

Language Rhythms: The Music in Words  
from Gabrielle Rico's *Writing the Natural Way*

He was a man past middle age, who with nothing to start with but sound health and a certain grim and puritanical affinity for abstinence and endurance had made a fair farm out of the barren scrap of hill land which he had bought at less than a dollar an acre and married and raised a family on it and fed and clothed them all and even educated them after a fashion, taught them at least hard work, so that as soon as they became big enough to resist him, boys and girls too, they left home (one was a professional nurse, one a prostitute; the oldest had simply vanished completely) so that there now remained the small neat farm which likewise had been worked to the point of mute and unflagging mutual hatred and resistance but which could not leave him and so far had not been able to eject him but which possibly knew that it could and would outlast him, and his wife who possibly had the same, perhaps not hope for resisting, but maybe staff and prop for bearing and enduring.

**W. Faulkner, *The Hamlet***

He would not think about that. That was not his business. That was Golz's business. He had only one thing to do and that was what he should think about and he must think it out clearly and take everything as it came along, and not worry. To worry was as bad as to be afraid. It simply made things more difficult...Think about them being away, he said. Think about them going through the timber. Think about them crossing a creek. Think about them riding through the heather. Think about them going up the slope. Think about them O.K. tonight. Think about them traveling, all night. Think about them hiding up tomorrow. Think about them. God damn it, think about them. *That's just as far as I can think about them*, he said.

**E. Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls***

But mountains yes Rose did think about mountains and about blue when it was on the mountains and feathers when clouds like feathers were on the mountains and birds when one little bird and two little birds and three and four and six and seven and ten and seventeen and thirty or forty little birds all come flying and a big bird came flying and they flew higher than the big bird and they came down and one and then two and then five and then fifty of them came picking down on the head of the big bird and slowly the big bird came falling down between the mountain and the little birds all went home again.

**G. Stein, *The World is Round***

### **Rico on the Faulkner:**

Instead of the staccato cadences of short, choppy sentences, we hear the flowing cadences of Faulkner's inordinately long sentences: in fact, the entire paragraph is one long sentence, with the ebb and flow of a minister intoning dire predictions about the wages of a life of sin. Next, Faulkner almost miraculously compresses one man's history from youth to "past middle age"—including what happened to his five children and an observation on his wife's personality—into one brief vignette. Finally the language is far more demanding than Hemingway's: observe such words as "affinity," "eject," "puritanical," "affinity," and "abstinence."

### **Rico on the Hemingway:**

What characterizes the famous Hemingway voice is, first, recurrence used almost to excess: "think about" is repeated fourteen times. Thinking, under the circumstances, is what the protagonist has a hard time doing: in his staccato language rhythms we sense a thinly controlled panic. The sentences are short, the whole piece in the hard-driving punctuated rhythm of a man's thought, a trapped man in danger of his life. No unnecessary description and no flowing lines are to be found here in this "masculine" piece. The language, too, contributes to the sense of panic—it is so simple as to be elementary—a condition of living experienced when in a state of panic.