

Notation

In the S bus, in the rush hour. A chap of about 26, felt hat with cord instead of a ribbon, neck too long, as if someone's been having a tug-of-war with it. People getting off. The chap in question gets annoyed with one of the men standing next to him. He accuses him of jostling him every time anyone goes past. Snivelling tone which is meant to be aggressive. When he sees a vacant seat he throws himself on to it.

Two hours later, I meet him in the Cour de Rome, in front of the gare Saint-Lazare. He's with a friend who's saying: "You ought to get an extra button put on your overcoat." He shows him where (at the lapels) and why.

Retrograde

You ought to put another button on your overcoat, his friend told him. I met him in the middle of the Cour de Rome, after having left him rushing avidly towards a seat. He had just protested against being pushed by another passenger who, he said, was jostling him every time anyone got off. This craggy young man was the wearer of a ridiculous hat. This took place on the platform of an S bus which was full that particular midday.

Auditory

Quacking and letting off, the S came rasping to a halt alongside the silent pavement. The sun's trombone flattened the midday note. The pedestrians, bawling bagpipes, shouted out their numbers. Some went up a semitone, which sufficed to carry them off towards the Porte Champerret with its chanting arcades. Among the panting élite was a clarinet tube to whom the untowardness of the times had given human form, and the perversity of a hatmaker had given to wear on the coconut an instrument which resembled a guitar that might perhaps have plaited its stringers together to make a girdle. Suddenly in the middle of some minor arrangements between enterprising passengers and bleating tremolos from the covetous conductor, a ludicrous cacophony broke out in which the fury of the double bass was blended with the irritation of the trumpet and the jitters of the bassoon.

Then, after sigh, silence, pause and double pause, there rang forth the triumphant melody of a button in the process of going up an octave.

Parts of Speech

Articles: the, a, an.

Substantives: day, midday, platform, S, bus, Parc, Monceau, man, neck, hat, cord, ribbon, neighbour, toes, time, passenger, argument, seat, hours, front, gare, Saint, Lazare, conversation, friend, opening, overcoat, tailor, button, little.

Adjectives: aforesaid, back, competent, encircled, engrossed, every, free, long, one, plaited, some.

Verbs: to notice, to wear, to start, to interpellate, to claim, to tread, to get, to abandon, to go, to throw, to see, to tell, to reduce, to get, to raise.

Pronouns: I, he, his, him, himself, who.

Adverbs: near, very, instead, suddenly, purposely, in, out, quickly, later, again.

Prepositions: about, on, of, with, by, down, in.

Conjunctions: that, or, but, and.

Interjections

Psst ! h'm ! ah ! oh ! hem ! ah ! ha ! hey ! well ! oh ! pooh ! pooft ! ow ! oo ! ouch ! hey ! eh ! h'm !
pffft ! ow ! oo ! ouch ! hey ! eh ! h'm ! pffft !
Well ! hey ! pooh ! oh ! h'm ! right !

—from *Exercises in Style* (1947) by Raymond Queneau (translated by Barbara Wright)