

The danger of most set-piece descriptions of place (the novels of Sir Walter Scott provide plenty of examples) is that a succession of well-formed declarative sentences, combined with the suspension of narrative interest, will send the reader to sleep. No risk of that here. The present tense describes both the place and the narrator's movement through it. The shifts in verbal mood – from indicative (“You come out of the hotel!”) to interrogative (“but can you get lunch?”) to imperative (“Don't walk. Drive. Don't walk. Run!”) and the generalizing second-person pronoun (“You walk left, you walk right”) – involve the reader in the process. After many pages of this sort of thing you might fall asleep from exhaustion, but not from boredom.

13 Lists

With Nicole's help Rosemary bought two dresses and two hats and four pairs of shoes with her money. Nicole bought from a great list that ran two pages, and bought the things in the windows besides. Everything she liked that she couldn't possibly use herself, she bought as a present for a friend. She bought coloured beads; folding beach cushions, artificial flowers, honey, a guest bed, bags, scarfs, love birds, miniatures for a doll's house, and three yards of some new cloth the colour of prawns. She bought a dozen bathing suits, a rubber alligator, a travelling chess set of gold and ivory, big linen handkerchiefs for Abe, two chamois leather jackets of kingfisher blue and burning bush from Hermes – bought all these things not a bit like a high-class courtesan buying underwear and jewels, which were after all professional equipment and insurance, but with an entirely different point of view. Nicole was the product of much ingenuity and toil. For her sake trains began their run at Chicago and traversed the round belly of the continent to California; chic factories fumed and link belts grew link by link in factories; men mixed toothpaste in vats and drew mouthwash out of copper hogsheads; girls canned tomatoes quickly in August or worked rudely at the Five-and-Tens on Christmas Eve; half-breed Indians toiled on Brazilian coffee plantations and dreamers were muscled out of patent rights in new tractors – these were some of the people who gave a tithe to Nicole and, as the whole system swayed and thundered onward, it lent a feverish bloom to such processes of hers as wholesale buying, like the flush of a fireman's face holding his post before a spreading blaze. She illustrated very simple principles, containing in herself her own doom, but illustrated them so accurately that there was grace in the procedure, and presently Rosemary would try to imitate it.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD *Tender is the Night* (1934)

"That she makes lists? You like that?"
 "Well, yes. You know, what she's going to do, what she has to buy, names of clients she has to see, et cetera."
 "Lists?" you murmur hopelessly, listlessly, your expensive beige raincoat still on.

Soon, of course, the narrator is making her own lists:

- CLIENTS TO SEE
- Birthday snapshots
- Scotch tape
- Letters to TD and Mom

In fact she doesn't have any clients to see, being a humble secretary. The lists are a way of competing with the image of the absent wife. When her lover hints that his wife has had an adventurous sexual life, the narrator responds:

Make a list of all the lovers you've ever had.
 Warren Lasher
 Ed "Rubberhead" Catapano
 Charles Deats or Keats
 Alfonso
 Tuck it in your pocket. Leave it lying around, conspicuously.
 Somehow you lose it. Make "mistaid" jokes to yourself. Make another list.

There is a kind of popular contemporary fiction about the lives of the rich, aimed mainly at women readers, which is known in the publishing trade as the "Sex and Shopping" (or less politely as the "S and F") novel. Such novels incorporate detailed descriptions of their heroines' purchases of luxury goods, down to the last designer label. Erotic and consumerist wish-fulfillment are simultaneously indulged. Scott Fitzgerald is also concerned with the connections between sexual allure and conspicuous consumption, but he handles it much more subtly, and critically. He doesn't reproduce Nicole's two-page shopping list in this passage from *Tender is the Night*, nor try to make brand names do his work for him. He creates the impression of prodigality with, in fact, remarkably few items, and invokes only one brand name, "Hermes" (which,

"THE RICH are different from us," F. Scott Fitzgerald once said to Ernest Hemingway, who replied, "Yes, they have more money." This anecdote, recorded by Fitzgerald, is usually told against him. But Hemingway's positivist putdown surely missed the point: that in money, as in other matters, quantity sooner or later becomes quality, for good or ill. Fitzgerald's description of Nicole Diver's Paris shopping expedition eloquently illustrates the difference of the rich.

It also illustrates the expressive potential of the list in fictional discourse. On the face of it, a mere catalogue of discrete items would seem to be out of place in a story focused on character and action. But fictional prose is wonderfully omnivorous, capable of assimilating all kinds of nonfictional discourse - letters, diaries, depositions, even lists - and adapting them to its own purposes. Sometimes the list is reproduced in its own characteristically vertical form, contrasting with the surrounding discourse. In *Murphy*, for instance, Samuel Beckett mocks conventional novelistic description by listing the physical attributes of his heroine, Celia, in a flat, statistical fashion:

- | | |
|------------|-----------------|
| Head | Small and round |
| Eyes | Green |
| Complexion | White |
| Hair | Yellow |
| Features | Mobile |
| Neck | 13" |
| Upper arm | 11" |
| Forearm | 9" |

And so on.

The contemporary American writer, Lorrie Moore, has an amusing story called "How To Be an Other Woman" (*Self-Help*, 1985) based on two non-fictional types of discourse, the do-it-yourself manual, and the list. The narrator's insecurity in the role of mistress is aggravated by her lover's praise of his wife:

"She's just incredibly organized. She makes lists for everything. It's pretty impressive."
 ...

girls in the dime stores and the Indian workers in Brazil: the profits made from their labour indirectly fund Nicole's shopping.

The second list is written in a more metaphorical style than the first one. It begins with a striking image, suggestive of both eroticism and gluttony, of the trains traversing the "round belly of the continent", and returns to the metaphor of the railway engine at the end to evoke the dangerous and potentially self-destructive energy of industrial capitalism. "As the whole system swayed and thundered onward" reminds one of the railway symbolism used to similar effect in Dickens' *Dombey and Son* ("The power that forced itself upon its iron way - its own - defiant of all paths and roads, piercing through the heart of every obstacle, and dragging living creatures of all classes, ages, and degrees behind it, was a type of the triumphant monster, Death.")

Typically of Fitzgerald, however, the image is developed in an unexpected and rather elusive way. The analogy shifts from that of a railway engine's furnace to that of a conflagration, and Nicole stands now in the position not of someone stoking a fire, but of someone trying to extinguish it, or at least defying it. The word "fireman" can bear either of these contradictory meanings, and Fitzgerald's use of it perhaps reveals the ambivalence of his own attitude to people like Nicole: a mixture of envy and admiration and disapproval. The words, "She illustrated very simple principles, containing in herself her own doom, but illustrated them so accurately that there was grace in the procedure" sounds like an echo, conscious or unconscious, of Hemingway's definition of courage: "grace under pressure."

interestingly, hasn't dated). But he emphasizes the *miscellaneousness* of the list to convey the completely non-utilitarian nature of Nicole's shopping. Cheap, trivial things like coloured beads, and homely things like honey, are mixed up promiscuously with large functional objects like the bed, expensive toys like the gold-and-ivory chess set, and frivolities like the rubber alligator. There is no logical order in the list, no hierarchy of price, or importance, or grouping of the items according to any other principle. That is the point.

Nicole quickly exceeds the parameters of the list she brought with her, and buys whatever takes her fancy. By exercising her taste and gratifying her whims without regard to economy or commonsense, she conveys a sense of a personality and temperament that is generous, impulsive, amusing and aesthetically sensitive, if out of touch with reality in some important respects. It's impossible not to respond to the fun and the sensual pleasure of this spending spree. How covetable those two chammois-leather jackets sound, kingfisher blue and burning bush (but the key word is "two": where lesser mortals might hesitate between two identical jackets of different, equally attractive colours, Nicole solves the problem by buying both). No wonder her young protégée, and future rival, Rosemary, will try to imitate her style.

Balancing the shopping list, however, is another list, of the human beings, or groups, on whose exploitation Nicole's inherited wealth depends, a list which throws our response into reverse. The whole passage turns on the sentence, "Nicole was the product of much ingenuity and toil," which suddenly makes us see her not as the consumer and collector of commodities, objects, things, but as herself a kind of commodity - the final, exquisite, disproportionately expensive and extravagantly wasteful product of industrial capitalism.

Whereas the first list was a sequence of nouns, the second is a series of verbal phrases: "trains began their run . . . chicle factories fumed . . . men mixed toothpaste . . . girls canned tomatoes . . ." At first sight these processes seem as mutually incongruous and randomly selected as the items of Nicole's shopping, but there is a connection between the men in the toothpaste factories and the