

Imitation and Analysis Essay

“1. As to just what this ineffable quality was . . . well, it obviously involved bravery. 2. But it was not bravery in the simple sense of being willing to risk your life. 3. The idea seemed to be that any fool could do that, if that was all that was required, just as any fool could throw away his life in the process. 4. No, the idea here (in the all-enclosing fraternity) seemed to be that a man should have the ability to go up in a hurtling piece of machinery and put his hide on the line and then have the moxie, the reflexes, the experience, the coolness, to pull it back in the last yawning moment—and then to go up again the next day, and the next day, and every next day, even if the series should prove infinite—and, ultimately, in its best expression, do so in a cause that means something to thousands, to a people, a nation, to humanity, to God. 5. Nor was there a test to show whether or not a pilot had this righteous quality. 6. There was, instead, a seemingly infinite series of tests. 7. A career in flying was like climbing one of those ancient Babylonian pyramids made up of a dizzy progression of steps and ledges, a ziggurat, a pyramid extraordinarily high and steep; and the idea was to prove at every foot of the way up that pyramid that you were one of the elected and anointed ones who had the right stuff and could move higher and higher and even—ultimately, God willing, one day

—that you might be able to join that special few at the very top, that elite who had the capacity to bring tears to men’s eyes, the very Brotherhood of the Right Stuff itself.”

—Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff*, pp. 18-19

Key:

Alliteration

Anacoluthon

Anastrophe

Asyndeton

Ellipsis

Fragment

Parentheses

Polysyndeton

Simile

<i>Term/Tropes/Schemes</i>	<i>Sentence/Location</i>
Alliteration	2
Anacoluthon	4, 7
Anastrophe	1
Asyndeton	4, 4, 7, 7
Ellipsis	1
Fragment	2, 5
Parentheses	4
Polysyndeton	4, 4, 7
Simile	7

Imitation

As to what was in the dish... well, it had chicken. But the chicken was not bad, plainly put. I believe what was rotten, what had gone bad in the dish, was more surprising than that. I believe what had gone bad (rather than just tasting bad) was the milk and cheese, not the beef, the chicken, the pork — oh, how we were deceived — but that which you would not expect, the cheese, the milk, the dairy. Not that it tasted bad. In reality, the cheese, it tasted fine. It tasted like when your mother who you trust grates it off the block, fresh and creamy; it was not fresh, it has spoiled and was rotten and had gone sour — the debilitating illness that resulted— that one would think we had been poisoned, that there had been an attempted murder, that someone wanted us dead.

Does *The Right Stuff* have “the right stuff?”

The passage I chose to imitate was from Tom Wolfe’s non-fiction novel *The Right Stuff*, which details the first 15 years of America’s space program and follows the first Project Mercury astronauts. I had to read the book in high school, and I found the style of writing very interesting. Tom Wolfe was a journalist that became fascinated with the space program, as well as the danger the test pilots were willing to put themselves in while pursuing their dream, and the physical and mental requirements of such a job. The novel is written in a journalist style, and includes interviews from the pilots, astronauts, and their families. I thought that the style employed by Wolfe was informative, and containing a narrative feel, while not losing the base of journalistic writing. I had difficulty identifying a passage to imitate, until I remembered the differed style Wolfe used. I chose this passage because it details exactly what Wolfe thought these men had that others did not, what fascinated him in the first place. Because this passage was so important to the book, which is called *The Right Stuff*, a term also mentioned at the end of the passage, I felt the passage would hold more significance than others, and would therefore contain many different tropes and schemes in order to aid in the reader feeling that sense of gravity that made Wolfe feel he needed to share the story of these men with others.

There were a few dominant troupes in the passage. The most dominant trope in the passage, I feel, was Asyndeton, which is throughout the passage. Wolfe also uses different forms of Asyndeton; rather than the typical short version like in the first and

second examples of sentence 4, he also includes more complex examples that I felt still fell into the category of Asyndeton, such as in sentence 7, in the second example that completes the passage. This use of Asyndeton is for emphasis, to bring attention to these words, in a direct, list-like manner. The second most dominant tropes in the passage are Anacoluthon, Fragment, and Polysyndeton. Polysyndeton is similar to Asyndeton in that it is a repetition to put emphasis, but it contains and. Because of the frequency of both of these tropes, it gives insight into Tom Wolfe's style of writing, what he chose to put emphasis on, and how he chose to portray that emphasis. In the first example, the use of these repetitious schemes acts as a kind of list of the requirements to have "the right stuff," then as a list of who is impacted by these qualities besides those that possess them. The repetition is then used to explain the way in which one can prove they have "the right stuff," and then as a description of what an accomplishment it is to have "the right stuff." Because of the way these two tropes are used, Asyndeton and Polysyndeton, it shows the style of writing Wolfe used, and how he wanted to be clear and straightforward in his description of "the right stuff."

The other two most common tropes used in the passage, Anacoluthon and Fragment, also give insight into the style. Wolfe uses Anacoluthon twice in the passage, both times to break up extremely long sentences, in sentences 4 and 7. Sometimes sentences of such a length are necessary, or are important to the style, and I feel that Wolfe used sentences like this because he wanted to portray a single image in one unit, rather than breaking it up into many shorter sentences. It would have made it easier to

read, but I feel it would have changed the urgency or importance. For this reason, he uses Anacoluthon to give a break to the reader, and to change the rhythm of the sentence during that breath. One of the sections of Anacoluthon, in sentence 4, contains Polysyndeton. The second example in sentence 7 is a more traditional example of Anacoluthon, because the format changes from how the rest of the sentence is set up. The third, Fragment, is also frequently used. These Fragment sentences are the shortest in the passage, which one would assume would be the case, but they are still not short. Both of the examples of Fragment, in sentences 2 and 5, are both completions of the thought in the preceding sentence. Wolfe's tendency to write very long sentences has an affect of making these fragment sentences feel out of place, which gives them more emphasis to those sentences.

After going through the passage and identifying all of the tropes and schemes, I found it much easier to imitate the passage than I had in past exercises. By dividing the passage up into these tropes, it made it easier to include the specific tropes in my imitation and keep what I was writing about, which is wildly different than what the original passage discusses, in line with how the original passage was written.

I feel that the schemes and tropes used in this passage were used to put emphasis on certain parts of the passage, as well as make these parts memorable as the reader continues the novel. Because this passage does occur in the beginning of the novel, pages 18-19, it not only makes the points mentioned memorable, it also sets up the style of writing of the rest of the novel. I believe the base of the style is journalistic, but still

contains a narrative component throughout. The style Wolfe uses, as well as the tropes used, are all for emphasis, to bring attention to certain sentences and claims, and to show the importance of what is being said, how it will be useful while continuing to read, and, most importantly, showing why Wolfe has chosen to write about it.

Works Cited

“II. The Right Stuff.” *The Right Stuff*, by Tom Wolfe, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979,
pp. 18–19.