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## ‘You will finish this sentence’

### German Longitude for Anglophone Readers

The German language has a reputation for complex syntax and complicated grammar that make it hard for the learner to attain proficiency. Unspoken in this complaint is the adverb “unnecessarily” – the notion that all this declining, conjugating, verb-splitting and multiple subordinating does not really serve any purpose other than ostentatious difficulty, in the manner of say, Latin or ancient Greek. Perhaps the most aggrieved charge came from a very proficient speaker of German, the writer Mark Twain, in his essay “The Awful German Language” (1880):

An average sentence, in a German newspaper, is a sublime and impressive curiosity; it occupies a quarter of a column; it contains all the ten parts of speech – not in regular order, but mixed; it is built mainly of compound words constructed by the writer on the spot, and not to be found in any dictionary – six or seven words compacted into one, without joint or seam – that is, without hyphens; it treats of fourteen or fifteen different subjects, each enclosed in a parenthesis of its own, with here and there extra parentheses which re-enclose three or four of the minor parentheses, making pens within pens; finally, all the parentheses and re-parentheses are massed together between a couple of king-parentheses, one of which is placed in the first line of the majestic sentence and the other in the middle of the last line of it – *after which comes the VERB*, and you find out for the first time what the man has been talking about; and after the verb – merely by way of ornament, as far as I can make out, – the writer shovels in “*haben sind gewesen gehabt haben geworden sein*,” or words to that effect, and the monument is finished. I suppose that this closing hurrah is in the nature of the flourish to a man's signature – not necessary, but pretty.<sup>1</sup>

Easy to see what a great effort it is to get to the end of a long and complex sentence: reading this section aloud requires considerable skill of modulation – and breath. Twain enumerates some of the structural, morphological and topographical features that make German sentences different from English and increase their length and density: a looser word order enabled by visible cases, compound nouns, multiple parentheses and subordinated clauses, and separation of prefixes, auxiliary and main verb for passive voice and compound tenses. In doing

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Twain, “The Awful German Language,” in Mark Twain, *A Tramp Abroad/Following the Equator/Other Travels*, ed. by Roy Blount Jr. (New York: The Library of America, 2010), pp. 374–392, here: pp. 375f.

so, he constructs a very German sentence himself so that the Anglophone reader gets a taste of the ‘awfulness’ thus described, including the gratuitous use of the semicolon to lengthen the torture.

Twain’s essay sits in the Appendix of *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), an account of a European tour that indulges the reader in humorous depictions of national character and customs. That Twain singled out German over equally complex languages such as Italian, Greek, or French (let alone any Slavic tongues) has perhaps more to do with the ethnic heritage of his audience at home than a detailed assessment of structural complexity. His home audience will have felt that English, in contrast, was a concise modern *lingua franca* stripped of awkward conjugations and declinations and unburdened by such quaint and undemocratic features as ‘king-parentheses’.

What is a humorous side swipe at grammatical complexity for Twain becomes a more wholesale rejection in Willa Muir’s remarks “Translating from the German” (1959). Muir (aka Agnes Neill Scott) spent most the late 1920s and 1930s translating fiction, from Christa Winsloe and Heinrich Mann to Lion Feuchtwanger, Hans Carossa, Hermann Broch and, notably, Franz Kafka. At the beginning of the Second World War, with no new German translations being commissioned, Muir fell on hard times. By her own admission, war and fascism prejudiced her against the language:

I find myself disliking the purposive control, the will power dominating the German sentence. I dislike its subordination of everything to these hammer-blow verbs; I dislike its weight and its clotted abstractions. I have the feeling that the shape of the German language affects the thought of those who use it and disposes them to overvalue authoritative statement, will power and purposive drive. [...] A language which emphasizes control and rigid subordination must tend to shape what we call *Macht-Menschen*. The drive, the straight purposive drive, of Latin, for instance, is remarkably like the straight purposive drive of the Roman roads. One might hazard a guess that from the use of *ut* with the subjunctive one could deduce the Roman Empire. Could one then deduce Hitler’s Reich from the no less ruthless shape of the German sentence? I think one could, and I think that is why I have come to dislike it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Edwin and Willa Muir, “Translating from the German,” in *On Translation*, ed. by Reuben Brower (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 93–97, here: p. 95. I am grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer for pointing me to this remarkable essay. In his *The Death of the German Cousin: Variations on a Literary Stereotype, 1890–1920* Peter Edgerly Firchow comments on the unexamined racism underlying Muir’s fuzzy logic (London: Associated University Presses, 1986), p. 20.

According to Muir's postwar logic, language because it shapes thought also informs all other structures, be it roads, national character or political systems. One dreads to think what she might have made of the grammar of Turkish, Farsi or Mandarin, let alone Russian, had she lived through military conflict with those empires; when comparing her own native Scots dialect to standard English she was certainly aware of a colonial hierarchy.<sup>3</sup> If Twain tutted over king-parenthesis as quaintly obsolete, Muir's hostility to the ostensibly "ruthless shape" of German grammar explained (at least to her, it seems) how difficult it was to turn "Classical German" – controlled, rigid, purposive, hierarchical – into "sound democratic English".<sup>4</sup> Translation method here virtually resembles a form of moral re-education for the text.<sup>5</sup>

Even today, one can eagerly gesture towards Hungarian, Czech, Polish or Portuguese as equally complex languages – all capable of infinite hypotaxis – but German remains saddled with the notion that it is *the* European language of habitual elasticity, prolixity and fiendish difficulty. By the same token, English enjoys the reputation of being structurally and grammatically simpler<sup>6</sup> and therefore more accessible compared to other modern languages. The length of sentences, as we shall see, seems to be a particular indicator for unwelcome difficulty because length allows for complications such as (multiple) subordinated clauses. Stylists refer to such grammatical arabesques as 'periodic sentences',

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3 There is no indication in Muir's later memoir *Belonging* (1968), that she was aware of writing that reflected on the potential of any language to support authoritarian structures, such as Victor Klemperer's *LTI* (1947) or Orwell's *1984* (1948). Michelle Woods, however, has pointed to her rather more antagonistic feelings towards what she felt was a kind of mechanical, martial English required by the BBC in contrast to her own Scottish vernacular. See Michelle Woods, *Kafka Translated: How Translators have Shaped our Reading of Kafka* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 54.

4 Muir, "Translation from the German," p. 97.

5 As Woods has pointed out, Muir's translations have been criticised as outdated from a range of points of view, but this may also have something to do with changing perspectives on the practice and theory of translation itself, which now on the whole affords the translator a great deal more visibility and creativity. See Woods: *Kafka Translated*, p. 45.

6 Comparative linguists have emphasised that English is less structurally complex than German and therefore more semantically context-dependent. See for instance, John H. McWhorter, „What happened to English?“, *Diachronica* 19 (2002): 217–79, here: 266 and John A. Hawkins, *A Comparative Typology of English and German: Unifying the Contrasts* (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 6, 27. Klaus Fischer distinguishes between structural and grammatical complexity. Structural complexity concerns elements of clauses (e.g. nominal or prepositional phrases) while grammatical complexity encompasses the entire system of regulations within one language. See Klaus Fischer, "Komplexität und semantische Transparenz im Deutschen und Englischen," *Sprachwissenschaft* 32, no. 4 (2007): 355–405, here: 361.

and gesture towards Cicero.<sup>7</sup> As a native speaker of German who writes in English I have occasionally been criticised for long sentences, as if periodic style was a foreign virus smuggled in through free movement; as if I had forced an unnatural syntactical pliability on the English language.<sup>8</sup> In this essay, I want to argue in favour of the conspicuously long sentence *in any language*, but particularly in English. When strategically deployed and ingeniously punctuated, the long sentence has enormous performative force: it can enact its content through its form, as Twain's example above demonstrates, and is therefore extremely effective. Before I demonstrate this with a range of examples, however, let me reflect why periodic style might be greeted with some animosity.

## 1 Translation and Periodic Style

It is quite common even for academic colleagues fluent in German to mention that they read this renowned historian or that eminent critic not in the original language but in translation because their work is simply more readable in English. In such remarks, the translator is credited with facilitating *greater* readability of the work by reducing its structurally foreign features.<sup>9</sup> The consensus among linguists and translators seems to be that translation into less structurally

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew Clark traces this term to Greek rhetorical theory, in which “a period is a long sentence that uses grammatical subordination, especially to create some sort of suspense of meaning”. This was easily done in inflected languages such as Greek or Latin where the verb can come at the end. Matthew Clark, *A Matter of Style: On Writing and Technique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 98f.

<sup>8</sup> Curiously, this complaint was never made about academic prose, presumably because the diligent readers of research publications are more concerned with the nuances of argument than the vagaries of style and are, in any case, used to densely structured prose.

<sup>9</sup> Conversely, a reviewer of the German translation of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in *Der Spiegel* noted that its German translator Klaus Fritz needed 250 pages more than the original, because German was “ausführlicher”. *Der Spiegel*, 27 (30.06.2003), p. 139. It is not entirely clear what such a statement says about German or English in terms of readability or complexity: German appears to be credited with more detail and prolixity but the genre of this text – children's fiction – may also imply that it is translated with a specific reading competence age in mind. In addition, Klaus Fischer points to the longer syllables of German words compared to English: more letters per syllable means more space is needed on the page. Fischer, “Komplexität,” 394.

complex languages such as English habitually simplifies languages whose structure prefers – or easily allows – “high information density”.<sup>10</sup> Here is an example of a dense sentence that packs in a lot of information:

Gestern, gleich nach dem Frühstück, wollte ich mich wieder an den Aufsatz über lange Sätze machen, aber unser naturbegeisterter und ungeduldiger Dackel saß schon mit der Leine im Mund in der Diele und ließ sich nicht vertrösten, sodaß ich notgedrungen die Arbeit aufschob und mich seiner annahm, erst am Waldrand entlang, dann die steile Böschung hinunter zum Donauufer, wo man stets auf Rennradfahrer, ipod-verstöpselte Jogger und anderweitig Unaufmerksame achten muß, damit man überhaupt heil wieder nach Hause kommt, und wieder hinauf in die Stadt durch unseren eher kümmerlichen Sportpark, wobei wir die angejahrten Freiluftgymnastiker links liegen ließen, am Bismarckdenkmal vorbei (letztes Schnuppern und Beinheben), bis wir uns endlich in der Konditorei Schiller eine Schale Wasser und einen Espresso gönnten und, verstoßen, ein frisches sizilianisches Hörnchen.

Clearly this sentence is very long, as is the walk it describes. Its main clause (Ich wollte mich an den Aufsatz machen) is enriched by adverbial adjuncts that specify time (Gestern, gleich nach dem Frühstück; wieder) and a noun phrase modifier that identifies the nature of the essay (über lange Sätze). The main clause is further extended by subordinated clauses introduced by conjunctions (aber, sodaß, bis) and these are blistered by more subordinated clauses (wo..., damit..., wobei). These list the obstacles on the way: one a compound noun (Rennradfahrer), the second a noun with a hyphenated noun phrase (ipod-verstöpselte Jogger) and the third a nominalised adjective with an adverbial phrase (anderweitig Unaufmerksame). Once we have got past these impediments we are headed for the patisserie although the park slows us down again with more noun phrase modification, from the geriatrics exercising outside to the Dachshund's final truffling and leg-lift at the memorial. This hypotactical sentence is packed with subordination, recursive compounding and heavy noun-phrase modification. The standard method for translators to decompress or dilute such “high information density” typical of complex languages is sentence splitting.<sup>11</sup>

Mario Bisiada has argued that translators split sentences irrespective of the structural idiosyncrasies of source and target languages when they believe that

**10** C. Fabricius-Hansen, “Informational density: a problem for translation and translation theory,” *Linguistics* 34, no. 3 (1996): 521–66, here: 558.

**11** See K. Solfjeld, “Sentence Splitting – and Strategies to Preserve Discourse Structure in German-Norwegian Translations”, in *Subordination vs 'Coordination' in Sentence and Text: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective*, ed. by C. Fabricius-Hansen and W. Ramm (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008), pp. 115–33.

such action aids explication without loss or change in meaning.<sup>12</sup> In addition, journal editors often recommend specific strategies such as sentence splitting in their guidelines to achieve greater readability, possibly because German has a reputation for complexity.<sup>13</sup> However, according to Peter von Polenz, the average number of words in written German sentences has in fact been steadily declining and so have hypotactical sentence constructions over the past two hundred years.<sup>14</sup> Unlike German, modern English uses more non-finite clauses such as participles and gerund constructions, and these can substantially increase both the length and grammatical complexity of English sentences.<sup>15</sup> (Sentence splitting, then, may also be a translation strategy applied to English hypotaxes with multiple gerund constructions.) A translator following editorial guidelines for splitting sentences may turn our German peripatetic perambulation into this sort of dog walk in English:

Yesterday, right after breakfast, I was going to return to my essay on long sentences. Yet our impatient dachshund was already in the hallway, keen for the outdoors and squatting with the lead in his mouth. I had no choice but to delay my work rather than his walk. We made for the edge of the woods and then down the steep banks of the Danube. Down there you have to watch out for cyclists racing past, joggers whose ipods make them oblivious to anything, and other careless people if you want to get home in one piece. Then back up into town through our paltry sports park where we ignored the geriatrics busy with their open-air exercises and passed the Bismarck memorial for a final truffling and a last wee. Eventually we reached Patisserie Schiller and rewarded ourselves with a bowl of water and an espresso and - no one was looking - a fresh cannoli.

Arguably, we have been walking the same dog and encountered the same landmarks and obstacles, but did it really feel like the same outing? It was certainly a longer one in German, where we properly earned our water, espresso and cannoli and are thus well-equipped for renewed reflection on long sentences, having just got to the end of one. Even the reader was rewarded with a full stop. In English,

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**12** Mario Bisiada, "Lösen Sie Schachtelsätze möglichst auf: The Impact of Editorial Guidelines on Sentence Splitting in German Business Article Translations," *Applied Linguistics* 37, no. 3 (2016): 354–76, here: 374.

**13** Bisiada, "Lösen Sie Schachtelsätze," pp. 370–72. See also K. Fischer, "Komplexität und semantische Transparenz im Deutschen und Englischen," *Sprachwissenschaft* 32, no. 4 (2007): 355–405. According to Bisiada, sentence splitting is not just a feature of non-literary translation from German into English but also of translations from English into German.

**14** Peter von Polenz, *Deutsche Sprachgeschichte vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), vol. III (19. & 20. Jahrhundert), pp. 353f. and vol. II (17. & 18. Jahrhundert), p. 274.

**15** See for instance Rohdenburg, cited in Fischer, "Komplexität," 392f.

sentence splitting afforded us so many pauses, yet another one at Patisserie Schiller seems a little self-indulgent before returning to a subject for which we have shown little aptitude. Sentence splitting, then, has changed the effect by changing the form. How did this happen?

The underlying idea of the practice of sentence splitting is that length and complexity are an impediment to reading *comprehension* while shorter sentences (and words) are presumed to be more lucid. A number of Reading-Ease formulas even quantify readability into grades so that text chunks can be sampled to test the suitability of a text for its intended audiences.<sup>16</sup> Such formulas assume that greater length necessarily results in greater structural complexity as if every long sentence was necessarily opaque and every short sentence, a marvel of semantic transparency (such formulas are notoriously poor at measuring semantic cohesion). In fact, hypotaxis creates meaning through the grammatical relations between its component parts; less important information is subordinated. When a hypotaxis is split this hierarchy may get lost, resulting in several sentences in which the significance of the information may be rearranged, levelled, even reversed. If we separate our one-sentence dog walk into shorter sentences, we ostensibly don't need the conjunctions that signal the relationship between main and subordinate clause (aber, sodaß, damit, wo). In the less complex sentences we necessarily lose the rhythm of the longer sentence in which the up and down of the landscape was accompanied by features to postpone, avoid or ignore. The shorter sentences do not pull us along in the same way but present these aspects more sequentially and episodically.

Sentence splitting may also result in greater or lesser ambiguity in the target text. In the example of the dog walk above, the German original plays with who

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<sup>16</sup> The most well-known of these is Flesch's for English-language texts:  $RE = 206.835 - 1.015asl - 0.846asw$ . (RE = reading ease, asl = average sentence length, asw = average number of syllables per word.) The higher the score the more readable the sentence, with the standard readability lying between 60 and 70. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formula places even greater emphasis on sentence length:  $FKGL = 0.39asl + 11.8asw - 15.59$ . See Ralf Lisch & Wolfgang Kriz, *Grundlagen und Modelle der Inhaltsanalyse* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1978), p. 181. The figures can be adjusted for different languages to take account of the different average length or number of syllables (e.g. Toni Amstad's German  $RE = 180 - asl - 58.5asw$ ). Karl-Heinz Best notes that while such formulas appear to take in only two criteria, they actually measure many more text qualities since word length alone is also a reliable indicator of epistemological age, frequency of use and polysemy. See "Sind Wort- und Satzlänge brauchbare Kriterien zur Bestimmung der Lesbarkeit von Texten?," in *Wissenstransfer—Erfolgskontrolle und Rückmeldungen aus der Praxis*, ed. by Sigurd Wichter and Albert Busch (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 21f.; here: p. 28. For an online test that runs through seven formulas see <http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php>.

is actually and metaphorically taking the lead - the Dackel keen on getting out or the writer eager to return to her desk – because there is no recursive pronoun or subject until they both stop at the Patisserie in need of refreshment. In English, the split sentences each require a subject so the translator has to make an interpretive decision (we/I/the dog) not required in the original German. Writing made up of shorter sentences may look easier to grasp on the page (or the screen) but can displace onto the reader or translator the cognitive labour an author of grammatically complex structures would have undertaken on their behalf.

Perhaps most problematic is the assumption that changing the structure and reducing the length of a sentence have only negligible impact on its content; that length and complexity are in fact dispensable, even awkward stylistic features: that walking a Dackel and walking a Dachshund are unquestionably the same journey. This would chime with the notion, cited above, that a non-literary German text translated into English is easier to read because *the information* is presented in a more digestible or easily extractable way. By the same token, this view seems to suggest that stylistic alterations made by the translator matter least in factual writing, whether it is a historiographical tome on the Second World War, a canonical textbook on mimesis or a car manual. Style, here, would be regarded as an integral aesthetic-semantic feature of literary prose alone while a negligible aesthetic attribute of non-literary writing. The most cursory consultation of renowned English-language handbooks on style would dismiss this view as reductive; these books draw their examples from literary and non-literary prose and include fiction and non-fiction, not least because hybrid genres such as memoir, journalism, cultural history and travel writing depend on narrative and use similar creative strategies.<sup>17</sup> Twain's example above referred to German newsprint, but he also cited in his essay popular, serialised writers such as Eugenie Marlitt, a bestselling contributor to the popular illustrated weekly *Die Gartenlaube*. And most importantly, in lampooning German, the highly proficient Twain stretches *English* syntax as far as it will go. In the process he demonstrates the possibility of a structural and stylistic cultural transfer from German to English.

One of the most skilful contemporary translators into English, the late Anthea Bell, has always been an advocate of seamless translation, faithful to the target language and faithful to the author's style. Occasionally, these two principles are in conflict as they seem to have been in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*. Here she comments on Sebald's periodic style as distinctly un-English:

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<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Clark's *A Matter of Style* and also Richard Lanham, *Analysing Prose* (London: Bloomsbury, second ed. 2013), William Zinsser, *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Non-Fiction* (New York: Harper Collins, [1976] 30th ed. 2006).



For a translator of modern German literature, it was an interesting experience to render Max Sebald's unique style, which preserves the special affinity of earlier German writers with long, intricate sentences made up of many interlinking subordinate clauses. *Austerlitz* contains the famous – or should I say notorious? – nine-page sentence about the camp regime at Terezín (Theresienstadt), to which Austerlitz has found out that his mother Agatá was taken. It would have been conventional English to break up that sentence, but Max would not have liked it, and it would not have done justice to his style.<sup>18</sup>

For Anthea Bell, Sebald's unique modernity seems to consist, paradoxically, in his stylistic borrowings from an older tradition, aesthetically uncontaminated by efficiency, concision and administrative inventiveness. Ben Hutchinson cites Thomas Bernhard's style and Thomas Browne's "labyrinthine sentences" as influences,<sup>19</sup> and Johann Peter Hebel is worth mentioning here, as are Adalbert Stifter, Hermann Broch, Franz Kafka, Vladimir Nabokov, and Stendhal – all of them capable of hypotactical excess. Bell is clear about her choice to retain the extraordinary and noticeable length of the book's longest sentence:

It is the job of a translator to reflect the original voice of the author as closely as possible, in so far as that is compatible with a faithful rendering of the *spirit* of the work. Sometimes there is a clash that obliges the translator to be free with the letter in order to preserve the spirit of a text, but not in this case.<sup>20</sup>

In the tension between "conventional English" (the letter) and unique style (the spirit), unique style wins. "[T]o break up that sentence" would have made it inconspicuous and conventional, and it is precisely its standing out that draws attention to what it is trying to hold and from which the reader is not allowed to escape: the obscenity of the camp, the absurdity of its administrative idioms and practices, the mendacity of its existence, and the obsessive scrutiny by its historian.

By the same token, no one reined in José Saramago's galloping phrases, no translator altered the marathon length of László Krasznahorkai's clauses, and nobody has streamlined the meandering sentences of Marcel Proust. Sebald's syntactical perambulations remain a hallmark of his prose style in English, too. Bell here helps us to define what length actually is: not so much a quantifiable

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**18** Anthea Bell, "Translating W.G. Sebald, with and without the author," in *A Literature of Restitution: Critical Essays on W.G. Sebald*, ed. by Jeanette Baxter, Valerie Henitiuk and Ben Hutchinson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 13–25, here: p. 17.

**19** See Ben Hutchinson, "'Egg Boxes stacked in a Crate': Narrative Status and Its Implications," in *W.G. Sebald: History – Memory – Trauma*, ed. by Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), pp. 171–83, here: pp. 172f.

**20** Bell, "Translating W.G. Sebald," p. 17.

aspect contingent upon average word count per sentence in the specific language but a quality noticed by the reader as having an effect on the reading process and on the way in which the content of the sentence is understood. The reader may become impatient, confused, entrapped, or mesmerised; she may be forced to slow down and go over sentences again. Like Sebald's subjects, she may not be able to find her way easily, see clearly, push on decisively. She may look for the 'conventional' chapter ending or a paragraph break, and not find it: no one puts a book down at a semi-colon. It may therefore be more apposite to speak of the longitude of sentences when their length becomes conspicuous as a readerly duration rather than as measurable distance between punctuation marks or as a word count.

## 2 Longitude as 'Unnatural' Periodicity

Another aspect of Bell's comment is worth scrutinising: that "conventional English" is not naturally periodic. Germans have no difficulty enumerating examples of periodic style from whatever literary period: Goethe's *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderter*, Kleist's *Michael Koolhaas*, Stifter's *Der Nachsommer*, Theodor Fontane's *Der Stechlin*, Herrmann Broch's *Der Tod des Vergil*, Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, Bachmann's *Malina*, Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, or Delius' *Bildnis der Mutter als junge Frau* as a more contrived example. Perhaps Bell's "conventional English" stands in for inconspicuous or non-literary usage; language that does not draw attention to itself. In so far as literary prose is rarely conventional, English is certainly capable of extraordinary periodicity, and when an Anglophone writer adopts periodic style it may well be more noticeable than in say, French, Portuguese, German or Hungarian, and its effect, more pronounced. For Richard Lanham, the long sentence flourishes in two styles, the extremely controlled and the ostensibly unfettered; they can be distinguished by the visibility of their effort:

The periodic style resembles the vast formal garden of a baroque palace, all balanced squares and parallel paths. The land is rearranged in ways that the visual cortex can easily sort out. The running style, on the other hand, is like the informal garden which shapes nature without seeming to. Nature is not dominated and reformed, but simply helped on

the way it wanted to go anyway. We can wander – since there is no beginning, middle and end, without fear of getting lost.<sup>21</sup>

Lanham's horticultural metaphor pitches 'French' versus 'English' gardens and therefore also implies that grammatically stricter periodicity is more akin to foreign languages with greater structural complexity, such as Greek, Latin or French, where the gardener-writer's ordering hand is more noticeable (by the same token, remember Willa Muir's 'ruthless' Roman roads).<sup>22</sup> Length, in English, should be an effortless informality, the Haha of a comma or semicolon replacing the wall-like full stop, say, so that a string of participles can canter into the open countryside of the paragraph. The English sentence, like the English garden, hides the labour required of its construction and modestly disguises its expansiveness. If the effort is visible and the length palpable, the writer is deemed to be demanding.

Can Mark Twain have been entirely oblivious of his contemporaries' hypotactical leanings? Herman Melville, Henry James and Nathaniel Hawthorne were hardly known for concision. James's remarkable ability to render utterly opaque the affairs of naïve New World protagonists among a more knowing Old World *haute bourgeoisie* by making the reader forget entirely, by the end of the parentheses-laden, paragraph-long sentences, how, where and why he had set out in the first place: what better way for the reader to inhabit their consternation? With James, you were permanently suspended in a semantic limbo of ambiguity, juggling multiple conjunctives and contingencies. The Anglo-German Ford Maddox Hueffer, later known as Ford Maddox Ford, invented an unreliable narrator in *The Good Soldier* who enveloped both himself and the reader in clauses of such complexity that you had to pay very close attention to spot behind the velvet curtain of multiple hypotaxes the outrageous extramarital English sex scandals that went on in a placid German spa. Joseph Conrad's long sentences attempted to chart the contortions of his English characters' inner turmoil, their navigation occasionally made more difficult by showers of arcane adjectives. What marvels of analysis did Virginia Woolf achieve in the representation of associative

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<sup>21</sup> Lanham, *Analysing Prose*, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> Muir's thoughts on the ruthlessness of the German language led her towards metabolic metaphors, equating the shape of German sentences to the Germans' love of sausages and Dachshunds: "So the right image for the German sentence, I suggest, is that of a great gut, a bowel, which deposits at the end of it a sediment of verbs." (Muir, *Translating from the German*, p. 96). An astonishing statement for someone who spent the better part of two decades transforming these excretions into "sound democratic English".

thought and feeling with the help of a cleverly deployed semi-colon.<sup>23</sup> And what about the Anglo-Irish Elizabeth Bowen who did not just split infinitives but inserted entire parenthesis between the auxiliary and the main verb as if her narrators needed a last chance to change their minds before the participle decided the character's fate?

All of these writers were outsiders, in one way or another, and preoccupied with the representation of consciousness, moral dilemmas and the nuances of perception. Whenever I taught these writers' work, my students invariably found them difficult and slow-going: if nothing much happened why was the prose so hard to follow? For me, the longitudinal English sentence – particularly when it proliferates into a style – often performs either the intellectual labour of well-reasoned, structured argument or its opposite, a difficulty in cognitive or visual perception: the narrator, the characters, the reader struggle to grasp immediately what is going on because the style mirrors the problem. One might also be tempted to interpret Lanham's distinction between the tightly controlled periodic sentences and the looser running style as the underlying principle not just between argument and reflection but between realism and modernism: the visual cortex of modernist characters is much more uncertain of the landscape ahead (or inside) but the manner in which this is syntactically communicated to the reader is no less artful. For instance, in her analysis of the Proustian sentence, Julia Kristeva has pointed to the performative nature of his syntax: the form of the sentence produces grammatically what the metaphor accomplishes stylistically.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Proust's periodic style closely resembles aspects of psychic processes of which the subject may not be fully conscious. In what follows, I am more concerned with longitude as the conspicuous use of periodic style. If the noticeably long sentence can feel un-English, unconventional or opaque, it may lend

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**23** It is tempting here to add the final chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses* in which he dispenses with punctuation altogether for Molly Bloom's interior monologue, but this chapter is not, grammatically speaking, one sentence. The same applies to the modernist style of Will Self's *Umbrella* (2012) or Lucy Ellmann's *Ducks, Newportland* (2019). The absence of punctuation communicates the flow of thought, even the perceptual fluidity of interior and exterior life. However demanding this may be for the reader, it certainly highlights how unlikelike the realist mode of representation is and to what extent grammatically correct written and spoken language re-orders (or translates) thought and perception in the act of communication.

**24** Julia Kristeva, "The Proustian Sentence," in Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 279–305, here: p. 291, 300. Matthew Clark has identified the looser version as "associative", made up of "independent little scenes – a style suited to cataloguing kaleidoscopic impressions" and as such "not well suited to tracing the links in a chain of argumentation but [...] highly appropriate to the depiction of less logical states of mind": dreams, hallucination or drunkenness (pp. 109f.).

itself to cultural transfer: the otherness reverberating in its semantics may help to underline a foreign topic, a sensation of strangeness, a cognitive or perceptual struggle, or a stylistic shift.

### 3 Strategic Periodicity

There are four reasons for a strategically deployed, conspicuously long sentence:

1. accumulation of evidence (the list);
2. deferral of meaning (Ciceronian suspension);
3. oneiric ekphrasis (the paradox);
4. deceleration (readerly hostage taking).

The list that lengthens a sentence, strictly speaking, is a cheat. What is being listed often has equal weight and so the writer only unfurls quite a cumbersome paratactical tail. Appended to a main clause, this parallel structure is then, isokolon-like, composed of a series of anaphoric subordinated adjectival or object clauses (that...; that...; that... ). It is perfectly possible to split such sentences but thus separated they would lose the rhythmic effect of “a tacit persuasion pattern: [the list] creates a world of integers which permits systemic search and arrangement”.<sup>25</sup> The list implies control. Sebald does this in *Austerlitz*, in the periodic sentence that runs over nine pages. This is the sentence in which Austerlitz recounts to the narrator what he has found out about Theresienstadt via H.G. Adler’s magisterial early postwar study of the ghetto. Sebald’s syntactical marathon includes several lists, separated by colons and semi-colons: the types of ghetto inmates, what is being manufactured in the ghetto through slave labour, which departments the ghetto administration has set up and what was contained in the bogus propaganda film about Theresienstadt for the inspectors from the International Red Cross. The sentence also includes a documentary photograph of a page from Adler’s *Theresienstadt* (fig. 1) so that the verbal list is further blistered with a visual enumeration.

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<sup>25</sup> Lanham, *Analysing Prose*, p. 130.

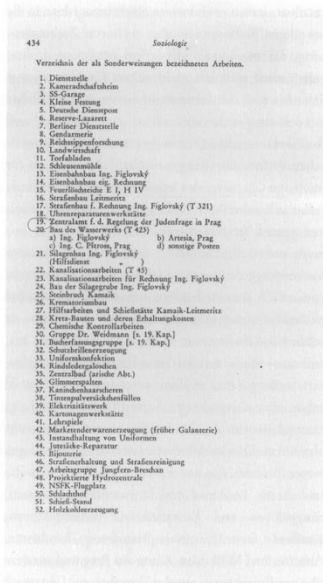


Fig. 1: excerpt from W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*

On these pages we see and read two lists. Both are mediated through several voices: Adler's, Austerlitz's, and the narrator's, so that narratologically any list here is also a mise-en-abyme that can never hope to get to the bottom of that which it accumulates. Lynn L. Wolff has argued that the page from Adler's study is mirrored in the multi-layered intertextuality in Sebald's longitudinal sentence.<sup>26</sup> The purpose of these enumerations within the very long sentence is twofold: they indicate how busy and densely populated this ghetto was and they provide evidence of the Third Reich's maniacal organisational zeal and bureaucratic imagination as well as Adler's meticulous dedication to document and record what he saw, experienced and researched. However metonymic, syntactical lists themselves are perhaps also manic. In this case, they express a duty to the dead

und aus Holland, aus Wien und München, Köln und Berlin, aus der Pfalz, aus dem Mainfränkischen und aus Westfalen, von denen ein jeder mit zirka zwei Quadratmetern Wohnplatz auskommen mußte und die alle, wofern sie irgendwie dazu instande waren, beziehungsweise bis sie, wie es hieß, einwagioniert und Richtung Osten weitergeschickt wurden, ohne die geringste Entlohnung zur Arbeit verpflichtet gewesen sind in einer der von der Abteilung für Außenwirtschaft zur Profitschöpfung eingerichteten Manufakturen, in der Bandagistenwerkstatt, in der Tischlerei, in der Galanteriewarenproduktion, in der Holzsohlen- und Rindsledergalochenerzeugung, auf dem Köhlereihof, bei der Herstellung von Unterhaltungsspielen wie Mühle, Mensch ärgere dich nicht und Fang den Hut, beim Glimmerspalten, in der Kaninchenhaarschere, bei der Tintenstaubbefüllung, der Seidenraupenzucht der SS oder in den zahlreichen Binnenwirtschaftsbetrieben, in der Kleiderkammer, den Bezirksflickstuben, der Verschleißstelle, im Lumpenlager, bei der Bucherfassungsgruppe, der Küchenbrigade, der Kartoffelschälerei, der Knochenverwertung oder im Matratzenreferat, im Kranken- und Siechendienst, bei der Entwesung oder der Nagerbekämpfung, im Ubikationsamt, in der Zentral-evidenz, in der Selbstverwaltung, die ihren Sitz in der »das Schloß« genannten Kaserne BV hatte, oder im

26 Lynn L. Wolff, "H.G. Adler and W.G. Sebald: From History and Literature to Literature and Historiography," *Monatshefte* 103, no. 2 (2011): 257–75, here: 265, 267.

and deported, an anxiety of forgetting or omitting which the sentence can perform.<sup>27</sup> This marathon sentence begins with a missed opportunity: "Deshalb scheint es mir heute unverzeihlich, daß ich die Erforschung meiner Vorvergangenheit so viel Jahre hindurch zwar nicht vorsätzlich, aber doch selber verhindert habe".<sup>28</sup> Nine pages later, it ends with further losses:

ein alles in allem beruhigendes Schauspiel, das die Deutschen [...] in einem Film festhalten ließen, der, wie Adler berichtet, sagte Austerlitz, noch im März 1945, als ein großer Teil der ihm Mitwirkenden schon nicht mehr am Leben war, mit einer jüdischen Volksmusik unterlegt wurde, und von dem sich nach Kriegsende in der britisch besetzten Zone eine Kopie gefunden haben soll, die er, Adler selber, sagte Austerlitz, allerdings nie zu Gesicht bekam und die jetzt offenbar vollends verschollen ist.<sup>29</sup>

The 'actors' of the film are mostly dead, a copy of the film has apparently been lost, and the film itself has never been seen by Adler, whose voice is also diluted through twice-mediated indirect discourse. Sebald thus inverts the classic hypotaxis of the Ciceronian model in which the list's component parts grow in importance until the most significant element concludes the sentence in the position of greatest emphasis. At the end of Sebald's sentence, however, the past described in Adler's study is already so remote, and its narration so faint, that it only reaches us through triple mediation in a final gasp.

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27 A more direct example is the alphabetical list of about 9,000 Jews deported from or killed in Italy or killed in the countries occupied by Italy between 1943 and 1954 in Daša Drndić's paratextually rich novel *Sonnenschein* (2007), translated into English as *Trieste* (2012) by Ellen Elias-Bursać. This list is titled "BEHIND EVERY NAME THERE IS A STORY" and located between pp. 143 and 187. The list can be read, but few readers, I would argue, will do so; they will interpret this section as a memorial in the manner of lists of names found on marble slabs in churches or modern *lieux de memoire* commemorating combatants or the victims of atrocities. Daša Drndić, *Trieste* (London: MacLehose Press, 2013).

28 Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 335. "It seems unpardonable to me today that I had blocked off the investigation of my most distant past for so many years". W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. by Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 331.

29 Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 345. „a most reassuring spectacle, all things considered, which the Germans [...] thought fit after the end of the Red Cross visit to record in a film, which Adler tells us, said Austerlitz, was given a soundtrack of Jewish folk music in March 1945, when a considerable number of the people who had appeared in it were no longer alive, and a copy of which, again according to Adler, had apparently turned up in the British-occupied zone after the war, although he, Adler himself, said Austerlitz, never saw it, and thought it was now lost without trace." Sebald, *Austerlitz*, engl. ed., p. 342.

This sentence about Theresienstadt also serves the third, paradoxical purpose of periodicity: oneiric ekphrasis (to offer a description that does not illuminate). It is perhaps the greatest similarity between Sebald and Kafka. No matter how detailed and dense the description, it fails to compose in the reader's mind a precise or intelligible picture of the object in question. No amount of data can really come to terms with the void that is at the heart of places like the ghetto Theresienstadt; the more we know the less we really grasp, as if the place were an intricate machine whose engineering defies even the mechanic. I am reminded here of the extensive ekphrastic passages about the torture apparatus in Kafka's tale "In der Strafkolonie". Pages and pages of detail cannot illuminate the mechanism which resembles the compartmentalisation required for a totalitarian system. We know what the machine does (slowly kill the victim) yet the workings of the levers, needles, cradles, rollers, the nuts and bolts of the process-in-motion remain opaque. The reader is undoubtedly repulsed by the machine itself and appalled by the enthusiasm with which the officer describes it to the traveller, or, in Adler's case, overwhelmed by the commitment to record for posterity the intricacies of such a dark administrative imagination. Sebald's periodic sentence amasses an extraordinary amount of data as the result of Adler's scholarly inquiry into the painstaking administration of genocidal fascism, yet it is prefaced by Austerlitz's failure, despite his efforts to grasp this new language, to gain any sense of a wider context because what the words describe *remains* unreal to him (nor do the visual images in this section – the map of the fortress and the postal stamp – convey any sense of the reality of life in the ghetto). Oneiric ekphrasis ironises Ciceronian periodicity. In the classic model elastic syntax defers meaning for as long as possible (e.g. the main verb comes at the end, in the most emphatic position of the sentence). In contrast, Sebald's periodic sentence, suspended between initial and putative losses, performs Austerlitz's melancholy of never-really-knowing. A periodic sentence at the end of which sits – emphatically – undesirable and painful knowledge may well anxiously delay its ending for as long as possible.

Hypotaxis can also underline (and perform) a circumspect cerebral process. Christa Wolf excelled in such syntax whose serial parenthesis and multiple qualifying clauses made her prose reflect a consciousness constantly striving for maximum precision while careful to avoid drawing the attention of the communist censor. To read Wolf is to inhabit a mind intellectually, ethically and politically at work: ambivalent about Socialism yet wary of her own subterfuges. This is most obvious in her magnum opus *Kindheitsmuster* (1976/77), an autobiographical novel about a childhood spent in fascist Germany. A hefty tome of almost 600 pages, *Kindheitsmuster* packs into Wolf's recollections three other



narrative layers – postmodern reflections on the nature of writing, a revisit to Wolf's former hometown Landsberg an der Warthe that causes a crisis of faith in the book, and intermittent reflections on the contemporary political situation in Vietnam and Chile. The reader has to negotiate these different layers, often within the space of a paragraph, sometimes within a single sentence. For this reason, the book – and her self-reflexive style in general – has been called ponderous, cerebral and even torturous. Wolf worked on *Kindheitsmuster* for five long years. The final manuscript had very little in common with its 1971 Ur-version, *Nachruf auf Lebende* which was only published in 2014, and translated into English by Katy Derbyshire in 2018. *Nachruf* is stylistically atypical for Christa Wolf: a straightforward page-turner, plot-heavy, direct, toned. It would never have passed the censor in East Germany because it violated doctrine: not only did Wolf point to the authoritarian similarities between fascism and communism in this early version; she also insisted that the trauma of flight from the Red Army and loss of home in the Eastern territories could not simply be compensated by socialist renewal. Wolf's ambivalence about the need to be truthful on the one hand and her loyalty to Socialism on the other made writing this book a protracted process in which addressing the core trauma of flight is constantly deferred.

In *Nachruf*, a novella of only 100 pages, the 'unerhörte Begebenheit' happens three pages into the story:

Ich wußte seit dem Bruchteil der Sekunde, da ich wach wurde, den Umriß meiner Mutter im Türspalt gegen den hellen Flur sah und ihre Worte hörte, die nicht anders waren als sonst, wenn sie uns für die nächtlichen Fliegeralarme weckte: Ihr müßt euch fertigmachen – ich wußte durch den Klang ihrer Stimme, in der das Wissen um die ganze Wahrheit war und auch das Entsetzen über dieses Wissen, daß ich sie zum letzten Mal so in der Tür unseres Kinderzimmers stehen sah, in dem ich wieder mit meinem Bruder Bodo, den ich Oddo nannte, zusammen schlief, seit Flüchtlinge, Verwandte aus Ostpreußen, mein Mädchenzimmer im ersten Stock bezogen hatten. In dem Augenblick vor ihrem nächsten Satz hatte ich alles begriffen und – vielleicht, weil ein langer Abschied unerträglich gewesen wäre – schon alles hinter mir gelassen, alles schon verraten, und mir graute vor mir selbst, während meine Mutter weitersprach: Es ist soweit. Wir müssen weg.<sup>30</sup> (N10-11)

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**30** Christa Wolf, *Nachruf auf Lebende: Die Flucht*. Mit einem Nachwort von Gerhard Wolf (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2014), pp. 10f. "I knew from the split-second when I woke, saw my mother outlined in the crack of the door against the bright hallway and heard her words, which were no different than usual when she woke us for the nightly air-raid alarms – Get ready, you two – I knew from the sound of her voice, which held the knowledge of the whole truth and also her horror at that knowledge, that it was the last time I would see her like that in the door to our

Note the carefully constructed hypotactical sentences that pull apart the moment of knowing ('Ich wußte'/'I knew') from that which is being imparted at the very end ('Wir müssen weg.'/'We have to leave'). The frequent relative clauses and qualifying parenthesis defer the moment of iteration as if the syntax has to perform the painful realisation (and memory) of this moment, wishing to postpone it as long as possible. The syntactical deferral in this passage is also – my fourth point - a deceleration: the longer we dwell in this explicatory sentence, the further away the moment of departure. Like the first-person narrator, the reader is wrapped up warm, still in bed at home, still rooted to the spot. Katy Derbyshire's translation has no difficulty rendering this *durée* exactly, keeping the Anglophone reader under the German duvet. This passage, in Derbyshire's translation, scores 36.2 on the Flesch Reading Ease scale (difficult to read). In the tougher Flesch-Kincaid formula, apparently only college graduates can be expected to cope with such "extremely difficult to read" prose.

The precise effect of being taken hostage by a long sentence of course varies. In Kafka's penal colony, we are in cahoots, like the visitor to the colony, for as long as we are reading the story; in Sebald's marathon sentence, we are asked to bear witness at least for 14 minutes. In Wolf's *Nachruf*, we are asked to identify with young Christa's anguish and the writer Wolf's pain at recollecting this moment. This will become a programmatic passage for work on the novel. In *Kindheitsmuster* – four drafts later – flight is not just syntactically deferred but structurally delayed until chapter thirteen and page 396. Chapter thirteen is as unquotable as Sebald's nine-page sentence: there are over forty changes in point of view, which indicates how hard it was for Wolf to maintain track and how hard it is for the reader to penetrate to the heart of the matter. In fact the passage above - that original prescient moment of knowing and the maternal announcement - is omitted altogether. If the beginning of flight is the 'primal scene' with which *Nachruf* begins, *Kindheitsmuster* is a series of retroactive screen memories erected to foreground the reprehensible seductions of fascism. *Nachruf* is the pearl formed around the irritant of a core trauma; *Kindheitsmuster* creates such a cerebral, rationalised prehistory for its setting that the pearl becomes a near-invisible speck, one more well-contextualised historical incident in an eventful childhood

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nursery, where I had moved back in with my brother Bodo, whom I called Oddo, since my upstairs room had been given over to refugees, relatives from East Prussia. In the moment before her next sentence I had understood everything, and – perhaps because a long goodbye would have been unbearable – I had left everything behind me already, betrayed everything already, and I was horrified at myself while my mother went on: It's time. We have to leave." *Eulogy for the Living: Taking Flight*, trans. Katy Derbyshire (London: Seagull, 2018), p. 5.

and youth.<sup>31</sup> The strategy of Wolf's extreme periodic style is a compromise: she can allow herself to remember (and just about mention) flight from the Red Army and the loss of home if she prefaces it with the relentless scrutiny of a petit bourgeois fascist childhood.

## 4 Longitude as Performative Remembering

Accumulation of evidence, paradoxically opaque description, deferral and deceleration are impressive rhetorical effects of the use of hypotaxis: sometimes a long sentence is the best *form* to communicate to the reader what the sentence is about because its structure performs the content. Because the conspicuously longitudinal sentence expands on the page I find it particularly apposite for evocations of space and time across the *durée* of reading. Below is a passage with a very long sentence which achieved a score of -112 when run through the Flesch Reading Ease formula: 'impossible to understand'. It is a section from my family memoir, in which I describe what it was like for a little girl growing up in a nineteenth-century flour mill. None of my readers found the passage or long sentence incomprehensible yet all noted its length because it had the desired effect of making them feel and smell what it was like for someone terrified of the dark to descend an enormous staircase into the black vault of a cellar.

Another door off the flour mill's hallway, which was frequently locked for our protection, led into the vast cellars two floors below. When I was old enough, Oma would hand me the key with instructions to fetch something – a bucket of wood or coal, say, or a bunch of carrots or a jar of sweet-and-sour pumpkin compote – always accompanied by a note of caution about the stairs. You reached the cellars via a set of three interconnected wooden staircases that ran along the inner wall of an enormous cavernous space. It was so big and empty, your voice echoed. Not even my older cousins liked using it, but such pusillanimity did not wash with Oma. Even my mother would rather walk all the way around the outside of the mill's east wing and through the yard and enter the cellars from the door of the west wing before she braved that staircase: it was windowless and pitch black. At the top of the stairs was therefore a light switch with a timer. Its counterpart was at the bottom, high up on the outside wall of the stairwell, an eternity away. The naked bulb, dangling on a thin cord from the ceiling high above, laboured under layers of dust to offer barely more than moonlight. There were thirteen steps on every side of the wall until you reached a small landing. I could not count to thirty-nine but I could count three sets of thirteen. Then all of a sudden, darkness engulfed you. No matter how dexterously you descended the stairs, the

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<sup>31</sup> See my forthcoming essay "No, it wasn't like that": Flight as counternarrative in Christa Wolf's prose and Helma Sanders-Brahms' *Deutschland bleiche Mutter*."

light would always run out just after two thirds of the staircase: too far down to turn around, still too high up to jump to the floor. We each had our strategy for this calamity. My sister sang to herself, jolly and loud as if to scare the witches and vampires lurking below. I whispered sections of *Das tapfere Schneiderlein* or better yet, *Von einem der auszog, das Fürchten zu lernen* – tales of gormless bravery in which the blithe hero survived his ordeal. It was not so bad on the way up; there was a door leading to light and Oma. But on the way down there was only more darkness and the prospect of the long main vault at the bottom of the stairwell from where directly to the right there branched off a narrow dry tunnel for storing apples and pears and sand-filled crates for carrots, which you knew you had passed once you could smell the Sauerkraut barrel at its opening, and then onwards into the main vault, where to the left sat four wooden turnip and potato lockers whose lids often doubled as a workbench while on the right an interminable row of slatted cellars harboured Oma's and the other tenants' hoardings (shelf upon shelf of pickled vegetables, jam jars, preserved fruit, precooked meat) and their fuel (neatly stacked rows of chopped wood and crates of cheap coal), before further along you smelled soap suds from the old bath and laundry room round the corner just as you knocked your shins on Opa's old moped parked against the end wall and which he refused to chuck for sentimental reasons although no one could even remember him riding it – and then you were finally at the heavy cellar door of the west wing, with the tiny window that let in some light from the miller's yard. When you opened that door, dappled daylight would transform the vault into a temperate cave where Opa often busied himself with nothing at all just to get away from Oma's bad temper.

Rewriting the 209-word sentence in order to achieve a higher Flesch score and greater reading ease is of course possible, but if the reader can put the book down after three steps into the terror of the dark, so to speak, the effect is ruined. One might as well install permanent fluorescent lighting or give the little girl an adult companion. Like the hero of a fairy tale, she must fight her fear and go down all the way from the top of the stairs to the end of the vault in the miller's yard, breathing shallow, singing, knocking her knees against the moped – through an eternity of possible disasters springing from the dark – and so will the reader, every step of the rhizomatic way. For a periodic, longitudinal sentence is an invitation to enter into an unknown, barely predictable world full of surprises. To refuse this journey is like saying no to an adventure. The syntax performs not just the girl's journey but also the writer's act of recollection as longitudinal. Life writing is, after all, a bit like travelling through space and time, backwards and forwards, and the long sentence can decelerate reading to, and synchronise it with, the unfolding of memory.

The German habit of long sentences, as I hope to have shown, has not only been an English habit, too, but comes in very handy when the sentence can be made to enact what it is meant to convey, particularly when space and pace require longitude and *durée*. Longitudinal sentences are by no means uniformly and measurably hard to follow, and even if they sometimes are this difficulty is often part of their content. Perhaps the modern insistence in the age of Twitter

that readability is not just a matter for school textbooks but should be a guiding principle for translation practice, non-fiction and literary fiction<sup>32</sup> indicates that contemporary readers are less willing to endure longitude – or simply notice it more if it becomes increasingly unusual as a stylistic feature. Yet the more impatient the reader, the more effective longitude turns out to be. It cannot be the task of literature to succumb to the reader's whims; it must be the reader's job to live up to and enjoy the text's demands. If those demands are deemed to be un-English, or if the subject thus elasticated is alien to the Anglophone reader, a little empathy with the possibilities of cultural transfer goes a long way to help everyone cross the Channel.

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<sup>32</sup> I recall the discussion over 'excellence' and 'readability' following the publication of the 2011 Man Booker Prize longlist in particular and the criteria for literary prizes in general. See "'Alison Flood's Booker Prize divides quality from readability' says Andrew Motion," in *The Guardian*, 16. October 2011: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/oct/16/booker-prize-criticism-andrew-motion>, accessed 28.07.2019.

