Exercises in Style Study Guide

Exercises in Style by Raymond Queneau

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Section 1

Section 1 Summary

Notes. In her commentary for the "1981 American Paperback Edition", the translator describes how the collection of Exercises evolves from a group of twelve written in 1942, to a group of 99 by 1946, which, according to the author, is the perfect number. The translator also describes how in later years the author sketches out possibilities for further exercises, and suggests that in addition to many of the Exercises being extremely funny, there are layers of meaning and implication that can be found in each individual exercise.

Preface. In her preface to the initial publication of her translation in 1958, the translator comments on the inherent wisdom of both the author and his works (including the Exercises). She also discusses how part of the author's intent in developing the Exercises was to help the spoken French language free itself from centuries of rules and restrictions (see "Objects/Places—The French Language"). Finally, she comments again on how the variations of character and communication found in the Exercises are, in fact, manifestations of an important aspect of humanity. "The point about the original story having NO point," she continues, "is one of THE points of the book."

Section 1 Analysis

This book is, as its title suggests, made up of a series of writing exercises in which the same basic story is told in a variety of different ways and from a number of different narrative perspectives. Some variations are more technical than others, with the exercise based on such elements as rearranging words, breaking down words into their component syllables and rearranging them, and telling the story backwards. Several variations tell the story from different points of view: first person, third person, subjective, objective, and according to the identity of the narrator telling the story. A number of variations explore the effects that can be created by limiting the selection of (usually modifying) words to those of a certain sort—medical terminology, and words associated with the senses, for example. Finally, a few of the exercises explore particular narrative styles, such as telling the story in the manner of a formal letter of complaint, a comic stage play, and an opera libretto. In all cases, the basic story is the same.

That basic story is this. The narrator sees an eccentrically dressed young man on a crowded bus, the young man accuses a second man of stepping on his toes, and after a brief confrontation the young man sits down. Later in the day, the narrator encounters the same young man having a conversation with a similarly dressed friend, who is advising him about the placement of a button on his coat. The story is, according to the translator, based on an actual experience of the author's, while the sense of

pointlessness referred to by the translator (that is, the pointlessness of the story) is in fact a reflection of the author's attitude towards the experience.

As the translator points out, consideration of the story's pointlessness leads to consideration of a core human truth—that in life there often seems to be no apparent point to either things that happen or to the way in which we experience them. It is interesting to note, meanwhile, the irony inherent in the very existence of the book—that the author has given the story a point by using it as a springboard to make a point about the flexibility of language.

Section 2

Section 2 Summary

Quotes in this section are of the first few lines of each variation of the basic story.

Notation. The story is told, for the most part, in point form—short images, few sentences, informal structure, a few telling details. "A chap of about 26, felt hat with a cord instead of a ribbon, neck too long, as if someone's been having a tug of war with it."

Double Entry. Everything is referred to twice. "Towards the middle of the day and at midday I happened to be on and got on to the platform [of a] bus and passenger transport vehicle which was packed and to all intents and purposes full."

Litotes (a form of speech marked by ironically minimal use of words, and in particular an expression of a positive by use of a negative—i.e. "I won't be sad" for "I'd be happy"). This very short exercise under-explains and under-describes the situation, characters, and events. "Some of us were traveling together. A young man ... spoke to the man next to him for a few moments, then he went and sat down."

Metaphorically. In this exercise, the story is told in metaphoric, imagistic, almost poetic terms (as opposed to literally). "In the centre of the day, tossed among the shoal of traveling sardines in a coleopter with a big white carapace ..."

Retrograde. The story is told backwards. "You ought to put another button on your overcoat, his friend told him."

Section 2 Analysis

The first point to note here is that the exercises are not themselves arranged into groups, but have been broken into smaller collections for the purpose of this analysis.

The second point to note is the way in which this analysis itself is structured. The summary of each (very brief) exercise incorporates a quote, taken from the same narrative point in the story, to illustrate how the language changes, but the story itself remains the same. For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Style—Language and Meaning."

Most of the explorations undertaken in this first section of the exercises are fairly straightforward. The most intriguing is "Retrograde", in which the story is told backwards, a narrative technique that tends to be both challenging and intriguing for audiences/readers to follow and which has been used successfully in both theatre (the play Betrayal, by Harold Pinter) and film (the movie Memento, with Guy Pearce). The story is again told backwards in "The Subjective Side" in the following section.

Section 3

Section 3 Summary

Quotes are taken from the final few lines of each variation of the basic story.

Surprises. In this variation, every sentence ends with an exclamation marks, as if every event or description was a great surprise "Two hours after, guess whom I met ...! The same fancy pants! Being given some sartorial advice! By a friend! You'd never believe it!"

Dream. The language of this exercise is poetic and mysterious, evoking the experience of recounting a dream in which the details are both vivid and somewhat unusual (see "Quotes", p. 27).

Prognostication. The style here is that of someone's fortune being told. "You will see [the young man] a little later ... in front of the gare Saint-Lazare. A friend will be with him and you will hear these words: 'your overcoat doesn't do up properly; you must have another button put on it'" (Prognostication, pp. 29-30).

Synchysis. Here, sentence structure is broken down, apparently randomly. "...I met him later two hours to his overcoat a button to add a friend was advising him."

The Rainbow. This exercise inserts (sometimes inappropriately) adjectives giving objects and people colors (see "Quotes", p. 32).

"Word game." This exercise begins with a list of words (that really have little to do with the main story and apparently selected at random) that the author has decided to insert into his narrative (including "bayonet"—see "Quotes", p. 33).

Hesitation. The speaker of this exercise is unable to be specific about what he recalls and the images he wants to use to describe the situation (see "Quotes", p. 36).

Precision. This version of the story is told with extremely precise detail, including a reference to exactly how long the encounter between the two men lasts. "57 minutes later he was 10 meters away from the suburban entrance to the gare Saint Lazare ... with a friend aged 28, 1m 70 cm. tall ..."

The Subjective Side. Like "Retrograde", the action in this exercise unfolds in reverse. Unlike "Retrograde," it is told from the highly subjective (and apparently quite snobbish) point of view of the young man in the hat. "This happened in one of those unspeakably foul omnibi which fill up with hoi polloi precisely at those times when I have to consent to use them."

Another Subjectivity. This version of the story is told from the subjective perspective of the second man, who tells the story with as much distaste for the first man as the first

man has for him. "I could also have told him," the exercise concludes, "just to annoy him, that he needed another button on his overcoat..."

Section 3 Analysis

This section contains some of the most entertaining, the most clever, and the most interesting variations. Among these is "Rainbow", in which some of the juxtapositions between the colorful descriptors and the words they modify are quite funny. The humor and cleverness here foreshadow later Exercises like "Gastronomical", in which everything is described in terms of food. There is the sense in these exercises that they were, for the author, as much about having fun as about making a point.

Others are worthy of deeper consideration. "Word Game", for example, is exceptionally clever because of the different ways the words have been incorporated. While some come across as contrived (in describing the encounter between the young man and his friend, the friend's opinion is described as being something "which he could very well have given him by correspondence", correspondence being one of the words in the game. Others such as bayonet (see "Quotes", p. 33) are much more effectively integrated, illuminating the truth or sense of what is going on while fulfilling the terms of the game.

Meanwhile, the two "Subjective" exercises are virtually unique in the book in that they develop genuine detail and character in both the young man and the second man. In both versions, there is a sense of relationship and conflict that go a long way towards defining each exercise as a real story, and not just an Exercise in Style.

Section 4

Section 4 Summary

The quotes in this section are taken from the center section of the narrative.

Narrative. The style in this exercise is the formal, almost exaggeratedly so, prose style of the novel. "This individual suddenly addressed the man standing next to him, accusing him of purposely treading on his toes every time any passengers got on or off."

Word Composition. This short variation on the story puts together new words out of the components of traditional ones in order to create meaning. "Who said to a mediocranon: 'You're jostleseeming me.'" "Having ejaculated this, he freeplaced himself voraciously."

Negativities. In this exercise, an expression of what the noun in the sentence is, is preceded by two examples of what it is not. "It was neither a procession, nor a brawl, but a scuffle."

Animism. This version of the story is told from the point of view of the first man's hat (see "Quotes", p. 48)

Anagrams (rearrangements of letters in a word to form a different word, or words). In this exercise, the words of the story are rearranged. "A pach of tabou swinetyx" (a chap of about twenty six) "had an urmagent with athrone gaspenser" (had an argument with another passenger) "whom he uccased of stoljing him on sporeup" (whom he accused of jostling him on purpose).

Distinguo. With language full of jokes and puns, this exercise comments on what is with references to what is not (see "Quotes", p. 51).

Homeoptotes. This exercise interjects the sound "-ate" at every possible opportunity, at times using actual words "...who started to altercate with a proximate inmate, and ejaculate ..." and at other times nonsense words "An hoate aftrate ... I notate him agate, talkate about a buttate ..." ("an hour after ... I noticed him again, talking about a button."

Official Letter. This version of the story is written in the form of an official letter to a person in authority, providing a clinical, objective recounting of the events on the bus (see "Quotes", pp. 54-55). The letter concludes with a request for information as to what the addressee believes the writer should draw from his observation of these events.

Blurb. This exercise is written in the form of an overly complimentary summary on a book jacket—in short, promotional material. "The whole makes a charming impression which the novelist ... has etched with rare felicity."

Onomatopoeia (the technique of using words to evoke the sounds of an action or experience) In this exercise, there are frequent interjections of words, both actual and of the nonsense variety, intended to more vividly portray the sounds heard during the altercation on the bus (see "Quotes", p. 58).

Section 4 Analysis

"Narrative" is the first of several exercises that explore the book's sense of satire (see "Themes—Satire". Others in this section include "Official Letter" and "Blurb", while others in the rest of the book include "Opera English" (Part 10) and "Medical" (Part 12).

For its part, "Word Composition" is one of several exercises in which the author plays with words (breaking them down, rearranging them, creating new ones) but still manages to communicate meaning. "Anagrams" in this section is another of this sort of exercise, which is perhaps the most effective group of variations when it comes to making the author's point that meaning can be conveyed no matter what language or style is being used. For additional consideration of this question see "Topics for Discussion—Do you think the events ..."

Meanwhile, "Onomatopoeia" is one of several exercises that demonstrate the functions of grammatically traditional forms of speech. "Litotes" (Part 2), "Apheresis" and "Syncope" (Part 5) are other exercises that function in this way.

At this point, it might be interesting to consider the exercises from another angle. In spite of the fact that the basic events of the narrative are communicated no matter what the style (a key component of the author's expressed intention), in several instances what emerges is ultimately nonsense. In other words, many exercises come across as experiments in writing, rather than experiments in actual communication. Granted, this is certainly part of the author's purpose and, it could be argued, anything labeled an "exercise." A project with such a label generally has, in educational terms, the purpose of being an opportunity to apply a new technique or perspective—communication is not necessarily the point. However, on the other hand, and in terms of written communication at least, is not the point of any exercise, not just the ones in this book, to develop effective communication? Further, is not creating at least a semblance of sense a component of such communication?

On the other hand, as the author himself suggests (and as discussed in the analysis of Part 1), part of the point of the exercises (both individually and as a collection) is that there is no point. In other words, the lack of sense in many of the exercises is, in fact (and in the author's mind) indicative of a lack of sense in life, and in the world. Here again, then, is the sense of paradox encountered throughout the book, a sense of tension between the seriousness of the author's purpose, the humor that often (intentionally? unintentionally?) manifests in the execution of that intent, and perhaps most potently the underplayed but nonetheless present intellectual intensity that underlies it all.

Section 5

Section 5 Summary

The quotes in this section, and throughout the remaining sections of this analysis, are taken from various points in the exercises.

Logical Analysis. Here the exercise contains stark, minimally described details and sums up the meaning and implications of each one. "Young man. Hat. Long thin neck. A young man with a hat and a plaited cord round it. That's the chief character."

Insistence. This lengthy version of the story (lengthy because of its repetitiveness) contains numerous examples of the speaker repeating his point in an insistent manner (see "Quotes", p. 62).

Ignorance. This version of the story is told from the point of view of someone answering questions about the situation from someone else, someone who neither knows nor cares about the specifics of the event. "He had words with another man? There's nothing unusual about that. And then I saw him again an hour or two later? Why not?"

Past. This version is told from the first person past perspective of a narrator or observer who does not know the details of the event and is not particularly interested. "I saw my young man having a discussion with a pal. The pal indicated a button just above the lapels of the young man's overcoat ... I had a seat and I wasn't thinking about anything."

Present. As this exercise looks at the event from the third person present tense, it also uses more poetic language than many of the other, non-poetic variations. "At midday the heat coils round the feet of bus passengers ... an atmosphere too heavy to carry ultimate insults very vividly from mouth to ear."

Reported Speech. This version of the event is hearsay, according to the speaker who was told of what happened by "Dr. Queneau." "As soon as he had noticed a vacant seat, said Dr. Queneau, the young man had rushed off towards it and sat down ..."

Passive. The language of this exercise is passive ... that is, things are done to things and people, rather than by things or people. "The man standing next to [the young man] was being grumbled at by the latter because of the jostling which was being inflicted upon him by him."

Alexandrines. This version of the story is told in the form of an Alexandrine sonnet, written with both a particular rhyme scheme (AA-BB-CC-DD, for example) and a particular rhythmic pattern (each line consisting of a series of six ta-TUM patterns). "One midday in the bus—the S-line was its ilk / I saw a little runt, a miserable milk / sop ..."

Polyptotes. In this exercise, all the personal nouns and pronouns are replaced by the noun "taxpayer." "Then the angry taxpayer went and sat down in a seat for taxpayers which another taxpayer had just vacated."

Section 5 Analysis

There are two noteworthy elements about the exercises in this section. The first is the way in which these exercises, merely through the quality of the words chosen, create a sense of character, perspective and attitude in the narration. The most vivid example here is "Ignorance", in which the narrator comes across as extremely defensive. "Polyptotes" is another example which (at the same time as it communicates a sense of satire on social liberalism through its repeated use of the word "taxpayer") also communicates a sense of anger and resentment (which also contributes to the exercise's satirical sensibility). Other examples of this (unintentional?) portrayal of character include "You Know" (Part 6), "Awkward" (Part 7), and "Reactionary" (Part 9).

Another noteworthy element in this section is the first instance in which a particular form of poetry (in this case, the Alexandrine sonnet) is used to define both the structure and linguistic style of the exercise. Other examples include "Apostrophe" and "Sonnet" (Part 7) and "Haiku" (Part 9), all of which develop the theory that no matter how formal the structure of a poem there is still a near-infinite capacity within that structure for communication of image and meaning. It may not be going too far to suggest, in fact, that in the context of that particular idea, the exercises based on formal poetic structure might be considered perhaps the most telling manifestations of the author's thematic intent. This, as discussed in "Themes", communicates the idea that meaning can be conveyed no matter the form in which the attempt to convey it is made.

Section 6

Section 6 Summary

Apheresis (a form of language in which the first letter or syllable of a word falls away as the word evolves into a new form). In this very short version of the story, the words are mere suggestions of what the usual words would be, having been altered in the way described. For example, "Ent at won here as ree eat" ("He went and sat down where there was a free seat").

Apocope. In this version, the reverse takes place—words and phrases have been altered to remove their latter letters and words. "Then he w and s d because th w a f s." is "Then he went and sat down because there was a free space."

Syncope. In this version of the story, middle syllables and letters are removed. "Then he occed a vnt st" is "Then he occupied a vacant seat."

Speaking Personally. This narrative includes frequent interjections of opinion from the narrator, many of which include the word "personally" (see "Quotes", p. 81).

Exclamations. This first person present narrative tells the story from the point of view of an excited observer, describing the event as it happens. "Well! 't's true! No! I'm right! It's really him! Over there! In front of the gare Saint-Lazare!"

You Know. The speaker of this version of the story interjects the phrase "You know" into his rather incoherently told version of the story. "Then he started to, you know, rave, at the chap next to him. He was, you know, treading on his toes. Then he went and, you know, sat down."

Noble. This exercise narrates the event in very formal, poetic, sometimes pompous language that, among other things, personifies the tension between the two men as "Baleful Discord with breasts of soot ... came to breathe her malignant virus ..."

Cockney. This first person narrative is written, with great detail, in the slangy, under-enunciated accent of a Cockney (lower class Londoner). "Six foot o'skin an'grief, A ses to meself, when awlver sud'n 'e starts to come ve ol' acid" is "Six feet of skin and grief, I say to myself, when all of a sudden he starts to come with the old acid."

Cross Examination. In this exercise, the story emerges through dialogue between a legal prosecutor and a witness to the event, whose dialogue is written as though it is being spoken by some kind of medical expert (see "Quotes, p. 90).

Comedy. The event unfolds as a comedy script. Details about the bus, for example, are included in stage directions ("On the back platform of an S bus, one day, round about 12 noon"), while the confrontation between the two men plays out in very polite dialogue ("It seems, sir, that you make a point of treading on my toes every time anyone goes

by"). The mini-play concludes with a line of dialogue from a passenger who observes the whole thing in which he comments to himself "Odd encounter. I'll make it into a comedy in three acts and in prose."

Asides (an aside, often used in theatre, is a comment made by one character directly to the audience). In this version of the story, as he describes the event, the speaker interjects asides to the reader—here indicated by ALL CAPS: "The bus arrived bulging with passengers. ONLY HOPE I DON'T MISS IT, OH GOOD, THERE'S STILL ROOM FOR ME."

Section 6 Analysis

The first three exercises in this section fall into the category of breaking down words, reshaping their structure and content with the intent of determining whether meaning can still be conveyed. Meanwhile, exercises such as "You Know" and "Exclamation" might be categorized among those that, perhaps inadvertently, create a sense of character in the voice of the narrator. "You Know" in particular has a very contemporary feel to it, "you know" being a very common interjection. "Cockney" functions in a similar fashion, although the effectiveness of the presentation here is much more dependent upon an effective transcription of dialect rather than on the words themselves.

At the same time, "Noble" and "Cross Examination" are among the exercises that are the most intensely evocative of style and context ("Official Letter" in Part 7 is another of this group). "Noble" carries with it a very powerful sense of classical Greek poetry, specifically in its personification of the "Discord" that comes between the two men on the bus. Classical Greek poetry not only contains large numbers of similar personifications, but descriptions of those personifications (essentially the gods and goddesses) that carry with them the same sense of tradition and formality as the description of Discord with her "breasts of soot" (both the Illiad and the Odyssey, for example, refer consistently to "shining eyed Athena"). This form of repeated description was an aid to memorization for the poets of the time, poetry in that era being a verbal rather than written form. Meanwhile, there is a similarly intense sense of character in "Cross Examination", but of course the characters there are very different. However, they will be nonetheless familiar to viewers of courtroom drama in television and/or film. All in all, these two exercises (and those similar in stylistic intensity and clarity such as "Official Letter") function as vivid examples of the author's thematic point that meaning is as dependent upon context as much as on event.

Finally, there is irony in "Asides", in that each exercise is, on some level, exactly that—an aside, the author communicating slyly to the reader the various opportunities for interpretation that exist beneath the apparently superficial events he describes.

Section 7

Section 7 Summary

Parechesis. In this version of the story, the letters "bu", making the sound "buh" are interjected throughout, at times making nonsense words and syllables, at times placing more common words as substitutes for the originals. "But bussequently I buheld him with a buckish buddy who was busuading him to budge a button on his bum-freezer."

Spectral. This exercise is written in language similar to that of a so-called "gothic" novel ("Wuthering Heights" is an example), and presents the date of writing as 1783. The incident is presented as though the first man was a ghost and the speaker was a witness to the ghost's activities—for example, reacting to individuals (the second man, the friend) and situations (the stepping on the toes) that the narrator cannot see.

Philosophic. In the rich vocabulary and complicated structure of a philosophical textbook, this version of the story examines the situation more as an encounter of ideas than of individuals (see "Quotes", p. 100).

Apostrophe (a component of classical Greek tragedy in which the Chorus speaks a poetic ode aloud). Written in the formal and richly poetic style of a stiff translation from classical Greek to English (see "Quotes", p. 103), this version of the story asks whether the first man ever knew he was going to become the "immortal" subject of a work of art.

Awkward. This version of the story is written from the perspective (and with the rambling, stream of conscious narrative voice) of an observer of the incident who wants to write about it but lacks both experience and confidence. "I'm only an amateur," he says. He becomes so flustered by his lack of effectiveness that he finishes his story without getting to the part about encountering the first man for the second time.

Casual. This exercise recounts the story mostly through overheard dialogue (between the two men) and the occasional interjection from the bus conductor.

Biased. This version recounts the story from the opinionated perspective of a narrator who expresses his strong opinions about the conduct of both men during the encounter (see "Quotes", p. 110).

Sonnet - This exercise recounts the story in the form of a sonnet, a poem created with a formal rhyme scheme (ABBA, CDDC, EFFE, GG) and structure (twelve syllables alternating in stress). New details in this version include the "rich bastards" who light cigars on the bus, and the description of the long-necked first man as a "giraffe."

Section 7 Analysis

The exercises in this section fall into several previously discussed categories. "Sonnet" and "Apostrophe" are examples of the story being told along the traditional, fairly rigid structural lines of formal poetry. "Awkward" vividly creates a sense of character—in this case, someone embarrassed by his/her inability to communicate the story clearly, and perhaps communicate clearly altogether. "Philosophic", meanwhile, can be seen as being quite satirical, coming across as poking fun at the writings of philosophical thinkers in which, in many cases, using big words and complex structure seems to be as much of the point as exploring ideas. "Spectral", like "Prognostication" (Part 1) and several other versions of the story, uses words to create a sense of atmosphere, while "Parechesis" is a nonsense sort of exercise, breaking down words and rearranging their contents in the name of again proving the author's point that narrative meaning can be conveyed even if the words themselves do not make sense.

"Awkward" is the only exercise in the collection in which the full chain of events is not followed through (the narrator of "Awkward" never sees the young man a second time). In other words, this is the only exercise in which words fail not the author but the story. There is the very clear sense, however, that this failure is the exception, not the rule. In other words, the author is writing from a place of belief in the near infinite power of words to convey facts, feelings, and insights.

Section 8

Section 8 Summary

These next five variations tell the story from the perspective of the various senses.

Olfactory, referring to the sense of smell. In this exercise, the event is described in terms of how it smelled. "...there was a certain scent of long juvenile neck, a certain perspiration of plaited cord, a certain pungency of anger ..."

Gustatory, referring to the sense of taste. This variation is described in terms of how the narrator imagines it might taste. "Next we sampled the chewing gum of dispute, the chestnuts of irritation, the grapes of wrath, and a bunch of bitterness."

Tactile, referring to the sense of touch. In this version, the encounter is described in terms of how the narrator imagines it might feel to the touch. "...your finger can even touch human clottishness, slightly viscous and gummy on account of the heat."

Visual. This exercise describes the encounter in visual terms that at times veer into crudity. "Then you'd shove in a patch the colour of duck's [shit] to represent fury, a red triangle to express anger, and just a pissworth of green to portray suppressed bile and squittery funk."

Auditory, referring to the sense of hearing. Here the encounter is described by how it sounds. "...a ludicrous cacophony broke out in which the fury of the double bass was blended with the irritation of the trumpet and the jitters of the bassoon."

Section 8 Analysis

This section is both a lot of fun and very clever. In many cases, there is a sense of clear connection between the author's images and the feelings, situations and events he is describing. The playing with words makes sense, rather than coming across as undertaken for its own sake. For further consideration of the value of the images in this section see "Topics for Discussion—Consider the images quoted in the summary of Part 8."

Worthy of particular note is the reference to the "grapes of wrath," a reference to both a verse in the Old Testament of the Bible and the famous novel written by American novelist John Steinbeck.

Section 9

Section 9 Summary

Telegraphic. This variation is written in the style of an old fashioned telegram. "Bus crowded. Stop. Yngman longneck plaitencircled hat apostrophizes unknown passenger unapparent reason Stop"

Ode. Written in the style of a poetic ode and accompanied by a musical score, this version of the story gives the first man a name (Monsieur Andre) and uses language in which frequently utilized rhymes of "-uss" and "-in" are alternated with less frequently used rhymes such as "-ay" and "-eau".

Permutations by Groups of 2, 3, 4 and 5 Letters. In this virtually incomprehensible version of the encounter, words are broken down into apparently random combinations of letters. This is the first few lines. "Ed on to ay rd wa id sm yo da he n tar re at pl rm fo an of us sb..."

Permutations by Groups of 5, 6, 7, and 8 Letters. Again, words are broken down so thoroughly that they appear incomprehensible. Here again are the first few lines. "Ytowa oneda ddayo redsmi earpl nther mofan atfor saway sbusi anwho oungm kwast"

Permutations by Groups of 9, 10, 11, and 12 Letters. In this variation, a few words become recognizable. Once again, the first few lines. "Ards midda one day tow r platform yon the rea saw a young of an S bus"

Permutations by Groups of 1, 2, 3 and 4 Words. Finally, in this variation both words and sense are discernible. "Day one midday towards the on platform rear an of bus S"

Hellenisms, referring to words of classical Greek origin. Here the author takes several words and terms originating in Classical Greek, such as "meta", "hyper", "hypo", and "hysteric", and both coins new words and uses ones that have already been minted.

Reactionary. This version of the encounter is told from the perspective of an older man, unhappy with the attitudes, actions and attire of the young (particularly the young man). He repeatedly refers to the lack of respect with which he and others of his age and experience (particularly the second man, who is described as being a veteran of World War I) are treated by such young men. "In my day," he writes, we were Young Royalists, not Rock n' Rollers."

Haiku, a Japanese form of poetry consisting of three short lines of five, seven, and five syllables respectively. This is the poem. "Summer S long neck / plait hat toes abuse retreat / station button friend."

Free Verse, a form of poetry in which images and words are juxtaposed seemingly at random, but through which sense and meaning are nevertheless apparent. The

encounter is described here in a series of short, stark images. A line such as "the bus/full/the heart/empty/the neck/long/the ribbon/plaited" suddenly becomes longer and more detailed: "and the unexpected meeting near the station with its thousand extinguished lights." The poem concludes with the mysterious phrase "and of that button."

Section 9 Analysis

Here again, several of the Exercises in this section fall into previously discussed categories. "Telegraphic", like "Official Letter" and "Cross Examination", is a vivid portrayal of a very specific form of linguistic communication. It also, like "Philosophical" and "Medical", can be seen as being somewhat satiric (see "Themes—Satire"). Meanwhile, "Ode", "Haiku" and "Free Verse" are, like "Alexandrine" and "Sonnet", exercises based in the rhythmic and linear foundations of types of poetry. It is interesting to note the contrast between the forms; both here and according to tradition, Haiku is short and strictly structured, while neither ode nor free verse have a set structure and can often be quite long.

Meanwhile, "Reactionary" is written from a very clearly defined sense of character and narrative perspective. Like the two "Subjective" exercises (Part 3), the effect seems to be deliberate, as opposed to the apparent characterizations in, for example, "Awkward" (Part 7), in which it almost seems as though character has been evoked accidentally. At the same time, the four "Permutations" exercises can be placed in the same category as the others in the collection that break down words and sentence structure but still manage to communicate meaning. In the case of the first two Permutations, however, and perhaps even the third, it is virtually impossible to interpret meaning—there is little or no sense to them. It may be that someone with the mind of a code breaker might be able to do so, but for the average reader, the "Permutations" are easily the most incomprehensible of the Exercises.

As discussed in the summary, a Hellenism is a term used to describe words originating in classical Greek culture and language. Here the author uses several such words found in relatively common usage. The author also creates new ones however; common words are put together to create new words that on first glance make no sense but which, upon deeper consideration, actually do.

Example (previously existing Hellenic words are Capitalized, new "Hellenic" words are in ALL CAPS):

"[The first man] Anathematized an Ephemeral and Anonymous [stranger] who, he PSEUDOLOGED, had been EPITREADING his Bipod..."

PSEUDOLOGED breaks down in this way: "pseudo" means false, "loged" resembles logic. Therefore, false logic can be understood as assumption. EPITREADING breaks down in this way: "Epi" means above, orexternal, as in "epidermis" [outer layer, skin], "treading" means stepping. Therefore "epitreading" means stepping on.

In short, "Hellenisms" is perhaps one of the most inventive, and subversively logical, of the exercises in the collection.

Section 10

Section 10 Summary

Feminine. This version of the story is told from the first person point of view of a female passenger, who describes the first man (and his hat) as attractive. She speaks of how irritating the second man is, how resentful she is that the first man does not let her take the empty seat that he eventually sits in, and does not recognize her when she sees him later that day talking with his friend.

Gallicisms. A note from the translator indicates that this version of the story replaces a version titled "Anglicismes" (English-isms) from the original French. The encounter is described in a blend of English, English written as though spoken with a French accent, and French.

Prosthesis. In this telling of the story, apparently random letters are added to the beginning of each word. For example, "...ga shat kwith vas plaited accord" is "a hat with a plaited cord."

Epenthesis. In this version, apparently random letters are added to the middle of each word. For example, "a hart with a planited chord" is, again, "a hat with a plaited cord."

Paragoge. In this telling of the story, apparently random letters are added to the end of each word. For example, "ar hate withy an plaitedm corda"" is, once more, "a hat with a plaited cord."

Parts of Speech. This version of the encounter is broken down into the various components of speech: articles, nouns adjectives, verbs, pronouns, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions. There is no linear narrative.

Metathesis. In this variation on the story, the letters in most of the words are scrambled. For example, "...whoes aht ahd a rost of string round it" is "whose hat had a sort of string around it".

Consequences. The actions of the characters in this version of the encounter all have consequences. As a consequence of the encounter between the first two men, for example, the first man goes and sits down. The consequence of his encounter with his friend is that "a book was written and translated."

Proper Names. Several nouns are replaced with proper names, some of which make interesting sense For example, "Theodolus [the young man] rapidly abandoned Eris [Greek goddess of strife] to park Fanny [to go sit down]" makes sense while others, such as "On the back Josephine of a full Leo ..." do not.

Section 10 Analysis

The majority of the exercises in this section belong in the category of language breakdown. "Metathesis", "Paragoge", "Epenthesis" and "Prosthesis" all manipulate words and the letters that form them, yet sense remains comprehensible. Perhaps the most destructive example of this technique is "Parts of Speech", in which the words used to tell the story are completely removed from any sort of sentence structure or phrasing that would create any sort of sense at all.

"Proper Names", meanwhile, is an intriguing and entertaining blend of existing and created words/phrases. On the one hand, Eris is the name given to the classical Greek goddess of discord, who first appears (as Discord) in another exercise that plays around with personification, "Noble" (Part 6). There is also "Fanny", a colloquial term for buttocks that has been in use for centuries. On the other hand, the majority of the proper names used in the exercise are nonsensical—for example, the use of Josephine for platform, Leo for bus, and Huyghens for hours. Here again, the exercise can be seen as evoking the author's thematic concern with the relationship between language and meaning (see "Themes"), regarding both an accurate relationship between the two and how important it is to be accurate.

Then ... "Gallicisms", like "Cockney" (Part 6) attempts to transcribe dialect, while "Consequences", like "Negativity" (Part 4) communicates a sense of both event and circumstance by phrasing descriptions and narrative in a different way.

Perhaps the most interesting of the exercises in this section is "Feminine." On one level, this exercise fits into the category of those in which the character of the narrator defines meaning as much as the events or the words used, "Reactionary" in Part 9 being perhaps the most vivid example. On another level, however, the writing portrays that narrator in an almost stereotypical fashion, making her preoccupied with appearances (particularly clothes), having her use her sexuality to get ahead (by flirting with the conductor), and portraying her as being resentful when men pay her no attention. This is one of a very few portrayals of the feminine in the entire collection of exercises. The others are, for the most part, female-defined images of discord and strife. In other words, the female presence in the collection is almost universally negative. The exception is the old woman in "Antiphrasis" (Part 11), who has a kind of gentleness about her.

Section 11

Section 11 Summary

Rhyming Slang, a form of English used in Britain in which rhyming words and phrases are used as substitutes for regular nouns, for example, "loaf of bread" for "head." This version of the story uses rhyming slang instead of regular nouns. "I see a chap in the bus with a huge bushel and peck [neck] ..."

Back Slang, otherwise known as pig Latin, a slang language in which the first letter of each word used is put at the END of the word and followed by the sound "ay." This variation on the story is told entirely in this form of speech. "Unway ayday aboutya iddaymay ..."

Antiphrasis. In this version, everything is the opposite of what it is in the original—for example, someone's gender, or the time of day (see "Quotes", p. 161).

Dog Latin. This version of the story is told in traditional, academic Latin.

More or less. The story is told using real words that the reader must join together in order to understand the sense of the story. "Too ours lay terror sore him" is "Two hours later I saw him."

Opera English. In this version, the story of the encounter is recounted in the over-dramatic, almost comically heightened language of translated opera. "His neck! How long and skinny! / His voice! How like a whinny / As o a nearby Johnny / he speaks with prejudice."

For Ze Frrensh. A note from the translator suggests that this exercise replaces one in the original French entitled "Poor lay Zanglay." The encounter is described in a phonetic transcription of someone with a strong French accent speaking English. "Zees mahn got ahngree ouiz a shahp" is "This man got angry with a chap."

Spoonerisms, mixing up the first letters of adjoining words. This telling of the story mixes up the first letters of all the words. "Chuddenly this sap rarted a stow" is "Suddenly this chap started a row ..."

Section 11 Analysis

A large number of the exercises in this section ("For Ze Frrensh", "Back Slang" and "Rhyming Slang") focus on reproducing dialect or accent, similar to the way "Gallicisms" (Part 10) did. Note the similarity between "Rhyming Slang" and "Cockney" (Part 6), especially since rhyming slang is generally regarded as an offshoot or component of the Cockney dialect. Meanwhile, "Back Slang" is a kind of pseudo-dialect, a jokey sort of communication that has often been used as a verbal code. A dialect-related exercise is

"Dog Latin", the only exercise in the collection written entirely in another language other than English.

"Spoonerisms" and "More or Less" fall into the category of what might be described as language puzzles, words that are broken down and rearranged but from which meaning can still be discerned. "Opera English" is another comic satire, this time on the stiff, over-wrought and over-emotional text into which foreign-language opera is often translated.

Finally, there is "Antiphrasis", a very interesting exercise in which meaning is changed completely by reversals of gender, age, and emotional context. What in almost every other exercise is a story of conflict between one man and another here becomes the almost poignant story of an elderly man searching for the right kind of contact with another human being. What the author does here is make the thematically relevant suggestion that depending on how language is used, events and the contexts in which they take place can be completely turned around ... perhaps the most vivid example in the entire collection of the power of language.

Section 12

Section 12 Summary

Botanical. The characters, situation and events of the story are all described in botanical terms. "This corny, creeping sucker" is the young man in the hat.

Medical. In this version of the story, the narrator substitutes medical terms for many of the words. For example, "a dyspeptic who was suffering from chronic gigantism with tracheal elongation" is the young man with the long neck.

Abusive. The narrator of this version of the story puts a confrontational emphasis on all the characters, situations and events (see "Quotes, p. 175).

Gastronomical. In this exercise, the language substituted for the original is food-related. "But when [the young man] found out that he had bitten off more than he could chew, he quailed like a lily livered dunghill cock and bolted off to stew in his own juice."

Zoological. Here the story is told with substitutions of animals and their behavior for the actions of the humans. "But the sucker got a flea in his ear; that foxed him, and quiet as a mouse he ran like a hare for a perch."

Futile. In this exercise, the story is told in the form of rhetorical questions, the sense being that there is no real way to effectively communicate what is going on (see "Quotes", p. 180).

Modern Style. The events of the encounter are described in an informal, casual, first person point of view (see "Quotes", p. 183).

Probabilist. The narrator of this version of the story puts its events and situations in the intellectually-phrased context of how likely they are. "... from that day to this I have never seen the young man again, in conformity with the established laws of probability."

Portrait. This version of the story is written in the form and style of descriptions of birds and other animals found in wildlife textbooks. It refers to the young man as an animal called the "styal" (see "Quotes", p. 186), describing the events of the story in terms of animal behavior.

Mathematical. This version of events portrays them in the form and language of a mathematical equation (see "Quotes", p. 188).

West Indian. The language used in this telling of the story has echoes of the West Indian accent. "...the test start to laugh kiff-kiff and the feller get in one set of confusion, he looking poor-me-one and outing off fast for vacant seat." A note from the translator suggests this is a replacement for a version called Paysan in the original French.

Interjections. There are no facts or events in this version of the story, only interjections of sound and exclamation marks. "Ow! Oo! Ouch! Hey! Eh! H'm! Pffft!

Precious. Here the story is told in excessive, self-consciously poetic and self indulgent language (see "Quotes", p. 193).

Unexpected. The narrator tells the story of what happened on the bus to a group of friends, one of whom, "Theodore," reveals himself to be the young man's friend.

Section 12 Analysis

As was the case with "Rainbow" (Part 2) and the Sense Section (Part 8), several of the exercises in this section play with both the literal and connotational meanings of certain groups of words. The metaphors and images in "Botanical", "Zoological", and "Gastronomical", while undeniably evocative of the various activities (relating to plants, animals, and food respectively) they suggest, also add effective layers of meaning to the story. "Medical", "Mathematical", "Probabilist" and "Portrait", each with their differing emphases on scientific jargon, function in the same way, with an additional layer of satire. These exercises poke fun at those who use the language of their disciplines to communicate simple facts and circumstances. There is one other satirical exercises in this section, "Precious", which satirizes the self-conscious intensity of feeling and image that tends to infuse the work of writers who take themselves too seriously.

"West Indian" is essentially another of the dialect exercises (like "Cockney" in Part 9 and "Gallicisms" in Part 10), while "Interjections" essentially falls into the "break the language down as far as you can"category. "Abusive" creates a very clear sense of character in the narrator, who comes across as violent and void of compassion. "Futile", by the same token, is less about the futility of the language and more about the futility of the narrator who, ironically enough, seems to be complaining the whole time about the inability of words to express his meaning and yet manages to convey event, and to an extent meaning, perfectly well. "Modern Style" is very casual, to the point of having almost no style at all. There is, however, a definite sense of attitude about this exercise, in that the young man and his clothes are repeatedly referred to as "pansy," a condescending term for "homosexual" that seems to serve as a focus for the general contempt the speaker feels for the young man throughout.

"Unexpected" is a fitting exercise with which to close the book. Told almost entirely in dialogue, the exercise ends with an unexpected twist, somewhat logical but ultimately amusingly unlikely, that many readers find highly entertaining. On a deeper level, however, both the story itself and its placement put a twist on the author's overall thematic perspective. The vast majority of the book seems to be contending that there is no sense of reason or meaning in life, that no matter how it is lived or spoken about, life is pointless. The conclusion of "Unexpected", however, seems to be suggesting that connections between events, circumstances and reactions, and perhaps even meaning, can become apparent in unanticipated, seemingly random ways.

Characters

The Young Manappears in All the Exercises

The Young Man (referred to by name, Andre, only once—in "Ode", Part 9) is the central character in the basic story, and in all its permutations. He is most frequently described as being under thirty years of age, as having an unusually long neck, an aggrieved, attention-seeking way of speaking, and in most cases an eccentric, exotic way of dressing. In several variations, he is described as being something of a dandy, a man who dresses extravagantly for no apparent reason other than to impress. He is also frequently portrayed as somewhat petulant—specifically, when his complaint that the second man keeps stepping on his toes seems to be ignored and he (the young man) takes the nearest empty seat. There is the strong sense throughout the variations that he is doing so in a sulk. The latter part of the story, in which the young man is seen talking to his friend about the apparently superficial matter of a button, reinforces the sense, frequently established in the various narrations of the story, that the young man is shallow and childish. This point of view is particularly evident in the variations that are recounted from the young man's point of view, "The Subjective Side" (Part 3).

If the reader looks at the characters in the basic story and its variations in metaphorical terms, and if the reader considers the book's basic narrative and thematic premise to use language in non-traditional ways, it may be possible to see the self-centered Young Man as a metaphor for a certain aspect of being French (see "The French", below). In other words, the apparently precious self-interest of the young man can be seen as making a satirical point about the precious attitude held by many French, throughout history, about their language.

The Second Manappears in All the Exercises

In traditional analytical terms, if the young man is described as the story's protagonist, the second man might be described as the antagonist, the character/person who acts in opposition and who generates conflict with the protagonist. The important thing to note about the second man is that he is portrayed in a wider variety of ways than the young man, and with fewer details about his appearance. In many variations the second man is not really described or defined, given that the focus of the narrative is on the reactions and attitudes of the young man. In other words, the second man is a catalytic character. In other variations, however, the second man is endowed with a clearly defined set of characteristics. In "Reactionary", for example (Part 9), he is portrayed as being an elderly veteran of World War I, which makes the young man's reactions to him, at least in the eyes of that particular narrator, particularly offensive. Another example of a more specific, characterized way in which the second man is portrayed can be found in Another Subjectivity (Part 2), in which the second man is portrayed as stepping on the young man's toes deliberately as a kind of punishment for his arrogance and petulance.

To continue the metaphoric interpretation of the story introduced above, if the young man is a satirical, metaphorical portrayal of the French obsession with the propriety and sanctity of its language, the second man might be perceived as a metaphor for an individual, group, or agency, who infringes upon that sanctity. In other words, the second man could be interpreted as representing someone like the author himself, who refuses to take the purity of the French language as seriously as some French might suggest.

The First Man's Friendappears in Most of the Exercises

This character appears in the latter section of the story, and is most frequently described as being similar in visual character to the young man. He is dressed in a similar way that suggests to various narrators (and therefore to the reader) that the two young men are of similar character: dandyish and superficial. The Friend is portrayed as telling the young man, often in terms that come across as being rather lecture-like, that the button on his coat is in the wrong place.

To conclude the metaphoric examination of the three central characters, there is the sense that the friend, like the second man, might be perceived as the author's satiric metaphor for an individual, group or agency determined to reinforce and/or maintain the integrity and purity of the French language, down to the minutest detail. For further commentary on this aspect of the basic story, see "Objects/Places - The Button."

The French

The French have for centuries insisted on maintaining the purity and integrity of their language, both in terms of what it means and how i spoken. In 1635, the government established an agency (the Academie Francaise) to oversee the usage and development of the French language, more often than not defending its traditions and discouraging change. This linguistic context gives the author's exploration of the flexibility of language a certain irreverence.

The Narrators

In several of the Exercises, the voice of the narrator could be perceived as neutral, as simply recounting the story, albeit in a specific way. For example, "Negativities" (Part 4) and "Asides" (Part 6) are straightforward presentations of the various narrative style in question without any sense of attitude in the narrative voice. In several other cases, however, that voice is defined by a clearly developed sense of identity. In "Cockney" (Part 6) and "Feminine" (Part 10), the narrators are specific types—a British Cockney and a woman respectively. "Reactionary" (Section 9) takes character development even further, with the narrator telling the story from within a specific emotional context. Finally, there are several exercises in which character can be inferred, in which the style explored communicates a sense of character without one actually being defined—in

other words, an "implied" character. "You Know" (Part 6) and "Awkward" (Part 7) are examples of this version of narrative shaping. For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Topics for Discussion—Go through the various exercises ..."

The Bus Conductorappears in Some of the Exercises

The conductor appears in relatively few of the ninety-nine exercises, "Comedy" (Part 5), "Casual" (Part 7), "Biased" (Part 7), "Reactionary" (Part 9) and "Opera English" (Part 10) being most notable. Throughout his various appearances, however, the character of the conductor is portrayed consistently. He is essentially surly, officious, and self-important, making him an intriguing parallel, in some ways, to the similarly self important Young Man. This also makes him a source of tension; very few people are comfortable being confronted with mirror images of themselves.

The Bus Line Director

This character makes his one brief appearance in "Word Game" (Part 3), referred to in passing as a wealthy man who oversees the operations of the Paris Bus System and who, the narrator of "Word Game" implies, has given the bus to his daughter as part of her dowry.

Discord

The tension between the young man and the second man is personified in "Noble" (Part 5) as the Goddess of Discord, whose name in classical Greek mythology was Eris.

Chorus of Passengers

For the most part, the rest of the passengers on the bus are described in casual, non-reactive terms. In other words, throughout the various exercises they are portrayed as being merely bystanders to the confrontation between the young man and the second man. Essentially, all the reader is told about the other passengers is that there are a great many of them. However, in "Opera English" (Part 10), the other passengers become a chorus, commenting on the action as it unfolds.

The Author

The author makes a brief appearance in his own fiction in "Reported Speech" (Part 4), in which the narrator comments that he is passing on the story as he heard it from "Dr. Queneau"

Objects/Places

Language

Language is the focus of each of the exercises contained in this book, innovative as well as traditional usage. In the Exercises, language is played with like a deck of cards; it is shuffled, dealt out, and played down in what seems like only the first few of an infinite number of ways. Language is celebrated and teased and manipulated throughout the book, but while there is very often a sense of irreverence and playfulness about the exercises, there is the strong sense that underlying it all is a sense of respect for language's flexibility and power.

The S-Line Busappears in All the Exercises

The action of the story takes place on this crowded city transit bus, with "S" being the designation of its particular route.

The Porte Champeretappears in Some of the Exercises

In a few of the exercises, the bus is destined for the Porte Champeret, and in one or two, the narrator's second bus trip (on which he sees the young man for the second time) is the return from the Porte. In many of the exercises, however, neither the destination of the first trip nor the origin point of the second is named.

The Young Man's Neckappears in All the Exercises

In a majority of the exercises, the young man's neck is described as being exceedingly long, in one instance ("Zoological", Part 12) as long as a giraffe's. There may be a reference in this aspect of the young man's character to the saying "stick one's neck out," which means to express an opinion or take an action that most would judge to be risky or unwise. This could indeed describe the sort of thing the young man does here when he confronts the second man.

The Young Man's Hatappears in All the Exercises

The young man (see "Characters") gets on the bus wearing a hat described generally as being made of soft brown felt. In some exercises (for example, "Notation" in Part 1) the hat is described as strange, while in others ("Cockney", Part 6) the hat is not mentioned at all.

The Cord on the Hatappears in All the Exercises

The young man's hat, and by extension the young man himself, are made even more distinctive by the presence of a kind of woven cord around the hat. This is unusual, given that most hats of the sort are bounded by ribbon. Again, the sense here is that the details of the young man's dress are evocative of his character—eccentric, attention-seeking, and self-indulgent (see "Characters - The Young Man").

The Button on the Young Man's Coatappears in All the Exercises

On one level, the button is merely the focus of a comment reinforcing the essential superficiality of both the young man and his friend. On another level, however, the button can be seen as continuing the metaphor outlined in "Characters" above, in which the story's three main characters (the Young Man, the Second Man, and the Friend) can be seen as symbols of various aspects of the French relationship with language. In this context, the button can be seen as representing small variations from expected propriety. that the guardians of that propriety (the symbolic aspect of the Friend—see "Characters—The Young Man's Friend") strive, with an almost obsessive attention to detail, to preserve.

The Empty Seatappears in Most of the Exercises

After the confrontation with the second man, the young man takes the first empty seat he can find. In several of the exercises, he comes across as taking refuge, hiding, or sulking in this empty seat—which, according to the narrators of a number of the exercises, should have been left for a woman or an elderly person.

The gare Saint Lazareappears in Most of the Exercises

The second appearance of the young man takes place outside this particular train station ("gare" meaning "station" in French).

The Cour de Romeappears in Some of the Exercises

The gare Saint Lazare is located in this area of Paris.

Themes

Celebrating Language

The book's primary theme, the essential purpose it and the exercises it contains came into existence, is exploring and celebrating the near-infinite ways language can be used to convey story. Each exercise does exactly that—use language in a different, generally unexpected, often apparently playful way, to convey both event and meaning. At this point, it is essential to note the distinction between the two.

Throughout the book and in each exercise, no matter what linguistic technique the author applies, the same narrative points (setting, character, event, consequence) are communicated (for a more detailed outline of those points see "Part 1 Analysis"). In other words, while celebrating the flexibility of language and anchoring that celebration in consistent narrative facts, the author is exploring the relationship between style and substance, between interpretation and fact, with the various techniques he employs functioning as manifestations of the former and the story's central narrative points functioning as the latter. Facts do not change, he seems to be saying; however, language, and by extension humanity, will change, and therefore so will meaning (for further consideration of this aspect of the book see "Style—Language and Meaning").

This premise, that meaning is the result of both fact and interpretation, is the core of both his celebration and his lesson—that language can present the same facts in a myriad of ways. In other words, events can, and inevitably will, carry with them different meanings depending on who experiences them, who observes them, who tells about them, and who hears the telling.

The Relationship between Language and Life

The book's demonstration of the flexibility of language can also be seen, without too much interpretive effort, as a demonstration of the subjectivity of experience,of the fundamental principle of existence that the experience of every individual is unavoidably different. Granted, in many of the exercises the techniques explored by the author essentially use different words, phrases and structures to describe the same attitudes as well as the same events; no matter who is narrating the story, the young man, for example, invariably comes across as arrogant, childish, and over-dressed. However, even taking that degree of consistency into account, many of the exercises adeptly communicate the reasons why the narrator sees the young man that way. In other words, facts and interpretations might both be consistent from individual to individual, but the contexts of those interpretations can, and do, vary. This is because the individual having them is exactly that, an individual, and therefore his experience, and his interpretation of that experience, is unique. What the author seems to be suggesting, through both his style and his substance, is that one person's interpretation of events is not going to be the same as another's, even if that other person is a co-participant in

those events. For examples, see the contrasting perspectives of "The Subjective Side", "Another Subjectivity", "Reactionary" and "Feminine." In short, the author is essentially making a plea for open-mindedness, not only about how language is used but also about why it is used in the way it is.

Satire

Satire is a form of humor in which characteristics and attitudes of a group or individual are exaggerated in order to point out how extreme, ridiculous, foolish or funny they are. In the exercises, there are at least two layers of satire at work. The first, as previously discussed, is somewhat indirect. In deconstructing the formality and rules of language in general, and of French in particular, the author is satirizing that same formality, those same rules. He is also, by extension, satirizing the individuals and organizations (such as the Academie Francaise—see "Objects/Places—The French Language") who adhere strictly to that formality and to those rules. It may not be going too far to suggest that this level of satire goes even further, extending to everyone (not just those focused on language) who stick too closely to the rules, adhering to them for their own sake rather than to the principles that gave rise to them.

The second layer of satire manifests within the individual exercises themselves. While many are straightforward explorations of specific techniques, several can be seen as satires of those who apply those techniques. For example, "Mathematical" (Section 12) can be seen as satirizing mathematicians and/or those who define themselves and their lives according to mathematical, logical principles. "Opera English" (Part 11) is a satire of the over-wrought, contrivedly-poetic translations of classical operas (originally written in German, Italian or other, mostly European, languages) into English. It may not be going too far, in fact, to suggest that the exercises in the Senses section (Part 8), among others, can be seen as satirizing those who over-use language, who over-metaphorize it (to coin a phrase) in order to display their own cleverness. Perhaps in this sense, the author is even poking satirical fun at himself.

Style

Point of View

On one level, the book's overall point of view is simultaneously objective and subjective. The author is simultaneously analytical and creative, developing his thematic premise with a somewhat clinical approach, by exploring each narrative technique in systematic turn while writing with a particular intent (see "Themes—Celebrating Language" and "Satire"). This gives the book a strong undertone of subjective irreverence and can be seen as an effective application of a fundamental maxim of education—do not let people know they are being taught. In other words, in his determination to open people (particularly the French—see "Characters—The French") to the possibilities of language, the author is writing from the point of view that if a lesson is disguised (particularly with humor, as it often is here), it is much easier for those being taught to both hear and learn.

On another level, while several of the individual exercises are written from objective, third person points of view, the majority are written from differing subjective, first person points of view. Here there is a further sub-division, with many of the first person narratives striving for objectivity in their telling of the story while others are much more clearly subjective, with the attitudes and personal contexts of their narrators coming across vividly. These parallel points of view can be seen as further manifestations of the author's essential thematic and narrative intent—to explore and expand upon ways in which language can be used to convey fact and context, and therefore meaning (see "Language and Meaning" below).

Setting

On one level, the setting for the book is irrelevant, in that the author's thesis (relating to the flexibility of language) could very easily be written about within any geographic, political, and/or linguistic context. On another level, however, it is doubtful that any of those linguistic contexts would be as strictly defined as in France, where language has been a focus of socio-cultural consideration for centuries (see "Objects / Places—The French Language". The author's intent is defined by the setting in which he created his work and in which he sets the events of his narrative; setting is more ideological and philosophical than physical.

All that said, there is a sense that the settings for the individual encounters in the narrative—in particular, the crowded bus and the gare Lazare—do have a role to play in defining and illuminating aspects of the book's theme and intent. Specifically, these two main settings, with their crowdedness and public quality, evoke a sense of individual struggle against the group, against perceived oppression. There are echoes, in fact, of this sense of oppression in the general reactions of the various narrators to the young man, whose apparently idiosyncratic style of dressing might be perceived as having

metaphoric echoes of the author's idiosyncratic style of writing. It might not be going too far, in fact, to suggest that the young man's struggle for respect might be an echo of a possible dark side of the author's intent—his own struggle to claim, and perhaps promote, individuality of language usage in a setting (France) that to all intents and purposes frowns upon such individuality.

Language and Meaning

As previously discussed, the book (see "Themes" above) is a simple celebration of language. On another level, that celebration is a cheeky tweaking of those who would regard the French language (and perhaps language in general) as sacred and unchangeable. On a third level, the book also seems to be tweaking those who would regard life that way, as open to only one interpretation or meaning. The author seems to be suggesting that life be viewed and experienced with the same sort of flexibility as the language in his book.

Specifically, the events of the narrative, considered alone, without relation to the way in which they are conveyed, create a certain, and consistently portrayed, sense of meaning. In other words, the events of the exercises are essentially an exploration of both chance (as manifest in the two apparently random encounters with the same man) and superficiality (as manifest in the actions and attitudes of that man and, in the latter part of the story, his friend). At the same time, each different exercise, each linguistically-defined version of the events in question, adds an additional layer of meaning to those events. In short, the author is demonstrating with each exercise, and with the exercises as a whole, that meaning is the result of the combination of style and substance. Each application of a technique, each exploration of narrative voice, combines with the standardized facts to offer and define an individualized interpretation of the story, evoking unique meaning each time.

Structure

As a collection, there is the sense that the exercises are presented in a fairly random fashion. There are a few stylistic groupings (the collection of sense-defined styles in Part 8, the various "Permutations" in Part 9) but for the most part, there does not appear to be a systematic organization to the order in which the exercises appear. This functions on two levels—as a reinforcement of the sense of playfulness that seems to underline the author's exploration of language usage, and as a reinforcement of the sense of randomness that underlines the events of the narrative.

Within each exercise, narrative structure is essentially the same, in that events follow the same order each time the story is told. The narrator sees the encounter between the young man and the second man and later in the day sees the young man talking with his friend. There are exceptions. "Retrograde" (Part 3) tells the story backwards, "Awkward" (Part 7) never gets to the second encounter, and "Unexpected" (Part 12) takes the narrative a step or two further. Those exceptions aside, the essential

uniformity of structure from exercise to exercise is a key element in the author's execution of his overall intent: to create the understanding in the reader's mind that meaning is at least in part dependent upon interpretation of events rather than events themselves (see "Language and Meaning" above).

Quotes

"[The author's] purpose in the Exercises is, I think, a profound exploration into the possibilities of language. It is an experiment in the philosophy of language. He pushes language around in a multiplicity of directions to see what will happen." Preface, p. 14.

"I had the impression that everything was misty and nacreous around me, with multifarious and indistinct apparitions ..." Dream, p. 27.

"There was a rather ridiculous young man on it—indigo neck, cord round his hat. All of a sudden he started to remonstrate with a blue man ... in a green voice ..." The rainbow, p. 32.

"There was a young man on this bus who was rather ridiculous, not because he wasn't carrying a bayonet, but because he looked as if he was carrying one when all the time he wasn't carrying one." Word Game, p. 33.

"I rather think that it was the same character I met, but where ... with a friend who must have been talking to him about something, but about what? About what? About what?" Hestitation, p. 36.

"At each stop the comings and goings of the passengers caused him to make certain lateral movements which at times were fairly pronounced, and this ended by angering him (the hat)" Animism, p. 48 (bracketed interjection is the author's).

"As the people were pushing and shoving (and not the sheep were shooshing and pupping), a newcomer (not a cute number) displaced the latter (not lacerated the display)." Distinguo, p. 51.

"...the perambulations of the outgoing and incoming passengers did not fail to provoke a certain disturbance which incited one of these passengers to protest, though not without timidity." Official letter, pp. 54-55.

"[he] suddenly turned (twirl, twirl) on his neighbor angrily, grrh, grrh, and said, hm hm "You are purposely jostling me, Sir." Ha ha. Whereupon, phht, he threw himself on to a free seat and sat down, plonk." Onomatopoeia, p. 58.

"...this young man, having got into this same nearly full S bus before me, at about 12 noon, was wearing on his head a hat which I found highly ridiculous, I, the person who happened to be in the same bus as he, on the S line, one day, at about 12 noon." Insistence, p. 62.

"Personally I thought the young man's neck was somewhat long and I also thought that kind of plait thing round his hat was bloody silly. Personally I would never dare to show myself in such a get up." Speaking Personally, p. 81.

"Prosecutor: Was his demeanour as singular as his attire and his anatomy? Witness: At the very beginning, no; it was normal, but in the end it proved to be that of a slightly hypotonic paranoiac cyclothymic in a state of hypergastric irritability." Cross-examination, p. 91.

. "... the transitory and faded appearance of a profane consciousness afflicted by the long neck of vanity and the hatly plait of ignorance ... plunges into the categorical imperative of its recriminatory life force against the neo-Berkleyan unreality of a corporeal mechanism unburdened by conscience." Philosophic, p. 100.

"O coxcomb with thy plait-girdled hat projecting over thy long neck, O cross-grained, choleric and pusillanimous cur ... didst thou suspect this thy rhetorical destiny ..." Apostrophe, p. 103.

"He worked himself up into a state of indignation and accused a perfectly ordinary citizen ... [who] looked at him severely, trying to find an aggressive retort in the ready made repertory that he no doubt lugged around with him through the varying circumstances of life ..." Biased, p. 110.

"...an old man whose head is sunk in his shoulders and who isn't wearing a hat thanks a lady sitting a long way away from him because she is stroking his hands." Antiphrasis, p. 161.

"After a stinking wait in the vile sun I finally got into a filthy bus where a bunch of bastards were squashed together." Abusive, p. 175.

"How can one convey the impression given by a quarrel between a placid passenger unjustly accused of purposely treading on the toes of someone and that grotesque someone happening to be the individual described above?" Futile, p. 180.

"I reckoned he'd have his work cut out to cut any ice, and to be fair I must say I was right. What do you know, he just ran away. How yellow can you get?" Modern style, p. 183.

"Of peevish disposition, it readily attacks its weaker brethren, but if it encounters a somewhat lively retort it takes flight into the interior of the vehicle where it hopes it will be forgotten." Portrait, p. 186..

"The oscillation of two homoids tangentially to the above trajectory has as a consequence the small but significant displacement of all significantly small spheres tangential to a perpendicular area of length ... described on the supra-median line of the homoid A's shirt front." Mathematical, p. 189.

"In order to give utterance to his lament, [the young man] adopted the acid tones of a venerable vidame who gets his hindquarters pinched in a public privy and who strange to state does not at all approve of this compliment and is not at all that way inclined." Precious, p. 193.

Topics for Discussion

Go through the various exercises. Determine which ones are written from the perspective of an implied character (see "Characters—Narrators" for a definition of "implied" in this context). Discuss what sort of person the narrators of those exercises might be.

Recall a randomly experienced, but memorable, occurrence in your life—perhaps an encounter you witnessed on a bus, like the encounter witnessed by the author. Write down that story from different points of view, using different grammatical and/or structural techniques, categories of images, etc.

Do you think the events of the story would be understandable if the reader did not know the events of the story in the first place? As an example, consider the quote from "Mathematical", p. 189. If the reader did not know the story beforehand, would he know that the language here refers to the conversation between the young man and his friend about the coat button?

Consider the images quoted in the summary of Part 8. In what ways are "pungency of anger" (olfactory"), "the chewing gum of dispute" (gustatory), "a pissworth of green to portray suppressed bile" (visual) and the others, effective evocations of emotion and/or sensation? What similarly evocative images can you come up with for common feelings and/or experiences?

Recall and describe a circumstance in which you were told the same story by different people. In what ways were the stories different? The same? In what ways were your reactions different? The same?

How much of a role do you think the context in which a word is spoken, or an idea is expressed, plays in the way that word or idea is received? Explore specific words/ideas and specific contexts, placing the same word/ideas in different contexts.

Create a list of evocative words with connotations that could be positive or negative. Express what each word means to you and/or the feeling it evokes in you. Compare your reaction to that of the person next to you, or to those of others in your classroom or small group.

Choose a writer or verbal communicator who you think uses words well, and one whom you think does not. Consider, compare, and discuss the ways in which their word usages are effective or ineffective.