Stafford College of Art and Design

Comparative settings of narrative text

Supplementary to:
Dimensional relationships in the composition of text

Specimen pages using two- and three-column formats
with standard intervals between words and paragraphs.

Typeface: Monotype Baskerville, Series 169;
9-point, cast on 10-point and
9-point, cast on 12-point.

Printing workshop,
January 1971

Since producing these specimens we have had second thoughts
about the use of a 4-unit standard for the co-ordination of word-space,
principally because this value can cause extra work for the machine compositor
with no advantage to the reader.

We would now recommend a 5-unit interval.

Typeface and size: Monotype Baskerville, Series 169. 9-pt (9 set), cast on 10-pt. Item: 9.10/5/20
Word space: 4 units of set.
Space between paragraphs: 5 points.
Maximum possible line length (measure): 20 pica ems.

In so many ways the Augustan age seems to be a time of order and of calm, a haven between the turmoil of the Civil War and the onset of the Industrial Revolution. The measured prose of Addison and Steele, the rolling parklands and elegant facades, the portraits of Reynolds and Gainsborough, the distaste for 'enthusiasm', the ubiquitous rhyming couplet, the 'balanced' constitution, all seem to point uncompromisingly in one direction.

Yet if we turn to the political history of the period we enter upon wholly different territory. Current research into the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is revealing a society so deeply torn apart over political issues that it is not easy to find adequate parallels either before or since.

In part these deep rooted political tensions were a question of geography. Britain in the Augustan era was much less of a unified country than it is today. In the words of Professor Everitt, the pre-industrial nation was 'a union of partially independent country-estates' rather than a single entity. It is interesting to note that the word 'country' was hardly ever used by contemporaries to describe the nation as a whole. It denoted rather the local community, the market town with its cluster of villages. Each area of Britain had its own distinctive ethos, its own character and traditions. Very often an area would even have its own style of clothing – the Scots kilt for instance – and its own kind of food and drink. In Herefordshire, for example, the inhabitants drank cider with their meals instead of the beer that was consumed in most other counties. By all accounts it was superb stuff; even many of the local gentry preferred it to a good hock or claret, as Thomas Baskerville found when he was entertained to 'a good dinner and excellent cider' by Sir James Bridges. We can still catch a faint glimpse of the culinary distinctness of each region by the names that survive today – Lancashire hotpot, Bakewell pudding, Chorley cakes, Wensleydale cheese, and so on. And, of course, on top of all these other differences there was the linguistic problem. Each region of the country had its own peculiar dialect. Some of these local forms of speech were so distinct that it was well nigh impossible for an outsider to make head or tail of them. When, for instance, that invetorate traveller Daniel Defoe wished to converse with a lead miner in the Matlock area he was forced to hire an interpreter before exchanges could begin.

The reasons for this regional diversity were numerous. Undoubtedly one factor was the power and independence of the J.P.s. Another was the appalling state of the roads, which inhibited the flow of ideas as well as the movement of people and goods. Then again, most localities had a close network of intermarriage. It was a favourite saying among Wealden men that 'in Kent they are all first cousins'. Literally speaking, of course, the phrase was quite untrue, but it does capture nicely the clannish, inbred character of so many parts of the country at this time. Perhaps the most interesting of all the factors contributing to the separateness of the different regions was the rise of the county town. All over England in the Augustan period the larger provincial centres were beginning to ape London and develop their own 'season'. Horseracing and assemblies proliferated. York had its own coffee houses as early as the 1660's. Even Shrewsbury, tucked away in the Welsh borderland, acquired a fine new hospital and carefully landscaped public parks and riverside walks. It was at this time too that the provincial newspaper got under way. Norwich was first in the field in 1701, and was quickly followed by Bristol in 1702, and Exeter in 1704. All these local urban developments meant that the majority of people could find all that the heart desired without having to set foot outside their own neighbourhood.

Whatever the cause, however, the fact remains that Augustan Britain was very much a patchwork affair, a country whose inhabitants had a strong sense of locality, of belonging to a particular region. And this powerful sense of local identity was one of the leading causes of the sharp political tensions within Augustan society. It was so for two reasons. In the first place, because so many people had sunk such deep roots into their own particular corner of the land, it meant that they were extremely touchy about provincial autonomy and hence often almost pathologically suspicious of the doings of the Court and of Whitehall. Throughout the Augustan period, in fact, there was always a very strong 'Country' element in Parliament which kept a careful watch on the behaviour of the central government, and was ready to squeal loud and long at the slightest hint of excessive zeal on the part of the executive. In the reign of William III this Country group became so formidable that, as Dr. Rubini has shown in a recent study, it actually crystallized for a time into a disciplined Country Party led by men of real calibre, like Sir Thomas Clarges and Paul Foley. But even when there was no identifiable Country Party, Country feelings inside the Commons remained a major devisive force, as the frequent Place Bills, the oft vaunted preference for the local militia rather than the central standing army, and the periodic demands for 'economical reform' all show. Indeed, no Augustan politician could hope for a quite life if he failed to take account of Country susceptibilities. One reason why Walpole stayed at the top for over twenty years was that his policy of peace and quiet at all costs was calculated to tread on as few country toes as possible.

But the Court/Country clash was only half the story. As well as producing tension between the provinces and the centre, the strong sense of local identity which pervaded Augustan society resulted in friction between the localities themselves. This second kind of conflict was most clearly evident in the most significant of all the local divisions at the time – the division between England and Scotland. During the Augustan period English contempt for the Scots was always considerable, and frequently savagely expressed. 'The most sacred ties, as oaths and the like, are snapped asunder by them (the Scots)', wrote one anonymous English pamphleteer in 1705. 'There is nothing among them to their kinds that is not vendible . . . proverbially clownish people . . . their women ugly, stupid, immodest'. 'The people are proud, arrogant, vainglorious, boasters, bloody, barbarous and inhuman butchers', ran another diatribe. 'Cozenance and theft is in perfection among them'. Their church services are 'blasphemy as I blush to mention'. Some English travellers, bent on visiting Scotland, were so revolted when they actually caught sight of the place and its people that they immediately turned back in disgust. The redoubtable Celia Fiennes, for instance, did so, and so too did Sir John Percival. Dr. Johnson's reaction was similarly John Bullish. And, of course, this English antipathy was fully reciprocated by the Scots. One major cause of political tension in Augustan Britain, then, was the patchwork nature of the country. An even more devisive force was party animosity. Time and time again the Augustan world was set ablaze by the clash of Whig and Tory. It was not just in Parliament that the conflict raged. It spread out over the whole nation. Provincial elections at this time were often little more than pitched battles between Whig and Tory Tory supporters. At the Coventry election of 1705, for instance, the Tory candidates led the mob

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Word space: 4 units of set.
Space between paragraphs: 3 points.
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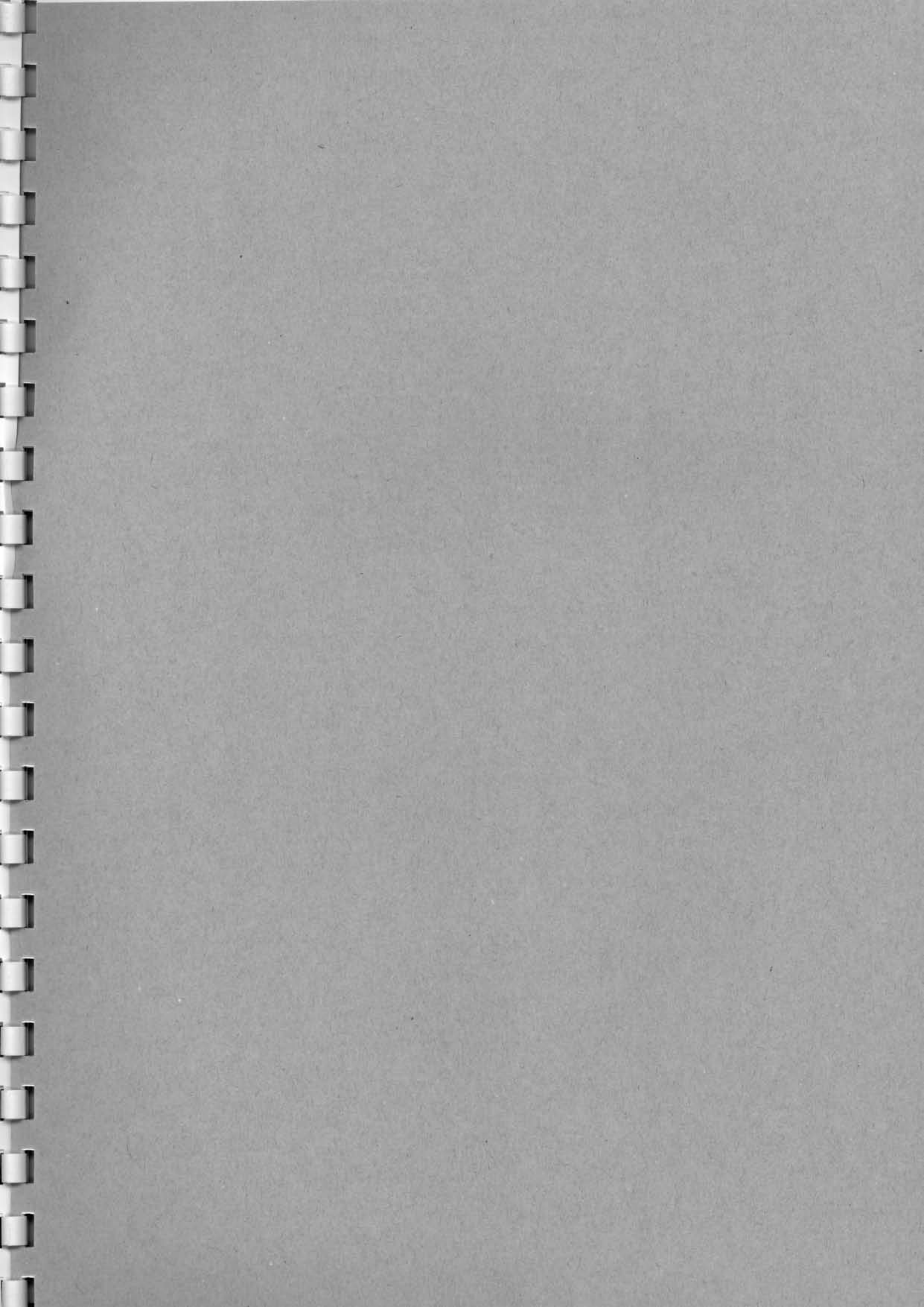

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