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What is style?

Depends upon your perspective:

- For the writer, style involves the decisions (conscious or unconscious, principled or intuitive) about what kinds of words to choose and sentences to construct.
- For the reader, style involves the effects created by certain combinations of words and sentences.
- For the text, style comprises the patterns and relations of words and sentences.
- For the language as a whole, or the culture it represents, style represents the means by which individual writers, readers, and texts emerge within, among, and against the conventions of usage and syntax that define the language and the social world.

I use my writing style to

- bring myself into being (not "express" so much as "construct")
- communicate with others (not only persuade, but make connections of all kinds)
- to practice the craft of writing (to make a beautiful or workable thing)
- to fulfill the destiny of a language-using, social life-form (to be human)
- to change the world (by making a historical record of experiences and ideas)

A Method for Stylistic Analysis

1. Imagine that there is normal language--that every sentence is a simple one (subject-verb-[complement]) and that every word is used only according to the denotation given in the dictionary. Now list every deviation from this norm that you can find in the passage you are analyzing.
 - 1a. (optional) If you know the technical name for the deviation ("complex sentence," "inverted subject and verb," "passive voice," "metaphor," "oxymoron," etc.), put it in your list.
2. For every deviation, list at least two other ways of communicating what the author seems to be saying. Try to use "normal" language for one alternative. Then create another deviant alternative.
3. Finally, speculate on why the author may have decided to use the original deviation. Reflect on the ways that the style brings the author to life, communicates or fails to communicate (including or excluding a particular readership),
 - creates beauty,
 - performs a social or cultural function,
 - and attempts to make an historical impact

On the next page is a sample analysis. It does not even begin to exhaust the deviations in the passage but merely selects a few.

On the empty table on the page following the sample, list a few of the deviations omitted in the sample analysis; then complete the analysis yourself.

After the sample, there are other passages and tables for you to practice with.