

75 Emphasis (1) cleft sentences

The 2006 Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to the Turkish author Orhan Pamuk. It was **his exploration of the clashes and interactions of different cultures** that brought him the award.



1 Form and use of cleft sentences

In a divided or cleft sentence, information which could be given in one clause is divided into two parts, each with its own verb:

Vanessa has made the greatest impact. (normal sentence: single clause, one verb)

***It is Vanessa** who has made the greatest impact.* (cleft sentence: two clauses, two verbs)

We use this pattern to emphasise new information, give explanations or make a contrast with a previous statement:

*All of the Redgrave family are gifted actors. But it is **Vanessa** who has made the greatest impact in the world of feature films.*

2 It cleft sentences

It cleft sentences have this pattern:

It isn't just his outlandish sense of humour that I'm complaining about.
It was his exploration of the clashes ... that brought him the award.

it + a form of *be* (+ *not* and/or *adverb*) + emphasised word/phrase + *that/which/who* clause

We can use *it* to emphasise the following:

(neutral)	→ Tom saw Will Smith at the awards party last night.
subject	→ It was Tom who saw Will Smith at the awards party last night.
object	→ It was Will Smith that Tom saw at the awards party last night.
adverbial phrases	→ It was last night that Tom saw Will Smith at the awards party. It was at the awards party that Tom saw Will Smith last night.

We can use *when* and *where* (instead of *that*) in subordinate clauses of time and place:

It was **in January** when the test results were published.

It's **in Green Street market** where the best bargains can be found.



We do not use *how*, *why*, or *what* in this way:

✗ *It was greed why he did it.* ✓ *It was because of greed that he did it.*

✗ *It is using a calculator how he does it.* ✓ *It is by using a calculator that he does it.*

✗ *It is the speed of the ride what is so thrilling.* ✓ *It is the speed of the ride that is so thrilling.*

We can reverse *it* + verb and the emphasised element in *it* clefts, but only in a very formal, literary style:

*And thus **Cézanne it was** who took the first steps towards Impressionism.*

Less literary: *And so it was Cézanne who took the first steps towards Impressionism.*