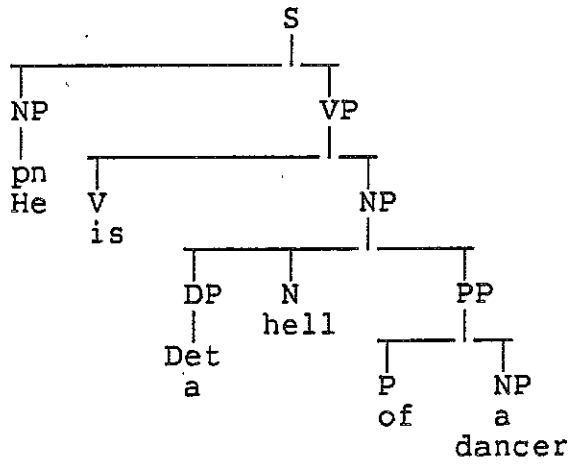
Somewhat of a Squib

There are some sentences which, strictly speaking, are generated by our grammar, but which would have different meanings from the idiomatic ones intended if they were generated form our PS rules as they are now:

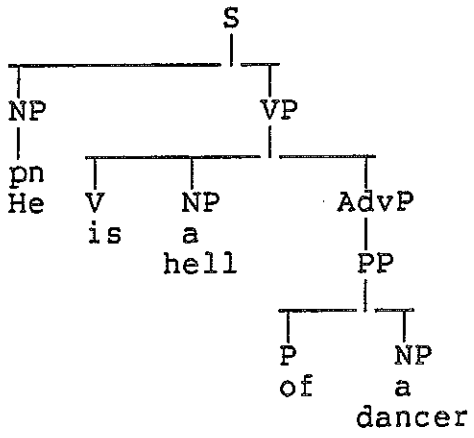
1. He's a hell of a dancer.
2. My daughter is something of a clod.
3. This movie looks like something of a bore.
4. That man is a bit of a flake.
5. Something of an argument was brewing between them.

If (1), for instance, were generated by our grammar, it would have to have one of the two following Deep Structures:

1.1:



1.2:



The first possibility is more likely to be the Deep Structure of (1) then the second, but I would argue that it is

still not the correct one. If it were, what the sentence would basically mean is, "he is a hell." The PP "of a dancer" would modify the NP "a hell". But is is obvious that what the surface structure really means is "he is a dancer." The phrase "a hell of" says what kind of dancer he is, i.e., modifies the NP it precedes. It is easy to see the difference between sentences like (1) and the following examples:

6. She was a woman of many talents.
7. I read a book of proverbs.
8. A bit of dust is stuck in my eye.

These sentences, in which the PP's are part of an NP, have DS's like the first one I proposed above.

Our PS rules state:

```
NP --> (DP) (AP)* N (PP)
   --> pn
   --> S-BAR
   --> (DP) N-BAR S-BAR

DP --> Det
   --> NP
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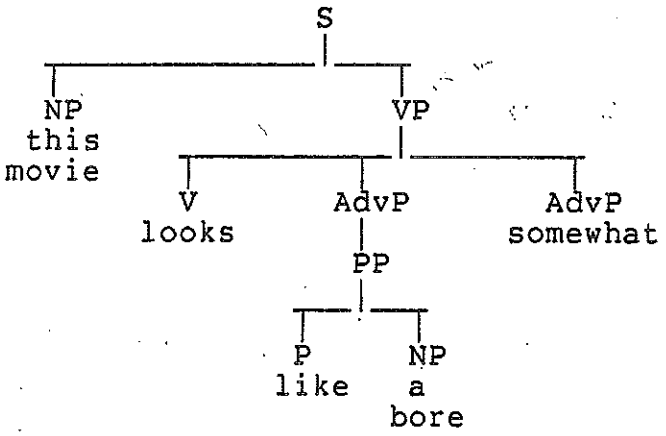
While these rules account for all of the examples above if they all have DS's like the first one I proposed, the rules don't account for the first five examples if "a hell of", "a bit of", "something of", etc. are phrases which modify the NPs that follow them. Perhaps it could be argued that the way the DS is treed doesn't change the meaning of the sentence, but I disagree. The possible ambiguity of some of the sentences indicates a need for a different DS than the one already proposed. For instance, (4) could mean either the obvious thing -- that the man was flaky, or something less probable, that he was but a small particle of a flake of something. If the sentence meant the latter it would have the same kind of DS as (6) - (8). Having two different DSs would make it easy to explain the two different readings.

It is also possible that examples are produced by a transformation of some sort and are not generated directly by the grammar. For example, the DS of (3) could be:

2.1:



A transformation could somehow insert the second AdvP into a PP and then insert the whole PP into the other PP. Not only would this transformation be complex and awkward, but this sort of DS is possible only for sentences with 'somewhat'. "A bit", "a hell", and 'something' are not adverbs as well as NPs the way 'somewhat' is, so they couldn't fit in this DS. Any DS which had these NPs anywhere but their surface structure positions would require a change in the PS rules, and I can't think of a DS where the phrase was elsewhere which is synonymous with the surface structure anyway. Therefore, I'm going to assume that examples (1) - (5) must be generated by a new PS rule.

There are several possibilities for changes in the PS rules. Two of them involve changing the rules for either DPs or APs, since those are the only kinds of phrases we've seen so far that precede Ns and modify them. The change in the PS rules could be one of the following:

```
DP --> Det
   --> NP
   --> NP[bit-like] of

or

AP --> (Int) Adj
   --> NP[bit-like] of
```

However, both of thes possibilities only account for the Det preceding the bit-like noun, and not the one preceding the head noun of the NP. Of course this could easily be fixed by simply inserting Det at the end of the phrase like this:

```
DP --> Det
   --> NP
   --> NP[bit-like] of Det

or

AP --> (Int) Adj
   --> NP[bit-like] of Det
```

But while either of these new PS rules could correctly generate the new sentences, there is something wrong with both of them. I think it would be wrong to say the these new phrases are DPs, because semantically they don't seem to do the same thing. While DPs specify which NP it is, the new phrases, like APs, tell what kind of NP it is. but if we decide that they are in fact APs, then it would be possible to get sentences like:

9. *The hell of a man walked in.
10. *She was her teacher's somehing of a pet.

The problem of the new PS rules can be soved by creating a new phrase category, which I'll call Prepositional Adjective Phrase (PAP) since it has a preposition in it but functions like an AP. The new PS rules that will be needed are:

```
PAP --> NP[bit-like] of

NP --> pn
   --> S-BAR
   --> N-BAR S-BAR
   --> (PAP) (DP) (AP)* N (PP)
```

Bit-like NPs will have to be a subcategory of NPs whose head nouns are either nouns like 'bit', 'hell', 'example', 'specimen', 'heck', etc., or the pronouns 'something' or 'somewhat'.

Some other restrictions are need so that the new PS rules don't overgenerate rampantly. The first restrictions needed are ones that limit the kinds of NPs that both follow the PAPs and are in them. Without restrictions, the PS rules could generate sentences like these:

11. *They are a bit of deer.
12. *Harry is a hell of the farmer.
13. *John is the hell of a dancer.
14. *He is a hell of something.
15. *They are bits of bores.

What these examples show is that both the NPs in PAPs and the ones they precede must be singular and indefinite if they are ordinary nouns, and that the NPs that follow them

can't be pronouns. The restrictions that are necessary would be:

N --> [indefinite, singular] / [PAP ... ____ ...]NP

NP[bit-like] --> ... N[indefinite, singular]
--> pn

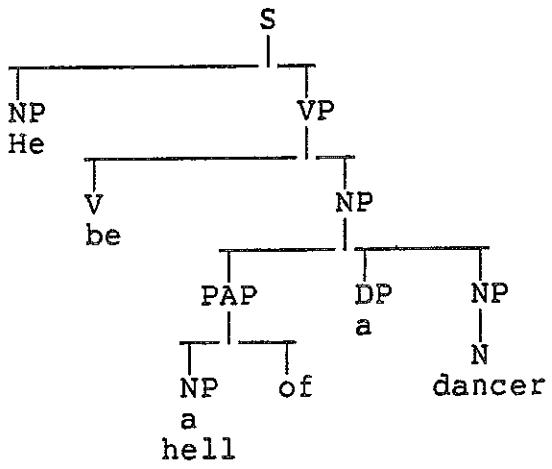
One more thing should now be considered in order to ensure that the PS rules don't overgenerate: what kind of verbs can PAP-infested NPs follow and precede? The only context thay are usually seen in is direct object of 'seem' -like verbs. Are they ungrammatical in other contexts?

16. ?He ate something of a meal.
17. ?Somewhat of a bore sat down next to me.
18. ?A bit of a ladies' man asked her out.

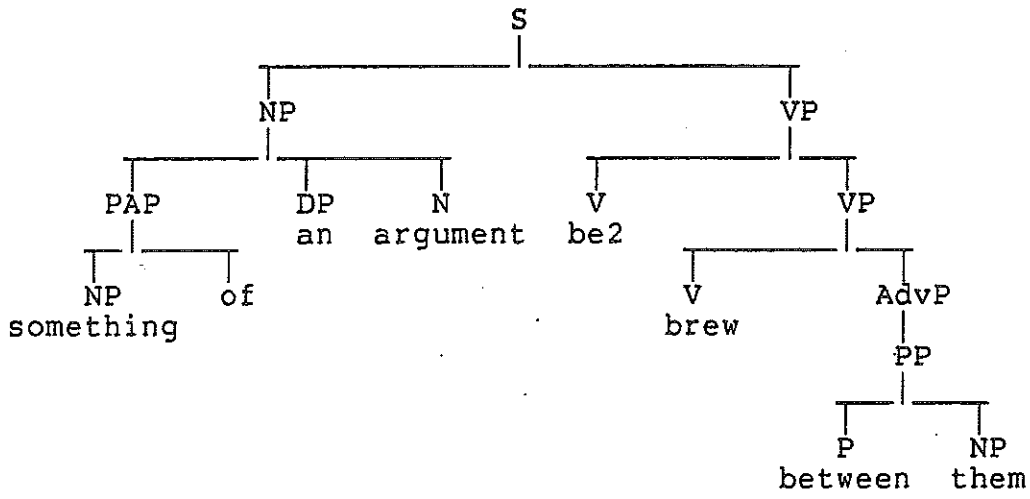
While these sentences might never be uttered, I don't think they are actually ungrammatical. Therefore I don't think verb restrictions are needed with PAPs.

Now examples (1) - (5) and others like them are generated by our grammar, and at least vast numbers of ungrammatical sentences aren't generated. The correct trees can be drawn as shown here:

1.3:



5.1:


S
NP
VP
PAP
DP
an
N
argument
V
be2
VP
NP
something
of
V
brew
AdvP
PP
P
between
NP
them