

**Clear and  
Simple as  
the Truth**

Writing Classic Prose

Second Edition

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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS *Princeton and Oxford*

**T H R E E**

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**The Studio**



## ■ Introduction

The first part of this book—which we will call “the Essay”—presents principles of style. The second—the Museum—presents exhibits and analyses of style. Once we had written the Essay and the Museum, we thought we had finished our book. Anyone who wanted to acquire the style, we assumed, had everything necessary at hand. All we had left out was the work involved in acquiring the style. Classic style pretends there is no work in writing, and we had happily skipped right over all the stages we had gone through ourselves in acquiring this most versatile and useful style. It is no secret that writing in any style is work, so we have added the Studio to our book—a place where apprentices can progress from inevitably awkward beginnings to confident mastery in semiprivacy under the benevolent eye of a friendly master who looks forward to regarding them as equals, perhaps superiors.

## ■ Fundamentals: Talk First

In a studio, apprentices learn fundamentals and become masters. The fundamentals, in this Studio, are taught through a set of common exercises—common in the sense that they are intended to be performed both in speech and in writing. We begin with speech because classic style grounds writing in speech.

### EXERCISE 1: *Classic Joint Attention*

The radical of presentation is a scene that cognitive scientists call “joint attention.” Joint attention is a familiar and common scene, one we experience routinely. In joint attention, people in one place are attending to one thing; they know they are all attending to it, and they know that by attending to it they are engaged with one another. They are jointly interacting. They may gesture and talk about what is engaging their attention, but it may be that no word is actually spoken. They are engaged in influencing one another’s

minds; words can help but are not essential. Joint attention does not necessarily have a practical goal. What is essential is common and interactive attention.

“Classic joint attention” is the simplest and most basic kind of joint attention. We have specified the features of classic joint attention in the Essay and in the Museum: there are just two people, paying attention to something that is directly perceptible, such as a blackbird in a tree. All of the features of classic style pertain: the motive is truth, the purpose is presentation, the scene is informal, language is adequate, truth can be known, speaker and hearer are competent, and so on. Not only do these two people see the same blackbird, but they also see it in the same mental context, a context that includes their influence on one another.

Classic joint attention is so familiar and common that we typically do not think about it or even notice it. But classic joint attention is the classic scene, the anchor of classic style. To become a classic stylist, one must be able to think about the classic scene consciously, to notice which actual scenes fit the classic scene, which are close, which are distant, and the ways in which an actual scene can differ from the classic scene. Failure to keep this classic scene in mind will result in a style that loses its anchor. Naturally, the first exercise in the Studio is to practice inhabiting an actual classic scene.

Here, then, is the first exercise: notice something directly perceptible and present it in speech to a companion who is next to you. You and your companion can be anywhere: in a park, a garden, a restaurant, walking down the street, in a grocery store, in a station waiting for a train. Recall from the Essay that to present something to someone is not merely to call attention to it, as in, “Look, there is a blackbird.” Rather, to present something is to present what you want your companion to perceive. You expect your companion to be able to perceive what you are presenting once it is pointed out, as in, “That blackbird on the tree limb by the hedge has a small red stripe on each wing.” What you present might be, for example, an architectural detail—something that is easy to see once your attention is directed to it, but something that just as easily could

be missed. It does not have to be something visual. It could be the melody of a bird's song or the salt in the sea breeze.

Like all the exercises in this Studio, this first exercise suits the classroom. Get a partner. Observe the room, the people, what lies beyond the windows, sounds and images from a mobile device, anything in your perceptual fields. Someone might run a slideshow depicting scenes from nature, buildings, works of art, airports, city spots, a movie. Begin a conversation with your partner and make brief classic presentations as the conversation progresses. This activity may seem artificial and uncomfortable at first, because you are trying to do something consciously that you prefer to do automatically. During this exercise, listen not just to your partner, but to your own voice. As you speak, monitor what you are saying. Initially, this conscious attention to your own speech will cause hesitation and even embarrassment. Keep at it. Eventually, you will relax more and more until it feels natural to inhabit the scene of classic joint attention and speak in classic style. The instructor may wish to take the class out of the classroom, for a walk, to a café, down a city street, to an art museum, to a garden. Continue your conversation with your partner as you go, taking every opportunity for classic presentation.

#### **TUTORIAL:** *Beyond Classic Joint Attention*

Learning to focus consciously on the classic scene and to perform within it is the first step to becoming a classic stylist. But most of human communication goes beyond the classic scene in one way or another. In any act of communication, you will have in mind a network of thoughts and ideas that can be quite complicated, and this network might be too large, too detailed, and too complex to be held in mind all at once. The network might include your own identity, the identity of others, past experiences, aspirations, inferences, judgments, predictions, and many varieties of cultural knowledge. The network will also include an array of participants: perhaps you think that many people are listening to you or will listen to you. Perhaps in this network of your thoughts, there are

important differences between individual members of your audience. Perhaps this network involves unknown or even fictional or imaginary participants. This mental network might involve large intervals of time—perhaps you are reacting to a criticism that someone made a week ago of a speech given by Abraham Lincoln, and you know that tomorrow someone else will comment on your response. The mental network might involve a long and complex chain of cause and effect. It might involve different and even conflicting motives or purposes. In this mental network, there might be complex ideas about how your expression will be distributed, received, and remembered. And of course, your subject in the mental network—what you want to talk about—might be very different from a directly perceptible object. We will call everything you are trying to juggle mentally “the network.” A network can be close to or distant from the idea of the classic scene. Some networks will be close in some ways and distant in others. The second step to becoming a classic stylist is to learn to anchor any network in the classic scene.

When you are actually with a companion, looking at a blackbird perched in a tree, and present something about the blackbird, you are inhabiting the classic scene. But now suppose you are talking to the same person on the telephone and, let us say, telling her something you saw when she was not with you. For this telephone conversation, you are using a particular mental network. It contains what you want to present, the mode of communication, the other person in a different place, the fact that you can't see one another, the delay between perception and conversation—the list is long. A telephone call is not an instance of the classic scene. Although the difference is obvious when you focus on it, it may be invisible at first. The reason the two scenes may not seem at first to lie in two different categories is that we ordinarily structure the telephone call by the classic scene. We anchor the first in the second. We can perform in an actual scene that goes beyond classic joint attention by anchoring our performance in that classic scene. We blend a network of thought—in which, for example, we view ourselves as alone with a telephone or a computer—with our idea

of classic joint attention. Writing a letter to someone is not the same as talking to that person. Writing is never an instance of the classic scene. But in writing to someone we know well, it is easy and conventional to treat this writing as if it were conversation. This is an example of what we mean by structuring one scene, writing, by another, conversation. In a way, we treat the scene in which one person is alone with a piece of paper as if it were the scene in which two people share simultaneous access to something. In writing to her sister, Jane Austen says, “I have now attained the true art of letter-writing . . . I have been talking to you almost as fast as I could the whole of this letter.” Writing is not talking at all, much less engaging in conversation, but writing can be anchored in our understanding of talking and even, as here, in our understanding of a one-sided turn in a two-person conversation.

This sort of “blending” of the classic scene with a mental network that does not strictly fit that scene is fundamental to classic style. Treating something we cannot perceive—“an obvious blunder,” for example—as if it were something anybody could “see” is an example of how a judgment can be treated as a perceptible object. The judgment is in the network; the perceptible object is in the classic scene. We blend them, and in the blend, treat the judgment, stylistically, as if it were a perceptible object. Often, in ordinary communication, we do quite classic things, but unless we focus consciously on the classic scene and the way in which we use it to anchor unclassic networks, our performance will be inconsistent and unreliable. Operating in the dark, we might float into and out of classic style without recognizing what we are doing. The result will be a style that is not under our control, and confusing for the reader. The classic stylist keeps clearly in mind what belongs to the anchor and what belongs to the network, and anchors the network in the classic scene. The mental networks we actually use in scenes of communication can vary greatly, but the anchor scene—classic joint attention—never varies, and this anchor sets the style.

Imagine that you are on a train, going through a landscape you have never seen before. The train stops in a rural station during the afternoon. Pointing to a tree outside the train window, you say to

your companion, “That apple tree is bearing two different kinds of fruit.” This is a scene of classic joint attention. Now imagine that you are writing a letter to your companion, who is back home. You write, “The train is stopped in a rural station. The apple tree outside the window bears two different kinds of fruit, one green and mottled, the other red fading to yellow.” This is classic style, anchored in the scene of classic joint attention.

The goal of every one of the following exercises is to develop your ability to take things that lie beyond classic joint attention and anchor them stylistically in that scene.

Insisting on the distinction between the scene of classic joint attention and scenes that are merely structured by it may seem to be unnecessary, but recognizing that distinction is indispensable to learning classic style. In the Studio, you learn how to structure networks by the scene of classic joint attention, and to do that, you must first recognize what is being done. Once you recognize it, you can focus on it and learn to anchor networks in the classic scene. If you don’t recognize what is happening, the performance remains a mystery. Recognizing what it means for a network to be structured by classic joint attention is the single most significant step to mastering classic style.

### **EXERCISE 2: *Hiding the Labor***

In the second exercise, introduce a single small change to the scene of classic joint attention that you practiced in the first exercise. You are still in a garden or walking down a street or in a restaurant or listening to a piece of music with someone. You direct your companion’s attention to something that can be perceived, but what you ask your companion to notice is not something you have just noticed yourself. It is something you already know. In calling your companion’s attention to it, however, you treat it in the same way you would treat something you observed just then. You offer no explanation of how you came to notice it yourself or how long you have known it. It is actually there to be seen, and you are not pretending that you have just noticed it; you simply point it out. There

is nothing in the style of your presentation that marks it as something you already knew. Suppose that you are on your surfboard beyond the break zone of the waves, and your companion is on her surfboard five yards away. You have known for years how the pattern of the waves changes with the change in tide. And you know, too, from having studied the surf report for the day that the tide is going out just now. You say, “The tide is going out. The waves are breaking farther south, and bigger.” The effect of the tide on the waves, although absolutely evident the minute you point it out, is just the kind of thing that people can look at without noticing. Your own recognition is not spontaneous; it rests upon a lengthy process of observation and study. The mental network you are dealing with goes beyond classic joint attention, but what you say is anchored stylistically in that scene. Here is the second exercise: present in speech to someone actually with you something directly perceptible that you have in fact noticed before, without marking stylistically that you knew it before.

### EXERCISE 3: *Fresh Inferences*

The third exercise asks you to move on to inferences. You are making an inference, for example, when you think that someone “looks disappointed.” The fact that the “disappointment” is an inference rather than something perceptible often goes unnoticed. We have to remind ourselves that a common phrase such as “You could see disappointment all over his face” is not literally true. The paradox is that throughout your life you have unconsciously treated some of these invisible inferences as things that can be perceived—but now, we are asking you to be aware that you are doing it, so that you can improve your command of style.

Here is the third exercise: present in speech to someone actually with you something directly perceptible and, in addition this time, present a related inference, but not one marked by any stylistic change in the presentation. Treat the inference the way you treat the perception. Here is an example: “That egret standing so still in the estuary is fishing.” You can see the egret, the estuary, the stand-

ing, the stillness, but you cannot see the fishing. The style blends perception with inference.

#### EXERCISE 4: *Previous Inferences*

Here is the fourth exercise: combine exercises 2 and 3. Study a scene and think it through until you have made an inference connected to what is directly perceptible. Then, when you are joined by your companion, make your presentation without marking stylistically the difference between perception and inference, the sequence connecting perception to inference, or the archival nature of your inference. Here is an example: suppose you have deduced at some point that a restaurant dining room with an ocean view down the street from where you live must once have been an outdoor patio, now enclosed. You say to your dining companion, “We are lucky to be here with an ocean storm setting in. Those electrical outlets in the wall have covers because this room used to be outside.”

#### EXERCISE 5: *Focusing on a Person*

The fifth exercise is the same as the fourth but focuses on a person. Among things that cannot be directly perceived—interest, disappointment, hope—many of them cannot even be inferred at a glance. They are discoveries that take time. They depend upon a series of refinements that eventually leads to an inference. But, as we said in laying out the principles of classic style, the style “does not acknowledge process or stages of discovery, does not acknowledge revision or successive refinements.” Since the style does not acknowledge process, what might, in fact, be the result of observation stretching over a long period, with many stages and many revisions, is presented in the same style as something that can be observed at once, like a blackbird.

How long did La Rochefoucauld know Madame de Chevreuse before he could say she “had sparkling intelligence, ambition, and beauty in plenty; she was flirtatious, lively, bold, enterprising; she used all her charms to push her projects to success, and she almost

always brought disaster to those she encountered on her way”? He could not have known this the first time he met her, but the style does nothing to draw attention to the steps by which he came to know her.

Everyone notices, after a while, features of temperament, personality, and character that are not directly perceptible. They often remain unspoken observations. Here is the fifth exercise: you and a companion are both looking at someone. Present the person. Include something you have come to notice only gradually. Your subject might be the bartender, the postal clerk, your Chinese teacher, the manager of the bicycle repair shop, or, if you are doing this in the classroom, someone you see in or from the room. Include inferences. Do not let your observation be displaced by whatever experience led to it, and do not mark the inferences stylistically as different from the perceptions.

**TUTORIAL:** *Two Steps to Classic Style*

You have now worked on the indispensable first exercise and four other exercises that go beyond the fundamental scene of classic joint attention. In exercises 2 to 5, you used the classic scene to structure scenes that did not fit it for one reason or another—the subject of presentation was not directly perceptible, or the recognition was not spontaneous.

This pattern—inhabit the classic scene, and then use it to manage networks that go beyond it—is the essential lesson of the Studio because these two steps are the whole art of classic style:

**Step 1:** Learn to inhabit the scene of classic joint attention consciously. In this first step we learn to do something consciously and consistently that we already do unconsciously and inconsistently.

**Step 2:** Learn how to blend the classic scene with any mental network supporting expression, so that the blend provides a familiar, consistent, manageable anchor for that network. You probably are not used to thinking of classic joint attention as a general “scene”; you probably do not consistently distinguish between what is directly perceptible, such as a blackbird, and what is not,

such as a sense of the absurd. So when you are asking a companion to “notice” somebody’s sense of the absurd, especially when that somebody is not actually present, you should be aware that you are not in a scene of classic joint attention at all. In the previous exercises, you already moved from step 1 to step 2. For example, when you presented an inference, you were inviting your companion to recognize your conclusion as if it were directly perceptible. This is an exemplary case of borrowing classic joint attention to structure the presentation of what cannot be directly perceived.

Often in writing, you will feel that things are getting away from you. You are not mistaken. Things are in fact getting away from you. Notice that you never feel that things are getting away from you when you are pointing out something directly perceptible to somebody next to you. You are at home in this case because the classic scene is intelligible by itself. In classic style, all other scenes become intelligible and manageable because they are structured by the classic scene. Step 2 consists of practicing how to structure everything beyond the classic scene using it as a stylistic template. When you feel that things are getting away from you, do the first exercise, and then go back to blending networks of ideas to the classic scene. These two steps will get you through any problem in classic style.

Classic style depends absolutely on domesticating realities whose borders are necessarily vague: jealousy, resentment, regret. They are never directly perceptible and can be managed in thought and language only if we treat them as what we know they are not. When we talk about “putting aside our resentment,” no one is fooled into thinking that we can move our resentment out of the way as if it were a bicycle in the driveway, but if we try to handle the metaphysical character of resentment without anchoring it in something perceptible, we will be unable either to grasp the thought or to match it to language. Turning resentment into a physical object is a cognitive compression. Cognitive compression happens routinely in blending and can turn unwieldy conceptual ranges into manageable scenes. An entire mental network supporting expression can be blended mentally with the classic scene,

to create a stylistic anchor for the expression. The network might involve any amount of complexity. Here is an example: In *Life on the Mississippi*, Mark Twain is writing for an unseen and indefinite audience about his boyhood experience growing up on the Mississippi before the Civil War. Classic style treats the invisible, indefinite audience as a person, treats the writing as speech, and treats “boyhood experience” in this time and place that no longer exist as if it were something directly perceptible, a thing with a definite shape, a definite texture, definite borders. This is a virtuoso, and classic, cognitive compression.

You are already a master at using simple scenes to domesticate conceptual ranges that cannot—in their undomesticated state—be held in mind. When you do that, you produce simpler, structured versions of those conceptual ranges. Language is the instrument par excellence for guiding us to that kind of structuring. In our experience, blackbirds are quite different from aspirations, but grammatically, “blackbirds” and “aspirations” belong to the same category. Nouns like *confidence*, *religion*, *nation*, *aspiration*, and *money* already prompt us to structure complicated concepts as things. In the structured version, they are all things that you can recognize. Single words prompt for simple structuring. So do larger grammatical constructions. Consider “Acid destroys metal,” “Acid eats metal,” or “Acid etches metal.” These sentences prompt us to conceive of the acid as an agent and the metal as a patient. In fact, as we all know, there is a chemical reaction between the acid and the metal, and the metal is as much a cause of this chemical reaction as the acid. The grammar prompts us to seize upon a simpler version of a complex thought; the structured version depends upon a universally accessible scene, a causal scene in which an agent acts on something passive, like a sculptor working on marble.

Blending, compression, and anchoring are the heart and soul of vocabulary and grammar. In the Studio, you are extending your abilities for blending, compression, and anchoring beyond simple vocabulary and grammar to communication, especially writing. You are learning to blend a complex mental network supporting expression with a simple scene of classic joint attention. That clas-

sic scene offers a clear and direct way of communicating about a clear and direct subject of presentation. These exercises are all moves toward learning how to blend any such network involving anything and anyone with that classic scene.

### EXERCISE 6: *Surfing*

This exercise has five parts. In all of them, keep these features from the classic scene:

- You are with a companion. You speak and gesture.
- You point out something to your companion that is directly perceptible.

In addition, keep a feature you practiced in exercise 2:

- Whether or not your recognition is spontaneous, present it in the same way in which classic style presents a spontaneous recognition.

But now, you are dealing with scenes that go beyond the scene of exercise 1.

In the five parts of this exercise, we use colloquial terms to mark different sources of knowledge: notably, *direct perception*, *inference*, *judgment*, *prediction*, *cultural knowledge*, and *belief*. Scientifically and philosophically, it is impossible to draw a line between perceptual knowledge and knowledge that comes from other sources, but for what follows, assume the commonplace distinction between every pair of such sources of knowledge. The goal of exercise 6 is not to create a consistent classification of sources of knowledge, but to acquire a smooth facility in moving back and forth across all such sources with no variation in the style and without marking the move from one to another.

In all five parts of this exercise, try using a single list of subjects. We provide one that has been road-tested:

1. a natural nonliving object
2. a manufactured nonliving object

3. a plant
4. an animal
5. a landscape
6. food
7. a work of art
8. a person
9. an interaction between two people
10. a public space

In the five parts of this exercise,

1. surf across perceptions and inferences
2. surf across perceptions and judgments
3. surf across perceptions and predictions
4. surf across perceptions and cultural knowledge
5. surf across perceptions, inferences, judgments, predictions, and cultural knowledge

The style never varies.

#### PART 1: *Inferences*

For each item on your list, present something that is directly perceptible joined with some associated inferential knowledge. In our own examples, because the style elides the distinction, we have used italics to indicate the features that cannot literally be perceived. We have provided analyses for the first three examples, because a smooth elision can go unnoticed although it becomes quite obvious with practice.

1. A natural nonliving object: The banded rocks are *formed by sedimentation*.

You can see the rocks; you can see that they are banded; but you cannot see the millions of years of geological sedimentation that produced the rocks and their bands. The sedimentation is no longer happening. Although the distinction here is neither nuanced nor subtle, the style elides the distinction. It is as if the sedimentation were as perceptible as the rocks.

2. A manufactured nonliving object: *Any owner who recognized that sound would have the slipping fan belt in that roadster fixed.*

You can hear the sound and see the roadster. It is an inference that the sound comes from a slipping fan belt. It is an inference that the owner does not recognize the sound because otherwise he would have had it fixed.

3. A plant: Our *struggling* lemon tree *needs less water and a little fertilizer.*

It might take an expert to infer from the lemon tree's appearance that it is struggling, and certainly that what it needs is less water and a little fertilizer. But these inferences are presented in the same way the directly perceptible lemon tree is presented.

4. An animal: The cliff squirrels, *starved by the drought*, have extended their range *looking for food.*
5. A landscape: The sand berms *have been bulldozed up to stop* the winter waves *from eroding* the sandstone cliffs.
6. Food: The harder goat cheese *has been aged longer. Moisture leaves the cheese over time.*
7. A work of art: The helmeted woman leaning on her spear in this stele *is Athena, the warrior goddess, protector of Athens.*
8. A person: She has the strong wrists and forearms *of a pole vaulter or a gymnast.*
9. An interaction between two people: The host and the chef are *joking* with each other *with the familiarity that comes of being married for thirty years.*
10. A public space: There is only one person running the flower shop. Business has *returned to winter levels.*

#### PART 2: *Judgments*

For each item on your list, present something that is directly perceptible joined with an associated judgment.

1. A natural nonliving object: A big wave gets thinner as it walls up. Just before it breaks, the sunlight comes through for a moment, turning it an *exhilarating* green.
2. A manufactured non-living object: The reflective green of the surfboard *clashes* with the translucent green of the wave.
3. A plant: Monterey Pines *do not look so beautiful* toppled over by the storm.
4. An animal: The *adorably playful* sea otters in the bay are actually banging abalone open to eat them.
5. A landscape: A small port town on an island in the Cyclades, with its deep blue water, white-walled buildings, and *pure* sunlight, *is the place* to send someone if you want to learn whether he is *crazy or merely disturbed*. *Anyone who can stay disturbed there really does have a problem*.
6. Food: The *marvelous* beef tacos here at the seaside burrito shack are taken for granted by the locals.
7. A work of art: To spend an hour walking through Victor Horta's house in Saint-Gilles is to understand *the attraction* of art nouveau architecture.
8. A person: He keeps missing the waves. *His combination of athleticism, ambition, and indecision is lethal*.
9. An interaction between two people: It's not his *good* looks that make her nervous. It's that she knows he would like her to find him *good-looking*.
10. A public space: The visitors to the row of antique shops do not see *the fraud* because they have made a commitment to a certain kind of experience. *They are on holiday and want a good time*.

### PART 3: Predictions

For each item on your list, present something that is directly perceptible joined with an associated prediction.

1. A natural nonliving object: The west-northwest swell *following this storm by a few days will have traveled thousands*

*of miles.* A swell like that loses much less of its energy than might be imagined as it travels long distances through weather.

2. A manufactured nonliving object: These houses are *future beach sculpture, once the sandstone cliffs give way.*
3. A plant: These pears *will be ready to harvest in a month.*
4. An animal: The mark of great racehorses is desire. Even in losing performances, they *never just give up.*
5. A landscape: When you are looking at the Swiss countryside through a train window, *the occasional buildings look offensive.*
6. Food: The price of the dinner includes *the sense of well-being that lingers through the evening.*
7. A work of art: The curator for Early Netherlandish paintings is depressed in anticipation of the *inevitable damage* to the fragile panels scheduled to be lent to an exhibit in New York.
8. A person: Her otherwise serene and beautiful mother is helpless trying to postpone her daughter's *imminent* descent into the long, dark tunnel of adolescence, in which bitterness, resentment, and sullen ingratitude are the power chords of emotional life.
9. An interaction between two people: His effervescence will evaporate *after the initial impression wears off.*
10. A public space: Improving the neighborhood *will destroy* its historic charm.

#### PART 4: *Cultural Knowledge*

For each item on your list, present something that is directly perceptible joined with an associated aspect depending on cultural knowledge.

1. A natural nonliving object: No political or financial scheme has blurred *the sharp division of rich and poor Chicago at the river.*

2. A manufactured nonliving object: Despite *indicating episcopal dignity*, a mitre makes all but the most regal bishops look ridiculous.
3. A plant: Tea is the wine of China. It even has some of wine's *sacramental character*.
4. An animal: Horses are no longer an instrument of war, but they have not been displaced as *a symbol of power*.
5. A landscape: *The English addiction to the hills of Tuscany as the earthly paradise* has always been a puzzle to the Italians.
6. Food: Both traditional French cooking before it and current techno-cuisine after it reject *the principle of nouvelle cuisine that great cooking should never mask natural savors*.
7. A work of art: James Ensor, *the only artist of the late nineteenth century who did great original religious painting*, and whose *Entrance of Christ into Brussels in 1889* was acquired by the Getty Museum in Brentwood to serve as the culmination of its collection, is famous instead for his grotesques.
8. A person: Tony went to *Flanders to study medieval architecture*, but ended up spending most of his time *surfing in Ostende*.
9. An interaction between two people: She was promoted because, as a server, she was the best presence the dining room had ever deployed, despite her tenuous grasp on the otherwise *adamantine principle that servers must not flirt with diners* because it distracts from the food.
10. A public space: Despite *the great reputation* of the experience, seeing the Piazzetta di San Marco as you arrive by boat is never a disappointment.

#### PART 5: Safari

For each item on your list, present something that is directly perceptible joined with any combination of associated inferences, judgments, predictions, cultural knowledge, beliefs, or any other such commonplace category.

**EXERCISE 7: *Classic Style without Borders*****PART 1: *A New List***

We offer another road-tested list, below. Here is the exercise: For each of the items on the list, present something that is directly perceptible, along with associated inferences, judgments, predictions, cultural knowledge, beliefs, and anything else that is not directly perceptible.

1. an article of casual clothing
2. an architectural feature
3. a piece of furniture
4. a uniform
5. a passage of music
6. a physical sensation
7. a taste
8. an electronic device
9. a piece of luggage
10. an actor engaged in a performance

**PART 2: *Another New List—Your Choice***

When you have finished your exercises with this second list, move on to invent your own list of ten categories. You will find possibilities everywhere. Consider a photograph of someone's face. When you see one, it is almost impossible to resist forming a quick sense of the character of the subject. Of course, all you can see is the photograph. But a classic presentation of the photograph can include inferences, judgments, predictions, cultural knowledge, in fact recognition of any sort. Raymond Chandler's Marlowe, the detective in *The Big Sleep*, is shown a photograph of a man he is looking for: "He pushed a shiny print across the desk and I looked at an Irish face that was more sad than merry and more reserved than brash. Not the face of a tough guy and not the face of a man who could be pushed around much by anybody. . . . A face that looked a little taut, the face of a man who would move fast and play for keeps." Here is the exercise: Invent your own list of ten categories, and then, for each item, do what you did in exercise 6. Enjoy the waves.

**EXERCISE 8: *Describing Is Not Presenting***

Exercises 6 and 7 focused on blending any subject with a directly perceptible object. Now we turn to blending any purpose with presentation. The nature of presentation is fully discussed in the Essay and exemplified in the Museum. Recall that in presentation, writers take responsibility for everything. The reason writers speak in classic style is to present something they judge to be worthy of presentation. In particular, in classic style, writers are not following orders or a template.

In this exercise, we refine our concept of presentation by contrasting it with a different purpose, one with which it is often confused—description. Although the term “description” is elastic, it is quite different from what we mean by “presentation.” Description, as we use the term, is a performance in which the speaker is a delivery device. In some cases, the speaker performs a monitoring service, giving a running account of the salient features of a subject, the way an announcer might for a sporting event. In others, the speaker fills in a pre-existing template. In all cases, the speaker follows a protocol that comes from someone else. A description is inadequate if it leaves out part of this protocol. Presentation, by contrast, is something for which an individual is entirely responsible—responsible for what is included and for what goes unmentioned. A presentation may have uses, but its goal, stylistically, is not utilitarian. If you describe a painting, for example, the painting’s dimensions are essential, as is its support (panel or canvas). This is the sort of information you expect to find in a descriptive catalogue. In a presentation, these features could conceivably be included, but they needn’t be.

When Julien Green offers a presentation of the Ghent Altarpiece, he deals with just one of that polyptych’s panels. If your knowledge of the altarpiece were limited to the details that Green chooses to present, you would have no idea that it consists of a dozen sections when open and nine others when closed. You would have no idea that it is an oak panel with wings and that the wings are painted on both sides. If Green’s presentation were

meant to be a description, it would be completely inadequate, but he is not working for the editor of a catalogue; he is offering what he finds worth presenting. What Green says in his presentation is informed by his distinctive imagination and intelligence. What he presents can be seen once he has presented it, but it is not necessarily what someone else in his place would find worth presenting. If a professional art historian or curator were offering a description of the painting, it would be identical to what any other competent professional would offer as a description. You would be able to recognize the painting from the description just the way you would be able to recognize a book from a description in a rare book dealer's catalogue.

It is not yet time to start writing, but in this exercise, while as always retaining the scene of classic joint attention as the anchor of the network, give up actually being next to your listener. Here is the exercise: Call someone on the telephone, or through some kind of voice chat, and in the course of the conversation describe something you can see. Then call someone and in the course of the conversation present the same thing. The two activities should feel very different.

This exercise is intended to draw a distinction between presentation and description. You can repeat the exercise—first description, then presentation, until you command the difference—by choosing different items on the lists used in previous exercises. You might first choose a concrete, definite, visible object, like a chair. Then advance along a scale: a tree, a bird, a dress, the way a particular animal moves, the way a particular person talks, a local environment—such as Mount Vernon Square in Baltimore—, a city, someone's character, a legal concept such as perjury.

### EXERCISE 9: *Conversations*

Here is the exercise: When you are with a companion, recall a conversation you had with her in the past. Present it in classic style. Notice that it is normal to treat this previous conversation as something present, something that you and your companion can jointly

see, even though each of you is dealing with a separate memory, a separate mental representation, which can be and probably is quite different for each of you. The basis of classic style is that any scene of communication can be blended with the classic scene to bring it to intelligible and congenial human scale. You are familiar with this sort of blending, and often do it without thinking about it, as in the case of recalling and presenting the conversation. What this exercise asks you to do is something you have been doing practically all of your life. It is a simple step from presenting a perception (“The blackbird on the tree limb has red markings on its wings”) to the presentation of a memory (“Your response to my suggestion two days ago that we go away for the weekend was unexpected”). You can see both the blackbird and the red markings, but both the response and its unexpected nature, although they can be presented in the same style as the blackbird and its markings, are unavailable to perception. Consistent classic style requires recognizing that these features lie beyond the classic scene, yet domesticating them by anchoring them in that scene.

#### EXERCISE 10: *Stealth Argument*

Classic style characteristically avoids explicit argument and never seems to press for agreement since it is structured by a scene where neither argument nor urgency has a place. Your project is to accomplish the goals of argument by what is ostensibly simply presentation. If you ask a companion to notice an owl whose coloring makes it difficult to distinguish the owl from the tree and the foliage where it is perched, you don’t have to persuade your companion that the owl is actually there; she can see it for herself as soon as she knows where to look. When classic stylists are interested in persuasion, they engage in a kind of stealth argument that is conducted as if it is simply presentation. In the Museum, we analyzed argument-as-presentation in Descartes, in Mark Twain’s discussion of the experience of war, in Liebling’s dismissal of the BBC’s account of the Normandy Invasion, and in the Smithsonian presentation of the dragoon tie, where commercial motives are

disguised as art historical presentation. Andrew Hodges on Alan Turing, Junichirō Tanizaki on Terukatsu, Jane Austen on Mr. Collins, and La Rochefoucauld on Madame de Chevreuse all engage in argument as presentation. Here is the exercise: Review these passages and then offer a similar stealth argument of your own.

### EXERCISE 11: *Arrivals and Departures*

Many situations impose a style—contractually or by convention. An official conducting a marriage must do so according to a protocol, and fulfill that protocol. These situations arise in life as soon as one represents a group. A child selling cookies may say, “Hello, we belong to Girl Scout Troop 27, and we are selling cookies to raise money for a field trip to the Getty Museum where we will earn our visual arts badges.” This is extremely unclassic, and all the participants in the conversation probably know that the Girl Scout has been taught to say exactly this. But when the Girl Scout is asked about the differences in the kinds of cookies, she may switch into classic style. After her classic presentation, she may switch back into the scripted sales conversation in order to complete the transaction, thank the customer, and otherwise create goodwill. Switching into and out of the classic scene serves a great range of situations, from selling Girl Scout cookies to presenting a case before the Supreme Court. Such situations often come with a scripted protocol. The moments that serve the protocol are highly unclassic because they are formal and because they are imposed. Yet the speaker or writer can switch into and out of classic style and keep the protocol to a minimum. The result can be a piece that has all the required parts but still feels classic most of the time.

In official style, the speaker is the agent of a system. A passport controller at the Brussels airport, for example, after asking the required questions about your travel plans, may drop straight into classic style. “What is the purpose of your trip?” “Cultural. I want to see the James Ensor paintings in Antwerp.” “You won’t be disappointed. Ensor lived in Ostende, but his best paintings are in Antwerp.”

Suppose two people are interviewing you for a job. This is an encounter so complex, unfamiliar, and difficult to navigate that many people find it paralyzing. The actual cast and purpose are far from classic. The scene can induce terrible anxiety; efforts to control it are often immediately apparent to the interviewers. But the job interview can be done in classic style. It just happens that what you are presenting is yourself, but in the way you would present the blackbird. You are pointing out what you expect the interviewers to recognize once you show them where to look. When asked, “So, what did you do in college?” you answer, “I divided my time between molecular genetics and surfing.” The exercise is to carry out a job interview in classic style. The reader of the Studio might not have the opportunity to do this assignment in the field. But it can be done in imagination, or with a friend, as a mock interview. Similarly, a letter of application for a job falls into a protocol. If it does nothing more than follow that protocol, it will be impossible to distinguish it from a hundred others. There is a real advantage in being able to include a passage in classic style even in this most unclassic situation. The situation need not—and usually should not—dictate the style.

Here is the exercise: Begin in a nonclassic style—official style or practical style, for example—and then switch out of it into classic style.

#### EXERCISE 12: *Talking to Strangers*

We began with the scene of classic joint attention, which has a cast of two. This scene and its cast anchor classic style, although in most forms of writing and in many forms of broadcast speech the audience could consist of any number of people, known or not, visible or not. Any audience is treated as if it were a single individual. Consider Alec Guinness’s speech accepting an honorary Academy Award, in which he wittily presents the defining moment of his formation as a film actor. (You can find it on YouTube.) Although his speech sounds informal, there are many reasons to think it has been carefully prepared: there are no false starts or awkward sen-

tences, grammatical mistakes, syntactic bobbles, or hesitations. Contrast this to Dustin Hoffman's introduction. Sir Alec's intonation, cadence, and pace are perceptible; their preparation and his forethought are neither perceptible nor, at first, even evident. He sounds natural and spontaneous. Although he probably wrote his speech and memorized it, it sounds like conversation. He is talking to a group, but it sounds as if he is talking to one person—you. Of course, he doesn't call you by name, but the model for the interaction is one person addressing a companion.

Now, do the same thing. Here is the exercise: Make a presentation to a group of people, but anchor it in the classic scene, treating the group, stylistically, as an individual.

### ■ Fundamentals: Write Second

If you have completed the common exercises in speech, you are probably ready to do them in writing. If you are wondering why there has been such a lengthy oral preliminary to the acquisition of a style of writing, our answer can be found in the opening paragraphs of this book. Writing is an intellectual activity. To achieve good prose styles, writers must work through intellectual issues, not merely acquire mechanical techniques. The heart of classic style is the root scene of classic joint attention. The actual scene of writing is blended with the classic scene so that writing is treated as speech. No matter how many people are addressed, no matter how indeterminate this "audience" is, no matter where they are, the style treats them as if they were a single person to whom the writer is speaking. Inferences, judgments, predictions, and cultural knowledge are treated as "things" that can be directly perceived. Neither the concept of classic joint attention nor an ability to blend an actual scene with the classic scene can be acquired simply by writing and then doing some local revision. Blending complex networks to the classic scene defines classic style, and while it is possible to acquire this ability through imitation of classic models, it is a chancy and inefficient path. In the Studio, we are offering a

tested and secure path. If you work out the intellectual issues first, the activity of writing will be defined by a concept of style. You can then proceed with confidence.

You have already practiced the common exercises in speech. Now is the moment to observe that what works in speech cannot be directly transferred to writing. Go through the common exercises anew, this time in writing. We are not asking you to transcribe what you have already said, offering it in written form. Approach the exercises now with the resources of writing; do not cling to the resources of speech. Anchoring writing in speech is not pretending that writing is speech. Anchoring a mental network supporting expression in the classic scene is not pretending that you are in an actual classic scene; it is more subtle. It may sound paradoxical to say both that having done the speech exercises will help you to master a style of writing and that writing is a very different activity from speech because it lacks the resources of speech. But both are true and for a crucial reason: classic prose style blends speech with writing. A classic prose stylist must be able to supply by imaginative blending the structure of classic joint attention that the actual environment of writing lacks.

In what follows, we will add some comments on doing these common exercises in writing.

#### **TUTORIAL:** *Blending Scenes*

Writing is not a scene of classic joint attention, but in classic style the writer will use the classic scene as an anchor so that, in the blend, writing becomes speaking, the indefinite audience that is not present becomes a single person who is right there, and the subject becomes something that can be perceived. If writing is not a scene of classic joint attention, neither is reading—and writing, especially in classic style, assumes a reader, so it is part of the writer's task to induce the reader to anchor her activity in the classic scene as well.

Neither writer nor reader is deluded. They both know they do not share an environment they can refer to directly, but the writer

anchors the actual scene to the classic scene in order to provide a consistent style.

**TUTORIAL: *Lost in Words***

In writing, you lose the effects of the charm you may have in person. You lose the effects of gesture, proximity, warmth, intonation. In person, you can command and hold attention by being attractive, but all of that is gone in writing. All you have is the appeal of the presentation—the attraction of thought and of language. A speaker of some personal charm can give a pastiche of clichés the illusion of meaning, but in writing, a pastiche of clichés will always look like a pastiche of clichés. Presence is crucial to the classic scene. But in classic writing, there is no speaker, no shared environment, no interaction between speaker and listener. Presence must be supplied by the writing itself. Bernard Shaw, a dramatist who wrote his plays to be read, was especially sensitive to this distinction. He once remarked that there are fifty ways of saying the word “yes,” and five hundred ways of saying the word “no,” but just one way of writing them down.

**TUTORIAL: *Onset and Dismount***

A written text has a beginning and an end—a first sentence and a last. Sections of writing have beginnings and ends too. Typically, speaking is not so discrete. When you drop into classic style in speaking, there may have been quite a bit of speech before it—greetings, small talk, and obligatory ceremonial questions and answers—and always after it the dribbling little bits of farewell, which the Viennese used to call “Goodbye without leaving.” Your first words are unlikely to be taken as the start of a coherent presentation. In classic prose, it is automatic. The first sentence is the onset. The last sentence, at least of the section, is the dismount. Crisp onset and dismount carry a premium in classic writing beyond their value in classic speech.

## ■ Advanced Writing

Every classic stylist encounters novel situations. We explained in the Essay how some occasions call for a sequence of styles, or a blend of styles, or the development of a special style based on a general style. A style, after all, is defined by a coherent and consistent stand on the elements of style, expressed as a short series of questions about truth, presentation, writer, reader, thought, language, and their relationships. These questions are addressed to fundamental issues that must be answered deliberately or by default before we can write at all. Style is an intellectual matter of thinking through these questions in any situation. Someone who has worked through the curriculum of the Studio is equipped to recognize and work on new projects without further coaching by thinking through the elements of style and drawing on techniques learned in the Studio. In what follows, we suggest a few encounters with novelty.

### EXERCISE 13: *Sketchbook*

Most of the writing instruction in the United States focuses on revision. This approach is fatal for the student attempting to master classic style. The essential ability of the classic stylist is to inhabit the style and to work within it. It is almost always a mistake to try to drag a piece of writing that was unclassic at its inception over rocks and through vegetation in a misconceived attempt to move it somehow to classic heights. Inhabiting the style means imaginatively blending the classic scene with the mental network supporting expression. The blend anchors the network and provides the stylistic structure. It is the platform from which the classic stylist works from beginning to end. The classic stylist learns to speak directly from inside that blend, even if the initial performances are weak. A piece conceived and written from within classic style can be improved, but no draft written without a settled style can be revised into classic style. The conventional advice to think of “style” as a final touch leads to disaster because style is not a surface deco-

ration that can be added during revision. Style must be considered at the outset. Forget entirely the idea that “working on your writing” begins after you have something down on paper.

Consider that students in an art studio are often asked to take their sketchbook out into the field to do speed sketching. They see something and sketch it rapidly, never erasing but instead flipping quickly to a blank page to sketch something else. Later, they review their sketches, but they do not revise. In this Studio, the sketchbook exercise asks you to do in writing what the art student does in speed sketching. Here is the exercise: Recognize something in the field; step into classic style; present your recognition. Do not revise. Continue until you have ten prose sketches. As you begin to advance in your sketchbook exercises, you might move up, as you did in the common exercises, to subjects that are less and less directly perceptible, always blending them stylistically with what is directly perceptible. Once you have finished your ten speed sketches in classic style, put the work of your session aside. Review it later, but do not revise it. Tomorrow, do the sketchbook exercise again. A daily dose of the sketchbook exercise for a couple of weeks seems to have the power to move students rapidly. At first, they find this extremely difficult and seem to make no progress, but after a few days the style starts to come naturally. Some students get past their previous conditioning only after a couple of weeks of the sketchbook exercise has purged them of bad habits.

#### EXERCISE 14: *Coherent Mixed Styles*

It may seem paradoxical in a Studio devoted to classic style to include the study of styles that are only partially classic. But classic virtues can come from even a few classic ingredients, and the opportunity to deploy such mixed styles arises frequently. Instruction manuals have a practical motive, but they do not have to be impersonal; the cast can be collusive; the thought and language can be distinctive. The voice does not have to be one job description speaking to another. We can instead match a practical motive

with a classic presentation, to produce a mixed style that might be called classic practical style, a style whose attraction and power do not depend exclusively on accomplishing a practical goal. Imagine reading a cookbook even if you have no intention of cooking. A cookbook in classic practical style might be attractive purely for the virtues of its classic presentation. There are many styles that can be mixed with classic ingredients to create an unmistakably classic flavor.

Here is the exercise: Pick a subject you understand well and write a “how-to” piece. The subject can be anything: how to identify a tree from its leaves, how to avoid probate, how to give a dinner party. The piece will be practical, of course, but experiment with the inclusion of classic ingredients. These classic ingredients might include a classic voice, a collusive cast, a full command of language, a crisp onset and dismount, truth as a complementary motive, presentation as a complementary purpose.

#### EXERCISE 15: *Lists*

Can a list be written in classic style? Of course. The material does not determine the style. The writer of a list could accept the stand of slavish adherence to a template, like a notary providing an inventory. But the writer can take the classic stand—someone recognizes something worth presenting to someone else. The writer can assume full responsibility for the selection.

A menu is a list, but if it is written in classic style, it can present the character and tradition of a restaurant and the nature of a cuisine. There is an owner, chef, or dining room manager standing behind the presentation. In classic style, neither the menu nor the wine list is a helter-skelter list of what happens to be available to eat and drink. A wine list can present the knowledge, culture, and taste of the sommelier. In the previous exercise, you practiced writing something in classic style that had an additional practical purpose. Menus and wine lists can similarly be written in classic style even though their ostensible purpose is practical. For some-

one interested in food and wine, a classic menu or wine list can be read for pleasure, even if the restaurant is a continent away or has been closed for years.

Menus and wine lists are only one example of lists that can take the classic stand and can accordingly be read and enjoyed independent of any practical goal. Georges Perec, in *La vie mode d'emploi* (*Life A User's Manual*), presents lists of the contents of basement storage lockers of an imaginary apartment building. Each is a masterful presentation in an individual voice not just of the items but also of the owner's habits, history, and character, and their cultural resonance. Here are two:

Bartlebooth's cellar:

In Bartlebooth's cellar there is some left-over coal on top of which still lies a black enamelled metal scuttle with a wooden grip fitted on its wire handle, a bicycle hanging on a butcher's hook, now unoccupied bottle racks, and his four travelling chests, four curved chests covered in tarred canvas, braced with wooden slats, with brass corners and hasps, and lined throughout with a sheet of zinc to ensure waterproofing.

The Rorschachs' cellar:

A bottle rack, wire, plastic-coated, is placed to the left of the slatted door. The lower level of the rack holds five bottles of fruit brandies: kirsch, apricot, quetsch, plum, raspberry. On one of the middle rows there is the score—in Russian—of Rimsky-Korsakov's version of Pushkin's *Golden Cockerel*, and a probably popular novel entitled *Spice, or the Revenge of the Louvain Locksmith*, with a cover depicting a girl handing a bag of gold to a judge. On the top row, a lidless octagonal tin containing a few novelty chessmen made of plastic, crudely imitating Chinese ivory pieces: the knight is a kind of Dragon, the king a seated Buddha.

Ernest Hemingway is said to have written a six-word short story—"For sale. Baby shoes. Never worn."—that provides the in-

spiration for this exercise. Here is the exercise: Locate some suitable publication that carries classified advertisements, and write for that publication a list offering items for sale. Take the classic stand.

#### EXERCISE 16: *Résumé*

A *résumé* is a list presenting a person. Its writer can take the classic stand. Often, *résumés* are completely unclassic, signaling—through their formatting and phrasing—anxiety and desire. *Résumés* often appear simultaneously pushy and defensive, with ungenerous margins, scarce white space, compressed fonts, hyperbolic and aggressive vocabulary (“High-powered self-starter seeks management position with superpotential for advancement”), and the listing of every conceivable fact that might sway a reader (“Second-place, all-class essay competition, 7th grade, East Nowhere Middle School”). Academic *résumés* often expose self-inflicted wounds under “Publications” (“Genetics of the *ALDH2* locus. *Science*, submitted”). Anyone established in the academy knows that anybody can submit anything anywhere; a submission is not a publication. A classic *résumé*, by contrast, is one whose writer, stylistically, is self-possessed, unconcerned, merely presenting. Stylistically, the writer has no anxiety. The writer does not want anything from the reader. The motive is truth—not desire for a job—and there is symmetry between writer and reader. A classic *résumé* typically has pleasing margins, ample white space, and a classic font. Its phrasing is calm. It is often distinctive for the range of lower-level detritus it leaves out. The style is not affected at all by insecurity, fear of unemployment, or sense of urgency, regardless of what is in the writer’s mental network.

Here is the exercise: Write a *résumé* strongly influenced by classic style for a historical person: Anne Boleyn before her marriage, Einstein when he worked in the Swiss patent office, Hannibal before he invaded Europe, Grace Kelly before she made her first movie, Vermeer applying to the painters’ guild.

**EXERCISE 17: *Admissions Essay***

The essay, or statement, that an applicant submits for admission to a program belongs to a real scene that, like the résumé and the job interview, is unclassic in cast and purpose. But the applicant can write the essay entirely in classic style and may by doing so distinguish the application from a mountain of predictable rival submissions. Here is the exercise: Imagine such a case and write an admissions essay in which you, someone you know, or a historical or fictional person is the candidate.

**EXERCISE 18: *Science***

Classic style is often the ideal style for scientific writing. Here is the exercise: Write a scientific piece in classic style. Point out where your reader should look and present the recognition. Stylistically, your reader is with you in a scene of classic joint attention, and pleased to be there.

Accomplished scientists often eschew stridency of any sort, since after all it is presumably the science that is the subject rather than the scientist or the scientist's chapel. Treating scientific writing as adversarial argument disguises the fact that almost all of a mature scientific piece is presentational: it presents the relevant tradition of research, and it presents the facts, events, and evidence that the reader needs.

Your own writing for this exercise will not resemble Sir Isaac Newton's prose, because he wrote in the early eighteenth century, but it may come as a surprise to see how often Newton used a style close to classic. Here is a passage from the *Opticks* (1704):

In a very dark Chamber, at a round Hole, about one third Part of an Inch broad made in the Shut of a Window, I placed a Glass Prism, whereby the Beam of the Sun's Light, which came in at that Hole, might be refracted upwards toward the opposite Wall of the Chamber, and there form a colour'd Image of the Sun. The Axis of the Prism (that is the Line pass-

ing through the middle of the Prism from one end of it to the other end parallel to the edge of the Refracting Angle was in this and the following Experiments perpendicular to the incident Rys. About this Axis I turned the Prism slowly, and saw the refracted Light on the Wall, or coloured Image of the Sun, first to descend, and then to ascend. Between the Descent and Ascent, when the Image seemed Stationary, I stopp'd the Prism, and fix'd it in that Posture, that it should be moved no more. For in that posture the Refractions of the Light at the two Sides of the Refracting Angle, that is at the Entrance of the Rays into the Prism, and at their going out of it, were equal to one another.

### EXERCISE 19: *Obituaries*

Obituaries often follow a template closely and exclude classic presentation. Such obituaries are conventional descriptions of mainly surface information—date and place of birth, education, professional accomplishment, cause of death. In these routine performances, there is often no indication that the writer is responsible for selecting details or exercising independent judgment. There are, however, exceptions. Jeremy Pearce's obituary for John L. Bull, one of the authors of *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds, Eastern Region*, from which we quote in the first entry of the Museum, appeared in *The New York Times* for 15 August 2006. He includes the obligatory descriptive information but takes the classic stance in presenting what he has judged to be worth presenting. Here is how he ends the obituary:

Mr. Bull was often accompanied by his wife, an educator at the [American Museum of Natural History], on birding journeys. In 1989, the couple collaborated on a book, "Birds of North America: Western Region: A Quick Identification Guide for All Bird-Watchers."

Remarking on the mourning doves that he spotted in Central Park, Mr. Bull observed: "They are the most mo-

nogamous birds I've ever watched. They always travel in pairs.”

This is classic presentation; it follows no template. The writer, in offering an analogy between the travels of Mr. Bull and his wife, and the travels of the mourning doves that Mr. Bull observed, decides what is significant and appropriate. His perfect dismount is a classic achievement, one that belongs to a writer, not to a template. Now try writing a classic obituary of your own.

#### EXERCISE 20: *Real Estate Pitch*

Like obituaries, real estate prose of the sort one finds in multiple listings of properties for sale is typically entirely impersonal. It is marked by obligatory hyperbole and artificial effervescence. Here is the exercise: Study some real estate prose and then present a house as if it were for sale, offering in classic style what the reader would want to know if that reader were shopping for a house. You might want to present a property not actually for sale: the Ca' d'Oro in Venice, Jacques Cœur's *hôtel particulier* in Bourges, the Rockoxhuis in Antwerp, the Getty Villa in Malibu, the White House during the federal government's bankruptcy sale.

#### EXERCISE 21: *Restaurant Review*

In classic style, direct perceptions, inferences, and judgments can all be treated as recognitions and can all be presented to a companion who will share these recognitions once they are pointed out. Restaurant reviews are not merely replete with inferences and judgments; they are an outstanding example in contemporary writing of discussions of taste, subject to endless debate and qualification. In classic style, taste can be treated as if it were as perceptible as a table setting. A restaurant review in the hands of a classic stylist treats its standards of judgment as obviously appropriate and writes as if the reader would agree not merely with the evaluation of the flavors in the *ris de veau en salade* but with the

standards that produce that evaluation. The style is indifferent to what those standards might be. They might devalue mere novelty or they might value novelty above all. A classic restaurant review could either criticize a formal restaurant for using exotic instead of common ingredients in a traditional dish or praise it for innovating the traditional dish by using exotic ingredients. The classic restaurant review consists, in large measure, of placing the reader in a position to perceive both the validity of the judgments and the appropriateness of the standards—as if such matters are impossible to miss once obstacles are cleared out of the way and the reader has an unobstructed view of things.

Consider:

On a November evening in Dijon, Jean-Pierre Billoux serves wild duck, in its own juice, roasted with apples. This is the refinement of a classic by a master cook. There is no stridency or forced originality. The eight-year-old Corton Grancey seems to have been made for this perfectly roasted duck. This dish is the culmination of a tradition that has its historical roots in Guillaume Tirel's "Chapitre de Fricassure"; it reflects the accumulated wisdom of a six-hundred-year-old craft that translates nature and seasons, and their immemorial recurrence, into textures, fragrances, and flavors that allow you to feel yourself a part of them. It is rooted in a place too; it is not a cuisine suitable for "international hotels." The seasons, the fragrances, the flavors of Burgundy are not the seasons, the fragrances, the flavors of Kyoto, or London, or Las Vegas.

The superiority of a cuisine rooted in a place and in a season over a cuisine suitable for "international hotels" is not asserted but treated as if it were as obvious as the duck and its apples.

Here is the exercise: Write a classic review of a restaurant and post it to one of the many online sites carrying restaurant reviews. Focus especially on including judgments in passing, almost incidentally, as if they are not personal judgments at all but rather ele-

ments of the restaurant that any competent diner could recognize, once pointed in the right direction.

### EXERCISE 22: *Travel Writing*

Travel pieces—like cookbooks, restaurant reviews, and real estate descriptions—can be utilitarian. The reader is going somewhere and looks for facts and information in order to organize a trip. But in all of these genres, the practical purpose can be subordinated or even ignored. Travel writing can be completely presentational, and when it is, it can incorporate indefinite ranges of history, judgments, and cultural commentary, treated as if they can be seen.

The Michelin Green Guides are the gold standard of commercial travel writing. Here is a passage from the entry on the Abbey of Fontenay from the Michelin Green Guide to Burgundy:

Cistercian architecture first appeared in Burgundy in the first half of the 12C (Cistercium was the Latin name for the town of Cîteaux). It is characterized by a spirit of simplicity in keeping with the teaching of St Bernard. He objected bitterly to the luxury displayed in some monastery churches, opposing the theories of some of the great builders of the 11C and 12C with extraordinary passion. His argument against the belief of abbots such as St Hugh, Peter the Venerable, and Suger, who believed that nothing could be too rich for the glory of God was expressed for example in the letter he wrote to William, Abbot of St-Thierry, in which he asks, “Why this excessive height in the churches, this enormous length, this unnecessary width, these sumptuous ornaments and curious paintings that draw the eyes and distract attention and meditation? . . . We the monks, who have forsaken ordinary life and renounce worldly wealth and ostentation for the love of Christ, . . . in whom do we hope to awaken devotion with these ornaments?”

Fontenay, which is now a historic site and has not been a functioning church since the French Revolution of 1789, is one of the

finest surviving examples of the austere beauty characteristic of Cistercian architecture, but no current visitor to Fontenay encounters Saint Bernard, his mentality, the opposition between styles of spirituality, or the architectural expression of that opposition in the uncluttered severity of Fontenay contrasted to the rich iconography of its Burgundian rival to the south, Cluny.

On reflection, it is not a surprise that the recognitions presented by the classic travel writer might lie beyond perception. As Mark Twain, launched on his career by his travel writing, observed, “[L]ife does not consist mainly—or even largely—of facts and happenings. It consists mainly of the storm of thoughts that is forever blowing through one’s head.” Classic style domesticates these vast conceptual networks by blending them with the classic scene. Travel writing is an exemplary genre for such capacious classic presentation.

Here is the exercise: Write a classic travel piece, a presentation of a place or places, ranging wherever thought takes you, and without foregrounding any practical purpose.

**EXERCISE 23: *Prejudices: What about Peanut Butter?***

A prejudice is something that has been accepted without the benefit of considered judgment: a preference for Swiss chocolate or Chinese tea, let us say, when they have not actually been compared to any alternative: Belgian chocolate or Indian tea. Everyone has such prejudices, but they are rarely presented as such. If you loathe baroque architecture and find art nouveau architecture pleasing because you have paid close attention to the style you like and haven’t paid any attention to any other style, your taste has been affected by prejudice, but that is not necessarily a bad thing—especially in classic style, because the style has a fundamental prejudice of its own for human scale, and life is too short to give an impartial and considered judgment to every variety of chocolate or every style of architecture.

Someone with a narrow taste guided by prejudice can in fact offer a thoroughly excellent presentation of what falls within this

restricted taste. Someone whose taste for art nouveau architecture has become a prejudice might be just the person whose essay on Victor Horta you will find most informative and even well-judged. Paul Erdős, the subject of a biography called *The Man Who Loved Only Numbers*, referred to anyone who had stopped doing mathematics as “dead.” For him, nonmathematicians were not alive. This legendary and, for Erdős, personally debilitating prejudice against anything but numbers did not mean that he was not worth listening to when he was talking about mathematics.

A presentation that covers many alternatives is not necessarily as good as a presentation—even if driven by prejudice—that focuses on just one. Here is the exercise: Present something you know and love without being defensive about it at all, without worrying about being fair or balanced. Belgian beer, baroque music, surfing in Southern California. Ignore that voice that says, “What about German beer? Gregorian chant? Alaia surfing in Australia? What about peanut butter?”

#### EXERCISE 24: *Tethered Excursions*

For this advanced exercise, select and present in classic style a subject as far away from the blackbird in the tree as possible, something that requires thought branching over almost every kind of conceptual geography. Our example—just one—is the concept of privacy. Privacy is something that cannot be directly perceived at all. It is a concept that stretches over all of human history, with remarkable differences across cultures in the placement of the dividing line between the private and the public. It is a highly nuanced concept that has never settled down. On the contrary, every aspect of it, from legal to moral to psychological, seems to be contested in our own time and place. It involves indefinitely many people, including unknown people. Presenting the concept of privacy is maximally uncongenial to the scene of classic joint attention. If you can blend the conceptual network for thinking and talking about privacy with the classic scene, we think you can blend any-

thing with the classic scene, and you can consider yourself a competent classic stylist.

## ■ Conclusion

Every great artist was once an apprentice who learned fundamentals from someone much less talented. Velázquez was a much greater painter than his teacher. Newton was a much greater mathematician than his teacher. Neither could have progressed without a formation in fundamentals. Now that you have obtained a formation in fundamentals and experimented with a few advanced exercises, you have completed the apprenticeship offered in this Studio. But artists never really leave their studios. They continue to refine their grasp of fundamentals and extend their reach. There is no end to this refinement or extension. If there were a final exercise in the Studio, it would be to keep your eyes open for new opportunities to advance your command of style while keeping your presentations clear and simple as the truth.