

**I REALLY MUST WIPE
MY MOUTH AFTER EACH
BITE OF THIS HAMBURGER**

Kevin Bertram

I have concerned myself with nothing. Not nothing at all, but rather the nothing of all. This began with the idea that the essence of a thing has its place in its most opposite counterpoint. Life is plumped by death. There are fingertips that socket perfectly into other belly-buttons. As we twist a towel –a back straightens, and as it stiffens the heart softens, until it shrivels into.

I Really Must Wipe My Mouth After Each Bite of This Hamburger is not a story. It begins with a simple statement. Something has happened, as they always do. In writing, events usually occur, but in *This Hamburger* they occur differently. They do not occur to help us move forward in time, but rather they occur to help us understand something else. This something else is most often completely unrelated to the event that has happened. We learn experientially over the course of our lives, and we relay this knowledge through stories of things happening. These events are reworked and embellished with specifics that have been pieced in over time. I am retelling the story that is never told, the story that never explains itself, and by completely avoiding its own events allows us to understand it more completely. Because I am not telling stories, I am just writing words.

THE EVENT

In *This Hamburger* the event is used as a springboard to deconstruct all parts within and without the event. Often, a system is created within the first few sentences that allows for repetition and slight change. The various sets of systems are an integral part of *This Hamburger*. They bring understanding without announcing the lesson. By following a pattern a common connection between parts is established. Placing different sets of ideas within these parameters allows for new relationships to be established. For example:

The moments it sits upon then, now, and later must be addressed and labeled, if not drawn toward with an arrow, around with a circle, hot-dogged with brackets, underlined with a ruler, enlightened with short concentric dashes, or retraced with patience.

The system within this excerpt can be shown as the following (with italicized explanations following bracketed sections):

[The moments it sits upon] *It has happened, in some moment it resides (sits)*
[then, now, and later] *in the past, the present, and the future.*
[must be addressed and labeled] *It should be remembered (written down, noted mentally)*

if not

- (a) [drawn toward with **an arrow**]
- (b) [around with a **circle**]
- (c) [hot-dogged with **brackets**]
- (d) [underlined with a **ruler**]
- (e) [enlightened with **short concentric dashes**]
- or
- (f) [retraced with **patience**]

Part (a) establishes the system. It determines that the first half (underlined) of the following phrases will be an adverb describing the manner in which the event will be remembered. It also establishes that the second half (in bold) will describe what will be used to employ this particular manner of remembering. Part (b) follows the system directly. Part (c) has a slight variation in its adverbial manner. It uses the phrase “hot-dogged.” This is no longer an adverb, but rather a verb in the past tense. Taking food, a “hot dog”, and turning into a verb “to hot dog (something)” results in an action that must be invented. Hot-dogging may relate to the act of sandwiching, or perhaps even chewing. Part (d) then follows part (c) by continuing to use a verb in the first half. Part (e) continues the verbal trend, yet uses a verb –enlightened, in which its action is not a physical motion. Part (f) then reverts back to a motion verb, but now instead of using a concrete noun like arrow, circle, brackets, ruler, or dashes, an abstract noun –patience, is used.

Another technique used is explicit determination, resulting in short direct statements that accumulate to a particular create mode of happening. In the following excerpt, adjectives are rarely used to describe the manner of things. Rather, the characters are created through what they do, and say.

He asked me about the weather. I politely replied, but wished it were a bit cooler. He called me a sadist. I laughed, my ears were red. He folded my fingers back and said (among other squinted things), "I have no closet. I have no windows." I replied again, but wished it would stay this warm forever, and ever. God bless you man. God bless you man. God bless you man. God bless you. I'll sit here fifteen more minutes to say I'm sorry.

This excerpt can be dissected as (with explanations italicized):

[He asked me about the weather.] *He asks.*
[I politely replied, but wished it were a bit cooler.] *I respond, and extend.*
[He called me a sadist.] *He accuses.*
[I laughed, my ears were red.] *I respond, my body responds.*
[He folded my fingers back] *He responds back*
[and said] *with words*
[(among other squinted things),]
["I have no closet. I have no windows."] *He explains why.*
[I replied again, but wished it would stay this warm, forever, and ever.] *I respond, and this time, comfort.*
[God bless you man. God bless you man. God bless you man. God bless you.] *Unknowingly, he guilts.*
[I'll sit here fifteen more minutes to say I'm sorry.] *I do or do not apologize.*

Underlying all lines written, there is a much simpler mode of wording. The intentions of actions and the intentions of words are much like this phenomenon. I could say the phrase, "I am hungry." Or I could phrase it by describing why I am hungry: "I haven't eaten today." Or, what I would do if I were eating, "I'd inhale that..." Or, my physical state: "My stomach is screaming."

UNITS

There are words I can use –words that are indeed mine. There are also words I could never use. These words are certainly not words. I am incapable of using these words in conversation, so I certainly cannot write them, and they do not appear in *This Hamburger*.

Often this occurs in the case of adjectives. The possible adjectives for every noun in the lexicon are infinite, and thus are rarely used in *This Hamburger*. This is because as much as I would like to be able to tell you *how* something is, I cannot. 'Nice' to you, is not 'nice' to me. 'Prickly' to me, is 'bristly' to you, while 'bristly' to me is much less

‘prickly’ and more ‘unshaven.’ So, the adjective is often omitted. Descriptions become statements:

I fell out of the tree. I was walking across the ice, and I wasn’t. These things always happen in pairs. I thought about fruit and fruition. *I was in pears.* Of course, two of them. Two pairs of pears. The first pear of the first pair housed my head, but not my hair! The second pear of the first pair housed my rabbits, but not my teeth! The first pear of the second pair housed my sweaters, but not my toothpaste! And so it was inevitable that the second pear of the second pair house nothing at all, but not me! I danced in that pear until the bruises rose. And of course! My roses bruised, also. And again, my cheeks, they slipped onto the stove. Please! I see! I see! I’m supposed to do these things!

Simply put, this passage is about embarrassment, but instead of describing the color of my cheeks, or the moistness of my palms, I present actions and motions. Take this sentence for example:

I was walking across the ice, and I wasn’t.

I fell. That is it. At first read, this feels quite simple, even dull –perhaps boring. Yet, this type of sentence is what gives *This Hamburger* life! *I was walking across the ice.* Many people are expecting this to mean: “Once, I was walking across the ice, and I kept walking. Soon, I reached the end of the ice and stepped off of it...” This presupposition of the nature of motion, and conventional storytelling pace is used and played with. Immediately, the “and I wasn’t” dislodges the reader. The falling of the narrator isn’t immediately apparent.

BEING READ ALOUD

The reading of the text attempts to leave the words unembellished. The flavors of each string of words is left simply to the words themselves, and not to the dramatic delivery of a somewhat acted performance. Of course, this straightforward and flat delivery is in itself a style, yet its style is presented as the absence of style. Breaths are sometimes rarely taken, and in certain moments, words may be lost. The words, still heard, may be heard seconds later, creating a folded, mashed, squeezed together processing for the listener. It is impossible to sit on each and every moment of the voiced text. This is purposeful. The performance connects to the core of reason for *This*

Hamburger. This Hamburger, as it is heard only lasts as long as you can listen. There is a beginning and an end. Yet the beginning never starts, and the end never stops. The words stay longer than the voice can resonate.

THE WORDS

The words are not to be taken to heart. Yet each and every word has a heart. It lives to be breathed. The subjects are arbitrary. They have no relevance to actual happenings. The vehicle is the sentence. I am circling ideas in this vehicle turning the wheel ever so slightly as I gradually reach the center of each and every idea. The ideas are nothing, but collectively they aspire towards the greatest things. Things like everything. Things like all of us. Things like you. Things like things.