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## THE AMERICAN SENTENCE

**Abstract:** The nature, history and transformation of the American sentence in XX century American fiction is the focus of the current essay which examines the shift from the oracular to ordinary style. This is the contrast between Henry James and Ernest Hemingway, or Thomas Wolfe and Cormac McCarthy. It is a shift in tone and syntax from an elaborate rhetoric and rhythm to a pointed, direct style that wastes no words. It suggests an impatient style reflecting an age of intensity, speed, and thrust. The leisurely and intricate style of late XIX and early XX century American writers loses its energy, although individual authors experiment and, within the body of their work, shift from an initial, ornate method to one that is immediate and precise. A new, fragmented cogency takes over, although this is not a prescriptive formula. There is a stylistic pendulum at work alternating between, say, the elaborate writing of David Foster Wallace or Don DeLillo and that of Raymond Carver or Jennifer Egan. The dynamics of this shift is the center of this discussion. Examples of XX century writers include Gertrude Stein, William Faulkner, J.D. Salinger, Thomas Pynchon, Cormac McCarthy and Jennifer Egan. Overlooked, the sentence remains the core of literary expression but it is a problematic form associated with such cultural changes as the telegraph, World War II and crime writing, as much as the literary imagination. Its permutations may, in fact, represent the “moral history” of America, its shifts in style reflecting the conflict between traditionalism and innovation, conservatism and experimentation.

**Keywords:** American literature, style, rhetoric, telegraph, World War II, language.

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## АМЕРИКАНСКОЕ ПРЕДЛОЖЕНИЕ

**Аннотация:** Природа, история и трансформация предложения в американской художественной литературе XX в. находятся в центре внимания настоящей статьи, в которой исследуется переход от риторического к обычному стилю. Это контраст между Генри Джеймсом и Эрнестом Хемингуэем, или Томасом Вулфом и Кормаком Маккарти. Это изменение тона и синтаксиса и переход от тщательно продуманной риторики и ритма к резкому, прямому стилю, в котором нет лишних слов и который отражает эпоху интенсивности, скорости и напора. Неторопливый и замысловатый стиль американских писателей конца XIX — начала XX вв. постепенно уходит в прошлое, при этом отдельные авторы в ходе поиска и экспериментирования в своем творчестве переходят от первоначальной, витиеватой манеры письма к прямой и точной. Убедительность и сила воздействия теперь не нуждаются в связности и риторических построениях, хотя фрагментарность не возводится в ранг предписываемой нормы. В вопросах стиля наблюдаются колебания маятника: от тщательно продуманного письма Дэвида Фостера Уоллеса или Дона Делилло до Рэймонда Карвера или Дженнифер Иган. Динамика этого сдвига находится в центре нашего внимания. Анализируемый материал включает разных писателей XX в.: Гертруду Стайн, Уильяма Фолкнера, Дж.Д. Сэлинджера, Томаса Пинчона, Кормака Маккарти, Дженнифер Иган. Предложение остается ядром литературного выражения, но при этом, как и литературное воображение, видоизменяется под влиянием культурного контекста, например, таких явлений и событий, как телеграф, Вторая мировая война, криминальная литература. Эти трансформации отражают историю морали и стиля в Америке, конфликт между традиционализмом и новаторством, консерватизмом и экспериментированием.

**Ключевые слова:** американская литература, стиль, риторика, телеграф, Вторая мировая война, язык.

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Rodney Graham. “The Avid Reader 1949.” (2011). Image reproduced from:  
Aaron Peck. “Remembering Rodney Graham (1949–2002).” *Frieze*. 2 Nov. 2022.  
<https://www.frieze.com/article/remembering-rodney-graham-1949-2022>

Never ask anyone what a sentence is or what it has been.  
Gertrude Stein.<sup>1</sup>

While there are many uninteresting pages in this novel,  
there are not many uninteresting sentences.  
Jay McInerney.<sup>2</sup>

What is an American sentence and how has it changed? In American fiction, it might be the turn to Hemingway away from James, although that seems too transparent and has long met resistance as seen in the reception of work by David Foster Wallace and Don DeLillo. The American sentence has been, rather, a pendulum, alternating between the elaborate rhetoric of a Thomas Wolfe or a Saul Bellow and the uncluttered style of a Raymond Carver or Cormac McCarthy — although sometimes the change occurs within the work of the same author.<sup>3</sup>

The sources of this shift are the subject of the current discussion which originated in a remark of Philip Roth’s in a 2022 documentary on Bellow. Two thirds of the way through the film, Roth comments on the

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<sup>1</sup> Stein, Gertrude. “Arthur A Grammar.” *How to Write*. Los Angeles, CA: Sun & Moon Press, 1995: 30.

<sup>2</sup> McInerney, Jay. “The Year of the Whopper. Review of *Infinite Jest*.” *New York Times* (3 Mar. 1996).

<sup>3</sup> The critic Mark McGurl believes that stylistically and thematically the development of postwar American fiction “has been driven by a strong polarity of minimalist and maximalist compositional impulses” divided by allegiance to either exclusion or inclusion [McGurl 2011: 377].

American sentence declaring that Hemingway cleared away the verbiage of earlier writers but that Bellow came along and juiced it up again with his energized rhetorical style, borrowed from the street, not the library.<sup>4</sup>

But can one trace the habits and idiosyncrasies of the American sentence? Is there something about Thoreau, Mark Twain, Dreiser, Dos Passos, as well as Gertrude Stein, Cormac McCarthy, Joyce Carol Oates or George Saunders, that is quintessentially American? Is there a distinctive American rhetoric / style / language or syntax? Is it possible to claim that for many writers they do not write texts but compose sentences which when accumulated form an American script? What are the qualities of the American sentence and how might it function as a compositional unit?

Allen Ginsberg thought he knew. Inspired by the Japanese haiku, he created an American sentence defined as a single statement of 17 syllables. He took the tradition of the 5, 7, 5 syllables of the haiku to add 5+7+5 to create his prose form, in essence a prose poem. Two examples: “Put on my tie in a taxi, short of breath, rushing to meditate (Ginsberg Nov. 1991); “That grey-haired man in business suit and black turtleneck thinks he’s still young” (19 Dec. 1992).<sup>5</sup> Further examples: “Taxi ghosts at dusk pass Monoprix in Paris 20 years ago.” “Bearded robots drink from Uranium coffee cups on Saturn’s ring.” These 17 syllable sentences first appeared in *Cosmopolitan Greetings* (1994), mixing a defined form with remarkable imagination.

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<sup>4</sup> See “The Adventures of Saul Bellow,” American Masters, PBS, broadcast 12 December 2022. Asaf Galay directed. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americannmasters/adventures-of-saul-bellow-documentary/23790/> Roth, from the transcript:

What he did is he blew the lid off of the sentence.

The lid had been put on by Hemingway.

Hemingway was the reigning master of the American sentence.

Hemingway had stripped away all the stuffing that had gotten into the American sentence in the 19th Century and got down to the bare Shaker-like beauty of a declarative sentence, and his motto was, 'Don't think about it.'

He lived off the surface of things, and Bellow's motto was, 'Think about it.'

And so, these sentences were full not just of description, not just of verbal energy, but of mentalness, experience, and consciousness.

That enriches the sentence, you know?

And this was a great shift in the American notion of what a great prose style was.

<sup>5</sup> Walker, Sue. “The American Sentence.” Blog, *Negative Capability Press*, 5 April 2015. <http://www.negativecapabilitypress.org/blog/theamericansentence>. Paul E. Nelson maintains an American Sentence website with numerous examples stressing the imagistic quality of the form. See <https://paulnelson.com/american-sentences-2/>.

But the sentence possesses its own poetics as the poet Louise Glück<sup>6</sup> noted in her 2017 essay “Ersatz Thought” from her collection *American Originality*:

The sentence deploys emphasis to create readings complementary to, or at variance with, the logical. It works magically, electrically; its reaches, in combination with the ways in which, and points at which, the line breaks create profound dramas: all by itself, the sentence is the Bible and the Talmudic commentary. If the sentence is to be forfeited, incompleteness must be able to match, or augment, its resources, must infuse the poem (or fiction) with equivalent depth and variety. [Glück 2017: 25–6.]

To repeat: “the sentence is the Bible and the Talmudic commentary” and cannot be “forfeited.” The sentence, “magically, electrically,” constantly creates dramas and suggests “variety through its concreteness, its presentness” [Glück 2017: 27]. The sentence both proposes and comments on itself simultaneously becoming both a text and its own analysis. The poetics of the sentence establish a “cycle of instigating actions,” a phrase of equal importance for writers as different as Edith Wharton or Gertrude Stein [Glück 2017: 33]. And omission soon became “a form of creation.”<sup>7</sup> We began to read for speed not meaning.

Alfred Kazin sensed the problematics of the sentence when in 1942 he wrote that modern American prose writing displays the writers’ “absorption in every last detail of their American world together with the deep and subtle alienation from it.” [Kazin 1956: ix.] This paradox may be the thematic explanation of the oscillating nature of the American sentence, on one hand the “spool of . . . rhetoric,” with pseudo-classical epithets that entraps the characters of Faulkner, versus the freedom found in the colloquial style of J.D. Salinger. [Kazin 1956: 358.]<sup>8</sup> In Kazin’s words, the history

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<sup>6</sup> She received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Shields, David. *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*. New York: Knopf, 2010: 126, 127. In 2015, Shields published *Life is Short — Art is Shorter: in Praise of Brevity*, co-ed. with Elizabeth Cooperman. Brevity in prose may be a form of neorealism that may erase the boundary between “art” and direct expression he states. Sentences are expressions of life stated through language, “a transcribable reality” even if language is self-canceling. (Shields, lecture Youtube, University of Richmond, 25 March 2010, 43:44.)

<sup>8</sup> William Faulkner: “Her voice would not cease, it would just vanish. There would be the dim coffin-smelling gloom sweet and oversweet with the twice-bloomed wisteria against the outer wall by the savage quiet September sun impacted distilled and hyperdistilled, into which came now and then the loud cloudy flutter of the sparrows. . .” (*Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Modern Library, 1951: 8.)

of the American sentence may be a “moral history,” the conflict between traditionalism and innovation, conservatism and experimentation [Kazin 19556: x]. But the sentence soon became writing without manners as every sentence became its own narrative.

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The material of an American sentence begins with a contest, that between the rhetorical excesses of a Cotton Mather in his *Magnalia Christi Americana* with its Greek and Latin quotations, learned references, wordplay, italic type and profusion of capital letters and that of Benjamin Franklin who outlined his own casual writing practice:

I sometimes jumbled my collections of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavored to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the full sentences and compleat the paper.<sup>9</sup>

Franklin’s process and forms of expression are informal, relaxed: plainness and lucidity are the goals. But as Howard Mumford Jones reminds us, styles of expression change in response to “changing demands upon language” brought about because of new aesthetic ideals or new ideas needing new expression [Jones 1934: 118]. Both of these things happened to accelerate the dominance of the plain style with this question as a backdrop: should there be a maximum length for a sentence?<sup>10</sup>

The immediate answer is “no” as evidenced by Faulkner who at one time supposedly wrote the longest sentence in literature, a 1288 word example in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936).<sup>11</sup> The work of David Foster Wallace extended the practice, Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* containing powerful sentences of immoderate length extending for pages. Offsetting this style

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Salinger: “‘Let me out here, please,’ the woman said quickly to the girl operating the car. The car doors opened and the woman got out without looking back.” (“Perfect Day for a Bananafish,” *Nine Stories*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1953: 26.)

<sup>9</sup> Franklin, Benjamin. *Autobiography*. In [Jones 1934: 117].

<sup>10</sup> Stefan Muller addresses this question [Muller 2016: 3ff]. Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* (1996) test the limits.

<sup>11</sup> See “When William Faulkner Set the World Record for Writing the Longest Sentence in Literature.” *Open Culture*, 14 March 2019. <https://www.openculture.com/2019/03/when-william-faulkner-set-the-world-record-for-writing-the-longest-sentence-in-literature.html>. A competitor is a sentence in Jonathan Coe’s *the Rotter’s Club* which ends with a 33 page long example of 13, 995 words.

is that of Cormac McCarthy or, in its extreme, what has been called “micro fiction,” Hemingway an early practitioner with this six-word story: “For sale: baby shoes. Never worn.”<sup>12</sup>

An initial attempt to identify an American prose style occurred in 1901 when the academic J.D. Logan published “American Prose Style” in *The Atlantic*, a defense of the uniqueness and value of American prose. Complaining that only American poetry received praise, Logan outlines the nature of a distinctive American prose style which is, he claims, “definitely original.” [Logan 1901: 689]<sup>13</sup> In generalized terms, he argues that such writers have expressed “the peculiar quality and temper of the American mood or spirit” which he attributes to “vivid faith and splendid cheer” [Logan 1901: 689]. Arguing that the virtues of an American poetic style do not always apply to the prose, Logan goes on to state that the best of American prose, from Franklin to Lowell, stands equal with that of England or France. Unfettered jingoism runs throughout Logan’s argument.

More specifically, however, Logan suggests that the diction “although plain, is pure; its idiom . . . wholly modern; its sentence structure is simple, direct, coherent,” possessing a “high seriousness” devoid of “mere visions and mysticism” and sometimes possesses “noble simplicity” and “sometimes sonority and exaltation” [Logan 1901: 690]. At the same time, he complains that American prose “is not a highly intellectualized product, elaborate and finished in structure” [Logan 1901: 690]. He clearly prefers a rationalized sentence, one of order and logic. Paradoxically, although Logan claims that American prose at its best “does not seek over aesthetic elaborations,” the prose of Irving, Poe, Hawthorne and Longfellow is, nonetheless, rhetorical, “aesthetically elaborated — sometimes in structure, sometimes in music and color” [Logan 1901: 690]. By contrast, the prose of Franklin, Irving, Thoreau, Emerson, Holmes, Lowell and Lincoln is “sane and well ordered” [Logan 1901: 690]. Patriotically, Logan claims such qualities “fitted American prose” to express “the life of the common people, to enlarge that life and to sustain it” [Logan 1901: 690]. This moralistic, democratic reading of the characteristics of American prose, short

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<sup>12</sup> Legend suggests Hemingway wrote the story to win a bet. For a comic take on the story, see Wortman, Zack. “Ernest Hemingway’s Six-Word Sequels.” *New Yorker* (11 September 2016). <https://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/ernest-hemingways-six-word-sequels>.

<sup>13</sup> In 1900, Logan published *The Structural Principles of Style*; in 1907, *Quantitative Punctuation*, as well as *Aesthetic Criticism in Canada*, appeared.

on analysis, nevertheless marks an early awareness of, and search for, an American voice.

But the colloquial and the stylish, the natural and the elaborate, were consistently at odds with one another, although there was a continuous effort to preach in a clear and distinct manner and adapt the discourse “to the Understanding of Men, and the Capacities of their Hearers.” Many argued that “*Plainness of Speech*” must rule opposing that “which is obscure, lofty and unintelligible, loose and incoherent” (Rev. E. Gay in [Jones 1934: 127–28]). Logic, not grammar, must be the technique for all audiences argued Rev. Marston Cabot.<sup>14</sup> But the drive towards the simple was unsuccessful. To be rhetorical or even obscure implied education and knowledge and a belief in harmony and unity. If a sentence, despite its elaborations, could make sense, so, too, must the world. But this soon became questioned, culturally and stylistically. With periodic sentences and clauses with qualifiers, the oratorical style trapped the reader and the author. But change was approaching, led in the mid-nineteenth century by electricity, specifically the telegraph.

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The telegraph rewrote the American sentence. As journalists around the country and overseas relied on the telegraph to file their stories, their style changed. Hemingway, a young reporter at the *Kansas City Star* was no exception. The paper’s style sheet was clear: “Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs. Use vigorous English. Be positive, not negative.” [Paul, Hendrickson 2018: xx; also see Griffin 1985: 38–55.] The result was “linear, action-based *American* sentences” influenced by money as much as writing practices [Paul, Hendrickson 2018: ix]. Telegraph companies charged by the word; to save money, one used fewer words. They also had a maximum of fifteen characters per word for a plain language telegram and ten per word for one written in Morse code. Language had to be frugal.

For further clarity, and to simplify the work of the operators, CAPS were used without punctuation. The average length of a telegram in the 1900s in the US was 11.93 words. And recent instructions for telegram writing have not changed: “Payment is made as per number of words used in the telegram;” “punctuation marks are not to be used. Write ‘Stop’ where

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<sup>14</sup> Rev. Samuel Buell outlined a method duplicated in much prose today: “Cast your public Discourses into the most regular and becoming Scheme; observe a steady Strain of Thought, good Connection and natural Transitions... make Use of Art to conceal Art” [in: Jones 1934: 128].



a full stop has to be used;” “write the message briefly. Do not worry about grammatical errors.”<sup>15</sup>

As a young foreign correspondent in Paris, Hemingway saw and used *cablese*, telegraphic instructions more than a formality of the job but a method for stripping down language, while adding an element of drama. [Yang 2020.] The language of strict denotation ruled unadorned prose encouraging Hemingway to form a writing system he called “the iceberg theory:” the facts float above the water, the unneeded details and context remain below”[Yang 2020]. What is visible is enough to evoke a sense of the whole. Prose became lean and spare. Hemingway went on to rely on telegrams throughout his life sending them to friends, editors, lovers, fans and wives. Appropriately, he learned of the Nobel Prize in 1954 by telegram.

The move to the Hemingway-styled sentence was a reaction to the intricate but established conventions of literary discourse emulating a stratified, established culture presented by mid to late XIX century American writers. But the sentence shifted away from a received and conventional form to a subversive act undermining the accepted belief that a sentence orders thought and language into logical structures. For the moderns, especially after the Great War, there seemed to have been very little that was logical. [Ekstein 1989 *passim*.]<sup>16</sup> The sentence in its new form becomes, itself, a composition that does not always contain a complete thought. Indeed, to shape such a rhetoric generates anxiety, hence the emergence of stylistic edges and hesitation, echoing Aristotle who believed that every sentence is a combination of elements where each part has an independent meaning. By contrast, others believed a sentence commissions and completes an idea.

The tone of the new writers became defiant, the aggressive new style identified by compact, often incomplete sentences and thoughts. Expose everything, confess all, challenge convention: “I would introduce myself

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<sup>15</sup> For information on the average length of telegrams in the early XX century, see [Hochfelder 2012: 79].

A sample telegram and worksheet follow stressing that telegrams clearly enhance narrative skills despite emphasizing the omission of articles, punctuation and certain conjunctions. [Telegram Writing] For a colorful history of Western Union and the world of the telegraph operator, see [Peterson 2014]. It includes an account of *Lightning Flashes and Electric Dashes* (1877), an anthology of writing about telegraph life, often by operators themselves. Supplementing this and focusing on the social realities of telegraphers is [Gabler 1988].

<sup>16</sup> [Fussell 1989] is an important continuation of this theme.

if it were not useless” is the off-handed opening sentence of Mailer’s “The Man Who Studied Yoga,” written in 1952 and first published in 1956.<sup>17</sup> In the novella, the protagonist attempts to write a novel but finds his thoughts too complex to express in predictable syntax and language and so thinks of using a short-handed form of expression, telling his friend that he’s suspended work because he does not want to write a realistic novel “because reality is no longer realistic.” But he cannot find a form and never writes his work.<sup>18</sup> A new, tough style originates in opposition, if not conflict, with syntax and language.<sup>19</sup>

The Second World War contributed. Returning soldier / writers — Mailer, Heller, Wouk, Shaw, Salinger, Jones and Uris — found the danger and intensity of the battle impacted their prose: suddenly, short, emphatic, elliptical statements (often orders relying on military acronyms) re-defined a sentence, undercutting any effort to embellish or elaborate their prose. Dialogue suddenly reflected the terse, direct exchanges on and off the battlefield. The collapse of the body’s unity from injury and harm created a parallel collapse of syntax and form. These writer/ soldiers wrote with immediacy, urgency, intensity. There was no chance to be excessive. And sometimes, influence was direct: Salinger met Hemingway in Paris and they corresponded.<sup>20</sup> One result was “For Esme — with Love and Squalor” (1950), narrated by a traumatized soldier emphasizing a sparse dialogue which would also characterize Salinger’s later work.

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<sup>17</sup> Mailer, Norman. “The Man Who Studied Yoga.” *Advertisements for Myself* (1959). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992: 157. For reference, *The Naked and the Dead* appeared in 1948, Wouk’s *The Caine Mutiny* in 1951, Uris’s *Battle Cry* in 1953, the same year as Bellow’s *Adventures of Augie March*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: 179.

<sup>19</sup> Mailer explores a countertradition in American writing which set a Naturalist movement against a genteel tradition. At one point, he offers this neat formulation of plot: “Dreiser all strategy, no tactics; and Wharton all tactics.” He also adds that “no writer succeeded in doing the single great work which would clarify a nation’s vision of itself as Tolstoy had done perhaps with *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina*...” He believed that “realistic literature had never caught up with the rate of change in American life...” an idea later shared by Philip Roth. See Mailer, “Modes and Mutations: Quick Comments on the Modern American Novel.” *Commentary* 41.3 (1 March 1966). <https://www.commentary.org/articles/norman-mailer/modes-and-mutations-quick-comments-on-the-modern-american-novel/>.

<sup>20</sup> Salinger and Hemingway met at the Ritz Hotel in 1944. See [Slawenski 2010: 206]. He also links the style of Sherwood Anderson with Hemingway and Salinger on 206.

As Mailer explained in relation to *The Naked and the Dead*, “I had no past to protect... no style to defend.”<sup>21</sup> Life was urgent because it might soon end. There was no time to venerate or imitate the ordered style of the past. Stylistically, one had to confront a grim and often abrupt reality destroyed by a bullet or mortar. The writing of these authors rejected an earlier, often opaque style, shifting to what Mailer in 1959 called *Advertisements for Myself*. And Mailer, himself, was absolutely clear: “Writing is not an act to excite tolerance.”<sup>22</sup>

Hard-boiled crime fiction, with its unsentimental, realistic / naturalistic style also had a part in the remaking of the American sentence. Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain and Mickey Spillane, with their staccato styles reflecting street talk, as much as Hemingway’s curt manner, began to influence others. The urbanized environment of much of the writing meant a city-style of tough guys fighting for survival or even to smile. From Hammett’s *The Glass Key* (1930): “He did not smile. ‘I don’t believe in anything, but I’m too much of a gambler not to be affected by a lot of things.’” Later, “His mouth twitched in a meager smile. He did not say anything.” And later still, “he moved his lips in a thin smile that his eyes had nothing to do with . . .”<sup>23</sup>

Spillane was more direct. From *One Lonely Night* (1951):

‘All right, you conniving little punks, I’ll play ball, but I’m going to make up a lot of rules you never heard of. You think I’m cornered and it’ll be a soft touch. Well, you won’t be playing with a guy who’s a hero. You’ll be up against a guy with a mind gone rotten and a lust for killing! That’s the way I was and that’s the way I like it!’

or

He was staring at my face. His eyes couldn’t leave my eyes and his flesh was already dying with the fear inside him. He tried to talk and made only harsh breathing sounds.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mailer to Diana Trilling in [Denby 2022.] Mailer’s Preface to “The Man who Studied Yoga” also addresses the impact of the war on writers and the reverse. See Mailer, “The Man Who Studied Yoga”: 155.

<sup>22</sup> Mailer, Norman. “Models and Mutations...”

<sup>23</sup> Hammett, Dashiell. *The Glass Key* (1930). <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/hammettd-glasskey/hammettd-glasskey-00-h.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Spillane, Mickey. *One Lonely Night* (1951). London: Orion Books, 2015: 192, 213.

*My Gun is Quick, I the Jury, Lady, Go Die!* and *The Big Kill* are representative, Spillane's titles all possessing a disjointed style. Hemingway and Stein were fans of the genre where idiom ruled and grammar went on vacation.<sup>25</sup>

Mailer is again key, soon believing that American fiction "gave up any desire to be a creation equal to the phenomenon of the country itself" — meaning in the fifties a conservative, Eisenhower-centered world of middle-class certainty.<sup>26</sup> Writing broke free of its inhibitions rejecting the world of William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956). Whyte may have hoped for a balance between individual desire and corporate obligations but that ideal was earlier undercut by David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* of 1950. The breakdown in American life, psyche and writing may be a reaction to the "other directed" individual and a need to turn inward. This started in the mid- fifties but flourished in the sixties while finding expression in the quasi-minimalist, uneven style of its writers. The new sentence struggled to contain continuity and discontinuity simultaneously, attempting to explain America to itself, broken and in pieces. Syntactic conformity was a curse, enjambment the new rule. One development was "the new sentence," the title of Ron Silliman's 1987 summary of a new approach to expression.

But there was another, often overlooked source for the minimalist emphasis: creative writing programs. Mark McGurl has outlined this in detail in *The Program Era*, an extensive study which charts the shift to the minimalist style associating it to a postwar change in programmed education and technology. The postwar text is a shortened text, the sentence a reduced form of verbal expression partly associated with program learning.<sup>27</sup> This development is set within corporate power structures and educational programming McGurl argues. But editors outside that sphere also played

<sup>25</sup> See Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* and her essay "Why I like Detective Stories." Also see [Landon 1980]. Hemingway's "The Killers," and *To Have and To Have Not* are two examples. In his Key West home, Hemingway had copies of Hammett's *The Thin Man*, James M. Cain's *Serenade* and *The Moth* plus John Dickinson Carr's *The Crooked Hinge* among other titles. See Hemingway Archive, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. When she visited Hollywood in late 1934, Stein expressly asked to meet Dashiell Hammett which she did. See the opening of *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937).

<sup>26</sup> Mailer, "Modes and Mutations..." He also writes that "the two impulses in American letters had failed, the realistic impulse never delivered the novel which would ignite a nation's consciousness of itself, and the aristocratic impulse clawed at the remaining fabric of a wealthy society it despised and no longer wished to sustain." (Ibid.)

<sup>27</sup> On this complicated topic see [McGurl 2011: 286–301.]

a vital role. Gordon Lish, “champion of American literary minimalism,” initiated this re-orientation through his teaching, editing and publications including a two-volume *English Grammar* [McGurl 2011: 288.] In the textbook, Lish declares that “the growing tempo of modern life changes language” where shortcuts replace rhetorical or syntactical complexity [in McGurl 2011: 289].

As *Esquire* magazine’s fiction editor in the 70s and then an editor at Knopf publishers from 1977–1995, Lish sponsored literary minimalism, not only in sentence structure but in encouraging works with unnamed characters identified with pronouns or their functions such as “the wife.” His influence on new writers grew: Don DeLillo dedicated *Mao II* to him, an act repeated by Amy Hempel in her collection *Reasons to Live*. A grammar text from the period equally stressed the minimal sentence as the most effective form of communication, Mina P. Shaughnessy’s *Errors and Expectations*, with its focus on Basic Writing (1977). The diminutive or miniature sentence rapidly grew in importance.

Minimalism became the favored form, not just of sentences but genre which soon generated a “negative narrative space” defined by emptiness or loss rather than plenitude [McGurl 2011: 292]. Excisions and understatement marked its style, a form of “self-protective concealment” which by hiding revealed more. Meaning emerged from absence which became “an aesthetic of risk management” often overtaking and hiding emotions [McGurl 2011: 294]. The two central examples for McGurl are Raymond Carver, the minimalist (and edited by Lish) and Joyce Carol Oates, the maximalist [McGurl 2011: 295–301].<sup>28</sup> Approvingly, McGurl declares that minimalism became a form “of resistance to the self-assertive blare of modern American gigantism” [McGurl 2011: 295]. Instead of Norman Mailer, Donald Barthelme, instead of excess, economy.

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<sup>28</sup> McGurl provides an extensive discussion of the minimalist and maximalist style of Carver and Oates on pp. 295–301. But he also advances a controversial theory that the emergence of the minimalist style is partly “a product of the corporate educational technology and textbook business” and may be its “singular aesthetic triumph” [McGurl 2011: 293]. He relates this to John Barth’s view that literary minimalism reflected a decline in reading and writing skills among students and teachers [McGurl 2011: 293]. In minimalist writers there are few if any sentences of “syntactical complexity” (Barth in [McGurl 2011: 294]). But others argue minimalism displays verbal self-control.

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A sentence thinks loudly.

Gertrude Stein<sup>29</sup>

Approaching the American sentence from a different angle was Gertrude Stein who in numerous essays grappled with the structure and meaning of the sentence which she loved to diagram.<sup>30</sup> Reverting to an idiosyncratic style reflects her own syntactic rebellion and determination to write individualistically rejecting, for example, commas. They become the slaves of the sentence but if a sentence can't make sense without multiple commas, rewrite it she argued. A friend of Stein's later commented that Stein "regarded a corner as something to cut, and another car as something to pass, and she could scare the daylight out of all concerned."<sup>31</sup>

For Stein, the normative sentence was an anathema, the conventional sentence understood as an authoritative, closed form to be overturned. Let disorder replace symmetry. In *Lectures in America*, Stein celebrates the sentence while expressing her pleasure in sentence hunting: "I really do not know that anything has ever been more exciting than diagramming sentences" she announces, adding that parsing sentences is "completely exciting and completely completing."<sup>32</sup> Her chapter "Sentences," the longest in *How to Write*, works to subvert conventional sentence grammar developing an offshoot from the conventional map of the American Sentence identified as subject / verb / object.

Stein wanted her sentences "to go on," reflecting the stream-of-consciousness process introduced by William James and developed by a series of French writers as well as Joyce. She then abolished nouns from her prose because they nail things down raising the curious question, did she ever send a telegram? More likely, it would have been Alice B. Toklas who, in fact, sent Stein a *petit bleu*, the favored Parisian telegram, after

<sup>29</sup> Stein, Gertrude. "More Grammar for a Sentence" [Stein 1993: 561.] "Make a sentence do" she adds in the same essay [Ibid.]

<sup>30</sup> See for example "More Grammar for a Sentence," "Sentences and Paragraphs." In *How to Write*: 19–32, *Narration* and portions of *Lectures in America*.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Kay Armatage, "Gertrude Stein's Radical Grammar," *Walrus* (12 Feb. 2007). <https://thewalrus.ca/2007-02-language/>.

<sup>32</sup> Stein, Gertrude. "Poetry and Grammar." *Lectures in America*. New York: Random House, 1935: 210, 211. She also declares that "a long complicated sentence should force itself upon you, make you know yourself knowing it" ("Poetry and Grammar": 221). Useful on Stein and sentences, especially diagramming, is [Steenen 2014]. Also see [Simpson 2001]. [Armatage 2007] is also a valuable summary.

they first met: it announced that she would be late to their second meeting. Stein sternly held it in her hand when she opened the door to the delinquent Toklas.<sup>33</sup>

Stein preferred verbs “and adverbs and articles and conjunctions and prepositions” because they “are lively because they all do something and as long as anything does something it keeps alive” (“Poetry and Grammar” 214) Importantly, for her “a sentence means that there is a future” (“Arthur A Grammar” 72). This echoes Flaubert who sought “clear, sharp sentences, sentences which stand erect, erect while running.”<sup>34</sup> A sentence gains meaning for Stein by use, not by naming. And her language is always ordinary, another feature of the abrupt style, Stein writing “Act so that there is no use in a center” from *Tender Buttons*.<sup>35</sup> Form and sound and length become meaning.

But if the term “sentence” possesses no absolute value, as Wittgenstein understood — “Look at the sentence as an instrument, and at its sense as its employment”<sup>36</sup> — it nevertheless remains an expression of authority, syntactically and semantically. The paradox is addressing the meaning of a sentence as only a form. Or as Saussure asked, “to what extent does the sentence belong to language? If it belongs to speaking, the sentence cannot pass for the linguistic unit.”<sup>37</sup> The distinction for Saussure is precise. But if it does belong to speaking, is that the source of a writerly preference for shorter sentences refuting the impact of lengthy, linguistic focused statements? Is the sentence heard before it is written? Does voice, not print, authorize the power of the contemporary sentence generating its meaning?

Stein, the radical sentence creator, believed that sentences organize at the same time they repress language, yet she returned “to sentences as a refreshment.”<sup>38</sup> What she implies is a mutuality of form within a paragraph and a text. But minimalist writers are not entirely minimalist as crit-

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<sup>33</sup> Toklas, Alice. *What is Remembered*. New York: Holt, 1963: 23–4. In Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein writes that “Sentences not only words but sentences and always sentences have been Gertrude Stein’s life long passion” (Stein, Gertrude. *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). London: Penguin, 2001: 47.

<sup>34</sup> Flaubert, Gustave. *Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, ed., trans. by Francis Steegmuller. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980: 160.

<sup>35</sup> This is the first line of the prose poem “Rooms” at the end of *Tender Buttons*.

<sup>36</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe: Basil Blackwell, 1974: 126. For Silliman see [Silliman 1987].

<sup>37</sup> Saussure in [Silliman 1987: 66.] On the New Sentence, see [Perelman 1993: 313–24.]

<sup>38</sup> Stein, Gertrude. “Sentences and Paragraphs”: 22.

ics have recognized when commenting on Frederick Barthelme or Cormac McCarthy.<sup>39</sup>

William H. Gass may be useful. In a 1976 interview in *The Paris Review*, he explained that contemporary fiction was divided between the performative and the ordinary. The first reflects writing for voice and in an auditory sense — but there is also a new mode that is neither performative nor auditory but “destined for the printed page.” You are “supposed to crisscross the page with your eye, getting references and gists.” You are to see it flowing and stopping and starting again, following it with your eye not your ear. This is the ordinary or semi-minimalist style visually broken on the page. He seeks a “spatial coordinate” for the shattered syntax he represents while trying to convey the sense “of different lines of language being sounded at the same time.”<sup>40</sup>

The visual layout of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006) may illustrate Gass’s point. The novel is devoid of quotation marks and familiar textual strategies: there are no italics marking interior monologues, chapter headings or numbers separating sections, only spacing. There is minimal punctuation and paragraphs are block paragraphs with no indentations. Lists of verbal phrases and multiple short paragraphs suggest “a wasteland of ruined objects and shoreless references.” [Trotignon 2016: 131. Dialogue is staccato. Studying the map towards the end of *The Road*, the father tells his son:

You always think we’ve gone further than we have.  
He moved his finger. Here then.  
More.  
Here.  
Okay.  
He folded up the limp and rotting pages. Okay, he said.  
They sat looking out through the trees at the road.<sup>41</sup>

Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), either a novel or set of short stories, fits Gass’s description more accurately. Her novel seeks

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<sup>39</sup> James Wood indicated this duality in his recent review of McCarthy’s *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*. [Wood 2022a: 60.] Also [Wood 2022b.]

<sup>40</sup> Gass, William H. “The Art of Fiction, LXV,” interviewed by Thomas LeClair. *Paris Review*, no. 70 (1977) 61–94; rpt. *Conversations with William Gass*, ed. Theodore G. Ammon. Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2003: 22–23.

<sup>41</sup> McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. New York: Vintage, 2006: 195–196.



a polyphonic form with every piece different and told from a different point of view. A Microsoft Power Point presentation formats one entire chapter seventy-five pages long (Ch. 12) and requires shifting the book horizontally to read the slides. Earlier, in Chapter 9, she incorporates footnotes, echoing Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. Time, she noted, is for her experienced not linearly but in layers that co-exist; movement in her novel was to be lateral, not forward.<sup>42</sup> Her earlier *Look at Me* (2001) was also an attempt to make her text look physically different and, if possible, depart from the page. The unbuilding of the sentence, however, is not meant to destroy the oracular or lyrical but to provide an alternative way to convey it.

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The merit of style exists precisely in that it delivers  
the greatest number of ideas in the fewest number of words.

David Shields<sup>43</sup>.

In formal terms, the American sentence possesses a sonic quality transmitted through its often discontinuous syntax expressed through its generative imagery and rhetoric. These elements escalate in importance until they evoke a world not entirely logical but one of emotional intensity replacing the allegorical and biblical universe of a Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards or Herman Melville.

The stress of syllables and length of the sentence determines its American sound. The poet / critic James Longenbach, in discussing how to

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<sup>42</sup> See Egan in [Julavits 2010.] For context, Zadie Smith's 2008 essay from the *New York Review of Books* is helpful: "Two Directions for the Novel" where she contrasts the lyrical realism of Joseph O'Neil's *Netherland* and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*. See [Smith 2009: 73ff] McCarthy's novel opens with this abbreviated style: "About the accident itself I can say very little. Almost nothing. It involved something falling from the sky. Technology, parts, bits. That's it, really: all I can divulge. Not much, I know." McCarthy, Tom. *Remainder*: London: Alma Books, 2006: 3. Re-enactment of previously lost experiences, newly repeated, become the *modus operandi* of the protagonist. *Reality Hunger* (Knopf, 2010) by David Shields is also useful in the process of unmaking literary realism thematically and stylistically driving to the sentence of honesty, directness and immediacy. But if "life itself had become disembodied," as Joseph O'Neil writes in *Netherland*, so, too, has the sentence with the distanced and abrupt style replacing the emotive and occasionally baroque. Richly patterned sentences in the so-called new realism disappear. For the O'Neill quotation, see O'Neill, Joseph. *Netherland*. New York: Pantheon, 2008: 30.

<sup>43</sup> Shields, David. *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*. New York: Knopf, 2010: 127.

make a poem, regards the stress of syllables the main element in shaping the length of sentences: language, he explains, tries “to bring attention to itself in a way that’s creating sonic patterns within the sentences, within the words, within the syllables, that are giving you a tactile or a sensory feeling that in turn gives you pleasure.”[Longenbach 2019]

Diction, syntax, figure, metaphor and rhythm, combining with a pattern of stressed syllables, all contribute to the making of the American Sentence which alternates in contemporary prose between the amplitude of Thomas Pynchon and the brevity of Cormac McCarthy. A XX century sampler of opening sentences:

**Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, 1902.** “She waited Kate Croy, for her father to come in, but he kept her unconscionably, and there were moments at which she showed herself, in the glass over the mantel, a face positively pale with the irritation that had brought her to the point of going away without sight of him. It was at this point, however, that she remained; changing her place, moving from the shabby sofa to the armchair upholstered in a glazed cloth that gave at once – she had tried it – the sense of the slippery and of the sticky.”<sup>44</sup>

**Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 1929:** “In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels.”<sup>45</sup>

**Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*, 1953:** “I am an American, Chicago born – Chicago, that somber city – and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style, and will make the record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> James, Henry. “The Wings of the Dove.” *Novels 1901–1902*. New York: Library of America, 2006: 217. An additional example is this sentence from *The Golden Bowl* from Book One Chapter 2: “The spectator of whom they would thus well have been worthy might have read meanings of his own into the intensity of their communion — or indeed, even without meanings, have found his account, aesthetically, in some gratified play of our modern sense of type, so scantily to be distinguished from our modern sense of beauty.” (James, Henry. “The Golden Bowl,” *Novels 1903–1911*. New York: Library of America 2010: 477–478.)

<sup>45</sup> Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms*. New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1929: 11. The prose is clear, clean, precise relying on compound sentences.

<sup>46</sup> Bellow, Saul. *Adventures of Augie March*. Viking, 1953 “This is a raucous, rollicking, diverting style — with ideas packed upon one another asserting independence, freedom and self-confidence. This is anything but somber, the style writing against its setting at the same time it incorporates it.” (Roth, Philip. “Freestyle America”: 3.)

**Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 1997.** “Snow-Balls have flown their Arcs, starr’d the Sides of Outbuildings, as of Cousins, carried Hats away into the brisk Wind off Delaware, — the Sleds are brought in and their Runners carefully dried and greased, shoes deposited in the back Hall, a stocking’d-foot Descent made upon the great Kitchen, in a purposeful Dither since Morning, punctuated by the ringing Lids of various Boilers and Stewing- Pots, fragrant with Pie-Spices, peel’d Fruits, Suet, heated Sugar, — [the text continues for another five lines before a period]<sup>47</sup>

**Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, 2006.** “When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of night he’d reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him. Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world. His hand rose and fell softly with each precious breath.”<sup>48</sup>

The contrasts are clear, the differences in tone, length and form reflecting shifts in meaning. Pynchon’s sentence accumulates objects, McCarthy’s disregards them creating evocative action using little punctuation. He later extends this to the power of the dark: “He got up and walked out to the road. The black shape of it running from dark to dark.”<sup>49</sup>

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Austerity lifts the heart and focuses the vision.  
Cormac McCarthy<sup>50</sup>.

What does the American sentence reveal? Directness, clarity, a determination to be understood, while not incorporating suppleness, flexibility, movement. But the evolution of the American sentence was not always a straight cut. It has a complex, not always straightforward history, underscored by Dashiell Hammett telling James Thurber that James’s *The*

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Bellow Tape on Augie. PRPL, Newark Public Library.) Roth also explained that in the mid-twentieth century, “the impulse was to attach oneself imaginatively to the secular democratic, unclaustrophobic America.” (Roth Interview with Bellow. Tape (1995), 1:16.” Philip Roth Personal Library, Newark Public Library, Newark, NJ.)

<sup>47</sup> Pynchon, Thomas. *Mason & Dixon*. New York: Henry Holt, 1997: 5.

<sup>48</sup> McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*: 3. The following is from the first paragraph of *Blood Meridian*: “See the child. He is pale and thin, he wears a thin and ragged linen shirt. He stokes the scullery fire. Outside lie dark turned fields with rags of snow and darker woods beyond that harbor yet a few last wolves” (McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian*. New York: Vintage, 1992: 3).

<sup>49</sup> McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*: 261.

<sup>50</sup> McCarthy, Cormac. *The Passenger*. New York: Knopf, 2022: 288.

*Wings of the Dove* was an important influence on his writing, especially *The Maltese Falcon*. Thurber was startled, writing that he was unable “to find many feathers of ‘The Dove’ in the claws of ‘The Falcon.’”<sup>51</sup> But Hammett’s remark shows the cross fertilization of styles and even unexpressed elements of influence.

This is true of a number of writers, a kind of pollination of styles within their own texts. James Wood recently made this point in a review of McCarthy’s new novels, *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*. In addition to the afflatus and deflatus styles, Wood proposes a third which “holds in balance the oracular and the ordinary” and refers to it as a kind of “lean poetry.”<sup>52</sup> This is a semi-lyrical style seen in *Blood Meridian* as in “the dry white rocks of the dead river floor round and smooth as arcane eggs.”<sup>53</sup> This simpler style combined with lyrical moments also appears in his two latest novels, Wood writes, but often abuts up against McCarthy’s signature minimalism as in this rendering of the Trinity atomic bomb test: “Two. One. Zero. Then the sudden whited meridian.”<sup>54</sup>

But the oracular manner never left the American Sentence and dominated a group of singular novelists, perhaps an American need to inflate itself. Lucy Ellmann’s *Ducks, Newburyport* (2019) is a recent example: it consists of eight sentences with short clauses that runs to 1020 pages without paragraph breaks, some sentences spooling out to 100 pages with the incessant repetition of “the fact that.” This is the oracular style in excess. *Ducks, Newburyport* becomes Ellmann’s own, Steinian *Making of Americans*.

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A formless music for the age to come.

Cormac McCarthy.<sup>55</sup>

American sentences offer a miniature history of American writing that alternates between high rhetoric and direct expression. To create the perfect sentence becomes an obsession as seen in the hero of William

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<sup>51</sup> Thurber, James. “The Wings of Henry James.” In Thurber, James. *Lanterns & Lances*. New York: Harper Bros., 1961: 91. The essay originally appeared in *The New Yorker* 7 November 1959.

<sup>52</sup> Wood, James. “The Numbers Game.” *The New Yorker* (19 December 2022): 60.

<sup>53</sup> McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian*: 145.

<sup>54</sup> McCarthy, Cormac. *The Passenger*: 368. Another writer for whom the oracular and semi-minimal intersect is Philip Roth. Compare *American Pastoral* or *I Married a Communist* with his three last novels anticipated by the dialogue in *Deception*.

<sup>55</sup> McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*: 77.

H. Gass's 2013 novel, *Middle C*. A supposed specialist in Arnold Schoenberg and atonal music, throughout the work Joseph Skizzen fixates on revising a single sentence: "The fear that the human race might not survive has been replaced by the fear that it will endure."<sup>56</sup> Variations of the sentence appear throughout in a quest for syntactic perfection but it is insurmountable: "the sentence had simply passed through his ears and lodged in his head like a random bullet from a drive-by gang."<sup>57</sup> His alterations, however, are a metaphor of the writer's perpetual search for the exact expression of an idea, event or feeling. Skizzen, never satisfied, embodies Oscar Wilde's quip. At a country house, Wilde once told his hostess that he was working all morning on the proof of one of his poems and took out a comma. "And in the afternoon?" she asked. "In the afternoon, I put it back in."<sup>58</sup>

The movement of the American sentence is the reaction against biblical oratory, scriptural typology and cultural hegemony, preferring to write not in the style of a chorus but a soloist. The American sentence emerged as a reaction against the enclosing, erudite, convoluted language of early American speakers and authors which evolved into a Melville or James. [see Bercovitch 1975] Where formally the centrality of the text became part of a communal self-definition, later writers sought a new freedom and a Stein or a Hemingway appeared remaking the idea of text into process itself. The individual clauses of such writers and their successors were succinct, creating a fragmented if awkward unity of alternating forms, shaped by readers as much as authors.

Maximalists, where coruscating prose becomes the preferred form of expression, confronted Minimalists where directness, shortness and simple language prevails. There is no winner but the engaging contest continues as that between Toni Morrison and Amy Hempel. The opening paragraph of Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), a rich, complex and redolent family history, contrasts with Hempel's complete short story, "Sing to It" (2019):

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<sup>56</sup> Gass, William H. *Middle C*. New York: Knopf, 2013: 22. See also 24. Michael Dirda, reviewing the novel in the *Washington Post*, claimed that Gass's writing is so rich as to make Nabokov's seem impoverished. The prose is intense and original as in "Panic followed him like a jackal waiting for a show of weakness" [Dirda 2013].

<sup>57</sup> Gass, William H. *Middle C*: 27.

<sup>58</sup> Sources for the anecdote are varied; see John Cooper, "Oscar Wilde in America," <https://www.oscarwildeinamerica.org/quotations/took-out-a-comma.html>. Another variation: "in the morning I took out a comma, but on mature reflection, I put it back again." (Ibid.)

At the end, he said, No metaphors! Nothing is like anything else. Except he said to me before he said that, Make your hands a hammock for me. So there was one.

He said, Not even the rain — he quoted the poet — not even the rain has such small hands. So there was another.

At the end, I wanted to comfort him. But what I said was, Sing to it. The Arab proverb: When danger approaches, sing to it.

Except I said to him before I said that, No metaphors! No one is like anyone else. And he said, Please.

So — at the end, I made my hands a hammock for him.

My arms the trees.<sup>59</sup>

The sentences are compact, incomplete, elusive and penetrating. The American sentence restates its allegiance to brevity by obliterating the nonessential. But each sentence, whether long or short, becomes a story, each “sentence has wishes as an event.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Amy Hempel, *Sing to It: New Stories*. New York: Scribner, 2019: 3. Jennifer Egan’s “Black Box,” originally published on the *New Yorker’s* Twitter account and then in the *New Yorker* in May / June 2012, would be another example of the truncated, abbreviated but effective style possibly characterized by the current catchall phrase, “smart brevity.”

<sup>60</sup> Stein, Gertrude. “Saving the Sentence.” *How to Write*: 14. For further commentary on Stein’s style, see [Perloff 2002.]

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