

## UNPREPARED PROSE

Examine how the writer conveys the experience of falling and the ways in which this experience is expanded and reflected upon. How effective do you find this description?

- The key word is how. There is always a tendency to repeat what the writer said, but not to analyse how it was said.
- You should refer to terms such as form or structure, syntax (sentence structure), first/third person narrative, choice of vocabulary and all the poetic techniques which equally apply to your analysis of unseen poetry such as simile, metaphor, alliteration, personification, imagery etc.
- A good technique is either to annotate the passage as you read it through, by writing references to the above in note form around the extract, or, if you prefer, on scrap paper.
- It is absolutely essential that you do not simply point to an example of a simile, say, but go on to say why it is effective in relation to what is being described.

I will give some examples of how the writer conveys the experience of falling. It is by no means exhaustive because there is no single right answer, but it will, I hope, give an example of the technique of analysis which will be credited.

1. The overall form of the passage contributes to the feeling of intensity. The writer begins, in the first paragraph, by talking in objective, rather philosophical terms about falling. Even though the passage is written in first person narrative, this paragraph refers to any faller (he), and any fall, whether seriously life-threatening or not.

In the second paragraph, the writer's fall is described in great detail. It is a subjective description, full of detailed description using graphic imagery. The description takes us through the experience more or less sequentially, from the initial "push" to the loss of consciousness.

(This is all you need as an opening. An opening like this gives you a chance to expand on these initial overall impressions by going into detail as to how the passage is made effective).

2. Lines 1 to 3. This a rhetorical technique, a pretence that the description cannot do justice to the experience. By repeating the word "how" and listing the adjectives (line 2), the reader understands the emphatic nature of the intensity of the experience. The adjective, "hopeless", is reworded with further emphasis in line 3 ("a total loss of hope"). For someone who "cannot hope to convey what the experience was like... ", the emphasis on despair has been pretty effective so far!

(Incidentally, Chaucer also uses a similar rhetorical technique of telling the reader that he cannot hope to tell him/her about something and in the process giving a detailed and accurate description. In Chaucer, the technique is called *occupatio*).

3. Lines 3 to 5. The subject of the description is revealed. The "child" and "man" could be anyone and thus the emphasis is so far on the objective. The intensity of feeling grows, it seems, as a person ages ("dreads" is far more intense than "fears".) The writer is appealing to the universal nature of the feeling, and this is intended to appeal to the reader. The syntax of the sentence is also significant. The main clause or statement is that "falling is itself the image of death". The writer makes the reader wait for this, the relative clauses in commas (analysed above) creating a crescendo. This is the writer's main point in the passage. Falling, in any shape or form, is a symbol, a metaphor for man's vulnerability and mortality. The writer completes this sentence by retaining the emphatic nature of this profound thought, which has been built up to slowly since the beginning of the paragraph, and this is done through the rhetorical "rule of three". The "body" now becomes the focus; its passivity and helplessness is heightened.

4. Lines 5 to 8. Having established that falling is a universal fear, the writer shows this by giving an everyday example. The "little moment of horror" is effective because the feeling is more intense due to its transitory nature. This is easy for the reader to relate to as most people have experienced what is being described. The writer is also preparing the reader for the unthinkable length of the particular fall which is expanded upon in the next paragraph. Indeed, it was the length of the fall which came first in the "rule of three" in the first sentence. Not only that, but the writer chose to italicise it ("how long it was"). It now becomes clear why it was this aspect of the fall which vexed the writer most. The feeling of helplessness is emphasised once again ("he cannot help himself,-"). The simple phrase is italicised, and there immediately follows a semi-colon, and a pause.

5. Lines 8 and 9. The quotation is effective because it is not attributed to anyone. Just like the fall itself, it remains suspended. Its vacuous futility dangles mid-paragraph!

6. Lines 9 and 10. This is an aphorism, or "pearl of wisdom", which sheds enough light on the quotation only to further its metaphorical doom ("an effigy of death"). (George Eliot is a writer who uses these aphoristic phrases to great effect).

7. Lines 10 and 11. This sentence contains no verb, as if the horror of the thought has overtaken the writer. Just when we think the intensity of feeling described has reached its climax, the writer goes on to extend and amplify the original thought. We have gone from "a harmless fall in the road" to, horror of horrors, "a complete fall into the void" (line 10).

8. Lines 11 and 12. The sentence is a crescendo, once again using the "rule of three", but the word "useless" sums up the futility, and the hope created in describing the "familiar protective mechanisms of the body" is inevitably dashed in a single word.

9. Lines 13 and 14. The final sentence is effective due to the sounds of the words. The "sh" sounds have an onomatopoeic quality producing a foaming of the mouth which mimes the destructive, aggressive meanings of these two words. The harsh consonants suggest the "hard mineral gravitational scene" and the contrast of the soft human body is incongruous against the images conjured up of smashing and splintering.

10. Line 15. The first word in the paragraph creates suspense. It soon becomes clear that the "It" was the writer's fall. Perhaps it was such a terrible experience that the writer cannot bring herself to be any more specific than "it." "Each part of the body..." is an example of personification which enables the writer to go into more detail later on. By looking from each part of the body, we view the fall from every perspective. The idea that parts of the body are entities in themselves is not a new one. These parts of the body are known as "homunculi" which literally means "little men".

11. Lines 15 to 17. This technique enables the writer to appeal to the senses. Here touch is important and injustice and deception are apparent in the fact that the writer could not see the hands coming.

12. Lines 17 to 19. The sense of touch is furthered. The vocabulary is precise and well-chosen. "Clasp" (line 18) seems to suggest a certain desperation, as if this was her frantic attempt to avoid the inevitable. "With which they were parting company" (line 18) is litotes or under-statement. It is an incongruously polite phrase which suggests that feet and the ground is a harmonious and fitting combination. Given the violence and the impending doom, the tone of this phrase is extremely ironic. The simile in the next line serves to emphasise the speed of the fall. Notice that the "hands, feet" introduced in line 11 are described in more detail, but there is an air of inevitability in their attempt to stop the fall because they have already been described as "useless". This is paradoxical.

13. Lines 21 to 24. The idea of each part of the body working independently becomes an extended metaphor. "My trunk twisted sickeningly" is an ugly image and the "t", "k" and "s" sounds throughout the line emphasise this.

14. Lines 24 to 26. The sense of sight is now important, but everything is blurred and confused. "Darkness-light" is an oxymoron as if both has become one. The "creamy, curling waves" is a strangely attractive, almost delicious image, which is ironic since the waves provide the greatest threat, perhaps.

15. Lines 26 to 28. The rather hopeful image of the "swimmer" is quickly banished. The alliteration on the "s" sounds, or sibilance, in this sentence suggests both the threat and the struggle to survive.

16. Lines 29 to 32. The imagery contrasts opposites; light above, dark below, both literal and metaphorical and the activity of trying to fight for breath, whilst acknowledging simultaneously that the body is passive and useless ("This is the end."). This is the paradox which was hinted at in the first paragraph, the desire to be in control is overtaken by a realisation that control is transitory and can just be an illusion. As readers, we have been confronted throughout the passage with the paradox of active and passive, of the instinctive fight for survival, and at the same time a realisation that this is futile. The last thought ("this is the end") is emphasised through the punctuation, the colon isolating its monosyllabic finality.

17. Lines 32 to 34. It is ironic that the fight is taken up again, the "f" and "s" sounds and the word "flailing" suggesting that panic has set in. It is ironic, too, that the fight over, the "loss of consciousness" is not the end.