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By-Brashers, H. C.

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As the inexperienced writer becomes aware of the issues involved in the composition of effective descriptive prose, he also develops a consistent control over his materials. The persona he chooses, if coherently thought out, can function as an index of many choices, helping him to manipulate the tone, intent, and mood of this style; to regulate the stylistic features of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and organization; to depict sensory and conceptual experiences in language; and to successfully combine character, action, and scene or setting as he tells his story. Through such assignments as writing three descriptions of the same object or place from the point of view of three different personae, the student can discover both the "unity of subject matter" and his own particular descriptive style. (JB) This article also appears as Chap. I of "Creative Writing for High School Students," by H. C. Brashers and others, published by the Bureau of School Services, of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, copyright 1968 by The Regents of the University of Michigan. (Author)

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# Teaching Descriptive Style

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**H. C. Brashers, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN**

When we are helping students to develop good descriptive style, whether in regular composition or in creative writing courses, whether in high school or college, teaching certain concepts and requiring certain exercises produce substantial results. Among the concepts are the answers to such questions as what is persona, how is it related to style, what is style, how can it be manipulated, what is description, and how do persona and style function in description. The most effective exercise is the assignment to write, say, three descriptions of the same object, such as a building, using three different personae as the indexes of style choices. My lesson plan for dealing with these questions and preparing the students to write the descriptions runs something like the following; perhaps it will be useful to other teachers.

I recommend making the assignment at the beginning of the lesson rather than at the end. I've tried it both ways, and I've come to believe that having the task and its breakdown before students motivates them to pay attention to the conceptual parts of the lesson; for it is through these parts that they make the imaginative transfer and come to some understanding of what we want. The more suggestions and examples they can see, the better idea they will have of the task before them.

But I do not recommend trying to make the discussions of ancillary, component questions—the several approaches to style and manipulation offered here—into a unified presentation, like a formal lecture. Student attention span is probably not long enough to stick to a unity that long, so there may be some value in avowedly and apparently changing approach and subject—enough so that the students can see the next stage of discussion as a different activity, one which invites their attention and refreshes their perceptions. There are, accordingly, deliberate conceptual breaks between the several sub-sections of the discussion which follows.

## WHAT IS A PERSONA?

**Persona** is the Latin word meaning 'mask of the actor,' hence it has come to mean a person, or character, in a novel, drama, etc. For the writer, it means the imagined pose or imagined personality whose story is being told, at any one moment. A girl writing about what

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it is like to be a working man has to imagine herself as a man in the situation she wants to describe; she has to assume a working man's persona. A boy writing about the relationship between a boy and a girl has to imagine, alternately, what it is like to be that boy in that time and place, and what it is like to be that girl in that time and place. In writing workshops I have taught, I have often asked students to use the personae of a country boy, who might well be characterized most by a tone of wonder; a nostalgic alumnus, who would be imbued with a positive love for what he is looking at; and a blasé iconoclast, a person primarily interested in tearing down the idols of a former generation. All but two of the illustrations in this discussion are drawn from student uses of these personae.

Language persists in creating personae. Words, sentences, are only graphic symbols of something that is imagined to have been said, because such linguistic qualities as pitch, pause, and stress constantly force meaning out of the graphic and into the oral. The quality of having been said demands the presence of a sayer; in all writing, creative or otherwise, this sayer is the imagined persona of the writer, a complete personality, with consistent characteristics, values, perceptions. All the choices of words and thought that the writer makes should be consistent with this imagined personality. We might illustrate this by comparing the way a person with a straightforward personality and a matter-of-fact character would describe a building with the way a person with a performer's personality and a poetic mind would describe the same building. The first might well be simple and objective; the second, high-flown and metaphorical. If either of these personalities should drift, even momentarily, into the language and word-choices of the other, the breaking of tone, point-of-view, and style would strike the reader as an aesthetic and conceptual mistake—that is to say, persona is a prime determiner of the qualities and effects of a style.

A word of caution to the student is in order at this point. It is a building that is to be described in this exercise, not a person (that comes in another lesson). To be sure, many characteristics of the persona are unavoidable. If one person refers to what he sees as the "three-story, central section of a magnificent building" and another person refers to the same thing as "a huge stone box in an architectural monstrosity," they will be revealing essential qualities of their personalities and character. But a reader should be able to see that the perceptual materials that prompted their comments are identical. Both some description and some characterization come through. In this exercise, the student should *focus* on the thing to be described, not on the processes of the describer's thought. In other words, keep the description external and denotative; do not drift into streams of consciousness. Be sure the reader gets primary, sensory detail.

In a very real sense, everything that goes into a piece of writing becomes a part of the style of that writing, but such a statement is so general as to be nearly useless. We should, however, always keep it in mind, as the total, controlling generality which contains and explains the specifics we are talking about. I have found it useful in class to begin at almost the opposite extreme of definition and pick out the mechanics of language that make up a framework for describing and manipulating style. The more specific we can be at first, the better.

It's always a good idea to spend some time in class, trying to arrive at a definition of style inductively. One might begin by asking the students what goes into a style and then write the students' suggestions on the blackboard. Students can almost always be depended upon for such statements as: it's the way an author uses words; part of it is whether or not he writes in dialect; his level of usage—colloquial, formal, stilted, etc. And so on. When the class has exhausted its suggestions, these raw materials should be arranged into groups which will organize and illuminate what the students have been saying without any very clear framework—that is, the teacher should make certain that an inductive leap into a generalization is actually made at the end of an inductive approach to the subject. Here is my guide to generalizations about style:

Every statement about style that is literary (and we should remember that non-literary statements are possible; witness the political statements in Russia, the religious statements from The Vatican, and so on)—every *literary* statement about style will fall under one or more of the five categories described and illustrated below. These five categories make up a practical, conceptual framework for describing and manipulating style. With it, students can analyze any author's style; they can describe and compare; they can even use the framework as a device in developing their own styles; but they cannot define style. The framework permits description, not definition.

**1. Features of Pronunciation**—This category contains all the audible elements of the language; such things as dialect and dialogue, conversational tone as opposed to formal or informal, and all of the things—rhythm, stress, pause, and pitch—that go into making up the intonation patterns and intonation contours in the language. These things affect the style of a piece of writing and are indicated in part by punctuation and respelling, in part by the word-choices and syntactical patterns, and sometimes with printer's devices such as italics and capitals. Everything on the page that indicates a quality of pronunciation indicates something about the persona's personality and values, something about the author's tone, something about the

- 4 mood that the piece invites the reader into. Here is a sample that uses respelling, exclamation marks, dashes, italics, pauses, hesitations for stylistic effect:

*A Building, by Dorothy Telfer*

What a bee-yoo-ti-ful building! It looks just like the picture my fifth grade teacher showed us—the one of the Parthenon—or was it the Colisseum? Anyway, Angell Hall has the *biggest* pillars you've seen in all your life. To think that people—just like me—could make something so big and wonderful! It is kind of gloomy with that dark cement and all, but if it's like what they have in Greece, it *musi* be good. Say, I wonder if we could do our barn over to look like that . . . Of course, we couldn't have pillars that big, but still . . . That's what we need back home, a little culture.

(One can get several details about the building from this—size, color, general shape of pillars, for example. But much of it—for instance, the irony—is characterization of the speaker, not description.)

2. **Features of Vocabulary**—This category is concerned with the kind of words the author chooses. We deal here not only with such things as level of usage, in terms of familiar, formal, standard, or non-standard, but also with slang, with in-group vs. out-group language, with Latinate words, with the number of polysyllabic words (which influences readability), with metaphor, simile, some aspects of irony, and the like. These features reside primarily in our understanding of the words themselves and, again, contribute toward our perception of the persona, the author, and the ultimate effect of the writing. In the following two examples, notice that the vocabulary choices, especially the choices of nouns and adjectives, proceed from fairly consistent criteria—and it is these criteria, more than anything else, which get communicated in the description of the building.

*An Aged Rock, by David Olson*

It's still there and, thank God, they haven't changed those big solid columns and those wonderful designs. The front pushes out from the wings in defiance of all those long-haired weirdos and all the nutty things they're trying to bring about. It's solid, substantial, and what's more you can understand it; you can appreciate its beauty. It's one of the few things today a regular person can really appreciate.

*A Pile of Rock, by Ida Malian*

Angell Hall? That aboriginal, primitive shingle stands only as a grim reminder of the incapacibilities of the Greeks in design. The khaki grotto overshadows all other institutions of learning. Angell Hall is incompatible with its neighboring buildings. Its facade is repetitious and monotonous. After an innocent passerby is hypnotized by the maze of steps, his mind is then teased by the eight huge tree-stump looking pillars. The blueprints to this hamlet obviously evolved from a sand castle on the beach. Angell Hall is no more than an assemblage of cement and earth, sprayed gray. It would serve as a fine place to film the movie, "I Saw a Funny Thing on My Way to the Forum."

3. **Features of Grammar**—In this category, we deal with the kinds of sentences an author uses: as simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex; periodic, loose, run-on, or balanced; declarative, interrogative, or exclamatory; long, short, or of medium length. We deal also with the arrangement of clauses and elements within those kinds of sentences—with whether the dependent clause of a complex sentence comes before the independent clause, or after it, or imbedded within it; with whether an adjective clause or phrase comes before or after the noun it modifies (post-nominal modifiers are a mark of Saul Bellow's "*Herzog*" style, for example); with whether the subject, verb, and object are in normal order, or are inverted; and—most importantly—with all the effects upon style that all these grammatical devices have. In the paragraph which follows, for example, the grammatical patterns of repetition and permutation, post-verbal apposite, and so on, combine with vocabulary to create a sort of roiling unity that suggests Faulkner's style.

*Speaking Ill of the Dead, by Glenda Bullock*

Sam Ward sat morosely regarding the edifice—sat because he would not have bothered standing to watch it. "A great, hulking anachronism," he thought, not hating it because it could not inspire hate, only disdain and perhaps pity. In fact, especially pity and pity especially for those who built it and thought they had done well when they had done nothing. It was Everytown's high school gymnasium, library, and Civic Center, or Art Gallery. It was a Greek temple made incongruous by concrete and glass, a hideous attempt to bring the past into the present. Ah, well, one should never speak ill of the dead.

(Notice that such clever use of language becomes one of the objects of appreciation in a style like this—which is to say that our focus is on the persona.)

4. **Features of Organization**—With this category, we begin dealing with structures of language that are larger than the sentence itself—with the structure of paragraphs; with the strategies of arranging generalization and detail for induction or deduction; with the presence, absence, and position of description or exposition; with dialog and dialectic; with dramatized and summarized scenes and their sequence; with the preparations, foreshadowings, undercuttings, and such that are incorporated into the effect of individual sentences and groups of sentences; with strategies of lead-in, complication, crisis, climax, consequences, and conclusions; with the order and balance (or lack of them) in the "parts"; in short, with all those features that cannot be seen in the texture of the individual sentence, but persist conceptually in our memories as contributors to the tone, mood, and intent of a piece of writing. Many of these features cannot be illustrated in a short paragraph, but perhaps a short maneuver in irony will suggest something of the effect:

*Memories, by Liz Vogel*

God, those were the good old days. Nothing's the same, 'cept for good ole Angell Hall. Strong, stable, yep, just like the class of '37. Nothing bad about that class, by God. This place brings back great memories; the beer party we had out on the front steps, third row, 'bout the middle between the columns. We had our laughs. Not like the kids who call themselves students now. No responsibility at all . . . just here for fun. Yeah, this place holds a lot of memories.

Here, it is the juxtaposition of premise and condition against conclusion—in other words, the organization of the statements—which creates the irony. Organization for climax or surprise, or for sequential clarity, for dramatization or summary, and many other patterns are in this category.

**5. Patterns of Aesthetic Heightening**—It should be obvious that none of these stylistic features can occur alone, but always is accompanied by all the others. No pronunciation occurs without a word; no word outside some grammatical scheme; no grammatical scheme without some order; all features are always present. But the effect of the concurrence of the several features is subject to control and choice and, thus, is a feature of style.

Each of the four features already discussed inevitably creates a pattern in its occurrence. These patterns can best be described in terms of the degree of the reader's attention that they attract or demand. The effect of pronunciation, for example, can be nearly nil in a passage of exposition, but let the exposition lead into a dramatized line or a short scene, and the quality of pronunciation becomes suddenly noticeable and important in the style. Or let a character in a dramatized scene suddenly speak in an unusual voice, say with a dialect that is different from his normal voice, or with a pose of ignorance or crudity or social polish, and the change will demand the reader's attention. Similarly an unusual word, or an unusually perceptive word, or a stout metaphor; or inverted grammar, or a suddenly short sentence, or an extract—a sentence that presumes you understand its grammar; or a strategy of organization that, after adequate preparation, pays off. In casual writing, these patterns are mixed to no especial effect: one may be beginning to tighten, while another is fully taut, while a third is in a process of recession. But it is possible (and common in the best writing) for the tense phases of several patterns to converge at important points, so that each enhances and strengthens the effect of the others and together they heighten the aesthetic effect of the moment. Most effective anecdotes use such converging patterns on their punch-line; for example, Benjamin Franklin's anecdote about

the man who, in buying an ax of a smith, my neighbor, desired to have the whole of its surface as bright as the edge. The smith consented to grind it bright for him if he would turn the wheel; he turned,



while the smith pressed the broad face of the ax hard and heavily on the stone, which made the turning of it very fatiguing. The man came every now and then from the wheel to see how the work went on, and at length would take his ax as it was, without further grinding. "No," said the smith, "turn on, turn on; we shall have it bright by-and-by; as yet it is only speckled." "Yes," says the man, "*but I think I like a speckled ax best.*" [Franklin's italics]

Notice how the shift from indirect to direct conversation dramatizes the most significant moment—imagine the initial question in direct dialog and the pay-off in indirect for a world of difference. The developments in the the passage actually produce a new vocabulary, and all these patterns are made to pay off exactly when the expository organization is complete. Such convergences are a common mark of good style.

It is probable that the first three of these style categories are more important than the other two for the beginning writer, for they function in the texture of every sentence. It is usually in such things as the conventions of dialog, the level of vocabulary, and the texture of grammar that the beginner is most often inconsistent. A consciousness of this framework can give the young writer a means of controlling and making consistent the choices he makes in the guise of a persona, help him to develop the persona's personality to the point that it can function as the index of choice, and furnish him with a semi-mechanical means of manipulating tone, intent, and mood in his style.

### **TONE, MOOD, INTENT**

Any particular style must finally be evaluated in terms of such qualities as tone, intent, and mood. A teacher is likely to find a deductive approach (informal lecture) best here, for students usually have little sense of these things. Tone, briefly defined, is the attitude that the writer takes toward his material. It can be satirical, comic; it can be serious, half-serious; it can be iconoclastic; it can be blasé; or what-have-you. We always describe tone in terms of an attitude, and it is something that we associate with the author himself. The intent, or intention, of a work of art is something that we must discover from the work itself. Every use of language arouses certain kinds of expectations and makes certain kinds of promises which we expect to be fulfilled. These promises, or these expectations, lead us, as readers, to know what the work of literature is intending. The grammar, the patterns of organization, the strategies that are embodied in the language, tell us what its intention is; thus, intention, or intent, resides in the work proper. Mood can be briefly defined as the emotional attitude that the work invites or causes the reader to take. We describe it in emotional terms, such as gloomy, happy, afraid, irritated, or what have you. Mood is always emotional and

8 is always a quality in the reader himself.

There is obviously a great deal of interconnection between these three aspects of style. A comic tone embodied in comic strategies will help to create a comic mood in the reader. Lugubrious tones, done formally, might well create a mood of gloom. These three aspects, however, are involved in every communication because there must be a communicator, a thing communicated, and a receiver of the communication. These three aspects of experience correspond respectively to tone, intent, and mood in style.

Each of these three aspects of style can be manipulated; in fact, we ought to think of style in terms of the manipulability of language, not in terms of a set pattern of characteristics. We should look upon style, not as a means of expressing the self, but as a means of expressing variant meanings, attitudes, and points of view. Every writer, then, coming upon style, should not try to develop *a* style, but as many styles as things he has to say. He should look upon style as a manipulable device for choosing how he is to say a thing, and, of course, tone, intent, and mood are manipulated by the practical features that get embodied upon the page in print. Manipulation of style is the only way a writer has of controlling the evaluation, the meaning, of the detail he uses, the only means he has of specifying his meanings in description, or exposition, or narration, for the style tells us what the "factual" details on the page mean. Some examination of the processes of description will, perhaps, help to clarify this.

### WHAT IS DESCRIPTION?

It is a truism by now, I suppose, that nothing can happen nowhere; the place has to be described or implied. And, indeed, most of us are pretty good at imagining what another person describes. The teacher, therefore, might profitably begin by asking (inductively), what is description? Students will almost surely be able to say things like: it's the way a thing looks, its color, shape, size; it's the way a thing sounds; feels; but what's pretty to one may not be pretty to another, so it involves personal impression and evaluation. Description also involves an understanding of definitions and cause and effect; the use of a word like "post" implies that we know what one is; "the post fell" depends upon our past experience of gravity. Again, the teacher should be sure to summarize and draw together the students' statements in some suitable conceptual framework. A handy, catch-all definition of description to work toward is: *the depiction of sensory and conceptual experience in language*. Some specific expansion on this definition is in order:

In what forms of language (as opposed to lexical items, as above) are sensory experiences communicated? First, and most obvious, is the simple enumeration of detail. "The lawn is green, the grave is

brown and fresh, a hearse is driving away," or the first part of this paragraph:

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Size is the dominant quality of Angell Hall. It is four stories high and about 600 feet long. The central part, and the whole, are dominated by eight, huge, six-foot-thick pillars, a stone gable with a carved frieze, and thirteen steps that extend the full width of the eight columns. Everyone thinks immediately of a Greek temple, especially the Parthenon, but architects may also notice the perfect symmetry, builders may note that it's made of Indiana limestone, and janitors sigh at all those ledges, nooks, and crannies that collect dirt and pigeon droppings. And everything about it is big; it is inconceivable that anyone could fail to notice or be indifferent to Angell Hall.

But simple enumeration of detail may not tell us much about a thing described. To say that a building is 600 feet long and four stories high may not give us so much of a picture of its size as seeing a person, stumbling backwards, trying to get into a position where he can see it all at once; that is, (and this is a second phase of depicting sensory experience) some impression of the effect of detail may be necessary. Impression is communicated in such pronunciation devices as "bee-yoo-ti-ful," in selection of vocabulary, as in "proud pillars" as opposed to "imitation Greek pillars," and in the grammatical and rhetorical organization, as in the examples below. A third device that helps to evaluate and evoke detail is comparison (including metaphor) and contrast. Here are a couple of examples that try to convey the impression a building makes on a viewer:

*A Boy's Wonder, by Liz Vogel*

The pillars towered higher than any tree in Cook County. The building they supported was twice the size of the high school. Two hundred persons could sit on those front steps. This was only one building; there were a hundred similar structures encircling it. There were thousands of people vacating its grounds. Sam Dobson turned his back to Angell Hall and wept. He was a small frog in a big pond.

(Frightfully bad cliché, that! But that's a problem for another day.)

*Angell Hall, by David Olson*

It looks like a fullback bursting through the line, his broad shoulders straight and unrelenting, his square head down, ramming through the enemy, ignorance. Its proud pillars stand guard above its granite steps as we dwarfs stare up at its magnificent motto, while Greek Gods gambol across its solemn gray front.

In addition, impression of detail may be conveyed through such pronunciation features as awe or wonder or disgust, such vocabulary features as excitement or surprise, such grammatical features as exclamation or question, such organizational features as arrangement for irony or induction or allegory—in fact, all of the resources of the language that participate in style.

The techniques for depicting conceptual experience are parallel, step by step, with the techniques for depicting sensory experience. The definition, in all its forms, including cause-effect and function, corresponds to the enumeration of detail. It depends not upon perceiving lines, colors, etc., but upon conceiving what a word means: in such a string of statements as "the lawn was green, the grave was fresh, the hearse was driving away, the funeral was ended," the writer depends upon the reader having some working definition of lawns, graves, hearses, funerals, and ends. This is an increasingly conceptual series: "lawns" needs only a definition in sensory terms; "graves" implies a sensory definition and a concept of use; "hearse" implies a definition, a concept of use, and a concept of its functioning; "funerals" implies a definition, a concept of use, a concept of function, and some understanding of a social institution; "ends" is a purely conceptual abstraction, without sensory embodiment.

Similarly the evaluation of detail corresponds to the personal impression. The evocation of a concept, like the evocation of a sensory detail, may not mean much by itself, and the author may be forced to imbed some kind of evaluation in his language. In the example below, this evaluation is imbedded in the surrounding narrative; the imagined situation itself participates in the description.

Division and classification correspond to comparison and contrast. It is a means of relating what we have and see to the great world around us. Our ability to abstract and summarize, to conceive of some things as different from others, and like some, is the source of much of our understanding of the world. It makes possible the concept of types, for example, and stereotypes—both subjects for another day. The recognitions of type and stereotype are conceptual forms of comparison and contrast; our classification of the scene we see becomes a part of its meaning, part of its description. This should be apparent in the following example:

***The Blessing, by David Olson***

Angell Hall? Well, actually "Angell" is used ironically. You see, some time ago, thunderclaps shattered the noonday quietness and then the previously bright sun was obliterated by an ominous shadow. The end of the world was obviously imminent. As the shadow approached Ann Arbor, people screamed "It's Gabriell! Prepare for the final trumpet blast!"

But as the shadow neared, it became increasingly obvious that this was not an angel. For an instant, its immense bulk blackened the ground beneath it in the shadow, and then it settled. It spread its huge cement wings over the lawn, then thrust its square head outward. There was no neck—just the box-like head connected to the rectangular phlegm-colored wings. Its red lower lip rolled out in thirteen steps.

It appeared to be dead, and the administration *did* need larger facilities. So the local tattoo artist was called in for some writing forms to adorn the face.

The administration was looking about for some place to enter, when suddenly the monster blinked one of its glassy eyes and bared

its eight Doric teeth in a grin of triumph, as the president led the others into its gilded stomach.

It should become increasingly apparent to the student that the choice of vocabulary is prime in determining the effect of a description, for vocabulary controls so much of the rest of language. A particular building, like Angell Hall, can be described in several ways; it can be made heroic, sentimental, frivolous, even obscene. The choices of style (including tone) in the description will determine whether we as readers like or dislike the whole thing. Whether we like or dislike it is related to the total picture of our sympathy and empathy for the setting, the characters, and the story. As in other approaches to the study of a story, sympathy and empathy influence the possible themes, because they actually become part of the effect the description has.

### SETTING AND SCENE

It would be possible, now, should a teacher wish it, to distinguish between scene and setting. We all know that some stories just happen anywhere—the place is unimportant, a mere backdrop against which the action plays. These stories have only setting, which we can define as the static description of the *place* of a story. But we all know also that some stories happen in specific places, that the place and situation are integral to the whole issue, that the story is so bound to its scene that to remove or destroy one is to destroy the other. These stories depend upon scene, which we can define as the *process* in which character, action, and setting combine to tell the story. I usually illustrate this difference in class with stories from an anthology, but perhaps a couple of hypothetical examples will clarify the issue here.

Imagine, first, a story that depends upon a trick of plot. We have to see a character, moving in a setting, preparing the details that are the terms of the trick, but the actual place will be unimportant. We can get the information in a restaurant, in a castle, in an airplane over the African desert, at a dinner table, in the living room, one elbow on the mantel. What is essential to the story is that we have prior access to the information upon which the trick depends. The trickery and its discovery must be arranged for, but it is the fact, not the setting, of the trick that is important. Such a story could operate very efficiently with only a setting.

On the other hand, imagine a story that depends upon an unusual or macabre character. We will *not* want to reveal the character directly, but lead the reader to discover the characterization upon which the story depends. We will, therefore, arrange all sorts of detail in action and scene, which will allow the reader to infer bits of information that tell—the way the character is dressed, the features of the house he lives in or the place he works, a habitual action or a stage

prop he keeps manipulating. Since the inferences from these descriptive details tell what the story is actually about, to remove the story to a new set of details, another house, another place of work, or to dress the characters differently, would be to destroy the point of the story. The description participates in the telling; it is part of the *process*.

It is always scene, not setting, that creates tone, mood, atmosphere, and even symbol; therefore, the distinction has some practical value in teaching young people to read and write sensitively. To make a young writer aware of the fact that place can do much more than just be there is to open all sorts of potential riches to him, and he can start asking himself, as he reads, what atmosphere contributes to the total meaning of a story, or what mood and tone contribute, and so on. The ultimate of this perception of process, I suppose, is the immediate perception of and reaction to symbol. A symbol, after all, is a described thing that represents much more than itself. It, too, is a way of telling.

### SUFFICIENT TO BEGIN

If the student has acquired some concept of these several ancillary issues—persona, style, description—and their uses, he should be sufficiently equipped to begin his three descriptions of the same building, using three different personae as the indexes of style choices. The exercise should launch him upon a voyage of conscious discovery about his own writing and about the possibilities in writing. The more we teachers can make him aware of, the better he will write, the better we will have done our job.

And when the student has done his job well, the unity of subject matter that I denied earlier will have been accomplished. For all these things, and many others, are involved in the central task of writing. What I have been trying to get at stands in relation to the kinds of things I have been saying as the hub of a wheel stands in relation to the spokes. We have been travelling down individual and apparently disparate spokes to discover several sides of the hub. When and *if* all these approaches are assimilated, the whole will be inferred and then the student will really start rolling. Perhaps that is too much to ask for now. Perhaps it is enough to give students an ambitious task to perform, give them enough ideas of how to perform it to excite them, and turn them loose. Perhaps, for now, it is sufficient to begin.

*The next, and correlative, assignment would be to write descriptions of a single object or place, from a single persona's viewpoint, but for differing audiences, say, for a child, for a foreigner, for a compatriot, for a grandmother, and such.*