Taken from the monography (Style in Fiction, by Geoffrey Leech**)**

7.8 Cohesion The rhetoric of text controls, as we saw in section 7.4, the way in which the message is segmented into units. Segmentation, however, implies its opposite – cohesion. The units must be implicitly or explicitly bound together; they must not be just a random collection of sentences. The connectivity of the elements of a text is essentially a matter of meaning and reference; but we are interested, here, in the formal means by which these connections are signalled. One kind of cohesion is syntactic inclusion: two noun phrases 'the princess' and 'the hunter' may be related by being part of the same clause: 'The princess loved the hunter'; but our concern now is with the linear connectivity which takes place between sentences, as well as within them: 'The princess loved the hunter. But she could not marry him.' The second sentence illustrates the two major kinds of linear cohesion: the pronouns she and him are examples of cross-reference, and the conjunction but is an example of linkage. By cross-reference we understand the various means which language uses to indicate that 'the same thing' is being referred to or mentioned in different parts of the text. Linkage, on the other hand, is the use of overt connectors: coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, and linking adverbials. The following is a list of the most important cohesive devices in English:18 A: Cross-reference 1 Definite reference (a) personal pronouns: he, she, it, they, etc. (b) the definite article the (c) deictics: this, that, these, those, etc. (d) implied: same, different, other, else, such, etc. 2 Substitution: pro-forms such as one, ones, do and so which substitute for other linguistic expressions. 3 Ellipsis: omission or deletion of elements whose meaning is 'understood' because it is recoverable from the context

Formal repetition: repeated use of an expression (morpheme, lexical item, proper name, phrase, etc.) which has already occurred in the context.

Elegant variation: use of an alternative expression (not a pronoun or a substitute) as a replacement for an expression in the context. [Note: By context we mean the relevant preceding (or sometimes following) part of the text.] B: Linkage 6 Coordinating conjunctions: and, or, but, both . . . and, neither . . . nor, etc.

Linking adverbials: for, so, yet, however, therefore, meanwhile, for example, etc. The list is incomplete, but will, we hope, be useful for reference. Notice that the items listed under A1 (definite reference) are not necessarily cohesive: these items refer to things which are in some sense contextually 'given', but the givenness can be supplied by extralinguistic, as well as linguistic context. When they are cohesive, such items may be said to co-refer to some other expression in the text. Cohesion is an important part of what makes a text, both in literary and non-literary writing, but it is not always an important aspect of literary style. In literary fiction it can most often be seen as a background to more significant style markers, just as the framework 2

which makes a building hang together is rarely the most interesting part of its architecture. To illustrate this obbligato working of cohesion, we choose part of the description of the Marabar Caves in E.M. Forster's A Passage to India (Chapter 12):

[48] Only the wall of the circular chamber has been polished thus (1). The sides of the tunnel are left rough, they impinge as an afterthought upon the internal perfection (2). An entrance was necessary, so mankind made one (3). But elsewhere, deeper in the granite, are there certain chambers that have no entrances (4)? Chambers never unsealed since the arrival of the gods (5). Local report declares that these exceed in number those that can be visited, as the dead exceed the living – four hundred of them, four thousand or million (6). Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil (7). One of them is rumoured within the boulder that swings on the summit of the highest of the hills; a bubble-shaped cave that has neither ceiling nor floor, and mirrors its own darkness in every direction infinitely (8). If the boulder falls and smashes, the cave will smash too – empty as an Easter egg (9). The boulder because of its hollowness sways in the wind, and even moves when a crow perches upon it.

The passage provides examples of the kinds of cohesion we have listed. A:

Cross-reference 1 Definite reference (a) personal pronouns: (2) they (co-referring to 'the sides'); (6) them (co-referring to 'chambers'); (10) it (co-referring to 'the boulder') etc. (b) the definite article: (9) 'the boulder' (co-referring to 'the boulder that swings on the highest of the hills'); 'the cave' (co-referring to 'a bubble-shaped cave') etc. (c) deictics: (1) thus; (6) these; those. (d) implied: (4) elsewhere (i.e. in a different place from that already mentioned); deeper (i.e. deeper than this). 2 Substitution: (3) one (= 'an entrance'). 3 Ellipsis: (6) four thousand (= four thousand of them); or million (= four million of them); etc. 4 Formal repetition: (1) chamber, (4) chambers; (7) nothing, nothing, nothing; (6) exceed, exceed; (9) smash, smash, etc. 5 'Elegant' variation: (1) the wall – (2) the sides; (9) empty – (10) hollowness; (8) swings – (10) sways; (8) the highest of the hills – (10) its stupendous pedestal. B: Linkage 6 Coordinating conjunctions: (4) but; (8) neither . . . nor; etc. 7 Linking adverbials: (3) so; (9) too; (10) hence.4

Cross-reference Cross-reference may be a device either for a repetition of meaning or for a repetition of reference. The most explicit kind of repetition, in each case, is what we have called 'formal repetition', the simple repetition of words or phrases. But cohesion frequently involves the principle of reduction, whereby language allows us to condense our messages, avoiding the repeated expression of repeated ideas. The most common form of reduction is by means of third-person pronouns, of which there are nine examples in [48] above: for example, it in (10) repeats the reference to 'the boulder' in the same sentence. Semantic repetition can, similarly, be reduced by substitution or ellipsis; thus Forster's repetition of the verb exceed in (6) could have 3

been avoided in two ways: [49] Local report declares that these exceed in number those that can be visited 1 exceed 5 1 formal repetition as the dead 2 do 6 the living. 2 substitution 3 – 7 3 ellipsis The rhetoric of text 199 Where choice of reduction exists, we are generally guided, at a practical level, by two principles which may be phrased as follows:

‘Do not reduce where reduction leads to unclarity.’ ‘Otherwise, reduce as much as possible.’ In other words, it is a good thing, on the whole, to make your message concise, so long as this can be done without loss of clarity.20 But even in workaday prose, there are two other principles of a more aesthetic kind which interfere with this maxim. In the first place, there is a principle of variety: too much repetition, either of lexical items or of reduced forms, can be tedious, and hence elegant variation becomes an allowable, and indeed welcome, device of cross-reference

. We have already seen in the discussion of Henry James (section 3.5) that this can become a powerful thematic device in literature. It can take the form either of a repetition of meaning (by the use of a synonymous or almost synonymous expression) or of a repetition of reference. In [48], the former is illustrated by the verbs swing and sway, which are virtual synonyms in the context. The latter is illustrated by the use of the phrase ‘its stupendous pedestal’ (10), referring back to ‘the highest of the hills’. A second principle favours the use of formal repetition even where the alternative of reduction would be possible and acceptable. We might name this the principle of expressive repetition, seeing it as a kind of aesthetic counterbalance to that of elegant variation. Repetition is expressive in that it gives emphasis or emotive heightening to the repeated meaning.21 Perhaps Forster was instinctively following this principle when he chose the first of three alternatives in [49]. Here, as is often the case, formal repetition is a means of strengthening a syntactic parallelism: ‘A exceeds B, as C exceeds D’.

The parallelism is potent because it compares the undiscovered caves to the unseen dead: a cosmic image which adds to the portrayal of the Caves as a place where everything is reduced to a mystic infinity of nothingness. Appropriately, the word nothing itself is repeated three times in (7), one of these repetitions being an ‘asyntactic’ repetition (‘Nothing, nothing would be added . . .) which has a purely rhetorical value. For a more complex example of expressively redundant repetition, we may look back to our earlier Conrad example: [14] She saw there an object. That object was the gallows. She was afraid of the gallows. The repetition of the gallows here is all the more striking because it appears dysfunctional in two ways: it resists both the principle of reduction and the principle of end-focus. According to the normal convention, the second occurrence of ‘the gallows’ cannot bear nuclear stress because it is old information, and so the pronunciation would have to be: ‘She was afràid of the gallows’. But by these apparent violations of textual principles, the repetition becomes doubly expressive of the horror with which Mrs Verloc regards the image that her mind has conjured up. Returning to Forster, we note that the last two paragraphs of A Passage to India provide another impressive example of repetition (this time combined with pronominal reduction): 4

[50] ‘Why can’t we be friends now?’ said the other, holding him affectionately. ‘It’s what I want. It’s what you want.’ But the horses didn’t want it – they swerved apart; the earth didn’t want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn’t want it, they said in their hundred voices, ‘No, not yet,’ and the sky said ‘No, not there.’ The effect of this ending can only be fully explained by reference to cohesion. The last paragraph is built chiefly on a series of parallelistic statements: ‘A didn’t want it; B didn’t want it; C didn’t want it . . .’ The repeated words ‘want it’ refer back to the balanced sentences in the former paragraph: ‘It’s what I want. It’s what you want.’ And it here in turn refers back to ‘Why can’t we be friends?’ said by the Englishman Fielding to the Indian Aziz.

So the whole paragraph looks back to this farewell conversation between friends resigning themselves to the irreconcilability of East and West. In this way, Forster leads us away from a specific human encounter, by stages, to a conclusion which relates it to the intangibilities of society, culture, environment which prevent the reconciliation. The parallelism begins with the two men, then moves progressively to their horses, to the earth on which they tread, to the immediate setting of an Indian town, and ultimately to the overarching sky. The personification which runs through this receding parallelism is more than a vain figure of speech; it summons up the many episodes in the book (notably that of the Marabar Caves) in which inscrutable nature, the very land and sky of India, blends with Indian civilisation to enforce its influence on man's motives and actions. Reduction also plays a part in this effect: the piling up of noun phrases ('the temples, the tank, the jail . . .), each with its predicate 'didn't want it' deleted, makes the forces against reconciliation seem overwhelming. A last and telling example of ellipsis comes in the final utterances 'No, not yet,' and 'No, not there'. The implied omission 'you can . . . be friends' links them directly, as answers, to Fielding's humanly unanswered question with which the passage begins.