

Activity 17.4 - *Vulgar Errors* - further syntactic analysis

- And therefore need not wonder at the variety of opinions; while some conceived it to be **flos maris*, and many, a bituminous substance floating upon the sea.

This is the second sentence of Text 119, but does not correspond to modern punctuation conventions, which would probably prefer it to be part of a longer sentence making up the first paragraph,

- What Sperma-Ceti is, men might justly doubt, since the learned *Hofmannus* in his work of Thirty years, saith plainly, **Nescio quid sit*, and therefore need not wonder at the variety of opinions, while some conceived it to be **flos maris*, and many, a bituminous substance floating upon the sea.

Students are sometimes discouraged from beginning a sentence with *and* or *but*. This is not a rule of punctuation, however, only a guide to acceptable style. Another reason to prefer the longer sentence is because we would expect the deletion of the subject *men* of the verb *need not*, to occur within a sentence. Browne's punctuation shows that sentences are written constructions, not spoken, because a simple change of full stop to comma leaves the clauses and word order completely unchanged. Browne's sentence consists of a MCI,

- **MCI** therefore (*men*) need not wonder at the variety of opinions,

which is linked to the first MCI by the conjunction *And*, and followed by two conjoined correlative clauses beginning with *while*, following the *since* in the first sentence.

- **AdvCI** while some (*men*) conceived it to be *flos maris*,
and **AdvCI** (*while*) many (*men*) (*conceived it to be*) a bituminous substance
floating upon the sea

The phrases in *italics* fill out the deleted items and show how the cohesion of a sentence can be achieved by leaving things out. Such deletions are part of everyday speech as well as formal writing, but in this text they contribute to the formal balance of the style of the sentence.

Instead of a lengthy complete analysis of the text, all we need to do is to demonstrate from selected parts of it how its formal style is maintained by features of the grammatical structure as well as of the vocabulary.

1st example

- That it was not the spawn of the Whale, according to vulgar conceit, or nominal appellation
Phylosophers have always doubted ...

The construction *That it was not the spawn of the Whale* is a NCI functioning as the object of *doubted*, and because it comes first as theme, followed by the PrepP *according to vulgar conceit, or nominal appellation*, the clause is front-weighted as well as having the marked OASP order of clause elements:

- **O-theme** **A**
[That it was not the spawn of the Whale, according to vulgar conceit, or nominal appellation]
S **P**
Phylosophers have always doubted,

