situation. He has worked inductively by making a generalization based on a very large amount of evidence. His generalization may be wrong, his inference false; but the error will be due to some fallacy in his judging the evidence. His method has been scientific.

Some inferences may be based on no such large amount of evidence, but on a single fact. If my newspaper tells me that the President of France is seriously ill, I accept that authority without demanding further evidence, and infer that he really is ill. If at

night I hear what sounds like rain pattering on the roof, I accept that evidence, and infer that it really is raining. If I taste an olive on a dish and find it palatable, I infer that all the olives on the same dish are equally palatable—I need not taste them all. True, my single bit of evidence may be insufficient on each of these occasions, and my inference may be wrong. But the method is our main interest just now—it is inductive. We shall discuss the fallacies later.

A third kind of induction is inference from comparison or analogy. Suppose that we have two things which, evidence has shown, are alike in many ways. We often infer, therefore, that they are alike in a certain other way about which we do not have evidence. We have found, for example, that one of a pair of twins likes the color red; and we infer that the other one also will like it. Or we have found that a certain drug is fatal to monkeys, and we infer that it will be fatal to human beings as well. Or we have found that a horse works more efficiently if he is allowed to rest three minutes every half hour, and we infer that an automobile likewise will work more efficiently if it is allowed the same amount of rest. All of these inferences are based upon observed resemblances between two things: twins, monkeys and human beings, horses and automobiles. Some of these inferences may be right and some (like the last) altogether wrong. But the method is inductive. *It proceeds from particular instances by means of inference to a conclusion.*

c. *Deductive reasoning,* on the other hand, shows how a general principle applies to a particular instance—or how a particular instance illustrates a general principle. A hoary example (put in the form of what is called a "syllogism") will illustrate:

Major Premise: *All men are mortal.*
Minor Premise: *Socrates is a man.*
Conclusion: *Therefore Socrates is mortal.*

Here the reasoning works downward from the general principle to the particular instance (Socrates).

Deductive reasoning, unlike inductive reasoning, always *begins* with an assumption. If the assumption has evolved from the inductive process, it may be justifiable. For example, the general

principle that "All men are mortal" has been proved over and over again by inductive experience. But if the general principle were some such statement as this: "All millionaires are dishonest," the assumption that, since Mr. X. is a millionaire, Mr. X. is dishonest would not be justifiable. The major premise has not been proved inductively. But even if the major premise were true and yet the minor premise were untrue (if Mr. X. is really *not* a millionaire), the conclusion would still be unjustifiable.

In any event, therefore, *deductive reasoning must depend ultimately on evidence derived from particular instances; that is, on inductive reasoning.*

Inductive reasoning, in turn, always involves making inferences. In the rest of this chapter we shall discuss the most common reasons why some inferences are invalid, and, by implication, why some are valid.

4. FALLACIES OF THE INDUCTIVE METHOD. The inductive method fails when the final inference is unjustified by the evidence. It will be recalled that inductive inference may grow from one of three sources: many bits of evidence, one representative or conclusive bit of evidence, or comparison. Accordingly, inductive reasoning may break down along any of these three avenues of inference.

a. The number of examples brought forward may be *too small* to justify generalization. Suppose my two cats like chocolate candy. From these two examples, would I be justified in saying, "All cats like chocolate candy"? By no means. The number of examples is too small to justify generalization. Or suppose ten people are in this room. I inquire how old each person is, but somehow manage to skip one of the ten. None of the nine people I have asked, however, is less than twenty years old. Would I, then, be justified in declaring absolutely, "Everybody in this room is over twenty years of age"? By no means. Anything less than the total number of examples here is insufficient to justify generalization.

All this does not mean, of course, that we must account for every single example in every group before we can safely generalize about it. We may safely generalize about thousands of individual birds or insects or flowers from examining a dozen specimens belonging to

one species. Just why so minute a percentage is satisfactory here, whereas ninety per cent of the people in the room was not satisfactory, it is difficult for us to say. Experience alone (that is, inductive evidence) acquired almost unconsciously through a lifetime tells us when a number of examples is too small. That is a vague statement, but it is the only one possible.

b. But what about generalization from a *single bit of evidence*? From eating one olive, are we justified in concluding that all the olives on a dish are good? Again the answer must be vague. Only experience we have had with other articles on other dishes will tell us whether we should trust the sample olive to be a representative example.

c. The same thing is true when the basis of generalization is *an analogy or a comparison.* Experience has shown us that we cannot treat horses and automobiles alike, even though the function of each is the same. Experience has shown likewise that we may treat one horse more or less as we treat another. A comparison is involved in each illustration; but only by experience can we know how far to carry the comparison.[1]

Experience, then, is the final authority, whether we argue from many examples, from one example, or from analogy or comparison. But experience itself (as the term is used here) is merely a rough generalization based on many years' accumulation of evidence. That is, experience is merely induction.

5. FALLACIES OF THE DEDUCTIVE METHOD. Fallacies in a syllogism are nearly always due to untruth in major or minor premise. This is equivalent to saying that most deductive fallacies are due to the inductive fallacies just discussed. For example: All Presidents of the United States are great men; Mr. X. is President of the United States; therefore Mr. X. is a great man. The major premise here is unsound; it has not grown out of a valid inductive process. Suppose the argument read: All birds have feathers; bats are birds; therefore bats have feathers. Here the defect lies in the minor premise. Bats are not birds.

[1] As a matter of fact, *all* analogies and almost all comparisons are false if carried to extremes. The proper use of analogy is for clarification, not proof.

Though many types of syllogisms (involving the use of words like "some," "no," and "all") exist, the fundamental syllogistic pattern is this:

$$\begin{array}{rcl} A = B & & A < B \\ C = A & \text{or} & C = A \\ \therefore C = B & & \therefore C < B \end{array}$$

Any other arrangement of the elements in the syllogism creates a fallacy. The following syllogisms contain fallacies which the student may analyze for himself:

All horses are quadrupeds.
Fido (the dog) is a quadruped.
Therefore Fido is a horse.

All Frenchmen are Europeans.
Hitler was a European.
Therefore Hitler was a Frenchman.

6. FALLACIES OF INCLUSION. Some arguments are faulty because they include more than logic justifies. They are closely related to some of the fallacies discussed in the previous section, and are sometimes indistinguishable from them.

a. Some of these fallacies involve the use of *too-inclusive words.* Writing in 1749, a woman correspondent of Samuel Richardson remarked of the word *sentimental:* "Everything clever and agreeable is comprehended in that word." Today "everything clever and agreeable" seems to be comprehended in the words "democratic" and "American"; and everything stupid and disagreeable is comprehended in the words "communistic" and "un-American." To be sure, most of us prefer democracy and Americanism to communism and un-Americanism (if the terms are at all comprehensible). But when politicians persuade great numbers of people to dislike a thousand things (from public health measures to social security) by calling them "communistic" and "un-American," the terms are being applied in too broad a sense, and the people who are seriously influenced by them are victims of a logical fallacy. In the same way, though the open shop, untaxed inheritances, wages and prices arrived at by the natural laws of supply and demand, and the entire

profit system may be altogether advisable for the country's general prosperity—they do not deserve support simply because certain persons cloak them with the terms "American" and "democratic." Those words are too broad, too inclusive. Using them to evoke praise or blame for a project is no substitute for logic. Other terms of the same sort are "the American way of life," "progress," "science," "liberalism," "reaction," "freedom," "unity," and "appeasement." It is one of the more melancholy traits of the twentieth century that such words have been so universally forced to do the work of fact, logic, and common sense.

b. Not only do certain words of the kind just mentioned include anything we happen to like or to dislike; in addition, they may include a considerable number of *unprecisely defined ideas.* Thus, few people would object to the statement, "Our freedom must be preserved." But whom does the word "our" refer to? Does it refer to convicted criminals, to labor unions, to millionaire industrialists, to middle-class American citizens? And what does "freedom" mean —freedom to murder, freedom to take other people's property, freedom to say what we wish when we wish (even to crying "Fire!" in a crowded theatre), freedom from taxes, freedom from poverty, freedom from foreign oppression or political oppression at home, freedom to deprive other people of freedom—or what? Many (perhaps most) other abstract terms are equally unprecise and all-inclusive. We may write fervently of "beauty"; but the term itself is only a generalization referring to specific beautiful things. "Beauty" does not exist separate from beautiful things. "Truth" does not exist either; only true statements exist. "Righteousness" does not exist; only righteous persons and righteous actions exist. When we use such terms, we should remember what they include—their specific and concrete manifestations. To use them in any other way is illogical.

c. Sometimes a statement may contain no such vague word, but may *include so much as to be fundamentally fallacious.* Someone writes: "I like children." Does he mean that he likes *all* children—even the ones who are impertinent, disobedient, loud, stupid, and malicious? Someone writes: "As a teacher, he is a failure." The state-

ment is broad. Did the man teach *nothing*, or *nobody*, at *any* time? Someone writes: "That administration was socialistic." Even if we know the precise meaning of "administration" and "socialistic," can we say that *everything* that administration did was socialistic? Did it do *nothing* merely negative, not socialistic or anti-socialistic, or perhaps actually capitalistic?—These are examples of statements that are unprecise and illogical because they include too much. The writer of argument is to look for them in other people's work, and to avoid them in his own.

7. FALLACIES OF CONFUSION. Some fallacies are due to thinking that actually misunderstands or ignores the subject. These fallacies may be wilfully perpetrated by dishonest people in order to cloud an issue, or they may be innocently deceitful.

a. A common fallacy of confusion results from the writer's *ignoring the question.* Every teacher is familiar with this sort of thing. He puts the problem: "Compare Swift and Addison as satirists." Half the students taking the examination will at once begin writing down everything they know about Swift and Addison—dates, life, character, names of chief works; they will ignore the real question. Or a politician may be asked what he intends to do about higher taxes; and he may answer by saying that he has never approved of higher taxes than are necessary, thinks that the present administration has wasted tax money, and believes that greater economy in government could save the people's money. But he has never said whether or not he will fight actively against higher taxes.

b. Much like ignoring the question is *argument beside the point.* A student fails to make a passing grade in a course. "But I was sick for five weeks," he says, "and could not attend lectures or hand in the daily assignments." That may be true, and the professor may feel very sorry; but the fact remains that the student did not hand in his work or know enough about the course to pass his examinations. He is answering questions that nobody asked him; he is arguing beside the point.

c. A subtle fallacy is that of *assuming a truth which involves the point at issue.* For example, a sincere and earnest old minister once advertised that, in his next sermon, he would prove from

historical evidence that Jesus arose from the dead. But in the sermon the only evidence he educed was a series of references to passages in the New Testament. He assumed that the New Testament is historically sound, though that is exactly the point at which doubters would have taken issue with him. Another speaker, this time a politician, tried to prove that he was a fit person for office because his policies were in accord with those of Thomas Jefferson. He assumed that Jeffersonian policies were wise for all occasions, though that is exactly what doubters might not grant.

These two instances involve an inference which has not been justified inductively. Often the inference is made subtly in the use of vague or ambiguous words. "Why should a business man *waste his time* with literature?" "The President's *reactionary* policies should be discouraged by the voters." "The *radical* notions of the Senator from Wisconsin will not mislead this august body." Each of these italicized words or phrases assumes as true that which, if it really were true, would necessitate no further argument. (In passing, it should be noted that another name for this kind of fallacy is "begging the question.")

d. A somewhat uncommon fallacy of confusion is that due to *argument in a circle.* Here the writer assumes something is true, reaches a conclusion on the basis of that assumption, and then doubles back to prove the original assumption on the strength of the conclusion just reached. An illustration will clarify. Lincoln once remarked, "God must have loved the common people, for He made so many of them." The implied assumption here is that whatever God has created in numbers, He loves. He has created a large number of common people. Therefore He must love the common people. And the fact that He loves them has made Him create them in large numbers. Another illustration: The Victorian Age, surveying its miserable and wicked industrial population, argued thus: God punishes the wicked by making them miserable. These people are miserable. Therefore God must have punished them. And the fact that God has punished them shows that they are wicked.

e. The fallacy of *improper classification* (see Section 3 of Chapter X) may result from an incomplete classification or from a non-

unified basis of classification. The former is the more common. Here a writer sets out to classify a set of items, but does not include all possible classifications. "The nations of Europe are monarchistic, democratic, republican, or communistic." At the present writing, this classification does not take account of the Spanish and Portuguese governments. More dangerous than this mere incomplete series is the classification that reduces a problem to an "either—or" basis. "It will either rain or shine"—but it may do neither; it may snow. "France will go either democratic or communistic"—but she may do neither; she may go fascist. Only very cautiously may a writer venture to commit himself to absolute alternatives; most of the time there is a third possibility or item that he has not considered.

Classification on a non-unified basis is uncommon. But when someone declares, "All voters may be divided into three classes: the stupid, the self-seeking, and the patriotic," he is obviously using a confused basis of classification. The three categories are not mutually exclusive.

f. Very different is the fallacy which *substitutes humor, emotion, or prejudice* for logic and fact. It is always easy to get a laugh at somebody else's expense, especially in addressing a crowd. But it is a cheap device. An honest person will not trade fact and logic for laughter, and listeners, even though they laugh in public, will not be convinced when they go home and think about the matter in private. Appeals to emotion are more effective and more permanent. Indeed, emotions (such as compassion, indignation against oppression, a sense of justice, and gratitude) are greater and finer than all the fact and logic in the world. Nevertheless, appeals to emotion must not be confused with fact and logic. In the first chapter of this book a passage was quoted in which Macaulay answered with sound fact and logic those who would forgive the sins of Charles I on mere emotional grounds. And in our own time America witnessed an occasion in which emotion was substituted for fact and logic. It was when General MacArthur returned from Japan. The policies which he advocated were involved and specialized; very few people in America understood the fundamental issues, or had any right to

have an opinion on the matter. Yet admiration for the man by some, and dislike by others, made all America choose sides noisily and acrimoniously. Emotion was being substituted for fact and logic. Appeals to prejudice are very similar. They make our local prejudices (for the South, New England, our own state, our city, our college, our team) blind us to fact and logic. Or it may be our national prejudices ("Right or wrong, my country"), or our racial prejudices (German, Jewish, Negro, Latin), or even our own tiny personal prejudices (against certain foods, red-headed people, black-headed people, people who speak with a broad *a*, people who part their hair in the middle)—we are all likely to be victimized by these prejudices. But, in the name of fact and logic, we must combat them by recognizing them in ourselves and in others.

8. **FALLACIES OF THE CAUSE-AND-EFFECT RELATIONSHIP.** Some of the most difficult kinds of fallacies to recognize, and to fall into, involve arguments from cause to effect, or from effect back to cause. In a loose sense, *all* argument, *all* logic, involves the cause-and-effect relationship. When we understand this relationship, we understand the basis of all argument.

a. We often make fallacies when we infer that *a certain cause will produce only certain effects.* Exposing these fallacies is difficult, for no one can read the future. Any action of ours, however well considered, may produce tremendous effects for which we never bargained. Most writers, however, are guilty of excluding from consideration the possible effects which may result in addition to those desired. Yet every cause is like a two-edged sword; it works both ways. It has a certain effect, and also the opposite of that effect. Thus the hope of becoming a member of Phi Beta Kappa encourages students to work hard in their courses, and yet it also encourages them to take easy courses in order to make good grades. A writer interested in exposing fallacies in the cause-to-effect argument can usually do no better than to study other possible effects his opponent has failed to include in the argument.

b. Fallacies in an argument from *effect back to cause* are easier to detect. Perhaps the most deceiving of them is the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (after this, and therefore because of this) fallacy. Since

an effect usually follows a cause, many people are led to think that any fact that invariably follows another is an effect of that other. For example, we have an ailment, are treated by a doctor, and get well. We think the doctor cured us. Yet the doctors themselves say that ninety per cent of their patients would recover successfully without medical attention of any kind. Or we elect a man to office; certain things happen in the country; and the man is defeated at his next candidacy on the strength of the things which have occurred —even though he is in no way responsible for them. *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc,* reason the voters. They forget that Monday always follows Sunday, but that Monday, nevertheless, is not an effect of Sunday. They forget to include in their reasoning other possible causes besides the immediately preceding event.

c. The opposite kind of fallacy is that in which *a cause is assigned for a condition, though the condition existed before the cause assigned.* People often say, for example, that the "modern" movement in American poetry was a result of the First World War. As a matter of fact, however, the movement began in 1912 and 1913, before the outbreak of war. The critics have failed to include that fact.

d. Sometimes *we mistake an effect for a cause.* We say that an instructor gives a bad grade because he dislikes a student; but perhaps the instructor dislikes the student because the latter has made a bad grade. Or we say that city politics are corrupt because of a certain mayor; but perhaps that mayor obtained office because city politics are corrupt.

e. In much the same way, *two effects of the same cause, or different causes, may be taken for a cause and an effect.* I build a house on a vacant block, and immediately someone else builds a house on the same block. Is the first fact a cause, and the latter an effect? Perhaps not; perhaps we both build because times are prosperous. Or hot weather comes, and the wheat ripens. Is the former a cause, and the latter an effect? Perhaps not; perhaps the first is due to the northward movement of the sun, and the second to the age of the wheat. If we argue otherwise, we are failing to include in our discussion two important causes.

f. The last fallacy we shall consider in studying arguments from effect back to cause is the fallacy of *mistaking for a sole cause that which is only an influence.* "Governor X was elected because I contributed one hundred dollars to his campaign fund." The sum contributed was only an influence, not a sole cause. Fallacies in real argument are not often so simple as the one just given. But existence is so complex that every effect usually has more than one cause. Accordingly, a writer wishing to refute an argument which tries to show the cause of a certain effect can nearly always do so by finding another influence which operated at the same time to help produce the effect.

9. FALLACIES OF EVIDENCE. Sometimes a writer errs by admitting as evidence that which is really inadequate or unreliable evidence. He states as true that which is not the truth, or else not the whole truth. "The utility interests have contributed ten thousand dollars to the campaign fund of my opponent," shouts a candidate. That sounds bad—but is it *true?* "The President has delivered the country into the hands of a visionary bureaucracy," shouts a Congressman. That is enough to condemn the President—but is it *true?* "Mr. X. is a very wealthy man," says the gossip. "To my certain knowledge, he has fifty thousand dollars in cash in the bank." This last may be true, but is it the *whole* truth? Perhaps Mr. X. owes a hundred thousand dollars. Unsound reasoning is not nearly so common as the use of unsound evidence.

As we have seen, we may use two kinds of evidence: that from authority and that from experience.

a. Before venturing to use *evidence from authority,* we should ask ourselves three questions:

Has the authority had the opportunity to know the truth?

Has he the desire to tell the truth?

Has he ability to tell the truth?

Suppose, for example, that we are trying to find out from a statesman something about today's European politics. We ask at once, Has he been to Europe recently? If so, did he stay long enough and travel widely enough to find out anything of importance? Did he talk to Europeans who really knew the situation? Has he had access

to reliable documents? In other words, Has he had the opportunity to find out the truth? If not, we must not use him as an authority.

Even if he has had the opportunity, is he reliable? Is there some motive of self-interest, fear, patriotism, or prejudice which may make him desire to conceal some of the truth or distort it all? Perhaps the statesman is a Senator who desires reëlection. Will he not be tempted to play up alarming theories in order to have a sensational campaign topic? Or perhaps he is writing a series of articles for a rabidly jingoistic chain of newspapers. Will he not be tempted to bow to the policy of the papers, and make European affairs look as dangerous as possible? Or perhaps he has a large interest in a factory that makes tanks. Will he not be tempted to be as alarming as possible in order that his factory may continue making tanks uninterruptedly? Any number of such considerations may influence our authority to try to obscure the real truth, and so make his evidence invalid.

But even if he has had the opportunity to know the truth, and if he honestly desires to tell the truth, he may still be an untrustworthy authority. He may be incompetent. He may not understand European politics, European psychology, or European economics. He may not know how class reacts to class, how historical alliances and animosities influence national politics in spite of logic, how much weight the opinion of the Pope or the Archbishop of Canterbury carries in men's minds, how much credence is to be given to French newspapers, and so on. In a word, though he has the best intentions in the world, he may not have the ability to tell the truth. He is not a good authority.

b. The other kind of evidence—that taken from our own *experience or observation*—involves a similar questioning of our own opportunity, desire, and ability to tell the truth. We say that seeing is believing. But we see smoke vanish into nothingness—and yet we do not actually believe that it has become nothing: we know that if we had the opportunity we could catch the smoke by means of certain apparatus, collect its particles, and even weigh it. We see a magician take money out of the air—and yet we do not believe that he does it: we know that we merely have not the ability to see through his trickery. And we see a close friend of ours do a questionable deed—

and yet we do not believe he is wicked: we "simply don't want to believe anything bad about him." Seeing, then, is not believing unless we, like the authority we have questioned, have the opportunity, the ability, and the desire to see straight.

EXERCISES

1. The Fallacy of Rationalization.

   a. Read Chapters 3 and 4 ("Various Kinds of Thinking" and "Rationalizing") of James Harvey Robinson's *The Mind in the Making.*

   b. Analyze your views on the following subjects; then set down in one column some possible reasons that may be causing you to rationalize about your views, and in another column some reasons that are obviously not the result of rationalizing:

   Your political views—campus, municipal, state, national, and international.

   Your religious views—including your church membership, your ideas of immortality, and your conception of God.

   Your ethical views—such as your ideas about cheating on examinations, stealing melons from a farmer, stealing money from a bank, slipping into a show without paying, sex, killing a fellow citizen, killing in war.

   Your social views—such as your ideas about capital punishment, old age pensions, inheritance taxes, income taxes, cosmetics, the broad *a*, boy-crazy girls, girl-crazy boys.

   Your personal views—about your ancestors, your immediate family, your roommate, the person who sits beside you in some class, your professors.

2. Fallacies Due to Diction.

   a. Tell what the following words would mean to the persons indicated:

   complex—to an ordinary reader and to a psychologist.
   progressive—to an ordinary reader and to an educator.
   mechanism—to an ordinary reader and to a philosopher.
   maturation—to an ordinary reader and to a biologist.
   old-fashioned—to an ordinary reader and to a heavy drinker.
   density—to a physicist and to an electrical engineer.
   basilisk—to a classical scholar and to a herpetologist.

escape—to a prisoner and to a botanist.

book-maker—to a publisher and to a gambler.

young—to a person of twenty and to a person of seventy.

American—to a citizen of the United States and to a citizen of Brazil.

socialist—to most Englishmen and to most Americans.

private enterprise—to a communist and to an American businessman.

God—to an Italian peasant and to a Unitarian minister.

b. Point out fallacies of diction in the following sentences:

Taking this English course should be of great value to you.

He is an undesirable alien.

You cannot afford to say what you really believe.

What Senator Blank thinks is of no importance.

We shall be much better off without him.

His arguments are quite unconvincing.

The human race is being weakened because modern civilization permits the unfit to survive.

You ought not to listen to such trash.

The government's grandiose ideals have ended in socialistic bureaucracy.

Shall we pay taxes to support those ne'er-do-wells who will not make a living for themselves?

The loud-lowing senator from the Deep South called a press conference.

The witness told some sensational yarn of no consequence.

When asked a direct question, the Secretary of State mumbled an answer of sorts.

The President admitted under questioning that at least a billion dollars annually was being spent on production of atomic bombs.

Congressman Jones lolled expansively in a plush, flower-filled hotel suite far from home.

3. Inference.

a. Describe the kind of evidence you would use in expositions on each of the following topics:

Chinese porcelains.

Tennyson's poetic art.

The honor system (or the proctor system) at your college.

Social philosophy in Galsworthy's plays.

What a man (or a woman) loses by going to college.

b. Which of the following generalizations would require many bits of evidence for proof? A single bit of evidence? A comparison?

Crows are black.
Dogs naturally hate cats.
Shakespeare is more read in Europe than is Dante.
A newly discovered species of cedar will remain green all winter.
Hitler is dead.
Small babies are not conscious.

Make a list of your opinions about certain individuals, people in general, politics, religion, etc. Discuss the evidence upon which you arrived at these opinions.

c. Invent syllogisms to fit the following conclusions:

Mary loves John.
Times will get better.
Times will get worse.
Women should take an interest in politics.
Public school teachers deserve higher salaries.
Professors should be more "human."

4–8. Exposing Fallacies.

Analyze and name the fallacies in the following statements:

He should be elected President, for he is a thoroughly honest man.
He would make a great President, for he was a great general.
I am sure he has no will power, for he is a confirmed drunkard.
Art should enter into the life of everyone, for it is beautiful and interesting.
I know he is intelligent, for I never saw a more intellectual forehead.
A radio is not worth having; it is merely an advertising mechanism.
Gentlemen of the Jury: How could anyone believe that this sweet and gentle little lady would murder her husband?
No one should obey prohibition laws; they are foolish restrictions on personal liberty.
As I thought—my job was too good to last.
You must know Greek and Latin in order to be cultured.

You are so much interested in writing that you should become an author.

He will continue on his course because he is too stupid to change.

He must love her; for if he didn't, he wouldn't send her flowers every week.

I can never win at cards, for I'm just not lucky.

This must be an oak tree; it has lobate leaves like an oak tree's.

This book is certain to be clever; Bernard Shaw wrote it.

He must be a good man, for he is very kind to his mother.

My wife and my daughter are afraid of mice, and so I suppose all women are afraid of mice.

People never have flown at the rate of five hundred miles per hour, and they never will.

I had a bad accident once in driving a car, and so I suppose I am incapable of driving.

There's no use in your doing the outside reading; you can pass the course without it.

This bird is blue; it must be a bluebird.

The veterinary said this medicine would cure dogs of roundworms; so it will probably cure them of tapeworms as well.

I left my raincoat at home—and sure enough! it rained. I'll take my raincoat next time.

He is such a good scholar that I know he will make a good teacher.

He is a grouch; the only time I ever spoke to him he nearly bit my head off.

My friend Rip van Winkle over here in the corner hasn't yet got the birds' nests out of his hair; don't pay any attention to what he says.

There is gold in sea-water. It only waits for the enterprising chemist to extract it and grow rich.

One of the good things the Soviets have accomplished is the abolition of serfdom in Russia.

Ducks have acquired the habit of living on or near water because their webbed feet and squat bodies make them awkward on land.

My mother used to hang a little bag of asafoetida around my neck to protect me from diphtheria. And since I never

took diphtheria, the old precaution was probably of some value, after all.

You should be ashamed of reading a book like that! What would your father say if he were alive?

Both the United States and Mexico would benefit materially if the United States would take over Mexico and give it a stable and honest government administered from Washington. Consequently, we ought to absorb Mexico.

President Wilson tried to negotiate the Versailles Treaty personally, and so the Treaty was a failure as far as America was concerned.

I argued with the professor too much, and so he failed me in the course.

Cats are so destructive of birds that it would pay us to do away with cats entirely.

Cats like to hunt at night because they can see in the dark.

People are hoarding their money, and that's why times are so hard.

He is taking almost every course I am taking in college. I think he is just imitating me.

9. Fallacies of Evidence.

Would the individuals in the following situations be trustworthy authorities? Why?

A man whose home was robbed while he was out of town.

A charwoman who felt sure the blood she mopped up was human blood.

A child of four telling what time of day an event occurred.

A private soldier telling the strategy of a great battle in which he participated.

A student giving a bad report of a course in which he had failed.

The same student giving a good report of the course.

A woman suing for divorce, and testifying about her husband's character.

A mother testifying in court about her son's character.

A district attorney trying to convict the son.

A defense attorney trying to have him acquitted.

An alienist telling about the mental condition of the son.

A scientist telling about a cure for cancer he thinks he has discovered.

Another scientist criticizing the first one's work.

Ourselves explaining how we made a large sum of money.
Ourselves explaining how a surgeon operated on us.

FINDING SUBJECTS FOR ARGUMENTATION

Some of the best places to find subjects for argumentation and debate are the contemporary journals and magazines. Compare, for example, the editorials of your local newspaper with the articles and editorials in magazines like the *Nation* and the *New Republic*. Look in the *American Mercury* for articles expressing controversial points of view on popular subjects. Examine *College English* for articles on teaching methods, and ideas about what college English courses should contain. Most of the scientific, political, and economic magazines contain articles and expressions of opinion about which there is certain to be controversy. And several weekly radio forums deal with controversial topics habitually. Any of these sources will suggest many subjects for argument.

Perhaps it would be well to classify certain fields of thought, and let each student work in the field that interests him most. Examples follow:

Economic:

Can the government establish a stable economy (without inflations or depressions) by fixing wages, prices, and working hours?

Does the safety of the American form of government demand a stable economy?

Would most people in America have a higher standard of living than at present if America had a stable economy?

Should a super-planning commission (something like the Supreme Court) with almost unlimited economic powers be set up as a means of forestalling economic depression and inflation?

Political:

Would labor (or farmers, or business men, or salaried workers) be economically better off under the Republican (or Democratic) administration of your state (or the federal government, or your local government)?

Should all law-enforcing powers against criminals be taken

from the states and handed over to the Federal Bureau of Investigation?

Would law enforcement be more just and certain if twelve impartial federal judges, instead of twelve jurors, tried all cases?

Would government function more smoothly and efficiently if all county offices were abolished?

Social:

Should divorce be automatically granted, after a waiting period of ninety days, at the request of either husband or wife?

Should architectural plans for all proposed buildings be passed on by a committee of artists and architects who would study the plans not only for their individual artistic merit, but also for their fitness to the locality where the building is to be erected?

Should local committees of parents and educators be set up to pass on the suitability for children of all motion pictures shown in local theatres?

Should old-age pensions be paid to every person over sixty-five (or seventy) regardless of proved need?

Educational:

Should the government pay small salaries to all needy young men and women who are capable of profiting by a college education, and who will go to college?

Do women's colleges serve any educational function that cannot be served by coeducational colleges?

Should all college students be required to take a course in trigonometry (or calculus, or chemistry, or physics, or American history)?

Should college teachers be compelled to sign a loyalty oath?

Literary:

Did the seventeenth Earl of Oxford (Edward DeVere) write the plays attributed to Shakespeare?

Do the novels of D. H. Lawrence show that he was a fascist?

What is *immorality* in literature? (Or is some specified literary work *immoral?*)

Was Hamlet's tragedy due to the fact that he was a delayer who could not make up his mind?

Historical and Biographical:

Was King Arthur a real person?

Did Byron have an affair with his half-sister?

Did the Incas invade America from Polynesia?

Did the government of Chiang Kai-shek succumb to the communists because it lacked supplies and funds that could have been furnished by the United States?

Reflective:

Do fixed moral standards result in unhealthy and unhappy mental states for the majority of people?

Does laughter arise from a feeling of triumph or superiority?

Is it "a crime to believe on insufficient evidence"?

Does the state exist for the benefit of its citizens of today or its citizens of tomorrow?

CHAPTER XII

Writing the Exposition

1. THE SUBJECT. People often wonder why so many poor articles and bad books are published. Their number is due to the popularity and interestingness of their subjects. A bad exposition on a vital subject will find ten publishers willing to buy it before a good exposition on an uninteresting subject will find one. Young writers often fail to realize this fact. They write excellent essays on "The Mountains and the Sea as Vacation Resorts," "How I Spent My Vacation," "Types of Razors," "English Ceramics in the Eighteenth Century," "The Typical Landlady," "Why Television Has Developed so Rapidly," and similar subjects. But who wishes to read them? No one but some patient professor ever hopeful of discovering somewhere in the weekly wilderness of such subjects at least one paper which shows that its writer has been willing to attack a vital problem.

A man's reach should exceed his grasp—and a student's efforts should exceed his ability to achieve. Young people perceive the elemental issues of life far more vividly and feel them more keenly than do their elders. If the young people would only write sincerely about these issues, if they would only have the courage to grapple with the problems presented to them as growing men and women —problems of authority, religion, sex, immortality, marriage, family relations, fear of life, ambition, dreams, hopes, despairs, and all the rest of them—if students would only write about such problems instead of "How to Build a Boat" and "The Typical Sophomore," they would produce something worth reading. But they won't. They will continue to attack small problems and decide unimportant issues until the boat is rotten and the sophomore has grandchildren.

2. AIMS. When a writer has chosen his subject, he should ask himself what his aims are in writing about it. First, he must decide

what his expository *purpose* is—whether to give mere information, or to interpret facts, or to try to change the reader's point of view.

If, for example, the subject involved the conservation of wild life in America, the writer could merely catalogue facts about the steps being taken by the government to conserve wild life. Or he could go on to interpret: He could say that certain measures are unsatisfactory or insufficient, that the prospects of new and better measures are remote, and that though certain results have been achieved, much remains to be done. Or, finally, he could devote his work to attempting to influence his readers to take conservation more seriously and work for it more energetically. What his purpose is will determine what the exposition is to be.

Next, the writer should determine the *kind of readers* whom he wishes to reach.[1] The type of readers he expects will often determine the purpose of his work. Thus (in the example just given) a report of a government official to a superior interested in wild-life conservation would be purely factual and statistical. A report of the president of a conservation league to the members of the league would be interpretative. An article by the same president in a magazine of general circulation would endeavor to change the public's point of view toward conservation.

Even when the purpose of the exposition is fixed, a writer must know what type of readers he will have. For example, a surgeon trying to explain to a patient the nature of a prospective operation would use simple terms, comforting reassurances, and careful analysis of the results which might occur if the operation were not performed. But if the same surgeon were trying to explain the same operation to a group of other surgeons, he would use technical terms, would convert the personal reassurances into mortality statistics, and would probably omit as well known the analysis of what might happen if the operation were not performed. The type of readers addressed may determine, then, the purpose, the language, the persuasive elements (see Section 7 below), and the nature of the facts presented in the exposition.

[1] Determining this often involves a consideration of the organ of publication. Practically all magazines, newspapers, and publishing houses have certain editorial policies which a writer must know and conform to if he expects publication.

Finally, the writer must decide *how long* his exposition will probably be. Only when he has done so can he select his material intelligently and organize his exposition with due regard for the laws of proportion. A newspaper paragraph, a magazine article, and a book on, say, wild-life conservation would require altogether different materials, different structures, and different methods of approach. Many a young author, inexperienced in handling papers of much length, writes the first half of his term paper in great detail, and then, discovering that he will have neither time nor space to finish the paper in the same detail, will hurry to his conclusion in a manner quite inconsistent with his early leisureliness. And writers even less skillful will do the opposite—that is, hurry through the first half of the paper, discover that at such a rate they will finish the work before filling the required number of pages, and then conclude with a wealth of unnecessary detail and deliberate padding. A well-planned paper commits neither of these errors. It is consistent and well balanced throughout.

3. THE TITLE. Specialized exposition requires only a descriptive title in order to attract the readers for whom the exposition was written. Titles such as the following automatically select their own readers:

"The Physiology of Digestion"
"Mural Painting in America"
"Milton's Use of Du Bartas"
"Carlyle and German Thought"
"Color in Advertising"
"The Lewis and Clark Expedition"

But general exposition is different. In these days of intense competition when a thousand titles a week in newspapers, magazines, and bookstores clamor for the average reader's attention, every writer of general exposition must find attractive titles for his works if he expects to be read. Some articles and some books, indeed, sell and are read for no other reason than that they have irresistible titles. *Little Man, What Now?* is no better book than it should be, but with such a title its popularity was assured even before it was written.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes and *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* are older novels with irresistible titles. Beer's *The Mauve Decade,* Bowers's *The Tragic Era,* and Allen's *Only Yesterday* are expository works with almost equally effective titles. Seeing them in a bookstore, almost any browsing reader would pick them up and look into them —which is the most important step in the sale of a book.

Just what makes a title attractive it is difficult to say. But a few general principles hold true:

a. The *subject* itself may be so interesting or unusual that the exposition requires no other advertisement in its title than a description of its contents. Such descriptive titles are these: "Probabilities of War in Europe" (*Atlantic*), "The Assassination of McKinley" (*American Mercury*), "Safer Childbirth with Less Pain" (*Parents' Magazine*), and "How to Marry Well" (*House and Garden*). A special form of such titles is that which proclaims superlatives, unusual magnitudes, or sensational ideas. Examples are: *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* (by Lewis E. Lawes), "$50,000,000 Can't Be Wrong" (*Saturday Review of Literature*), "Money by the Ton" (*Asia*), and "In Search of the Smallest Feathered Creatures" (*National Geographic*).

b. Often the *diction* of a title may catch the reader's eye irrespective of the subject indicated. Devices which thus attract attention are the following:

(1) *Alliteration* is often effective in fixing the reader's wandering glance. Examples of alliterative titles are these: "The Reputation of Rommel" (*Yale Review*), "Feats of Our Flying Foresters" (*American Forests*), "The Rise of the Rubber Railroad" (*Fortune*), "Prospects for Peace" (*Harper's*), and "The Great Galilean" (*Atlantic*).

(2) *Antithetical ideas* expressed in titles attract attention. Examples are these: "Ladies and Lawlessness," "Less Money and More Life" (both from *Harper's*), "New Armies for Old" (*Current History*), "The Awful English of England," and "Insurance that Doesn't Insure" (both from *American Mercury*).

(3) *Incongruous words* have much the same rather startling effect that antithetical ideas have, and tempt the reader's curiosity to delve further into the exposition. "Fra Angelico and the Cabin Pas-

senger" (*Harper's*), "Socrates Up to Date" (*Atlantic*), and "A Philosophy of Pith-Balls" (*Atlantic*) are good examples of such incongruousness.

(4) *Parodies* of well-known sayings attract attention, though often, it is true, the attention goes no further than the title. Examples are these: "The Trap that Jack Built" (*Collier's*), "Nature Says It with Flowers" (*American Forests*), "For Whom the Bell Clanks" (*Atlantic*), "Trial by Ice" (*Life*).

(5) *Made-up or unusual words,* such as those in the following titles, may pique the reader's curiosity and lure him to read the exposition: "Shirahama" (*Atlantic*), "'Cheapies' Threaten Chain Stores" (*Forbes*), "Capeadores of Wall Street" (*Atlantic*), "Punnet sive Pundigrion" (*Atlantic*), and "Bonanzas in Blue-Collar Jobs" (*U.S. News and World Report*).

(6) *Single-noun titles* also excite curiosity. Yet unless the word used can touch a live spot in most readers, this sort of title is not satisfactory. In the following group, probably only the first and the last titles listed can meet the test: "Professor" (*Atlantic*), "Rio Grande" (*American Mercury*), "Conclusions" (*Atlantic*), "Paradise" (*American Mercury*), and "Earthquake" (*Scribner's*). Variations of this kind of title are single nouns preceded by an article (like *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair), and single nouns followed by a noun in apposition (like "Lincoln the Lover" in the *Atlantic*).

(7) More common and, perhaps, less impressive is the *single-noun-and-single-adjective* title such as "The American Way," "The Larger Agnosticism," "Our Lawless Heritage" (all three in the *Atlantic*), "Hospital Night," "Burnt Offering," "Half-Told Tales," and "This Hard-Boiled Era" (all in *Harper's*). Titles like these have little to recommend them unless they include some unusual word or idea like the last one given, or excite curiosity like the two which precede the last.

c. Many titles draw attention by means of their *grammatical forms.*

(1) Titles beginning with *How, Why, Where, What, The Story of, The Future of,* etc., appeal to every reader's desire to enlarge his information: "How Not to Buy" (*Consumers' Research*), "Why

the Business Man Fails in Politics" (*Nation's Business*), "Why Literature Declines" (*Atlantic*), "How Charles Dickens Wrote His Books" (*Harper's*), "What a Man Loses by Going to College" (*Saturday Evening Post*), and "How to Stay a Bachelor" (*This Week*).

(2) Very closely related is the title stated as a *question.* In order that the question be effective, however, it must be pertinent to some universally interesting topic. In the following list of titles probably only the first and the two last meet this requirement: "What About Mixed Marriages?" (*Woman's Home Companion*), "How Good Are Your Schools?" (*American*), "Why Hold Back the Children?" (*Harper's*), and "Is Sleep a Vicious Habit?" (*Harper's*).

(3) Titles containing an *active verb* suggest a narrative, and are therefore more likely to encourage a reader than are mere static words. Note the hint of action or story in each of the following titles: "Emerging from One Other Depression" (*Catholic World*), "My Brother Commits Suicide" (*New Republic*), "Building a Futile Navy" (*Atlantic*), "Justice Comes too Late" (*This Week*), and "America Discovers Itself" (*Vogue*).

(4) Of late years, what we may call *and-titles* have been popular. They are titles containing two words or phrases joined by *and.* They have no special virtue unless the two members so joined are alliterative, antithetical, paradoxical, or incongruous. Examples follow: "Sound and Sense" (*Vogue*), "America and the Russian Market" (*Current History*), "Juries and Justice" (*Atlantic*), "Logic and the Ladies" (*Harper's*), "The Cat and the Pain Killer" (*Wall Street Journal*), and "Four Boys and a Piano" (*Life*).

(5) The last sort of title we shall mention is that which contains a *prepositional phrase.* For some reason, such phrases run trippingly on the tongue and stick in the memory. Examples are these: "From Chicago to the Sea" (*Atlantic*), "Planks without Platforms" (*Atlantic*), "Miracles of Healing" (*Ladies Home Journal*), "Elected for Oblivion" (*Life*), "Czar of Song" (*New Yorker*), "Man with a Mission" (*Time*), and "Australia on the March" (*Fortune*).

4. THE INTRODUCTION. Though short expositions seldom require formal introductions, long expositions would often lack clarity without some preliminary explanations. The following scheme is custom-

arily used in the introductions to formal debates and arguments. It is presented here as a suggestion of what may be done, rather than as a rule stating what must be done. The writer of an argument will probably follow the scheme rather closely; the writer of an informal exposition will use only such parts of it as seem to him suitable to the occasion. The latter writer, furthermore, may not use the parts in the order here given, and may place before any of them (at the very beginning of the exposition) some device for catching the reader's attention.

I. The immediate reason for the present discussion.
II. The origin and history of the question.
III. The definition of terms.
IV. The exclusion of
    A. Irrelevant matter.
    B. Waived matter.
    C. Admitted matter.
V. The statement of the main contentions made by opponents.
VI. The statement of the actual issues to be discussed.

5. THE ARRANGEMENT OF IDEAS. The arrangement of ideas in an exposition practically always follows one of the methods named below. Since these methods are discussed in most freshman textbooks of composition, they will be only mentioned here:

a. The chronological order.
b. The order of procedure from simple to complex.
c. The order of procedure from known to unknown.
d. The order of procedure from particular to general (the inductive order).
e. The order of procedure from general to particular (the deductive order).
f. The order of climax.
g. The order of alternation when two things are being compared.
h. The order of simple enumeration.

The order to be adopted is often determined by the method and the type of the exposition. But not always. For example, suppose a student is trying to explain to his parents what his curriculum will be during his four years of college. The type of exposition will be

"Abstract Description" and the method will be "Descriptive." But the student may arrange his details *chronologically* by telling what courses he will take in each year from the first to the last. He may arrange them by proceeding from the *simple to the complex*—that is, he may begin by explaining that his courses will all be either majors or minors, and then go on to explain more and more complicated details about these majors and minors. He may proceed from the *known to the unknown* by saying something like this: "As you know, I am specializing in Biology. You know, too, that Biology is based on Physics, Chemistry, and Geology. Consequently, I must take courses in those subjects. In addition, I must take French and German to help me read what foreign biologists have done. And finally, the administration requires me to take certain other subjects which I shall now tell you about"—and so on. He may proceed *from the particular to the general* by listing his courses, and then adding, "You see, I am specializing in science, and in Biology most of all." He may proceed *from the general to the particular* by saying the same thing, and then proceeding to list his courses. He may proceed in the *order of climax* by listing his courses in the order of their importance in relation to Biology. And he may content himself with a *simple enumeration* of the courses he will take in his four years at college.

The writer should decide on some arrangement he will give to his ideas, and then stick to that arrangement. Making this decision requires initiative and originality on his part; it does not come naturally as a result of the subject.

6. DIVISION. Division in exposition is of two types—logical and mechanical. Good exposition consists of a few major thought-groups, under each of which are collected subordinate thoughts. These groups are distinct from one another, and yet are linked together by means of transitional devices and logical relation. If they are too few in number (say two or three to every five thousand words), they require too long-continued concentration by the reader, and therefore weary him. If they are too many (say ten or twelve to every five thousand words), they confuse him with their diversity and make him lose sight of the main objective of the exposition. Of these two sins of division, however, the latter is more forgivable. Indeed, it is

a sin only in informal exposition where the writer attempts to secure an easy and flowing continuity. In more formal exposition, where ideas in a series may be plainly numbered or lettered (as in this book) the use of many thought-groups is quite permissible. The mechanical numbering or lettering makes for clarity even though it does detract from beauty of style.

This numbering or lettering of the different parts of an exposition is the other means of division mentioned above. If done with the slightest comprehension of the thought-groupings, mechanical division of this sort makes the exposition easy to follow and to understand. It appears commonly and elaborately in formal technical discussions, and it appears on a limited scale even in informal expositions. In the latter type of writing divisions are customarily indicated by Roman numerals. These have a double effect: They indicate a division of thought, and at the same time they break up the solid printed page in such a way as to rest the reader's eye and promise him relief from concentration too prolonged. The writer of exposition should nearly always avail himself of these devices for helping and encouraging the reader. They are tricks, but they are useful and legitimate.

7. **PERSUASION.** Writers seldom address sympathetic and enthusiastic readers. Usually they must overcome a dead inertia, and sometimes they must refute directly hostile opinions. For the accomplishment of either of these purposes clear logic is not always sufficient. It must be supplemented by persuasion.

Conviction involves intellectual approbation; persuasion involves emotional approbation. Most people will resist the former unless conquered by the latter, and many people do not require the former if they have been conquered by the latter. No writer can afford, therefore, to neglect the art of persuasion. It usually requires of him a double ability: to make the reader like him, and to make the reader like his arguments.

a. *Being likable* is an art that cannot be taught in textbooks; but perhaps a writer can be taught to make the best use of whatever likable traits he happens to possess. A few hints, stated as brief commandments, follow:

(1) Work toward persuasion in the first part of your exposition, and toward conviction in the latter part.

(2) Keep an air of sincerity and frankness throughout; but unless the occasion or the subject is unusually grave or sad, confine your most solemn earnestness to the latter part of the exposition.

(3) In the average exposition written for general reading, begin with some bit of humor, wit, whimsicality, or cleverness. Such a beginning need not, and usually should not, be a funny story. It may be only an idea expressed playfully, an amusing remark incident to the occasion, a witty paradox, or some other such bid for the reader's good humor. People are more tolerant when they are in a good humor than when they are solemn.

(4) Make some not-too-serious comment on your own lack of qualifications to write about the subject you are explaining. The average reader does not like for the average writer to take himself too seriously.

(5) Flatter the reader by praising some custom, habit of thought, point of view, or opinion which you know he holds. Appeal to his sense of local or racial pride. Pay tribute to his ancestors, to his individual enterprise, to his known efficiency and goodness of heart.

(6) Concede many virtues to those who believe differently from you, and even explain those virtues at some length if you intend to be particularly aggressive later on.

(7) Unless you know your readers will be unintelligent, never, never resort to vituperation, passion, and name-calling. Do not forget to be a gentleman. Nothing is quite so persuasive as a self-possessed, well-mannered gentleman. Remember Chesterfield's epigram: "A man's own good breeding is his best security against other people's ill manners."

(8) Do not write down to the reader. Act as if you were addressing a person of equal or superior intelligence. When technical details that the reader could not possibly know much about are to be explained, be modest and casual rather than ostentatious. Act as if you thought that the reader might be as well off, after all, without knowing such details.

b. The writer's next problem is to *make the reader like the in-*

formation given and the opinions expressed in the exposition. Here are a few suggestions worth considering:

(1) Relate your information and opinions to the higher impulses and emotions of the reader. Nearly all people, though not very intelligent, are fundamentally good and well meaning. If you can show how your ideas may satisfy their higher impulses, or if you can use your ideas to stir their higher emotions, you can persuade your readers to believe almost anything.

(2) Try to show how your reader's acceptance of your ideas will help him as an individual—physically, intellectually, or materially —or how it will help his children, his community, or his nation.

(3) As much as possible refer to authorities whom you know your reader views favorably. And when you must use authorities of whom you know the reader is suspicious, admit that he has some right to his suspicions, but that, for this once at least, you can show that the authorities used are reliable. If you must refute a well-liked authority, appear to do so with regret, and at the same time pay tribute to the authority in a way that will partly compensate for your showing that he has been wrong.

(4) Use a simple, direct style; have a clear and easily followed organization in the exposition; refer to familiar instances that "come home to men's bosoms" rather than to remote or specialized instances.

(5) Finally, if you know your readers are hostile, try to appeal to their sense of fairness. Try to show them that even people in the wrong (like you) deserve a hearing from fair-minded readers. But do not try to do so by pleading the justice of your cause. Instead, point out that you are depending on the reader's customary broad-mindedness, and are venturing to impose on his well-known charity and tolerance. It is not sufficient that the reader believe you have a right to be heard; he must be made to consider himself magnanimous for listening to you.

8. SOME STRATAGEMS. In these days when there is such a tremendous amount of competition for both reader attention and editorial attention, a writer must sometimes resort to stratagems to get himself read. This is not as it should be—but it is a fact. Few things in

the world are as they should be. In the following paragraphs certain means of attracting attention are discussed, even though they may be superfluous to the actual writing of good exposition.

a. As was said previously, the *title* may attract attention because it suggests information that certain people, or all people, are automatically interested in. Thus the title (by Isabel Mann) "The First Recorded Production of a Shakespearean Play in Stratford-upon-Avon" automatically selects and attracts certain readers. On the other hand, there are expositions that the writer would like for everyone to read, that are, indeed, written to attract as many readers as possible. Such expositions must have titles that tempt all readers. To fabricate these titles the writer must resort to all the stratagems he knows for constructing attractive titles. Some of these stratagems have been mentioned in Section 3 of this chapter.

b. The *beginning*, the first sentence or two, must be attractive. It may be phrased so as to *shock, amuse, or perplex* the reader. It may appeal to his self-interest, contradict a statement usually accepted as true, state a bold generalization or paradox, or make some other sort of startling observation. Lamb begins an essay, "I have no ear." A student begins an essay, "Life is never what it seems to be. It is usually worse." Laura Spencer Portor begins an essay, "I have a definite, decided taste in taxi drivers." Will Durant begins an essay on Schopenhauer's philosophy, "Consider, first, the absurdity of the desire for material goods." John Fischer begins an article in *Harper's*, "Fifteen years ago I knew a nice revolutionist named Peter." Fred Schwed, Jr., begins an essay in the same magazine, "I was born, so far as this chronicle is concerned, at a large and famous boys' prep school at the age of sixteen." It should be added that Mr. Schwed then appends a footnote, saying that someone has just told him that Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* had everyone born at the age of seventeen; Mr. Schwed comments sadly: "In this business it is harder to be original than you might think." All these beginnings are meant to startle the reader a bit, to catch his attention, and to tempt him to go on reading. A somewhat modern variation, noted in about one-third of the popular articles today, is to quote somebody directly or indirectly in the first one or two sentences. Quotation implies char-

acter and drama, and (as was pointed out in the first chapter of this book) is always likely to seem more interesting than mere straight writing by the author. Even if the quotation, and the character who allegedly said it in the first place, must be made up out of whole cloth, quotation is an excellent stratagem for creating a good beginning.

Sometimes very serious and important articles on serious and important topics at serious and important occasions, or by serious and important people, do not need beginnings of the kind just discussed. They need only to present in a clear way some serious and important *problem to be solved.* Huxley begins an essay, "What is education? Above all things, what is our ideal of a thoroughly liberal education?" Woodrow Wilson begins an essay, "What is liberty?" William James begins an essay, "Of what use is college training?" Alfred Russel Wallace begins an essay, "The majority of persons, if asked what were the uses of dust, would reply that they did not know it had any." All these beginnings set a problem before the reader in such a way that he is tempted to read further to find out the solution of the problem.

A third kind of beginning is that which *states the theme or principal idea* of the exposition. Professor Alexander Meiklejohn begins an essay, "One of the greatest dangers of the American college is that it will be drawn into the common life, that it will conform to that life, will take the common standards as its own." Benedetto Croce begins an essay, "I will say at once, in the simplest manner, that art is *vision* or *intuition.*" Henri Bergson begins a chapter, "Comedy begins with what might be called *a growing callousness to social life.*" Beginnings such as these are clear (a recommendation of no mean worth); they give the reader a vigorous intellectual jolt; they put him at once on his intellectual mettle; they make him feel that he is plunging directly into the heart of the subject; they give him confidence that this writer really has something to say.

Finally, the beginning sentences may *outline the ideas to be discussed* in the exposition. Lamb begins an essay, "The human species . . . is composed of two distinct races, *the men who borrow,* and *the men who lend.*" Arthur Twining Hadley begins an essay, "The

three faults most commonly charged against our national character today are materialism, lawlessness, and unwarranted self-assertion." Louis Untermeyer begins an essay, "The poetry produced in America in the last decade has been distinguished by three outstanding features. These three dominating qualities are . . . its vigor, its vividness, and its variety." Beginnings of this kind are closely related to those which state the theme, and possess the same kinds of advantages in attracting the reader's attention.

c. Writing in *The Review of English Studies* (XVI: 116–121; 1940), the late R. B. McKerrow, editor, advised writers of research papers to give their articles a "*boost.*" This boost, which should come early in the paper, should magnify or explain the tremendous importance of the discoveries or arguments revealed in the paper, tell what a revolution they will cause in thinking, tell how new and superior they are, and never reveal the slightest doubt that the writer considers that all the work he has spent on his research could not possibly have been spent to better advantage. In a way, Mr. McKerrow is being facetious. But he adds seriously, "In the first place, unless you yourself believe in what you are doing, you will certainly not do good work, and secondly, if your reader suspects for a moment that you do not set the very highest value on your work yourself, he will set no value on it at all."

d. Mr. McKerrow adds that a paper should end with a "*crow*"—that is, a summary or restatement of the main point of the paper, and a reassertion of the writer's conviction that he has given "complete and unshakeable" proof to back up his very important facts or ideas.

e. Finally, the writer of exposition (even more than any other kind of writer) should learn to apply the "Fundamental Principles" outlined in the first chapter of this book.

EXERCISES

1. The Subject.

   Make a list of the personal problems (both specific and general) which have troubled you most during the last year. By making use of the "sources of exposition" mentioned in Chapter VIII above, de-

velop at least one of these problems into an exposition of considerable length. Hand your list in to the instructor. When he has examined all lists, let him classify the problems of the class members, and tell what kinds of problems are of most general interest.

2. Aims.

Turn back to the topics given under the exercises for "Definition" (Section 1, Division III, in Chapter IX) and try to show how three different purposes could lead to the development of three altogether different expositions from each topic.

Show how your method of developing each topic would be changed if you were writing to be read by (a) a radical labor agitator; (b) a conservative Vermont farmer; (c) a liberal-minded, thoughtful college professor.

Tell how your methods of exposition would differ if you developed each topic in (a) a paragraph, (b) two pages, and (c) ten pages.

3. The Title.

Try to find attractive titles for subjects mentioned in the exercises for the preceding chapter. Consider as many of the subjects as your instructor thinks necessary.

4. The Introduction.

Outline formal introductions for six of the expositions mentioned at the end of the exercises for Chapter XI.

5. The Arrangement of Ideas.

Set down more or less at random all the items of information you have about one of the following subjects:

Student self-government on your campus.
Student organizations on your campus.
The administration of your college.

Show how these items could be successively arranged in all orders (except the order of alternation) mentioned in Section 5 above.

6. Division.

Refer again to the topics mentioned in the exercises for "Definition" in a preceding chapter. Show how long, informal expositions (5000 words) on five of these topics might be divided.

7. Persuasion.

Refer again to the topics just mentioned. Suppose your exposition on each of the topics is addressed to readers whose ways of thought are completely hostile to the subject and what you believe about it.

Outline methods of persuasion you would use in writing each exposition. Write a complete persuasive exposition on one of the topics.

What methods of persuasion would you use in the following expositions:

A plea for governmental control of railroads before a group of railroad owners; a group of railroad employees; a group of Congressmen; a group of average citizens.

A plea for reforestation before a group of farmers; a group of city-dwellers; a group of sportsmen; a group of lumbermen.

A plea before Southerners for social equality for the Negro.

A plea for liberal education as opposed to professional education before a group of poor parents; before a group of engineering students; before a group of business men being asked to contribute sums to a liberal college; before a group of working men being asked to vote funds for a liberal college.

8. Some Stratagems.

Bring to class several types of magazines (scholarly, scientific, popular of various kinds) and examine the articles in them to discover the different stratagems the authors have used (or could have used) to make their work more tempting to the reader.

PART THREE

The Writing of Fiction

CHAPTER XIII

The Nature of Fiction

I. Imagination and Fiction

1. WHAT IS FICTION? Essentially, fiction is narrative—and all narrative tells about changes taking place in time. Fiction is not necessarily untrue; historical fiction may be quite true, perhaps more fully true than history itself.

A second characteristic of fiction is that its chief concern is not merely with *what* happens, but with what happens to *somebody*. It is narrative that centers around a personality.

Finally, most good fiction is descriptive. Poor writers believe that merely telling a story, without trying to make the reader *see* the action, constitutes good fiction. Pick up any of the magazines of confession, and notice what an overwhelming percentage of each of its stories consists of the simple recounting of incidents without a particle of imagination to enliven the account. Here is an example:

> My friend went inside to phone a few more men in his effort to get an escort for me, and I waited outside with his "date." When he came out, I knew that he had failed. I figured there was no use in my spoiling his time for the evening; so I told the two to go ahead without me. I said that I wasn't feeling very well, and that I thought I would go home and get some rest. He was very gallant and polite, but finally I persuaded him to take me to my rooming house, where he left me with a promise to call the next night.

Compare this bare account of happenings with a truly imaginative bit of writing from Stevenson:

> All three peered covertly at the gamester. He did not seem to be enjoying his luck. His mouth was a little to a side; one nostril nearly shut, and the other much inflated. The black dog was on his back, as people say, in terrifying nursery metaphor; and he breathed hard under the gruesome burden.

"He looks as if he could knife him," whispered Tabary, with round eyes.

The monk shuddered, and turned his face and spread his open hands to the red embers. It was the cold that thus affected Dom Nicholas, and not any excess of moral sensibility.

"Come now," said Villon—"about this ballade. How does it run so far?" And beating time with his hand, he read it aloud to Tabary.[1]

The first of these passages merely tells what happened, whereas the second makes us *see* what happened. The first creates no images; the second is filled with images—is literally *imaginative.*

Fiction, then, is of two sorts: that which may be called non-imaginative, and that which should be called imaginative. In this book we shall disregard the first sort completely, and shall concern ourselves with the second alone. For our purposes, fiction shall be *imaginative narrative.*

2. IMAGINATIVE NARRATIVE. Short stories, novels, and dramas are all alike in being scenic; that is, each of them is made up of a *series of scenes* imaginatively presented with short passages of necessary exposition sandwiched here and there between scenes. When the fiction writer has learned this elementary law, and has learned how to abide by it in his own work, half his task toward writing good fiction is done.

An examination of any well-written piece of fiction will reveal that it is made up of scenes—sometimes one or two, as in some of Poe's stories; sometimes several, as in dramas; and sometimes a great many, as in novels and most short stories.

The intervals between scenes are passed over, as was suggested above, with the least possible ado—sometimes with the mere skipping of a line, sometimes with a row of asterisks, sometimes with a new chapter heading, sometimes with a few transitional phrases (such as, "On the following day . . ."; "It was three months later that . . ."; "He met her on the street a week later . . ."; and so on), and sometimes with a brief expository passage conveying necessary information.

3. DRAMA. In this book we shall not consider drama separately from other fiction. Drama differs from other kinds of fiction only in

[1] From "A Lodging for the Night," in *New Arabian Nights.* Used by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

the limitations imposed by the physical restrictions of the stage and the theater. The principal limitations are these:

a. Intervals between scenes are indicated in the program in the hands of the audience.

b. Necessary exposition must appear either in the program or in the dialogue of the actors on the stage.

c. The number of scenes must be limited so that scene-shifting will not be too frequent or too costly, and so that the total number of scenes will not hold audiences in their seats for more than two or three hours.

d. The nature of the scenes is determined by the physical restrictions of the stage; for example, an airplane battle could not be presented on the stage, nor could psychological changes which do not affect the actions of a character, nor could stories which hinge on meaningful looks passed between characters, nor could very short scenes which would not be worth the trouble of scene-shifting, nor could stories in which animals or very small children act or think, and so on.

Reason and experience assist a writer in determining whether a contemplated story may be good dramatic material; but once a writer satisfies the requirements of dramatic presentation, the methods of play-writing are the same as those of story-writing or novel-writing. All consist of a *series of scenes* imaginatively presented.

II. Truth in Fiction

1. HISTORICAL TRUTH AND POETIC TRUTH. It is not uncommon for a critic to tell some young writer that a story written by the latter is improbable—only to be answered by the triumphant author, "But it really happened!" The fact that something really happened does not make it credible, probable, or suitable for good fiction. Indeed, just the opposite is almost always true: incidents or stories from real life usually make the poorest sort of art. The fact that a thing has really happened is almost proof positive that no writer should attempt to record it as fiction.

Anything is possible; accidents do happen; rich uncles do die and

leave a million; lightning does strike villains meditating the ruin of worthy folk. But as Aristotle avers, the business of the writer is not to record the merely possible but, rather, to record the probable. Historic truth is one thing; poetic truth another. Scott's famous example of killing off six people (one of them by lightning) in a final chapter so that the hero may live happily ever afterward is not an example to be emulated. It *might* have happened, but it *probably* would not.

Narrative having historical truth tells what actually did happen; narrative having poetic truth tells what would probably have happened under a given set of circumstances. It is the latter sort of narrative that is the sole concern of the fiction writer (unless he happens to be a writer of historical fiction). Fiction writing is like playing a game of cards. The writer decides whether he is going to play bridge, poker, whist, hearts, or anything else; he decides the conditions of play. He is not compelled to play any one of the games instead of some other. But once he has decided on the conditions, he cannot change the rules in the middle of the game. In the middle of a bridge game he cannot suddenly decide that deuces outweigh aces, or that clubs are worth more than spades. He must play out the game according to the conditions selected.

Likewise, if a fiction writer decides that his story is to be about colonial America, he must not bring in a helicopter to help his hero rescue the fair damsel from the redskins. To do so would make the writer guilty of what William Archer calls *improbability on the external plane.* If the hero succeeds in rescuing the damsel by some more plausible device than a helicopter in colonial America, and if he is fleeing with her along a mountain trail, with the redskins in close pursuit, and if an avalanche suddenly descends and erases the redskins, the writer is guilty of creating an *improbable event.* It is not impossible that such a timely landslide would occur, but it is excessively improbable. Finally, if the bloodthirsty redskins should actually capture the hero and heroine, tie them to the stake for burning, and then suddenly decide to release them after all, and let them go free with the tribe's gifts and blessing, the writer portraying such a happy conversion is guilty of *psychological improbability.*

It is possible that Indian character would change in such a manner, but it is not probable.

These three types of improbability are the ones the fiction writer must ever guard against.

2. IMPROBABILITY IN FICTION. In spite of what has just been said, improbability may, under certain circumstances, have a place in fiction.

a. It is an old aphorism that readers will strain at a gnat of improbability in the course of a story, but swallow a camel at the very beginning. In other words, the reader will go along with the writer, play almost any kind of game that the writer wishes under whatever rules or conditions the writer specifies; but once the game is started, the reader expects it to be played according to the announced rules and conditions. Thus, the reader might balk at having a story end with a couple unexpectedly inheriting a fortune; but he would readily accept a story that began with a couple just having inherited a fortune. The reader might balk at a story that ended with an unannounced call from a radio station telling a woman she had just been selected by lot to make an all-expenses-paid trip to Paris; but the reader would accept such a condition readily enough as the preliminary condition of a story. Indeed, *an improbable situation existing at the beginning of a story* furnishes one of the best of all starting points for a story.

b. Improbability is acceptable in a story *when the story is impossible.* For example, fantasies such as Andersen's fairy tales, *Alice in Wonderland,* the *Arabian Nights,* and so on, which are fundamentally impossible, may be improbable without shocking the reader. That is, miracles may happen in them, sudden rescues may come, animals may learn to speak, storm and lightning may destroy the old witch, or anything else not specifically bargained for at the beginning may occur.

c. Improbability is acceptable *when the main charm of the story lies in its improbabilities.* Many of the comedies and farces one sees on stage or screen contain this type of improbability. There are hairbreadth escapes, incredible encounters, sensational accidents, astonishing strokes of luck, and vast misunderstandings. For example,

the whole story of W. S. Gilbert's *The Pirates of Penzance* turns on the fact that someone was told to apprentice a boy to a "pilot" and was thought to say "pirate" instead. The situation is utterly improbable, yet that is its chief charm.

3. CHANCE AND COINCIDENCE. Technically, chance may be defined as an unexpected and simultaneous happening of two related events; and coincidence may be defined in the same way except that three or more events are involved. Actually, however, the distinction is of hardly more than academic interest. It is true that chance and coincidence happen in real life. Many people say, therefore, that chance and coincidence are justifiable in fiction. But fiction, it must be remembered, is not a picture of what *could* happen in life, but of what would *probably* happen under a given set of conditions. Chance plays a part in all lives; but few people regulate their lives according to chance. Most people make plans according to what will *probably* happen. Nevertheless, as with improbability (of which chance and coincidence are only one aspect), chance and coincidence may sometimes have a place in fiction.

a. Long ago Aristotle mentioned as permissible in tragedy that kind of chance that *seems to imply design.* And he told the story of the murderer who, happening to lean against the statue of the man he had murdered, was himself killed by the statue unexpectedly tumbling down and crushing him. The accident seems to imply design; and Aristotle doubtless approved it because of the old Greek belief in destiny or fate existing superior to the gods themselves.

A similarly intense belief in destiny forms the basis of that neat, almost tricky, unity of O. Henry's stories. The O. Henry ending is perfectly satisfying, not because it is a surprise, but because (when we take time to reflect) it is the only ending which, under the circumstances, could possibly have happened. His "Double-Dyed Deceiver" is of exactly the pattern of Aristotle's illustration mentioned above. A young man kills another young man; the murderer becomes a refugee from justice; through one chance after another he finally becomes the foster son of the parents of the young man he had slain. Here is destiny working itself out. The ending is a surprise; but under the circumstances (if we only believe in the inevitable rightness of things) it is the one ending possible.

The same thing is true of another story of O. Henry's, "Roads of Destiny." A weak young man leaving home comes to a branching of the road. He takes one branch, has certain adventures, and comes by his death in a certain way. Then the story is recommenced: he takes the other branch, has certain other adventures, and comes by his death in the same way. And then the story is recommenced: he goes back home, has certain adventures, and comes by his death in the same way. The idea behind the story is that a man of a certain character will come eventually to an inevitable end, no matter what he does in the meantime—that a man's destiny lies within himself. This is an advancement over the old Greek idea of an external destiny, but the effect in fiction is the same.

b. Destiny and chance are close kin. Perhaps they are the same thing. In any event, a story may justifiably use chance or coincidence *when the author wishes to show that chance (or destiny) governs men's lives.* Many of Thomas Hardy's novels have coincidence piled on coincidence because the author wishes to show that mankind is the plaything of the Immanent Will, and is not the master of his fate. In a similar way, Joseph Conrad writes an entire novel, *Chance,* to show that man's fate is determined by chance alone, not by anything sane or rational in the universe or in his own nature.

c. Finally, chance is justifiable in fiction under certain technical circumstances. *When chance complicates the difficulties of the author and of his characters* instead of solving them, chance is forgivable in a story. If, for example, a character has made careful plans to escape from a prison-camp through a tunnel he has dug under the fence, and if a small dog chasing a rat uncovers the tunnel and reveals it to the guards, the reader will accept the chance; it makes matters more difficult for the author and for his character. But if, just as the prisoner is about to escape and a guard is coming to investigate a suspicious noise, the dog runs up and bites the guard's leg, and distracts his attention while the hero escapes, the reader will balk; the chance has made matters easier for the writer and for his character.

4. **SURPRISE.** Despite popular opinion to the contrary, outright surprise in fiction is seldom used nowadays by great writers. A plot built up with any reasonable regard to probability, to natural law,

to consistency of character, to philosophic necessity, to cause and effect, can usually surprise only in its externals, not in the plot itself. Real surprise is *prima facie* evidence of poor structure. For this reason, the *deus ex machina*—the unforeseen and accidental force appearing at the critical moment to decide the issue of the action—the strawberry mark on the left shoulder—the dying of a rich uncle—the appearance of the hero just in the nick of time to save the heroine from the clutches of the villain—this is bad art.

Even worse (and dreadfully amateurish) is the story that leads the reader to believe through several pages that a certain thing is happening, and then brings the reader up abruptly at the end with the revelation that something altogether different has been happening. For example, a freshman wrote that a burly, ill-dressed man approached the young thing as she stood trembling in a corner; her hair was falling in her eyes, she was quaking with terror; her breath came in great gasps; she saw a rope in the man's hands; she could see the hard look in his eyes; yet she could not move or cry out. The man reached out for her, seized the hair at the back of her head, tied the rope fast about her neck—and led her over to a stall where he bridled and saddled her! Once in a lifetime, perhaps, one may write such a story, but no more than that. It is deliberate deception, outright lying. It can hardly be forgiven.

Any surprise in a story must be a surprise in method. "Give the reader the ending he expects in a way that he doesn't expect." It is ancient advice, but is good. Perhaps it would be still better if it were written: Never give a reader an ending that he has had no reason to expect, but always bring about the ending in an original and unexpected way. Actually, the original and unexpected ending may sometimes border on chance or coincidence. But the chance or coincidence is not vital in the story itself; it involves only a method of ending, not the real ending. For example, the ending of *Hamlet* is destined to be tragic from the beginning; it is impossible that it could have avoided being tragic for all the figures most concerned. But the actual methods by which their deaths are brought about at the end involve accidentally exchanged swords and a poisoned cup (accidentally?) used by the Queen. Only the method here is origi-

nal and unexpected. Tragedy would have arrived somehow, in any event. What would have been inexcusable would have been a happy ending to the play—with all the villains deciding to reform, Hamlet forgiving everyone, Ophelia proved to have been not drowned after all, her and Hamlet marrying, and everybody living happily ever afterward. Shakespeare does have certain plays ending in such a way, it is true; but nobody thinks they are the greater for such endings. These particular plays are great in spite of their plots, not because of them.

Stevenson says that if a story is going to end tragically, it ought to begin ending tragically with its very first sentence. At any rate, we do not want characters to undergo sudden conversions; we do not want characters to act "out of character"; we do not want to be prepared through four-fifths of a story for one kind of ending, and then get the opposite kind; we do not want the laws of nature and of probability suspended. If our hero is to rescue the heroine, he must do it in an original and unexpected way; if our hero is to be elected to Congress, he must get himself elected in some original and unexpected way; if our hero is to marry the heiress, he must win her hand in some original and unexpected way.

In conclusion, two special "don't's" must be expressed:

Don't have a character escape from his difficulties by waking up and finding that it has all been a dream.

Don't kill off a character at the end just because the story has to be finished *somehow*. Whenever you feel inclined to kill off a character, be suspicious of yourself. Don't kill him unless there are excellent reasons for doing so—besides the necessity of bringing the story to an end.

EXERCISES

I. Imagination and Fiction

1. What Is Fiction?

Take a few sentences or a paragraph from some history or historical article, and convert it into imaginative writing. (For your present purposes, historical accuracy is unnecessary.)

2. Imaginative Narrative.

Into what scenes would you crystallize the actions outlined in the three following paragraphs?

A barber longs for the romance of faraway places and high adventure; he joins the Marine Corps; and then he finds himself stationed permanently at a military post in Massachusetts as the company barber.

An unsuccessful poet commits suicide because of his failure to find a publisher for his work. As a result of his suicide, public interest is aroused; and a book of the suicide's poetry is published and is successful.

A young wife gradually loses faith in her husband's omniscience, but finds that she loves him just as well after she has lost her faith in him as she did before.

3. Drama.

Could any of the stories you have just worked with be presented dramatically?

Read a few stories in current magazines—or in one of the annual collections of the year's best short stories—or in the works of one of the older writers—and try to convert one or two of the stories into short dramas. Perhaps the campus dramatic organization will be interested in presenting your play.

II. Truth in Fiction

1. Historical Truth and Poetic Truth.

Which of the following situations are impossible? Which are merely improbable? Which of the three types of improbability is involved?

A band of gorillas attacks a hunter in the Amazon jungle.

A villainous agent of some foreign government is preparing to murder the hero on a ship in mid-Atlantic; but a storm washes him overboard.

The same villainous agent talks with his intended victim, and decides to leave the service of the foreign country and become an American citizen.

A freshman in his first term is elected president of your college's student association.

The sixty-year-old Professor of Bible Studies announces that he has become an atheist.

A young woman goes backstage to meet a world-famous pianist; they fall in love immediately and elope that night.

A literary critic who has been asked to speak at a memorial

service honoring a just-dead novelist, makes a speech in which he declares that the novelist was a very bad writer.

A gang of criminals kidnaps a little girl; but her sweet nature and religious admonitions persuade the criminals to return her to her home, submit to arrest, and join the church.

A cat learns to talk, and makes some indiscreet revelations about what he has seen of the morals and manners of certain human beings.

A beggar in a city at night fears that he will freeze to death before morning; but he finds a five-dollar bill on the sidewalk and rents a room for the night.

A Negro ardently supports the theory of "white supremacy."

Every time a man has a difficult problem to solve, the ghost of his grandfather appears and advises him.

A seventeen-year-old girl is in love with a seventy-year-old man.

A man has a pet grasshopper which flies to him whenever he goes to the door and whistles.

A man invests money in a Florida orange orchard; but a severe freeze in April kills all his trees.

2. Improbability in Fiction.

In your opinion, which of the improbabilities and impossibilities mentioned in the preceding exercise might be used in a good story? Why, and under what conditions?

3. Chance and Coincidence.

Make a list of all the coincidences that have happened to you or to acquaintances of yours. Which of these might seem to imply design? Which might be used to show that chance (or destiny) determines men's lives? Which made your life, or the life of your acquaintances, more difficult or complicated?—If you cannot recall any original coincidences, use the following:

A medical student finds that he is dissecting the body of a man whom he once knew.

A man misses a train, which is wrecked, with many casualties, a few hours later.

A man's shoelaces become untied on the street; he stoops to tie them, and finds an expensive diamond ring lodged in a sidewalk crack right at his toe.

A man in a sawmill is called to the telephone; just as he steps out, a large band saw breaks and swishes through the air where the man had been standing an instant before.

The same man has just stepped over to the side to get a drink of water when the saw breaks.

4. Surprise.

Think up surprising, yet probable, endings for stories about the following:

A man who, the doctors say, can live only two weeks.

A public official who is dishonest.

A pair of lovers who are angry with each other.

An escaped convict.

A student competing for a literary prize.

A woman on trial for shooting and wounding her husband.

A pair of lovers whose different religions seem to prevent their marriage.

An inquisitive person who reads, in the "personal" column of the paper, about arrangements for a meeting between a man and a woman, and who goes to their place of meeting.

CHAPTER XIV

Types of Fiction

Critics have classified fiction into many types and according to many bases of classification. But for the practical purposes of the creative writer it may be sufficient for us to classify fiction into two groups—the story and the novel. A story is short (from 500 words up to 20,000 words); a novel is long (from 60,000 words up to 300,000 words or more). For works of intermediate length (30,000 words to 50,000 words) the term *novella* is frequently used; but we can afford to disregard this type here, and treat the novella as only a long story or a short novel. Except for differences in length, there seems to be no valid distinction between the story and the novel.

I. The Story

1. BROAD TYPES. Somerset Maugham has pointed out that the modern short story has developed into two branches that may well be named after the two masters who established them—Maupassant and Chekhov.

a. The *Maupassantian Story* has a plot and often a tricky ending. It is the stuff out of which a newspaper story might be made—an action that is unusual, but not surprising—like a theft, a drowning, a desertion, a murder. Most stories of this type could be analyzed according to the old Aristotelian formula of "beginning, middle, and end." By way of illustration, Maupassant has a story about a man who picked a quarrel with another man and challenged him to a duel, who then became mortally afraid, and who finally committed suicide to avoid facing his enemy the next day. Then there is the other story by Maupassant in which a woman's adored maidservant turns out to be a man in disguise, a criminal wanted by the police. And there is the very well-known story by Maupassant in which a

woman borrows an expensive necklace, loses it, spends many years paying for it, and then discovers at the end that the necklace she lost was only paste, after all.

We read these stories for the sake of the plot, the action, the narrative element. Character, if it matters at all in them, matters only as something that stands for human nature in general, without individuality. Furthermore, many of the stories could have happened anywhere at any time; there is little relation between background and action.

The Maupassantian influence affected Kipling (who added to it Bret Harte's local-color contribution), and reached a certain kind of climax in O. Henry. The influence still persists, especially in the more "popular" magazines designed for readers who expect a story to *be* a story, to have action and plot. It is still a respectable, attractive (and sometimes lucrative) field for the young writer.

b. The *Chekhovian Story* is very different from the Maupassantian; Katherine Mansfield perfected the Chekhovian story in English; and a great many modern stories of the "quality" level belong to the type. These stories have little or no real plot; they may have no suspense; whatever action occurs in them is of no great interest in itself—that is, it would seldom be considered worthy of space in a daily newspaper.

These stories deal more with *psychological states,* or with psychologically peculiar or interesting characters, than with unusual happenings. If they do record such happenings, they focus attention on the effect of the happenings on the mind and personality of a character; the happenings are not recorded for their own sake.

Besides presenting a psychological state, these stories may present merely an *interesting situation.* Thus, a Maupassantian story might begin or might end with the marriage of a seventeen-year-old girl to a seventy-year-old man—an occurrence that might well be the subject of a newspaper item. But the Chekhovian story would merely present the situation as it exists, and reveal, probably by means of passing thoughts and insignificant daily happenings, the psychological state of the married couple.

The Chekhovian story tells of the impulses, the inner terrors, the

unconscious motives, the perversions, the scars left by early influences, the mind in confusion, the inwardly violent effects of certain minor events on sensitive personalities, the personality trying to understand other personalities, or to grapple with the bewildering problems of modern civilization. And, more often than not, all this is done, not by actual expository analysis, but by recording small gestures, looks, tones of voice, scraps of conversation, involuntary exclamations, tremors of emotion, fleeting images, brief sense impressions. The effort is to render a complete psychological experience. Of course, the effort is certain to fail. To record *everything* that constitutes the psychology of any person for even an hour would require at least a volume. James Joyce, in *Ulysses*, tried to render a complete psychological experience of a mere twenty-four hours, had to write a very long book to do it, and then did not succeed in being absolutely complete. Thomas Wolfe tried to do it, wrote billions of words, and found at last that he could use only a small part of what he had written. This effort to be true to the complete consciousness has resulted in what has been called the stream-of-consciousness type of fiction. The type is extraordinarily important in modern fiction; and every modern writer who hopes to create anything more than potboilers ought to practice it to a certain extent. On the other hand, it cannot possibly tell *all*. Under the circumstances, the young writer might do well to remember Schiller's aphorism: "The artist may be known by what he omits"—and to reconcile himself to omitting much that passes through the consciousness, the subconsciousness, and the unconsciousness of his characters.

Sometimes the Chekhovian story is not content to reveal a mere individual situation or a psychological experience; in addition, it may reveal an underlying *social culture* that has produced the situation or the psychological experience. In Chekhov himself, this cultural context is most commonly the Russian peasant's life, his problems, and the influence of his environment on his personality. In various American writers (Marquand, Faulkner, Saroyan, for example) the cultural context may be the bloodless life of aristocratic Boston, or the decaying and decadent world of the Old South, or

the artificial and overstimulated life of wealthy New York, or the simple virtues of the very low economic classes.

Or sometimes the chief interest may lie in some unusual *personality;* or in some typical personality (child, old person, teen-ager, illiterate, immigrant, Negro, college student) not usually understood; or in some latent or concealed conflict within a personality, or between personalities. Or it may lie in a scene or place which itself has "personality"—or in an insignificant event which has intricate and manifold meanings to different people—or in the revelation of truths (usually about human relations) that have been lying deep-hidden beneath surface appearances.

The sole function of the Chekhovian story is *to reveal.*

To be sure, the Chekhovian story may have a plot; it may tell about sensational events that the daily newspaper would also record. But plot is not an essential, as in the Maupassantian story. Plot, or action, may be reduced to a mere time sequence: things that happen successively in an hour, a day, a week—a breakfast of a married couple; an encounter with a street beggar; a walk in the country; the few minutes of a wedding; a conversation of a young man and a young woman who happen to occupy adjoining seats in a train; a child spending a day with his grandmother; the way an employer's character is revealed during the first week that his stenographer works for him.

But though these stories may have little plot, they seldom merely end in mid air. Their revelations are arranged more or less in the order of climax; or the end of the story is some especially revealing or convincing detail, or some new development that verifies the previous revelation, or some summarizing conclusion reached by a character, or some odd twist of circumstance, or anything else that gives a slight lift, novelty, or "whiplash" at the end.

2. SPECIAL TYPES. Short stories may be classified in another way —that is, according to their length and structure.

a. The *Short Story* is both a general type and a special type. As a special type it is a fictional narrative that does not belong to any of the three special types discussed below. As a rule, it covers a

relatively few days or weeks in the life of a person; and nearly always it deals with a single climax or crisis in the life of that person. The novel, in contrast, may sometimes cover the lifetime of a person, or even several lifetimes; and it deals with a series of climaxes and crises in the lives of people.

b. The *Long Short Story* is not so much a paradox as its name implies. It is merely a fictional narrative that deals with a single climax or crisis in the life of a person, and that is from about 15,000 words to 25,000 words long. Conrad's "The Secret Sharer," "Typhoon," and "Heart of Darkness" are well-known examples of the type.

c. The *Short-Story* (with a hyphen) is one of the oldest and best recognized types of short fiction. The young writer should remember, however, that he is under no compulsion to write short-stories —any more than a poet is under compulsion to write sonnets, or pastorals, or anything else. As a matter of fact, the short-story has some very arbitrary restrictions that may make it a dangerous plaything for the young writer. It may lead to slavish rule-following, artificiality, and sterility. On the other hand, it is an interesting form, and it can be a worth-while exercise.

The ideal short-story (according to the standards set by the originator of the type, Poe) is something more than a story which is short. Instead of attempting to create a multiplicity and variety of effects, instead of trying to analyze character, instead of presenting a theme, the short-story attempts to create a single emotional effect, a single mood in the mind of the reader—grief, fear, horror, pity, mirth, hate. Characters, setting, action—emotion displayed, places described, deeds told about—are selected and emphasized only as they contribute to the single emotional effect.

To accomplish its purpose, the short-story limits itself in every direction. It deals with moments or hours, not years: in "The Cask of Amontillado" an hour or two; in "The Pit and the Pendulum" an afternoon; in "The Masque of the Red Death" an evening. It begins at the latest possible moment, as close to the climax as possible, and with as little exposition as possible; and it ends as soon as the effect

has been made on the reader. It has only one or two important characters. And the action occurs in the fewest possible places—usually in only one.

Nowadays one hears more about the short-story in critical works than one sees it in actuality. For though it is neat and effective, and though any writer may learn from it the value of compression, it is artificial in an age which has come to respect primitive naturalness rather than cultivated artistry. Paradoxically, however, the short-story's artificiality is its chief asset. Writing it, like writing a sonnet, is an æsthetic exercise. Its limitations, its strict requirements, and its singleness of purpose tempt the writer's skill and offer a challenge to his literary power. At the same time, these definite standards make it possible for connoisseurs in literature to read the short-story with a keenly discriminating and appreciative taste. Accordingly, the form will doubtless persist, much as the sonnet has persisted, despite all conflicting tendencies.

d. The *Short Short-Story* is even more restricted and artificial than the short-story. At its best, the short short-story is only about 1000 words to 2000 words long; it has all the limitations of time, place, and characters that typify the short-story; and it must end with a surprise, a sudden change of direction, a "whiplash." This last is the writer's chief difficulty. Too many writers solve it in a way mentioned in the previous chapter—by deliberately deceiving the reader, misleading him, lying to him by implication if not in fact through nineteen-twentieths of the story, and then undeceiving him at the very end. This sort of thing is inexcusable. The writer must avoid it, and yet achieve a surprise ending.

II. The Novel

1. BROAD TYPES. Though novels have been classified in many ways, they may be viewed by the creative writer as belonging to only two types.

a. The *Vertical Novel* tries to depict the heights and the depths of individual human character. It need not be naturalistic in its details, or even possible; it may be poetic (like *Paradise Lost*), or

allegorical (like *Pilgrim's Progress*), or fantastic (like some of Cabell's novels). It is a fiction of *intensity,* not breadth; of emotion, not truth to the outward appearances of life. Hawthorne's novels belong to this class; so does much of Faulkner and of Conrad. Reading this type of fiction, one does not say, "How lifelike!" One says instead, "How wonderful is the human heart! Of what passions is it not capable! What can it not suffer! What evil can it not dream! What grandeur and nobility can it not achieve!"

As a rule, this field of fiction is suited as much to the young writer as to the old; for the young writer has had intense, profound, and elevating experiences of his own, if only for a few minutes—and he can transfer these episodes of passion to imagined fictional characters.

b. The *Horizontal Novel,* in contrast to the preceding, might almost be called panoramic. It is more worldly, less individualistic, more broad and various, less intense and passionate than the vertical fiction. It is the wide-angled lens, not the microscope. It deals with many types of people, many different emotions, many years, and, if not many places, one place in full detail. It shows human nature in its many guises; its subject is not the intricacy or the marvel of the individual personality, but the incredible variety of the human race at large.

Chaucer belongs to the school of horizontal-fiction writers; so does Shakespeare in some of his historical and Roman plays; so do Defoe, Fielding, and Scott; Dickens and Thackeray are the greatest of the group; Arnold Bennett is, perhaps, the greatest of the twentieth century in England; John Dos Passos is the most outstanding in modern America; Sinclair Lewis is a member of the group; and so is Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* if in nothing else.

To deal with life in its variety and multiplicity, the horizontal-fiction writer usually needs a plot. "What the devil does the plot signify, except to bring in fine things?" asked George Villiers. A plot exists as a scaffold upon which to display the infinite variety of human nature. Without the plot, the variety would not hang together. Plot is somewhat under a cloud in the most advanced criticism today. And, to be sure, plot for its own sake, however thrilling,

has implications of naïve primitivism. But plot used in horizontal fiction as a binder for variety and multiplicity is almost necessary unless the story is to seem quite formless. Of course, some of the more advanced critics might ask, Why should a story have form? To which the proper answer is, Why should it not have form? At any rate, it is noticeable that the writers mentioned above as belonging to the horizontal-fiction group are also plot-makers.

The young writer is seldom able to create fiction of the horizontal type. Usually, he has had no opportunity to learn how various human nature can be. Accordingly, the field belongs, for the most part, to the older writer.

2. SPECIAL TYPES. For the last two centuries, and more, novels have been so widely written and so universally read that they have achieved an almost unclassifiable variety. But the young writer should be familiar with the names, at least, of certain types—even though these types are not mutually exclusive.

a. The *Picaresque Novel,* which deals with the adventures of a none-too-moral character (*picaro* is Spanish for "rogue"), consists of a series of adventures that befall an individual trying to make his fortune by his wits. The adventures seldom add up to a unified plot, but are only a disconnected series interesting in themselves individually, but not as a whole, or as a unit. Defoe and Smollett are the two principal picaresque novelists in English.

b. The *Character Study* is less concerned with the adventures that happen to an imagined character than with the character himself. The interest in this kind of novel lies in the intricacies a character reveals within himself, in his growth and development, in his mental and emotional reactions to the things that happen to him and in the world about him. Richardson was the first English novelist who wrote this type of novel exclusively; some of the greatest novelists (Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Thomas Mann, Henry James) have written mostly character studies —and the type is still one of the most popular both with writers and with readers.

c. The *Historical Novel* came into its own with Sir Walter Scott, was popular during the first half of the nineteenth century, ceased to

be popular in America during most of the later nineteenth century, had a brief revival in the years about 1900, dropped back again, was revived in the 1920's, and has been extraordinarily popular ever since. The interest here is usually in a historical period rather than in character. Nevertheless, some of the modern historical novels have shown as much concern for character as the character study, and for thrilling adventures as the picaresque novel.

d. *Biographical Novels* are related to the historical; but here the emphasis is on a historical character rather than on a period as a whole. This type of novel has been written chiefly in the twentieth century (as a companion to the modern personalized biography), and is still very popular. Very likely the young writer will not wish to try his hand at either the historical or the biographical novel until he is older. They require an amount of research that the young writer is not usually prepared to give.

e. *Romantic Novels* may be historical, and frequently are. "Romantic" is a hard term to define; but it implies remoteness (in time or in place or in both) and beauty. The romantic novel deals with faraway, strange events; and it pictures them idealistically, glamorously, seductively, beautifully—"in a light that never was on sea or land." Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is romantic; so is Cabell's *Jurgen;* so is McCutcheon's *Graustark;* so is Tarkington's *Monsieur Beaucaire.* Lately, in the motion pictures, certain classes, remote because of their wealth from the popular audience, are pictured romantically; and the "Western" is almost always romantic. Unless the young writer has an exceptionally fanciful, beauty-loving, and creative mind, he should not attempt romantic writing. It usually turns out to be merely very bad escape writing.

f. The *Naturalistic Novel* is the opposite of the romantic. By means of many details it pictures, or tries to picture, life as it really is. By custom, if for no other reason, these details usually add up to a more or less sordid picture of the world. Furthermore, this kind of fiction usually involves a philosophic naturalism—that is, a willingness to dispense with the spiritual in man and the supernatural in the universe, and an inference that man's actions are determined for him by the laws of heredity and, especially, environment. Zola,

Maupassant, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, and James T. Farrell are some of the best-known practitioners of naturalism. (Perhaps the *Realistic Novel* should be considered as a separate type; in general, however, it lies close to the naturalistic novel, and differs from the latter in degree rather than in nature. In America, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, and John P. Marquand are typical realists.)

g. The *Novel of Social Criticism* is a realistic novel that points out the evil or the folly of certain laws, customs, popular beliefs and standards, popular methods of speech and behavior, and well-known social types. This kind of novel actually has its origin in the dramas of Ibsen; H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy popularized the genre in the novel; Sinclair Lewis, John Steinbeck, and some of the naturalists brought it to a high point in America.

h. The *Novel of Locality* tries to give a realistic picture of life as it is lived in some rather restricted region or province. It depicts the landscape, the effect of the landscape on the character of the people, the typical people, their language and behavior and ways of thought, the principal occupations and interests of the region, and so on. Individual characters may be important in the novel, but the region is more important. This kind of novel started with the local color story writers of the nineteenth century (Bret Harte, Charles Egbert Craddock, Constance Woolson, and others), got into the novel through Edward Eggleston and George W. Cable, and has been prominent in American fiction ever since.

This type of novel and the two preceding types (naturalistic and social criticism) are usually well within the scope of the young writer.

i. Numerous *Other Types* of novels exist, but cannot be treated here. The reader will find them catalogued under the heading "Fiction" at the end of the annual volumes of the *Book Review Digest*, found in most large libraries. These types include, among many others, Allegorical Novels, Family Chronicles, Fantasies, Ghost Stories, Humorous Novels, Love Stories, Mystery and Detective Novels, Philosophical Novels, Psychological Novels, Religious Novels, Satirical Novels, War Novels, Westerns.

EXERCISES

In doing the exercises for this chapter, consider the lists of stories and situations suggested in the exercises for the preceding chapter, and also the following suggested exercises and stories:

A poor boy wants a violin.

A beggar goes to a cheap lodging house for the night.

A German family living next door have two interesting children.

A man runs past the house.

A lover gives a costly amber necklace to his sweetheart.

A dog bites a man.

A couple marry.

A ship's captain gets a new first officer.

A man wins a fortune in the stock market.

A man falls heir to a fortune.

A woman is deeply interested in national politics.

A child throws a cup at his mother.

A brutal army officer is shot in the back by some of his own men during a battle.

A child gets a long-desired toy for Christmas.

A man wounded in a brawl is brought to a hospital.

A young husband gets a new son.

A family with a grown daughter moves next door to a college boy's home.

A youth finds that he is in love with his best friend's sweetheart.

A college boy from a good family finds that he is in love with a waitress in a cheap restaurant.

A college graduate gets a new job.

A young man goes to live with a rich aunt.

A young woman notices that for several days a man has been following her wherever she goes.

A sixteen-year-old country boy who has been left an orphan goes to live with his grandparents in the city.

An idealistic, pure-minded young man gets a job as a common sailor in order that he may work his way to Europe.

1. Find at least three items in the list that might be developed into short-stories. Briefly summarize or describe the story as you might write it; tell the scenes into which you might mold your story, and give a rough idea of the characters involved.—Do the same for short short-stories (with particular attention to the endings). For Maupassantian stories. For Chekhovian stories. For vertical fiction (but

differentiate from Chekhovian stories). For horizontal fiction (list characters, places, and social strata you might bring in, and tell the kind of plot you might use to thread them together).

2. Could any of the stories or situations in the list be developed into various kinds of novels discussed in the text?
3. Look back over the text of this chapter, and list the types of fiction that are not recommended for young writers.
4. Which of the types of fiction appeals to you most as a reader? Which do you think would appeal to you most as a writer?
5. If you are not acquainted with some of the authors and works mentioned in each section of the chapter above, go to the library and read some of them. Be sure to become acquainted with the authors or works mentioned in Sections 4 and 9.

CHAPTER XV

The Writer's Approach

The two preceding chapters have tried to introduce the would-be fiction-writer to the general nature and the large possibilities of the field he has elected to enter. Beginning with the present chapter, we start working toward the actual process of creating fiction.

One of the commonest sounds that the teacher of writing hears from his students is a despairing wail: "I want to write, but I don't know what to write about!" On first thought, the remark seems ludicrous, but actually it is quite natural. The young writer feels within him "an instinct that reaches and towers," a creative urge, a desire to express something that he vaguely feels. But he has so little self-confidence that he does not trust himself to say anything; he sees so much to express that he does not know what to choose; his training in the recognition of good subject matter for fiction has been vague; and he has had so little experience with writing that he does not know how or where or upon what to begin. This chapter is intended to help the student over these first hurdles of the young fiction-writer.

I. The Writer as a Person

1. EGOTISM. First of all, a writer should be something of an egotist, and he should not be ashamed of it. "I am clever," said the great and honest La Rochefoucauld, "and make no scruple of declaring it. Why should I?" One writes to be read; every other kind of writing is dilettantism. And unless a person thinks he can write something worth reading, something so good, indeed, that other people ought to pay money to read it—he has no business writing. If he writes what he knows is trash, and asks other people to buy it, he is being a cheat. He can sometimes make a living, or even get

rich, by such writing—but then people have got rich, too, by selling worthless oil stocks or shares in played-out gold mines. The difference between these latter and the writer of self-acknowledged trash is quite academic. Like Ben Jonson, the writer should be able to say honestly of his work, "By God, it's good!"

The young writer may cry at once: "That lets me out! I am not an egotist." Yet Hazlitt long ago observed that, though we may wish ourselves different, we have never seen anyone with whom we should like to change existences. "We had as lief not be, as not be ourselves." Even St. Paul, one of the greatest writers, not only did not wish to be anyone else, but was egotist enough to wish that other people were like him: "I would that all were even as myself." One asks of a writer only that he be himself, insist on being himself, and request that others recognize him as a unique self. Everyone has that much egotism, and should cultivate it.

2. HUMILITY. At the same time, the writer should have humility —in certain directions. First, he must be humble enough to think that he does not already have a God-given power to write immortal literature. He must be humble enough to try to learn; to consider well-meant criticism even if he does not always take it; to admit he has made mistakes, and to try to profit by them; to study the art of other writers; to keep trying to perfect his own work by continual revision and polishing; to be never completely smug and satisfied with only one success.

Next, the young writer must be humble enough to try to adjust his work to his readers. After all, readers are the final goal; and the young writer must not declare to himself, "There is one way to say what I have to say; I shall say it that way; I shall not lower my standards." The author of this book, though he thinks that a writer should always be somewhat ahead of his reader, leading him on with new and difficult ideas, and introducing him to new and radical methods and points of view, does not think that the writer should be so engrossed in private symbolism, private associations of words and images, private techniques, and private references as to be largely incomprehensible. Much "advanced" poetry belongs to the school of incomprehensibility, and has therefore removed modern

poetry from all but a tiny handful of readers. The writer of this book hopes that fiction-writers will never commit that crime against civilization. Discussing a flower with a group of children, one would use a certain language; discussing it with a college class in botany one would use a different language; and discussing it with a group of professional botanists, one would use still different language. No lowering of linguistic standards is involved here; only common sense is involved—and the determination that nobody shall be deprived of knowing the marvel and the beauty of a flower.

Likewise, the proud young writer ought not to feel that he is lowering his literary standards by writing so that nearly all normally intelligent and well-educated people can understand nearly all of what he writes. He need not worry if, occasionally, he puzzles his readers; but he should remember that crossword puzzles do not make literature. Browning remarked wisely of his own poetry: "I have never purposely written obscure poetry; but neither do I wish my poetry to be a substitute for an after-dinner cigar or a game of dominoes." One can be highly individual and original by standing on one's head in church; but who would want to be original in such a way? There is a happy medium between grotesque individualism and stupid conventionality. The young fiction-writer should be humble enough to try to find that happy medium.

3. CHARACTER. Every teacher of writing knows that it is not always his *best* students who, later on, make names for themselves in fiction-writing. The brilliant student without character will never go so far as the fairly good student with character. Too often the former (perhaps partly spoiled by his delighted and admiring teacher) depends on his natural talent alone, whereas the latter, knowing his weaknesses, depends upon something besides natural talent. Even writers with the greatest natural gifts must work at their writings—as an examination of their messy, worked-over manuscripts, their many revisions, and their frequent rewritings will show. They must have self-discipline, patience, an "infinite capacity for taking pains," tenacity of purpose, ability to sit writing at a desk many hours every day, self-confidence enough to continue working in spite of discouragements, humility enough to keep learning all

the time, shrewdness enough to gauge editorial desires and public receptivity, steadiness enough to keep going in spite of private and personal distractions, and enough understanding of the world to know that the heights of Olympus are seldom scaled in a single effort, or in a few years, or by many writers in their early twenties. Writing is serious work—like law, medicine, or teaching; and, if it is to become one's profession, it demands, like other professions, of all but a very fortunate few, a long and diligent apprenticeship.

II. The Writer's State of Mind

1. DE-EDUCATION. The word *mind* in the phrase just above does not mean *intellect*. It means what the psychologists would call the *psyche*—the totality of conscious and unconscious, intellectual and emotional, activities of the individual.

It should be understood at once that this totality is only about ten percent conscious, willed intellect, and is about ninety percent emotion, mood, sensation, subconscious memory, suppressed impulse, anxiety, desire, and much besides. Our schools, from kindergarten through college, are concerned almost exclusively with developing the intellectual ten percent of our personality, and pay very little attention to the other ninety percent. Students are taught that the ideal is to be entirely intellectual and rational, and to judge all things by intellectual and rational standards. As a matter of fact, they seldom realize that any other standards exist. The vast mass of the submerged ninety percent of human personality they ignore, or deny, or try to suppress.

But the student cannot afford to adopt the intellectual and rational approach to fiction-writing. He must come at it by an entirely different road. He must abandon the scholastic methods to which he has been accustomed all his life, and the purely intellectual and rational standards of value with which he has been indoctrinated. "Education has not made great writers," observes Lafcadio Hearn. "On the contrary, they have become great in spite of education." The entire imaginative faculty, he says, "must be cultivated outside of education."

For the student to abandon abruptly the intellectual and rational values that he has been taught so thoroughly for so many years will not be easy. Many students can never accomplish it. But until the student learns that by *merely* taking thought, by being *merely* intellectual and rational, he cannot add one cubit to his creative stature, he cannot be a good writer of fiction. He must, in a sense, become de-educated. A Phi Beta Kappa key is not the passkey to creative writing; more often than not, it is a ball-and-chain. It represents an intellectual and rational triumph by an intellectual and rational personality—when what is wanted is creativeness.

2. FEELING. So completely intellectual and rational has been the ideal of the schools that no generic term exists to describe a deep and lasting emotional attitude of a personality. We may say that a personality is "pessimistic" (like Hardy), or "optimistic" (like Dickens), or "brash" (like Kipling), or "disillusioned" (like Dos Passos), or "cynically melancholy" (like Conrad), or "hypersensitive" (like Proust), or "gloomy" (like Dreiser), or "satiric" (like Lewis), or "flippantly unmoral" (like Oscar Wilde)—but even the word "feeling" (used at the head of this section) is inadequate to include these attitudes. The only reason the word is used here is that it is the least inaccurate of all that might be chosen; the reader must not be misled into thinking it implies a mere temporary or single emotion.

The fiction-writer's approach to his work must always be that of *feeling*—"a deep and lasting emotional attitude" toward his subject. It cannot be merely intellectual and rational. Unless the young writer *feels,* unless he is totally *possessed* by feeling about his subject, unless he overwhelmingly desires to make his reader *feel* the same way (have the same deep and lasting emotional attitude) toward the subject, he can never write good fiction.

Often the feeling cannot be described, or certainly not described in a single word. The feeling back of Hemingway's "The Killers" was doubtless a horrible fascination with the cold-blooded business of gangsterism. In Katherine Mansfield's "Her First Ball" it was a sense of the poignancy and the quick-passingness of youthful joy. In Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" it was a sad, fierce, bitter awareness of the awful evil of which the human heart is capable. In Saki's

"Tobermory" it was amused contempt for a certain section of British society. Without comparable feeling (or perhaps several related feelings) about his own subject, the young fiction-writer will fail.

3. THOUGHT. It is widely taught that intellect and emotion are natural enemies. In a sound mind, however, they are friends and allies. For example, the more one reasons about the folly, waste, and cruelty of war, the more one loathes war; the more one reasons about certain social and economic injustices, the more intensely one feels about them; the more one reasons about a person one loves (if he is really worthy of love), the more one loves that person. Certain types of minds act as if feeling were not a value worth cultivating; and certain types of minds act as if thought and logic were not worth cultivating. But the fiction-writer belongs to neither type. He knows that both must be cultivated.

Feeling weighs more than thought in fiction, as in life. But the fiction-writer (especially in the twentieth century) must be something of a philosopher, a critic of life, a theorizer about life, a scientific observer of life, sometimes a satirist, sometimes a promoter of ideas, sometimes a revealer of hidden truths, sometimes a solver of social problems or moral problems or economic problems or political problems or psychological problems or racial problems. Indeed, the very greatest fiction has always been interfused with what has been called "fundamental brain-work." Nevertheless, a caution must be reiterated: thought, intellectuality, is desirable, perhaps necessary, in good fiction; but it is not so vital as feeling—or even the faculty to be mentioned next.

4. IMAGINATION. The fiction-writer must have the kind of mind that can, or will, convert feeling and thought into concrete imagery. An earlier chapter of this book has discussed imagery at some length. All that need be said here is that the fiction-writer expresses his feeling and his thought in concrete images: (1) in words and phrases whose sounds create patterns and rouse feeling; (2) in descriptive details appealing to the sight, sound, taste, and other senses; (3) in concrete characters; (4) in entire scenes with characters visualized as speaking and moving against an imagined background; and (5) in large works conceived in terms of certain forms.

III. Cultivation of Values

Because of our characteristic intellectualized education, easy habit, or mere utilitarian living, most people do not possess the values that enter into good fiction. Yet many of these values can be cultivated in any personality. The following sections, and the exercises that succeed them, suggest values which the young fiction-writer should have in approaching his problem, and means by which those values may be cultivated.

1. FEELING. The fiction-writer must view everything with feeling; if he does not do so already, he must cultivate the habit of doing so. As a matter of fact, he already has the habit—everybody has it. But in his pursuit of intellectual and external goals, he has permitted his emotional attitudes toward the world to be ignored, neglected, and allowed to die at last. As a child he experienced these emotional attitudes continually; and that is what so many critics have meant when they have said that the great artist is the one who recaptures the fresh vision of a child. But "shades of the prison-house begin to close about the growing boy"; utilitarian considerations smother the elemental emotions. It is the fiction-writer's task to get out of his prison-house, and get in touch once more with his long-neglected emotions.

For practice, wherever he goes and whatever he does, he should train himself to explore minutely, to follow doggedly, his faint and disregarded feelings about the world around him. Suppose he enters a classroom and sits down to hear a lecture. What is his emotional reaction to the room itself? Does it depress him? Does it seem coldly businesslike? Does its lightness and orderliness cheer him? Does it have unpleasant associations from the past?—Does his chair welcome him? As he settles into it, does he feel as if he were returning to an old, familiar friend? Or does he feel like a prisoner returning to his cell? Or does he feel repelled and unwelcome because of the chair's hardness and moroseness? Does the chair, sitting year after year in this same room, seem tired and unhappy?—And the people around him? Does the perfume of the young woman sitting on his left make him dream pleasantly of springtime and

flowers and open spaces and love? Or does it nauseate him? What does he feel about the young man on his right? Does he feel happier because of the young man's bright expression, or unhappier because it looks so vapid? Is it a face to admire or a face to pity? Does he feel that he might like the young man if he knew him better, or does he feel that he never wants to know him any better?—To explore the emotions suggested by such questions, to learn to draw up from the depths of the subconscious one's emotional reactions to every detail of daily life, is to be on the highroad to writing good fiction.

Not only must the young writer have feelings about concrete details; he must have them about abstract ideas as well. It was a powerful feeling about the injustice of the law that inspired Galsworthy's *Justice;* a powerful feeling about the absurdity of artificial knight-errantry that inspired *Don Quixote;* a powerful, and probably unconscious, feeling for the interestingness of an adventuress's life that inspired *Moll Flanders;* a powerful feeling for the amusing and heartily lustful life of rural England that inspired *Tom Jones;* and, as Arnold Bennett himself has said, a powerful feeling for the changes wrought in human beings by time that inspired *An Old Wives' Tale.* The young fiction-writer almost certainly has feelings about a hundred such matters; but he probably hasn't realized it. His business as a writer is to discover and cultivate those feelings.

2. OBSERVATION. Most people are such victims of habit, or so accustomed to regarding all objects for their utilitarian value alone, that they seldom observe anything. They do not know how the color of the sky at the horizon differs from its color at the zenith; they cannot reproduce the general shape of an oak leaf; they cannot describe the wrapper of their favorite gum or candy-bar; they do not know the eye-color of their history professor, and cannot describe his voice; they cannot describe the difference between a meadowlark's song and a redwing blackbird's; they cannot remember the size, color, and shape of buildings they can see from their study window; they use a chair or a desk or a book or a pen or a knife or a pencil-sharpener, and do not know what it looks like or

feels like or sounds like or smells like. Yet it is of just such details as these that fiction largely consists.

The young fiction-writer can do much to cultivate the observational powers that are probably undeveloped within him. First, he can deliberately exercise his observation at all odd moments when his mind is not otherwise occupied—as when he is riding a bus, waiting to keep an appointment, walking along a street, or listening to a dull lecture. He can note precisely, *and state to himself in words,* details that he carefully or casually observes. Second, he can keep a notebook in which he sets down four or five brief concrete images every day. And finally, if he has the inclination, he can sketch or paint. It is not an accident that very many creative writers have also been artists, after a fashion, with pencil or brush. To draw or paint, one must observe details with a fresh and careful eye; and to write imaginatively, one must do the same thing.

3. PEOPLE. Perhaps those who are not interested in people do not even desire to write fiction. Yet many of those who get into fiction-writing classes have only a slight interest in people. Sometimes, however, they possess one saving grace: they are profoundly and intensely interested in themselves. This interest may make them boresome in conversation; but it is certainly no barrier, but actually a lift, on their road to becoming fiction-writers. To understand oneself is no mean accomplishment—and besides, it is one way to understand other people.

But the writer who appreciates only himself is capable of writing only vertical fiction, and perhaps very little of that. To write horizontal fiction, or much fiction of any kind, the writer must appreciate other people as well. He does not need to love them (Dos Passos' immense *U. S. A.*, with its hundreds of characters, has not one quite lovable or admirable character), or even understand them; he need be only intensely aware of people. If he is not aware of them already, he can deliberately cultivate awareness.

He can cultivate it on three planes. First, he can be industrious in merely noting, remembering, or recording external details about people: their face and body, their dress, their gestures, their voices,

what they say, what they do. He can do this by a mere process of non-participating observation, as suggested in the preceding section. He can watch them in the bus, on the street, in the classroom, at social gatherings—and when he gets home, he can jot down in a notebook some of the details he has observed.

Next, he can react emotionally to people. He can dislike them (and he should certainly observe the unlikeable people quite as carefully as the likeable ones); he can like them; he can feel contempt for them, or disgust, or admiration, or pity, or respect, or fear, or any other emotion, definable or indefinable. Most of the great nineteenth-century novelists, and many in the twentieth century, got no further than this in their reaction to characters. The feeling we have about people is usually quite different from the feeling we have about things. Our feeling about the latter comes entirely from ourselves; and even when we endow things with certain emotions, as when we speak of "an unfriendly room," "a merciless sun," "an unhappy flower,"[1] we are fully aware that it is ourselves who endow these things with feeling. But when we have a feeling about a person, we are very likely to have done a little interpretation, a little unconscious character-reading. We know that a person may very well be unfriendly, or merciless, or unhappy—and we react with certain feelings in return. If it is a small child who is unfriendly, we react by behaving and feeling almost excessively friendly; if it is a salesman in a shop who is unfriendly, we react by being even more unfriendly, and walking out of the shop; or if it is a bus driver who is unfriendly, we react by ignoring and forgetting him. The point is that our own feelings about people are often a function of what we think people are; we think we understand them, and our understanding makes us have a feeling about them.

Writers of what is considered the best modern fiction, however, seldom react by mere feeling to their concepts of people. Instead, the modern fiction-writer often assumes a scientific detachment,

[1] Endowing things with feelings which are actually our own is what Ruskin condemned as the "pathetic fallacy." But we need not take Ruskin too seriously. The pathetic fallacy is entirely respectable; it is as old as poetry itself, and has been used in great literature from the Bible down to today.

and tries to find out what makes people have certain characteristics. If a person seems unfriendly—why? Is it an inferiority complex working on him? Is he frightened? Has he been dominated so much by parents and others that he feels hostile to everybody? Is he a sensitively organized person who is hurt by close contact with the world? The modern fiction-writer delves into all these matters—and usually comes up with only one feeling for a character: sympathy. The villain is not so common in modern fiction as he formerly was; and when he does appear, he is treated quite objectively—no effort is made to understand him completely. "To understand all is to forgive all"; if we understood the villain in fiction, we should not have a villain.

All this leads up to a very important recommendation for the young fiction-writer. He should be familiar with the principal modern psychological theories involving personality; he should be especially familiar with the elements of Freudian psychology, both in Freud's own work and in the work of Freud's disciples and critics. And he should look into sociological-psychological works recording case histories of juvenile delinquents, criminals, and other socially maladjusted people. Acquaintanceship with these books is quite as important to the fiction-writer as acquaintanceship with books on the art of writing.

4. INFORMATION. What has just been said leads straight into the matter of being well informed. Readers nowadays expect to get information from fiction, especially from novels; they expect to be told something about "how the other half lives," or about some locality that they do not know or do not know so well as the writer knows it, or about some historical period, or about some other specialized field of knowledge (sailing ships, Egyptian archaeology, life on a submarine, dogs, mining coal, building dams, or the like).

The amount of information demonstrated by most great writers about a variety of subjects is amazing. Everything, literally everything, is grist for the writer's mill; and everybody, literally everybody, can make a contribution to him. He should read the newspapers and magazines (every type of magazine), books of science and books of history, books of criticism and biographies—about

every conceivable subject, idea, place, or person. He should try consciously to acquire knowledge about different varieties of tomatoes and the latest theory about the expanding universe, about the way a helicopter works and the poetry of T. S. Eliot, about the principal wild flowers of his region and the newest economic proposals about rehabilitating the world. In particular, he should cultivate a nodding acquaintance with art in all its aspects (painting, sculpture, architecture, music, writing, dancing, acting); natural history, especially in its local aspects (botany, zoology, meteorology); the most important local businesses or ways that people have of making a living; modern psychology; and (apparently more and more necessary nowadays) sociology and politics.

Much of the knowledge just mentioned the writer can get from reading. Much more he can get from observation of the world about him—nature, architecture, social classes, slum districts and wealthy districts, the work that people do, and people themselves. Most people have a special knowledge about something—about babies, cooking, pruning trees, digging a ditch, repairing a car, ancient history. When a writer meets a new person, he should try to draw him out, to suck him dry like an orange. (The remarkable thing is that the person himself is delighted to be drawn out.) Of course, some people can be sucked dry in a few minutes or a few hours—after which they may become bores. But there is nobody from a baby in its cradle to a professor of physics, from a teen-age boy to an octogenarian tenant farmer, who cannot contribute something valuable to the writer. The writer must learn to cultivate them all. He cannot afford to be snobbish, to hold himself aloof from people. The dirtiest, loudest, poorest, most ignorant, or most boorish people are the ones who can contribute most of all.

5. IDEAS. The fiction-writer should observe life, read about life, accumulate facts, gather data from many sources, and then generalize about it all. He should have theories, ideas, philosophy—about motivations of human behavior, morality as distinguished from conventionality, facts as distinguished from ideals in men's conduct, man's relation to the unknown, the essential nature of male and female or child and adult, the influence of environment

and of heredity in forming character, economic and social abuses and means of correcting them, the deep implications of certain political theories, and much besides.

If the writer does not already have ideas on such matters, he can cultivate them in several ways. First, he can do much reading in books and magazines devoted to economics, politics, philosophy, and the arts. Every library has more of these than any person can ever read. Just which of them the student reads makes little difference, provided he reads more than one on the same subject, and chooses those that interest him most. Next, he should cultivate the habit of deliberately disagreeing with the theories he reads, especially if those theories are conventional and generally accepted, and of trying to find sound arguments or specific examples that refute them. This habit of questioning the commonplace is a healthful and mentally stimulating practice, as well as a means of acquiring a stock of ideas that actually belong to oneself. Third, the writer should approach the problem from a more personal direction. When someone he knows acts in a certain way, or when he reads in the paper that someone has done or said something newsworthy (perhaps it is a murder, or a confession, or a public statement by an official, or an editorial, or the introduction of a bill in the legislature) —the writer should try to think out the reasons behind it all. It is not enough to say that the murderer is cruel—*why* is he cruel? It is not enough to say that an acquaintance acted thus-and-so because he is arrogant—*why* is he arrogant? It is not enough to say that the legislator does what he thinks is best for the people—*why* does he think this particular bill is best? Who are the people he wants to benefit? Could it be that he is rationalizing? All that is ever required for cultivating a large crop of ideas is to ask a diligent *why* of everything.

6. DELIGHT. For the honest fiction-writer, writing should be a delight—not a constant delight or a delight in every detail, but an overall delight, and a delight in at least some of the details. It does not matter that writing is work; creative work and accomplishment is almost the most satisfying activity that a person can engage in. When a writer becomes excessively bored with his work, it is due

to the fact that he needs a short vacation, is not actually creating, or is not cut out to be a writer. As a rule, the writer, with a little help, can dispose of the first of these troubles; nobody can take care of the last; and the writer himself, by listening to a little good advice, can take care of the middle one.

The writer can cultivate delight in his work by giving more and stricter thought to (a) the general architecture of his work: scenes, transitions, space requirements, exposition, contrasts, plot complication, movement, and so on; (b) the more minute, jewel-cutter's details of apt, brief, clear, suggestive, and beautiful sentence, phrase, and word; (c) the elaboration of sensuous appeal, the creation or re-creation of concrete images; (d) emphasis on the idea, theme, or philosophy for which the writer is trying, like a lawyer, to build up a case; (e) an increased attempt to view the subject, as a whole and in detail, emotionally, and to make the reader have the same emotion about it; and (f) the deep and intricate motivations that make his characters act as he has them act. In addition, the creative writer may consider himself as a kind of god taking delight in creating and peopling worlds—or he may consider himself a kind of emissary of God in revealing to others the marvels of the created universe. Browning expressed this idea dramatically in "Fra Lippo Lippi":

> You speak no Latin more than I, belike;
> However, you're my man, you've seen the world
> —The beauty and the wonder and the power,
> The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,
> Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!
> —For what? Do you feel thankful, aye or no,
> For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
> The mountain round it and the sky above,
> Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
> These are the frame to? What's it all about?
> To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
> Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.
> But why not do as well as say,—paint these
> Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
> God's works—paint any one, and count it crime
> To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works

Are here already; nature is complete:
Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
There's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that.

If none of these devices can prevent the writer from being bored with the task he has set himself, he has probably set himself the wrong task. It is too big for him; it is too difficult for him; he does not know as much about it as he thought he did; he is not able to be so original, creative, or self-expressive in it as he had hoped. He had better drop that task and undertake a new one.

7. IN CONCLUSION. No writer possesses, abundantly or completely, every desirable characteristic mentioned in this chapter. All writers are weak in one or more of them. The student need not feel that he is born to be a failure because he cannot live up to the standards outlined here. Furthermore, it is quite likely that the student has several of these characteristics without knowing it. For example, he may have observed without being conscious of it; images may have registered in his mind automatically. Or he may have an insight into the characters of people, and an understanding of their motive forces, without being aware of it. He has no way of knowing the truth about such matters till he has tested himself in writing.

It should be mentioned, moreover, that the suggestions already given in this chapter, as well as the exercises below, should be chiefly regarded as—exercises. They are like the finger exercises of a pianist. Everybody knows that finger exercises do not constitute good music, and that a pianist who is very proficient in finger exercises is not necessarily a great musician. But they may *help* the pianist become a great musician. In the same way, the suggestions and exercises of this chapter are not guaranteed to produce great writers. But they can *help*. They can open the eyes of the young writer to certain possibilities he may not have recognized previously; they can call attention to certain values that he did not know were

values; they may acquaint him with an approach that he may have stumbled past without noticing. In a word, this chapter is not meant to carry the student all the way along the road to perfect fiction-writing. It is meant only to show him, by persuading him to explore in certain directions, where the road to fiction-writing lies.

EXERCISES

I. The Writer as a Person

1. Egotism.

a. List the ways in which you think you differ from most other people;

or your five or ten outstanding traits as a person;

or several specific ambitions (perhaps about very minor matters of the next few days or weeks) that you have;

or some opinions of yours that differ from the opinions of your parents or of your best friend;

or your private emotional attitudes toward the town you live in, the college you attend, the group of friends you go with, or some particular course you are taking.

b. Briefly characterize eight or ten people whom you know much better than any of your friends or the people in your writing class know them.

c. List private emotional experiences of yours (pride, humiliation, grief, despair, love, pity, terror, hatred) that have had a deep or permanent effect on you.

d. List specific experiences of yours (sickness, travel, receiving honors, making speeches or acting in plays, visiting certain buildings or rooms or landscape features, fights, quarrels, accidents) that other people have not had.

2. Humility.

a. If possible, the writing class should be organized into a Writing Club where students can read their work, or have it read, and where other students criticize. If a club is not feasible, papers should frequently be read aloud in class, and the students allowed to criticize. But the students should remember five rules: Never be content with saying merely, "I like that" or "I don't like that"—be prepared to tell why; always say something good as well as something bad about a work—to encourage as well as to correct the writer, and to train your-

self to be generous and humble about other people's work; never be personal or make personal inferences or act as if you thought some story were autobiographical—stick to the work itself without getting outside it to make personal remarks; never criticize a work for not being or not doing what the writer did not want it to be or do; never spend much time finding fault with minutiae like anachronisms, slight inaccuracies of fact, minor inconsistencies, or debatable probabilities —merely point them out, and then drop the subject.

b. Read some of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake,* T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land,* and some of the poetry published in the 1940's and 1950's in *Poetry, The Sewanee Review,* and the *Kenyon Review,* and try to determine for yourself whether the writers were always sufficiently humble.

3. Character.

a. During at least a week, write for an hour at exactly the same time every day, regardless of what happens or how you feel.

b. Resolve never to let yourself get behind in your work in the writing class—and keep the resolution.

c. Recopy three times (revising each time) the first page of at least the next five manuscripts you hand in.

II. The Writer's State of Mind

1. De-education.

a. Make a list of occurrences in your life that have pleased you most; that have disturbed you most; that would please you most if they should happen; that would disturb you most if they should happen. What percentage of them have an entirely intellectual or rational basis, or are closely related to intellectuality or rationality?

b. Read over the section on "Rationalization" in Chapter XI, and do some of the suggested exercises. Do you think many of your opinions, your parents' opinions, your professors' opinions, or your friends' opinions are altogether intellectual and rational—or are they products of rationalization?

2. Feeling.

a. If you are reading stories in connection with your class in writing, try to express in words the feeling (the overall emotional attitude) of the writer of each story to his subject.

b. Analyze some of your own stories in the same way.

c. What are your two or three basic emotional attitudes toward people in general; the world in general; children; your contemporaries; your elders; animals; your own life?

d. Turn to the lists of story subjects suggested in the exercises of the two preceding chapters, and tell of the feeling with which you might approach several of them.

3. Thought.

a. Turn to the lists of story subjects mentioned just above, and see which ones might be used as vehicles for some more-or-less philosophical ideas of yours about human nature, environment, heredity, modern morality, economics, and so on.

b. Probably you have often in life implied that you have a generalized philosophy about human nature by saying: "People are like that!" "Isn't that just like a man—or a woman!" "What else could you expect of an Englishman—a Negro—a white man—a Jew—a Christian—a Protestant—a Catholic—a carpenter—a college professor!" "After all, we shouldn't be surprised because a child acts like a child." Write down more precisely some of the ideas implied in these generalizations.

c. Do you have any specific economic, educational, or social theories that you hold by very firmly? Write them down as briefly, but precisely, as possible.

d. Do you have any specific theories about men's duties or obligations to one another? To their country? To their class? Write them down.

e. Do you have any specific theories about God's relation to man, or man's relation to God? Write them down.

f. Could you plan a story illustrating the truth of some of these theories? (The characters and action would probably be symbolistic —as described in Section 8 of Chapter XIV.)

4. Imagination.

Turn back to some of the exercises (not previously done) that were suggested in connection with Chapter VII.

III. Cultivation of Values

1. Feeling.

a. Briefly describe the following so as to show the feeling you have about them, or to make the reader have a feeling about them:

a pencil; a pair of shoes; an automobile; your classroom; the building in which your classroom is located; an insect; a fish; a cat; a cow; a flower; a lawn; a hedge; a tree.

b. What is your feeling about the following:

college life; some job you have once held; the city or locality where you live; the maturity and old age that will come to you; marriage; the single life; private charity; America's present

foreign policy, or domestic economic policy, or some aspect of either; orthodox morality; immortality.

2. Observation.

a. Write a brief descriptive sentence about each of at least twenty details that you can see in the room you are now in.

b. Write a careful and considerably longer description of one of these details.

c. Write careful descriptions of the following:

some bird's song; the noise in a classroom before the instructor appears; a particular flower; a particular insect; smells in a kitchen, or in a restaurant, or in a grocery store; your cat asleep; your cat stalking a bird; your cat reacting to a dog; your cat wanting to be fed.

d. Turn back and do some more of the exercises (not previously done) that were suggested in connection with Chapter VII.

3. People.

a. Watch some lecturer for an hour or so, and, as he talks, jot down a list of specific details about his dress, his facial expressions, his gestures with hands and arms and head, movements of his body, his voice.

b. Do the same for one of a group of children playing outside your window; or for a young man and young woman sitting together; or for your mother as she goes about her housework.

c. Look about at the students in one of your classes, or at people passing a street corner, or at any other group of people, and write down your feeling about each individual. You need not try to be fair to the individual; just blurt out your first feeling in looking at him.

d. Read any of the books on the psychology of personality, and books or magazine articles recording psychological or sociological case histories, that your library contains. Be sure to include Freud's work, or commentaries on it, and probably Jung's work. Learn the Freudian concept of dreams, and the meaning of the following terms: *libido, the unconscious, mental conflict, repression, sadism, masochism, Oedipus complex, extrovert* and *introvert, ambivalence, defense mechanisms, phobias, projection, sublimation* and *substitution.* Learn the symptoms of *paranoia, dementia praecox, manic-depression, schizophrenia.*

4. Information.

a. Go to your library and discover the major classifications in its system. Note the ones in which you feel yourself totally ignorant, and then read elementary books on those subjects.

b. The next time you are thrown with a stranger, try to draw him out. When you get home, jot down in a notebook what you have learned from him.

5. Ideas.

a. Do what is suggested in the second paragraph of this section; that is, read some recent magazine or newspaper (choose a notoriously conservative or notoriously radical one) and then deliberately try to prove to yourself that its point of view is false.

b. Do the same for some popular professor.

c. Can you put up a good argument for disagreeing with anything you have read in the present chapter of this book?

d. Consider the last time you took offense at someone's actions or remarks. Can you imagine any reason *why* the offender acted or spoke as he did?

6. Delight.

Which of the methods of cultivating delight (suggested in this section) do you consider most applicable to your own problems and your own character? Which sorts of delight predominated when you wrote your last story?

CHAPTER XVI

The Substance of Fiction

Up to this point, we have discussed fiction somewhat as we might discuss an automobile. We have told the general nature of the fictional automobile, have mentioned the chief types of automobiles, and have outlined the requirements of drivers. In the present chapter we shall point out, one by one, the different parts that compose the automobile and make it work.

1. FEELING. The word *feeling* keeps bobbing up incessantly when we talk about fiction. Feeling is like steel in our automobile; practically everything in fiction is feeling. It takes many forms, but the elemental substance is the same. The one indispensable substance the writer must put into fiction is feeling, because the one indispensable substance the reader requires in fiction is feeling. It is the substance which is molded into character, setting, action, idea, and style. Before an automobile can exist, there must be steel; and before fiction can exist, there must be feeling.

2. SUBJECT. Fiction must be *about* something. Unlike some forms of modern painting or sculpture, in which design exists abstractly, like an algebraic equation, fiction is representational. The representation may be either "lifelike" or distorted. But fiction is about *something*. It has subject matter consisting of people, events, ideas, background, and perhaps much more.

In general, the young fiction-writer should follow four rules, or commandments, about the subject:

a. *Write about a world with which you are familiar.* The word here is *a* world, not *the* world. Every person is familiar with many worlds. A college student, for example, is familiar with the world of youth as a whole, the high-school world, several geographical worlds (city, section of city, county, section of country, country) where

he has lived or visited, several economic worlds (rich, poor, middle class) that he has observed, church world, the racial or professional world to which his parents belong, any world where he has ever held a job, his intimate family world, any world (sports, army, night clubs, shipboard, airplane) where he has ever had an experience, the private world of his own dreams and fantasies, and (if he has ever studied any one topic intensively) the world of that particular topic. With all these worlds to choose from, the fiction-writer need never be at a loss for a subject. He need not write about British royalty, the antebellum South, Chicago gangsters, or pirates in the Malay seas.

It should be remembered, moreover, that familiarity with any world is a relative matter. Nobody ever knows everything about any one of his worlds; and if the young writer waits until he is very thoroughly informed about any world before writing, he will never write. One need not have lived in a place all his life in order to write about it; for example, O. Henry never lived in Nashville, but his "A Municipal Report," set in Nashville, is a superb story. One need not have been a rancher to write about roundups; seeing one roundup is enough. One need not be a gardener in order to write about roses, or a mother in order to write about children, or an ornithologist in order to write about birds. What a writer usually does in actual practice is to conceive the idea of writing about one of the worlds with which he is more or less acquainted, and then accumulate more precise details about it by means of specifically directed observation, inquiry, or reading. Of course, if one already knows enough about the subject to write from his memory or knowledge of it, so much the better.

b. *Choose for subject matter anything in one of your worlds that has stirred a feeling in you*—joy, amusement, grief, anger, pity, wonder, delight, bliss, adoration, admiration, horror, indignation, hatred, contempt, bewilderment, frustration, disappointment, disillusionment, or anything else. The feeling need not be strong; it need only be pervading and real. It may be a feeling, as already suggested, for a character, a place, an idea, an action, or a situation. You are delighted with a fine play in a crisis on the football field;

that is a subject for fiction. You are amazed that two such persons as A and B should be married; that is a subject for fiction. You recall the pain of some of the disillusionments you have suffered in college; that is a subject for fiction. You feel sorry for a child begging on the streets; that is a subject for fiction.

c. *Prefer the unusual to the customary and commonplace as a subject.* Actually, everything, if looked at in a certain way, is out of the ordinary—for the simple reason that every character is a unique individual, every situation involving such a unique character is therefore unique, and every incident is unique because it happens at a time that never has been before and never will be again. Moreover, some writers (like Jane Austen and Arnold Bennett) have a genius for charming the reader with the fascination of the commonplace; and some (like Chekhov, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Wolfe, and sometimes even Maupassant) can make high drama out of the ordinary by revealing the emotional tensions, or perhaps the social significances, lying beneath the surface. Nevertheless, the student would probably do well to start his fiction-writing career by dealing with an unusual subject. Later on he may experiment to see whether he is a new Jane Austen or Arnold Bennett.

But the word *unusual* is also relative. One kind of unusual subject is that which would make a newspaper headline or "stop a crowd in a street." It might be a war, a riot, a fight, a murder, a pursuit, a celebrity, a freak, an experience with the supernatural, an accident, a convict, an exploration, some far-off and little-known place like the Arctic or central China or islands of the South Seas, a strange group of cultists, a little-known pocket or stratum of our own society, or the like. On the other hand, unusual subjects may be nothing more than unsensational out-of-the-ordinary incidents in the lives of rather ordinary characters: a broken doll in the life of a little girl, a chance meeting of two former lovers, a college student's interview with his draft board, the birth of a baby, a quarrel with one's lover, a love affair, a marriage, an operation, going to the circus, and so on. The interest of such stories (Chekhovian stories they would be) would lie in the characters revealed, the psychological states suggested, the emotional conflicts implied, certain types of

society or of character presented, a setting created or represented, a fanciful world invented.

d. *A subject should always be at least two subjects.* In the nineteenth century the fiction-writer could tell a story of a love affair between characters, with various misunderstandings, false accusations, and other obstacles to the happy consummation of the love—and that was all there was to it. Indeed, a great many stories in the "popular" magazines today require nothing else but a story—nothing but an interesting subject (usually love or adventure) worked into an interesting plot. But the modern story with any serious pretensions to literary merit exists on two levels. If it is a war story, it will not only recount war adventures, but will illustrate some feeling or philosophy of the writer's concerning war or men at war. If it is a love story, it will try to reveal the intricate nature, the curious sources, the odd manifestations of the emotion of love broadly conceived. If it is a story about a child, it will not be a story about one child, but about all children—about their problems, their struggles, their griefs, their joys, the fundamental nature of child psychology, the difficulties an adult has in getting into the child mind or child point of view. *Alice in Wonderland* could probably not be written today, and neither could *Robinson Crusoe.* Neither the authors nor the readers of those books would be satisfied to have them remain what they are: pure studies in fantasy; modern authors and readers would want all the characters and events to have a deeper meaning, a symbolic significance. When books of pure fancy (without deeper meaning) such as these are written today, the critics slight them and they are soon forgotten. One out of a thousand or so of them (*Anthony Adverse, Gone with the Wind, Forever Amber*) may become a popular best seller, usually for a very short time; but then they are forgotten. Serious fiction in the twentieth century must nearly always have more in it than appears on the surface; its subject is both individual and general.

3. THEME. What has just been said about the dualism of subject overlaps the topic of theme in fiction. The theme is the essential idea, or intellectual concept, of which the characters and action are specific illustrations. It is the generalized abstraction covering the

concrete instances of the story. Fiction is not philosophy and it does not philosophize or preach, but good fiction is always philosophic. It generalizes about life, expresses ideas about life, comes to some intellectual conclusion about life (even if the conclusion is that no conclusion is possible). Professor J. W. Mackail, of Oxford, once expressed the idea thus: "Life, as it presents itself to us as we pass through it, has no pattern, or at least none (except to some people of very simple and fervid religious belief) that is certain and intelligible. It is multiplex and bewildering; its laws are confused; it does not satisfy our hopes or our aspirations: sometimes it seems purposeless. . . . It makes no pattern." Good fiction makes out of life some intelligible pattern, draws some kind of meaning out of the multiplex, bewildering, and confused world. Good fiction has theme. Indeed, says David Masson, "the value of any work of fiction, ultimately and on the whole, is the worth of the speculation, the philosophy, on which it rests." Of course, it by no means follows that a piece of fiction having the deepest philosophic or moral import, one expressing the profoundest truths about human life, is necessarily great or even good fiction. But really good fiction cannot exist without philosophical content, without theme.

The theme may be trite and painfully obvious, as in certain Sunday-School stories; it may be highly original and thought-provoking, as in Shaw, Wells, and Galsworthy—where also the theme is often too obvious; or it may be subtle, something merely suggested or implied or vaguely felt by the reader and perhaps not clearly understood by the writer, as in Conrad, Bennett, Faulkner, Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and Virginia Woolf. But even in these last, a theme is present, and is profound.

4. CHARACTERS. a. Perhaps the first, and most obvious, thing to be said about characters in fiction is that, in general, the narrative should be centered about *one character*. But this advice should be taken with reservations. Sometimes a group of people (a family or a squad of soldiers, for example) may constitute the central "character." Sometimes it may be a house, or a locality, or an animal, or even a half-personified force in nature like a storm, a sea, a mountain, or a drouth.

Furthermore, in a very long narrative (like Bennett's *Old Wives' Tale*) the central character may change from part to part, or even from chapter to chapter. Finally, in some chapters, or parts, or even entire works, the interest may be focused on no one character, but may be divided among many—though such a scattering of interest is very unusual.

As a general rule, however, the young fiction-writer should decide from the beginning that his work will be centered about one character, or two at most. This means that the one character will be given most space; his actions, thoughts, and emotions will be recorded in greatest detail; little or nothing will be narrated if it does not concern him or does not happen in his presence; and the world in which he lives will be seen as through his eyes and nobody else's. As in a photograph, he will be in sharp focus constantly, and all the other characters will be more or less out of focus except as they move very close to him.

b. Some characters are highly *individualized,* and exist because they are intrinsically interesting—like the designs in a kaleidoscope, or a three-legged duck, or a midget. Many of Fielding's and Dickens's minor characters are of this type, as are some major characters in other authors (Silas Marner, Quasimodo, Becky Sharp, the Mayor of Casterbridge). Such characters are likely to predominate in stories of the Maupassantian type.

c. *Typical characters* have always appeared in fiction, and are more common today in serious fiction than are individualized characters. A character may be typical in several ways. He may be typical of a period of life (childhood, the teens, youth, and so on), of a sex, of a time in history, of a geographical region, of a race, of a trade or profession, of a social class, of a manner of thinking or acting or feeling (the ambitious person, the religious person, the wastrel, the disillusioned, the person maladjusted in any number of ways, the coward, the melancholic, and so on). Furthermore, he can be typical in several of these ways at once; for example, he could be a happy-go-lucky peasant boy of teen age in fifteenth-century England (manner of feeling, class, sex, age, time in history,

geographical locality)—or he could be a grouchy old aristocratic landowner in Virginia today. Oddly enough, if one gives any character a large number of typical traits, the character becomes individualized.

Typical characters are in demand nowadays because this is a scientific age—and a typical character gives the reader solid information about some group of people, and seems to be the inductive result of extensive observation on people.

d. *Static characters* prevail in most short stories and many novels. They are characters (like those in Chaucer's Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*) that do not change while we know or observe them; they remain throughout a piece of fiction just what they were at the beginning. Most love stories in the popular magazines have such characters; so do stories of sports and outdoor adventure; so do most humorous stories; so do certain analytical stories whose chief concern is to reveal a psychological condition that exists.

e. *Developing characters*, those that change, are usually more interesting than static characters. They are more interesting because they indicate more skill and understanding on the part of the author, and because they are more true to life than are static characters. In the real world, our mannerisms vary from year to year; our opinions, our habits of action, our customary reactions change as we change places of residence, grow older, and learn more from experience. When a teacher is young, he wants to fail all his students; as he grows older, he wants to pass them all. When he is young, he believes he knows a good deal; as he grows older, he doubts whether he knows anything. When he is young, he tries to help people with good advice; as he grows older, he knows that nobody ever takes advice.

A writer who can trace the growth of such differences in character, can account for them by the experiences he allows his character to undergo, and can present them convincingly, always has a higher place among the critics than does a writer who portrays merely static characters. Nearly all the greatest works of fiction show the development of characters: *Macbeth* shows it; *Hamlet*

shows it; *Julius Cæsar* shows it; *Antony and Cleopatra* shows it; *Les Misérables* shows it; *Crime and Punishment* shows it; *The Doll's House* shows it.

The words "development" and "change" as used here are meant to signify *growth.* The mere changing of a character's nature from good to evil or from evil to good, or from wisdom to folly or from folly to wisdom, and so on, is easily portrayed. Moreover, such out-and-out transformations may, at first glance, seem quite plausible. A man's son dies—and the father, grief-stricken, resolves to be sober thereafter. Or a respectable woman cannot retain her lover, and so, in vexation, resolves to be bad. Or a man who has intervened to help settle a family quarrel gets into difficulties with the entire family—and so resolves never again to be so foolish as to interfere in a family quarrel.

It is easy to project such changes, mere transformations as they are, into fiction. But if we regard character development not as mere change, but as growth, we must ask ourselves, "What did this new phase of character grow from? What was the seed within the character which was only waiting the proper encouragement to unfold?" Before a writer can venture to attempt the portrayal of character growth, he must ask himself, Have I planted the seed for such growth? If Macbeth had not had the seed of ambition within him, the witches could never have egged him on into crime; if Hamlet had not had the seed of strength in him, he could never have grown into the resolute courage which was his after his return from England; if Brutus had not had the seed of personal honor and affection in him, he could never have become the sad and remorseful man he was on the eve of Philippi. Sudden conversions do not indicate character growth: they are always unwarranted in a well-constructed plot, and they are not true to life.

Moreover, it is not character growth when, under the pressure of extraordinary circumstances, some hitherto reliable bulkhead of character gives way. For example, when, in the almost notorious play *Rain,* the woman's wickedness at first gave way, and then the preacher's virtue, there was no real change in either the woman or the preacher. Neither had before been subjected to such a strain

as both encountered on the island; if they had been, they would have given way before. On the island they underwent new experiences; but after those experiences the woman was actually no better and the man actually no worse than they had been before. Their true characters were merely exposed by the new incidents. But character exposure and character development are not the same thing.

5. BACKGROUND. The background against which characters move and within which the action occurs was only incidental in the very earliest fiction. But beginning with the historical novel of the early nineteenth century (Scott and his followers), background became very important. A little later (with Kingsley, Dickens, Thackeray, and Eliot) the social background was introduced. Still later, what may be called the geographical background began to take precedence over the other types. It was extremely important in *Wuthering Heights* (1846) and became all-important in the "local colorists" of America (Bret Harte, George W. Cable, Charles Egbert Craddock, Thomas Nelson Page, Mary Wilkins Freeman). Today all these types of background figure in fiction, sometimes all together, and usually much more exact and circumscribed in scope than previously. Thus, today we should probably not have a book like Scott's *Ivanhoe* about medieval England in general; we should have instead a book about persons belonging to the armorer's trade in a certain section of London in 1202.

Probably the majority of stories published in most of the magazines of our time have little important background material; the stories could have happened almost anywhere in modern America to almost any generalized class of people. On the other hand, some of the best stories (one thinks of Faulkner, Steinbeck, Welty) are built solidly into a background without which the story could not exist. And practically all of the best novels depend similarly on background.

The ideal (which, of course, cannot always be attained) is to have background, actions, and characters so interdependent that no one of them could exist without the others. What happens in New Orleans could not possibly happen in Chicago; what happens in

1875 could not possibly happen in 1925; what happens in the Mexican section of San Antonio could not possibly happen in the wealthy Anglo-American section of the same city. Narratives written as if they happened vaguely somewhere at approximately some time to people who make their living at some vaguely suggested business may not always be bad; but they might be better if they used background creatively.

6. INFORMATION. The serious reader of modern fiction expects it to give him information. That is one reason why background is so important. The serious reader may expect fiction to teach him something about history—but not vague, generalized history. Probably he has a pretty good idea of the American scene in 1875, say; but he expects his fiction to give him a precise view of Memphis, Tennessee, or of Bangor, Maine, or of Portland, Oregon, in 1875. Moreover, he would like to have his fiction teach him a little about social classes and the means by which certain groups of people make a living. He would want to know exact details about cotton buying in Memphis in 1875, or the lumber trade in Bangor, or the fishing industry in Portland; and he would want to know what races of people, economic classes, social groups, and intellectual types made up the population of Memphis, Bangor, and Portland in 1875, 1900, or today. If he did not get this historical, social, and economic information, he would ask, at any rate, for a picture of the landscape, details of costume, manners of speech, and other external details. If he were denied this, he would wish for some new philosophical idea in his fiction, or some large truth about God or mankind, or some analysis or criticism of society, or some revelation about certain moral or political theories. And if he were denied all this, he would wish, at least, for some increased knowledge of child psychology, or the psychology of elderly people, or the psychology of love, or abnormal psychology, or the psychology of the college student, the college professor, or the college president.

One of the most significant distinctions between poor fiction and good fiction today is that the former is almost barren of information, and the latter is rich in it.

7. CHANGE. The fundamental element of all narrative is time.

A genuine narrative does not merely reveal or describe a static situation; it tells what has occurred in time. Now, time is conceived and measured by means of *change.* Accordingly, the first question the fiction-writer must ask himself about his prospective story is, *What kind of change is to be effected in my story?* The change may be of various kinds:

a. It may be a change in the relationship of characters to one another. A couple may be unmarried when the story opens, and married when it closes; the hero may be a victim of oppression at the beginning, and a victor at the end; he may be loved by others at the beginning, and hated at the end.

b. The change may be in the relation between a character and his environment. Robinson Crusoe is apparently at the mercy of nature when he is shipwrecked, but as the story progresses he becomes master; in the old Alger books the poor boy would come to the city, where he would be duped and cheated on every hand until he at last became knowing in the ways of New York; in the old-fashioned picaresque novel, the hero would start life as a football of fortune, and would end as a successful and wealthy man.

c. The change may be within a character himself—a change brought about by environment (as in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*), by other characters (as in *Silas Marner,* where Silas's whole nature is softened by the presence of little Effie), or by deep physical or spiritual experience (as in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Macbeth*). This type of change has always appealed most strongly to critics, not only because it requires the most consummate skill on the writer's part, but also because it is creation in the process, human personality in the crucible, the actual labor throes by which all that is significant in character comes into being.

d. The change may be in the reader's knowledge. On the most elementary plane, this knowledge may involve nothing more than knowing what happened. Did Robinson Crusoe get off his island at last? Did the hero find the buried treasure? Did the detective ever find out who committed the murder? Or it may involve elements in character, in which there is a gradual revealing (as in *Hamlet*) of the depths and complexities of a character. Or it may involve ele-

ments of human nature and of society—as in *Vanity Fair* or *Babbitt* where the reader discovers, in the course of the story, some characteristics of society at a certain time and place. Or it may involve the reader's increasing insight into the laws of life, or his introduction to a new philosophy.

e. Finally, though this should probably be included under the change in the relationship of characters, the change may be in the knowledge which some characters in the story have about other characters. In *Tom Jones,* for example, most of the action centers about the way various people misunderstand Tom, but eventually come to know him.

8. STRAIGHT NARRATIVE OR OBSTRUCTED NARRATIVE. The change that occurs in every narrative may occur steadily, without interruption or obstruction from any source. Thus a boy and a girl may fall in love at first sight, resolve to marry, and get married—with never any doubts, misunderstandings, jealousies, quarrels, parental objections, or financial difficulties. But that is not what usually happens, nor would it make a very interesting story in itself. *Straight narratives* of this sort (for example, stories of travel, accounts of hunting trips, newspaper stories, narratives about unusual experiences) derive any interest they may have from the intrinsic interest of their subject, or from the subtlety and skill of their portrayal of character, or from their descriptions or their style, or from the curious or unusual nature of the events they record. They are not interesting just as narratives.

For the purposes of the fiction-writer who wishes to tell a story that readers will enjoy for its own sake, *obstructed narrative* is essential. The boy and the girl who fall in love do not immediately become engaged and get married straightway, without doubt, difficulty, question, self-question, objection, delay, or obstruction from any source; and their story would not be interesting if they did. The fiction-writer makes their story interesting by throwing in all sorts of obstructions, and letting the characters struggle to remove these obstructions.

This kind of narrative may be conceived as a series of incidents —some of them tending toward a certain conclusion or result, and

some of them tending toward a different conclusion or result. Thus, there is an interplay of what may be called positive and negative forces. The positive forces have a common direction or movement toward a certain end; the negative forces run counter to this trend, or obstruct it. Suppose, for example, I leave my home to go to a theatre downtown. I go out, get in my car, ride to the theatre district, park my car, walk to the theatre, present my ticket, and go in. This is straight narrative. But suppose the story went like this: I leave my home in my car, but halfway to the theatre I discover that I have forgotten my ticket, and must return home for it. Here is a positive force moving in one direction, and a negative force obstructing it. Suppose I go back and get my ticket, and start out once more—and run out of gasoline on the way. The positive force is obstructed by another negative force. Then I get gasoline and start out again—and before I have gone two blocks I find that I have a flat tire. Positive and negative again. The story might go on endlessly thus. All I need to do is to think up more and more obstructions: an arrest for speeding, a train blocking a street, a fire to be gone around, a minor traffic accident, no parking place available near the theatre, and so on.

Joseph Conrad's "Youth" uses this method in a very simple and obvious form: the ship bound for the East is delayed by a whole series of accidents that fall as obstructions to its successful voyage. "Heart of Darkness" uses the same device, but a little more subtly. The picaresque novel of the eighteenth century consisted almost exclusively of this obstructed narrative; and most romantic novels of the early nineteenth century consisted of very complicated obstructions to a main character's reaching rather simple objectives. Most of Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth*, for example, is an account of an ingenious variety of obstructions that the young Erasmus met in attempting a journey from Holland to Italy.

9. QUEST AND CONFLICT. Most books on fiction-writing say a great deal about "conflict" in a story. But perhaps Miss Eudora Welty came very near the whole truth when she said in the *Atlantic* for March, 1949: "On some level all stories are stories of search." Perhaps, however, "Quest" is a better word than "search." In most sto-

ries, at any rate, someone is in quest of something. Someone is in quest of a wife, a fortune, an honor, a murderer, a victory, truth, righteousness, knowledge, power. Whenever anyone starts in quest of anything, a story is begun.

Sometimes the quest is initiated out of a character's own desires—as when a character wishes to marry someone, or to find a buried treasure, or to graduate from college, or to escape from prison or from a desert island. And sometimes a quest, like greatness, is thrust upon a character—as when the necessity of avenging his father is thrust upon Hamlet, or the necessity of saving the Roman Republic is thrust upon Brutus, or when the necessity of making adjustments to a new kind of world is thrust upon "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" in Katherine Mansfield's story of that name. The quest may be deliberate and self-conscious (as in *Treasure Island*), or it may be unexpressed by the author and unrecognized by the characters (as in Ellen Glasgow's *Vein of Iron*, in which the quest of all the characters is to live a reasonably happy and decent life). Most stories and novels end with the quest either attained by the seeker, or denied to him. But there are variations on the pattern. For example, a story may be largely concerned with the fate of a character *after* he has succeeded or failed in his quest; much of Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* is this sort of story, and so is that portion of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* which tells what happened to the boy Quentin after the failure of his impossible love. Or a story may bring a character up to the point where he realizes that a quest, a hopeless quest, lies before him—and leave him there; Katherine Mansfield's "Miss Brill" does this by letting us see the little old lady quite happy and contented, and ending with an incident that makes her lose her happiness and content forever. The same author's "Bliss" shows a wife exquisitely happy in her marriage but realizing at the very end of the story that her husband is in love with another woman. In both these stories the quest is implicit in the end; the women in both stories thought they were securely anchored, but henceforth they must drift without anchorage, though seeking one.

When a character pursues a quest, certain incidents show him on the way to attaining it, and certain others may show him having dif-

ficulty in moving toward it. These are the positive and the negative elements already mentioned. Sometimes the interplay of these two elements does create a *conflict.* But to apply the word *conflict* to a situation like that (outlined previously) in which a person going to the theatre runs into various difficulties and delays, or even like that in Conrad's "Youth," is employing the word rather loosely. Conflict implies strife, and strife implies opposing wills.

Conflict may exist on one of three planes: (1) The action may derive from the conflicting wills of two people (or groups of people), as when police try to capture a criminal and the criminal tries to prevent them from capturing him, or when one body of soldiers tries to take a hill and another body tries to hold it, or when one person tries to keep a secret and another tries to discover it, or when one man tries to marry a girl and another man tries to marry the same girl. (2) The action may derive from the conflicting wills of several people (or groups of people), as when a criminal is trying to escape, the police are trying to capture him, another person is trying to make an innocent person seem to be the criminal, and the innocent person is trying to prove his innocence; or when one man is trying to marry a certain girl, another man is trying to marry the same girl, and the girl herself is trying to marry a third man. (3) The action may derive from the conflicting wills within one person, as when a man is attracted to two women at once, or a man wants to be honest but is tempted to be dishonest, or a man wants to be brave but is afraid, or a man is so incapable of making a choice between two objectives that he chooses a third.

Many books and many stories have used conflicts such as these; indeed, many people think that a story cannot exist without conflict. To be sure, conflict does intensify interest in fiction, and is almost a necessity in the "popular" stories and novels. But a story or a novel may be very fine literature, and yet have no conflict in the literal sense—as Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf have proved repeatedly.

10. PLOT. The commonest statement any teacher of writing hears from his students is, "Oh, I can't invent plots!" The first answer to that exclamation is, "You can write good stories without plot." And

the second answer is, "Creating a plot is the simplest thing in the world."

A writer creates a plot when he sets a character on a quest. That is the essence of plot.

The quest may be for something insignificant; but if it is to hold the reader's interest very long it must be for something that the character involved, or the reader himself, considers important.

The story of the quest may be told as straight narrative; but in any story that hopes to attract willing readers, the story must be told as obstructed narrative—with positive and negative elements.

All the incidents in the story should have some relation (positive or negative) to the central quest. (But sometimes, in a novel or a very long story, irrelevant incidents may be included for the sake of humor, character revelation, their intrinsic interest, the creation of a certain emotional atmosphere, or conveying necessary exposition.)

If a writer can be sure that his narrative fulfills the four requirements just listed (Change, Obstructed Narrative, Quest, Conflict), he can be sure that it has plot.

Perhaps it would be wise to mention here certain kinds of writing that do not constitute plot-narrative. (1) Interesting characters who talk together and do things, but who do not pursue some quest, do not make a plot. (2) An interesting scene with typical characters moving and speaking in it—backstage in a theatre, on the bridge of a ship, around a campfire on a cattle ranch, in a college classroom—does not make a plot. (3) An interesting situation in which characters are depicted—a married couple who are ill-matched, an oil well just brought in on the place of an ignorant farmer, a blind student at college, a child whose father has been murdered—does not make a plot. (4) An interesting incident that befalls a character—the sort of thing one might read about in a newspaper: a holdup, an automobile accident, a fire, a drowning, an attack by a mad dog—does not make a plot. (5) A series of unrelated incidents that happen to a single character—as in the picaresque novel, where the hero wanders about and runs into various adventures and misadventures—does not make a plot. (6) A quest for one thing that is attained, only to be followed by a quest for another thing, and so on, does not make a unified plot, but may make a series of plots.

11. COMPLICATIONS. Complications of plot are not a necessary substance of fiction; but they are worth striving for in a narrative of any length. Some devices for creating complications are the following:

(1) One device has already been mentioned; it is to have several people with mutually conflicting objectives—No. (2) in Section 9, above.

(2) A writer may create two or more objectives, instead of just one, for the main character to seek. Thus the hero may be trying to marry a certain girl, gain a fortune, serve his country, and vindicate himself of a false accusation all at the same time.

(3) There may be two or more persons, or groups of persons, with different sorts of quests in the same story. In other words, a story may have a plot and subplots. Thus a love affair of one young woman might be interesting; but adding the story of her sister's love affair going on simultaneously might make the narrative still more interesting. Shakespeare includes subplots in many of his plays; *Midsummer Night's Dream* consists of at least five series of actions running along together, and having characters crossing over from one to the other. Some skill is required, of course, for the several plots to be knit together by having characters in one be important or influential in the others.

(4) An apparently insignificant or unimportant character, incident, or object introduced early in the story may turn out to have a tremendous importance later on. Thus, in *A Tale of Two Cities,* the nurse and Jeremy Cruncher are apparently insignificant characters throughout much of the novel—yet they play an absolutely essential part at the crucial moment. In *Romeo and Juliet* the comparatively trivial incident in which an illiterate servant asks a bystander to read a note for him results in the entire tragedy of the play. And in *Lady Windermere's Fan* the fan is indispensable at the turning point of the action.

EXERCISES

1. Feeling.

   Turn back to the exercises suggested for Divisions II and III of the preceding chapter, and do some that you have not already done.

2. Subject.

a. In the text, certain generalized worlds of the college student were mentioned. For each of these general worlds, mention specific worlds of your own.

b. What is your predominant feeling about each of the specific worlds that you have just mentioned?

c. Which of your specific worlds seem to you rather more unusual than others? Have you had any unusual experiences (physical, mental, emotional) in the last week or so? What are they? Would any of them be an interesting subject for a story?

d. Could any of the worlds or the experiences you have just mentioned furnish subjects for stories on "two levels"? Turn back to the story topics suggested in the exercises of preceding chapters, and decide which ones might become stories on "two levels."

3. Theme.

a. In one rather long but precisely worded sentence, express at least one of your fundamental ideas (not feelings) about each of the following:

> women; men; small girls; small boys; some course you are taking or have taken in college; the principal defect of your college; the students of your college; the principal weakness of the home training you have received; the principal defect of the career you have planned; patriotism; sexual morality; why most people go to church; destiny; war; socialism; communism; the profit motive in business; private charity; public charity; idealism.

b. Turn back to the exercises on p. 306, and reconsider them.

c. Find subjects for the following themes (all taken from the *Maxims* of La Rochefoucauld):

> Passion often makes able men foolish, and foolish men able.
>
> The constancy of wise men is only the art of suppressing the agitation of their hearts.
>
> In order to establish oneself in the world, one must do all one can to seem established.
>
> In the business of life we please more often by our faults than by our virtues.
>
> Great names lower instead of elevating people who do not know how to support them.
>
> People often do good in order to be able to do evil with impunity.

We are so accustomed to disguising ourselves from others that at last we disguise ourselves from ourselves.

There are people who would never have loved if they had never heard of love.

It is not enough for one to have good qualities; one must make use of them.

Weak persons cannot be sincere.

4. Characters.

a. For about twenty of the stories suggested in the lists, tell who the central characters would be.

b and c. Characterize about ten of your acquaintances (choose those who are least similar to one another) and try to express the types to which they belong. In characterizing the ten, use for each one all the types mentioned in the text (period of life, sex, geographical region, race, occupation, social class, manner of thinking or feeling).

Which ones of these characters seem most individualized?

d. Which ones of the characters you have just described seem to be interesting in themselves, just as they are—that is, which ones might be better left as mere static characters?

e. How might the personal traits of the people mentioned below grow into quite different (not necessarily opposite) traits under the circumstances mentioned?

A rebellious girl is forced to suffer hardships.
The same girl falls into a life of wealth and luxury.

A gay but foolish man marries a phlegmatic woman.
The same man marries a serious, ambitious woman.
The same man marries a foolish, vain woman.
Any of the women just mentioned marries the same man.

A wise and thoughtful author becomes a popular success.
The same man is never able to become a popular success.

A somewhat stupid girl goes to college.
The same girl stays at home on the farm.

A very kind man goes to war.
The same man becomes a social service worker.

5. Background.

From the lists of stories suggested in this book, choose about five that might profit by having their backgrounds developed fully. Briefly describe the backgrounds that you might use.

6. Information.

List several fields of information that you have and that you think your teacher probably does not have.

See also the very first exercises given for Chapter XV.

7. Change.

Plan five different stories showing five different kinds of change which may grow out of each of the following situations:

A young preacher from the city goes to take charge of a church in a small village.

Because of poverty and ill health, an old farmer has to go to the city and live with his daughter, whose husband is well-to-do.

8. Straight Narrative or Obstructed Narrative.

a. Plan straight narratives (that would be interesting because of their emotional, psychological, social, philosophic, or imaginative appeal) about each of the following:

Two hours at a dance; half an hour in a doctor's waiting room; a conference with a professor; a scene with your mother (if you are a young woman) after you have come home late at night; a scene with your father after you have done something that displeased him; half an hour shopping in a grocery store; meeting an old lover on the street; making a decision to do something that you know you shouldn't do; a night in a sick-bed; a conversation with a fellow passenger on a bus or train; a conversation with a classmate whom you do not know well.

b. Make a list of the imagined obstructions which might delay the smooth progress of the straight narratives suggested below:

A love affair between college students.

A six-day voyage.

A one-day train trip.

A new job.

An interview with a celebrity.

Finding a boarding place.

A girl trying to marry a man for his money.

A man trying to escape the unwelcome attentions of a young woman who has taken a fancy to him.

The problems of a young man who has just been elected to office on the reform ticket.

The problems of a young man who has graduated from an

agricultural school and gone back to his native county to start farming.

c. If the narratives just listed are unsatisfactory, choose narratives suggested in any of the other lists in this book.

9. Quest and Conflict.

a. Choose several of the characters you have worked with in Exercise 4, above, and give them quests. Can you think of several simultaneous quests for any one of them? Can you imagine a story in which two or three of the characters would have the same quest? conflicting quests?

b. From any of the narratives suggested anywhere in this book, choose two or three in which each of the three types of conflict could be used.

c. Choose two or three in which all three types of conflict could be used in a single story.

10. Plot.

a. From one of the quests you have mentioned in Exercise 9, above, work out a plot that would satisfy the requirements outlined in the text.

b. Analyze the plot, or lack of plot, in each of ten stories that you have read in your life.

11. Complications.

a. Try to remember stories, plays, or novels which use one or another of the four types of complication mentioned in the text.

b. Choose several stories that you have written or planned, and try to give them complications. Do the same for stories that your classmates, or other people, have written.

CHAPTER XVII

Composing the Narrative

Before an author comes to the actual moment of starting to write his narrative, he must do a good deal of thinking about it. Perhaps he will not work out every detail, or even make an outline; but he will almost certainly compose, in his mind, a generalized picture of what he is going to do. He is like a painter who cannot predict every detail he will make in a contemplated picture, but who knows beforehand what his general compositional structure will be.

The present chapter deals with that very critical period between the time when a writer says to himself, "I want to write a story" or "I want to write a story about *that*"—and the time when he actually writes the first sentence of the story. It is granted that no two writers compose in the same way. It is granted, furthermore, that writing fiction is not a process for which recipes can be given—like recipes for making a cake; something else is required of a writer in addition to the ability to follow directions. It is granted, finally, that the process of composition is not always a step-by-step affair, as it must be treated in the following pages; it is more often a simultaneous, almost intuitive, juggling of several elements all at once. Nevertheless, the advice given here may be serviceable—if only by way of suggestion.

1. TWO METHODS OF COMPOSING. It must be admitted at once that, from reader standpoint, there are three kinds of fiction: fiction for intelligent, critical, thoughtful people who have imagination and good taste, and who want to read fiction of depth, sincerity, originality, and imagination; fiction for people who want merely to be amused, who want something to pass the time without their having to think; and fiction that appeals to both the first and the second group, that the thoughtful people can enjoy and the other people (in their various gradations down to the mere barber-shop reader) can

use as a method of escape. Some fiction (the kind that gets into the collections of "Best" stories annually) exists for a very small group of the so-called intelligentsia; some fiction (the kind that gets into the great "slick-paper" magazines) exists for the great masses of people who do not care to think, ever; and some (like that of Hemingway, Steinbeck, Lewis, Dreiser, Bennett, Dickens) exists for all levels of readers. We might say that the first type of fiction consists of ingredients *A*, the second type of ingredients *B*, and the third type of ingredients *A* and *B*.

The chief elements in *A* are feeling, idea, and imagination; the chief elements in *B* are incident, plot, and character (though not the subtleties of character that serve to compose the psychological ideas of the first type). The writer should learn which of these types of ingredients appeal to him most. If he likes *A*, he will start composing from a feeling, a thought, or a background; if he likes *B*, he will start composing from a character, a situation, an incident, or a plot.

2. STARTING FROM A FEELING. One can have feelings about concrete things—about a person, a scene, a town, a community, an animal, a machine; one can have a feeling about something equally real but less concrete—about a time in history, a class of people, a profession or way of life, a war, an economic depression, old age; and one can have a feeling about abstractions—about destiny, chance, man's relation to God and to his fellow man, democracy, communism, socialism, poverty, justice. Even if he thinks he has no feeling about some of these matters, a writer should carefully analyze himself and his reactions (as advised in a previous chapter); the chances are at least ten to one that he will discover he does have a feeling about them, after all. The feeling need not be intense and passionate; it need only be real and recognizable.

Having discovered his feeling about some subject, the writer may begin composing his narrative in the following way:

a. First, he *translates the feeling into terms of theme, or idea.* For example, if his feeling could be expressed in words like this: "I feel the mechanical, efficient coldness of most hospitals," he translates the feeling into an idea: "Most hospitals are mechanical, efficient, and cold." If he can say, "I feel the romantic glamour of the

Middle Ages," he translates the feeling into an idea: "The Middle Ages were a time of romantic glamour." Or if he can say, "I feel that a destiny must be shaping men's affairs," he translates the feeling into an idea: "Destiny shapes men's affairs." Feeling must become philosophical in at least this elementary way before it can become a good starting point for fiction. That was the implication of Section 3 of the preceding chapter, where it was said: "Really good fiction cannot exist without philosophical content, without theme."

b. Next, if his feeling concerns, not some concrete thing, but a condition or an abstraction, he must *express the condition or the abstraction concretely.* For example, if he has a feeling about war, he must visualize war in terms of some specific war, and of some specific theatre of that war. If he has a feeling about destiny, he must visualize destiny in terms of some specific and concrete case, some person or incident. If he has a feeling about some way of life, he must visualize that way of life in terms of certain people practicing it. Art is concrete; it deals with abstractions only when they can be made concrete.

All this means that the writer must decide very early what the background of his narrative is to be. He must decide its *time and place.* (Here the writer should re-read and try to apply what was said in Section 2 of the preceding chapter.)

c. Next, the writer should recall what was said about *change* in the preceding chapter. Presumably, the main change that occurs will be in the way the reader, or some character in the narrative, feels about the subject. The writer's purpose is to make the character or the reader change from having no feeling, or a mistaken feeling, about the subject, and adopt the feeling that the writer has about it. This may be accomplished in several ways: (1) The writer can gradually *accumulate details* that eventually make the reader feel as the writer wishes. (2) The writer can begin by allowing the reader, or the main character in the story, to feel a certain way on the subject, and then gradually have him *change to feeling the opposite way*—as a youth may go to war feeling that it is romantic but gradually change to feeling that it is brutal. (3) The writer may take his reader, or his main character, through a whole series of feelings

until the writer's own feeling is reached—as when a youth goes to war feeling that it is romantic, and then comes to feel that it helps build heroic characters, and then that it is a necessary evil, and then that it is a wholly unnecessary evil, and finally that it is downright brutal and murderous.

d. About this time the writer should *choose or invent a character who will be the central figure of the story.* This character may be one of three types: (1) He may be a person who is conceived as merely human, and who excites human feelings of sympathy, admiration, contempt, pity, and so on just as would any real person. Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Tom Jones, Becky Sharp are such persons. (2) He may be a person who symbolizes some abstraction or some condition, and who attracts to himself the feeling the reader is expected to have about the subject itself—as Sister Carrie represents all poor working girls in the city, as George Babbitt represents the enthusiastic American businessman, or as Tom Sawyer represents the American boy. (3) Occasionally the main character is only an emotional intermediary whose feelings about the subject are supposed to be reflected in the reader—as with George in Hemingway's "The Killers," and Nick in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby.*

e. *The central figure must be started on a quest.* Almost any kind of quest will do; it need not be closely related to the feeling the writer is trying to create. In Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence,* for example, the writer's main purpose is to give the reader a certain feeling about aristocratic New York society; but the quest of the main character is merely to marry a certain girl.

f. *Obstructions must be invented* so that the main character will not reach his goal, or fail to reach it, too soon.

g. Meanwhile, the writer should be *inventing characters to typify, or personify,* various aspects of the subject. Suppose, as in an example already given, a writer is trying to give a feeling, or convey an idea, about the mechanical and efficient coldness of hospitals. He will invent a nurse, a house doctor, and an orderly who are mechanical, efficient, and cold. Or suppose he is trying to give a feeling about poverty in some city. He will invent characters who typify the poverty-stricken child, the poverty-stricken woman, and the poverty-

stricken man; perhaps he will invent several types of each—say, the pitiful poverty-stricken child and the poverty-stricken juvenile delinquent; the honest and hard-working poverty-stricken woman and the hard and immoral poverty-stricken woman; the man who is a victim of hard luck, and the man whose own vices have brought him misfortune. Obviously, some of these characters will be used to rouse a feeling in the reader; some will be used to further the main character's quest; and some will be used to obstruct the main character's quest.

By the time the writer has invented such characters, chosen a central one, given him a quest, thought of obstructions that will hinder his quest, located the scene precisely, and decided what method of accomplishing a change in the reader's feeling he is going to use—the story begins to write itself.

h. The writer should consider the possibility, or the advisability, of *introducing conflict and complications* (see Sections 9 and 11 of the previous chapter) into the story.

3. STARTING FROM A THEME. Sometimes one has *an idea* (a philosophic concept, an intellectual judgment, a critical analysis, a generalization about some aspect of life) that he wishes to express in fictional form. Most of Hawthorne's short stories were originally conceived (as his notebooks testify) as philosophic ideas; Galsworthy's novels and plays are usually based on some sociological idea; so are Sinclair Lewis's; so are John Dos Passos'—and so on. Since ideas and feelings are so closely related (see Section 2 "a" above) a writer may compose a narrative around a theme by following the procedure just outlined in Section 2. As a special bit of additional advice, the writer starting from a theme will often do well to *let the reader begin by believing the negative of the theme.* If the theme is to be, for example, that "People may repent, but they do not change," the writer would begin by making the reader think that some character who repents early in the story has really changed; then, gradually, by the accumulation of evidence, the reader would be brought to see the falsity of his original belief. This device is usually helpful, but is not essential; the devices mentioned under "c" of Section 2 above are also useful.

4. STARTING FROM BACKGROUND. Some places or times or social groups or ways of life cry aloud for stories to be written about them. The plains of North Dakota, many places in China, Mexico, the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century, gangsters and cowboys, doctors and nurses, scenes of war—these are the kinds of backgrounds that demand stories for themselves.

The process by which a narrative is composed from a setting is much the same as that outlined above for feeling or theme. In particular, the writer should:

a. Have a *feeling* about the background.

b. Develop the feeling into a *theme.*

c. Invent *characters typical of the background or in contrast to it.*

d. Perhaps decide that the change that is to occur in the narrative will involve *the relationship between character and background.* Possible changes that might occur in such a relationship are these: (1) The main character begins by being out of harmony with the background, but adjusts himself to it; (2) the character begins by being out of harmony with the background, and changes the background to make it more harmonious with himself; (3) the character begins by being out of harmony with the background, and is destroyed by it (literally or figuratively); (4) the character begins in harmony with the background, but ends out of harmony with it; (5) there are alternations of all these situations, with the character in harmony and out of harmony again and again, or in harmony or out of harmony with certain aspects of the background.

EXERCISES

1. Two Methods of Composing.

   a. Study the stories in *The Best American Short Stories* collection for some recent year, in *Harper's* and *Atlantic* magazines, in the *Partisan Review* and *Kenyon Review,* and in the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies Home Journal.* What ingredients of these stories were probably of most concern to the writers?

   b. Omitting financial considerations, tell which of the publications just mentioned you would most like your work to appear in. Why?

2. Starting from a Feeling.

Following the plan outlined in the text, compose a story on one or more of the following subjects:

The town or community you live in.
Your cat or dog or horse or other pet.
A relative.
College life.
Some job you have held.
The time of your parents' childhood.
True Christianity.
True morality.
Poverty.

3. Starting from a Theme.

Following the plan outlined in the text, compose a story on one or more of the following subjects:

Any of the subjects mentioned in the preceding exercise.
Any of the following ideas:

Before a man marries, his love belongs to his parents; after he marries, it belongs to his wife.

A man who has gold but no knowledge has little.
What one fool spoils, a thousand wise men cannot repair.
Lies uttered in order to make peace are not forbidden.
The thief becomes law-abiding when he can steal no more.

4. Starting from Background.

a. Following the plan outlined in the text, compose a story on one or more of the following subjects:

Your college campus.
Your community.
The rural area with which you are best acquainted.
The poorest social class which you know fairly well.
The richest social class which you know fairly well.
Some job you have held.
Your parents' childhood.

b. Outline the four or five kinds of changes that might occur in the relationship between character and environment in the following situations:

A country boy (or girl) comes to live with well-to-do (or poor) relatives in a large city.

A city boy (or girl) comes to live with well-to-do (or poor) relatives in the country.

The daughter of a wealthy city family marries the son of a small businessman in a country village, and goes to live in the village.

A foreign student (young man or young woman) comes to an American university as an exchange student.

CHAPTER XVIII

Composing the Narrative (Continued)

The suggestions in the preceding chapter dealt with the problem of composition when the narrative-basis is a generalized subject. The present chapter deals with composition when the subject is more specific.

Furthermore, the kind of story discussed in the preceding chapter, if handled with technical skill, is likely to belong to the Chekhovian type of story, and to appeal to the more discerning elements of modern criticism. The kind of story discussed in the present chapter is more likely to belong to the Maupassantian type, and it may or may not be good literature. It is the kind of fiction that *may* have no higher ambition than to help the reader pass away the time. On the other hand, the two kinds of fiction may unite in one narrative, which will be all the better for the union.

5. STARTING FROM CHARACTER. Some people a writer meets, or dreams of, or invents, seem designed purposely to go into fiction. The difficulty comes when the writer tries to make a narrative out of the mere character. The following suggestions may help solve this difficulty:

a. The writer should decide whether his character is interesting primarily because he is *typical,* or because he is *unique.*

b. If he is primarily typical, *of what is he chiefly typical?* Of a period of life, a sex, a time in history, a geographical region, a race, a trade or profession, a social class, a manner of thinking or acting or feeling, or what?

c. When the answer to the question just asked is found, the next step is to *discover what one feels or thinks about the general subject* of which the character is a typical example. From here, one proceeds

along the steps outlined in the preceding chapter for generalized subjects.

d. But if the character is unique, not typical, the writer's first step should probably be to *determine the one or two chief character traits* of the fictional character. Is he romantic, idealistic, egotistical, selfish, religious, mercenary, ambitious, lustful, courageous, cowardly, generous, or what? Sometimes the chief characteristic is that there is no chief characteristic—or there may be several equally strong characteristics in conflict with one another. Meredith has a novel in which he names the chief trait of his chief character: *The Egoist.* Maupassant has "The Coward" and "The Enthusiast"; Hawthorne has "The Ambitious Guest"; Mansfield, "Such a Sweet Old Lady"; D. H. Lawrence, "The Lovely Lady."

e. Next, the character should be placed in one of the following situations:

(1) He may be placed in *a situation (or environment) where his chief trait will have an opportunity to operate extensively,* and so reveal itself. This is a particularly useful device when the chief trait is admirable. Thus a young woman who has a way with children may be made a teacher of elementary grades; a scholarly young man may become a college teacher; a generous man may become a millionaire; a mercenary man may go into some shady business; a courageous man may join the Marines. The narrative problem here is to create interest by means of plot, obstructed narrative, conflicts, and complications (see pp. 319–325). Perhaps the suggestions given at the end of the preceding chapter, concerning relation of character to environment, may also be helpful.

(2) The character may be placed in *a situation (or environment) out of harmony with his chief trait.* This is, perhaps, an easier solution to the problem than the preceding. Shakespeare put the thoughtful Hamlet in a situation where he had to act, not merely think; he put the proud and egotistical King Lear in a situation where he was humiliated; he put the ambitious Macbeth in a situation where he was called on to exercise the highest loyalty that Shakespeare knew, loyalty to the king. Stephen Crane took a coward to war in *The Red Badge of Courage;* George Meredith had his egoist in love in *The*

Egoist. Here again the narrative problem is to create one of the kinds of change outlined on pp. 318–319, and to make the narrative interesting by plot, obstructed narrative, conflict, and complications.

6. STARTING FROM SITUATION. Sometimes a writer comes across, in real life, a situation which strikes him as having narrative possibilities, or he invents such a situation from a hint or suggestion in real life. The situation should be considered as a static condition that has resulted from previous action, and that may result in succeeding action. Any of the following may be regarded as a situation: A woman has married a man she does not love; a man is in love with a woman of another race; a man knows he has only two months to live; a wealthy old lady finds her fortune suddenly gone; a girl is in love with a man to whom her family intensely objects.

To make a story out of this sort of material, the writer may take the following steps:

a. He should decide whether the situation he has in mind is *a beginning, a middle, or an end* of a narrative. Shall he tell how the situation came about? Or shall he tell what results from the situation? Or shall he do both? For example, shall he use a good part of his narrative to show how the wealthy old lady mentioned above lost her money? Or shall he concentrate on what happens to her, now that she has lost it? Or shall he do both? Precise answers to these questions are impossible here. The writer's tastes, abilities, and prospective readers, and the nature of the situations themselves, will determine the answers.

b. Next, the writer may proceed (as directed in the preceding chapter) to build a narrative from *feeling, theme, or background;* or he could *concentrate on one or two of the characters* involved in the situation, and then proceed as suggested in the preceding section.

7. STARTING FROM INCIDENT. Sometimes a writer may happen upon an incident or event in his daily life which, he thinks, has in it the elements or the possibilities of a story. It may be an item in the paper, a chance remark heard on a street corner, a significant look passed between a man and a woman, a "personal" in the advertising column of a journal, or some other such contribution to the writer's

store of observations and experiences. As he waits on the corner, he may see a little girl come up to the old woman selling papers nearby, and tell her something, whereupon the old woman begins to weep. Sitting in the subway, he may see a burly gentleman slowly lift a long blonde hair from his coat-sleeve, deposit the hair in the aisle of the car, and smile. Walking along the street, he may see an urchin suddenly assume a pitiful expression, sidle up to a well-dressed gentleman, beg for money and, on being refused, run back and start laughing and romping with other urchins on the street corner. Every person with eyes in his head and senses alert notices a dozen such incidents every day.

But how to make them into a story? More lively inventive power, more intuition about character, more vision to perceive a whole situation in a minor incident are required for the writer starting with an incident than starting from any other point. Perhaps the best thing the writer can do is to try to translate the incident into terms of character or situation, and proceed from that point, as advised in the first sections of this chapter. For example, he may see as chiefly important in the incident of the newspaper woman and the little girl, the character of the woman or the character of the child. Or he may invent details of the situation: What are the broad aspects of the situation under which the woman and the child live, and what specific happening has the child reported to make her mother weep? Or what are the broad aspects of the situation under which the gentleman in the subway acquired the long blonde hair on his sleeve? Did the hair belong to his wife, a sweetheart, a mistress? And, if either of the latter two, who is she? And who is he? And where is he going now? All this boils down to two questions that the writer must practically always ask himself when he tries to start a story from an incident: (1) What is the general situation of which this incident is a part? (2) What immediately preceded, and what will immediately follow, the incident?

8. STARTING FROM A COMPLETE STORY IDEA. Sometimes a story comes to a writer almost full-blown. For example: Parents work, slave, and deprive themselves of necessities in order to send their son to college; then he dies a month after he graduates. Or the prodi-

gal son returns home, but soon leaves on account of his father's too officious solicitude about him. Or a politician has a mistress who, on the eve of an election, threatens to denounce him; he has her killed.

These are complete stories in themselves. About all the writer need do is to visualize each of them as a series of scenes. If he wishes, in addition, to bring in obstructions, conflicts, and complications, he may do so; if he wishes to develop characters, portray a feeling, or present a theme, he may do so. But essentially his work is cut out for him already.

9. THE ACTUAL START. Even though the writer has composed in his mind the general scheme of his narrative, a major problem remains. It is to know exactly how to begin, how to trigger the story off, how to get it in motion.

a. One must visualize story-writing as something like using a microscope. One starts out with a low-power lens covering a large general field; then one switches to a high-power lens concentrating on a small part of that field. Certain *general circumstances* surround (or constitute) every story. They include time, place, general condition or situation in which characters find themselves, interrelationship of characters, interrelationship of characters and environment, and the like. By and large, these general circumstances represent a virtually static condition, or at least a condition that has been moving along in the same direction for a considerable time.

b. Into the midst of these large, general, static circumstances comes a *spark of provocation, an inciting force,* something new after which something else new is bound to happen. Or, to change the figure, the relatively static general situation visualized as fiction material is given a shove, an impulsion, that sets it moving forward—or, if it has already been moving, changes the direction of its movement. This is the real beginning of any story. For example: Three cats are in one room, a dog is in an adjoining room, and a closed door stands between them. These are general circumstances, a static situation that may remain unchanged indefinitely. But someone opens the door, and lets the dog into the room with the cats. This is the initial shove, or impulsion, or inciting force, or spark of provoca-

tion, or something new after which something else new is bound to happen. This is the beginning of the story.

Or you are going to college routinely in a normal and unspectacular way. This is a generalized, relatively static situation. But suddenly both your mother and your father are killed in an automobile wreck. This again is the beginning of a story.

A recent number of the *Saturday Evening Post* has stories that begin thus:

An ordinary American family is seen relaxing after dinner [general circumstances]; then the wife suddenly tells her husband that the ladies in the neighborhood have decided that he must run for president of the local Parent-Teachers Association, a position normally reserved for women [shove or spark that starts the story].

A wealthy rancher in Oregon has working for him a young cowboy who is in love with the rancher's daughter, who is also more or less in love with the cowboy [general circumstances]; then, in a sudden fit of pique, the foreman of the ranch fires the cowboy and makes him leave the ranch [shove or spark that starts the story].

A young American naval attaché in Istanbul is living a fairly normal life there [general circumstances]; then a mysterious Turkish girl whom he has never seen before accosts him on the street and pleads with him to meet her at the public fountain next day so that she can give him some very important information [shove or spark that starts the story].

The shove or spark of a story grows out of one of the following:

(1) *An accidental happening* to the character (or characters) meant to be central in the story. The shipwrecks that initiate the real stories in *Robinson Crusoe* and in the Lilliput adventure of *Gulliver's Travels* are accidents of this sort. So is Silas Marner's finding the child Effie; so is Mowgli's escape from the tiger to the wolf's den in the *Jungle Book.*

(2) *A new happening that results from a more or less natural development, growth, or change.* The death of the old colonel in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" is an example; so is the return of the young couple to America in *The Silver Cord.* One can think of

many examples in real life: A depression comes, and a character begins to suffer hardships; old age comes, and a character has to adjust his life to it; a war comes, and a young man has to join the armed forces; a couple marry and have a baby. Sometimes a writer has trouble with this kind of beginning because the developments (as with the depression and old age in the examples just mentioned) occur too slowly to be represented as dramatic narrative scenes.

(3) *An action by a character.* Sometimes a character virtually outside the story may give the initial shove that sets the action going—as does the ghost in *Hamlet.* Or sometimes an important character within the story may give the shove that starts the story—as do the rebellious Percies in *Henry IV.*

(a) A character may initiate action because he has developed a *desire* (or sometimes a mere whim) to bring about a change in his life, the lives of other people, or certain conditions or situations about him. It is such a desire that moves the murderer in Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" and the good citizens who chase out the riffraff in Harte's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat."

(b) A character may initiate action out of no actual desire, but from a sense of *moral obligation*—as with Don Quixote who sets out to do what he conceives his knightly duty, or the king and his court who renounce love at the beginning of *Love's Labour's Lost,* or the convict who aids the boy who was kind to him in *Great Expectations.*

(c) A character may initiate action by having it *forced* upon him, often in the form of a decision he must make. But here it may be that the forcing is being done through the desire or the moral obligation of other characters, so that this means is really not valid. It is the *Hamlet* situation, or the situation in *The Silver Cord,* where four people have action forced upon them because of the selfish desires of old Mrs. Phelps.

(d) A character may initiate action by continuing to behave in an *ordinary and habitual way that suddenly becomes vitally significant.* But here too the narrative significance will usually depend upon some very unusual (or accidental) circumstance. Thus, in Maupassant's "A Piece of String," the old man's picking up a piece of string

(ordinary behavior) would not have resulted in a story except that a rich man had that very day lost a purse with a large sum of money near the place where the string was picked up.

To see how these generalizations about beginnings may be applied to almost any commonplace situation in order to make it into the beginning of a story, let us take this situation: "A girl is a senior in college." From this situation the following eleven different beginnings may be developed.

1. Her parents are both killed in the same automobile wreck. (*Accident.*)

2. She graduates from college and has to face the problem of getting a job. (*Natural development.*)

3. She desires to marry a certain young man. (*Action derived from a character's desire.*)

4. She would like to marry, but feels obligated first to pay off a debt that her father has contracted in order to send her to college. (*Moral obligation.*)

5. Just when she graduates and is about to marry the young man, she is offered a lucrative and glamorous job in Paris. (*Some sort of action forced upon her, a decision to be made.*)

6. She is studying in the library, happens to be seated by a young man she has never noticed before, gets to talking with him, goes with him to get a cup of coffee, finds him likable, falls in love with him. (*Ordinary behavior leading to a significant event.*)

All these situations but the first could be varied by having the action initiated, not by herself, but by someone else:

1. Just as she graduates from college, her mother dies, and the daughter automatically takes over management of the household. (*Natural development.*)

2. Her parents desire her to marry a certain young man. (*Action derived from a character's desire.*)

3. Her father insists that she help him pay off his debt before she marries. (*Moral obligation.*)

4. She is strongly urged by her parents to take one of the jobs offered her, in preference to the other. (*Action forced upon her.*)

5. The young man by whom she happens to study in the library

starts a conversation, asks her to go have coffee with him, asks for a date, falls in love with her, persuades her to marry him. (*Ordinary behavior leading to a significant event.*)

Though none of the eleven stories suggested here may be really remarkable for originality, the point should be obvious. It is that the most ordinary of situations imaginable has in it the beginnings of a story.

10. ENDING THE NARRATIVE. The problem of endings was discussed in Chapter XIII, where recommendations of the probable or inevitable ending, and warnings against the surprise ending, were given. We should consider the ending here in connection with what we know about obstructed narrative. In simple terms, the obstructed narrative consists of an alternating series of pleasant-unpleasant-pleasant-unpleasant things happening to the characters in whom the reader is most interested. If the story stops on a pleasant happening, with no unpleasant happenings in the foreseeable future, the story is said to have a *happy ending.* If it stops on unpleasant happenings, with no important pleasant happenings within the foreseeable future, the story is said to have an *unhappy ending.*

Happy endings are most common, best liked, and, as a rule, the most advisable for the writer. Indeed, so fine a critic, philosopher, and scholar as Joseph Wood Krutch remarks, "All works of art which deserve their name have a happy end." Still, it would be very difficult to find anything resembling a happy end in some of Conrad's work ("Heart of Darkness" and *Lord Jim,* for example), in some of Hardy's, and even in so fine a work of art as *The Old Wives' Tale.* On the other hand, there is little excuse for the deliberate killing off of characters, or deliberately bringing disaster on characters, just to win a tear from the reader, when there is no sense of inevitability or probability leading straight through the story to the unhappy end.

If one cannot have a happy ending to his narrative, he may strive for the more difficult *happy-unhappy ending.* This is an ending in which disaster overtakes the characters whom we most like, but in which there is some element of consolation. This consolation derives from one of several sources: (1) A spiritual triumph of the individual despite his physical disaster (as with the thief hanging on the

cross to the right of Christ's, and the death of Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*). (2) A compensatory defeat of those who have defeated the people the reader most likes in the story (as in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*). (3) A feeling by the reader that the situation has become so irredeemably bad that death for all concerned is the most merciful solution (as in the story of Samson and *King Lear*). (4) An accomplishment of some good result through the sacrifice of some character the reader likes (as in Kipling's "The Miracle of Purun Baghat" and *Romeo and Juliet*). Sometimes several of these sources of consolation exist in the same ending. The ending of *Hamlet,* for example, contains the consolation of (1), (2), and (3); so does *King Lear;* and *A Tale of Two Cities* ends with the consolations of (1), (2), and (4).

EXERCISES

5. Starting from Character.

   The instructor may have each member of the class write on three sheets of paper short character sketches of three different people. All these papers may then be jumbled together, and afterward redistributed so that each student gets three character sketches different from the ones he wrote. At least two of these should be worked into stories in the manner outlined in the text.

   Or the student may take two characters of his own invention, and work one of them into a story by placing him in a congenial environment, and the other into a story by placing him in an uncongenial environment.

6. Starting from Situation.

   Following the plan outlined in the text, construct a story from one of the following situations:

   A young farmer must always leave his sweetheart just at nightfall in order to go home and attend to his cow.

   Of twin sisters, one goes through college successfully, and the other has refused to go to college.

   A brilliant and forceful young wife adores her husband without realizing that he is shallow and weak.

   A wife thinks constantly of the man she *could* have married.

   One of your classmates, who has seemed to be quite worldly, has stopped school suddenly and entered a convent.

7. Starting from Incident.

Following the plan outlined in the text, construct a story from one of the following incidents:

You go out at night to put your car in the garage, and find a strange woman sitting in the car.

You go out on your front porch at night, hear a scuffling on the doorstep, and see a man coming up the steps on all fours.

At the Public Library you notice across the table from you a young woman with the most beautiful hands you have ever seen.

In a restaurant a person who has been eating at another table and staring at you while you eat gets up when you get up, and follows you (or seems to follow you) out.

Someone gives you a strange red-eyed tree-frog which has been taken from a bunch of bananas just shipped in.

8. Starting from a Complete Story Idea.

Following the plan outlined in the text, construct a story from one of the complete story ideas suggested below:

A rich man who has been poor, and who knows the hardships of poverty, has a daughter (or a son) who is thoughtless and inconsiderate of the poor. The father influences the younger person to be more sympathetic.

A preacher who entered the ministry as a youth fired with zeal finds in his mature age that he no longer has his early enthusiasm and belief.

A farm woman engaged to be married to a farmer is called away to live in the city for a year. When she returns to the farm, her sense of values is so changed that she cannot bring herself to marry the farmer.

Or the farmer may not be able to care for her as she now is.

Or she may hate the farm which she loved before going to the city.

As a child, a man sees (or thinks he sees) a ghost with a horrible face. Years later he sees the same face on a ship in which he has planned to sail. He refuses to make the voyage on that ship. A week later he learns that the ship sank on the voyage he had intended to make.

9. The Actual Start.

Examine all the suggested starting points for stories suggested in the exercises for this and the preceding chapter, and try to decide what and where the inciting spark of each story might be.

Take any one of the suggested stories, and make several different inciting sparks for it; include an accidental happening, a new happening resulting from natural development, action by a character.

10. Ending the Narrative.

Show how several of the story ideas mentioned in Exercise 8 above might have either happy or happy-unhappy endings, and tell what kind of consolation the reader would have in the stories with the latter type of ending.

CHAPTER XIX

Writing the Narrative

This chapter supposes that the writer has his narrative fairly well composed in his head. He knows the dominant feeling and theme; he has visualized the general nature of his chief characters; he knows what kind of quest is to be followed in the narrative; he has planned an obstructed narrative that is to have an ending that has been predetermined; and he has considered the use of possible contrasts, conflicts, and complications. Now he must get down to the practical work of writing.

I. Some Preliminary Decisions

1. LENGTH. The writer has probably thought already about the probable length of his narrative. If not, he should begin thinking about it now. The length depends upon the medium of publication which the writer hopes to use. A novel is about 70,000 to 200,000 words long. Sometimes novellas, or short novels, or long short stories (like some of Conrad's) of about 25,000 to 50,000 words are published separately in book form. Magazines are to be studied individually if one is to know their preferred lengths: some use stories of 1000 to 1500 words; the large slick-paper magazines use them up to 6000 words long, and occasionally much longer.

2. QUANTITIES IN FICTION. In all fiction, certain decisions about quantities and proportions must be made; often they can be made, roughly at any rate, before the actual writing begins. The question of length has just been discussed. Knowing the approximate length of the total work helps the writer decide many other quantitative problems. In a very short story, exposition and description must often be reduced almost to the vanishing point; in a long novel they may occupy much space. Accordingly, the writer who is chiefly con-

cerned with imagery and backgrounds will be unwise to attempt to write very short stories. Likewise, the writer who is chiefly concerned with the slow development of character will not attempt to write very short stories.

Since it often happens that the same idea could be developed into a short story, a novella, or a novel, the writer must decide early which of these forms he will write. If he determines on one of the shorter forms, he will need to invent only a few obstructions to be put in the path of the positive movement of the narrative. If he determines on a longer form, he will have to invent more obstructions. Thus, one or two obstructions to the happy ending of a love affair would be enough for a short story; but dozens of obstructions would be required for a novel.

A very important, and often neglected, consideration in fiction is that implied in the proverb, "One swallow does not make a summer." This is actually the expression of a scientific point of view. The doctor who administers a certain kind of medicine to only one patient, and seemingly effects a cure, would never convince his brother physicians that the medicine is so wonderful as he says; he would be forced to administer it to a whole series of patients, and cure most of them, before he could produce a really convincing argument. It is much the same in fiction. If one wishes to show that a fictional character is culpably weak, one cannot show him being weak in merely one instance—everybody is occasionally weak. One must show him being weak in instance after instance. Or (to return to a situation already mentioned) if one wishes to show that a hospital is cold, mechanical, and heartless, one will not show merely one nurse being cold, mechanical, and heartless—cold, mechanical, and heartless people are found occasionally everywhere. One must show several nurses who are cold, mechanical, and heartless, and a supervisor of nurses who is the same way, and an intern or two who are the same way, and people in the business office who are the same way: the many instances constitute proof, whereas one instance would mean little. In Galsworthy's *Justice*, there are two accumulations of instances to prove the actual injustice of so-called legal justice; one is the collection of condemned criminals in the prison who are all

mentally or emotionally sick characters whose personalities are being still further distorted by prison, and the other is the gradual conversion of all the people who really know anything about the central crime in the play to the belief that legal justice is really injustice. Were it not for this accumulation of numerous instances, we might feel that the injustice worked on the central character of the play is just one of those unusual and unfortunate exceptions to a general rule that are bound to occur occasionally. The writer must know from the beginning, in a general way at least, how he is going to accumulate convincing details—provided, of course, that he is writing the kind of story that requires an accumulation of convincing details.

3. STYLE. Just as the prospective medium of publication determines length, the same medium determines style. Some magazines like long sentences, some short; some are not averse to big words, some are; some do not object to long paragraphs, some do; some like crisp details of action with much dialogue, some do not object to deliberate psychological analysis or description. The writer must find his medium of publication, and try to fit his style to it; or else he must try to find the medium of publication that would be receptive to the kind of style he likes to write.

To be sure, the nature of the subject often determines the style, and the writer should remember this. The writer should remember, furthermore, that adjusting his style to fit different kinds of readers is not a prostitution of his art. As has already been remarked in this book (p. 291), mere common sense dictates that one kind of language and style be used with small children, another kind with average adult readers, and another with readers of very specialized knowledge or tastes. Novels find their own readers and may have any sort of style that a publisher thinks will make them saleable. Some of the literary, or "advanced," magazines may use fiction written in an original or experimental style, particularly the stream-of-consciousness style, or some derivation or approximation of it, together with descriptive and psychological material of some length. The more popular magazines tend to shun such style, as well as such material.

4. POINT OF VIEW. Most fiction is written from the mental, emotional, and physical point of view of one character. The action is told, character portrayed, and setting constructed as they appear to one character. If thoughts or feelings are analyzed, they are the thoughts and feelings of one character. In other words, the author tells his story as it appears to one of his characters, and the author enters the mind of only one of his characters.

Deviation from this general rule does occur. Sometimes the author takes an omniscient point of view (see below) from which he surveys the entire field of his work—the minds and emotions of all the characters, things that happen simultaneously in several places, things that no one character could possibly know about. Sometimes the author changes the mental point of view from scene to scene, or from chapter to chapter. For example, a story may begin with our being shown a man and what he is thinking, and then his daughter and what she is thinking, and then the daughter's lover and what he is thinking. But seldom would all points of view be taken at once; that is, in the scene where the daughter, say, is the central figure, the author will seldom skip back and forth between the mind of the daughter and the mind of her father. *Each scene belongs psychologically to one character.* As a matter of fact, the tendency in most of the best fiction is to keep an entire story or an entire novel in one mind's experience.

Just whose mind shall be the center of the web is a rather important problem that the writer must solve before he begins writing. Two main points of view are possible: the personal, in which the author, or ostensible narrator, enters into the story as a character; and the impersonal, in which the author, or ostensible narrator, never appears.

a. The *personal point of view* is that in which the narrator is a character in the tale he tells. The advantage of this point of view is that it always gives a look of veracity to any story in which it is used. The disadvantage is that the adoption of this point of view prevents the author's showing events occurring in different places at the same time, or events kept secret from the supposed teller of the tale, or the thoughts and intentions of anybody in the story except the teller.

(1) The *principal character* point of view intensifies the chief advantage of all personal points of view, that is, it makes the narrative seem altogether credible unless the narrator obviously has some axe to grind, some benefit to be gained by lying. But it prevents the narrator from making himself out a hero or a witty person; for obviously he could not, in good taste, tell the fine things he did or the clever things he said. Moreover, if the principal character happens to be an illiterate person, a spirit, or an animal, he could not plausibly be pictured as writing down his experiences.

(2) The *minor character* point of view is that in which the action is performed in the presence and with the knowledge of the narrator, who himself participates in the action but plays an inconspicuous part in the events he narrates. This is one of the most effective, but one of the least used, of the personal points of view. It has the advantage of plausibility, as does the principal character point of view, and, in addition, it has the advantage of impartiality, since the narrator here is telling what he saw happen to other people, rather than what happened to him. Moreover, the minor character here is a kind of emotional intermediary through whose personality we ourselves experience emotions about the action narrated—the fact that he feels the emotions makes us feel them. The minor character point of view does not have the disadvantages peculiar to the principal character point of view. But one serious disadvantage that it does have is the fact that the character may seem to the reader an undignified and ridiculous tag-along (as Mackellar seems, for example, in *The Master of Ballantrae*). And another is that he cannot very well appear in love scenes, or know anything about love scenes which involve the principal character. The latter would not make love in the presence of the minor character; and if the minor character overheard the other making love, he would appear to the reader as nothing better than a gossiping eavesdropper.

(3) The *reportorial* point of view is that in which the author reports (as does Kipling in *Soldiers Three*) stories told to him by other people in the language of the other people. We may say at once that this point of view is usually to be avoided. From a dramatic point of view it is bad, for it first interests the reader in one series of

actions (the reporter's meeting one set of characters and getting them started on a story), and then it starts all over again and begins interesting the reader in another set of characters; and finally, it must end with a flat, expository conclusion in which the reporter brings the reader back to the first scene once more. It is bad from the standpoint of plausibility, for the reader wonders how the reporter could remember all the words, expressions, and accents of the teller of the story, and then write them down accurately. And it is bad from the standpoint of psychology, for it keeps a third party constantly between the reader and the teller of the story. Yet the point of view of the reporter has one advantage; it permits the reader to get a story in the colorful and amusing language of people who are witty or picturesque, but who are too illiterate to write their own stories.

(4) The point of view of a *non-participant* is that in which the narrator tells a story as he saw it, though he himself did not participate in it. It is the point of view of Conrad's Marlowe. The advantages and the disadvantages which accompany its use are very much the same as those which accompany the point of view of the minor character already discussed. But the non-participating point of view does not endanger the dignity of the narrator as does the minor character point of view. On the other hand, to have a non-participant tell a long story does not make for plausibility: the reader asks how the narrator knows so much without being a prying individual. Furthermore, the introduction of the non-participant is sometimes as awkward as is the introduction of the narrator in stories having the reportorial point of view; and the quoting of what the non-participant said is sometimes as unreal as quoting from the reportorial point of view. In general, therefore, this point of view is dangerous. It has its uses, and it has very real advantages; but when it is misused, it is chaotic and unreal. Even Conrad would have done well to avoid it more often than he did.

b. The *impersonal point of view* is that in which the narrator of the tale never enters into the action, or names himself, or uses the first personal pronoun.

(1) The *omniscient* point of view is that in which the writer knows everything that happens to all his characters at any time in

any place; he knows their thoughts, their hearts, their purposes; he may skip from England to the Holy Land in an instant; he may overhear all secrets; he may pry behind all doors; he may look in at all windows. He knows the characters better than they know one another, and better than they know themselves. The advantages of this point of view are too obvious to deserve comment. The chief disadvantage is that it loses a certain flavor of veracity which the personal points of view have. Yet this disadvantage may be ignored because of the fact that long traditions of tales told from the omniscient point of view have made it acceptable to readers. They are willing to bow to convention and not ask the author, How do you know?

(2) The *dramatic* point of view (such as is used in all plays) is certainly the most natural and convincing point of view. The spectator of a play does not have to take anybody's word for anything; he himself sees the action progressing under his eyes. He sees the villainy of the villain and the heroism of the hero; he interprets character, reads his own meaning into speeches and actions, and works out the implication and involvement of events. Obviously, this is the perfect point of view. Yet it is not always practicable. For reasons stated in the first chapter of this study of fiction (reasons which need not be repeated here), authors can profitably avail themselves of the dramatic point of view only occasionally. Generally they must make a choice from the other five points of view.

5. SYMBOLISM. From earliest times, fiction has had characters and has narrated events that have significance beyond the mere surface appearance. The fables of Aesop and the parables of the New Testament are examples of symbolic fiction. In the first, the various animals represent people acting in certain ways, and what happens to them represents what would or should happen to people acting in the same way. Thus, the lion letting the mouse go free symbolizes a great person acting with magnanimity, and the mouse helping the lion to escape from a net symbolizes both gratitude and the dependence of the great on the small. Likewise, the good Samaritan of the parable is more than just a good Samaritan; he

symbolizes all good men who do, or should, help their fellow men in distress.

Sometimes the characters are symbolic. Thus, in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* Dr. Stockmann represents the liberal-minded, well-meaning man who is too impractical to deal with the corrupt world around him; his brother, the Mayor, represents the well-to-do conservatives; his wife's grandfather, Morten Kiil, represents the old-fashioned reactionaries; Aslaksen represents the lower middle classes; Dr. Stockmann's daughter represents the new enlightened woman—and so on.

Sometimes many details of action, speech, and image are symbolic. For example, Dr. Stockmann goes out in his best morning clothes to address a public meeting; a riot ensues and the Doctor's trousers are torn and muddied. At home he remarks ruefully, "A man cannnot afford to wear his best trousers when he goes out to fight for truth." The symbolism is clear: Dr. Stockmann has failed because he has tried to act on too high a plane of conduct. In the same play, the pollution of the city's profitable baths comes from old Morten Kiil's tanyard. Again, the symbolism is clear: the town makes its living out of polluted sources, and the origin of the pollution is the older generation's mistakes or misdeeds.

Since the 1920's, at least, most serious novels and stories in English have contained a large element of symbolism. And the young writer, before he beings his story, might do well to see where he could use symbolism. Characters need not exist just for themselves (as in nineteenth-century fiction) but they may represent types; and action need not be merely a plot spun out for its story-interest, but it may be a symbolic representation of the social, moral, and intellectual struggles of a social group.

II. The Beginning and the Ending

1. EXPOSITION. One of the major problems of beginning is that of finding a way to tell the general situation (see p. 340) prevailing when the inciting spark of action occurs. This situation includes

information as to the place where the action happens, the time when it happens, the historical setting, the identity and the relationship of the characters, the past careers of the characters, and the like. There are four ways in which this exposition may be given:

a. *Retrospective exposition* summarizes what happened before the story commences. It is a resumé of action, a narration told without benefit of scenes or of imagination. Nearly always it is completely and unforgivably bad. If the action leading up to the beginning of the story is so important, the reader is tempted to ask, why doesn't the story begin with that action? Why is the beginning postponed until so late a time? When a story is begun, the reader expects it to go straight ahead, not to drop back and talk about events that happened long ago. The only exception to this rule is the flashback which the motion picture has made popular. The flashback, however, is not exposition; it is fiction that is scenic and imaginative. The flashback exists for its own sake; retrospective exposition exists for the sake of the story being told. The former is quite legitimate; the latter is not.

b. *A lump of exposition at the beginning* was characteristic of many novels of the nineteenth century, in which the first chapter was an interminable mass of description, history, and characterization. Short story writers also used this method of exposition well into the twentieth century; even Maupassant would write many long paragraphs of exposition before he got the story started. This sort of thing eventually went quite out of fashion. On the other hand, there has lately occurred a reversal of fashion, and many modern stories (instead of having obviously arty beginnings) start off with a plain and unvarnished, but very brief, passage of pure exposition. If not over-extended (one hundred words, at the outside, for the average short story, and about a page for a novel), exposition given in this manner makes a perfectly sound and rational beginning. The young fiction-writer need not be afraid of it. But he must be sure to make it true exposition of a situation existing at the start of his story—not a summary of a narrative leading up to his story.

c. *A lump of exposition given after the story is well under way* is an attempt to make a compromise with the quick beginning and the

slow beginning just described. Again, if the exposition is not too long, so that it delays the progress of the story beyond the bounds of the reader's patience, exposition given in this manner is quite acceptable. If it were divided into small pieces so that it could be dropped into the story almost without the reader's having to break step in his progress with the narrative, it would be even better.

d. *Exposition given piecemeal* by means of casual hints dropped unobtrusively is the most natural, most dramatic, and least obvious type. Suppose, for example, one began a story thus:

The girl stood at the top of the library steps and looked out over the campus. She breathed deeply, and caught the odor of pollen from a thousand trees and flowers just coming to life again in the warm May sunshine.

Another girl came out of the library and stood beside her. "The campus is lovely this time of year," she said. "Do they have scenes as pretty as this in Arizona?"

"I don't mind going back," said the first girl. "Virginia has its good points—but four years here is long enough. I'm not sorry I'm graduating."

"I'm not either," said the other girl. "But I don't have Arizona waiting for me—I've only got Detroit."

The first girl laughed. "I'm not worried about you, Jane," she said. "You'll probably end up with your name in lights *that* high on Broadway."

"Don't be silly, Nan! I'd be happy to get a job teaching school. Do you think your dad could wangle a job for me out in Arizona?"

"Are you serious?"

"Certainly!"

"It might be managed at that. Do you want me to write to him?"

This passage contains no exposition. Yet it tells us all these facts: the names of the two girls, the homes of both, that they have been going to college in Virginia, that they are about to graduate, that one of them is perhaps somewhat restless, that the other has had experience with dramatics, that the father of the Arizona girl is probably influential, that the other girl needs a job. Furthermore, with the last two or three speeches in the dialogue, a story gets started, a new situation is imposed on the general situation. This is exposition and beginning as they should be.

2. THE FIRST SENTENCES. In a praiseworthy attempt to avoid the

old-fashioned long expository beginning, many story writers of a generation ago would begin stories with dialogue, or with some bit of startling action, as in these first sentences:

"The baby is dying," the doctor whispered.
"I would never marry you," she said. "Never."
The stranger fell heavily. A hole in his forehead gushed blood.
The ship was going down swiftly by the bow.

Though such beginnings have an undeniable attraction, they have given way, for the most part, to something less melodramatic. The latest volume of "Best" short stories has only one story beginning with dialogue, eight with description, nine with some detail of rather insignificant action, and ten with brief exposition. Of twenty-eight stories in recent numbers of the *American Magazine, American Mercury, Atlantic, Harper's,* and *New Yorker,* five begin with dialogue, five with description, seven with details of action, and 11 with exposition. In other words, the modern short story may have almost any kind of beginning that does not delay the start of the narrative itself more than fifty to one hundred words.

The main thing for the writer to remember is that *the writing should begin as close as possible to the beginning of the narrative itself.* The less preliminary material, the better.

Ideally, description in the first few sentences should set the tone of the story, or indicate the large feeling that transfuses it; action should be interesting in itself, or it should help reveal character, or it should get the story started; dialogue should reveal character, or have expository value, or get the story started. Furthermore, exposition or description at the beginning can often be best conveyed dramatically. For example, "He remembered with impatience that his train was not due for another half hour" is better than the blunt statement, "His train was not due for another half hour." "He looked up at the bats flickering about the cathedral spires in the gray evening sky" is better than, "He stood before the cathedral in the early evening."

Some negative rules for beginnings follow:

Don't make the first paragraph extremely long.

Don't overload the beginning with many expository details that the reader must absorb in a short space.

In particular, *don't* introduce by name more than one or two characters or one or two places in the first few paragraphs; too many proper names all at once confuse the reader.

Don't introduce any detail in the first few paragraphs unless you can convince yourself that it has some usefulness in setting the tone, revealing character, giving necessary information, or getting the story started.

Don't use long or bookish words in the first few sentences.

3. THE LAST SENTENCES. The novel of the nineteenth century often had a final chapter called "Conclusion." This chapter contained a quick summary of what happened to the main characters after the story itself ended. It was like an extended "They lived happily ever afterward." Early short stories sometimes had a similar, but necessarily briefer, conclusion appended as a paragraph or two after the story itself was finished. Later on, there was a tendency to end the story with dramatic suddenness the instant the final scene or episode, the climactic denouement, was finished. That tendency is still apparent in many modern stories; yet most modern writers seem to feel that the abrupt ending, like the abrupt beginning, sounds studied and artificial. Consequently, a very large proportion of modern short stories, and of modern novels also, continue for a few sentences after the denouement; they do not end with a shock. The shock, if there is to be one, comes a little earlier than the end of the writing.

More often than not, the last sentence in the modern short story or novel is a bit of dialogue. Sometimes it is a description; sometimes it is an action that marks an end of the narrative (like a departure, or a greeting on arrival at a destination, or the closing of a door, or a separation); and sometimes it is a semi-philosophical comment on the preceding action, or a summary of its meaning. But it is never an outright *moral.* In the typical happy-ending story of the popular magazines, it is often a kind of licking-of-the-chops, a smug self-congratulation by some character in the story over an action well finished.

III. The Body of the Narrative

1. SUSPENSE. Most people have glanced through a story or a novel so bad that it actually hurt, and have muttered, "How on earth did *this* ever get published?" The answer, more than likely, is —suspense. The bad writers who continue to be published and the good writers who continue to be read have it. Why readers love to feel suspense is a mystery, for suspense is painful. Milton put it bluntly: "Suspense is torture." Perhaps there is something of the masochist in all readers that makes them court suspense, just as it makes people ride on roller coasters. At any rate, the writer must be something of a sadist; he must be willing to torture his reader with suspense, torture the hero of the story by piling mountains of miseries upon him, and tantalize hero, heroine, and reader by snatching from them, time after time, the cup of bliss.

As has been said already in this book, suspense consists of three parts: *a hint or suggestion that something important is likely to happen, a long wait for it to happen, and then the happening itself.* The hint is vital, and the wait is vital; for if the reader does not know that something is going to happen, he does not know that he is waiting for anything, and he is not in suspense—and if the reader does not have to wait, but gets satisfaction immediately, he is not in suspense. Amateur writers often prefer the minor virtue of brief surprise to the greater virtue of long suspense; and they like to get a story told without delay, without making the reader wait. They do not realize that people appreciate a thing only after they have waited and longed for it. If they have not waited and longed, the thing comes to them "stale, flat, and unprofitable."

Suspense may be studied under three headings: the general conditions or requirements of suspense, methods of giving the necessary hint, and methods of making the reader wait. (The final happening may be taken for granted if the writer has composed his story well.)

a. The *conditions of suspense* are likewise three:

(1) *Uncertainty* is one of the conditions of suspense. We endure suspense when we are uncertain—about the winning of a football game or of a battle or of a war, about an election, about the recovery

of a sick child, about the success of a love affair. Often the uncertainty involves a conflict—an actual *physical* conflict between individuals or groups, as in war stories, western stories, and sports stories; a conflict of *wits,* as in tales of intrigue and crime; a conflict between *individual and environment,* as in adventure stories about outdoor life and in certain modern sociological stories; a conflict *within the individual himself,* in which opposing desires or emotions within a character war against one another, as in most serious fiction. But the uncertainty does not necessarily involve conflict. There may be uncertainty as to whether a storm is going to strike a coast, or whether rain will come in an area suffering from drought, or whether a sick person will recover, or whether love will develop between two people, and so on.

(2) The next condition required before there can be suspense is that *the issue at stake must seem important.* We may be uncertain about whether the sun will set at 5:15 or 5:35 this evening; but we feel no suspense about it because the matter is of no importance to us. But if, like James Corbett in his fine tales of hunting man-eating tigers, we knew that being out after sunset would probably mean death, we should be much concerned about the sunset hour. Or we may be uncertain as to whether rain will come this week; and if we were living in the city, we would probably feel no keen suspense about it. If, however, we were living in the country, and we knew that our crops and our cattle could not live another week without rain, and that without rain this week we should lose all the money we have ever saved, and our land, and our home—we might be in considerable suspense as to whether this week will bring rain.

There are several ways in which the writer can make the issue at stake seem important: (a) He may make the issue some matter which has acquired importance by the mutual consent of our civilization: life, love, honor, country, fortune, the welfare of the innocent. (b) If he shows that the characters within a narrative regard some matter as extremely important, or feel intensely emotional about it, he will make the reader likewise regard the matter as extremely important—through the reader's mere fellow feeling. (c) If he gets the reader interested in a character, anything that happens to that char-

acter—from a broken finger to a broken neck—will seem important to the reader. (d) If the writer deals with an issue that is typical of the issues that confront some whole class of people, or group, or place, or time in history, the issue will seem important to the reader.

(3) The *uncustomary* may be a source of suspense. Thus, we may be certain that a condemned criminal will be executed at promptly the announced moment; but if we are to witness the execution, we feel suspense about it nevertheless—simply because it is not customary for us to witness executions every day. Still, there is some question as to whether the uncustomary is a necessary ingredient of suspense. Hardy once wrote that the aim of fiction is "to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience." And again, "We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests (in other words, the hurrying public) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman." The realists among us would not agree with Hardy; they would insist that "the ordinary experience of every average man and woman" is exactly what should *most* concern the tale-teller. Perhaps a compromise, in which the word *important* could be substituted for Hardy's *unusual,* would satisfy the realists. What the realists are trying to show is that certain common, usual, and ordinary experiences (a child's grief, a workman's resentment, a youth's frustrations) when viewed understandingly and sympathetically, are important enough to halt any Wedding Guest. The whole problem may boil down, then, to this: Is the subject important? Are the issues at stake important?

b. Once the conditions of suspense are satisfied, the next question the writer must answer for himself is this: How can the *hint* be given that something important may happen?

(1) The *title* may give the hint. Some stories in recent magazines have these titles: "The Lynching," "Check for $90,000," "Night of the Execution," "Wedding Night." All these titles convey a hint that something extraordinary and important is in the air.

(2) The *first sentence* may give the hint. The following are experiments with such sentences; they are easy to make: "His chances

of escaping alive and unhurt were small, and he knew it"; "Against his better judgment, he decided to yield to his impulse"; "It was too late now for Gerald to go back"; "He was certain that he would die before morning." As first sentences, these would almost certainly start a chain of suspense that the reader could hardly resist.

(3) Putting a character in a *new environment or a new situation* creates suspense. Balzac has said, as a matter of fact, that the best way to start a story is to take an ordinary character and put him in an uncustomary situation. Think over the last few novels and stories you have read, and the last few motion pictures you have seen, and you will be struck by the frequency with which this device is used. It creates suspense because it hints automatically that adjustments must be made and conflicts must occur in the rest of the story.

(4) Starting a character on a *journey* is an easy and always-effective means of creating suspense; it is as old as the *Canterbury Tales* and as new as the last war story about a voyage, an invasion, or a raid. A journey creates suspense even when the reason for it is unimportant. This device is close kin to the next device.

(5) A *meeting or encounter* planned early for central characters is an excellent suspense-creating device. It is used in *Moby Dick,* in "Heart of Darkness," in "The Killers," in many scenes and episodes of many plays and novels.

(6) *Concealed identity* was a stock-in-trade device of most drama and most fiction up to almost the twentieth century. All of Oscar Wilde's plays in the 1890's pivot upon a concealed identity; it is hard to remember a single novel or long narrative poem by Sir Walter Scott that does not use the device; and it appears often nowadays in detective and crime stories. It is still an effective device, provided the reader is in on the secret.

Here follow three rather specialized methods for creating suspense by hinting at important action to come:

(7) *Foreshadowing* is hinting vaguely at coming events, creating an emotional tone to fit the anticipated ending, or introducing suggestive signs, premonitions, portents, predictions, and the like. Hawthorne's "The Ambitious Guest" is a model of a story gaining

suspense by foreshadowing. The student should read it, noting carefully how disaster is suggested so skillfully in the midst of rather tiresome characterization that the reader finds himself tense with excitement even though practically nothing happens in the main body of the story.

(8) *Preparation* is literally a build-up—talk about important characters before they appear, or important events before they happen. It is the standard method of advertisers of coming events (like circuses), and many dramas and motion pictures use it. A classic example is the introduction of Cyrano in the first act of *Cyrano de Bergerac;* and another is the talk about the heroine of *A Farewell to Arms* before the reader is permitted to meet her. This device is particularly useful when a meeting of important characters is planned.

(9) *Anticipation* is the actual description of what is going to happen before it happens. The play-within-the-play in *Hamlet* is an example: the little play is completely outlined for us before it happens. The device is most commonly seen in fiction nowadays when the narrative begins with a concluding scene, and then resorts to a flashback to show how the big scene came out. *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is an example.

c. Suppose now that we have put the reader into suspense by any of the devices just discussed. Our next problem is to make him *wait.* It is a relatively simple problem. The principal thing to remember is that creating high suspense cannot be done in an instant. Suspense is allied, at least, to emotion, and it may be an emotion. Emotion is produced by hormones released into the blood stream by certain glands; these hormones cannot bring about an emotion in less than about thirty seconds. In that time a reader can cover about 150 to 200 words; that is to say, it is physiologically impossible for the reader to work up any kind of emotion in less than about one-third to one-half a page of reading after the initial hint is given. For him to work up a really intense emotion, he must wait much longer. Suspense and emotion are not created in an instant; the writer must go slow.

(1) He can invent a long series of *obstructions,* or obstacles, to the progress of a narrative toward its inevitable conclusion. When

the hero starts out for his objective, or on his journey, or to his meeting, or toward adjusting himself to his new environment—he must not be allowed to succeed all at once. Logs must be thrown across his path; he must be compelled to overcome difficulty after difficulty. Like England, who loses all her battles but the last, the hero must fight through many battles before he comes to victory at last—or, if the story is to end unhappily, he must fight through many battles, now losing and now winning, until he comes to the last battle and loses that too. Almost any story can be lengthened to whatever dimensions the writer desires, provided the writer can invent enough obstructions to the positive course of the action. This is the secret of the perpetual popularity of Alexandre Dumas.

(2) In addition to placing obstructions in the way of the action, the writer may delay matters by *temporary distractions* in the form of descriptions, psychological analysis, some accidental interruption, or even exposition. While the hero is riding toward an ambush that we know is waiting for him, the writer will prolong the suspense by describing the scene as it appears to the hero riding along; or he will let the reader glimpse what is passing through the hero's mind; or he will have the hero pause to say a few words to a friend or a stranger whom he encounters on the way. Under no circumstances will he let the hero ride straight and quickly to the ambush.

Sometimes an action may occur so quickly and unexpectedly that the writer may have no time to build up suspense. For example, an automobile accident, or a snake biting a character, or a sudden fall may happen so quickly and unexpectedly that building up to them by means of any of the devices listed here would be unnatural and unconvincing. On such occasions, however, the writer can still get an emotional reaction in the reader by pausing to describe, psychologize, or even explain affairs *after* the event has occurred. All of us have had the experience of narrowly missing an accident, and then having a strong emotional reaction within the next minute *after* the accident, or sometimes hours or days after it. This post-accident period is a time for creating emotion in fiction.

(3) One way to insure obstacles being present, if there is a conflict in the narrative, is to have the conflicting elements *evenly*

matched. A one-sided conflict never pleases anybody; it contains too little torture. A good story is hardly more than a hero prevented through five pages, or fifty pages, or five hundred pages, from getting what the reader wants him to have. When all is said, it is essentially an experience in slow torture for the reader, and an exercise in deliberate sadism for the writer. No writer can afford to be merciful—until his last page, or last chapter.

2. CREATING CHARACTERS. If one could tell writers how to create characters, one could tell writers how to be geniuses. If a writer of fiction can portray interesting characters, he will be remembered; if he cannot, he is likely to be forgotten. We can forgive an author almost anything if only he is able to create well-rounded, convincing, memorable characters. Though there is no rule that will tell a writer how to create characters, there are some hints that may help.

a. A fictional character may be lifted *directly from life.* Balzac, Daudet, Maupassant, Dickens, Maugham, D. H. Lawrence, and many others have confessed to having picked a large number of their characters ripe off the tree of life. On the other hand, says Maugham, "Nothing, indeed, is so unwise as to put into a work of fiction a person drawn line by line from life"; the writer, he adds, "takes only what he wants of the living man" so that the fictional character is "the result of imagination founded on fact." Sometimes a fictional character is a combination of several characters the author knows in real life; sometimes he is a personification of only one or two traits from a person the author knows in real life. Actually, one does not have to know well a character whom one transfers from life to fiction. Joseph Conrad, for example, saw the original of Mr. Jones, in *Victory,* for only about five minutes; Mr. Jones is a result of Conrad's imagination founded on this five minutes of fact. Indeed, the attempt to put into fiction an exact portrait of some person whom we know well is likely to make difficulties; real human beings are much too complicated and inconsistent for the simplified artistic purposes of the writer.

b. As was pointed out in Section 5 of Chapter XVI, one may conceive a character as being typical in several ways—of a period of life, of a sex, of a time in history, of a geographical region, of a

race, of a trade or profession, of a social class, of a manner of thinking or acting or feeling. Out of characters typifying such things an author can sometimes create individualized and convincing characters in several ways:

(1) A character who is conceived as *typical of many things at once* becomes individualized, and is convincing.

(2) A character who is *exaggeratedly typical* of anything is individualized and convincing. For example, a character who is exaggeratedly youthful, or exaggeratedly masculine, or exaggeratedly Texan, or exaggeratedly middle class, and so on, makes an excellent character.

(3) On the other hand, a character who is *incongruously nontypical* is individualized and convincing. Thus, an elderly person who acts too youthfully, a woman who acts too mannishly, a Texan who acts like a Beacon Street Bostonian, a middle-class person who acts like a millionaire—all these make good characters.

(4) *Exaggeration of some trait* (that is, caricature) makes interesting, if not quite convincing, characters. The old comedy of humors (by Jonson, Steele, Cibber, Sheridan, and others) had this kind of character—as in Miss Lydia Languish, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, Sir Anthony Absolute, Lord Lovelady, Lady Comfortable, and others whose names tell their dominant trait.

(5) A superficial but sometimes effective device is to give a character some *obvious external peculiarity,* like a wooden leg or a patched eye (as in *Treasure Island*), or a characteristic gesture or tag-line, like Mrs. Micawber's "Nothing can ever persuade me to desert Mr. Micawber," or Jeremy Cruncher's continual peeling of his hands, or Uriah Heep's constant writhing.

c. A character seems convincing when the reader has *several conflicting emotions* about him. A character who is all goodness is not convincing, and neither is one who is all badness. A character whom we merely admire is not convincing, and neither is one whom we merely despise. To be convincing, he must make us admire him and despise him; pity him and dislike him; think him false and yet true; understand why he does something in the narrative, and yet deplore his doing it; regard him as fundamentally intelligent and

yet sometimes inexcusably foolish. In general, he will be a character whose fundamental traits will make us sympathize with him under certain circumstances, and make us condemn him in others. Thus, under certain circumstances, we admire the patriotism of Brutus, in *Julius Cæsar;* but under other circumstances we deplore it. In Hamlet thoughtfulness and studiousness could be admirable in normal circumstances; but in abnormal circumstances such traits make him not admirable. And in any event, both the good and the evil, the strength and the weakness, of a character must be presented frankly and unapologetically; neither of them is to be ignored or glossed over by too casual treatment. Bret Harte's miners, gamblers, and strumpets are false characters because their creator, though admitting their immorality, minimizes it by neglecting to portray it; at the same time he magnifies their goodness by dwelling on it. In contrast, the villain of the contemporary motion picture, of the melodrama and melodramatic novels of the last century, of the average boy's book and comic magazine, is a creature of unmitigated depravity who is not convincing. When the fiction writer feels that his reader may have only one emotion about a character the writer has created, the character is probably not well conceived.

(At the same time, it must be confessed that, in the first place, a character may be so unimportant in the narrative that the writer may have no desire to waste time trying to make him too convincing; and in the second place, the writer may sometimes wish to stack the cards for or against a certain character just to make him perform the function in the story for which he was originally designed.)

d. Perhaps the fiction writer's best friend is the *sensitive character*—the character who is almost abnormally alive to the world about him, keenly perceptive, emotionally responsive, intensely impressionable—the person who understands quickly, is easily susceptible to being emotionally touched by the world, reacts intensely to persons, nature, society, situations. A character such as this creates that almost exaggerated atmosphere of taking-things-seriously which is the essence of drama; and he is a mirror in whom the world as the fiction-writer conceives it can be reflected.

3. **PORTRAYING CHARACTERS.** The actual method of character por-

trayal in any narrative is either direct or indirect. An author who uses the first method may tell his reader, either by blunt character analysis or by interpretative description, exactly what sort of person a certain individual is—as Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper have a habit of doing at the first introduction of any principal character. A variant of this method, though actually identical with the device just mentioned, is the portrayal of character by means of reports of other characters about him. Cæsar characterizes Antony several times in Shakespeare's play; King Henry characterizes Hotspur early in *I Henry IV;* and Hotspur's ambassador returns to his chief with glowing tributes characterizing Hal. Such direct character portrayals have the virtue of informing the reader, from the very first, about some person who is to figure in the story. Yet this virtue can hardly compensate for the fact that this direct method halts the action and is unnatural. People in real life do not bear labels, nor do they subject themselves to immediate and full analysis when we first encounter them.

Much more natural is the indirect method of character portrayal. A writer using such a method introduces his characters by name or business, and then allows them to reveal themselves just as new acquaintances reveal themselves to us in real life.

a. Sometimes a man's *conversation* exposes his nature to the listener much better than could any studied analysis of his character. Coleridge tells of a banquet at which a mysterious and interesting-looking guest ate and said nothing during a large part of the meal. Coleridge conceived that the man must be a man of genuine importance. But at length, when the potatoes were passed, the stranger reached for them and cried out, "Them's the bullies for me!" That one remark characterizes the man completely.

b. Sometimes the *actions,* impulsive, deliberate, or habitual, of a person will reveal his character:

> At the height of that fearful tempest, with Mrs. Johnson hysterical and the children dumb with fright, Mr. Johnson stood by the door methodically tamping down the tobacco in his pipe, and trying to strike one wet match after another on the door-facing.

We need no more analysis of Mr. Johnson: we know him already. This next shows habitual actions which thoroughly characterize a man.

He had worked as a section-hand on a railroad for fifteen years; he had never married; he had denied himself all luxuries and many comforts, even necessities; and he had done all this in order to send back to his home in Greece a yearly sum to support a disabled father and an aged mother.

What else need be told of this man?

c. *Habitual environment* is a third means of portraying character. We understand Don Quixote much better when we see his untended and dilapidated paternal estate; we understand Gerald (in *The Old Wives' Tale*) better when we see the expensiveness of his surroundings in Paris; and we understand Miss Prittle when we read the following description of her surroundings:

Miss Prittle's gate clicked behind him. A clean-swept, glistening brick walk, red with white mortar, led straight to a clean-swept front step between two rows of straight zinnias. The door-knob gleamed in the sun, and the bell buzzed sharply when he touched it.

d. Finally, a description of *the effect one character has on others* is an excellent means of depicting character. For example, we might be tempted to take Glendower's sentimentality seriously if we did not see the skeptical Hotspur ridiculing the Welshman. Or we should miss half the humor of Don Quixote's folly if we did not see the effect of it on the unimaginative Sancho.

The child had been playing with her dolls on the sofa; but as soon as her father entered the room, she collected her toys and disappeared.

We know now both the father and the daughter.

4. CREATING A BACKGROUND. A complete background for a piece of fiction includes time, place, and social group. To create such a background, and a sense of it to the reader, the writer may do one or several of the following things:

a. He may *describe the physical setting* of his story—as Kipling describes the Himalayas in "The Miracle of Purun Baghat," or as George W. Cable describes New Orleans in *Old Creole Days.*

b. He may *present typical characters* of a region, a time, or a social rank—as Sarah Orne Jewett presents typical characters of New England, as Scott in *Ivanhoe* presents typical characters of England in the twelfth century, and as O. Henry presents typical characters of the lower working classes of New York.

c. He may *introduce typical dialect*—as does Charles Egbert Craddock in her stories of the Tennessee mountaineers, and Joel Chandler Harris in his stories of the Southern Negro before the Civil War. This typical dialect (as well as the other typical details to be mentioned immediately) may be typical, of course, of a place, a time, or a social rank.

d. The writer may *describe typical costumes*—as does Scott in all his historical novels (Carlyle says that he "describes his characters from the skin outwards").

e. He may *describe typical customs*—as Synge does in *Riders to the Sea* and as Flaubert does in *Salammbo*.

f. He may *describe typical mental attitudes*—as Maupassant describes the cold and selfish cruelty of the typical Norman mind, as Hawthorne describes the narrow and austere Puritanism of the typical New England mind, as Oscar Wilde describes the impudent and cynical sophistication of the typical aristocratic mind in London of the nineteenth century.

IV. Incidentals

1. DIALOGUE. Dialogue is not absolutely necessary in fiction; yet most writers of fiction use dialogue because it helps create an illusion of reality, because it is more vivid and direct than a mere roundabout summary of what people in the story say, because it helps in characterization, because it may sometimes advance the action swiftly, and because it affords variety. Though dramatic writers must necessarily give information through dialogue, writers of other sorts of fiction ought to be a little wary of purely expository dialogue. They ought to take it as a rough rule-of-thumb that dialogue has no place in a story unless it serves one of two purposes—to illustrate character, or to advance action. If it serves neither purpose, or some other purpose, it should give place to another sort of writing.

The chief problem of most writers is to make dialogue sound natural. As a matter of fact, however, readers will readily accept even very unnatural dialogue provided it is consistent. That is, readers will accept stilted and artificial dialogue if this sort of dialogue is consistent with the tone of the work as a whole, and if it is consistent within itself. For example, if a writer pictures a character as using modern slang, he could not have him talking in well-rounded Johnsonian periods; or if he pictures the character working in a realistically conceived contemporary setting, the writer could not have the character talking in the more elaborate fashion of our grandfathers. The point is that readers will accept dialogue just as the writer wishes to present it if only he remains consistent in his own presentation. Nobody objects to the poetic speeches of Lord Dunsany's characters; nobody objects to the inhuman wit and glitter of the speeches of Oscar Wilde's characters; nobody objects to the impossible distortions of grammar, pronunciation, and logic in the speeches of Dickens's characters; and nobody objects to the oracular and philosophic disquisitions in the speeches of Bernard Shaw's characters. All these speeches are consistent within themselves and within the author's work as a whole; and accordingly, all are acceptable to the reader.

But though naturalness of dialogue is not all-important, it is often desirable and necessary. Naturalness will come if the writer has conceived his characters perfectly, and has entered completely into their imagined existence. Nevertheless, a few suggestions about writing dialogue cannot come amiss; they are short cuts to the knowledge which the writer would eventually come to through experience even if he had never read a textbook on writing.

The first of these suggestions is that long passages of uninterrupted dialogue do not make good writing. This is a general rule to which almost anyone can find many notable exceptions in literature. But it is a good rule, nevertheless. If the young writer finds himself reporting over a page of uninterrupted dialogue, he should catch himself up and ask himself if a paragraph or so of description, comment, exposition, or straight narrative should not be inserted in order to break up the dialogue.

The next suggestion is that dialogue should usually be mixed with a good measure of detail from the author's own imagination. In the following passage from Arnold Bennett, for example, notice how large a proportion of the words are Bennett's, and not Constance's, Sophia's, or Mr. Povey's:

The tension was snapped by Mr. Povey. "My God!" he muttered, moved by a startling discovery to this impious and disgraceful oath (he, the pattern and exemplar—and in the presence of innocent girlhood too!). "I've swallowed it!"

"Swallowed what, Mr. Povey?" Constance inquired.

The tip of Mr. Povey's tongue made a careful voyage of inspection all around the right side of his mouth.

"Oh yes!" he said, as if solemnly accepting the inevitable. "I've swallowed it!"

Sophia's face was now scarlet; she seemed to be looking for some place to hide it. Constance could not think of anything to say.

"That tooth has been loose for two years," said Mr. Povey, "and now I've swallowed it with a mussel."

"Oh, Mr. Povey!" Constance cried in confusion, and added, "There's one good thing, it can't hurt you any more now."

"Oh," said Mr. Povey. "It wasn't *that* tooth that was hurting me. It's an old stump at the back that's upset me so this last day or two. I wish it had been."

Sophia had her teacup close to her red face. At these words of Mr. Povey her cheeks seemed to fill out like ripe apples. She dashed the cup into its saucer, spilling tea recklessly, and then ran from the room with stifled snorts.

"Sophia!" Constance protested.

"I must just—" Sophia incoherently spluttered in the doorway. "I shall be all right. Don't—"

Constance, who had risen, sat down again.[1]

These two suggestions about dialogue are of prime importance; those which follow are only suggestions about minor devices which make for naturalness.

Dialect should not be reproduced accurately, but should be merely suggested. The distortions of spelling necessary for the accurate transcription of Negro dialect, Irish brogue, broken English

[1] From *The Old Wives' Tale,* by Arnold Bennett, reprinted by permission of Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc.

spoken by foreigners, and so forth, are confusing to the reader. A few words or constructions written in the manner of the dialect are enough to suggest the entire dialect to the reader's imagination.

Speeches by individual characters ought to be fairly short—seldom over fifty or a hundred words in length. Sentences in dialogue ought not to be always grammatically complete; there should be elliptical constructions, self-interruptions, exclamations, phrases suggesting whole sentences (like "You don't say!" "What for?" "Why not?" "And me not there!" etc.).

Above all, dialogue should not consist of mere questions and answers. If one character asks a question, the other character may ignore it (as Mr. Povey ignores Constance's question in the passage quoted above), or answer an anticipated or implied question, or ask another in return. For instance:

"Are you going to town?"
"I must finish this book before I go anywhere."

Here the question asked is not answered, but a question anticipated ("Why aren't you going to town?") is answered.

"What are you doing?"
"We are to have an examination tomorrow, and so I have to finish this book."

Here the question "What?" is answered as if it had been "Why?"

"What are you doing?"
"Why do you ask?"

Here one question is answered by another.

By such slight devices as these an author can often give the breath of life to his speaking characters.

2. TITLES. Sometimes a writer has a title in mind from the beginning of his work on a piece of fiction, and keeps shaping his story to fit the title. More often, perhaps, he thinks of a title when he is halfway through his work, and then goes back over the work and revises it to fit the title. And most often of all, a writer finishes his story, and then wonders what to call it.

If one is seeking professional publication for his work, titles are

extremely important. A good title can attract editorial attention when a manuscript first arrives in a publishing office, and it will attract readers after the story or the novel is published. As a matter of fact, it frequently happens that publishers do not like the title the author has given a narrative, and (if the work is accepted) publish it with a title of the editor's own devising. It might be said in passing that the editor's title is often worse than the author's; but the editor has the privilege of being wrong if he insists, and the author can do little about the matter.

The general form and diction of titles have been discussed on pp. 248–251 of this book. The student should look back over what was said there, and apply it to the following remarks that concern fiction specifically.

a. A title should perform at least one of the following services:

(1) A title may *attract attention* by being unique, surprising, or pleasing. *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Reflections in a Golden Eye* are examples from novels, and "The Shame of the Man on the Egg" and "Fists of an Afternoon" are examples from stories.

(2) Titles that attract attention may also *excite curiosity*. Sometimes a reader will pause to read a story just to satisfy the curiosity the title has aroused in him. This baiting of readers, and trying to catch them on the hook of a suspenseful first few paragraphs, is quite legitimate in these days when so much is being published that readers must be lured to read even good literature. Examples of titles, from novels and from stories, that excite curiosity are those quoted just above and others like *Fandango for a Crown of Thorns; Run, Mongoose;* ".007"; "Thomasina Disparue"; "The First Death of Her Life."

(3) The title may *indicate the type of the story*, and thus appeal to specific groups of readers. For instance, "Sandra's New Hat" would attract women readers, but "Action at Salano Bay" and "Amphibious Operation" would probably repel women. The lover of mystery stories would eagerly inspect *The Bahamas Murder Case*, and the more romantic-minded person would read "Summer Romance" and "Late Summer Idyl."

(4) Sometimes a title may give the general *emotional tone* of the

story. This is particularly true of the quality and "little" magazines. One need not read the story to know that "Shut a Final Door" is not humorous, but that "Antlers to the Alpenrose" is likely to be. "Years Brought to an End" is likely to be serious and moody; "Treat the Natives Kindly," ironic; "A Little Girl Named I," nostalgic; and "Son of the Sea," romantic. Titles like these attract readers (and editors) who are looking for stories having the emotional tone implied.

(5) Once in a great while the title may serve to *clarify the writer's meaning.* Conrad's *Victory,* for example, ending as it does with the death of all the important characters, takes on a special meaning because of its title; so does his "Heart of Darkness." In Sherwood Anderson's "The Door of the Trap," the title calls attention to the fact that conventions are a trap. But such titles are uncommon because stories so subtle as to require this kind of title are uncommon.

b. Though the writer may know what functions a title may serve, he still has the problem of *finding* a title. The following suggestions may help:

(1) The title may be the *main character's name*—as so often happened with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel: *Tom Jones, Roderick Random, Adam Bede, David Copperfield.* Two recent stories, both in *Mademoiselle,* were called "Jerry" and "Charles," and three in *Harper's Bazaar* were "Victoria," "Dibly," and "Mr. Bonebreaker." Names of women are usually more glamorous than those of men—as in *Kitty Foyle, Peg Woffington,* "Carmencita," "Miss W." But unless it can excite curiosity, as "Mr. Bonebreaker" does, or unless it can be used with other words (as in *Forever Amber,* "Cleve Pikestaff, Senator," and "Pastor Dow at Tacaté") the name-title is not advisable.

(2) Sometimes a title may be manufactured out of some *main characteristic of a chief character*—his dominant trait, his profession or office, his situation in life, his relationships to other characters: *The Cardinal, The Egyptian, The King's Cavalier,* "The Old Maid," "The Lovely Lady," "The Man of the House," "The Mother," "The Man Who Could Work Miracles."

(3) The title may designate some *object, place, or time* that figures prominently in the story. Here are some examples naming an object: *A Bell for Adano, Lady Windermere's Fan, The Wall, The Cherry Orchard,* "The Birth Mark," "The Black Cat," "The White Hound," "The Shared Bed." A place: *Tobacco Road, Oklahoma, The Sea and the Jungle,* "Home," "In the Park," "At Paso Rojes." A time: *In Old Creole Days* (which also implies a place), *When Knighthood Was in Flower,* "One Rainy Night," "A Summer Day," "In the Good Old Summertime."

(4) The title may name the *main situation or outstanding event* in the story: *The Light that Failed, Of Human Bondage, Lady on the Lam,* "The Courting of Dinah Shadd," "The Temptation of Emma Boynton," "My Brother's Second Funeral."

(5) *Quotations* from poems, the Bible, proverbs, and other works have become very common in modern fiction. Examples are *Gone with the Wind, For Whom the Bell Tolls, And Tell of Time,* "Edge of Doom," "Hail Brother and Farewell," "Take Her Up Tenderly," "Brother's Keeper." A few minutes with almost any good book of quotations in any library will suggest dozens of titles for almost anything one has written.

3. HUMOR. In these days humor is valued (and paid for) more highly, it may be, than at any other time in history. Nearly all novels have, or should have, humor; many stories have it; and some stories are almost entirely humorous. This universal demand for humor has attracted some of the world's most expert humorists into the field of purveying humor to the public, and as a consequence the public has developed certain tastes and standards of humor that are fixed, if not high. It follows that not everybody can compete successfully in the field of humor; the public has become too demanding, or too critical according to its own lights. It may be stated as a rule that, unless the student feels very sure that he is a humorist, he might do well not to try to be a humorous writer; nothing is so pathetic as a writer who tries to be humorous, and fails. Furthermore, the student should remember that humorists are born, not made.

Nevertheless, everybody has a sense of humor after a fashion; and

everybody occasionally says or writes things that make other people smile appreciatively, or laugh aloud. The task of the student writer is to make use of whatever humorous talents he may have—because humorous writing is readable in itself, it attracts readers, and it helps give pleasing variety to serious work. Perhaps the following suggestions may help the student inject at least a little humor into his work.

a. Nobody knows just *why people laugh.* Dozens of theories have been suggested: that laughter is triumphant, that it is cruel, that it is intended to humiliate others, that it is intended to exalt oneself, that it is a result of a sudden relief of inner suppressions, that its chief source is irreverence, that it is inspired by the incongruous or by the mildly disappointing or by the surprising in life, and so on. We need not pause to philosophize or to psychologize on the subject any further. All we need remember is that laughter may be more serious than we realize.

b. What may be called *serious laughter* has been discussed by George Meredith, who distinguishes the laughter of humor, the laughter of satire, and the laughter of comedy from one another. This serious laughter is ridicule; it derides or humiliates. *Humor,* says Meredith, is ridicule of something for which we retain affection —like children at whose mistakes we laugh, or foreigners who mispronounce English words, or freshmen who seem so ignorant. *Satire* is ridicule with a purpose—of persons or social customs that are irrational, immoral, or unwise; it uses the weapon of laughter in order to effect reform, for it knows that, for some reason, nobody likes to be laughed at. *Comedy* is "intellectual laughter," "laughter of the mind"; it has no desire to reform, and it does not love the thing ridiculed; it merely points out the follies that exist among men and women, the people who "wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate . . . self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly." Comedy is "humanely malign"; it is neither warm with affection nor hot with anger; it is

coolly dispassionate, intellectually ruthless to that which is unintelligent.

c. *Light laughter* exists on another plane that is ill-defined and inexplicable. It is thoughtless laughter that may express anything from mere animal good feeling to a sense of relief from restraint, or from a feeling for the incongruous to a feeling of superiority.

(1) One manifestation of this light laughter is the laughter we have for *comic characters.* In general, comic characters are those in whom we are aware of exaggerated traits that do not offend us morally. The clown in the circus, with his exaggerated shoes, nose, and rags, is a comic character; Falstaff, with his exaggerated belly, lechery, and lying is a comic character; the characters in the comedy of humors, with certain traits exaggerated, are comic characters; Molière's Hypocrite (*Tartuffe*), Blue-Stockings (*Les Précieuses ridicules*), Bores (*Les Fâcheux*), Misanthrope (*Le Misanthrope*), and many other characters with exaggerated traits are comic. Almost any writer may create a comic character by exaggeration; perhaps other sorts of comic characters exist, and perhaps genius is required for creating just the kind of exaggeration that is comic without being tiresome. But exaggeration of certain traits does produce comic characters.

(2) *Verbal comedy* is the use of words and phrases that in themselves produce a laugh, almost regardless of their meaning. Puns, or plays on words and double-meaning words, are humorous; we laugh at them even when we deplore them. In English, a self-conscious use of big words (Johnsonese, it is called, after the great Doctor) is laughable. Mispronunciations, especially by foreigners, children, or certain races, are laughable in America, though other nations do not seem to find mispronunciations funny. Misapplications of words (like Mrs. Malaprop's "know something of the geometry of contagious countries") are comic. In a slightly more complicated way, parodies and language incongruous with the character using it are comic.

(3) Certain *comic actions and situations* may be manufactured almost at will; Hollywood, indeed, does manufacture them delib-

erately and cold-bloodedly in almost every motion picture. Most of them may be classified under one or another of the following heads:

Moral turpitude (irreverence, deceit, cowardice) that is not so serious as to cause actual moral indignation; absent-mindedness; perplexity (the man who leaves his Pullman berth at night and cannot find his way back); the amateur who is forced to do the work of the expert (the city boy milking a cow, the old curmudgeon forced to take care of a baby, Harold Lloyd in nearly all his comedies of a previous generation); people "caught in the act" of doing something that they wish to keep secret (like kissing, eloping, stealing jam, trying to deceive someone); turning the tables on a villain, or "the worm turns" situation (the typical situation in the Charlie Chaplin motion pictures, and in most Walt Disney cartoons in which the little fellow turns the tables on his persecutor); the mild discomfiture of anybody (chasing a hat, slipping on ice, a woman with a shoe-heel caught in a grating, people doused with water from a hose, well-dressed people being overwhelmed by an affectionate dog who has just had an encounter with a skunk); mechanical tricks like a chase, repetition or multiplication (the drunken man who knocks not merely on one wrong door but on five or six wrong doors in succession, the catch phrase continually repeated, as in "Barkis is willing" and many others in Dickens, triplets); stupidity (from Shakespeare's clowns and rustics down to the latest stooge on television, village idiots, amiable drunks, freshmen). There are others, but these are the most common, and perhaps the most easily manufactured.

4. PREPARATION OF MANUSCRIPTS. A manuscript intended for publication should have a professional look, and should be submitted to the prospective publisher in a professional manner. Some hints on professionalism follow:

a. All manuscripts should be typed (double-spaced) on only one side of good, not too thin, typewriter paper. Substance 20 is about the right weight; and 8½ inches by 11 inches is the right size.

b. Margins should be left on every page as follows: At the top, about 2 inches; at the left, 1¼ inches; at the bottom, ¾ of an inch.

c. Every page should be numbered with Arabic numerals in the

upper right corner. Do not number the pages at the bottom or in the middle at the top. The first page need not be numbered.

d. Any manuscript submitted for publication in a magazine or newspaper should bear the following items on the first page: (1) In the upper left corner the name and the address to which checks or correspondence must be sent by the publisher—if any; (2) in the upper right corner these words: "This manuscript contains (number) words. A Story" (or "An Article"); (3) the title in the middle of the page (from left to right) and about four inches from the top of the page; the title is usually not written in capitals, though all important words and the first word and the last word in it are capitalized; the author's name, or assumed name, as he wishes it to appear in print. (Sometimes the name under which one wishes to have his work appear is not exactly that under which he is generally known at his mailing address, or under which he does business. But do not use an assumed name unless you have good reason for doing so, and unless you explain carefully to the prospective publisher why you wish to do so. Editors do not like assumed names; they think that if an author is ashamed or afraid to use his own name, they should be ashamed or afraid to publish his work.)

e. A letter should accompany a manuscript sent unsolicited to a magazine or to a newspaper under the following conditions *only:* (1) If the writer knows or has had correspondence with the editor; (2) If the writer wishes to explain (*very* briefly) why he considers himself capable of writing on the subject he has chosen—for example, if he writes a story or an article about China, and has lived in China, he should say briefly that he has lived in China. Sometimes a note briefly identifying the author is clipped to the manuscript; the note would read something like this: "Author is ex-Marine; fought in China; contributor to Army newspapers; author of stories previously published in _____ magazine."

f. Short manuscripts (one to three pages) may be folded twice across the page, like an ordinary business letter, placed in an ordinary long envelope, and mailed. Longer manuscripts (five to ten pages) may be folded once across the middle of the page, and mailed in a somewhat larger (manila) envelope. Longer manu-

scripts should not be folded at all, and should be mailed in a full-size manila envelope. A page-size slip of cardboard is often sent along with such a manuscript; it makes the postage higher, but it saves crumpling the manuscript.

g. A stamped, self-addressed envelope the same size as the one containing the manuscript should *always* be included with the manuscript when it is mailed. It should be included even if the author does not care to have the manuscript returned to him; for unless the author has the manuscript back in his hands, he can never know whether or not it has been rejected, and so can never know whether or not he ought to try to sell it to another publisher.

h. It is illegal to send any kind of manuscript through the mails without sealing it and paying first-class postage.

i. Book manuscripts should be sent by prepaid express, and insured for about $100. The first page of the manuscript should contain the author's name and address, a statement of the approximate number of words in the manuscript, and some such sentence as this: "If not accepted for publication, please return this manuscript *express collect* to _____."

j. A letter stating the simple fact that you are sending a book manuscript of such-and-such a title, that you hope the editors will consider it for publication, and that if the manuscript is unaccepted it is to be returned express collect—such a letter should be mailed on the same day that you send the manuscript. Most publishing houses send you a printed card telling you that the manuscript has arrived.

k. Unless you know the name of the editor of the magazine or publishing company, address your manuscript to "The Editor." Sometimes a company is so large that it has several departments—as College Department, Fiction Department, Juvenile Department—each with its own editor. Under these conditions, a subaddress to the editor of such-and-such a department may be placed on the manuscript. (Of course, if the editor communicates personally with the author about a manuscript, the author will reply to the person writing, not to the impersonal "editor.")

m. Make the order of contents in a book manuscript just like

those of any book of a similar nature issued recently by a well-established publishing house.

n. Ordinarily, publishers hire their own artists to illustrate fiction, or even articles. Send your own illustrations only if they are charts or figures clarifying an article, or if (once in a very great while) they have a peculiar humor or charm that make them an integral part of the literary work. Illustrations should be pasted lightly but securely on separate sheets, with titles of illustrations written below them.

EXERCISES

I. Some Preliminary Decisions

1. Length.

   Look through several issues of several magazines that you might like to write for, and estimate the number of words in their stories. (Estimate by counting the number of words in about fifteen lines, finding the average number of words per line, multiplying by the number of lines per page, and then multiplying this figure by the number of pages.)

2. Quantities in Fiction.

   a. Look over some of the suggestions for stories listed in previous exercises in this book, and determine which ones might be developed into very long stories or novels by an accumulation of obstructions.

   b. Mention at least three examples (characters or events) that you could use in writing a convincing story on one of the following themes:

   College is very confusing to the student.
   Most young people are troubled about religious beliefs.
   Women don't love men who are too perfect.
   Men don't love dominating women.
   People don't learn by experience.
   Perfectionists make themselves miserable, and don't succeed in making the world perfect, either.

3. Style.

   Be sure that you are familiar with the style and method of treating the subject in the novels of Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, Thomas Wolfe, and Virginia Woolf.

4. Point of View.

Study the narratives suggested in different exercises of this book to determine the point of view which would be most suitable for each narrative.

Suppose you are writing some such story as this:

> A young man graduates from college, goes into business, and finds himself in charge of a group of working girls. He allows himself to fall in love with one of the girls, though she has no education, no culture, and no worthwhile background. Eventually, however, the young man realizes that he and the girl are utterly unsuited to each other. The theme is, of course, that oil and water will not mix.

What point of view would you take if you were trying to show the folly of the young man?

If you were trying to show the folly of the girl in thinking she might permanently hold the affection of the young man?

If you were trying to show the different stages in the development of the young man's feeling about the girl?

If you were trying to show the effect the whole affair might have on the young man's character?

If you were chiefly interested in emphasizing the theme?

II. The Beginning and the Ending

1. Exposition.

Write an expository paragraph about the life and character of some person you know, or some character discussed in the exercises of this or preceding chapters; and then try to present this information dramatically, as in the example given in the text.

2. The First Sentences.

Try to compose melodramatic first sentences like those given as examples early in this section. Can you compose such sentences for stories you have already written? Examine some of the very brief stories frequently published in newspapers, and see how many of them begin with melodrama in the first sentence—so as to catch the immediate attention of the hasty newspaper reader.

The instructor may mimeograph, or copy on the blackboard, the first few sentences of several stories that have been submitted in his classes, and ask the students to improve the beginnings in whatever way they think best.

3. The Last Sentences.

Make a special study of the last sentences in some collection of stories. Study the ends of stories you have written, and the ends of

stories by other members of your class. Which ones seem altogether satisfactory? Why? How can the others be improved?

III. The Body of the Narrative

1. Suspense.

Invent as many devices as you can for getting suspense in a narrative that you might write about

A journey by train, bus, private car, or ship.
A young man who has arrived penniless in your town.
A girl who wants a certain young man to propose to her.
A passenger plane that has one motor fail in mid air.
Any of the stories suggested in any of the exercises of this book.

2. Creating Characters.

a. Which characters in stories you have written have some basis in real life? How do your fictional characters differ from the real ones? Get your fellow students to answer the same questions.

Write a brief character sketch of one of the following people whom you know personally:

An old man.
An old woman.
A college boy.
A college girl.
A college professor.
A working girl.

b. Write a brief character sketch of one of the characters just mentioned by making him exaggeratedly typical. Then, in another sketch, make one of the characters incongruously nontypical. Then make one in which some one trait is much exaggerated. Then characterize one by means of some obvious external peculiarity.

c. Tell about several characters who arouse conflicting emotions in you.

3. Portraying Characters.

In each of the ways mentioned in the text, characterize three of the individuals listed above, or three characters of your own acquaintance or invention.

4. Creating a Background.

By what means (one or several) would you reconstruct the following backgrounds imaginatively:

Your high school.
Your college.

Your social class.
The part of town in which you live.
Some distant community where you have visited.
Your mother's girlhood.

IV. Incidentals

1. Dialogue.

   Take some parable of the New Testament, some episode of the Old Testament, some fable from Aesop, or some narrative episode summarized in a modern story or novel, and tell it with much dialogue.

2. Titles.

   The instructor should list the titles of twenty or more stories that have been submitted in his classes, and have the students discuss their merits and their defects.

3. Humor.

   Try to think up comic actions or situations (involving all those listed in the text) that will center about

   A college student.
   A college professor.

Appendix

Since everything is grist for a writer's mill, students of writing are likely to ask questions on every conceivable subject. Some of the questions that are often asked in classes presided over by the author of this book, together with his answers, follow:

Q. Do you think a writer needs inspiration in order to write well?

A. *Inspiration* is a vague word. Once in a while a brilliant idea strikes a person—it doesn't seem to come from anywhere in particular. Then the fortunate person who has been struck has to do a lot of hard thinking to develop the mere idea into a complete work. More often, a person who has been doing a lot of hard thinking about some topic, without getting anywhere, suddenly feels a clarifying idea shoot through him—everything that has been confusing him now falls into place. Ideas coming like this may be called inspiration. But perhaps you imply that one shouldn't write until he feels inspired, until he feels a spirit moving him. Don't wait for that kind of inspiration. You must write whether you feel like it or not; write routinely. Once in every few weeks or few months, to be sure, a writer may feel that he can't possibly sit down to his desk and write; he feels that he will die, or at any rate get sick, if he does. On these occasions, he should take one or two days' vacation. But only on these very widely scattered days does one have a valid excuse for not writing. Mary Roberts Rinehart says somewhere that the average professional writer sits down to his desk with as much enthusiasm as if he were sitting down to a dish of cold boiled turnips.

Q. Should a writer keep a notebook?

A. Most of the best writers do. Everybody has one or two clever or original or penetrating thoughts every day. If you don't jot those thoughts down immediately, you forget them. It is a good plan to jot them down on any old envelope or other piece of paper that is handy, and enter them in the notebook at night. It is also a good idea to keep the notebook by one's bed at night. The most brilliant thoughts often come to one just before sleep; and if they are not set down then and there, they will have vanished by morning.

Q. How about keeping a journal?

A. Young writers especially can profit immensely by keeping a journal. It gets a young writer into the habit of writing something almost every

day, whether or not he feels like it; it teaches him to see something worthy of comment in everyday life; and it accustoms him to expressing himself without too many inhibitions. Besides, the more writing one does, the more facile one becomes in writing.

Q. Would you advise a prospective writer to go into newspaper work?

A. Newspaper work is unimaginative; it allows no writer (except a few columnists) to express his personality; it has a certain stereotyped form of composition; it almost necessarily falls into stereotyped phrases; and it puts no value on beauty or appropriateness of style. As a rule, therefore, a long period of newspaper work is bad for the creative writer. A short period may be useful because it may train him to write regularly, clearly, and concisely.

Q. How should a person who doesn't have an independent income go about adopting writing as a career?

A. Women should marry, get somebody to support them, and sit down and write while their husbands are off at work. If they have children, they may have to wait ten or fifteen years, till the children get into school, and allow their mother a few hours' peace every day. Men have it harder. They should get a job that will not be too taxing physically, and then try to write in the evenings and over week ends, holidays, and vacations. This takes moral courage, persistence, patience, and self-sacrifice (as well as sacrifice of one's wife). But if you write only 300 words a day for five days a week, you will have a novel within a year.

Q. Is teaching a good means of earning a living while one is writing?

A. Yes—with qualifications. Teaching in the public schools (especially in the junior high schools) can tax one's nerves and physical stamina to the utmost—so that no mental or physical energy is left over for writing. On the other hand, teaching in the elementary grades, and sometimes in high school, may be relatively pleasant. And all teaching leaves most of the evenings, Saturdays, Sundays, long holidays at Thanksgiving, Easter, and Christmas, and the summer months free for writing. Teaching in college is more satisfying in some ways. But the very serious drawback here is that you will be expected to do "research" either for advanced degrees or for advancement in the profession. Research will not only consume all your spare hours, but will also tend more and more to make you a critic and a scholar rather than a creative writer. Only certain very obstinate and unimpressionable people can succeed in both scholarly and creative writing.

Q. Can one expect, eventually, to make a good livng at writing?

A. A good many people get rich at it; but a very large majority of even well-established professional writers have only a fair competence, not wealth; and most have to supplement their incomes by other work.

Q. Which is more profitable—writing for magazines or writing books?

A. In general, writing for magazines is more profitable. But, of course, certain books make a great deal of money for the author. Furthermore, writing for the poorer class, "pulp" magazines is not really lucrative unless you can turn out enormous amounts of copy, and there is no honor in writing for these magazines. Therefore, not counting the occasional writer who can produce ten novels and a hundred stories per year, a writer who cannot write good literature would probably do better financially if he got a job in a large corporation, and worked up in it. To be sure, if he wishes to make a little extra money occasionally, and has time to write, he can try writing for the pulps. But, as a rule, he should write as well as he can, try to be proud of his work, get some satisfaction from self-expression and the act of creation, and (until he becomes well established as an author) depend on his job with the corporation for his livelihood.

Q. Should one send his work off directly to the magazines and book publishers, or should one have a literary agent?

A. That is still an unsolved problem. Most magazines and book publishers *do* examine the unsolicited manuscripts that come to them; on the other hand, they undoubtedly look with greater attention at manuscripts coming to them from a reliable agent. But most reliable agents do not like to handle the work of embryo authors; and the agents who solicit the manuscripts of amateur authors are often worse than useless—they may be merely frauds and bloodsuckers.

Q. How does the new writer possibly get out of this dilemma?

A. He can do three things. First, he should keep on sending his material to prospective markets among the widely read magazines; in particular, he should enter all prize contests in which he thinks his work might have a chance. Next, he should send material to the "little" magazines, which pay little or nothing for manuscripts, but publication in which encourages the larger magazines to look favorably on other work by the same author. Finally, he should associate with literary people—that is, not people who *try* to be literary, or *think* they are literary, but truly literary people. Sometimes, especially in small communities, this is difficult. But, if possible, he should go to places where established writers and teachers of writing are likely to be. He should not force himself upon them, but he should try to become acquainted with them, hear their lectures, visit their classes, talk with them at gatherings. He should write to authors whose work he likes, especially local authors, and keep up a correspondence with them. He should not hurry matters—but eventually some of these people will find out that he writes, and will ask to see his work, or will consent to look over some of it. Except by specific request, the first manuscript submitted to these people should be short. If these

people judge that the young writer has any possibilities, they will be glad to encourage him, to criticize his work, and to recommend him to agents and publishers. Writers and critics and teachers of writing are busy people; they do not have time to help everybody who has written something, or to criticize in detail long novels that total strangers thrust at them. Still, they are always glad to discover and to encourage talent. If the young writer will try to be unselfish and considerate, he will find that most other people will be the same.

Q. Should a young writer frequent writers' groups?

A. He should certainly frequent writing groups in college. Members of these groups are better read, more seriously interested in writing, and more capable of criticism than are groups made up of the public at large. Moreover, college groups have the leadership and sponsorship of some professor whose opinions are sometimes valuable. Groups made up of the general public have low literary standards, as a rule, are poor critics, and do not have competent leadership. Even college writing groups have fulfilled their function for most people after a few years. "Incentives come from the soul's self," Browning wrote. "The rest avail not." As you grow older, you must more and more depend upon yourself, not on other people, for your incentives.

Q. Do you imply that we should not heed the criticism of others?

A. Criticism is a profession; do not trust amateurs. Above all, never, never listen to your mother's criticism of your work, or your best friend's, or your wife's or husband's, or your roommate's. It is a safe rule to do always just the opposite of what they advise. College professors are sometimes good critics (but not always); so are some professional writers. Listen to their criticism, pass judgment on it for yourself, and heed it if it seems sensible. Remember that personal taste has little to do with criticism. The person who says of your manuscript, "I like it," or, "I don't like it," is helping you very little. He is a statistic, nothing more. He is not a critic. To be a critic, one must have read a great deal of good literature, must have thought about it, must be able to tell *why* he likes or dislikes a piece of writing, and must understand that his personal likes and dislikes have no relation to the literary value of a piece of writing. By way of illustration, I myself thoroughly dislike the major part of John Galsworthy's work; yet I am thoroughly convinced that he is a much greater writer than many people whom I like much better.

Q. Should a writer seek other people's advice while he is writing a book or a story?

A. Definitely not—except to seek mere information about facts. Talking about a book or a story is likely to get it out of your system, as it were, and make you less eager to get it down on paper, less interested in

writing it. Furthermore, if you tell other people that you are writing for publication, and then don't get published, you will have a lot of explaining to do. It is best just not to talk.

Q. Should one ever pay to have his work published?

A. In general, no. On the other hand, if one wants to see his work in print, and is willing to spend the money to get it into print, there is no reason why he shouldn't do so. It is a hobby considerably less expensive than collecting antiques or keeping a boat, and considerably more harmless than betting on horses or maintaining a private bar. One may indulge it if one wishes. One's great-grandchildren will probably treasure the self-published volumes of their ancestor. Furthermore, poetry (even good poetry) seldom pays its own way; much of it can be published only at the author's expense. One of the classics of our time, or of all time, Housman's *A Shropshire Lad,* was published at the author's expense. But one must not think that self-published work is a paying proposition; only very exceptionally does one ever get back the money put into such a project.

Q. What about writing for the movies?

A. Forget it. When the movies want you to write for them, they will tell you. The larger motion picture houses have a staff of editors whose only job is to pore through current novels and magazine stories to find suitable material. Once they have selected material that they wish to use, they may ask the author to come and help them. In addition to these editors, publishers and authors' agents are continually bringing promising works to the attention of the motion picture companies. Finally, most of the companies have a permanent staff of professional writers who have worked up in the business gradually. One doesn't "break into" the business of writing for the movies.

Q. You mentioned agents?

A. Yes. The agent is more for the established writer than for the amateur. The professional writer himself doesn't have time to learn all the markets or to try to crash them; he is too busy writing.

Q. When one sends a manuscript to a publisher, how long will it be before the publisher makes a decision—one way or the other?

A. Give the publisher six weeks or two months if the manuscript is intended for a magazine; but most magazines answer much sooner. A book publisher may take longer. Manuscripts that are being favorably considered take a longer time than others; and manuscripts sent in the summer, when many people on the publisher's staff are away on vacation, take longer. In any event, if you have heard nothing from the prospective publisher within three months, write to him politely and ask him whether he has made a decision yet.

Q. Do manuscripts ever get lost?

A. It has happened—but very uncommonly. But as a hedge, *always, always* keep a carbon copy of your manuscript. This is an elementary rule.

Q. Should you keep sending out manuscripts after they have been once rejected?

A. Of course! It is true that some manuscripts could probably be published in only three or four places. Try them all. Other manuscripts are more general. Do not give up till you have got at least fifteen rejections.

Q. How can you find out where to send manuscripts?

A. The *Writer's Digest,* published at 21 East 12th Street, Cincinnati 10, Ohio, and *The Writer,* 8 Arlington Street, Boston 16, Massachusetts, not only publish addresses and requirements of publishers, but also advertise many good books on the business angle of writing. Buy copies of these magazines at the newsstands, or send for sample copies or subscription rates.

Q. In class you have spoken frequently of "unprofessional looking" manuscripts; what do you mean?

A. Manuscripts written with a typewriter ribbon that should have been discarded months ago; letters like *e* and *o* clogged so that they make round black spots on the paper; small margins; single-spaced lines; pages pinned or stapled together; pages numbered somewhere but in the upper right corner.

Q. Should the typing of the manuscript be absolutely perfect?

A. Not necessarily. Be reasonably neat and always legible. But if you want to change a word or two on a page, run a line through the word, and write the correct word above it, either in ink (with *printed* letters) or with the typewriter. Don't rewrite an entire page because one or two words are wrong; but make the first page flawless. The point is that you need not be perfect, and yet your page ought not to look messy. When in doubt, do it over.

Q. Suppose you want to make insertions after the manuscript is completed and numbered?

A. Number the inserted pages *a, b,* and so on; thus pages inserted after page 15 would be 15a, 15b, and so on. Sometimes you can paste on an addition at the bottom of a page, and then fold the over-length page to normal size.

Q. Should one write in longhand first, and then type off the final copy? Or should one compose on the typewriter?

A. Some people compose better in longhand, some think they compose better on the typewriter. I recommend longhand, but wouldn't insist on it.

Q. Can you give any suggestions about the best working methods for a writer?

A. Different people have different methods. Carlyle thought he had to have a soundproof room to write in; Jane Austen wrote in the family living room with the ordinary life of a large household going on about her. Some people think everything out beforehand, and then write it down; some people work out all the details as they go. Some people work in the early morning before other people in the family are up (Anthony Trollope produced numberless volumes this way); some people work only at night; some people work at any hour. One should remember, however, that it is easy to rationalize, easy to persuade oneself that conditions are not just right for working—that it is too soon after a meal, or too soon after exercise, or too late at night, or that others will be disturbed by one's typewriter, or that one will think more clearly later in the day, or that one is too sleepy from staying up too late last night, or that the weather is too hot, or that the poor light will injure one's eyes, or that one had better wait to get somebody else's opinion before going further, or that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. One should remember that conditions for writing are *never* perfect. A passage from Macaulay describing the conditions under which Milton wrote has already been quoted in this book; it is worth quoting again: "Neither blindness, nor gout, nor age, nor penury, nor domestic afflictions, nor political disappointments, nor abuse, nor proscription, nor neglect, had power to" prevent him from writing *Paradise Lost.* One should not wait for conditions to be perfect; one should just sit down and *write.*

Q. But suppose one sits down to write, and no writing comes?

A. Get a piece of clean paper, write "The" on it, and then write another word to go with "The," and then write a word to go with that word, and so on. You may have to throw away your first paragraph or first page later on; but that is a minor matter.

Q. How does one keep from being bored with one's own writing?

A. One doesn't. There are always times when one is bored with writing. But the amount of boredom can often be reduced if you will concentrate on the *art,* or *craftsmanship,* of your work. Don't try to tell the story too fast. Strew little jewels of style and description through it, and stop to polish these jewels carefully. Perfect your sentences; seek for the best of all possible words to fit your feeling; try to create rhythms and patterns of letter-sounds. You will be surprised to find how much these devices help you over your boredom.

Q. How does one keep from growing discouraged about one's own writing when one reads the so-much-better writing of other people?

A. It is not always *better* writing; usually it is just *different* writing.

"I cannot carry forests on my back," said the squirrel to the boastful mountain, "but neither can you crack a nut." Jane Austen couldn't write like Sir Walter Scott, Conrad couldn't write like Dickens, and Eudora Welty can't write like Hemingway. Don't get discouraged because you can't write like other people; write like yourself.

Q. Why should people read fiction? How can the fiction-writer justify his existence?

A. A full answer to that question would fill a book. Fiction entertains; it gives information; it makes readers better acquainted with the possibilities and the intricacies of human nature; it reveals certain philosophical truths or laws of life; it gives a certain meaning or interpretation to the confused details of life; it presents ideals of belief, or emotion, or conduct that humanity might not know without reading of them in fiction; it re-creates the faiths, the customs, the ways of life of other peoples than one's own; it has something of the value of laboratory work in the study of a science, in that it gives vivid concrete examples of general truths that would mean little to students or readers were it not for the concrete examples; and it exercises the reader in the use of emotions that, the more they are used, are the more easily aroused. In this last respect, fiction has immense propagandistic value that is being recognized and utilized more and more by many specialized interests and points of view. Perhaps it should be added in this connection that the fiction-writer has a moral responsibility to see that his work contributes to the intellectual, emotional, and moral welfare of humanity. The fiction-writer is today's most influential preacher.—But the instant he forgets that he is a fiction-writer and not a preacher, he is lost.

Q. Why do so many of the best writers like to write about unpleasant topics? And why do so many of them have radical ideas?

A. Writers write because they are obsessed with an idea or a feeling about something, and because they want to tell people about the idea or the feeling that obsesses them. Since nobody but a complete bore wants to tell people about what people already think and feel, the writer tells them about what they *don't* think and feel already. And then people call him unpleasant and radical.

Q. What do people like in fiction? That is, what makes a best seller?

A. Thousands of publishers, authors, and booksellers would give a fortune to know the answer to that one. Sometimes a book becomes a best seller because it appears at precisely the right time; a little later or a little earlier, and it would not sell at all. Sometimes it becomes a best seller because it is in fashion. (By the way, you can get some idea of the kinds of books that are currently in fashion by looking in the classified lists at the back of the last volume of the *Book Review Digest,* and find-

ing which kinds of books are most numerous.) But, everything else being equal, a book will sell if it has the following characteristics: (1) suspense; (2) reader identification—that is, a main character with whose desires and struggles and troubles the reader can sympathize as if they were his own; (3) some scenes of strong emotional appeal; (4) at least one very extraordinary character at whom the reader can marvel; (5) an interesting background; (6) information—historical, biographical, geographical, sociological, psychological, scientific; (7) a touch of sex won't do any harm—but don't overdo it; (8) variety in episodes, scenes, and characters; (9) contrasts everywhere; (10) ideas—philosophical, sociological, psychological, moral, political, religious.

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Set in Linotype Caledonia
Format by Robert Cheney
Manufactured by Kingsport Press, Inc.
Published by HARPER & BROTHERS, *New York*