The Evolution of American Expository Prose Style as Exemplified by the Easy Chair Columnists of HARPER'S MAGAZINE

Cherie Rouse

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Abstract

THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN EXPOSITORY PROSE STYLE
AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE EASY CHAIR COLUMNISTS
OF HARPER'S MAGAZINE

by Cherie Rouse

This thesis aims to describe the way American expository prose style evolved during the period 1851 to 1981 as exemplified by the Easy Chair columnists of Harper's Magazine. Major premises of the study are that style and meaning are the same, but that a writer chooses among various shades of meaning, sometimes on the basis of rhetorical strategy, and thus it is possible to make meaningful statements about a writer's style.

The research methods emphasized synthesis of many different kinds of information about each author's writing, rather than complete reliance on impressionistic judgements or on quantified data. For each author and for the Easy Chair columnists as a group, the following features underwent scrutiny: content, role of author in society, diction, sentence styles, construction schemes, tropes, finite verbs, and general quality of writing. Methods for examining these features combined strict quantitative techniques with subjective observations which might generally result from careful, critical readings by educated readers.
The findings suggest that there have been five periods in the development of American prose style during the last 130 years. The first, 1851 to 1853, saw Donald G. Mitchell in the Chair. This was the Decorative Period, when Mitchell filled the columns with aimless chitchat, gossipy trivia, and melodramatic tales, all served to the reader in long, rhetorically styled sentences piled with numerous tropes and construction schemes that amount almost entirely to excessive garnishes. The Easy Chair was chiefly ornate entertainment.

The Rambling and Comfortable Period followed, from 1859 to 1892. George William Curtis occupied the Chair, from it handing down a wise grandparent's analysis of happenings on the American scene, often drawing a moral lesson, but in a positive, easy-going tone, using many long but simple sentences.

William Dean Howells occupied the Easy Chair during the Elegant Period, 1880 to 1920. Using the column to promote and guide the development of American literature, Howells demonstrated in his own writing the grace he urged in others: highly varied and imaginative devices; masterfully effective and unobtrusive tropes and construction schemes; language that is formal and dignified, yet plain; and beautiful prose rhythm.

With the installation of Edward S. Martin in the Easy
Chair in 1921 began the Journalistic Period, continued after Martin by Bernard DeVoto and John Fischer until 1975. The content of the columns changed to analysis of current political and social events, offered from the viewpoint of the man in the street. The style of the writing became journalistic, with shorter sentences and fewer rhetorical strategies. The tone became critical and factual.

In 1975, Lewis Lapham began the Prophetic Period. Still occupying the Chair, Lapham makes of the column a place from which to denounce the weaknesses and moral disease he sees infecting the inner realities of American life, especially its politics, press, and arts. Lapham moves poetically from one dominant impression to another, using great rhetorical skill, especially with extended tropes and with rhetorical sentence types. He apparently intends his lamentations for the well-educated; his columns are sprinkled liberally with abstract and technical language and with far-ranging references to art, literature, and historical scholarship.

Three especially striking changes have developed in the Easy Chair columns since 1851. One is the view of America. To the various columnists, this country was initially unimportant, then basically good, then needing a Jonah's dreadful warning. The tone of the column has changed correspondingly, beginning light, almost silly, and becoming earnest and
damning. Highly artistic prose was used by Mitchell for elaborate entertainment in the early columns, whereas similarly artistic prose is used in the current columns to make properly dramatic and penetrating the lamentations of a despair-stricken prophet.

The results of this study suggest that in prose style analysis, quantitative data may not by itself meaningfully describe prose styles. The results also suggest that the traditionally-defined aspects of style are more closely associated with the role the writer takes in relation to his message and audience than with anything else. Finally, it appears that while several striking differences develop among writers over 130 years, their styles really remain very similar.

The findings of this study also show that the Easy Chair columnists, considered through the years to include the best American prose stylists, demonstrate the principles traditionally taught to college composition students.
THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN EXPOSITORY PROSE STYLE
AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE EASY CHAIR COLUMNISTS
OF HARPER'S MAGAZINE

by

Cherie Rouse

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts
in English

August 1981
Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this thesis in her opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree Master of Arts.

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INTRODUCTION

I. SCOPE OF STUDY

This thesis seeks to describe the way American expository prose style evolved during the period 1851 to 1981 as exemplified by the Easy Chair columnists of Harper's Magazine. In the research described here, I examined the prose style of each of the seven columnists who occupied the Chair during that 130-year period, then tried to discover and point out the similarities, differences, and trends among them.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

During the last fifty years, stylistic analysis has been the subject of much controversy and is undergoing great change in premises as well as methods. Discussion has centered around three questions: What is style? What is the relationship between content and style? How can style be validly and reliably described?

A. Definition of Style

For an elementary definition of style, Howard S. Babb's statement would probably satisfy everyone as a starting point: style comprises "the verbal traits that are
characteristic of an author's linguistic mode."¹ I would caution that the verbal traits characteristic of one author's style may also characterize other authors' styles. A complete description cannot focus entirely on an author's idiosyncrasies.

B. Relationship of Style and Meaning

Until recently, two views have dominated the discussion of the relationship between style and meaning, or in other commonly used words, form and content. The oldest and most influential is that ideas exist wordlessly and can be dressed or verbalized in a variety of ways. This is the classical view, expounded chiefly by Aristotle, and reinforced and popularized by countless followers, among them Quintilian, Cicero, George Louis Leclerc (Count de Buffon), and most college composition teachers. Directly opposing this classical dualism is Crocean monism—the view that meaning and style are the same thing.

Several modern theorists have felt the classical dualism is incorrect, but cannot accept a complete monism, believing that it would make analysis of prose style and the teaching of composition both meaningless. These theorists

have developed a number of interesting compromises. Richard Ohmann, for one, holds that style is a part of what we call meaning--the "peripheral," "subterranean," "connotative" meaning--the implicit rather than cognitive meaning. Similarly, Beardsley ventures that style is "detail of implicit meaning," and thus, bad style can only be defined as "incompatibility" of implicit and explicit meanings. The eminent critic and theorist I. A. Richards has also offered a compromise, based on his notion that ideas fall into a finite set of categories according to logical shape or form: style is simply a manner of clothing these already-formed thoughts in tailored word patterns. Richards promotes a corollary of this notion: communication depends on sameness of experience. Ohmann persuasively discounts Richards' theory, pointing out that in practical application of it, one finds each thought to have a unique, individual form;


thus, the meaning and style distinction is meaningless. Ohmann also explains convincingly that experience is formless and not the same even to an individual who witnesses the same event twice, much less to different individuals. To Ohmann, thinking and expressing oneself in language is a process of imposing form on experience—a making of "epistemic choices."7

Several scholars still contend that meaning and style are separate, but they tend to qualify their stances either in statement or in practice. Milic, for instance, holds that style is a writer's choice from among the linguistic resources available to him,8 but advises that when analyzing a writer's style, the critic must consider style to be not only the writer's dress for his thought, but also an expression of his personality.9 Weathers calls style the art of choosing, but as he applies stylistic analysis in a study of series construction, he shows a concern with style

9 "Theories of Style and Their Implications for the Teaching of Composition," in Contemporary Essays on Style, p. 17.
also as meaning. Similarly, Miles seems to hold that style is separate from meaning--style is grammar selected for its suitability to content, but in practice Miles connects form and content. Likewise, Sledd belies in practice his theory that form and content are separate. Among about thirty scholars surveyed for this research, only Rulon Wells insists absolutely that style is independent from content.

More convincing to me than either the compromisers or the dualists are the monists--those holding that style and meaning are the same. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Martin Steinmann are representative of the monists. According to Wimsatt, style is:

the last and most detailed elaboration of meaning. . . . If a word is to be placed here or there in a sentence in order to be effective, to have due weight, this ought to be thought of not as a juggling of words round a meaning to give the meaning emphatic expression, but as a choice of a more emphatic rather than a less emphatic meaning, or, strictly, the choice of the meaning


12 James Sledd, "Coordination (Faulty) and Subordination (Upside Down)," in New Rhetoric, p. 176.

needed, for meaning exists through emphasis; a change of emphasis is a change of meaning.  

Steinmann at one point says that style in writing is equivalent to strategy and tactics in a game, as compared with rules. In another essay, he clarifies his view by stating that form and meaning are inseparable, and then he sketches an interesting way to retain the notion that writers choose from among alternatives: several forms may have the same meaning, and a writer may choose those that are rhetorically more effective; a difference in meaning entails a difference in form but not every difference in form entails a difference in meaning.

Wimsatt and Steinmann are correct in seeing style and meaning as inseparable, in my view. Unlike Steinmann, however, I do not find that different forms may carry the same meaning, but that each variation in form, however slight, is a variation in meaning. Most of the theories published on this matter assume that a writer brings to the writing task a specific, finely narrowed meaning which is somehow prior to style. This assumption is probably an inheritance from

15 Foreword, in New Rhetorics, pp. iii, iv.
16 "Rhetorical Research," in New Rhetorics, p. 16.
classical dualism. I propose instead that a writer may often intend a general meaning, and on sorting through the various shades of this meaning, he may choose a particular one on the basis of rhetorical effectiveness.

In a monistic view such as this I see no threat to either stylistic analysis or to the teaching of composition. A writer may still make choices–choices among meanings which are also stylistic strategies, and even if the writer's precise meaning dictates a particular style, it would be useful to study his style in order to examine every clue to meaning and thus appreciate it fully. Ohmann concurs:

"... style is just as useful a key to total meaning as is any other element. For this reason and for no other, it is worth studying. ..."17 Mark Schorer urges analysis of form precisely because form and content are inseparable.18

A monistic view such as I propose may also affirm the value of teaching composition. Novice writers need to learn sensitivity to the alternatives available to them and to the consequences in both meaning and style of the choices they make.

By insisting that the monistic view still allows a

17 "Prolegomena," p. 190.
18 Excerpt from "Fiction and the 'Analogical Matrix,'" in Essays in Stylistic Analysis, p. 338.
writer to make choices, I do not mean that such choices are completely free. As a number of scholars have pointed out, several other factors influence style in addition to the writer's choice: the writer's personality; the current fashions in education, rhetoric, and literature; the writer's purpose, which may commit him unknowingly to a certain kind of style; the social context of the communication; the audience; the common ground the writer and audience share; limitations in the language itself; the changing convictions of the society; and the writer's skill and knowledge.

C. Methods of Stylistic Analysis

Judging from the differences among the theorists' views

19 This factor is proposed by many different scholars and theorists.


23 Young and Becker, p. 104.

24 Young and Becker, p. 95.


26 Klaus, p. 62.
on the nature of style, their controversy regarding the proper way to study style is no surprise. On the one hand, Milic insists that "a description of style, when it is not quantitative, can only be figurative. . . . Study of style must be pursued by rigorous means derived from linguistics and the quantitative sciences." On the other hand, Ian Watt asserts that the "brilliant achievements" in stylistic analysis by Auerbach and Spitzer are "essentially subjective."

Surely scholars at both of these extremes find unacceptable the impressionism which leads to only labeling a style as "sinewy," or "staccato," or "liquid." And all grope toward a not yet developed method for studying style that is comprehensive and also valid and reliable.

Thus, Ian Watt calls for the analyst of style to examine all the details of a work, then build from these a unifying critical synthesis. Miles concurs, and Milic urges that one examine not only the individual's writing, but also the linguistic resources which were available.

30 Miles, pp. 194, 207.
to the writer. 31

Milic is alone in his insistence that only quantitative descriptions are useful. 32 Wimsatt has not found statistics useful alone, but only "in context." 33 Babb agrees. He omitted computerized statistical studies from his 1972 volume, complaining that such studies are to date disappointing. Although Babb did include an excerpt from Josephine Miles' statistical work, he cautions that her papers are not "merely" statistics and that since their publication, Miles has "qualified somewhat" her use of statistics. 34

Richard Ohmann enthusiastically points to transformational grammar as the probable foundation for a valid, reliable way to analyze style. He holds that a proper analysis of style waits upon a satisfactory analysis of sentences, 35 and that transformational grammar can provide this analysis, since style is at least in part an expression of the ways the sentences have been transformed. 36

31 "Against the Typology," p. 292.
33 "Diction," p. 209.
Ohmann's approach will finally be too narrow, I suspect, even for him, though it offers the security of objectivity. Until some better approach has been developed, I believe with Wimsatt, Watt, and Miles that objective, statistical methods should be used but not relied on entirely nor interpreted too extravagantly. I have not found any one statistic which can serve as an important index to an author's style, but I do believe that examining many features of a writer's style together can yield valuable, valid, and reliable observations, which will serve well until better methods are developed. Therefore, in this project, I tried to look at several aspects of each writer's style and consider them in relation to each other, though the project's limited scope did not permit exhaustive analysis.

III. HARPER'S MAGAZINE

Harper's Magazine appeared in 1850 as a new business venture of the huge publishing firm of the four Harper brothers. The Harper house produced a large variety of books, but its mainstay and the chief reason for its

immense success was its cheap reprints of English fiction. Thus the Harper brothers took a logical step in offering a new magazine which featured English novels in serial form with a few pages advertising Harper books. The idea gathered steam and with the first issue, Harper's Magazine became a complete magazine with varied content and departments. Frank Luther Mott describes the first issue:

It consisted of 144 octavo pages printed in small type in double columns on a good paper stock, enclosed in a light buff cover designed in imitation of the English Bentley's. The price was $3.00 a year. Two serials were begun: Charles Lever's historical romance, Maurice Tiernay, Soldier of Fortune, and Mrs. Anne Marsh's Lettice Arnold. There were three short stories, two of them by Dickens— one of his less-known Christmas tales and "A Child's Dream of a Star." There were biographical sketches, some travel essays, and popular articles on science—in all over sixty items, long and short, in great variety of subject matter. . . . Three departments appeared—a "Monthly Record of Current Events," giving an uncolored resume of the happenings of the preceding month; "Literary Notices," giving brief announcements of new books; and two pages of fashions. The only illustrations were three portraits of historians and five woodcuts of styles—all eight in the back of the book.38

The magazine thus "developed from a sort of undigested Reader's Digest for foreign periodical literature," observes A. John Kouwenhoven in a centennial issue.39 The Harper's

new business gamble quickly became a striking success. While the first issue comprised 7,500 copies, within six months the new magazine's circulation reached a phenomenal 50,000, and by the beginning of the Civil War, 200,000. At this time, with the American people scattered, communications slow and haphazard, good reading matter scarce, and no media of mass entertainment, Harper's Magazine became in Mott's words, "the great successful middle-class magazine." Fletcher Harper, who guided its policies until 1877, hoped above all that it should be popular in a high and generous sense, popular with the plain people, not the philosophers and poets. And he succeeded. Harper's became "the first truly national monthly magazine of general interest." Mott credits this success to (1) its republication in serial form of novels by the immensely popular English novelists, like Dickens, Reade, Collins, and others, (2) its large size--twice as many pages as the older magazines, and (3) its lavish illustration with woodcuts, which came to take

40 Mott, A History, p. 391.
41 Mott, A History, p. 391.
42 Mott, A History, p. 391.
43 Kouwenhoven, p. 8.
a larger and larger proportion of the pages. Other aspects also helped to make it popular: its variety of miscellany and its long, emotionally stirring serial on Napoleon.

Mott notes that the magazine did not remain so British as it began, but the departments came to be wholly American, and contributions from American authors claimed more and more space as time passed, especially for their short stories. Henry Mills Alden, editor, in a fifty-year anniversary issue, explains that because Harper's aimed to be chiefly a home magazine for family reading, short stories of domestic interest, and especially well-written love-stories, were characteristic features. Although many of the earlier American short stories could be called "sentimental balderdash," as the 1880's approached, more serious and fresh stories appeared on its pages, and the magazine came to be a major force in the development of the American short story.

45 Mott, A History, p. 390.
46 A History, pp. 387, 393, 394.
Kouwenhoven accurately describes the three stages of development of Harper's Magazine. The first he calls the phase of visual description, extending from 1850 to about 1880. During this phase, the emphasis of the content was on "recording, almost as objectively as a camera lens could do it, the external realities of an expanding world."\textsuperscript{49} For example, the January, 1855 issue announced that each number will include, besides the serialized English fiction,

(1) Biographies of distinguished Americans.
(2) Illustrations of American scenery, life, and manners.
(3) The agricultural products of the United States.
(4) Narratives of governmental exploring expeditions.
(5) Voyages, travels, and sketches.
(6) Social, political, and religious sketches in Europe.
(7) A series of articles on the Holy Land.
(8) Natural history.
(9) Consular experiences by our consuls abroad.
(10) Memoirs of the reigning dynasties in Europe.
(11) Other articles and departments etc.\textsuperscript{50}

The pictures revealed this visual focus, too, being anonymous woodcuts and engravings meant to illustrate and portray.

Beginning in the 1870's, the thrust of the magazine began to change under the editorship of Henry Mills Alden. As Frederick Lewis Allen explains, it came to have a "fastidiousness and attention to propriety"--it was edited for a more narrow readership--"ladies and gentlemen of

\textsuperscript{49} Personal and Otherwise, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{50} Kouwenhoven, p. 10.
either means or intellectual interests, or preferably both." 51

And in the 1880's, the emphasis shifted into the stage Kouwenhoven calls "the phase of interpretive sensibility," when what was important was not the thing seen but the way the individual artist saw it. 52 Alden announced in 1903 that the magazine would "print at least eight short stories in every number" and "maintain a distinctly literary standard, avoiding such subjects as sports, politics, 'graft,' crime, etc." The descriptive articles had been dropped, and fiction increasingly displaced articles of an informative nature. Alden felt that it was in the best fiction that "the deeper currents of our modern life and thoughts are most interpretatively indicated." 53 The magazine included some serious articles on international politics, exploration, history, and science, but a larger and larger proportion was devoted to fiction, especially the short story. The art was subjective and interpretive. Kouwenhoven tells us that


52 Personal and Otherwise, pp. 10, 12.

53 Editor's Study, Column, Harper's, 1903, quoted by Kouwenhoven, p. 12.
along with the shift from description to interpretation there was also a shift from what may be called a strictly middle-class outlook to a preoccupation with Society and upper-class life. In fiction it was the shift from Dickens to Henry James and (heaven forbid) Mrs. Humphry Ward.

In the article it was the shift from pieces about gold miners, cowboys, and farmers to articles like Casper Whitney's "Riding to Hounds in England" (September 1894) or Richard Harding Davis's "The Streets of Paris," illustrated by Charles Dana Gibson (the following month). In travel articles, or in the illustrations of far-away places which accompanied them, curiosity about the present had been replaced by reverence for the old and the quaint--especially the quaint. 54

A revolution in the magazine publishing industry led to another change and finally to the present phase. At the turn of the century, the general level of learning was rather low, the average American having received only five years of schooling. 55 And the publishers discovered among the less intellectual Americans a new mass market that would buy in huge quantities magazines filled with less discreet, less literary, and more popular stories. Because they also chose to sell advertising space, these magazines could soon buy away from the old "quality" journals the most popular authors and artists. When Thomas Bucklin Wells became Harper's editor in 1925, he realized the futility of trying to appeal

54 Personal and Otherwise, p. 16.

to a class having all of wealth, discrimination, and literary taste, and so he drastically changed the magazine, as Allen describes,

... to aim it at a somewhat different though overlapping public--to thoughtful and discriminating people, of whatever income bracket, who appreciated fine quality, felt a deep sense of responsibility for the general national well-being, and possessed genuine intellectual curiosity. He pulled the illustrations out of Harper's, put it in a plain brick-orange cover, and went in for a new program focused upon human, energetic, and often controversial articles on the burning issues of the day.56

Thus began the phase emphasizing not objective description or appreciative sensibility, but analytical understanding. Harper's became primarily a public affairs magazine. From a survey of his readership, John Fischer, editor after 1953, reported that they were 85 percent college graduates; more than half had taken some graduate work and had traveled abroad within the year surveyed.57

In the eighteen fifties and sixties, Fletcher Harper was producing a popular family magazine, aimed at a pretty large common denominator of American readership. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, Henry Mills Alden was producing a select magazine for respectable and well-to-do gentlefolk of nice tastes. After the change which took place

56 "Fifty Years of Harper's Magazine," p. 32.
57 Emery, p. 570.
in 1925, Thomas B. Wells was pointing the Magazine less toward well-to-do gentlefolk than toward readers who combined brains and taste with a concern over public affairs.  

DeVoto, Easy Chair columnist for twenty years, says that "The evolution of American journalism made Harper's a magazine of appraisal, of critical inquiry," and that Harper's function has become that of examining, interpreting, criticising, and reconsidering the issues reported by other media--"The function assigned to Harper's by natural selection, then, was that of assuring the expression of opinion." Harper's cannot and will not be a crusader's soapbox, however, or the stage for an "exhibition match" of opposing sides. DeVoto insists that for the writer who publishes in Harper's,

However ardent the heart, the mind must be cool. The critical spirit is skeptical, resolved to find out, to test all things. It refuses to let the mind's edge be blunted by wishfulness or indignation. . . . There is the additional necessity of being civilized. The skeptical intelligence will be urbane. It will dread solemnity as much as it dreads inaccuracy or propaganda. It will have leisure to enjoy the altogether unimportant and it will insist on handling even the weightiest subjects with a light touch.  

Frederick L. Allen, in his centennial editorial, asserts

58 "One Hundred Years of Harper's," p. 32.  
that through the history of Harper's its aims have remained constant:

1. To be interesting, "a *sine qua non* of any publication that hopes to be able to pay its bills." Allen suggests that though the 1950 circulation of 160,000 is small, it includes "so many people who write, speak, teach, edit, manage, and govern that we may perhaps be permitted to remind you that the ignition system is a very small part of an automobile."

2. To provide news, in the widest sense.

3. To provide interpretation and discussion of the important issues before the public.

4. To provide a platform for original and inventive thinkers.

5. To provide a vehicle for the artist in literature.60

The Nation said in 1866 that

[T]o a large part of the American people, Harper's for many years has been English literature; and it has been so very successful that we may well consider it an index to the literary culture and general character of the nation.61

Mott, writing in 1957, believes that "doubtless Harper's has remained such an index during the years which have

60 "One Hundred Years of Harper's," pp. 34-36.

followed the Nation's observation, and in its latest phase it points to certain changes in the national character. 62

IV. THE EASY CHAIR

The first Easy Chair column (from the pen of Donald G. Mitchell) was introduced in October, 1851. "After our more severe editorial work is done," Mitchell explains, we throw ourselves back into an old red-backed easy chair and indulge in "the gossiping papers of the day" and in "chit-chat with chance visitors," to keep informed of "the drift of the town-talk." In the Easy Chair column, Mitchell plans to pass on to the readers gossip and those "lighter whiffs from the great world of opinion. . . ." He goes on,

We shall be on the watch for such topics or incidents as give a handle to the conversation of the town; and instead of treating them in any such philosophic fashion, as most writing men think it necessary to do, we shall try and set them down with all that gloss, and that happy lack of sequence, which makes every-day talk so much better than every-day writing. 63

Thus the Easy Chair has remained pretty much as Mitchell

63 Editor's Easy Chair, Column, Harper's, Oct. 1851, p. 707.
here describes it—a short column of general, wide-ranging commentary, personal opinion, and personal anecdote. Its modern cousins are the popular columns in today's newspapers, like Mike Royko's from Chicago, Jack Smith's in the View Section of the Los Angeles Times, Miv Schaaf's in the Los Angeles Times Home Magazine, and "My Turn" in Newsweek. On television, the Easy Chair is faintly echoed by "Channel 7 Editorial," Johnny Carson's jokes, Erma Bombeck's morning remarks, or Charles Kuralt's commentaries on life in America. These are spaces where an individual can speak candidly and personally about whatever he chooses—-one-person "rap" sessions. The Easy Chair was thus at first the vehicle for a wise commentator, then for a distinguished art critic, then for a series of prominent social analysts, and finally, for a secular prophet. Such a column gives a magazine or newspaper a personal, human touch and provides an unrestricted space for whatever miscellany the staff and/or the columnist are pleased to write about. In these functions, the Easy Chair is a direct descendant of Richard Steele's Tatler—the first English magazine, whose announced intention as it began in April, 1709, was to present "accounts of gallantry, pleasure and entertainment."

Mott calls the Easy Chair the "best of the early departments," and agrees with other observers that Curtis, the Easy Chair occupant from about 1853 to 1892, "made this
section of Harper's the most delightful department in an American periodical." And the Easy Chair continues as Kouwenhoven states, to be "the oldest and most distinguished" column in American journalism.

As shown by the time line at the end of this chapter, Harper's Magazine has had nine editors and seven regular Easy Chair columnists during its 131 years. Only the present Easy Chair occupant has served concurrently as Easy Chair columnist and Editor in Chief.

V. THE EASY CHAIR COLUMNS AS EXEMPLARS OF AMERICAN PROSE

The project described in this thesis has sought to trace the evolution of American prose style by examining the styles of the Easy Chair columnists. Harper's Magazine is an appropriate magazine from which to find representative samples of American prose style because as the oldest "quality" magazine, it has been both an arbiter and a reflector of American taste. Harper's announced intention was to select and present the best of contemporary literature, and as it developed, the magazine became a force in the development of

64 A History, p. 389.
65 Personal and Otherwise, p. 18.
American fiction writers. Moreover, as a financially independent magazine, Harper's has also had to publish material that would sell well to the American public. In order to meet both demands, it has maintained particularly close editorial guidance and scrutiny of the material published. When in the summer of 1980, reporters, as they often have done, asked Johnny Greene, a contributing editor of Harper's, what it was like at the magazine, Greene explained, "I could never find a short, satisfactory answer. . . . I could say, however, that I knew of no other magazine where the editors actually sat down with you for hours, sometimes for days, to help you with a story. . . ."66

Like the other elements of the magazine, the Easy Chair and its occupants were carefully selected and guided by the editorial staff. At least two of the columnists, John Fischer and Lewis Lapham, were managing editors or editors-in-chief themselves during a major portion of their times in the Easy Chair. Some of the others, notably William Dean Howells, definitely had a hand in the selection of other content for the magazine. Moreover, the Easy Chair has remained a consistent feature of the magazine throughout its 131-year history, except for the eight-year gap from Curtis (1892) to

Howells (1900). The Chair is therefore a convenient vehicle for comparison and contrast of styles.

Fig. 1. TENURES OF EDITORS AND EASY CHAIR COLUMNISTS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Editors</th>
<th>Easy Chair Columnists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H.J. Raymond, 1850-1856</td>
<td>D.G. Mitchell, 1851-1859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.H. Guernsey, 1856-1869</td>
<td>G.W. Curtis, jointly with Mitchell 1853-1859, solely 1859-1892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.M. Alden 1880</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869-1919</td>
<td>No Easy Chair column</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>1892-1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>W.D. Howells 1900-1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>E.S. Martin 1921-1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.B. Wells, 1919-1931</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.F. Hartman, 1931-1941</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Shnayerson, 1971-1975</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Lapham 1975</td>
<td>L. Lapham 1975-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

METHODOLOGY

The chief aim of the methodology used in this project was synthesis. Each of the aspects selected for study was examined in relation to the other features. As to content, I paid particular attention to the subjects the authors wrote about, and also tried to describe the role each author seemed to take in relation to American society. In a project of this scope, I necessarily limited the number of stylistic features to be studied, choosing to focus on those that I hypothesized would be especially useful indexes to the authors' styles; this included those features that are the most deliberate strategies. The quantities that I calculated were not expected to provide a great deal of information by themselves, but were interpreted in relation to other aspects of the works studied.

The pages which follow list the features that were studied, define the terms used, and explain the procedures.

I. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

For defining and categorizing grammatical elements, I depended on A Grammar of Present Day English, by R. W. Pence
A. Content

Content is the subjects the authors write about.

B. Role

A role here is defined as the relationship the author understands himself to have to the readers of Harper's Magazine—whether he functions toward them as a teacher, reporter, gadfly, or entertainer, for example.

C. Diction

Diction is the choice of words, which can be categorized as plain or grand, Anglo-Saxon or Latinate, informal or formal, concrete or abstract, general or specific, and connotative or denotative.

D. Sentence Style

1. Lengths: This includes the mean sentence length,


the standard deviation, and the range of lengths.

2. Complex Sentences: A complex sentence is one containing one or more main, independent clauses and one or more subordinate clauses. It includes clauses of which some parts are ellided and are simply understood.

3. Rhetorical Sentence Types: There are four rhetorical sentence types.
   a. Balanced: This type presents clauses or phrases in groups of two or more, and structures them similarly so that the reader can easily compare and contrast them. The balanced sentence is defined in this study as one in which the portions which are similarly structured comprise at least half of the sentence. For statistical purposes, I counted each case of two sentences of like structure as one instance of balance. This category includes both parallelism and antithesis. Here is a sample balanced sentence: To contain the enemy forces, to reinforce his own depleted resources, to inspirit the sagging morale of his troops, and to reassess the general strategy of the campaign--these were his objectives when he took command.
   b. Interrupted: The interrupted sentence has a phrase or clause of four words or more intruding between major grammatical parts of the sentence: subject and verb, verb and complement, one verb part and another, and opener and subject.
A prepositional phrase was not counted as an interrupter unless it was longer than five words or was attached to another interrupting element. Other interrupters had to be longer than three words. This is an interrupted sentence: Mary, knowing she wanted the job but also knowing she feared the risks it involved, regretfully turned it down.

c. Periodic: Most of the expansion in a periodic sentence is placed in the first part; the last item in the sentence is a word, phrase, or clause that is the subject, verb, or complement in the main clause of the sentence. For a sentence to be counted in this study as periodic, this closing element must not be followed by modifiers totalling more than three words. This is a periodic sentence: Since the flag on the staff in front of the fort was now fluttering wildly toward the east, we assumed that the wind had changed.

d. Cumulative: In the cumulative sentence, the words, phrases, or clauses that constitute the subject, verb, and complement appear first, followed by the expansion. For the purposes of this study, only a tenth or fewer of the words in the sentence may precede the subject, and the expansion following the main clause must be at least twice the length of the main clause. Here is an example: Harvey missed the train, although he had started packing early and had looked at his watch every half hour.
For the purpose of identifying uses of rhetorical sentence types, length of a sentence portion was measured either in words or in the proportion of the typed line which it used. When one part of a compound sentence qualified as a rhetorical sentence type, the whole sentence was counted as that type.

E. Construction Schemes

The construction schemes, like the rhetorical sentence types, are intentional uses of arrangement to reinforce the content. The schemes, however, are smaller units than those that distinguish the rhetorical sentence types. For example, major balancing elements that made a sentence balanced rhetorically were not counted again as a scheme of construction. The various construction schemes can be summarized in four categories, as follows.

1. Balance: Use of similar grammatical structure to highlight the similarity or difference between items, for example: His purpose was to impress the ignorant, to perplex the dubious, and to confound the scrupulous. Balance includes parallelism and antithesis.

2. Unusual or Inverted Order: An example is "Backward run the sentences till reels the mind." This category includes the following three figures: anastrophe--inversion of the natural or usual word order, parenthesis--insertion
of a word or phrase in such a way as to interrupt the normal flow of the clause or phrase, and apposition--placing after one element another that explains or modifies it.

3. Omission: Omission includes asyndeton--deliberate omission of conjunctions, and ellipsis--omission of a word or phrase readily inferred from the text. Examples are: "I came, I saw, I conquered." "And he to England shall along with you" (Hamlet, III,iii,4).

4. Repetition: This group included any repetition for rhetorical effect of any word in any position, for example: "I'll have my bond!" (The Merchant of Venice, III, iii,3-4). The various kinds of repetition are: alliteration--repetition of initial or medial consonants, assonance--repetition of similar vowel sounds, anaphora--repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginnings of successive clauses, epistrophe--repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive clauses, epanalepsis--repetition at the end of a clause of the word that occurred at the beginning of the clause, anadiplosis--repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause, climax--arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses in order of increasing importance, antimetabole--repetition of words, in successive clauses, in reverse grammatical order, chiasmus--reversal of grammatical structures in successive phrases or clauses, and polyptoton--
repetition of words derived from the same root.

F. Tropes

The tropes are figures of speech which involve a transference of meaning—giving a word or group of words a different-than-ordinary effect. The most familiar tropes are metaphors and similes. Like the schemes of construction, the tropes are indeed the "dressing of thought," "embellishments," intentionally crafted stylistic strategies.

I have not defined and identified each of the separate tropes or schemes of construction, but rather have grouped them; thus they were easier to use in the simplified analysis which I attempted in the project described here, and the fine distinctions among the many specific kinds were not useful or meaningful for this study.

1. Comparisons: Suggestions of similarity between things which are, over all, dissimilar. This group includes both metaphor (implied comparison) and simile (explicit comparison).

The simile differs from the topic of comparison, a means of constructing an argument, first in that simile compares basically unlike things, and the topic of comparison pairs like things. They also differ in that the simile is chiefly used as rhetorical strategy—for persuasive, emotional force, whereas a comparison as a topic is mainly
a part of the substance of the discussion, a part of the logical development. Both of them, however, serve both strategy and substance; the difference is one of degree, not kind, as the following examples illustrate.

She found Thai as hard to learn as Chinese, but not as difficult as Russian. (Comparison as a topic)

At first, Chinese characters seemed as inscrutable to her as tea leaves to a nonbeliever. (Comparison as a trope)

The question of federal aid to parochial schools is a bramble patch. (Metaphor)

2. Personification: Metaphors referring to abstractions or inanimate objects as if they had human qualities or abilities. For example: The ground thirsts for rain. This figure of speech could perhaps be grouped with the other metaphors and similes as comparison, but I chose to watch for it separately, since it is an index to the authors' bent toward anthropomorphising. This reason was also behind my decision to define as comparison and not as personification those instances in which an author refers to an abstraction or inanimate object as living though not necessarily human.

3. Parts-for-Wholes: Use of a part, an attribute, or one of a class to suggest the whole, or using a whole or a class to suggest a part. This group includes synecdoche, illustrated as follows:
Genus substituted for the species:
vessel for ship, weapon for sword, creature for man, arms for rifles, vehicle for bicycle

species substituted for the genus:
bread for food, cutthroat for assassin

part substituted for the whole:
sail for ship, hands for helpers, roofs for houses

matter for what is made from it:
silver for money, canvas for sail, steel for sword

It also includes metonymy, of which these are examples:
crown for royalty, mitre for bishop, wealth for rich people, brass for military officers, bottle for wine, pen for writers.

I have also enlarged the definition of part-for-whole to include use of examples to suggest a whole class. An illustration is the mention of Aunt Martha, cousins Tony and Jim, and Grandpa George as examples meant to suggest anyone's relatives.

4. Puns: The group of figures which make plays on words. They include: antanaclasis (repetition of a word in two different senses), paronomesia (use of words alike in sound but different in meaning), and syllepsis (use of a word understood differently in relation to two or more other words which it modifies or governs). An example is the following syllepsis: I waited patiently for him in the car during his interview, as he had requested, for more than an hour. It was 102° outside, so I became rather hot. But when he returned to casually relate his chance visit for a half hour with a friend in the cool hallway, I was really hot.
5. Hyperbole: Use of exaggerated terms for emphasis or effect, as in this example: I looked for another chess set like it in every store in southern California.

6. Litotes: Deliberate understatement, for effect. For example: "I am a citizen of no mean city."--St. Paul

7. Rhetorical Question: Asking a question in order to assert or deny something. For example: How can you possibly make good wine from poor grapes?

8. Irony: Use of a word so as to convey a meaning opposite to the literal meaning of the word. Sarcasm is often a form of irony. Example: "Sure you could live without Yellow Pages (or without newspapers or automobiles or clocks).--Bell Telephone

The reader who is well acquainted with the tropes will notice that I have omitted some--anthimeria, periphrasis, oxymoron, and onomatopoeia. The reason is that I found no instances of any of them in the seven passages analyzed in detail.

G. Finite Verbs

Finite verbs are those which can make assertions and which undergo change to show person or number; by contrast, the "verbals" (participle, gerund, and infinitive) cannot make assertions and do not change to show person or number. I divided the finite verbs into three categories:
1. Active Non-linking Verbs: Active verbs are those in active voice; they have subjects which perform the action of the verb or which are in the state or condition described by the verb ("John hit James," "Professor Nicholson has discovered a new star").

2. Active Linking Verbs: Verbs which are completed by a subjective complement, a unit that renames or describes the subject ("Tom was my friend," "He has been unfriendly," "Lucy seems unhappy," "She appeared distraught"). The linking verb used most commonly by far is "be." But this verb is also used in the sense of "exist," and I understood it to have this sense when used with the expletive "there," ("There are a lot of people in the hallway"). Linking verbs are also active verbs.

3. Passive Verbs: If the subject receives the action of the verb, the verb is in the passive voice—it is a passive verb ("James was hit by John," "A new star has been discovered").

In counting the types of verbs, I counted parts of compound verbs separately of course, and also counted verbs which were implied but not stated. I considered some participles to be subjective complements which followed verbs-of-being and which renamed or described the subjects of their sentences, and thus counted the verbs-of-being as linking verbs rather than as auxiliary verbs.
A high proportion of passive verbs may signal a lack of skill or a general casualness about one's writing, since the passive construction is considered undesirable except for occasional variety or for a particular emphasis. The passive, which does not name the agent of the action, emphasizes the fact that the action took place. A great preponderance of active verbs, on the other hand, suggests an inclination to note and fix the responsibility for actions. Linking verbs are used chiefly to define; a high proportion of them might signal a special interest in the nature of things.

H. Quality

I judged the quality of each author's writing by the following criteria.

Social, spiritual, and intellectual value of the material presented: To evaluate this, I asked of each author's columns whether they heighten the reader's awareness, whether they concern matters of significance, whether they reinforce and feed humane interests.

Technical craftsmanship: unity; general clarity; ease and smoothness of reading; and competence with grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Rhetorical competence: Effective use of rhetorical sentence types, schemes of construction, and figures of
speech, "effective" meaning that the rhetorical strategies match and reinforce the content, and that they are unobtrusive.

Tone (attitude): I defined writing of high quality as that evincing an attitude which is altruistic, constructive, and hopeful, yet restrained and critical.

The reader of this thesis will recognize two features in these criteria: (1) They are arbitrary, and are probably not entirely what another scholar would include. But such criteria are necessarily and unavoidably arbitrary, reflecting the interests of the critic; I admit that these reflect mine. (2) These categories are somewhat artificial. A piece of writing does not display its various features in such separated fashion as this listing implies. Each column is an organic whole. For example, ability to heighten the reader's awareness cannot be separated from ease and smoothness of reading, and similarly, general clarity results from rhetorical competence as well as from technical competence.

II. PROCEDURE

The first step in examining the Easy Chair columnists' writing was a rapid survey to discover general subjects and styles. This survey included at least 8 columns from each writer, except for those of Curtis; since he occupied the
Easy Chair for so long--33 years--more than 16 of his columns were scanned.

From the passages surveyed, I chose for detailed analysis 1, 2, or 3 passages from each columnist that together totalled 50 sentences of material representative in both subject and style. I chose to use 50 sentences for these reasons: (1) This is the smallest number I could use and still have significant statistics on such features as percent of sentences that are a definite rhetorical type. (2) Using the same number of sentences for each writer made quantities, such as number of tropes, easy to compare among writers without use of complicated mathematical or statistical procedures. (3) The columns are short, and often a single column discusses several subjects, so a sample as short as 50 sentences can accurately represent an author's typical range of subjects and styles.

The next step was to examine each columnist's writing in detail, as described below.

A. Content

I made and studied a list or summary of the topics discussed in the 8 or more passages initially read.

B. Role

I examined the topics discussed and the general tone
in all the columns read.

C. Diction

I again scanned all the passages already read, and looked in detail at the 50-sentence passages chosen for quantitative analysis. I judged the following characteristics simply by careful, attentive reading: plainness or grandness, concreteness or abstractness, generality or specificity, formality or informality, and connotativeness or denotativeness. In the descriptions of diction which I then wrote, I supported my generalizations about these features with abundant examples from the columnists. Since Anglo-Saxon words are usually short and Latinate words are long, I counted the words longer than two syllables and the words of only one or two syllables in each 50-sentence passage to discover whether the particular passages are more Latinate or more Anglo-Saxon. This was also a clue to grandness or plainness of style.

D. Sentence Style

By examining sentence styles, I sought to answer two sets of questions, as follows.

1. Is the author more interested in explaining relationships or in simply stating assertions? Does the author have a logical, reasoning bent or is he more of an announcer
or narrator? Does he assume a great deal, and simply declare his observations, expecting ready agreement, or does he explain and defend his views?

To answer these questions, I counted the number of complex sentences in each 50-sentence sample, because it is with these structures that an author typically explains his reasoning and indicates which ideas are primary and which are secondary.

2. Is the writer more of a careful, deliberate craftsman, or is he more inclined to simply spill out his views as they occur to him? Does he present himself in a formal, calculated way, or in an informal, come-as-I-am style? Does he choose to highlight similarities and differences among the items discussed, using many balanced sentences and balance schemes? Does he rather focus on the qualities of things and actions by using interrupted sentences? Does he use cumulative sentences, making simple, direct statements of what is happening, with details and qualifiers loosely tagged on at the ends of the sentences? Does he have a rambling, relaxed conversational style, using cumulative sentences, or a weighing, judging approach (balanced sentences), or a measured, desk-pounding finality (periodic sentences)?

To answer this set of questions, I counted the number of sentences in each 50-sentence sample that are definite
rhetorical types, and I counted the number of times each type appears.

Range of sentence lengths was calculated as an index to pacing, deliberativeness versus assertiveness, level of formality, and level of abstraction.

E. Construction Schemes

I counted in each sample the schemes of construction which were used and what kinds were used. I used these for further clues to a writer's attitudes, interests, and extent of deliberate artistry.

F. Tropes

In each 50-sentence passage, I noted how many tropes were used and what kinds were used. I used these for further clues to the answers for the two sets of questions above.

G. Finite Verbs

I counted and then analyzed the instances of the three types of verbs (active-nonlinking, active-linking, and passive) as they appeared in the 50-sentence passages used for quantitative analysis.

H. Quality

I judged quality of writing by applying the criteria
previously described in a careful reading of several representative columns from each author and by synthesizing results of the other analyses performed as described above.

I. Statistical Analysis

I calculated the following quantitative data from the 50-sentence passages chosen for detailed analysis:

- Number of sentences that are definite rhetorical types.*
- Percent of sentences that are definite rhetorical types.
- Number of tropes.*
- Number of construction schemes.*
- Percent of words having only one or two syllables.*
- Number of complex sentences.*
- Percent of complex sentences.
- Number of finite verbs.*
- Number of finite verbs per sentence.
- Percent of finite verbs which are active and nonlinking.*
- Percent of finite verbs which are active and linking.*
- Percent of finite verbs which are passive.*
- Mean sentence length in words.*
- Standard deviation of sentence length in words.

"Mean" is the simple arithmetic average. "Standard deviation" is the amount of variation above and below the mean which will contain 68% of the cases. This is an indication of how often an author varied from the mean.

To find out if any two characteristics were related to each other, I calculated the correlation coefficients for all the possible pairs among the ten aspects of style which are marked above with an asterisk (*). For use of a one-tailed test applied to the seven data points (authors), five degrees of freedom are appropriate, which makes the critical
value .669. This means that if two items are related, their correlation coefficient will fall between .669 and 1.000. Thus the more closely the correlation coefficient approaches 1.000, the higher the correlation, or in other words, the closer the relationship between the items.

SUMMARY

The methods which I have used reflect the nature of the art of writing and the current stage of development of stylistic analysis--they are a mixture of strict quantitative techniques and subjective observations which I surmise would result from careful, critical readings by most sensitive, educated readers.
Chapter 2

DONALD G. MITCHELL IN THE EASY CHAIR: A GRAND, GAY BEGINNING

I. DONALD G. MITCHELL

Born in 1822 in Norwich, Connecticut, Donald G. Mitchell studied at Yale University, then worked in the American consulate in Liverpool, England, for a year. Because of poor health, he returned to the United States to write for a New York newspaper and to write the books that made him famous: Fresh Gleanings (1947), about European travel; Reveries of a Bachelor (1850) and Dream Life (1851), collections of essays written under the pseudonym "Ik Marvel;" and My Farm at Edgewood (1863) as well as Wet Days at Edgewood (1865), about life at his Connecticut farm. Mitchell originated the Easy Chair column, writing it by himself during 1851 and 1852, and from 1853 to 1859 together with Curtis. He died in 1908.¹

II. SAMPLES OF WRITING

A. American Women Need Outdoor Exercise

This passage is from the first Easy Chair column, printed October, 1851.

We have forewarned our reader, or should have done it, that we shall shift our topic in these our after-dinner musings, as easy as the turning of a leaf. Our eyes have just now fallen upon a passage in Mr. Greeley's last letter from Europe, in which he speaks of the appearance of the English women, and commends, with a little more than his usual ardor of expression, their perfection of figure. He attributes this, and very justly, to the English lady's habit of out-of-door exercise. We had thought that this fact was known: that it was known years ago, and that our fair countrywomen would catch a hint from it, that would throw color into their cheeks and fullness into their forms. And yet, sadly enough, our ladies still coop themselves in their heated rooms, until their faces are like lilies, and their figures--like lily stems!

We have alluded to the matter now, not for the sake of pointing a satire surely, but for the sake of asking those one or two hundred thousand ladies, who every month light our pages with their looks, if they do indeed prize a little unnatural pearliness of hue, and delicacy of complexion, beyond that flush of health (the very tempter of a kiss!) and that full development of figure, which all the poets, from Homer down, have made one of the chiepest beauties of a woman!

If not, let them make of themselves horsewomen: or, bating that, let them make acquaintance with the sunrise: let them pick flowers with the dew upon them: let them study music of nature's own orchestra. Vulgarity is not essential to health: and a lithe, elastic figure does not grow in hot-houses.

For ourselves, we incline heartily to the
belief, that if American women have a wish to add to the respect, the admiration, the love, and (if need be) the fear of the men, they will find an easier road toward that gain, in a little vigorous out-of-door exercise and a uniform attention to the great essentials of health, than in any new-fangled costumes, or loudly applauded "Rights."

We have grown unconsciously heated with the topic, and this added to the 90° by Fahrenheit, which is steaming at our elbow, must cut short the first installment of gossip from our red-backed easy-chair.²

B. Death of Daniel Webster

This is the first part of the December, 1852 column.

A great death will tear a rent even in the raiment of our town gayety; and when, a month ago, the lightning told us upon a Sunday morning, that the great statesman Daniel Webster had said his last prayer and gone to his last reckoning, there was a throbbing and a stopping of the blood even at the gates of the gayest hearts, which preached louder than all the sermons. It is a matter we are all marching toward—in pink bonnets and blue, in striped waistcoats and in velvets, on cross-legged stools, or in easy chairs. And we never feel the truth more, than when some great mind, which seemed by its stature and its strength to rise above all the ordinary harms which belong to humanity, is suddenly shivered from top to bottom—like a gnarled oak by lightning—and falls crashing, to rise no more! Then the old, simple Publican plea, "God be merciful!" levels us all; and the large and the small, seem all of equal stature, as they struggle together upon the strand where the great waves of Death roll up, and lick us to our graves!

² Harper's, Oct. 1851, p. 709.
Not a few black clouds have passed over the sunshine of the season gone by; and the annalist of the current year, upon whose skirts we are now treading, will have a fearful array of deaths to record—not of great men only, but of companies of travelers swept away by dozens and fifties. It affords no unfair measure of the influence of such a man as Webster, to recall the fact, that the announcement of his death struck the nation with more awe, and with a deeper sense of loss, than even that frightful catastrophe upon the Hudson, when the dead were counted by fifties. Indeed, thousands might have slipped away from the ordinary paths of life in a body, without quickening that keen sense of want and deprivation, which belonged to the simple story—Daniel Webster is dead!

This may not seem an Easy Chair topic, yet it bites so deeply into the gayety of the hour and the time, that we must give it this passing note, and so yield it up to the hands of the teachers.3

C. The Wonderful Napoleon, and What Has Become of the Palais Royal

In the middle of the December, 1852 column, Mitchell leaves the subject of Cotton Mather's views on spiritism for something lighter.

Turning from this somewhat leaden-colored subject, we beg to transport our readers, by a lift of the pen, to the sunny parterres and sparkling fountains of Paris. Never was the season richer; never held on the autumn with more loving fingers to the flowers and the foliage of summer;—never were the streets, the Boulevards, the Champs-Élysées, the garden of the Tuileries, the theatres, more full of the seekers of listless or active

3 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 128.
pleasure. The lodging-houses are crowded; and the tired loungers over the baths of Germany, or the gaming-tables of Homberg, or the mules of the Apennines, are pricking up their ears at the quick-coming salutation of the new Emperor, "Napoleon the Third." The jewel-shops are overrun, and diamonds have risen in value;--the Bourgeois traders rub their hands in their shop-doors at the thought of so much of regality in their beautiful France, as will bring new customers to their shops and stability to their stocks and their trade.

The thought which animates all--and such a thought will almost animate a Frenchman--is the present and assured conviction, that a great and brilliant change is soon to come over their political constitution, and that an Emperor in the old robes, and with the old splendor of illustration, is within a month to step into the place of their decennial President. The people are reckoning up, with greedy tongues, the pleasures and the fêtes which will attend this grand changing of the scene; and foreign loiterers linger still, that they may witness once the scenic transfiguration of Republican France.

Doubt--if we may trust such friends as keep us provided with the aspect of the gay capital--has gone wholly by; and people talk in serious earnest of when the Senate will sit, and when the Prince will determine, and when the Empire will be proclaimed.

There is something not a little grand--detest it, and mock at it as we will--in the idea that those thirty millions, more or less, of working thinking, dancing, dying Frenchmen are waiting just now, in gaping wonder, upon the sheer will of that one man, Louis Napoleon--not five feet ten in his stockings--and are querulous for the signal, to break into a shout that shall proclaim him their Lord and Emperor!

Nor is the Prince altogether so poor a speech-maker as some of his Republican friends would have us believe; he has certainly evinced a tact in his southern tour, which will more than match any thing in the speech management of our twin-candidates for the Presidency.
Hear him at Bordeaux (we give the spirit of his matter): The invitation of the Chamber of Commerce of Bordeaux, which I have accepted with unfeigned pleasure, gives me occasion to thank the inhabitants of your beautiful city for hospitality as kind as it was magnificent; and it gives me further occasion now, at the end of my journey, to tell you of the impressions it has created. Never—if I may say it without pride—has a people shown a more frank and sincere desire to relieve themselves of all pre-occupations about the future, by centralizing the power in prudent and careful laws.

"I rejoice in having saved the ship of state only by raising the standard of France. Disabused of absurd theories, the people have won the conviction, that these pretended reformers are merest dreamers, incapable of giving any practical issue to their shadowy schemes. The nation greets me kindly, because I am no idealist. There is no need for new systems; confidence in the present, and security for the future, is what we want. This is why an Empire is demanded.

"They tell us that the Empire is war. But I say—the Empire is peace. It is peace because France desires it; and when France is satisfied, the world is tranquil!"

This last touched, as was intended, and the air rung with such plaudits as tranquil Frenchmen can only give!

Among other gayeties of the hour, there is present talk of the establishment of the old gaming-houses of Paris. It is argued in their favor, that in these days of railways, the vice—if vice it be—flourishes under Parisian patronage at all the watering places upon the Rhine; and that it would be fully as well to retain this quiet changing of capital within the city, as to pamper by it the beer-drinking Germans. It is also advocated, under the belief that it would restore something of the old gayety and brilliancy to the now almost deserted arcades of the Palais Royal.

It is not a little curious in the fashionable
history of the city, that particular localities have, for a time, their prestige and eclat; after which they yield to some new quarter. Thus they tell us that the old arcades of the Place Royale, toward the column of the Bastile, and where Victor Hugo, until driven away, had his home, were once as sportive and rollicking with the mirth and the beauty of Paris as the veriest flaneur could desire. After this followed the endowment of the loftier and more brilliant arcades of that great Orleans property--the Palais Royal. Even within fifteen years, and up to a date still more recent, no Cafes were more thronged than those of the Rotonde, and Véfour, and Trois Frères; and no gardens were more haunted of white spirits and gray; and no fountains were more looked upon by grisettes, and strangers, and men blasés, than those of the Palais Royal.

But now they tell us (and a friend writes in corroborative vein), the Palais Royal is deserted, and fashion, and lorettes, and strangers have gone over to the Boulevard des Italiens, and the Café de Paris, and the Maison d'Or. Only here and there you see some old sexagenarian, whose habits are hard to change, or some stranger, who takes his cue from old guide-books, or some connoisseur who knows the cookery of the Trois Frères, wandering about the once brilliant precincts of the Palais Royal. Even the little theatre, which has rejoiced successively in the names of Théâtre du Palais, Théâtre Montansier, and I know not how many others--now shows but a beggarly array of boxes; notwithstanding the inimitable Valvassor, and Sainville, and Grasset, and the pretty Mdme. Schnivaneck.

Poor Rachel, the persecuted of a thousand petty suits at law, now and then will fill the benches at the other end of the Palace, with her personation of Camille, or Elvire, or that masterly portrayal of the afflicted Virginia; but beside her there is none at the Theatre Francais to bring either a bravo, or (what she brings oftener) floods of tears.4

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4 Harper's, Dec. 1852, pp. 130, 131.
III. CONTENT

In September, 1851, Donald G. Mitchell penned the first Easy Chair column. "After our more severe editorial work is done," he explains, we throw ourselves back into an old red-backed easy chair and indulge in "the gossiping papers of the day" and in "chit-chat with chance visitors," to keep informed of "the drift of the town-talk." In the Easy Chair column, Mitchell plans to pass on to the readers gossip and those "lighter whiffs from the great world of opinion." He explains,

We shall be on the watch for such topics or incidents as give a handle to the conversation of the town; and instead of treating them in any such philosophic fashion, as most writing men think it necessary to do, we shall try and set them down with all that gloss, and that happy lack of sequence, which makes every-day talk so much better than every-day writing."5

Thus Mitchell forecasts fairly accurately the rambling, shallow, over-blown writing with which he will waste several pages of Harper's Magazine each month for the following year and a half. After 1852 George W. Curtis fortunately assisted him in preparing the monthly Easy Chair columns, and in 1859 Curtis took complete charge of the columns.

The following topics treated in representative columns

5 Harper's, Oct. 1851, p. 707.
illustrate Mitchell's rambling, mostly banal interests.

A. Startling Tales from Abroad

In the very first column, Mitchell recounts a gruesome story translated from a French magazine of a man who went mad, then exhumed his dead wife's body, cutting off her head and carrying it to his home so its rotted eyes could witness his suicide. He also relates a romantic tale, again from the French magazines, of a wealthy man who through ingenious means cured his wife's mania for gambling and thereby cemented his happy marriage with her. 6

These stories in the September, 1851, issue are followed in the February, 1852, Harper's with a heart-rending story of a general finally won in love by the lovely blond daughter of a friend. The general is imprisoned, but is finally freed and able to marry the woman. Mitchell goes on to recount the recent Paris "lottery of Gold," after which two losers went mad. He closes this issue with a silly story from an English magazine of a clever, scurrilous horse salesman. 7

Again, in commenting on the high drama of a French

7 Harper's, Feb. 1852, p. 420.
court, as described by French reporters, Mitchell cannot resist passing on the story of a cooper, Leonard Vidaillon, and his troubles buying a pony. 8

And through several columns Mitchell prints sentimental, melodramatic stories contributed in letters from a loquacious old gentleman who is probably imaginary. When the fellow's August, 1852, letter, for example, finally gets around to the stories which are its point, they turn out to be shocking, unlikely tales demonstrating the great power with which mental events or cures can affect bodily health. 9

B. New York Chitchat and Gossip

Mitchell sandwiches into his columns an amazing variety of comments on New York life, as illustrated here: October, 1851--The current fashion in ball gowns is interesting. New York is startlingly loud and busy to a resident returning from a quiet, rural summer. 10 February, 1852--A number of factors have dampened the gaiety of New York this season, fatigue of the winter, troubles on Wall Street, ugly weather, departure of Jenny Lind to her mother's funeral, and lack of

8 Harper's, Aug. 1852, p. 413.
10 Harper's, Oct. 1851, p. 709.
August, 1852--New York is so empty and dead during the summer. But it is a pleasure to sample the first of the fall's fruit harvest, brought in from the country. There is much critical enthusiasm for the Italian singer, Alboni, which compares and contrasts interestingly with that for Jenny Lind. The music critics use far too much technical language. And the public has been outraged, then accepting, toward the idea of showing trained animals at the Astor Place Opera House.12

C. Paris Gossip and Politics

Mitchell clearly would rather be in Paris than anywhere else. Of things Parisian, he comments that:

Gambling is popular in Paris and will surely be imported to New York soon.13

The French republic (by February, 1852) has been transformed over night into an "empire" under the dictator Louis Napoleon. How could this happen? Probably the uneducated military are to blame. Such a thing would never happen in England or America. Regardless of political upheaval, the soirees and romances continue in Paris, and are far more

11 Harper's, Feb. 1852, pp. 419, 420.
12 Harper's, Aug. 1852, pp. 413, 414.
13 Harper's, Oct. 1851, p. 709.
interesting. 14

The fetes of May bring such excitement and turmoil to Paris! And how disgusted the Parisians become with the insouciant, uncouth visitors from the country. Wonderful travel bargains are available. The author has just discovered an interesting account of General George Washington which was written by a Frenchman, M. De Broglie. 15

D. American Life Style and Politics

Mitchell often views America from a European perspective. He believes that the superior beauty of English women results from their habit of exercising outdoors and that American women should follow suit. 16 He is disgusted at Congressional coldness in welcoming the Hungarian adventurer Kossuth and sad that Washington social life is apparently ruled by the diplomats. 17 The rival candidates, Generals Pierce and Scott, are having so many troubles and such bad treatment by the press. 18

14 Harper's, Feb. 1852, p. 419.
15 Harper's, Aug. 1852, pp. 411-413.
16 Harper's, Oct. 1851, p. 709.
17 Harper's, Feb. 1852, pp. 418, 419.
18 Harper's, Aug. 1852, p. 414.
IV. ROLE

In the Easy Chair, Mitchell alternates in the roles of a neighborhood gossip and a comic master of ceremonies. During the first year and a half, from his pen, the Easy Chair column seems to be light filler material written, selected, or translated at the last minute. Some of the columns are composed almost entirely of cheap, melodramatic romances translated from the French magazines. Comparable material printed today is Rona Barrett's gossip columns, the society pages in the newspapers, and the melodramatic yarns printed in the lighter women's magazines. Apparently, Mitchell's main purpose is to entertain the reader—not to inform, inspire, enlighten, or admonish, as did his successors.

V. DICTION

Three features distinguish Mitchell's diction: (1) its inclination toward the high style and archaic, fancy language, (2) its excessive proportion of foreign words, notably French, and (3) its repetition of the words "gayety" and "gay," meaning lightheartedness and light of heart.

If Mitchell can find a grand way of saying something, he does not miss the opportunity to do so. Introducing yet
another story from a writer in the French journal Courrier, he points out that he has "transmuted" this writer's stories time and again, "with some latitude of construction into our own noon-tide sentences." Mitchell observes the French affection for "velvet panoply" and "festal-days." A man who takes advantage of the new travel bargains can "lay him down" again at home afterward, a fresher and fuller man with only six weeks "cloven" from his summer. In a typical French tale, M. Vidaillon, a cooper, "bethought himself" of buying a conveyance for his family. About the new fall fruit, Mitchell says it is a pleasure to taste the "firstlings" of the country's growth.

However, Mitchell's grandness does not result from using Latinate or formal language as much as from words which are fancy, sometimes archaic, and sometimes close to cloying in their romantic sweetness. A full 91.4% of Mitchell's words have only 1 or 2 syllables, a higher percent than in any of the other six Easy Chair columnists. But the words he chooses, as illustrated above, are not

20 Harper's, Aug. 1852, p. 411.
21 Harper's, Aug. 1852, p. 412.
22 Harper's, Aug. 1852, p. 413.
23 Harper's, Aug. 1852, p. 414.
plain, everyday language. For yet another example, he does not say "Now let us look at something a little lighter," but rather, "we beg to transport our readers, by a lift of the pen, to the sunny parterres and sparkling fountains of Paris." Nor does he tell us, "We've never had a nicer or longer Indian summer," but "Never was the season richer; never held on the autumn with more loving fingers to the flowers and the foliage of summer. . . ."

Furthermore, Mitchell's language is rather concrete and specific, and also more connotative than denotative, as one would expect of a writer with a romantic orientation toward experience. Wherever possible, Mitchell works in a sensory detail. He finds the subject of spiritism "leaden-colored;" a more attractive topic is Napoleon's plan to become France's emperor. Mitchell anticipates this event in concrete terms: "... an emperor in the old robes ... is within a month to step into the place of their decennial President."

Mitchell's connotative language works to bring the reader into vicarious participation in the mood described rather than to foster cool analysis. For example, in his

24 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 130.
26 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 130.
discussion of Napoleon's coming rise to emperor, he presents not a listing or analysis of objective political and social forces, but a sympathetic description of the popular feeling about the event:

The lodging-houses are crowded; and the tired loungers over the baths of Germany, or the gaming- tables of Homberg, or the mules of the Apennines, are pricking up their ears at the quick-coming salutation of the new Emperor, "Napoleon the Third." The jewel-shops are over-run, and diamonds have risen in value;—the Bourgeois traders rub their hands in their shop-doors at the thought of so much of regality in their beautiful France, as will bring new customers to their shops, and stability to their stocks and their trade.27

In harmony with his effort to be concrete, Mitchell prefers not to state generalities, but to suggest the general by the specific. Rather than telling us that about thirty million real, alive Frenchmen are anxious to make Napoleon their emperor, he says that "... thirty millions, more or less, of working, thinking, dancing, dying Frenchmen" are waiting for the declaration.28

Mitchell is clearly in love with France and with things French, and he assumes that his readers are, too. About two-thirds of the Easy Chair space during Mitchell's tenure is devoted to translations of French stories, commentary on Paris happenings, and discussion of French politics. These

27 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 130.
28 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 130.
passages are heavily dotted with French words and French-English cognates. In eight short, typical paragraphs, Mitchell mentions the bouillon, the fleurs-de-lis, the fête, the garçon, the mode, the parroquet, the maison garnie, the courriers and valets-de-place, the carte-du-jour, char-a-banc, and a host of French places and establishments: the Maison d'or, Café Anglais, Fauborg St. Honoré, the Bal Mabil, the Estaminet-Café, the Champs Elysées, the Bois de Boulogne, Meudon, St. Cloud, Aix la Chapelle, the Boulevard de la Madeleine, Havre, Strasbourg, Rue de la Paix, the Palais Royal, Versailles, the Louvre, Notre Dame, the Bourse, Fontainebleau, the Hotel de L'Ecu, Leman, and Mont Blanc. Mitchell thus demonstrates the sense of kinship with our European cousins which was still so strong in mid-19th century America, a sense of kinship and affection shown after Mitchell by the persistent interest of his successor, Curtis, in things British. To most of the later Easy Chair writers (Howells, De Voto, Fischer, and Lapham) Europe is by contrast rather foreign and uninteresting.

Donald Mitchell's central concern is clearly "gayety." The content of his columns seems chosen mostly to entertain, and even in a passage commenting on such a sober event as the death of the great Daniel Webster, Mitchell's emphatic

29 Harper's, Aug. 1852, pp. 411, 412.
opening observation is that "A great death will tear a rent even in the raiment of our town gayety," and will affect even "the gayest hearts." As he ends the passage, Mitchell apologizes: "This may not seem an Easy Chair topic, yet it bites so deeply into the gayety of the hour. . . ." 30

Mitchell's Paris correspondents keep him informed about the "gay" city. 31 Passing from a discussion of the French adulation for Napoleon, Mitchell tells us that "among other gayeties of the hour," there is talk of establishing the old gambling houses of Paris. This move would "restore something of the old gayety" to the Palais Royal. 32

In an 1852 column, turning again to the "foreign chit-chat," Mitchell wonders whether he has the spirit to talk of foreign "gayety" when Napoleon has begun his violent conquests. But Mitchell reassures us with news that in Belgium, "a poor exiled gayety makes glad the hearts of thousands of refugees." 33

30 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 128.
31 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 129.
32 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 130.
33 Harper's, June 1852, p. 128.
VI. SENTENCE STYLE

The mean length of Mitchell's sentences is 39 words, and the standard deviation is 19 words. His longest sentence is 87 words, his shortest, 7 words. His sentences have more average length and also more variety in length than those of the other columnists. Sentences like these would be expected of a writer who tries to effect a dramatic, ornate style.

Of Mitchell's sentences, 74% are complex sentences. This proportion is similar to those of Martin and Lapham, who treat quite different kinds of materials than does Mitchell, and who have styles rather different from his. While Lapham generally uses a complex sentence to relate concepts in an analytical passage, Mitchell uses it to add to his statements qualification and elaborations which sometimes do not seem necessary but appear to be written mostly for the pleasure of the tropes or schemes they contain. Thus it is clear that complex sentences are not in fact indexes to the degree of analysis or deliberation carried on in a piece of writing.

As expected, 72% of Mitchell's sentences are definite rhetorical types, more than those of the other authors; he is an especially self-conscious, deliberate writer. The 36 sentences in question are distributed as follows:
Balanced 11
Interrupted 7
Cumulative 18
Periodic 0

The preponderance of cumulative sentences harmonizes with Mitchell's high number of subordinate clauses used to tack on ornate elaboration.

VII. CONSTRUCTION SCHEMES

Mitchell also uses more construction schemes than do the others, though Curtis and Howells use almost as many. Mitchell's schemes are distributed as follows:

Unusual or inverted order 21
Omission 0
Repetition 29
Balance 19

Mitchell's stand out far more than those of Curtis or Howells because his seem less needed or used to advance argument but rather seem to be there "for the fun of it"--for ornateness as an end. Not only does Mitchell scorn a simple, English word when a French or archaic word is available, but he is rarely content with only one word when he can find two. In February, 1952, he announces that France, with her "regularly-elected President, and her regularly-made--though somewhat tattered--Constitution" has been made into an
empire held together only by "an army, and a Bonaparte," the Bonaparte having managed to out-maneuver "the bustling little Thiers, and the bold-acting Cavaignac." Bonaparte reminds us of the time when Changarnier so completely ruled the "Paris military and Paris constabulary." 34

About the cold welcome given the Hungarian, Kossuth, in Washington, Mitchell finds an answer in the "every-day chit-chat, and dinner-table talk." Apparently, "Washington has a peculiar and shifting social character," with elements varied "of manner and of opinion." But since the diplomatic circles are the only stable basis for "habit and gossip," probably they are to blame. 35

During the winter season of 1852 and 1853, Mitchell wishes for the "sunny parterres and sparkling fountains" of Paris. There, autumn clings with loving fingers to "the flowers and the foliage of summer." The streets, gardens, and theatres are full of "seekers of listless or active pleasure." The reason for the excitement is the "present and assured conviction" that the empire will be restored. It is a grand idea that those millions of "working, thinking, dancing, dying Frenchmen" are so taken with this one man. 36

34 Harper's, Feb. 1852, p. 418.
35 Harper's, Feb. 1852, pp. 418, 419.
36 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 130.
In the same column, Mitchell remarks that Daniel Webster has "said his last prayer and gone to his last reckoning," which precipitated "a throbbing and a stopping of the blood." In fact, we are all marching toward death, "in pink bonnets and blue, in striped waistcoats and in velvets, on cross-legged stools, or in easy chairs." We are reminded of this when some great person of "stature and strength" dies. There have been many deaths in the past year, companies of travelers "swept away by dozens and fifties." But Webster's death struck the nation with "more awe, and with a deeper sense of loss" than these, quickening "a keen sense of want and deprivation." 37

Mitchell apparently believes and practices the philosophy that ideas, words, and grammatical units are much grander if marshalled in pairs or trios.

VIII. TROPES

Mitchell uses 77 tropes in the 50 sentences examined, far more than do any of the others. They are distributed as follows:

37 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 128.
His use of tropes echoes his use of construction schemes; they are part of a deliberately, self-consciously ornate style, and they often seem used more for their own sake than for better clarity or greater logical force. Thus they are rather noticeable compared with the tropes used by Howells or Lapham. For example, advising women to get more exercise outdoors, Mitchell spurns the ordinary, commonsense style Curtis, DeVoto, or Fischer would use and advises, "... let them make acquaintance with the sunrise: let them pick flowers with the dew upon them: let them study music of nature's own orchestra." 38

IX. FINITE VERBS

Mitchell uses 152 finite verbs in 50 sentences, or an average of 3.0 per sentence. This is about as many as the other columnists; Fischer uses fewer and Howells more.

38 Harper's, Oct. 1851, p. 709.
Mitchell's finite verbs occur as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active and non-linking</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active and linking</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This low proportion of passive verbs would be expected of a deliberate stylist like Mitchell.

Of Mitchell's finite verbs, 19% are linking verbs. This is about the same proportion as used by most of the other columnists. Linking verbs are used to define; the limited proportion of them in Mitchell's writing suggests again that his major concern is to tell what is happening and who is doing it, rather than to define the nature of things.

X. QUALITY

For the most part I find Mitchell's material to have little value. Much of his column space is given to trivia, such as the possibility of importing the pastime of gambling from Paris to New York, how the public feels about showing trained animals at the opera house, and the details of this season's fashion in ball gowns. And unlike Curtis, Mitchell makes no effort to use such material to stimulate insights about human nature or morality.

Most of his space not given to trivia Mitchell uses for passing on sentimental, romantic tales from abroad. These are of three kinds. One is the gruesome murder or suicide
account, which feeds the reader's morbid curiosity about the inner lives of others. Another is the silly story of a clever fraud worked on a gullible person, through which the reader can laugh at others and feel superior to them. The third kind is the tale of two improbably attractive people who amid rather improbable circumstances fall in love, and after surmounting formidable obstacles manage finally to settle down and live happily ever after. These stories are certainly direct ancestors of such presently popular stories as the Harlequin romances and the short stories in many of the "slick" magazines--simply escape literature.

Mitchell is a little weak as a technical craftsman. While his columns are generally clear, he makes little effort toward unity in any column or major portion of a column. His typical column is a hodgepodge. The sentences are not all smooth and easy to read because of Mitchell's fondness for awkward interrupted sentences. Fischer uses about as many interrupted sentences as Mitchell, and Howell uses more, but theirs are smooth and unobtrusive, possibly because their interrupters are more often modification of the subject which attaches to it securely and becomes part of an easily processed package with it. Mitchell's, on the other hand, are often rather parenthetical, as in this example: "Doubt--if we may trust such friends as keep us provided with
the aspect of the gay capital—has gone wholly by. . . ."39

A few misuses of grammar and punctuation also slightly mar Mitchell's columns by confusing the reader. For example, he writes that when a well-known person dies,

Then the old, simple Publican plea, "God be merciful!" levels us all; and the large and the small, seem all of equal stature, as they struggle together upon the strand where the great waves of Death roll up, and lick us to our graves.40

Of the four commas in this passage, the third clearly should not be there at all, and the necessity or usefulness of the last one is questionable. Another instance of technical weakness is the following sentence, coming after an account of a speech by Napoleon: "This last touched, as was intended, and the air rung with such plaudits as **tranquil** Frenchmen can only give!"41 Surely Mitchell's meaning would be better conveyed by this revision of the last part of his sentence: such plaudits as only tranquil Frenchmen can give.

Although Mitchell can write beautiful and dramatic tropes and weave finely crafted sentences and schemes, they are not always well done, and they do not always help communicate the content effectively. Examples of Mitchell's poorly done tropes follow:

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"... [We] beg to transport our readers, by a lift of the pen, to the sunny parterres and sparkling fountains of Paris."42 One does not readily accept the idea of a pen as a means of transportation.

"While he was riding the very topmost wave of popular admiration, a rumor had it that he had been uncivil and unduly exacting in his intercourse with the officers of the Mississippi frigate, struck his gallant craft and threatened to whelm her under the sea she was so triumphantly riding."43 (Here Mitchell mixes a metaphor, comparing popularity to riding high on a wave, with an actual fact, a threat to sink a man's ship.)

And many of the tropes and schemes that are well done are not important or particularly useful for communicating the content, and some do not match the content very well. For instance, Mitchell says that Webster's death reminds us of our own mortality: "It is a matter we are all marching toward--in pink bonnets and blue, in striped waistcoats and in velvets, on cross-legged stools or in easy chairs."44 How can one march in an easy chair? Why the emphasis on what we wear to this solemn, final event? Even if Mitchell means the listed items to represent a time sequence, the pinks, blues, and velvets made it sound like a Sunday picnic.

Continuing, Mitchell observes that "the large and the small, seem all of equal stature as they struggle together

42 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 130.
43 Harper's, Dec. 1851, p. 131.
44 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 128.
upon the strand where the great waves of death roll up, and lick us to our graves!" This trope is a puzzle, first making us pause over who might be struggling and with whom; death seems a person (capitalized) and yet a great ocean (appropriately grand and solemn), and then it "licks" us to our graves! This last phrase brings to mind such far from grand or solemn scenes as the family mongrel licking up a hapless red ant from the patio floor.

Finally, Mitchell uses many rhetorical devices for their own sake - apparently for the fun of hearing himself talk. The result is an overblown effect as illustrated in this passage from a discussion of the spring floods:

"It is a pretty thing to see-as we have seen-the mountain rivulets growing white and angry, and swelling into great torrents that run writhing around the heel of mossy rocks, and start the mouldering logs that bridged them, into sharp-flung javelins that twist and dash along the growing tide; and it is grand to see the lithe saplings that border such maddened streamlet, dipping their sappy limbs, and struggling, and torn away by the chafing waters; and it is like a poem--richer than any tame pastoral--to listen to the rush and whirl bearing down scathed tree-trunks, and mossy boulders, and loitering with a hissing laziness in some spreading eddy at the foot of a mountainslope: but it is terrible, when the rush of a thousand such streams has doubled the volume of a river, and drowned the sweet spring banks, and borne off struggling flocks, and rose to the level of firesides--deluging gardens and families--spreading through the streets of a town like a

45 Harper's, Dec. 1852, p. 128.
reeling monster of a thousand heads, lifting its yellow ghastliness into chambers, and rocking from their foundations rural homes, and swaying the topmost limbs of fruit trees that shadow the roof."46

I have stated that a good Easy Chair writer's tone will probably be altruistic, constructive, hopeful, yet restrained and critical. Mitchell's is for the most part frivolous, fun-loving, and unrestrained.

SUMMARY

Donald G. Mitchell's Easy Chair columns are distinguished by light, sometimes trivial content; by his decorative, sometimes overblown style; and by his decidedly European orientation. His entertaining columns may have been a welcome relief from serious, heavy pieces in the magazine. And they probably fed a desire for gossip and vicarious romance. But I suspect his love for things French may not have been shared by a large proportion of his audience, and neither was his ease in the French language, with which he liberally sprinkled the columns. The less educated, wealthy, or well-traveled among Harper's readers may have had trouble also with Mitchell's general obliviousness of all but the wealthy class. He apparently assumes, for instance, that

46 Harper's, June 1852, p. 126.
most of his readers will appreciate his descriptions of how New York seems to one returning from the usual spring or summer spent in Europe, at the seaside, or in the country. As food for the mind, Mitchell's Easy Chair columns are cream puffs.
Chapter 3

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS: AMERICAN FAMILY PATRIARCH

I. GEORGE W. CURTIS

George W. Curtis, 1824 - 1892, was born in Rhode Island. During his eighteenth and nineteenth years he stayed at Brook Farm, where he formed a lasting association with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Afterward he traveled in Europe for four years. On his return, he served as an editor with the New York Tribune, then with Putnam's Monthly. In 1853 he began contributing essays to the Easy Chair of Harper's Magazine. In 1863 he also became political editor of Harper's and was much in demand for lectures. Curtis was a leader in civil reform, trying especially to promote women's suffrage.¹

After Mitchell left Harper's in 1859, George William Curtis settled into the Easy Chair for the next thirty three years. In a Harper's history published in 1900, editor Henry Mills Alden explains that the Easy Chair came to be so completely identified with Curtis that

II. SAMPLES OF WRITING

A. Higher Education for Women

This passage begins in the middle of a lengthy discussion of higher education in America, written at the time of the mid-summer commencement ceremonies.

If our young men tend to be a little dry and cynical, and are too often yielding to the mechanical drift of the new science without rising into its upper currents of spirit and life, we ought to welcome the new movement that is so earnest to introduce such a vital and emotional element into the higher schools of education as woman. It has been manifest for some years that the social aspects of college festivals were becoming more conspicuous than the merely literary, and that the students cared more for class-day and its spreads and its dances than for Commencement, with its procession, degrees, and its speeches. But this preference is part of the old story, and does not forebode any new departure in principle or policy. The most conspicuous fact in American society this year is the serious discussion of the propriety of opening our universities to women upon equal terms with men, and the approach of our oldest university toward this measure by issuing a prospectus of seventy-two pages for regular examinations of women in courses of study that have the range and dignity of university education. The first examinations are to be in the last half of June, 1874, and will be of two grades - the first for young women who are not less than seventeen years old,

the second of a more advanced character for those who are not less than eighteen years old. The first examination will embrace English, French, physical geography, either elementary botany or elementary physics, arithmetic, algebra through quadratic equations, plane geometry, history, and any one of the three languages, German, Latin, and Greek. A full list of specifications is given, and specimen examination papers are furnished. The advanced examination will be divided into five sections, in one or more of which the candidate may present herself, as follows: 1. Languages - any two of these - English, French, German, Italian, Latin, Greek; 2. Natural science - any two of these branches - chemistry, physics, botany, mineralogy, geology; 3. Mathematics as stated; 4. History, whether of Europe during the Reformation, or of English and American affairs from 1688 to 1800; 5. Philosophy - three of these subjects - mental philosophy, moral philosophy, logic, rhetoric, political economy.

Without doubt these examinations will be largely attended, not only by the earnest young women whose limited means will induce them to accept the offered help of the Woman's Education Society, but by the best specimens of the most favored young women of Boston and the vicinity, if not of the whole State and country. The result will be the rise and recognition of a class of thorough female scholars, and the encouragement and increase of schools capable of preparing them for the examination and of securing their services as teachers. The advantages will be great, and on two points they can not be easily overestimated. They will enable young women to win a more secure and honorable livelihood than before, and they will do a great deal to put society upon a more worthy intellectual basis, and make education a new social power. Women need not only bread and clothing and lodging, but they want the sympathy and friendship of the best of their own sex and of ours. An accredited position in knowledge and refinement will do much to win this association, and many a bright and noble girl will find new light upon her path as she secures not only a good livelihood, but, what is of equal account to her, a cheerful, generous, social life, which opens
to her with her new culture and its surround-
ings.

Exactly how far women are to carry out their aspirations, in what associations they are to be educated, or what pursuits they are to follow, it is not easy to say, and we must trust to ex-
perience rather than to theory to show us what is coming. The great thing is to give woman fair play in all respects, and try to carry for-
ward her march not in any pet direction, but along the whole line of her powers and her in-
terests. We need the characteristic womanly mind alike for her sake and for man's sake. We are not, indeed, to neglect the utilitarian view of the subject, and who does not see that fearful evil comes from the want of a practical training that will secure to the great host of girls without property their honest bread? Who does not see that often the social privilege that prepares young men for business and thrift encourages young women in idleness and vanity, that makes them more exacting as they become more helpless and dependent? Employment for woman is, of course, the most conspicuous practical aspect of her wel-
fare. Yet it is wise not to make her mind wait upon her circumstances, but rather make it command them. The new culture, like the old religion, must take it for granted that there is always room enough for the right spirit to turn about in. The women of the primitive church did not wait to find occupation before they came out of the old idol-

"Our modern life is in some respects drying up, and our young men are too often mere sticks, with-
out a living idea or generous inspiration. They sometimes do their utmost to spoil young women, and young women repay the folly with added grace and assiduity. The true womanhood, in its quick perception, ready wit, flashing intuition, per-
sonal devotedness, and high fidelity, must come to the rescue.
She must show us that under her interpretation reason is not a cold and heartless rationalism, but a genial, loving wisdom, with a ray as glowing as it is luminous for our pathway and our home. She can teach us that virtue is not a hard law, a dull formalism, a harsh negation, but a living inspiration, drawing power from the eternal love, and going forth in healthful freedom to its conflict and to its peace.

All men may confess to a share of weakness for the ring of pretty girls who are found almost every where trying to make mediocrity charming, and to keep up the old routine of empty show and petty clique. We understand in some degree the power of that ring of graces when they pass into favored establishments, the pet wives of husbands whose principles and aspirations are not always the better by this charming petticoat government. But among the girls and the matrons we have seen enough of what a true woman can be to make us wish and strive that she may be a more frequent fact and power in these new times that threaten dangers as well as promise privilege, and call upon men and women to study together the science and the art of the social order which they are to suffer or to enjoy together. We often call our time the age of mechanism, but it ought to be the millennium of ideality and faith; for within all the facts of nature and history mysterious forces move, and over all the supreme love presides. If men are too often forgetting the more humane and divine view of the universe, and becoming as soul-less as the machines by which they make their money, women do not tend that way, and even their faults vindicate the emotions, and do not wholly deny the ideal sphere.

The true culture under the supreme guidance will give woman due power for man's sake as well as her own, and bring the marvelous quickness of her perceptions, the flash of her intuitions, and the richness of her genius into the true life. She has more genius than man in proportion to the measure of her faculties, and Hartmann well says that young men should associate with women for the best incentive, for you can find men in their books, but women must be seen in actual society to be appreciated. They have certainly done
wonders in our age by their books, and the century that has given us Corinne, Consuelo, and Romola may, before it closes, show us a type of society worthy of the womanly fascination that appears in those pages. If they can do so much in print, where so much of their form, movement, and spirit is kept back, what will they not do in society when full culture is given to their powers, and full sweep is allowed to their graces and charms? Perhaps there is danger that they will have too much power, and imperil masculine sense by their witching art. If so, the remedy is in more education, not less, and a new day will come when women will have science enough to check their frequent folly, and to bring far-seeing wisdom to the service of their beautiful tastes.3

B. The University's Contributions to Art

This passage immediately follows that above.

How much our new scholars are doing for the beautiful arts, and for the beauty which is the life of art, is a question that every year is doing something to answer.

Perhaps the arts have not received as many recruits from the university among us as could be expected, and the most noticeable service from this quarter has been rendered to architecture, which is pre-eminently a learned art, and one which has been helped much by the work of graduates and the bounty of patrons. Some of the finest buildings in America have lately been erected for literature, and the successful architects have been college graduates. Puritan Yale

3 Harper's, Sept. 1873, pp. 615-617. A rapid reading of several columns per year from Curtis' long tenure in the Chair showed that his style did not change during that time. Therefore representative samples could be selected from any column. I arbitrarily chose this passage and the passage following from about the middle of Curtis' tenure.
takes the lead in establishing an art department with an especial professorship, and the enterprise promises well.

Sculpture and painting have noted names from the list of American scholars, although their chief honors have been won in literary art, whether history, poetry, or philosophy; and the most ideal of our sculptors, William Story, has been called, with some reason, somewhat bookish, or literary, in his marbles. Perhaps, however, the best art that has come from our educated men has been their high style of character, which has so stamped itself upon our constitution and thought and temper--the living art that carries repose into courage, exalts thinking above the strife of opinion into the light of reason, and lifts sensibility above passion and impulse toward the supreme beauty, which graces strength with gentleness, and makes love a virtue instead of a madness. Perhaps this art has spoken somewhat distinctly in our purest writers and speakers, our best statesmen and lawgivers; and there has been not a little in the speech of our best authors, the acts of our lawgivers and our leaders, to prove that the old Greek and German fire has not died out, and our artists have much to learn before they work up to that ideal. Undoubted heroism and peculiar susceptibility belong to the genuine American, and he needs only due culture to bring out his artistic powers, and put virtue and heart into marble and color and music.

Word comes of the death of the most widely known of American artists, Hiram Powers. Much has been said of him, and still the tributes multiply. . . .

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4 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 617.
III. CONTENT

Curtis' wide-ranging interests and his involvement with all aspects of the American scene are illustrated by the following list of common topics in his Easy Chair columns.

A. Prosperity of the Arts

In the nine columns surveyed for this paper, Curtis assesses the state of American art, holding that its best feature is its expression of good character. He discusses what the universities have contributed to art, and praises the maturity and continued development of the sculptor Hiram Powers. He praises the poet William Cullen Bryant, and recounts (in 1883) the history of the then-waning intellectual ascendancy of Boston and contrasts with it the New York Knickerbocker Club. He joins in the contemporary (1883) argument over which kind and extent of borrowing is legitimate among story and play writers, and which is

5 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 617.
6 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 617.
7 Harper's, Aug. 1878, pp. 463, 464.
8 Harper's, Dec. 1883, pp. 149, 150.
plagiarism. In 1888 Curtis praises several public readings by American authors to raise funds to erect a memorial to Longfellow and to secure better copyright laws. He notes with pride that the readings displayed a wealth of distinctly American and national (not regional) literature.  

B. Quality of American Higher Education

Curtis points out the logical fallacies in a speech of Edward Everett at the opening of a girls' school named for Everett. He goes on to point out that political power should depend on education. At commencement time in 1873, Curtis writes that college education should emphasize far more science. The students should leave the libraries and observe nature for themselves. This would work against the artificial, mechanistic understanding the youth commonly have, and would restore their awareness of the "life and soul of things," and their high ideals.

C. Simplicity, Sincerity, and Common Sense

In one column, Curtis decries Mason Jones' incessant

11 Harper's, Nov. 1861, pp. 848, 849.
12 Harper's, Sept. 1873, pp. 613-615.
advertising of his New York lecture series—the advertising smacks of "quackery." 13 And he takes most of another column to show how foolish is the principle "de mortuis"—blindly praising the dead. 14 Curtis notes that two important colleges are considering admitting women students. He insists this is a good idea—women could be trained as school teachers and thus gain good livelihoods, and higher education would enable a woman to enjoy a better social life. 15 In another column, he discusses some of the less wealthy inhabitants of embassy row in Washington, D.C. who feel they must match the expensive feasts of the very rich or not entertain at all. Curtis calls for pride in one's hospitality however simple, and calls for general restraint and good sense in entertaining. 16 In his last column, Curtis pleads for celebration of a simple, meaningful Christmas without pretentious extravagance. 17

13 Harper's, Mar. 1863, p. 563.
15 Harper's, Sept. 1873, pp. 615-617.
16 Harper's, Feb. 1888, pp. 470-472.
17 Harper's, Nov. 1892, pp. 957, 958.
D. Books of Travel, History, and Social Commentary

Curtis registers his disgust with a book by the British Irishman Russel about the Civil War. The book is "comment by a happy-go-lucky Irish scribbler upon the most sober and momentous of modern events."18

E. British Politics and Personages

From a 1981 viewpoint, Curtis seems unusually interested in things British. He notes the great change of the British monarch from ruler to figurehead which has still a great moral power.19 At the death of Prince Albert he praises the man, claiming he was more noble than commonly believed.20 But Curtis is critical, too, and finds Britain deficient when judged by the democratic American ideal. He urges abolition of English social classes, and wider distribution of suffrage and wealth.21 Curtis especially lauds the American government by popularly elected officials, recommending it to Britain as a replacement for its rule "by the few" blooded

18 Harper's, Mar. 1863, p. 562.
19 Harper's, Nov. 1861, pp. 847, 848.
20 Harper's, Mar. 1863, pp. 565, 566.
21 Harper's, Mar. 1863, pp. 566, 567.
artistocracy. 22 He devotes most of a long column to analyzing the character and rise to power of the sensational Lord Beaconsfield, prime minister of England. 23

F. The American Way of Life

Curtis is the exemplary citizen, and he urges a more sensitive social conscience on his readers. He expresses great pride in American political achievements and tries to promote and preserve the ideals of the founding fathers. Curtis also concerns himself with the spiritual and social health of American culture, and with all aspects of civic life. For example, he decries, with dramatic stories, the general sloppiness of city governments, builders, theater owners, and the general citizenry in their lack of concern for fire safety in public meeting halls. 24 He observes in 1878 that the country is healing, and that Decoration Day celebrations promote a true union of the country. 25 He explains possible definitions of "gentleman," condemning the ungentlemanly "gentlemen" who were guests of Northern

23 Harper's, Aug. 1878, pp. 462, 463.
Pacific Railroad at the driving of the golden spike completing the transcontinental railroad. Organized charity is a good thing, Curtis asserts. He also mentions the 50-year anniversary meeting of some New York men who in 1833 had almost been lynched for holding a meeting to organize the city's abolitionist citizens. Curtis calls this a narrow escape for the important American freedoms of speech and peaceful assembly. Like the other Easy Chair occupants, Curtis gives special attention to New York and its current happenings. In 1888 he mourns the loss of community pride and affection among New Yorkers, blaming this partly on the disappearance of their Dutch heritage. He still finds New York a delightful place, because of its outstanding musical offerings, as well as good theater, lectures, and other amusements. But like other Easy Chairs, Curtis finds New York not yet a great city; it has several deficiencies in his view—it lacks libraries, museums, great art, great educational institutions, and memorials to great citizens.

26 Harper's, Dec. 1883, pp. 150, 151.
27 Harper's, Dec. 1883, pp. 151, 152.
G. Current Events

Curtis displays such interest in current events that he must have read several major newspapers in their entirety daily. The events that he chooses for Easy Chair attention are examined with a patriarch's moral eye. Regarding each happening, he explains what really happened, why it occurred as it did, and what lesson can be drawn from it. In the fall of 1861 he describes with amusement the outrageous plans for a ball to entertain the young visitor, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales. He condemns William Walker, a small-time American mercenary who had taken his private army to Nicaragua and Honduras, where he had been pursued and executed by natives. In spite of popular sympathy for the "martyr" and "hero," Curtis insists that Walker's death was well-deserved. Curtis reads in the newspapers about a working women's demonstration in New York city to express disgust with a women's hotel built and offered to them by a local male philanthropist, and about the subsequent financial failure of the hotel. He presents the whole history of the project, then suggests that the problem was a failure of the builder to discover the real needs of the

30 Harper's, Nov. 1861, pp. 845-847.
31 Harper's, Nov. 1861, p. 849.
working women (for instance, the rooms lacked closets!). Curtis closes his analysis with an appropriate general moral to be learned. 32

IV. ROLE

Although Alden calls Curtis a "prophet," 33 "patriarch" describes him better. Curtis takes the role in American society of the powerful and wise grandparent in the family—an unapologetic preserver of Christian and American philosophy and values. Curtis is neither an alarmist nor a pessimist, feeling that Americans and the American lifestyle are generally good. He assumes, however, that his readers need the wise insights of a sage and that they need reminding of their traditional values. Curtis exhibits a lively interest in all aspects of national and New York life, and offers a full evaluation of each event he discusses, telling what really happened, why things happened as they did, and what lesson can be drawn, assuming the American people both need and appreciate his insights.

32 Harper's, Aug. 1878, pp. 460, 461.
33 Alden, p. 960.
V. DICTION

Curtis' diction is that of the broadly and well educated philosopher-citizen who chooses to devote himself to promoting society's good and to sharing his ideas effectively with the average citizen. Thus he mixes plain, informal words with fancy, sometimes archaic, polysyllabic words. For instance, in one column, he uses such simple, common adjectives as "softest," "sweetest," "warm," "mellow," and "affectionate" together with adjectives like "benignant," "pathetic," "fragmentary," "metropolitan," and "saltatory." He mixes simple nouns like "fruit" and "glow" with others like "proceeding," "paternity," " declamation," "prostration," "imbecility," and "dependencies." 34

Curtis uses foreign or classical language infrequently but without a hint of apology. He argues against the sacred principle "de mortuis," revealing that as to Benjamin Franklin, "there is a little supplement to the life of the good Doctor, qui eripuit, which shows certain facts..." 35

Curtis' ease with Latin, German, French, and Italian reveals

34 Harper's, Nov. 1861, pp. 844-850.
his extensive education and travels; his infrequent use of these languages shows how lightly he wears his learning and how dedicated he is to communicating effectively with the less educated American.

Since Curtis deals in general truths supported with specifics, his language is mixed general and specific, as in the following passage. After observing that the old intellectual and literary clique of Boston is said to be passing away, Curtis asserts that:

It is undoubtedly true, because so many of the group are gone, and no such company of men and women is immediately succeeded by another. The age of Pericles did not pass into another age of Pericles. The Elizabethan era did not renew itself. The "Anne's men" had no such successors. Dr. Johnson's club was not recruited. The Edinburgh of the beginning of the century does not re-appear at its end. The Knickerbocker set that preceded the Column, the Sketch Club, and the Century in New York, has left no heir, and the Boston circle, once broken, is not completed elsewhere. The London Times thinks that the Boston intellectual decrees have always been tinged with Boston, and that intellectual autocracy in New York will be free from any local stamp. There is no particular meaning in such a remark, for Hawthorne is no more Yankee than Scott is Scotch, and Longfellow no more local than Tennyson, nor Emerson than Carlyle. Doubtless in all of them the Puritan bent is discernible, like the Cavalier sympathy in Scott. Like Milton, they are blossoms of the old Lutheran stock; but that stock clings to no single garden, and strikes its roots in every soil.36

36 Harper's, Dec. 1883, p. 150.
For a writer dealing with so much abstract and general thought, Curtis is very concrete and informal, and thus very pleasantly readable. A concrete style is achieved partly by inclusion of many specific examples, as in the paragraph quoted above, and by skillful use of tropes, again seen above, in the last sentence. Curtis also takes the space to tell illustrative stories. He begins his indictment of disregard for public safety with a long story about the carefree, rollicking picnic crowd from the idyllic town of Sunmead (probably imaginary) who ride, singing, onto a poorly maintained bridge, which then collapses, leaving several of them seriously and permanently crippled.37

Wherever possible, Curtis uses a concrete style. In reference to the various types from New York's elite society who are planning a ball for Prince Albert Edward, Curtis mentions "the Misses Gunnybags," "Clara Cobra of the venomous tongue," "Mr. Shoemaker Sole," and Mr. Willow-legs."38 He expresses disgust at the fulsome praise heaped on "Old Grab" in the sermon at his funeral.39 In other passages, he refers to other types common in any society:

37 Harper's, Oct. 1868, pp. 708-710.
38 Harper's, Nov. 1861, pp. 845-847.

Informality in Curtis' style results from use of the first and second-person pronouns, from use of dialogue which includes colloquialisms, and from occasional use of informal words. Curtis says Nature will restore the union between the states "if you do not balk her efforts." 45 Philanthropist Stewart should know "we value what we pay for." 46 "We hope" that the superstitious did not think the lightening was an ill omen. 47 Mr. Murray's church, "as we understand it," will not be built upon emotional religion. 48 "We" are contemporaries of a picturesque character of English history. 49 "You smile as you read." 50

40 Harper's, Aug. 1878, p. 460.
44 Harper's, Aug. 1878, p. 461.
45 Harper's, Aug. 1878, p. 460.
46 Harper's, Aug. 1878, p. 460.
47 Harper's, Aug. 1878, p. 461.
48 Harper's, Aug. 1878, p. 462.
49 Harper's, Aug. 1878, p. 462.
50 Harper's, Aug. 1878, p. 462.
Curtis observes that Bumptio feels Decoration Day is "sentimental swash"—"gush and mush." He doesn't plan to be "humbugged" or "taken in."

When inquiring about the ghost in the dead governor's closet, the Easy Chair is told, "Habits! why the Governor used to fuddle himself with liquor, that's all."

Explaining his failure to repair the Sunmead bridge, poor Shirker exclaims,

"Dear me. I was only jest hayin', and I knew there was a sleeper not exactly right, and I meant to have mended it right up, but I thought I'd jest finish hayin', and who'd a thought any body would go tumblin' through the bridge, massy me!"

The woman's hotel failed because the builders ignored the need for what Aunt Margery called "clusets."

If smoking became unfashionable, the tobacconists would "tear their hair."

Curtis uses the proportion of denotative and connotative words to be expected from an apologist who assumes certain traditional values but who also tries to make a reasoned case for his view. In an example of his writing presented

55 *Harper's*, Nov. 1861, p. 848.
earlier in this chapter, Curtis urges the wisdom of admitting women as students in our colleges. In his opening sentence he portrays the question as whether or not to "welcome... such a vital and emotional element...as woman." He could have used more cold, neutral language, asking whether the colleges should admit females. Later he retreats to a little more neutral, thoughtful language, predicting "the rise and recognition of a class of thorough female scholars," a good thing for two reasons: "young women" will be enabled to hold secure, honorable jobs (in teaching) and to enjoy a better social life. After establishing his train of thought in a neutral, reasoning tone, Curtis again takes up more connotative language, discussing the typical man's "weakness for the ring of pretty girls who are found almost everywhere trying to make mediocrity charming...," and who become "the pet wives of husbands whose principles and aspirations are not always the better by this charming petticoat government."

Of all the words in the sample 50 sentences from Curtis, 86.3 percent have only 1 or 2 syllables. Thus, like the others, Curtis uses a mostly Anglo-Saxon vocabulary.

Harper's, Sept. 1873, pp. 615, 616.
VI. SENTENCE STYLE

Like Mitchell, Curtis tends to write many moderately long sentences but with a great deal of variation. His average sentence is 38 words long; the standard deviation is 17.3 words. Curtis' sentences range from 11 words long to 78 words. However, only 58% of his sentences are complex, far fewer than the 74% in Mitchell's writing and 76% in Lapham's. Thus more of the expansion in Curtis' sentences must consist of adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. As Miles has pointed out, this amounts to a more adjectival style, in contrast to a connective style. The connective style uses subordinate clauses to state relationships, leaving them open to be questioned, whereas the adjectival style assumes the relationship exists and that it probably won't be doubted.57 Here are some simple examples:

Our young men too often yield to the mechanical drift of the new science. (Adjectival)

Our young men too often yield to the drift of the new science, which is mechanical. (Connective)

It is natural that a moralistic patriarch like Curtis would

have an adjectival style. He is simply reminding his readers of values and beliefs he thinks they already have.

Only 30% of Curtis' sentences are definite rhetorical types, fewer than of any of the columnists. In the 50-sentence sample of his writing, I found:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balanced sentences</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrupted sentences</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative sentences</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodic sentences</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows far less effort to be ornate than is seen in Mitchell. Curtis is anxious to influence his audience rather than simply to please and entertain them. His preponderance of balanced sentences also shows this; they are used to compare and contrast in order to analyze and persuade, as seen in these two examples:

It has been manifest for some years that the social aspects of college festivals were becoming more conspicuous than the merely literary, and that the students cared more for class-day and its spreads and its dances than for Commencement, with its procession, degrees, and its speeches.58

Who does not see that often the social privilege that prepares young men for business and thrift encourages young women in idleness and vanity, that makes them more exacting as they become more helpless and dependent?59

58 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 615.
59 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 616.
Curtis uses 63 construction schemes in 50 sentences, almost as many as Mitchell and Howells, and far more than the other four columnists. Curtis' are distributed as follows:

- Unusual or inverted order: 10
- Omission: 9
- Repetition: 16
- Balance: 28

Curtis uses the schemes, like the rhetorical sentence types, to communicate more effectively. The repetitions provide continuity to help the reader follow the thought, and the balance schemes help convey short comparisons and contrasts as in these examples (I have underlined the schemes):

But this preference is part of the old story, and does not forebode any new departure in principle or policy.  

We need the characteristic womanly mind alike for her sake and for man's sake.  

They sometimes do their utmost to spoil young women, and young women repay the folly with added grace and assiduity.

60 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 615.  
61 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 616.  
62 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 616.
But among the girls and the matrons we have seen enough of what a true woman can be to make us wish and strive that she may be a more frequent fact and power in these new times that threaten dangers as well as promise privilege, and call upon men and women to study together the science and the art of the social order which they are to suffer or to enjoy together.63

VIII. TROPES

Curtis uses 45 tropes in 50 sentences, far fewer than Mitchell. These 45 are distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tropes</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personification</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-for-whole</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pun</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperbole</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litotes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irony</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical question</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Curtis' tropes are generally unobtrusive, some close to being commonplace, their force worn away. For example, he asserts the importance of poor girls getting training which will allow them to secure "their honest bread."64 The educated girl will "find new light upon her path. . . ."65

More extended and extravagant tropes appear infrequently,

63 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 616.
64 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 616.
65 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 616.
when Curtis has established his train of logic and is summing it up with persuasive emotional force, as here, where Curtis tells what an educated woman should do for society:

She must show us that under her interpretation reason is not a cold and heartless rationalism, but a genial, loving wisdom, with a ray as glowing as it is luminous for our pathway and our home. She can teach us that virtue is not a hard law, a dull formalism, a harsh negation, but a living inspiration, drawing power from the eternal love, and going forth in healthful freedom to its conflict and to its peace.66

IX. FINITE VERBS

Curtis uses about 2.9 finite verbs per sentence, distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Verb</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active, non-linking</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active, linking</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared with Mitchell's, a few more of Curtis' verbs are linking and a few more are passive. This shows Curtis' greater interest in describing what happened regardless of who did it and what the natures of things really are.

66 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 616.
Curtis' columns probably do heighten the reader's awareness, concern matters of significance, and reinforce and feed humane interests. Curtis' purpose most often seems to be to help Americans see how they need to apply their traditional values and principles in practical ways to current situations. For example, he reviews the broad meaning of "gentleman" as he condemns the ungentlemanly "gentlemen" who behaved improperly while guests of the Northern Pacific Railroad at the driving of the golden spike completing the transcontinental railroad.\textsuperscript{67} As Christmas, 1892, approaches, he pleads for celebration of a simple, meaningful Christmas without pretentious extravagance.\textsuperscript{68} When a new girls' school opens, he uses his critique of the ribbon-cutter's speech for an occasion to explain that political power should depend on education.\textsuperscript{69}

There is no question that Curtis' columns concerned matters of significance, some of practical, logistical significance, and some of broad, universal, moral and social

\begin{enumerate}
\item Harp\textquotesingle ers, Dec. 1883, pp. 150, 151.\textsuperscript{67}
\item Harp\textquotesingle ers, Nov. 1892, pp. 957, 958.\textsuperscript{68}
\item Harp\textquotesingle ers, Nov. 1861, pp. 848, 849.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{enumerate}
significance. Common subjects treated by Curtis include: prosperity of the arts; quality of higher education; simplicity, sincerity, and common sense in social associations; and suggestions for preserving American political achievements.

Curtis demonstrates thorough competence in the technical writing skills. His columns are free of errors or stumbling blocks in grammar, spelling, and punctuation, and his writing is consistently clear and easy to read. Although each column ranges from one topic to another, each separate discussion in a column is unified. Occasionally, a whole column is devoted to a single topic or to closely related topics, as in the succeeding columnists.

Though Curtis is not a polished master of rhetoric like Howells, his rhetorical strategies are generally effective, well-handled, and unobtrusive. For instance, he sustains a useful trope in this passage: "...our young men tend to be a little dry and cynical, and are too often yielding to the mechanical drifts of the new science without rising into its upper currents and spirit of life..."70 His brief mention of "drift" and "upper currents" may bring subliminally to mind the flight of a bird; its triumphant,

70 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 615.
exhilarating flight in the upper air currents express beautifully the spiritual experience Curtis sought to promote.

Another example, below, illustrates Curtis' rhetorical ability. After praising the women of the early Christian church, Curtis says:

We may expect something of the same victory in the conflict with the new paganism, that sets up the empire of clothes against the reign of heaven, and that leads so many women to worship the clothes, and so many men to idolize the frailty wrapped up in the dainty attire.

The worship and idolatry metaphors are used effectively.

Curtis demonstrates perfectly the attitudes which I have proposed to define good writing: altruistic, constructive, hopeful, yet restrained and critical. He is interested, for example, in the healing of the country, after the Civil War,72 the advantages organized charity will provide to the poor,73 New York's chances of becoming a great city,74 and good housing for working women.75 When decrying a public problem, he always suggests a

71 Harper's, Sept. 1873, p. 616.
72 Harper's, Aug. 1878, p. 460.
73 Harper's, Dec. 1883, pp. 151, 152.
74 Harper's, Feb. 1888, p. 474.
75 Harper's, Aug. 1878, pp. 460, 461.
solution. Though he is hopeful, often noting progress of American institutions toward high ideals, he takes a restrained commonsense view of just about every issue, and he is as critical as one would hope a reasonable but professional social critic would be.

**SUMMARY**

During the thirty three years Curtis wrote the Easy Chair column, *Harper's Magazine* sought to appeal to every American who could read, and with its lavish illustrations, to many who could not read. I suspect Curtis' columns were about as suitable for this task as one could hope. As Curtis wrote it, the Easy Chair became, like its readers, more and more distinctly American, in its attention mainly to things American and its pride in America. Curtis' attention to the arts, political principles, and social and educational theories might not have appealed to the less wealthy and less educated among his readers, and some of his vocabulary may have challenged them a bit. They could not feel, however, that he was condescending to them. And he did discuss many topics of current general and practical interest (fire safety, the working women's demonstration in New York, etc.). Curtis often uses folksy, informal language the lower classes would have found
neighborly. Other features of his style also echo Curtis' content and his stance as a wise American grandfather—his long, rambling, unhurried sentences; his old-fashioned use of construction schemes; and the generally uncalculated, undecorated character of his writing.
Chapter 4

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS: THE ARTIST'S ARTIST

I. WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

William Dean Howells, Easy Chair columnist from 1900 to 1920, was born in 1837 and raised in the small Ohio town of Martin's Ferry where his father was a newspaperman. When James Russell Lowell accepted his poems for publication in the Atlantic Monthly, Howells went to New England, where he met Lowell, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and (in New York) Walt Whitman. He spent four years in a consular position in Vienna, then began helping to edit the Atlantic and began writing travel pieces, reviews, and novels. After 1882, he wrote the critical department, "Editor's Study," for Harper's Monthly, and in 1900 he was persuaded to write the "Easy Chair" also.

Howells came to be known as "dean of American letters." William M. Gibson reveals that Howells considered critics "mere caterpillars on the leaf of literature" and held that "the only good critic was a creative writer."

Howells is chiefly memorable, according to Gibson, as "an engaged reviewer-editor-friend to a host of writers for 60 years." These included Henry James, Mark Twain,
George W. Cable, John W. DeForest, and Bret Harte. Moreover, he was one of the first to appreciate and promote Emily Dickinson, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Hamlin Garland, among others.  

II. SAMPLE OF WRITING

A. Why Americans Enjoy Greek Tragedy

In the first part of this column, Howells has begun to tell about going to Harvard to see the students stage AEschylus' Agamemnon. While the audience waited interminably for one tardy musician to arrive, a man in a sack suit and straw hat, incongruous in the Greek stage set, came out with a plate, stumbled, spilling most of the contents, and poured the rest on the altar top.

It proved to be the stuff of the sacred fire, but the rain had got into it, and when the priest and his acolytes issued from the palace to invoke the favor of the gods, and the priest tried to light it with his torch, it would not burn, and nothing remained for him but pour his libation, and retire with what dignity he could amidst our unseemly laughter. The dignity of his recession, which was truly great, was marred by the effort of one of the acolytes to scrape from the sole of his bare foot, as he mounted to the bronze portal, the short-cut grass which had stuck to it from the lawn-mowed turf.

This was really the last touch of malicious fortune, and for the rest the tragedy stood forth in its majestic gloom, as a king might who has dropped the disguise of a beggar's rags and lifted himself, awe-striking and awe-stricken, to front his doom. Thereafter the teasing sense of county fair which had haunted us from our coming into the Stadium, and mixed with the sense of circus, as one might have known it in the Coliseum at Rome or the Arena at Verona, ceased from our consciousness and left it singly sensitive to every effect of the noble scene and responsive to all the beauty that appealed to the soul through the eye or ear. We four thousand Yankees, arrived there in the wet from every part of the big Republic, were transmuted into so many Hellenes of the great Republic, and were pure Greek; so pure that we almost understood our own language as it was rolled forth in the stately measures of the poet. Not even the veil which the English libretto interposes between us and Verdi or Wagner at the opera which Greek tragedy recalls seemed to hang between us and the meaning of AESchylus, and we realized how much more native one may be to the Greek than to the Italian or the German, without being born to it.

Perhaps we followed the sense the more readily because we had already and very recently read the faithful translation of the piece; but we now prefer the livelier conjecture, and we invite the reader to suppose that it was the mother-civilization interpreting it to us and making us one with her eldest children in a sort of family speech, less dependent upon letter than upon spirit.

If our readers have never staged a Greek tragedy, it is probable that they cannot fully imagine the difficulties of it. In modern drama, especially the drama of Ibsen, who is so very Greek in some things, we are used to a fulness of stage direction beside which the drama of AESchylus is absolutely empty. From the beginning to the end of his tragedy the Greek poet makes no sign outside of the dialogue, and very little in it, to show when any person comes on or goes off; and this defect has to be supplied by the management.
But in the staging of the tragedy at Cambridge the management had been equal to the demand upon it, and after the exterior and adventitious misadventures of the prelusive moments, the play went forward with entire evenness, or if there were any errors they were lost to us in the excellence of the rendering. You said to yourself that of course the musicians ought to have been in their burrows under the altar before the spectators were in their places, and that, of course, the sacred fuel ought to have been on the altar and kept from being rained on, but these were slight details that you quickly forgot, and were, in fact, ashamed to remember.

We chose rather to remember the scholarship that had gone to the flawless result, with a young joy in the beauty of it, which was itself very beautiful. It was not merely that the players were letter-perfect in their parts; certain difficulties of characterization had to be overcome, which in a co-educational university would not have presented themselves. Clytemnestra and her attendant maidens, and Cassandra and the captive girls of Troy, must be studious youth of the other sex, and the grave seniors of the chorus must be undergraduates of a borrowed senility.

But perhaps—who knows?—the difficulties were facilities in disguise, and all contributed to the fine result. If the part of Clytemnestra or of Cassandra had been taken by some clever actress, all emotion, and consciousness, and chic, as clever actresses oftenest are, it might have wanted the charm which those studious youth gave each. They somehow made their appeal to reason, not to passion, and the feeling, too deep for tears, which underlies passion was the more potently touched because of the certain constraint, not archaic but primitive, not Byzantine but Homeric, in the double supposition of their performance.

As yet we cannot be sure how much we have lost in having women's roles taken by women in Shakespeare.

The very horses which drew the chariots had to be imagined from Norwegian ponies with manes hogged after those of the sculptured steeds of
the Parthenon, and then trained to their his-
trionic duties under unaccustomed yokes. The
mere mechanical obstructions overcome were such as
only love of the thing to be done could have met,
and that they were met, so that they could suggest
themselves only to the spectator's afterthought,
was part of the success that was not less than
splendid. The success implied an illusion which
began with the first glimpse of the palace, lift-
ing its authentic forms and colors from the sha-
ven grass, and confronting the comer as he issued
upon the open Stadium and looked out down on the
space which the tragedy was to fill with its
poetry. Nothing really diminished the gravity of
this. Even the figure of the Cambridge policeman,
who appeared at the moment of the tumultuous demon-
stration following the defiant speeches of
Clytemnestra and AEGisthus, after Agamemnon's
murder, and waited with folded arms, ready to
interfere if necessary, was a false note soon
lost in the tremendous harmony of the action.

In the mean time many things commended them-
selves to the mind of the spectator. Of course the
first was that formal unity of the tragedy not only
with grand opera, but also with that minor opera
which we call comic without always meaning some-
thing droll. The sung or chanted speeches of the
chorus, and the spoken speeches of the persons in
the action, suggested the naturalness of the form
which casts off recitative, and approaches life
more nearly than the species in which the Italian
composers wittingly or unwittingly perpetuated the
tradition of the Greek dramatists. AESchylus
seemed to have wrought his play not so much in the
fashion of Il Trovatore or La Somnambula, as in
the fashion of Iolanthe or of Patience, only he
took seriously the help of the chorus which
Mr. Gilbert takes ironically. But beside the
form, uttering the mood and make of a people child-
like in their ethics, there dwelt far more im-
portantly and interestingly an identity of spirit
which one must hesitate to call Puritanic, though
it recalled Puritanism. The chorus was made up of
moralists as severe as the average of church mem-
ers, and a familiar confusion of counsel informed
their censure. They understood that the gods were
dealing with Agamemnon and according to their
pleasure and caprice, and would duly visit
Clytemnestra and AEgisthus in turn with disaster logically as little consequent from the deeds of either.

What the chorus saw was the operation of Fate, but they treated it in their personal criticism as if it were Predestination, and they apparently regarded it with something like the mystical resignation with which the religious once viewed the wisdom of God in saving some and damning others for His own glory. The doomed and the damned were alike censured for sin, because they ought to have done right on the chance of being spared or saved. Oddly enough, the victims of Fate coincided in this view, and sought to justify their crimes, instead of pleading emotional insanity, and throwing the responsibility on their gods. The personal conscience, which we supposed absent from the Greek conception of man's relations to the deity, evinced itself as distinctly as in the Anglo-Saxon ideal portrayed in Macbeth or The Scarlet Letter. The wicked knew themselves, and were known, wicked, and held to answer for their misdeeds quite as if their wills were free.

In this religious unity you lived simultaneously in the pagan and in the Christian world, but it was not one of the agreeable moments of the double life. The experience made you think that perhaps we had not got so far as we sometimes fancy; but there was something in the aesthetic atmosphere which more pleasingly suggested the oneness of the ancient and modern drama. The contemporary play conforms more nearly to the classic unities of time, place, and action than to the romantic ideal of widely changing scene and swiftly lapping time. But what perhaps the Greek dramatists could best teach an American audience would be patience and pleasure in far simpler intrigue and action than we are used to on our stage. The events of the Agamemnon were great enough; nothing could surpass them in moral magnitude, but they were few, and their succession was apparently unstudied, so that you did not proceed from shock to shock, as we imagine we must if we are to believe ourselves interested in a scene upon the stage. In AEschylus the drama has perhaps less evolved itself from the epic than in the later dramatists; the figures are in high relief, but
not yet in perfect detachment; the story is more
told and less acted; but that all gives it a naive
charm which we would be glad if our nascent theatre
could revert to.

It might help us to be a little more naive our­selves, a little more simple; every world is primi­tive, when you come to know it, and at heart we
might find ourselves as childlike as those Greeks
seemed. We might like long, explicit speeches; we
might enjoy the same fables over and over again;
in fact, as it is, we do so when a piece runs a
hundred or three hundred nights.

The trouble with us is one that the Greeks
never had to face. They were autochthons and had
their emotions fresh from their own ground, but
we are derivatives a thousand times derived, and
in our multiplicity of origin we are a people
without an origin of our own. When we need an
origin, or want it, we go and get it somewhere
outside of ourselves, but too often we choose a
bad origin.

That is one of the reasons--we own we are late
coming to it--why we would like to realize our
unity and contemporaneity with the ancients. If
having Greek plays in English would help us do
this, we wish we might have them, though of
course it would be something like having Verdi
or Wagner in English. It had been well on twenty­
five years since we had heard a Greek play, and
we should not like it to be so long again, though
we would willingly live through the interval, if
necessary.2

2 Harper's, Oct. 1906, pp. 796-798.
III. CONTENT

A. Criticism of Arts

Howells' favorite and most frequent Easy Chair subject was critical evaluation of contemporary art. He explains his dismay with actress Mme. Bernhardt's effort to portray Hamlet. He concludes,

Art, like law, is the perfection of reason, and whatever is unreasonable in the work of an artist is inartistic. By the time the Easy Chair had reached these bold conclusions it was ready to deduce a principle from them, and to declare that in a true civilization such a thing as that Hamlet would be forbidden, as an offense against public morals, a violence to something precious and sacred.3

In another column, he explains with much imagination, wit, and sarcasm what the Easy Chair department would do with a rumored gift of several thousand dollars if it were in fact received. First, he would establish a museum for would-be popular authors. It would contain all the standard properties of the popular novel, for their study and imitation. Howells asserts that the lack of this museum is . . . what might be called, with regard to the infantile intelligences concerned, a crying want, and the proposed museum should unite with the entertainment afforded by the collections the instruction imparted by the kindergarten methods.

3 Harper's, Mar. 1901, p. 643.
Howells would also use money from the purported gifts to finance the cutting of published poetry to its essentials (usually only a line or two), to give prizes to editors who will pay for quality rather than quantity, to give prizes for new, more imaginative endings for monthly installments of magazine serials, and to give prizes to authors who devise ways to avoid the affected inversions popular in dialogue in popular fiction. This column ends with reviews of several new works of literary history and criticism. 4

In the column from which the passage was chosen for close examination, Howells recounts the staging by Harvard students of AE'schylus' Agamemnon and goes on from the play to analyze his enjoyment of Greek drama. 5

In another column, Howells repeats a dream he supposedly had in which people from the latest novels and short stories gather around him to visit. He tells them of his concern and dismay over the immorality and indecency in popular literature. But he is consoled by the law of inevitable change; decency must return. 6

4 Harpér's, May 1903, pp. 974-976.
5 Harpér's, Oct. 1906, pp. 795-798.
6 Harpér's, Jan. 1918, pp. 299-301.
B. The Personality of New York City

Howells, like Mitchell and Curtis before him, devotes whole columns to description of how startling it is to return to New York City in the fall after a long summer absence, and to describing the mood of Indian summer in New York City.

C. Contemporary Social Issues

Howells discusses the notion which is gaining popularity that divorce might be acceptable. It is Howells' thesis that the divorce problem would be settled if people were prevented from rushing so easily and blindly into marriage.

Another column is denoted to a discussion of the American election process--whether votes are based more on logical evaluation of men or measures or more on prejudice, mystical emotion, and bias.

In 1920, Howells published an account of an imaginary visit to this planet by an old couple from elsewhere in the universe who try to tell about their superior

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9 Harper's, June 1910, pp. 149-152.
10 Harper's, Dec. 1912, pp. 149-151.
civilization. They are misunderstood and mistreated because the New York populace thinks they are expressing socialist views. Through this story, Howells seems to plead for a clear, open, unbiased evaluation of new ideas.  

IV. ROLE

Howells chiefly took the role of a promoter and guardian of the arts, as well as a mentor to contemporary artists. By 1900, most Americans saw him in this role, too. In the Easy Chair column as well as in his other works, Howells sought to exemplify the simple, graceful writing he expected of his artist-peers. In the Easy Chair columns, Howells also occasionally acted as social critic and news commentator.

V. DICTION

Howells prefers short, Anglo-Saxon words, 87.2% of his words having only 1 or 2 syllables, and he favors simple, plain words. In a representative passage of about 12 sentences, the longest, grandest words I could find were:

11 Harper's, April 1920, pp. 710-712.
"supposition," "historic," "diminished," "gravity,"
"tumultuous," "recitative," "perpetuated," and "Puritan-
ism." Though he uses short words, Howells' language is
far more formal, graceful, abstract, and denotative than
that of Curtis. It is the language of a polished literary
scholar. Some of its ivory tower gracefulness results from
occasional archaic, Biblical sounding usages, such as these
from the sample chosen for analysis: "issued" for "came
out of," "stood forth," "amidst," "front" for the verb
"face," "eldest," and "wanted" for "lacked." Howells is
consistently graceful, as in the following examples from
the account of the Greek play: The failure of the sacred
fire to light was "really the last touch of malicious For-
tune." Howells could have said, "This was really the last
hitch" or "the last fumble." Howells goes on to say that
after the problems in its early minutes, "the play went for-
ward with entire evenness, or if there were any errors they
were lost to us in the excellence of the rendering." Another writer might have chosen a less graceful way to

12 Harper's, Oct. 1906, p. 797.
say it: "the play then went off without any more trouble (or 'without another hitch'), and if the kids made any more mistakes, we didn't notice them because the performance was so good."

These examples also illustrate the formality of Howells' writing, which is saved from stuffiness by the slight personableness of his first person editorial "we" and his occasional "you" and "yourself," used in a general sense, as in "You said to yourself that of course the musicians ought to have been in their burrows, . . . but these were slight details that you quickly forgot, and were, in fact, ashamed to remember." 16

Howells' formality also avoids stuffiness by not being too abstract and general. While he uses a lot of general and abstract words, they are alternated with concrete and specific statements in a recurring pattern of a general, abstract statement followed by a specific, concrete illustration or an illustration followed by a generalization. For example:

But perhaps--who knows?--the difficulties were facilities in disguise, and all contributed to the fine result. If the part of Clytemnestra or of Cassandra had been taken by some clever actress, all emotion, and consciousness, and chic, as clever actresses oftenest are, it might have

16 Harper's, Oct. 1906, p. 797.
wanted the charm which those studious youth gave each. They somehow made their appeal to reason, not to passion, and the feeling, too deep for tears, which underlies passion was the more potently touched because of the certain constraint, not archaic but primitive, not Byzantine but Homeric, in the double supposition of their performance.17

Howells' writing is more denotative than connotative, but not all denotative caution and objectivity. Howells does make many value judgments, sometimes making them by choosing connotative language. Note the connotative words underlined in these passages from the account of the Greek play:

We four thousand Yankees . . . were transmuted into so many Hellenes of the great Republic, and were pure Greek, so pure that we almost understood our own language as it was rolled forth in the stately measures of the poet.18

The Norwegian ponies the students used had their manes hogged "after the sculptured steeds of the Parthenon."19

The speeches of the play "suggested the naturalness of the form which casts off recitative and approaches life more nearly . . . ."20

Though Howells' language is often formal and denotative, his columns certainly do not lack humor, as in the

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17 Harper's, Oct. 1906, p. 797.
sample passage that began this chapter, where Howells recounts the hilarious fumbles that occurred early in the Greek play. Such humor in Howells' columns is not associated with informal or connotative language; rather it results from Howells' decisions to include in his account the details that are humorous. In the opening paragraph of the sample passage, Howells' formal language heightens the humor by highlighting the formality, dignity, and solemnity with which the actor's mundane act of scraping his foot clashed so amusingly. And later in the passage, Howells sets out to turn our minds from the fumbles and the machinery of staging the play, but he cannot resist telling us of the local policeman who

. . . appeared at the moment of the tumultuous demonstration following the defiant speeches of Clytemnestra and AEgisthus, and waited with folded arms, ready to interfere if necessary . . .

VI. SENTENCE STYLE

Howells' sentences are about the length of Mitchell's or Curtis' (average of 38 words), but varied somewhat less (standard deviation of 14.8 words rather than 19 for Mitchell and 17.3 for Curtis). These long sentences would be expected of an author who dealt with many concepts, and they

would also be expected in an author who likes to use the rhetorical strategies of which Howells was a master. More space is often required to put together a balanced sentence or to include a trope. Howells' longest sentence is 72 words, and his shortest is 7 words.

About half of Howells' sentences are definite rhetorical types, distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balanced</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrupted</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The large number of interrupted sentences may be surprising, since this type is hard to handle well, that is, without jarring the reader or making him impatient. However, Howells is skillful enough to handle the interrupted sentence well, as shown below:

The dignity of his recession, which was truly great, was marred by the effort of one of the acolytes. . .22

Thereafter, the teasing sense of county fair which had haunted us from our coming into the Stadium, and mixed with the sense of circus, as one might have known it in the Coliseum at Rome or the Arena at Verona, ceased from our consciousness. . .23

Possibly Howells handles the interrupted sentence well by using as interrupters only those elements which are clearly modifiers of the subject and not at all parenthetical, and by using expert punctuation and prose rhythm to guide the reader. Howells' reasons for using so many interrupters were probably to focus attention on the interrupters and to maintain variety and good prose rhythm, another outstanding and unique feature of Howells' writing.

VII. CONSTRUCTION SCHEMES

Like Mitchell and Curtis, and unlike the rest of the columnists, Howells uses many of construction schemes—68 in 50 sentences, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unusual or Inverted Order</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of his schemes are repetition, far more than any of the others'. Here are examples:

The tragedy "stood forth" like a king who is "awe-striking and awe-stricken."24

The sense of county fair and the sense of circus "ceased from our consciousness and left it singly sensitive . . . ."25

The play went forward "with entire evenness."26 The Harvard students staged the play "with a young joy in the beauty of it, which was itself very beautiful."27 Probably Howells' use of repetition, like his beautiful prose rhythm, reveals that he is a good poet as well as a prose stylist, and that he is a student and critic of poetry.

VIII. TROPES

One might expect that Howells, being a skilled and deliberate writer, would use many tropes, but this is not the case. He uses 40 in 50 sentences; and three of the others use more—Mitchell uses 77 in 50 sentences, Curtis uses 45, and Lapham uses 58. More than any of the others, however, Howells makes his tropes serve the end of effective communication, and they are far less noticeable than in the others' samples. In fact, they are hard to locate to count for statistical purposes.

Howells' tropes are distributed as shown below. This distribution is much like that of the other columnists.

26 Harper's, Oct. 1906, p. 797.
Comparison 20
Personification 9
Part-for-whole 5
Pun 0
Irony 0
Rhetorical question 0
Hyperbole 6
Litotes 0

It should be noted that Howells uses imaginative devices for the frameworks for whole passages which the others never use, and these contribute to the impression that Howells' writing is much more deliberately and skillfully crafted than theirs. In fact, these devices almost create an effect of overdone artifice which is a cousin to the overblown style of Mitchell. The June, 1910, discussion of divorce is a transcript of an imaginary after dinner conversation of a typical upper class couple and their guests. 28 Similarly, a column discussing the American election process is a conversation of "the Easy Chair" with a friend who is a Chinese philosopher. 29 Howells' discussion of immorality and indecency in popular literature takes place as a discussion, in a dream, with characters from recent works. 30 His plea for unbiased evaluation of new ideas is veiled in

28 Harper's, June 1910, pp. 149-152.
29 Harper's, Dec. 1912, pp. 149-151.
30 Harper's, Jan. 1918, pp. 299-301.
a story of an old couple visiting earth from another planet. This variety of imaginative approaches makes one wonder if the rumor of a philanthropist's large gift to the Easy Chair, around which Howells weaves his May, 1903, column, is also his creation.

IX. FINITE VERBS

Howells' writing is distinguished by the large number of finite verbs he uses as compared with the other columnists. Whereas counts of the others' finite verbs in 50-sentence passages range from 122 to 155, Howells uses 185, as follows:

- Active, Non-linking: 71%
- Active, Linking: 23%
- Passive: 6%

Only Martin uses fewer passive verbs, and he uses one fewer. Howells' high count of finite verbs matches his high count also of complex sentences, and his scarcity of passive structures demonstrates his general skill in good writing and his interest in noting the agents of actions he describes.

31 Harper's, April 1920, pp. 710-712.
32 Harper's, May 1903, pp. 972-976.
X. QUALITY

There is no question about the value of Howell's materials. In his guardianship the arts, he is concerned for the quality of the expressions and as well as molders of the American spirit and culture. And his judgments are supported by carefully thought out analyses and theories which at least bear serious reading. His commentaries on contemporary issues are also creative and insightful. Whereas many readers must have valued Curtis' interest in practical matters and current events, those of the early 1900's must have likewise appreciated Howells' concern with the broad matters of the spirit and of more general social import.

Howells' technical craftsmanship is excellent, and his rhetorical skill is superior to that of most of the other columnists. This would be expected from his familiarity with all forms of writing and from his stated concern specifically with style, revealed here in an ironic suggestion of one thing the Easy Chair would do with a large monetary gift:

Missionaries, in certain limited number, would be sent out to combat the superstition that style is something which may be, with great pains and expense, put into a man, by the studied imitation of master stylists, and for the propagation of the true faith that style is something which can only come out of a man, and is
nothing but his peculiar way of saying things, as personal to him as his voice or his walk, or his delight in sweets, or salted almonds.33

Howells' altruistic attitude is shown by the care he takes in preparing his Easy Chair columns for delightful and easy reading, and by his earnest involvement in important and current social and artistic issues. Amid his close criticism of his culture, he nearly loses his hope sometimes, but he usually regains it.

SUMMARY

By the time Howells came to occupy the Easy Chair, Harper's target audience had changed. No longer did the magazine try to appeal to the whole range of American classes and subcultures; instead it became one of the "quality" magazines which were intended for the wealthy, educated reader. Howells' appointment as Easy Chair columnist reflects this fact. As mentor of contemporary artists and as promoter of the arts to those who could afford to enjoy them, Howells demonstrates in his own columns the characteristics of literary beauty he sought to foster in others: grace, simplicity, formal elegance, masterful craftsmanship, and pleasing rhythms.

33 Harper's, May 1903, pp. 973, 974.
Chapter 5

EDWARD S. MARTIN: GOOD-NATURED PEOPLE WATCHER

I. EDWARD S. MARTIN

Edward Sandford Martin was born in Owasco, New York, in 1856. After his graduation from Harvard in 1877, he helped found The Lampoon, and was for many years an editor of Life, as well as Harper's Easy Chair columnist from 1921 to 1935. His published works include: Sly Ballads in Harvard China (1882), A Little Brother of the Rich (verses) (1890), Pirated Poems (1890), Windfalls of Observation (1893), Cousin Anthony and I (1895), Lucid Intervals (1900), Poems and Verses (1902), The Luxury of Children, and other Luxuries (1904), The Courtship of a Careful Man (1905), In a New Century (1908), Reflections of a Beginning Husband (1913), The Diary of a Nation (1917), Abroad with Jane (1918), and What's Ahead and Meanwhile (1927).  

II. SAMPLES OF WRITING

A. Obituaries

The following two passages were excerpted from an Easy Chair column entitled "Remarks on the Departed," a rambling essay ranging among the demise of The Harvard Graduates Magazine, obituaries of all kinds in all settings, Clemenceau's obituary, Dakin's book about Mrs. Eddy, the 318 convicts burned alive in a prison fire, Prohibition's effect on crowding in the prisons, comparison of war with prisons, and the need for better and wiser government, all of these subjects tied to obituaries.

Of course the population has increased, circulations have increased, obituary columns in newspapers in which publication of departure is popular have lengthened very much, but real obituaries belong to the high art department of journalism and they are not often accomplished.

Perhaps it was partly M. Clemenceau's perception of this fact that led him after he had composed a full and adequate obituary of himself in a book of memoirs, to break out with another giving his positively last words on all people and subjects. Clemenceau's book had come out, Foch had died, and Recouly had published his conversations. Clemenceau, dissenting, jumped for a pen and proceeded to do himself an obituary in which there should be no nonsense. He did it; everybody smiled, for Clemenceau being dead, it was safe to smile again. He really showed himself a champion obituarian of his time, at least for fervency and comprehensiveness, and not only made a notice of himself but of everybody else that he had been intimately concerned with in politics for the last fifteen years of his life.
Whether he expected to meet any of his late colleagues or accomplices on the farther shore of Styx does not appear, but he showed not the least concern to secure himself an affectionate welcome from any of them. Everyone, and especially every Frenchman, concerned with the War or the Peace of Versailles who he thought deserved to be smitten in the eye was so smitten with all the emphasis of a character practiced all his life in smiting adversaries. He was more kind to Colonel House than to anyone else, but also gave Mr. Wilson much more credit than one would expect, and recognized the merits and services of Lord Balfour, Lord Robert Cecil and Mr. Bonar Law, of General Bliss, of Dr. Benes and others, reserving his more caustic benedictions for the Frenchmen who, he thought, had earned them.

The marvel about Clemenceau was the persistent energy of his resentments. In most people resentment, if it exists at all, becomes enfeebled as the end of life approaches and other things seem more important. Not so with Clemenceau, who went down firing broadsides. He said very kind things of Mr. Wilson but blamed him for being so slow in getting into the War. As to that he might have been interested in remarks credited to Melville Stone of the Associated Press, who allowed it to be known some years after the War that in 1915 and 1916 Mr. Wilson had repeatedly asked him if he thought Congress would declare war under all the conditions then existing, and that he had had to say that it would not. In 1921, looking back at the complex political situation of the neutral years, when his own hand had been on the pulse of Western public opinion, Mr. Stone was "sure that it would not have done so." Such is the report of Mr. Alexander Dana Noyes in obituary remarks about Mr. Stone in January, 1850.  

B. The Humanists

After finally running out of things to say that can

2 Harper's, Aug. 1930, pp. 250, 251.
be tied even loosely to obituaries, Martin turns to the Humanists.

What is a Humanist?

Apparently, some sort of a religious animal.

One finds a good deal written about it in current periodicals, but the writing is apt to be of a sort that one may read a good deal of and not feel any wiser.

What one would like to know about the Humanists is such things as whether they say their prayers; whether they think there is any Hell; whether they are Drys or otherwise; whether they play golf Sunday mornings, or only in the afternoons. One can read pages about them and not get answers to practical questions like these, nor even get their views upon divorce.

If a little group of Humanists, or even a single one, could be kept on exhibition in Bronx Park it would make greatly for elucidation of ideas on this subject. Even a stuffed group in the Natural History Museum would be better than nothing. It would not show us how they function, but at least we would know what they look like.

As it is, the Humanists are up in the air. One does not know off-hand whether Doctor Fosdick is one, or Doctor Cadman, or Doctor Bernard Iddings Bell, or Cardinal Hayes, or Rabbi Wise. It helps visibility of them to have a newspaper report Mr. Theodore Dreiser as calling up from Texas to say that he is not a Humanist and does not expect to join. Mr. Paul Elmer Moore writes about them, but one easily forgets whether he is for or against them, and one turns, if he must know more, to Professor Irving Babbitt, who seems to be the leading expositor of the cult. Of course it takes time to connect the name of a new sect with the principles it stands for. Does it mean anything to you to have someone say that John Wesley was an Arminian, or that somebody else was an antinomian? It is not really remarkable that we should be a little in the dark about Humanists, but nothing yet known about them equals expectation
based on the space given them in the weekly periodicals. Driver ants are more interesting so far and it is easier to get on to their wiles. 3

C. Finding Truth

In a New Year's column, Martin is optimistic.

Here it is the beginning of another year and one that holds out extraordinary prospects of human advancement. What is the best thing that can be said about it? Shall we go to the statisticians and learn how many motor cars are in operation and how many more the makers of them expect to sell? Shall we figure on the crops? Shall we contemplate the building fund and find out what it is going to do? Mr. Brisbane the other day set forth that the income of the country—that is, the value of its products—was one hundred billions a year, and that, economically, the most encouraging item therewith connected was that fifteen billions of it were not spent, but stayed on as productive capital. That is interesting, to be sure; but the most promising detail in the bases of our expectations is that the human mind is comparatively free—not free, of course, but comparatively free. In spite of all the fanatics, all the consecrated ignorance, all the timid who insist that we should all stay in the trenches of past conviction, our minds are still fairly free to work if they can, to probe everything, to discover if they are able, and to apply discovery.

Diamonds are mixed up with other stones in blue clay, gold lies hid in quartz, most of the precious metals have to be lifted out of mineral containers of one sort or another. So it is with truth. We get what we get of it mixed with much baser stuff, with error, with superstition, with prejudice, with whatever we have in our heads and in our habits. All religions we know anything about are a mixture of what is true and what isn't. That is better realized than it was. We all know that the wheat

3 Harper's, Aug. 1930, p. 252.
and the tares grow up together, but what we may need to have impressed upon us is that that is the way truth comes. We have to pick it out of its containers and sort out what seems to us valuable and eternal from what is merely temporary, and so, presently, misleading or obstructive. And what we get seems not to last eternally but presently re-enters the crucible to be presented with differences by another generation. Accordingly, every religion seems to be a working hypothesis whereby one practices to live a good life. It is by that practice that we test the hypothesis; which accords with that Scripture which says, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God."4

III. CONTENT

Most of Martin's Easy Chair columns are rambling miscellanies of comment on current events, trivial or weighty, containing bits of wisdom and amused observations about human nature. His interests center around six different subjects, as shown below.

A. Religion and Religious People

Martin thinks the veiled objections to having Catholics in public office are unfounded.5 He provides numerous miscellaneous observations about the histories, philosophies,

4 Harper's, Jan. 1929, p. 258.
5 Harper's, Nov. 1928, pp. 785, 786.
and behaviors of organized religions. A popular notion is widely disseminated, he notes, that a sweeping revival is needed which will solve mankind's current problems. The chief exponent of this notion is Reverend Frank Buchman. Martin goes on to note that myriad new and varied forms of Christianity are now available to try to meet the needs of people who want a new point of view to help them cope with their new circumstances— their dependence on hand-outs, with their jobs, homes, and savings gone. Indeed, the whole world needs a new outlook. But personal religious revelations are no different, really, from ordinary efforts to follow one's best intuitions, which depend on race, education, and environment. Though religion specifically, by itself, may not fully enlighten us, it motivates us and helps us endure. ⁶

B. Prohibition

Martin believes the Prohibition amendment was a mistake, and he takes every opportunity to remind his readers of this. He urges his readers to take advantage of the coming election to repeal the amendment. Of the recent flooding, he asks:

⁶ Harper's, Nov. 1928, p. 788.
What have we done that we should have so many floods? Where does all the water come from? . . . . Why so much water? Could not the prohibitionists divert their energies a little to prohibiting excess of water? They might not succeed immediately in their effort, but they might easily do at least as well as they have done in prohibiting rum. Are all these floods sent to us as a reminder that nature does not care for legislation but will take its course no matter what there may be in the Constitution? 7

While material things are less important than spiritual matters, Martin insists that it is impossible to legislate good behavior, as prohibition attempts to do. 8 Prohibition may be one reason for the new crime wave among the young, 9 and it may be one of the reasons for the crowding in the prisons. 10

C. United States Foreign Relations

Martin keeps a watchful eye on international as well as national events, and his main concern for several years is America's handling of the war debts owed us by European countries. He asks whether the recent flooding may not have been an expression of Divine displeasure with our over-zeal

7 Harper's, Nov. 1928, p. 788.
in collecting our war debts.\textsuperscript{11} Looking to the inauguration of a new governmental administration, he pleads for prayerful consideration of our proper relation to our foreign debts.\textsuperscript{12} Three years later, he asserts that the recent election "slammed the Republican party a heavy crack between the eyes" which was deserved. The Republicans should have been nicer to Europe, less anxious to collect the war debts, and more ready to join the League of Nations and the World Court.\textsuperscript{13}

Martin also concerns himself with the horror of World War I and with ways to prevent more war. He believes, at Christmas time, 1928, that war can be prevented, and other problems solved as well, because man is really a remarkable creature, and new, helpful things are waiting to be discovered. But the real answer is to realize that Christ has already saved the world.\textsuperscript{14} Martin devotes much space in 1931 to the scrap over Britain blocking Jewish immigration to Israel. He points out the legitimate claims of the

\textsuperscript{11} Harper's, Nov. 1928, p. 788.
\textsuperscript{12} Harper's, Dec. 1928, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{13} Harper's, Jan. 1931, p. 256.
\textsuperscript{14} Harper's, Dec. 1928, p. 128.
Arabs and the fact that Jacob did have twelve sons.\textsuperscript{15}
And Martin describes the regrettable government set up by Marx and Lenin.\textsuperscript{16}

D. Rapid World Change

The feature of contemporary life that Martin finds most disturbing is rapid and pervasive change. Why do so many people go crazy nowadays? he asks in 1928. Probably because they cannot handle this rapid change.\textsuperscript{17} Why the big, new crime wave among the young? Many factors have been blamed, but the most important factor is probably the proliferation of the motor car, which makes visible the way machinery is taking over the world.\textsuperscript{18} But Martin is sure most thinking people would not want to go back to the prewar world, and he finds Americans more fitted than anyone to survive future change.\textsuperscript{19}

E. Government

Martin often charges the government to take its

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Harper's, Jan. 1931, pp. 254, 255.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Harper's, Jan. 1931, pp. 254, 255.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Harper's, Nov. 1928, p. 788.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Harper's, Jan. 1926, pp. 258, 259.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Harper's, Sept. 1934, p. 512.
\end{itemize}
responsibilities seriously, but he also points out the limitations of governmental power to better human life. In 1928 he expresses the widespread feeling that "something is about to drop" in the business world. There will be serious problems for the next administration to handle. However, he shows that rule by the majority is not necessarily a good thing, that good behavior cannot be legislated, and that government is not increasing in favor (1931). In fact, "most of what has happened to the United States has happened because of the character, energy, and responsibility of the people who lived in it." In short, "governments will not save us."

F. The American Scene

Martin believes generally that the American ways of life and of government are good, though stupid people sometimes say or do stupid things and sometimes manage to take charge for a while. For example, he observes that the American blending of many nationalities is mainly a

21 Harper's, Nov. 1928, p. 786.
24 Harper's, Jan. 1931, p. 255.
source of strength.  

But he notes also the foolishness of several prominent Americans who recently went "mouth first" into an issue, including a doctor who publicly compared Sacco and Vanzetti to Christ, then was targeted for arrest by the Boston police because of some equally foolish reactionary element wielding too much power in Boston society.

IV. ROLE

Edward S. Martin, in his Easy Chair columns, takes the role of the uneducated but insightful amateur critic--the farmer-philosopher. The earthiness, pointedness, artlessness, amusement, and unorganized, rambling character of his columns bring to mind a garrulous old janitor chatting during his tenth coffee break of the day, or the wandering commentary of the neighborhood gossip while at the small-town beauty shop. This stance allows Martin an escape from the responsibility of an educated, aware person who could not be permitted the range, irreverence, or pungence that Martin enjoys in the Easy Chair.

26 Harper's, Nov. 1928, p. 787.
V. DICTION

After one reads some of Howells' columns, Martin's seem very informal, even folksy. While Martin's language is generally plain, simple standard English, it is so sprinkled with concreteness and informality, approaching slang, that it has a very earthy, direct effect, contrasting strikingly with Howells' grace and dignity. For instance, Martin titles his January, 1926, column "The Motor Cars'll Git You, Ef You Don't Watch Out!" In this column are found the following phrases, in which I have underlined the informal, slangy phrases and colloquialisms:

"The city [Detroit] takes its own medicine."

"We see the avenues widening, and all extra space won for the cars by squeezing the taxpayers [is] instantly gobbled up by more cars."

The family buys everything else besides the car "after item one is settled for."

"There is more to be said for this arrangement [putting the car payments first in one's budget] than average moss-backs would suppose."

"A handy man on a farm nowadays will . . . drift away from agriculture toward mechanics."

As to the increasing crimes of violence, "Drys will lay them to the Wets and to their disregard of law, and tell us that while we tolerate boot-leggers we deserve to have our throats cut and our jewels stolen, and had better expect that."

We don't condemn Henry Ford for bringing the mass-produced automobiles, even if we don't like the consequences. "If Henry is the dog, and the bootleggers and the gunmen, and the careless drivers and the corrupted youths, and the general increase of the perils of life are the fleas, still we would not kill the dog to get rid of the fleas."

Because of increasing mechanisation, "Apparently, old-style farming is a dead duck . . ."

Government's function is to "take care of the winnings." 28

"Undoubtedly the late election slammed the Republican party a heavy crack between the eyes." After all, "the Republican party needed to sit down and think a little." 29

In relation to Europe, the United States has been "too insistent on hogging prosperity" for itself. We should "wipe off the slate what Europe owed us on the War account. . . ." 30

Martin's language is as pungent and pointed as he can make it. Concreteness helps—as often as possible Martin works in a sensory reference, as the examples above also demonstrate. And another distinguishing feature of Martin's diction is his frequent use of Biblical and religious language, which accords with his abiding interest in religion and his frequent statements that Christianity and God hold the important answers to human problems. For instance,

28 Harper's, Jan. 1931, p. 256.
29 Harper's, Jan. 1931, p. 256.
30 Harper's, Jan. 1931, p. 256.
Martin says:

Mr. Coolidge's great specialty is "to rescue the perishing." 31

"All of Europe" is "anxious, observant, and wanting to know what to do to be saved." 32

Everyone who Clemenceau "thought to be smitten in the eye was so smitten with all the emphasis of a character practiced all his life in smiting adversaries." 33

As to truth, "we all know that the wheat and the tares grow up together." But as Scripture says, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." 34

Martin's word lengths are about the same as those of Curtis and Howells--86.1% have only 1 or 2 syllables.

VI. SENTENCE STYLE

Martin's sentences are noticeably shorter than those of Mitchell, Curtis, or Howells; they average 26 words, while theirs average, respectively, 39, 38, and 38. Martin's longest is 64 words. His shortest is 4 words. The standard deviation in Martin's sentences is 14.5 words, so about

31 Harper's, Jan. 1931, p. 256.
32 Harper's, Jan. 1931, p. 256.
33 Harper's, Aug. 1930, p. 250.
34 Harper's, Jan. 1929, p. 258.
two thirds of them are between 12.5 and 40.5 words long. These short sentences lend themselves well to Martin's direct, bald manner of statement, and they give a somewhat naive, simple-minded ingenuousness to his style as they do to Kurt Vonnegut's. I find this style attractive, but it borders on cuteness, and it is rather choppy after one has been reading Howells.

Though Martin's sentences are comparatively short, 64% of his sentences are complex, which suggests that he is working with ideas much of the time.

It is no surprise that only 34% of Martin's sentences are rhetorical types. Like Curtis, of whose sentences only 30% are rhetorical types, Martin is a plain, neighborly communicator, not a "stylish" writer like Mitchell (72% of his sentences are rhetorical types) or Howells (52% of his sentences are rhetorical types). Martin's rhetorically styled sentences are distributed as follows:

- Balanced 7
- Interrupted 5
- Cumulative 3
- Periodic 2

VII. CONSTRUCTION SCHEMES

Martin uses far fewer schemes of construction than do
any of the three preceding columnists--28 in 50 sentences, as follows:

Unusual or inverted order  9
Omission            4
Repetition          10
Balance             5

28

This, too, would be expected of a writer less concerned with classical style than is Mitchell or Howells, but Martin's effective and noticeable use of repetition and balance show he is not unconscious of rhetorical effects. Note the examples below:

"Of course the population has increased, circulations have increased, obituary columns in newspapers in which publication of departure is popular have lengthened very much. . ."\(^{35}\)

". . . everybody smiled, for Clemenceau being dead, it was safe to smile again."\(^{36}\)

"Does it mean anything to you to have someone say that John Wesley was an Arminian, or that somebody else was an antinomian?"\(^{37}\)

We find truth mixed with whatever we have "in our heads and in our habits."\(^{38}\)

\(^{35}\) Harper's, Aug. 1930, p. 250.
\(^{36}\) Harper's, Aug. 1930, p. 250.
\(^{37}\) Harper's, Aug. 1930, p. 252.
\(^{38}\) Harper's, Jan. 1929, p. 258.
VIII. TROPES

Though Martin uses shorter sentences and fewer of the other rhetorical devices than do the preceding columnists, his count of tropes is about the same as Curtis’ and Howells’—40 in 50 sentences, which shows, again, that while Martin is not a "fancy" writer, he is a careful and skillful rhetorician, and he tries for a concrete style. His tropes are as follows:

- Comparison: 21
- Personification: 0
- Part-for-whole: 2
- Pun: 0
- Irony: 6
- Rhetorical question: 6
- Hyperbole: 5
- Litotes: 0

Total: 40

IX. FINITE VERBS

Martin uses an average 3.1 finite verbs per sentence, in the high part of the range of the other columnists. His finite verbs are distributed as follows:

- Active and Non-Linking: 64%
- Active and Linking: 33%
- Passive: 4%

Total: 100%

Martin, like DeVoto after him, uses a higher proportion of linking verbs, showing a greater interest in definitions
than the others.

X. QUALITY

Martin's easy, naive style belies the depth and value of much of what he has to say. Some of his columns comprise amusing observations and interpretations of common American experience, and others discuss weighty matters with universal interest. For example, Martin frequently debates important political issues, such as America's foreign relations, and he takes up again and again his exploration of the nature of religious truth and religious experience.

Like most of the other Easy Chair columnists, Martin is an almost flawless technical craftsman, and in general, he is also a competent rhetorician. His writing is particularly sensory, as the following examples show. Note the concrete verbs, used where other good writers would use abstract verbs:

The fact that real obituaries are not often accomplished led Clemenceau to "break out with another." 39

Clemenceau "jumped for a pen. . . ." 40

40 Harper's, Aug. 1930, p. 250.
"In most people resentment . . . becomes enfeebled as the end of life approaches. . ."41

"As it is, the Humanists are up in the air."42

". . . most of the precious metals have to be lifted out of mineral containers of one sort or another."43

Martin's seeming ingenuousness is also an interesting rhetorical accomplishment, maintained consistently throughout his columns, and involving a variety of stylistic devices: short sentences; common language approaching slang; pointed irreverence; humor; and absence of the more artistic devices of construction schemes and rhetorical sentence types. Perhaps Martin's language is a little too informal and earthy at times, which with his amused viewpoint, may tempt the reader to dismiss his writing as mere entertainment and not valuable or serious discussion.

Martin is unique among the Easy Chair columnists in his almost always amused outlook on human behavior. Of almost every issue, he can see a light side. Martin is involved in the problems of the average citizen and is concerned about national and international affairs. He is critical, always with a light touch, but hopeful, too,

41 Harper's, Aug. 1930, p. 250
42 Harper's, Aug. 1930, p. 252.
43 Harper's, Jan. 1929, p. 258.
as this passage illustrates:

When we are discouraged about it and think its inhabitants are too densely stupid, too prejudiced, opinionated, reactionary, and selfish ever to make the rough-hewn sphere they dwell on really habitable, we can renew our hopes by basing them somewhat on things not yet discovered.

Feel as you will about man, he is really a remarkable creature. Give him elbow room, omit for a while to shoot or hang him or put him in jail because he thinks, and he will probably solve the problems of life. Not only is his knowledge increased and his power amplified by that, but there is a great deal more to him than has been generally suspected. He is still comparatively undeveloped; full of latent, unsuspected powers.44

SUMMARY

It is hard to imagine a segment of the literate American population that would not find Martin's columns pleasurable and worthwhile reading, and his style makes his material accessible to anyone. His ideas would also interest and stimulate the intellectual, thoughtful reader. Like DeVoto and Fischer who follow him, Martin is a professional journalist, and like them he focuses on contemporary life, American politics, and international relations. However, in keeping with his stance as an amateur--a farmer-philosopher--he writes in a style that is by contrast with

theirs sensory, earthy, direct, pointed, ingenuous, and amused.
Chapter 6

BERNARD DEVOTO: THE OLD BEAR

I. BERNARD DEVOTO

Bernard DeVoto was born in Ogden, Utah. After military service in World War I and education at Harvard, he became known as a controversial social and literary critic, editor, historian, and novelist.1 DeVoto taught at Northwestern University and at Harvard, and won both the Bancroft and Pulitzer prizes, the latter for Across the Wide Missouri (1947). David Galloway calls DeVoto an authority on the life and works of Mark Twain, and says that DeVoto's book The Course of Empire (1952), a history of the exploration of the American continent before 1850, is "one of the best books ever written about the American West."2 DeVoto occupied the Easy Chair from 1935 to 1955.

II. SAMPLES OF WRITING

A. What a Summer Vacation Is Really All About

The following passage is the first part of a column in which DeVoto explains what the real function of a summer vacation is—to demonstrate that one can "take it"—that one has strength, stability, and fortitude.

This issue of Harper's will be distributed to people who have just experienced the relief of learning that what Mary was suffering from was only poison ivy after all. Mary is convalescent now and so is everyone else. Pop's bursitis is all but gone and he has found and thrown away the last decaying starfish that was folded in among his shorts. Give the beauty shop another six weeks and it will get the piebald patches out of Mummy's hair and restore her skin to about what it was before she went away. By November 1 the whole family will be enjoying their vacation. By November 15 they will be planning next year's, which is why I commend them to your reverence.

For I am one of those who have made the great discovery. It is a liberating and enfranchising truth: You don't have to take a vacation. All summer long those of us who have found this out have stayed on in the city, working contentedly at jobs we like to do, eating good meals well prepared, sleeping in comfortable beds, with all the city's diversions easily accessible to us. As our friends come back from the country, the mountains, the shore, or that long motor trip, we admire their endurance, rejoice in their feeling of achievement, and thank God that we have broken the compulsion which still grips them. And of course as moralists and psychologists we are fascinated by their behavior.

I gladly grant that the vacationist is a more admirable man than I. And I do not in the least desire to abolish the custom of taking vacations. Anything so deeply rooted is certainly necessary
to individual well-being and the national welfare. It is also reassuring to patriots. A people who have extended the standard vacation from two weeks to three and are going ultimately to make it four--such a people are not decadent as some mournful thinkers have been saying, they are vigorous beyond any demands that will ever be put on them. The United States contains millions of people who will drive from Hartford to Seattle and back by way of Los Angeles in three weeks, with a nine-year-old and a six-year-old in the rear seat, and at the end will be in practically as good condition as their car. Three weeks in a luxurious summer hotel, eating the food that is purveyed there, leave them in but little worse shape than an attack of pneumonia would. Three weeks at a popular summer resort are hardly more destructive to their health and morale than divorce, bankruptcy, or a nervous breakdown; they take the experience in their stride, shrug it off, and in a few months are completely restored. Strength, stability, fortitude, courage--every August the nation proves that it has far more of them than it will ever be required to expend. What have we to fear from Russia or from any period of strain and hardship that may lie ahead?

A moralist is concerned only to make sure that we know what we are doing, that we do not succumb to self-deception, that we understand what the vacations we take actually are and what our motives and emotions actually are. Not the illusion of the vacation seems to him a possible danger but self-delusion, not myth but falsehood, not masochism but unwillingness or inability to recognize it. This is in no way, however, a protest against personal or public hypocrisy, for hypocrisy is the lubricant of social life and an indispensable instrument of government, a courtesy which gives life grace and makes the co-operations of society possible. Especially at vacation time.3

3 Harper's, Sept. 1951, pp. 43, 44.
B. The Public Lands

Here, DeVoto finishes and clinches an argument entitled "Billion Dollar Jackpot," a polemic in favor of preserving the public lands as such.

The public lands are public property which Congress long ago decided to preserve and develop in the common interest. The new Congress would be wise to recall the reasons that made conservation a national policy. The reservation of the public lands was the outcome of the realization that much of our heritage of natural resources had been wasted, that much of what remained was impaired, and that all of it was in grave danger of being exhausted. The objectives were the controlled use of non-renewable resources, the preservation and scientific development and increase of renewable ones, and the protection of watersheds, especially in the arid West. The great achievements of our conservation policy have been in the twentieth century but its roots go back almost to the Civil War. One remembers the pioneers, the prophetic genius John Wesley Powell, such scientists as Charles Sargent and Nathaniel Shaler and Othniel Marsh, such statesmen as Carl Schurz, many other scientists, public officials, industrialists, business men, and the National Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Association for the Advancement of Science.

The new Congress will note that those I have named were all Republicans; down to 1932 practically all the achievements of conservation were the work of Republicans. The word "conservation" itself was given its present meaning by W. J. McGee, a Republican. The first reservations of public land were made by President Benjamin Harrison and the biggest ones by Theodore Roosevelt, who also established the Forest Service and procured the passage of the Reclamation Act. The Carey Act, the Withdrawal Act, the Weeks Act were Republican measures. The Inland Waterways Commission was a Republican creation and so were most of the national parks, the mineral and oil and coal and water-power reserves, the licensing system under which they are used, and the
reservation of Muscle Shoals. If Franklin Roosevelt is one of the three greatest names in conservation, the other two, Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, are Republican. Finally, it was a Republican who phrased the policy under which the public lands have been administered: "the greatest good of the greatest number over the longest time."

From this well established point of view, safeguarding the future has always been more important than enriching small pressure groups at public expense, the nation more important than 2 per cent of the West, and the public interest in publicly owned resources more important than the private interests that coveted them. This view has always been under attack and will now be under very hopeful attack by groups, hitherto frustrated, who hope they can induce Congress to undo the great work that has been done. They are the same interests they have always been, and they constitute the same threat to the future of the West and of the United States. They are using the same pressures, arguments, lies, and fraud that they have been using for more than fifty years. In the twentieth century they have won only one victory, the annihilation of the Grazing Service expertly perpetrated by Senator McCarran.

Senator McCarran's technique is in their minds as they prepare now for what they hope will be the kill. As I have been pointing out here at intervals every since the January 1947 issue of Harper's, their first objective will be the Forest Service; if they cannot wreck it as completely as the Grazing Service was wrecked, depriving it of its regulatory power would do almost as well. Beyond the Forest Service are oil and oil shale, phosphates, water power, and the hope that Massachusetts can be induced to build dams for Utah. They will be stopped again unless they carry it with the first rush, for Western and national public opinion will, as always, solidify against them. But there is that first rush. When it begins, Congress should remember three things: that the public lands belong to the citizens of forty-eight states and not to 2 per cent of eleven, that impairment of the public lands would arrest progress in the West and
ultimately make the region a charge on the rest of the country, and that the public lands are the only responsibility of the government besides atomic energy about which Congress could make an irretrievable mistake, one that could not be corrected later on. For if the public lands are once relinquished, or even if any fundamental change is made in the present system, they will be gone for good.4

III. CONTENT

In his November, 1955, column, on the twentieth anniversary of his first, DeVoto notes that the words he has written for the Easy Chair must total at least 900,000, as much as half a dozen long books.5 When pressed for a description of the column, DeVoto calls it "cultural criticism." He says three different considerations have affected his choice of subject matter: his own interests, a desire to "keep the subject matter so varied that a reader would not know what to expect when he turned to the column," and the need to discuss things that needed discussing but which no one else would talk about. He explains,

If I have written as readily about disc jockeys as about The Federalist, that willingness too can be ascribed to the study of history. Library stacks as well as the town square taught me that

4 Harper's, Feb. 1953, p. 56.
5 Harper's, Nov. 1955, p. 10.
no manifestation of American life is trivial to the critic of culture. Such a column as this could not easily avoid politics but no doubt I have felt an additional incentive to write about it because I was practicing history. Also, unlike much writing, political comment is a form of action.6

DeVoto says that before the war one of his major concerns was literary censorship, during the war--suppression of the news, and more recently--the public lands controversy. His commonest political theme has been the erosion of the Bill of Rights.7 Other than these generalizations, however, one cannot categorize the amazing variety of subjects DeVoto treated from the Easy Chair. Some representative columns are described below.

A. Ecology and Conservation

DeVoto discusses two new books and a pan-American conference on ecology, conservation, and the earth's dwindling resources. Almost the whole column is cast as a bitter damnation of Time magazine for its weak review of one book, its failure to notice the conference, and its negative review of the other book, a review which, in DeVoto's words, "stinks."8

6 Harper's, Nov. 1955, p. 16.  
7 Harper's, Nov. 1955, p. 16.  
8 Harper's, May 1949, pp. 54-57.
B. DeVoto's Trip to the West

DeVoto concludes an account that has continued through several issues of his long trip in the West. In this column, to "clean up the file," DeVoto provides all the homely, practical details and statistics—what kind of gas mileage he got, how his carburetor held up, how many quarts of oil he used, how many dents he got, how the motels and restaurants were, and so forth.9

C. Behind the Scenes

In bed, sick, as he writes this column, DeVoto does not have his outlines, left at the office, for his planned columns, so he decides to fill the readers in on the facts of some modern literary history in which DeVoto himself had been involved. One is the Strange Fruit court case in Boston, which concerned literary censorship. The other was a stunt played by the editorial staff of the Saturday Review, who, when told they could not review a D. H. Lawrence book published in only ten copies to protect the copyright and available only for payment of $500,000 each, got hold of a copy in the Library of Congress and reviewed it anyway.10

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9 Harper's, Nov. 1946, pp. 430-433.
D. Literary Criticism

DeVoto defends his preference for objective methods and for recognition that there are no absolutes in literary criticism. This column is a rather abstract and involved discussion.\textsuperscript{11}

E. The War Effort

DeVoto, in 1942, advises insightfully on proper attitudes the public officials and the ordinary citizenry ought to take toward the war effort.\textsuperscript{12}

F. Government

In 1937, DeVoto expresses disgust with the lack of any realistic thinking and planning in the current administration.\textsuperscript{13}

IV. ROLE

Of all the Easy Chair columnists, DeVoto is the most versatile, moving among three different roles. Most frequently, he is a careful, thorough reporter, finding all

\textsuperscript{11} Harper's, July 1940, pp. 221-224.
\textsuperscript{12} Harper's, Mar. 1942, pp. 445-448.
\textsuperscript{13} Harper's, Oct. 1937, pp. 557-560.
the facts of a case and getting to the bottom of it, then going on to interpret the information and point out the appropriate social or political criticism. In another role, DeVoto is what he calls a "moralist"—the voice of reality and conscience speaking to help us understand ourselves as we are and to call us back to basic human values. For instance, in his column about vacations, DeVoto explains,

As our friends come back from the country, the mountains, the shore, or that long motor trip, we admire their endurance, rejoice in their feeling of achievement, and thank God that we have broken the compulsion which still grips them. And of course as moralists and psychologists we are fascinated by their behavior...

A moralist is concerned only to make sure that we know what we are doing, that we do not succumb to self-deception, that we understand what the vacations we take actually are and what our motives and emotions actually are. Not the illusion of the vacation seems to him a possible danger but self-delusion, not myth but falsehood, not masochism but unwillingness or inability to recognize it.  

Severa l of the other Easy Chair columnists take this moralist role as their stated intention, also; and almost all of them occasionally share DeVoto's third role—the entertainer, the amuser. DeVoto takes this role infrequently, and when he does, he not only amuses but enlightens his readers regarding human nature and human foibles.

14 Harper's, Sept. 1951, p. 43.
V. DICTION

DeVoto's diction ranges from informal, even personal in some columns meant chiefly to amuse, to more formal and grand in passages where he is trying to persuade readers to adopt and support a view he thinks important. Both of these varieties are illustrated in the sample passages which begin this chapter. But in either mood, he uses plain, simple language consistently. Like the other Easy Chair columnists, his language comprises mainly short and therefore Anglo-Saxon words--84.5% have only 1 or 2 syllables. And in the more abstract and general of the two sample passages, the longest and most abstract words are public, develop, conservation, policy, reservation, regulatory, relinquished, non-renewable, procured, administered, resources, annihilation, impairment, and fundamental.15

In the informal passages, DeVoto's writing is heavily connotative as he expresses his personal opinions, and he uses some loaded words, too, in his more formal, serious passages. In his sample presented earlier, however, on the preservation of the public lands, he withholds use of connotative language until his reasoning has been stated

15 Harper's, Feb. 1953, p. 56.
and he is clinching the argument and trying to motivate action. But he provides enough reasoned support for his opinions that his writing does not seem like emotional manipulation.

DeVoto achieves specificity and concreteness in both kinds of writing by providing many illustrations for his generalizations.

Note in the passage below DeVoto's use of first person pronouns and concrete characters, which I have underlined. His writing here could not be more concrete:

This issue of Harper's will be distributed to people who have just experienced the relief of learning that what Mary was suffering from was only poison ivy after all. Mary is convalescent now and so is everyone else. Pop's bursitis is all but gone and he has found and thrown away the last decaying starfish that was folded in among his shorts. Give the beauty shop another six weeks and it will get the piebald patches out of Mummy's hair and restore her skin to about what it was before she went away. By November 1 the whole family will be enjoying their vacation. By November 15 they will be planning next year's, which is why I commend them to your reverence.

For I am one of those who have made the great discovery. It is a liberating and enfranchising truth: You don't have to take a vacation. All summer long those of us who have found this out have stayed on in the city, working contentedly at jobs we like to do, eating good meals well prepared, sleeping in comfortable beds, with all the city's diversions easily accessible to us.16

16 Harper's, Sept. 1951, p. 43.
Here, note the abundant concrete illustrations provided to support the general, abstract statement which follows them:

The United States contains millions of people who will drive from Hartford to Seattle and back by way of Los Angeles in three weeks, with a nine-year-old and a six-year-old in the rear seat, and at the end will be in practically as good condition as their car. Three weeks in a luxurious summer hotel, eating the food that is purveyed there, leave them in but little worse shape than an attack of pneumonia would. Three weeks at a popular summer resort are hardly more destructive to their health and morale than divorce, bankruptcy, or a nervous breakdown; they take the experience in their stride, shrug it off, and in a few months are completely restored. Strength, stability, fortitude, courage--every August the nation proves that it has far more of them than it will ever be required to expend.17

VI. SENTENCE STYLES

DeVoto's sentences average 27 words long, with a standard deviation of 15 words. They are about the same length as the other columnists who wrote after 1920. DeVoto's longest sentence is 84 words. His shortest is 4. Complex sentences make up 66% of his sentences.

Of DeVoto's sentences, less than half, 44%, are rhetorical types, as follows:

17 Harper's, Sept. 1951, p. 43.
DeVoto's balanced sentences are concentrated in his serious, persuasive passages, as in this example sentence:

> From this well established point of view, safeguarding the future has always been more important than enriching small pressure groups at public expense, the nation more important than 2 per cent of the West, and the public interest in publicly owned resources more important than the private interests that coveted them.\(^{18}\)

The high proportion of balanced sentences in DeVoto's writing indicate his interest in using comparisons and contrasts to clarify his views. Furthermore, they give his writing an element of gracefulness.

**VII. TROPES**

DeVoto uses only 30 tropes in the 50 sample sentences, fewer than any of the others, distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tropes</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parts-for-whole</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperbole</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical question</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personification</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pun</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irony</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litotes</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of DeVoto's comparison tropes are metaphors that are such common usage that they have almost lost their rhetorical force if they have not entirely:

"... we have broken the compulsion ..."\(^\text{19}\)

"Anything so deeply rooted is certainly necessary..."\(^\text{20}\)

"... they take the experience in their stride, shrug it off..."\(^\text{21}\)

"... hypocrisy is the lubricant ... and an indispensable instrument..."\(^\text{22}\)

This limited use of tropes does not result from lack of rhetorical skill, but, I suspect, from choice. Where DeVoto chooses, he can use "fancier" tropes with great ease and skill, as in his account of the stunt \textit{Saturday Review} played on a publisher who refused to let out any of its $500,000 books for review and thereby got much attention. DeVoto observes,

\begin{quote}
Practically nothing else at the Book Fair got any publicity. Here was a top hat that cried out for a snowball, a beautifully glistening surface that you had a powerful impulse to splash some mud on.\(^\text{23}\)
\end{quote}

\(^\text{19}\) \textit{Harper's}, Sept. 1951, p. 43.
\(^\text{21}\) \textit{Harper's}, Sept. 1951, p. 43.
\(^\text{22}\) \textit{Harper's}, Sept. 1951, p. 43.
VIII. CONSTRUCTION SCHEMES

DeVoto uses 35 schemes of construction in 50 sentences, a few more than the other post-1920 writers. He favors repetition, as this list shows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unusual or Inverted Order</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

His use of repetition is slight enough to be unobtrusive but strong enough to give his writing oratorical force. DeVoto uses two kinds of repetition—(1) alliteration, and (2) repetition of a word to fix it in the reader's mind and enhance logical coherence, as these phrases from the sample passages illustrate.

First, alliteration:

The beauty shop will get the "piebald patches" out of Mummy's hair.24

If the present system is changed in any way, the public lands will be "gone for good."25

Now, word repetition:

The people who have supported conservation were Republicans; until 1932 all conservation

24 Harper's, Sept. 1951, p. 43.
achievements were the work of Republicans; "conservation" was defined as presently used by a Republican.26

DeVoto's view has been under attack and will be under attack again soon.27

The attackers represent the same interest and the same threat they always have.28

IX. FINITE VERBS

DeVoto's use of finite verbs is unremarkable—he uses 144 in 50 sentences, an average of 2.9 per sentence, which is not very different from the other columnists. His distribution, however, is somewhat different—he uses more linking and passive verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active, non-linking</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active, linking</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100%

This distribution suggests that DeVoto had a greater interest in giving definitions and in the nature of what happened than in the agents of the actions.

26 Harper's, Feb. 1953, p. 56.
27 Harper's, Feb. 1953, p. 56.
28 Harper's, Feb. 1953, p. 56.
DeVoto's talent for painstaking examination and for handling minutiae makes some of his columns a little harder work to read than a lot of the earlier Easy Chair columns, and he may sometimes provide more specifics that are really wanted, but this penchant for enumerating in fine detail gives his practical pieces, like his discussion of ecology books and his statistics on his drive in the West, some interesting historical value. His columns which aim mainly to amuse also illuminate human nature, and in his discussions of contemporary political issues, he provides insightful enunciations of principles which gives these columns enduring value. I find his material to have definite value.

DeVoto displays no weakness in technical craftsmanship, and while his style is a plain one, he uses the rhetorical strategies he does use with good effect and with impressive versatility, ably changing style to fit subject and mood.

For the most part, DeVoto's columns are suitable for a wide audience that would have included far more than the educated intellectuals Harper's catered to. However, his discussions of literary theory and criticism are heavily abstract and were probably read with interest and understanding by a rather small group.
I find DeVoto's writing weak on only one count--his tone is too angry and bitter at times. The extreme example among the eight columns examined in detail for this paper is that on *Time*'s handling of ecology news and books.\(^{29}\)

Noting the natural differences of viewpoint and interpretation among the various ecology scientists, DeVoto says that "in the article *Time* published in its issue of November 8, such slight (and usually distorted) scientific opinion as it makes use of derives from these differences."

Furthermore, he continues, *Time* represents the scientists' "tentatively and rigorously limited theories" as "facts."

According to DeVoto, *Time*'s article sought to "get rid of the nonsense that there is any food problem now or that there will be one in the future:"

> It gets rid of the problem by sweeping misrepresentations of Mr. Vogt's book, by making him and people of like opinion say what in fact they have never said, by attributing to them ideas which they do not in fact hold, by derisive epithets, by citing as demonstrated facts what are really limited hypotheses or mere wild guesses or special experiments under controlled conditions, by ignoring the issues and the evidence, and by assertions for which no support is given and none exists. I cannot believe that *Time* set out to pervert the facts. The alternative, however, is not flattering to the judgment of a news organization, for its editors accepted and

\(^{29}\) *Harper's*, May 1949, pp. 54-57.
released as a statement of the facts a stultifyingly ignorant story based on research so superficial and incomplete that it falsified the facts.30

Elsewhere, DeVoto accuses Time's science editor of scornfulness, derisive wisecracks, jeers, ignorance, statements that are "fantastically untrue," in short--"fearfully irresponsible journalism"--a job that "stinks."31

It is interesting in the light of the column described above that in the "Personal and Otherwise" column on the twentieth anniversary of DeVoto's first column, editor John Fischer attempts to improve DeVoto's image in a section entitled, "Portrait of the Artist as an Old Bear."32 Fischer says DeVoto himself "is innocently responsible for a good piece of the misunderstanding." Fischer quotes a reader who has come to suspect DeVoto "is so interested in conservation because he feels that the more he sees of people, the more he wants to preserve the grizzly bear."

Here follows the beginning of Fischer's defense:

This lady--along with a lot of other people who know Mr. DeVoto only from his writings--thinks of him as a professional curmudgeon, who wakes up with a growl every morning, and promptly looks around for somebody's leg to chew off. This image is a carefully-nurtured literary illusion.

30 Harper's, May 1949, p. 55.
31 Harper's, May 1949, pp. 56, 57.
In fact, Mr. DeVoto is a sentimentalist, with a coronary melting point 14 degrees lower than maple sugar. He is incapable of saying no to anybody who sounds either needy or put-upon; so he collects underdogs the way a blue serge suit collects lint. As a consequence he spends a large chunk of his time helping people to find a job, a publisher, a sound whisky, an elusive fact, a comfortable motel, a sense of prose style, justice, or a reliable psychiatrist—all the while emitting roars of exasperation.

He is also shy.

Now any creature that suffers from both shyness and a soft interior has to grow some kind of protective armor: witness the armadillo and the porcupine. The bristly DeVoto manner is a precisely similar biological mechanism. (It is true, however, that when something he believes in is threatened, he does resemble a mother grizzly protecting a cub.)

In spite of DeVoto's bristly manner, I find his writing on the whole of good quality.

SUMMARY

In spite of DeVoto's bristly manner, he succeeds in being a careful reporter; a qualified, informed social and political critic; and an insightful moralist. His style is plain and unadorned, but sufficiently versatile to serve all the roles he plays. DeVoto's writing is therefore generally of good quality, fulfilling his wish, quoted

33 Harper's, Nov. 1955, pp. 20, 21.
here from his twentieth anniversary column: "I hope that what I have said has been said gracefully and that sometimes it has been amusing, or informative, or useful." 34

34 Harper's, Nov. 1955, p. 17.
John Fischer, born in 1910, was raised on the High Plains of the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles.1 After studying at Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship,2 he worked as a journalist for United Press and Associated Press in Europe and Washington, then in government posts during World War II.3 Before taking the editorship of Harper's in 1953, he also worked in the Department of Agriculture, for the Board of Economic Warfare, and for Adlai Stevenson as a speech writer.4 Other professional experience prior to his work at Harper's included jobs as publishing editor,5

2 Lapham, p. 16.
4 Lapham, p. 16.
5 John Fischer, "After the Age of Affluence," Easy Chair Column, Harper's, Mar. 1971, p. 16.
free-lance writer, and police reporter. In one of his columns, Fischer reveals that he lives in a small town where he wears jeans and a work shirt most of the time and grows as much of his household's fresh produce as he can in his organic garden. His best-known books are *Why They Behave Like Russians* (1947) and *Master Plan, U.S.A.* (1951). Fischer wrote most of the Easy Chair columns from 1956 to 1974, though invited guests often wrote it during this period.

II. SAMPLES OF WRITING

A. Inside the World of a Publishing Editor

The passage which follows is the first part of a delightfully amusing and revealing column published in 1959 with the title "Writers and Their Editors: Notes on an Uneasy Marriage."

6 Fischer, Mar. 1971, p. 16.


9 *Current Biography*. 
Several years ago, when my main job was editing books, I began to wonder whether it might be possible to introduce at least a trace of scientific method into a wildly unscientific business.

Every day authors or their agents would come in to get money to finance the writing of a book. Usually they would have a couple of chapters finished and an outline of the rest. Sometimes they had nothing but an idea, in their heads or scribbled on the back of an old envelope. (One agent, whose effrontery I have always admired, didn't even have that. She said she represented a radio commentator, and she suggested that if a publisher would put up $10,000 so that he could lie on a Florida beach and think for a few weeks, he might bring back an outline for a possible book.)

On such tenuous security, publishers frequently advance sums ranging from $500 to several thousand dollars—to be repaid out of the author's royalty, if and when he delivers a manuscript which can be published and sold to a far-from-eager public. The decision is made almost entirely on the basis of sheer hunch—or what publishers prefer to describe, wistfully, as "editorial judgment." The editor takes a look at whatever the author has down on paper; checks the sales and reviews of his previous books, if any; finds out what he can about any recent books on a similar theme; wonders whether the buying public will have any interest in the subject when the book is published, maybe two years later; makes a personal estimate of the writer's talent, responsibility, and character—and then takes a deep breath and decides how much of the firm's money to gamble. (Even when there is no advance to the author, publishing a book requires an investment of at least $5,000.)

If an editor guesses wrong too often, he and his firm will be out of business. Even the best make so many bad guesses that every publishing house has to write off thousands of dollars in unearned advances each year. And the mistake of being overcautious can be equally serious; I remember with shame at least five authors whose demands I turned down as exorbitant, and who are now bringing in fat, green wads of money for rival firms.
So--like many another naive young editor--I started to look for some clue which might help me to calculate on a less haphazard basis whether any given author would be likely to earn enough to re-pay the money he asked for. I made a careful study of the performance records of some two hundred writers, looking for common characteristics which would distinguish the good risks from the bad.

Two showed up. Nearly all the successful writers had them, while the failures did not. They were: (1) An abnormal supply of simple animal energy. (2) An over-charged ego.

This discovery proved less than revolutionary, because there is another essential ingredient—talent—which I never did learn to spot with any certainty until the writer had demonstrated it on paper, and not always then. Plenty of would-be authors are endowed with Napoleonic ego and the energy of a terrier pup, but still can't write a lick. Yet it also seems to be generally true that the most luminous talent won't get very far when the other two qualities are missing.

As a scientific finding, this may not amount to much—but for an editor it does have its uses. In addition to cutting down his bad debt figures, it can help him in developing a working partnership with his authors. For, once they have entered into their curious alliance, the editor's main jobs are then: (a) to keep his writer churning out manuscripts and (b) to nourish, protect, and shepherd that all-important ego.

The first chore is relatively straightforward.10

B. Caution Urged On Anti-Vietnam Agitators

In the 1965 column of which this is the last part,

Fischer explains that he is, so far, a potential critic of President Johnson's foreign policies.

And, as Joseph Alsop has pointed out, the President is risking some very costly blunders so long as he tries to serve as his own field marshal, running the detailed operations of a jungle war from a desk many thousands of miles away.

Criticism on matters such as these is the plain duty of the press, the political opposition, and the ordinary citizen who is interested enough to keep reasonably informed. Mr. Johnson would do well to listen to them, instead of howling like a cowhand with a centipede in his boot; maybe their comments could help him avoid similar fumbles in the future.

Another group of critics, however, need not be taken too seriously, by Mr. Johnson or anybody else. It includes many (though not all) of the poets, pediatricians, novelists, painters, and professors who have been making so much noise during the last four months. Most of them are deeply humane people, who loathe war and wish it would go away. In a rather vague fashion they feel that the way to avoid a fight is to drop your gun and back off--forgetting the disastrous results of these tactics in Ethiopia (1935), Spain (1936), and Munich (1938); for history of foreign policy is not their strong point. (It is noteworthy that few historians or professors of international relations took part in the "Quit Vietnam" teach-ins.) Neither are they very familiar with Marxist doctrine--understandably, since reading a Marxist text is sheer torture to anyone who is at all sensitive to the use of language. Consequently they are prone to dismiss Communist aggression as a myth, dreamed up by Barry Goldwater and his ilk.

They are bred in a tradition, moreover, which holds that all proper intellectuals are alienated from society--or, in the words of Alfred Kazin, "rebels against their own middle-class background." They see it as their duty, therefore, to stand in eternal opposition to Authority and The Established Order. Whenever authority uses force in defense
of the established order—in Santo Domingo, Vietnam, Berlin, or in the Cuban missile crisis—they grow eloquent with anguish and suspicion. On the other hand, they seldom protest against the use of force (including terrorism) by anyone who proclaims himself a rebel; for they have a romantic identification with rebellious characters, especially exotic ones like Castro and Mao. If Robin Hood is against the bad guys, then they assume that he must be a good guy—overlooking the sad historic fact that a Robin Hood come to power is often just as brutal and oppressive as the Sheriff of Nottingham he overthrew.

They have every right, of course, to express their views on matters of universal concern. But their professional eminence—Robert Lowell's in poetry, Mark Rothko's in painting, Dr. Spock's in medicine—does not automatically endow them with wisdom about foreign policy. Here their opinions are worth just about as much as Dean Rusk's views on poetry or Robert McNamara's on raising babies—which are also matters of universal concern.

Personally I am inclined to give more weight to the opinion of another rebellious intellectual who, in addition to his scholarly accomplishments, has considerable experience in statecraft. He is Dr. C. Rajagopalachari, a leader in India's struggle for independence, a companion of Gandhi, a pioneer in civil disobedience, and an apostle of peace. He also served, after independence, as Governor General of India. In a letter to the New York Times of June 6, 1965, he spoke to "the best brains of America" about their "criticism and ridicule" of the President's policy in Vietnam.

"There is not the slightest doubt," he wrote, "that if America withdraws and leaves Southeast Asia to itself, Communist China will advance and seize the continent. All the people of Asia will soon be intimidated to pay homage to the Communist parties in each of the regions of Asia . . . There is no hope for freedom of thought in Asia if the hegemony, if not the empire, of China is established."

III. CONTENT

One of Fischer's major interests is innovation in government, which recurs as his Easy Chair subject, but his interests are really as far-ranging, varied, and impossible to categorize as DeVoto's. This is shown by the columns summarized below.

A. America's Future

In a column entitled "Planning for the Second America," Fischer urges the necessity of long-range planning on a national level to deal with the "inescapable arithmetic of the population explosion." He promotes four books reporting the findings of various government commissions of experts on the problem and calls for serious consideration of their recommendations, especially for creating new, planned cities, which he discusses at length.

In another column, Fischer reviews two books about America's future, The Greening of America, by Charles Reich, and After the Revolution, by Robert A. Dahl. He finds Reich's book concerned with useless, adolescent magic, but

12 Lapham, pp. 14, 16.
believes Dahl's to contain much valuable insight.  

B. Civil Rights

In a 1963 column entitled "A Small Band of Practical Heroes," Fischer explains the work of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a handful of students who are trying to promote blacks' rights in Mississippi, initially by persuading blacks to register and try to vote. He discusses how different Mississippi is from the rest of the states, what the difficulties are that the students face, and what their methods are. Fischer is sympathetic almost to the point of gushing.

C. Personal History

Fischer begins a delightful account of the Civil War with the information that "as every southerner knows, there is a sharp distinction between the truth and the sure 'nuff truth. One is concerned with fact, the other with essence." Then he goes on to tell about his grandfathers, who served on opposite sides in the Civil War, and about the stories he heard from them. He explains, "The first bit of sure

'nuff truth I picked up--at about the age of six--was that the Civil War was fun." The yarns that follow amply support this truth.16

D. Silly Leaders

In a column entitled "It's Only Money," Fischer comments that in the hot midsummer, sensible behavior is too much to expect, and the "Silly Season" takes over. He elaborates on four examples of silliness in prominent citizens. The column closes with a lament over the problem of inflation eating up the returns on investments in U.S. savings bonds.17

E. Problems of the Postal Service

In a column entitled "A threat of death by mail," Fischer explains the details of the hardship the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 will work on ten thousand magazines and small newspapers, even threatening their existence. He reviews the philosophy of the Postal Service and the various proposals which have been advanced to relieve the problems.18

17 Harper's, July 1957, pp. 11-15.
IV. ROLE

In the Easy Chair columns, Fischer plays the role of reporter and commentator, much in the style of television's Charles Kuralt. Fischer shows a deep and consistent interest in American government, probably because of his own background as a government official, political speech writer, and Washington reporter. His futurist bent frequently leads him to propose innovative solutions to political and civil problems. Therefore, in a November, 1978, obituary, Lapham calls Fischer "an outrider in advance of the great expedition of American democracy" -- "a tinkerer with the machines of government and the models of human possibility." Also, Lapham calls Fischer's articles in Harper's "so many reports to the main party," . . . "filled with useful suggestions." 19 Like the other journalists in the Easy Chair, Martin and DeVoto, Fischer is a conscientious, enthusiastic reporter and commentator on current politics and social issues.

V. DICTION

Of Fischer's words, 82.5% have only one or two

19 Lapham, p. 16.
syllables - fewer than any of the others. His language is necessarily abstract at times in order to communicate about highly abstract subjects, but he tries to make it as accessible as possible, and he presents himself as a down-to-earth fellow, sharing information with ordinary citizens. For example, in his discussion of the need for long-range national planning, he says:

Commissions to study such problems can be financed with foundation money "in a pinch."\(^\text{20}\)

The typical commission chairman is "not too nervous" about criticism.\(^\text{21}\)

Our cities are likely to become extremely crowded, but not everyone "wants to hive up that way." However, according to present trends, that is where they will "end up."\(^\text{22}\)

Liberal use of personal pronouns even in the most serious and abstract of discussions contributes to Fischer's neighborly stance. And he works in concrete language that refers to commonplace experience as often as possible. He thinks Dr. Spock probably has as much expert knowledge of foreign affairs as does Robert McNamara on "raising babies."\(^\text{23}\) Fischer doesn't simply tell us, in abstract

\(^{20}\) Harper's, Nov. 1969, p. 22.  
\(^{21}\) Harper's, Nov. 1969, p. 22.  
\(^{22}\) Harper's, Nov. 1969, p. 22.  
and general language, that the population will double in the near future and that this will tax our resources, he explains concretely that

to take care of the predicted growth in population, [the nation] needs to build a new house, school, and office building for every one that now exists. It will need twice as many parking lots, universities, bus lines, jails, garbage dumps, airports, and bars.24

Fischer adopts a more neutral stance when conveying facts that support his case, but when summing up his personal opinions, he uses strongly connotative language:

If he is interested in saving money, therefore, every true conservative ought to be a passionate advocate of The Plan. So should everybody who simply wants the country to be a decent place to live in. And, after all, why shouldn't we build the Second America in a sensible and humane fashion? If the British and the Finns can do it, why can't we?25

VI. SENTENCE STYLE

Of the Easy Chair columnists, Fischer has the shortest sentences, just a little shorter than Martin's--26 words, with a standard deviation of 13 words. These comparatively short sentences give almost the same effect of ingenuousness that Martin's do, but not quite, because

Fischer's words are longer, and he uses fewer colloquial-
isms. Fischer's longest sentence is 85 words. His short-
est is 4 words.

A full 54% of Fischer's sentences are definite rhetor-
cical types, but his writing does not appear highly stylized
because 18 of his 27 rhetorical sentences are cumulative,
the style of common, rambling conversation. Here is the full
breakdown:

Balanced 3
Interrupted 6
Cumulative 18
Periodic 0

Only 31 of Fischer's 50 sample sentences are complex--62%.
This coincides with their short length and with his effort
toward an ingenuous style.

VII. CONSTRUCTION SCHEMES

Fischer uses fewer construction schemes than any of
the other columnists, 26 in 50 sentences. This fits the
pattern of sharp drop in use of the construction schemes with
the death of Howells and the advent of Martin, the first of
the journalists, in the Easy Chair. It is interesting to
note that Martin uses almost as few as Fischer--28 in 50
sentences, and that these two, Martin and Fischer, try to
effect the stance of ordinary fellows--neighbors--rather
than experts or pedants. Apparently, construction schemes characterize a more formal style.

As the tabulation below shows, Fischer uses high proportion of unusually ordered or interrupted structures. Good writers tend to avoid such structures because they often impede and frustrate the reader. Fischer, however, succeeds with them because he uses them in short passages so that they are still easily read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unusual or inverted order</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VIII. TROPES

Fischer uses more tropes than does DeVoto, another fairly plain writer, and these two use far less than the others. Fischer’s tropes are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tropes</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personification</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parts-for-whole</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pun</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Question</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperbole</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litotes</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fischer’s tropes, like his other concrete touches, are usually warm and down-to-earth, as in these examples:
Many hopeful authors have "the energy of a terrier pup but still can't write a lick."26

Once an editor has given an author a contract, the editor must try "(a) to keep his writer churning out manuscripts and (b) to nourish, protect, and shepherd that all-important ego."27

The Greening of America is "pure moonshine."28

"I suspect that our fabulously productive economic machine will begin to strip some gears."29

Such language does not usually get in the way of Fischer's sounding serious and authoritative when he needs to, but he also avoids DeVoto's bitter anger and Lapham's dreadful earnestness.

IX. FINITE VERBS

Fischer uses fewer finite verbs per sentence (2.4) than do any of the other columnists. This coincides with short sentences, having a mean length of 26 words, and also suggests that Fischer has an adjectival and adverbial style, placing much of the sentence expansion in adjective or

28 Harper's, Mar. 1971, p. 15.
29 Harper's, Mar. 1971, p. 16.
adverb phrases. With this style, a writer tends to assume a great deal which if stated in clauses is posed instead as an invitation to debate. Fischer's finite verbs are mostly active and non-linking, which gives his writing an attractive liveliness. Only Lapham uses fewer passive or linking verbs than Fischer. Fischer's are distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active, non-linking</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active, linking</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X. QUALITY

Fischer's material, like DeVoto's, is important because of his carefully researched facts. While some of his concerns about contemporary affairs are possibly dated, the abundant factual material he presents is reliable history.

Fischer has practical vision. When he discusses theories about caring for America's huge future population, he comes close to proposing a specific location and design for a "new city." And he always presents abundant and convincing support for the opinions he urges.

Fischer is especially skilled at making complex

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theories and ideas as clear and simple as possible. Generally, he is a skilled technical craftsman and rhetorician, probably as much of a rhetorician as he wants to be, though he is perhaps not as rigorous as Howells or as successful as DeVoto. Fischer seems inclined to use suspenseful openings for columns or subsections of columns; in these, he presents long descriptions of several paragraphs before revealing the subject of the description. I find these a little irritating to the usually impatient reader. Also, he occasionally misplaces a down-to-earth trope, letting a potentially humorous image threaten the serious tone of a passage, as in this portion of his commentary on the Vietnam war and President Johnson's critics:

Criticism on matters such as these is the plain duty of the press, the political opposition, and the ordinary citizen who is interested enough to keep reasonably informed. Mr. Johnson would do well to listen to them, instead of howling like a cowhand with a centipede in his boot; maybe their comments could help him avoid similar fumbles in the future.31

But this is an infrequent defect; on the whole, Fischer's writing is of high quality.

SUMMARY

John Fischer exemplifies a journalistic period in the writing of the Easy Chair columns which followed Howells in 1920 and extended to 1975, including Martin and DeVoto. Fischer's columns are chiefly devoted to political and social fact-finding and commentary. Lapham reveals, "I had the feeling that Jack would never tire of asking questions of one kind or another and that no answer would ever seem to him entirely satisfactory." Also, like the other journalists', Fischer's sentences are shorter and his writing generally plainer though still attractive. Like Martin, Fischer takes the role of an ordinary fellow rather than an expert, but his columns are distinguished by well-informed, practical, and futurist commentary.

Chapter 8

LEWIS H. LAPHAM: AN AMERICAN JEREMIAH

I. LEWIS LAPHAM

Lewis H. Lapham came to Harper's Magazine after fifteen years of experience as a journalist, first as a reporter for newspapers in San Francisco and New York, then as a writer for a number of national magazines. He was managing editor, then editor of Harper's, and his negative stance survived the near-demise of Harper's in the summer of 1980. At this writing, in the summer of 1981, he is still its editor and Easy Chair columnist. Lapham's book, Fortune's Child, is according to reviewer James Sloan Allen an earnest, lordly hell-fire warning of damnation. Lapham's effect is "to shower brimstones on a languishing culture while demonstrating that even in this culture the critical spirit thrives."  

1 Footnote to "Letter to a doctrinaire friend," Easy Chair Column, Harper's, Jan. 1972, p. 10.

II. SAMPLE OF WRITING

A. On the American Hero

The passage below comes from a November, 1974, discussion of the lament for the lost American hero. As the passage begins, Lapham is recounting the search conducted for a hero to occupy the White House when Nixon resigned. Kissinger was unlikely, being a successful diplomat who necessarily depended on cunning, precise calculation, and willingness to employ whatever means justify the ends.

I suspect that a comparable awkwardness disfigures most public men, which is why it requires such a great deal of money to make a hero out of anybody employed by the state. If the successful hero is a manufactured object, then the man who carries around the effigy must be somebody about whom his contemporaries know only those things that contribute to the effect. The trick is always done with mirrors (cf. the life and times of Teddy Kennedy). Possibly this is because the ideas associated with the heroic and the ideas associated with government no longer belong to the same categories. Except in time of war, and then only by accident, the two sequences of ideas have little to do with one another. The business of the state requires an absence of passion that would do credit to a dealer in a gambling casino; it comes down to a matter of maintaining the army and the roads, of enforcing the laws against civil disorder, of collecting taxes, and distributing the dole in such a way as to forestall crimes against property. Although necessary, none of these tasks seems to me heroic. The civil servant who gives way to generous impulse interferes with the workings of the machinery and finds himself brought up on departmental charges of conduct unbecoming to a democrat.
The lament for the lost hero became popular in the middle 1960s. It conformed to the rhetoric of despair and provided yet another reason to revile the troop of pygmies that somehow had gained control of the government in Washington. As the bright visions of the decade receded into the historical past a great crowd of critics emerged from within its shadow bearing witness to an apotheosis or a massacre. A number of writers couldn't tell the difference between these two events, which led to schisms and excommunications among the secular clergy, but all were agreed that everything had changed and that nothing could ever again be the same. For the loss of innocence it was necessary to choose sides and affix the blame. Somebody had to be responsible for the loss of the Vietnam war, and it was important to find out why America the Beautiful suddenly was revealed as a society divided by class distinctions and racial hatred.

Who had been lying to whom, and for what reason, and where was justice? The public debate assumed a quasi-religious character, and questions of morality preoccupied the authors of best-selling tracts; books such as *The Greening of America*, *The Armies of the Night*, and *The Best and the Brightest* became the modern equivalents to the inspirational literature published in the Victorian era under such titles as *The Exemplary Life of Miss Betty Anne Stamper--A Christian Confession*.

Content to nod and make the ritual responses ("yes, it is true, this is the worst of all possible worlds, worse than it ever was, o dearly beloved, and slowly falling into dust"), I accepted the lamentation as a literary convention of the period because I understood that publishers paid large advances for bad news. I also understood that it is a comforting thing to imagine that all the heroes have died. If only pygmies remain, then who is there against whom a man can measure his own shortcomings?

With the passing of the Nixon administration I expected the convention to change. The succession of indictments, convictions, and mumbled confessions testified to the miserable truth of
what the moralists had been saying for so many years, and I assumed that they would rest content with their victory. In this I proved to be mistaken. Even the President's enemies took no pleasure in his undoing. Instead of celebrating his resignation with joyous thanksgiving they posed for the television cameras in attitudes of civic grief and continued their lament in the pious mode of Charles Colson's conversion to the truth of God. Otherwise worldly men--Congressmen and journalists familiar with the ways of the milk lobby and accustomed to the settlements in conference committee--began talking about the restored conscience of the American people and the light they had seen on the road to Damascus.

If I thought that they were merely hypocrites, feigning a seizure of conscience for a moment's publicity, I wouldn't have felt so saddened by their statements of faith. But I suspect that many of them believed what they said, and this gives me reason to fear their disillusion. No sooner had President Nixon departed for California than it seemed as if everybody in Washington was determined to make a hero of Gerald Ford. Columnists competed with one another in the extravagance of their praise for the new President's candor, for his willingness to bind up the wounds of the nation, for his simple-minded belief in the American way of life. George Meany consented to visit the White House for the first time in two years, and Democratic Congressmen remembered that good old Jerry Ford embodied all the Midwestern virtues of loyalty, trust, open-handedness and charity.

The business of making images resembles any other business in that it requires the transposition of subjects into objects, and within the first twenty-four hours of President Ford's accession to office he had begun to acquire the rigidity of a statue in a public park. The trouble with this technique is that it does an injustice to the man whom it seeks to transform. Whereas the object can be relied upon to represent what it is supposed to represent and to trade at a fixed price, the man who retains his humanity cannot be trusted to conform to factory specifications. Sooner or later he does something that disappoints his fabricators.
They become dissatisfied with their handiwork, which, because they consider it their own, they then feel entitled to destroy. With President Ford this entire process took exactly one month. When he made his acceptance speech in August it was apparent that he was a man who believed in the Christian doctrine of compassion. At the time this was accepted as a virtue, yet another aspect of the American hero who had cleared the wilderness during the first six days of the week and then listened to sermons on the seventh. But when the President acted on his belief to grant a full pardon to former President Nixon, his compassion was denounced as a weakness. The same columnists who had praised him for his honesty reproved him for his betrayal of the Constitution. I concede that Ford acted with impolitic haste; my quarrel is with those who convert men into icons and then perversely smash them, in both instances for reasons of their own. The gilding on the statue was barely dry before the makers of the image began to gouge it off.

I suspect that Charles Lindbergh understood the whimsical nature of this process, which is why he avoided the publicity that threatened to turn him into stone. I assume that he also recognized that what most people mean by heroism is the deification of success.

The people who mistake the made object for the sudden lurching of the spirit must always be looking in the wrong place for the wrong thing. They will look past the courage of their friend to the empty television screen, ignoring the evidence of their own experience for the ready-made hero who might return triumphant from the moon or run onto the stage of the Merv Griffin Show dressed in a mohair suit. Because we don't know when to expect him, and because we must hold ourselves in perpetual readiness for his entrance, we devalue any expression of the heroic that does not carry with it the emblems of success. We will assume that the heroic comes to us direct from studios in Washington or Los Angeles, and we will condemn our own lives because they will seem to resemble home movies, lacking a professional cast and a musical score by Lalo Schiffrin.
For people reduced to such a state of confusion, the American Hero must be somebody whose approach they would be well advised to dread. I think of a mechanical contrivance rolled onto the stage of a high-school auditorium, its fixed grin as vacant as the smile of a vaudeville comedian, its gestures as life-like as Disney's Abraham Lincoln, and its promises as vague as the ways in which its admirers soon will begin to vanish through unmarked exits.\(^3\)

III. CONTENT

Lewis Lapham's main subjects are "the American literary mind," "the officials and quasi officials who conduct the national debate and formulate the public policy," and the American press. However, his concern is not with particular events so much as with the basic nature of these institutions and with what they reveal about the general state of American culture. Lapham seeks to reveal the dismaying nature of things as they really are, to explain what is really happening beneath pervasive and carefully constructed illusions. For example, he confronts the American "equestrian" class with its slovenly ineffectiveness and calculated shams, and he points out the emptiness and evasiveness of contemporary literature. While T.S. Eliot sees modern man as ineffectual and hollow, Lapham sees him as also fraudulent and

\(^3\) Harper's, Nov. 1974, pp. 30, 31.
potentially dangerous.

A. The American Literary Mind

Lapham titles a typical column "The Shattered Mirror: bits and pieces of experience." In the column he continues a discussion of several months' duration of "the intimidation of the American literary mind." Looking for a book that will interpret the American mind to itself, he finds help only in Erwin Chargaff's The Hericlitean Fire, which describes the disintegration of modern consciousness into fragments of specialization. "This splintering effect," he says, has "forced the literary guilds to give up all hope of portraying society as a whole." And he goes on to decry the timidity of contemporary American writing, its denial of change, its refusal to advance the mind, its failure to recognize any truth that cannot be weighed and measured. Lapham particularly cites Theodore White and William Styron. He finds modern reader and writer alike "suspended in a state of artful innocence."4

B. Americans Prefer Symbols

In the March, 1980, column Lapham notes that

4 Harper's, Aug. 1979, pp. 6-12.
"the candidates who appear in the shop windows of the media must display themselves in a manner appropriate to the season's merchandise," and must therefore match the popular notions that everything is corrupt but that Presidential candidates should have "the virtue of high-school athletic directors." He goes on from an assertion that "the public prefers not to be too-well-informed," to a long demonstration from Jimmy Carter's presidency that what the public wanted and got was a manipulation of symbols rather than real action or decision. Lapham concludes,

Having been elected by a public that insists on lying to itself because it wishes to believe that the storm of the world can be met by symbolic pieties, Mr. Carter has been doing what he was asked to do.\(^5\)

C. Dread Afflicts Our Leaders

Lapham sustains throughout one column the image of wealthy, seemingly powerful and prestigious first-class passengers in an airliner who begin to suspect something is wrong with the engines but who do not understand even the elementary principles of airplane operation or flight and who therefore can only sit quietly in growing terror. Thus he portrays the "feeling of dread that seems to afflict so many of the officials and quasi officials who conduct

the national debate and formulate the public policy," and the "shriveling of the American spirit and the loss of courage." He goes on to demonstrate the "idiot omniscience of the media," the middle distance missing alike from the view of the airplane passenger and the maker of public policy, and the preference for self-deception on the part of American leaders and citizens. He blames the present loss of courage on the emptiness of American education, especially its neglect of attention to the past and the future, and on the growing feeling people have that they are expendable.6

D. The Lost American Hero

Here, Lapham discusses the popular lament for the lost American hero. We do have heroes, he contends, but Americans are confused about what a hero is and where to look for one. Lapham finds many heroes revealed in the generosity, selflessness, and courage of ordinary Americans. However, he says, we have become accustomed to looking for heroes as images manufactured in studios in Hollywood or New York.7

E. Extravagant Expectations

Lapham structures another column as a reply to a

friend, "Sherman," who writes asking him to support a current cause. Sherman stridently and humorlessly denounces politicians, the press, big business, celebrities, and in general, gentlemen in power. Lapham tells him, "If you can play at revolutionary, then I can play at weary courtier, accustomed to presiding at the death of kings." The problem is his friend's extravagant expectations of these groups, who are really set out to be no other than crooks and frauds in the first place. Lapham says,

> I am not as cynical as you suppose, but neither do I share what I take to be your unstated faith in the goodness of mankind. In a religious context I can believe in the idea of redemption, but not in a political context. The extravagance of your expectations ... leads you into a continual sequence of disillusions.8

F. Larry Flynt and the First Amendment

Lapham recounts the unsuccessful attempt of Larry Flynt's editor to gain Lapham's support for a defense of Flynt's First Amendment rights. From this story, Lapham goes on to a denunciation of the press and an explication of the philosophies behind the principle of freedom of the press.9

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G. Political Lies

Lapham titles his May, 1976 column, "Card Tricks: dealing Jimmy Carter from the bottom of the deck." Here, he reveals the events that followed Harper's publication in its March, 1976, issue of an extremely well-researched article by Steven Brill entitled "Jimmy Carter's Pathetic Lies." As Lapham relates, the Carter people were unable to refute the facts presented by Brill, and so engaged in a malicious, concerted attempt at character assassination.10

IV. ROLE

Lewis Lapham, the latest Easy Chair occupant, is a striking contrast to Donald G. Mitchell, the first Easy Chair writer. While Mitchell sought merely to entertain, Lapham is a prophet crying earnestly in the wilderness. He writes with a sense of urgent responsibility to warn Americans, especially literary people and political leaders, of what is really happening in American culture during the twentieth century. Lapham is thus a descendant of the journalists who preceded him in the Chair. They sought to report the facts of specific political and social events

and apply the criticism these facts warranted. Lapham looks beneath passing events to find and describe the underlying ills of American culture.

V. DICTION

Lapham's diction, compared with the other columnists, is rather formal and abstract. His use of the first person pronoun and his use of contractions do not change this effect. Below are listed the long, abstract, or unusual words found in a typical chapter: apotheosis, schisms, excommunications, quasi-religious, lamentation, feigning, transposition, fabricators, impolitic, icons, deification, contrivance, accession, and specifications.\(^\text{11}\)

Lapham deals with rather abstract and new, unusual ideas—one cannot follow him easily from having heard the ideas before, as one could perhaps with Martin's aphoristic statements. And Lapham tries to define the nature of reality specifically, with fine distinctions of meaning. For one attempting this, his writing is surprisingly concrete, and I find him thus as able a writer as Howells. Lapham's concreteness comes chiefly from effective and frequent use of tropes and from specificity. For instance,

\(^{11}\) Harper's, Nov. 1974, pp. 30, 31.
note that this sentence begins with a very general, abstract statement up to the comma, then we are given a specific example, and finally a concrete comparison:

The business of making images resembles any other business in that it requires the transposition of subjects into objects, and within the first twenty-four hours of President Ford's accession to office he had begun to acquire the rigidity of a statue in a public park.\textsuperscript{12}

Lapham's language is connotative, as appropriate in material trying to communicate clearly his personal insights and opinions.

One might expect a writer dealing with so much finely qualified abstract thought to use longer words, or more Latinate language, but Lapham's words are about as long as Fischer's on the average--83.5\% have only one or two syllables.

VI. SENTENCE STYLE

Lapham's sentences are neither long nor short compared with those of the other columnists--having an average length of 28 words and a standard deviation of 13.7 words. This results from his use of long sentences in conceptual passages and short ones when reporting facts, which is why his

writing does not have the effect of ingenuousness of Martin's and Fischer's. Lapham's longest sentence is 58 words. His shortest is 7 words.

Of Lapham's sentences, 76% are complex--more than for any other Easy Chair columnist except Howells. This would be expected judging from the heavy intellectual content of Lapham's columns.

Of Lapham's 50 sample sentences, 34, or 68%, are definite rhetorical types. Only Mitchell uses more. Lapham uses them in these proportions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balanced</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrupted</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodic</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lapham's preponderance of balanced sentences reflects both his interest in carefully defining intangible realities, which requires comparing and contrasting, and his concern and skill with rhetorical strategy, also seen in his use of tropes.

VII. CONSTRUCTION SCHEMES

Lapham uses 30 schemes of construction in his 50-sentence samples, more than those used by Fischer, but less than half those used by the pre-1920 writers. Lapham's are distributed as follows:
Lapham uses 58 tropes in his sample passage; the only columnist who uses more is Mitchell. Lapham, furthermore, uses them masterfully. He succeeds in making them "go on all fours." Lapham carries a comparison through a whole column, using first one facet of the image and then another to illustrate and clarify various elements of his argument. The result is that the image and the train of ideas become inseparable and unforgettable, as with the New Testament parables.

One outstanding example is the column "Perspectives of Flight." First Lapham explains that a "feeling of dread" seems to "afflict" public officials; since the election, Carter's men "have begun to lose faith in their epistemology." After making this abstract assertion, Lapham introduces his guiding metaphor:

They remind me of first-class passengers traveling in an airplane at an altitude of 43,000 feet, careening through the upper air at greater and more efficient speeds, but knowing nothing of aerodynamics and wondering if something might be wrong with the engines.
They exist in a suspension of time and space, afraid of an environment they didn't make, feeling themselves always and unjustly (i.e., through no fault of their own) besieged by risk. The stewardesses do everything possible to conceal the risk, to soothe the passengers, and to persuade them that nothing unpleasant can happen to them. The passengers remain unconvinced. They know that the plane sustains itself by unnatural means and that only a few feet away from them the immense forces of the universe shriek like banshees along the wings.

After pointing out several examples of "the general desire to conceal the world of experience behind a veil of words," Lapham continues the flight image:

On a plane coming east from Houston at the end of May I found myself looking at the design of the Mississippi River and thinking about the deceptions implicit in the view from 43,000 feet. At that height the landscape dissolves into lines on a map, and for a moment I could imagine that I was looking at what the equestrian class likes to call "the big picture." The topography of Arkansas presented itself in the form of an abstract painting about which I could make the kind of critical analysis practiced by literary critics and presidential advisers. Everything seemed so easy to perceive and understand.

After several more examples of prominent persons glibly describing what they understand to be the broad view, Lapham describes the other alternative when there is no middle distance, no realistic perspective:

But if I turned away from the universal truth that shimmered in the far distance, what remained? I was left with the equally uninteresting image of my own face in the window. At 43,000 feet the middle distance disappears, and I could choose between the broad perspective so beloved by makers of public policy and the narrow reflection of self so much beloved by the human-potential
movements and the legions of soi-disant revolutionaries trying on the Halloween costumes of social and political dissent.\textsuperscript{13}

Lapham uses the same technique of continuing comparison in the column about the American hero. After introducing the subject and his own definition of hero, Lapham goes to a conversation he had with a California producer who seriously contemplated televising actual suicides. This turning of people into packages for selling to sponsors suggests the reason for the confusion regarding the American hero: "Those who bemoan his disappearance dream of an image instead of a man." Lapham then goes on to discuss image-making and selling in American politics, especially as seen in the experience of Jerry Ford. He tells us, "No sooner had President Nixon departed for California than it seemed as if everybody in Washington was determined to make a hero of Gerald Ford." The result is described in the sample passage that begins this chapter.\textsuperscript{14}

Lapham's many tropes are distributed as follows:

\textsuperscript{13} Harper's, Aug. 1978, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{14} Harper's, Nov. 1974, pp. 30, 31.
The proportion of comparisons is high for all the columnists, but for Lapham unusually high. This reflects, again, his need for comparisons and contrasts to define the intangible reality he seeks to describe.

IX. FINITE VERBS

Lapham uses 2.7 finite verbs per sentence, an unremarkable number compared with the other columnists. No other columnist, however, uses as high a proportion of active, non-linking verbs. And many of Lapham's verbs have concrete, metaphoric value, which further shows him to be a master rhetorician.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active, non-linking</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active, linking</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X. QUALITY

Lapham's concerns are certainly humane--he fights
the turning of people into objects, the clouding of moral issues, the failure of modern man to know his past, and modern man's refusal to squarely face current problems and plan for future changes and needs.

Lapham's material is valuable in the same way T. S. Eliot's is--it is a penetrating examination of modern man which attempts to find out what he is really like and why. His columns are bound to heighten the reader's awareness and reinforce his humane impulses whether or not he agrees with Lapham.

Lapham's impressive technical and rhetorical competence produces columns that are remarkably concrete and lively for such abstract content, largely because of his colorful verbs and abundant, well-chosen, and well-designed tropes. However, Lapham's work is much harder to read than the others'. Part of the difficulty certainly lies in the complexity and abstraction of the ideas, but part of it too results from the fact that Lapham presents, not an organized argument with logical steps clearly outlined, but rather a series of rambling, almost poetic impressions, each explained and illustrated in turn.

SUMMARY

More than any of the other Easy Chair columnists,
Lewis Lapham shares Donald G. Mitchell's use in the first Easy Chair columns of lavishly artistic writing, using many rhetorical sentence types and many tropes. However, Lapham's use of such writing is a striking contrast to Mitchell's. Whereas Mitchell uses such devices for entertainment and decoration, Lapham uses them to warn Americans eloquently of the chronic and serious illnesses that infect the foundations of their culture. His tone is earnest and almost consistently negative—his reader acquires insight but also despair. Lapham asserts his admiration for ordinary citizens, but persistently denounces "the equestrian class," literary guilds, and journalists. Perhaps in these denunciations, there is an underlying assumption that the denounced will listen and reform, and thus a veiled hope that they are at bottom intelligent, responsible people. But still one suspects that most readers wistfully pray Lapham will find somewhere in the American political or social milieu something to restrain his damnations and give him reason for hope.
Chapter 9

THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN PROSE STYLE
IN THE EASY CHAIR COLUMNS

Since the first Easy Chair column was published in October, 1851, some aspects of its style have remained about the same, mainly those connected with continuity in subject matter and with qualities of good prose style. Other elements, however, have changed. The general outlooks and, to some degree, the subject matter of the columnists have changed. Also the writing style has changed from decorative to journalistic, which is consistent with the changes in content.

I. CONTRASTS, COMPARISONS, AND TRENDS

A. Content

All of the columnists present personal views and experiences, analyses of current affairs, cultural criticism, and speculation about human nature. Interestingly, they all include certain topics: the essence of New York City, a recent election, one or the other of the arts, American higher education, and new books. The differences in content, however, outweigh the similarities.
From the trivia, chit chat, and entertainment offered by Mitchell, the content changes to the wise, moralistic commentary of Curtis, then to elegant cultural criticism, to journalistic fact-finding and evaluation of public life, and finally to prophetic lamentation about the sorry state of American culture.

The relationship of the Easy Chair to public events also changes, from no particular interest or only casual, occasional interest, to concern with general, non-controversial aspects, to frequent journalistic inquiry, factual evaluation and criticism, and finally, to repeated exposure of miserable realities.

The first columnist seems to identify more with European culture than with American, and the second is much interested in things British. After that, particular interest in things European disappears from the Easy Chair, reflecting the isolationism of the country before World War I. After the war, America's foreign policy becomes and remains a major subject for Easy Chair discussion.

The feeling the columnists have about America changes, too. To the first columnist, America is not important, and is to be measured by the standard of European ways and accomplishments. Then the Easy Chair finds America basically good and healthy, just needing occasional reminding of its proud heritage and basic principles. A little later,
however, America is seen to need watching and frequent criticism. The current Easy Chair weighs America and finds it sadly wanting.

B. Role

The title "Easy Chair" has been retained throughout the 130-year history of the column, sometimes varied as "Editor's Easy Chair." This title suggests a column in which the writer can lean back from people and events to get perspective, then relate his personal view—a column that gives the writer freedom to say candidly what he pleases. The title was apparently developed by Mitchell, who saw the column as a space for the easy, idle chatter that took place in the editorial offices of Harper's during coffee breaks, when friends dropped in, and when the work was done. Thus, in his columns, Mitchell seeks to entertain the reader and catch him up on the gossip and social events of New York City and Paris. Curtis is a kindly, indulgent grandfather, gently reminding of values and responsibilities, and pointing out appropriate moral lessons. Howells is an art critic and a crusader for enrichment and elevation of American culture. The three Easy Chair occupants who follow, Martin, DeVoto, and Fischer, are feature journalists, providing the reader with the facts of the case, political or social, interpreting them, and pointing
out the citizens' responsibilities. The current columnist is a prophet crying in an American culture that he finds to be a wilderness. While the Easy Chair has remained a vehicle for personal, widely ranging comment, it has in fact become less and less "easy."

C. Diction

The Easy Chair columnists display strong similarities and differences in language. All mix concrete and abstract language, since all seek to convey viewpoints and ideas, and all ably support general, abstract statements with specific, concrete illustrations. All mix connotative and denotative words--connotative as they express personal views, and denotative in attempts at cautious reasoning. And all include much Biblical and Christian language. Probably Mitchell does this because Biblical knowledge and viewpoints pervade the culture and language of his time, and because Christianity figures so strongly in the background of Western culture, but this usage in the others is probably chiefly a part of their moralist roles.

The columnists differ, however, in the plainness or grandness of their writing and in formality or informality. These differences seem to reflect individual inclination more than anything else. Mitchell uses a high, grand style, with many archaic words, fancy words, and foreign usages.
Curtis' language is more classical—that of a well-educated citizen, and it is informal. Howells' is by contrast much more graceful, formal, and abstract, and at the same time, surprisingly, more plain. Both Martin's and Fischer's are very informal, showing their stances as regular, but well-informed citizens, whereas Howells sees himself and was seen as an eminent authority—a teacher. DeVoto's is strikingly varied depending on his content and purpose, from formal and grand, to informal, though using plain language throughout. Lapham's language is formal, reflecting the seriousness of his attitude, connotative because it is personal, and considerably more abstract and learned than that of the other columnists, reflecting his intention to influence a "fit though few" audience.

Thus the language of the Easy Chair column has become at once more personal, abstract, and intellectual, reflecting the change in audience from the widest possible cross-section of Americans, to the rich and art-loving, to the intellectual and the socially and politically concerned.
Figure 1 shows that word length increased slightly in the Easy Chair columns as time passed. It should also be noted that use of short words correlates in the data on the Easy Chair columns with use of tropes, use of construction schemes, and with longer sentences. Thus, use of short words may be seen as a reflection of the intentional craftsmanship more characteristic of Mitchell, Curtis, and Howells than of Martin, DeVoto, and Fischer. Lapham seems to contradict this pattern, since he is clearly an intentional and highly skilled craftsman, yet he uses a relatively high proportion of long words. This can be explained by the fact that more than any of the others, Lapham writes to an especially well-educated audience about particularly complex and abstract ideas—thus he uses a more learned and abstract vocabulary, which tends to include more long words.
Fig. 1. WORDS ≤ 2 SYLLABLES.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>1851-1853</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis</td>
<td>1859-1892</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howells</td>
<td>1901-1920</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>1921-1935</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeVoto</td>
<td>1936-1955</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fischer</td>
<td>1956-1974</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapham</td>
<td>1975-present</td>
<td>83.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D. Sentence Style

Fig. 2. MEAN SENTENCE LENGTH IN WORDS.

- Mitchell (1851-1853): Mean = 39, SD = 19
- Curtis (1859-1892): Mean = 38, SD = 17.3
- Howells (1901-1920): Mean = 38, SD = 14.8
- Martin (1921-1935): Mean = 26, SD = 14.5
- DeVoto (1936-1955): Mean = 27, SD = 15
- Fischer (1956-1974): Mean = 26, SD = 13
- Lapham (1975-present): Mean = 28, SD = 13.7
The data shown in Figure 2 demonstrates a drop occurring about 1920 in the mean length of sentences used by the Easy Chair columnists and a gradual chronological decrease in the variation of sentence length. A drop in the mean length would be expected in the columnists who were trained as journalists and who came from newswriting backgrounds; this includes all of those after 1920. Also, short sentences would be expected after modern printing technology made cutting of articles from the last sentence backward a standard practice. Perhaps the shortness of sentences after 1920 can also be explained as characteristic of writing that is more earnest and urgent, contrasted with Curtis', which is comfortable and rambling; or more functional, contrasted with Mitchell's, which is largely decorative and entertaining; or with Howell's, which is more artistic and also less concerned with practical, political, or social problems and events.
Fig. 3. SENTENCES = RHETORICAL TYPES.
As Figure 3 shows, use of rhetorical sentence types coincides with observations made elsewhere about the individual writers. The most are used by Mitchell, the most decorative of the writers, and nearly as many are used by Lapham, who has as finely crafted a style as Mitchell. Curtis, the most comfortable and rambling, naturally uses the fewest, and Martin also uses fewer than the others, which coincides with other signs of his attempts toward a simple, ingenuous effect. I find the level of use of rhetorical sentence types strikingly high, however, among the Easy Chair columnists as a group, which reflects the fact that they are all professional, consciously skillful writers.

According to Table 1, cumulative sentences are favored by the Easy Chair columnists, but only slightly; balanced sentences are used almost as often. Given the nature of the Easy Chair column as a personal essay, I would have expected a higher proportion of cumulative sentences, since these are the sentences of ordinary conversation. The high proportion of balanced sentences, like the high proportion of rhetorical sentence types, shows the Easy Chair columnists to be generally skilled, conscious craftsmen. Only half as many interrupted sentences are used as balanced or cumulative sentences. This is no surprise, since the interrupted sentence is difficult to manage effectively. Probably this is the reason it is used the most by Howells, the most skillful
of the seven writers. The periodic sentence is used rarely by the columnists; it is a formal, oratorical device I expected they would avoid.

### TABLE 1. RHETORICAL SENTENCE TYPES / 50 SENTENCES.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interrupted</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Figure 4 demonstrates, the Easy Chair columnists use an average of 71% complex sentences, and show no chronological trend in usage. The pattern of usage may reflect a difference in kind of material conveyed. Those using the fewest complex sentences--Curtis, DeVoto, and Fischer--are those giving the most space to facts and narratives, whereas the other four use more space for interpretation and deliberation.
Fig. 4. SENTENCES = COMPLEX.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>1851-1853</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis</td>
<td>1859-1892</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howells</td>
<td>1901-1920</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>1921-1935</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeVoto</td>
<td>1936-1955</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fischer</td>
<td>1956-1974</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapham</td>
<td>1975-present</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 5. CONSTRUCTION SCHEMES PER 50 SENTENCES.

- Mitchell 1851-1853: 69
- Curtis 1859-1892: 63
- Howells 1901-1920: 68
- Martin 1921-1935: 35
- DeVoto 1936-1955: 26
- Fischer 1956-1974: 28
- Lapham 1975-present: 30
Figure 5 demonstrates a sharp drop in use of construction schemes about 1921. Perhaps construction schemes are part of a more ornate style that was gradually abandoned. Also, the drop coincides with occupation of the Easy Chair by professional journalists, possibly because construction schemes require longer sentences, which a journalist generally avoids.

**TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF SCHEMES / 50 SENTENCES.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mitchell</th>
<th>Curtis</th>
<th>Howells</th>
<th>Martin</th>
<th>DeVoto</th>
<th>Fischer</th>
<th>Lapham</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Inversion | 21 | 10 | 12 | 9 | 7 | 15 | 6 | 80 |
| Omission  | 0  | 9  | 0  | 4 | 6 | 0  | 6 | 25 |
| Repetition| 29 | 16 | 38 | 10| 13| 5  | 10|121 |
| Balance   | 19 | 28 | 18 | 5 | 9 | 6  | 8 | 93 |
| Total     | 69 | 63 | 68 | 28| 35| 26 | 30|319 |

According to Table 2, the columnists used far more schemes of repetition than the other three schemes, and used few schemes of omission. Surprisingly, they used almost as many schemes of unusual or inverted order as schemes of balance. I predicted that few would use these difficult structures, and that those who used them would be the less skilled writers. In fact, Mitchell, who uses 21 in 50 sentences, does often use them ineffectively and awkwardly, but Howells uses many, also, skillfully and effectively.
As Figure 6 shows, the Easy Chair columnists use an average of .93 tropes per sentence, which suggests again that in general their writing is somewhat artful and that they are skilled writers who take their craft as well as their messages seriously. As expected, the most artful, Mitchell and Lapham, use the most tropes, and the journalists
use the fewest--Martin, DeVoto, and Fischer. The few
tropes used by Howells is a surprise, since he is probably
more skilled and polished than the others.

TABLE 3. DISTRIBUTION OF TROPES / 50 SENTENCES.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mitchell</th>
<th>Curtis</th>
<th>Howells</th>
<th>Martin</th>
<th>DeVoto</th>
<th>Fischer</th>
<th>Lapham</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1851-1859</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901-1920</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1935</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-1955</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-1974</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>Comparison</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-for-whole</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pun</td>
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<td>Hyperbole</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 3 shows, the tropes favored by the Easy Chair
columnists are chiefly comparisons, parts-for-whole, and
hyperbole. The columnists vary little in their preferences
for comparisons except that the more artful writers, Mitchell
and Lapham, again use more than the others. It is no
surprise that Mitchell, of flamboyant, over-blown style, uses far more hyperboles than do the others. Neither is Howells' greater use of personification surprising--this coincides with his highly imaginative style. Martin uses more rhetorical questions and more irony than do the others, which is compatible with his effort at humor and at a simple, ingenuous style. There is no ready explanation for the absence of litotes after Mitchell's 4 and Curtis' 1. Perhaps this is a remnant like the use of schemes of a more ornate style which was almost abandoned by the late 1800's.

G. Finite Verbs

It is hard to find a pattern in the number of finite verbs used per sentence, as shown on Figure 7. Variation among the columnists is not very great, but perhaps I can explain the difference between Howells, who used the most, 3.7 per sentence, and Fischer, who used the fewest, 2.4 per sentence. Fischer devoted much of his column space to providing facts and explanations, taking a few inches at the end of each column to discuss implications. Thus he used many qualifying phrases to expand his sentences, rather than subordinate or coordinate clauses. Howells, on the other hand, devoted more space in his columns to conveying abstract concepts and lines of reasoning.
TABLE 4. DISTRIBUTION OF FINITE VERBS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-linking</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 4 shows, there was no chronological trend in the kinds of finite verbs used by the Easy Chair columnists. Only individual variations are revealed, and these are probably connected to the central interests of the writers and to their writing ability. For instance, Mitchell and Lapham are the most artful of the writers; they also use the highest proportions of active, non-linking verbs. Martin and DeVoto especially are interested in explaining the nature of things as they really are, hence their high proportions of linking verbs. In addition, DeVoto more often discusses events in which the agent of the action is irrelevant, so he uses more passive structures than the others. It must be noted, however, that Lapham's main intention also is to convey the true nature of reality, but being a highly skilled and artful writer, he avoids passive verbs. As one would expect, the Easy Chair columnists as a group use few passive verbs, which are generally thought to work against a vigorous, attractive, concise style.

H. Quality

The work of all the Easy Chair columnists is generally good—what we would expect of a magazine that came to be the archetype of the "quality" magazines. The defects seen in Mitchell are perhaps part of his content and the fashion of the age then passing. He writes mainly
entertaining, gossipy trivia and melodrama. His style seems overblown compared with that of the others, and his writing is a little weak technically. In some of the other writers, defects are only minor, and in the rest, the writing is in every way excellent. The writing of Curtis, Martin, and Fischer is not highly polished but is certainly worthwhile reading and thoroughly competent. That of Howells is excellent on every point—flawless. Though it is easy to suffer an overdose of Lapham's despairing view, his technical and rhetorical competence is also impressive. The Easy Chair columnists are all competent craftsmen; some are masters.

II. IMPLICATIONS FOR ANALYSIS OF PROSE STYLE

From this study, some limited conclusions can be drawn regarding methods of analyzing prose style. First, the quantitative data collected proved not to be by itself a meaningful description of the various prose styles at all. This is shown particularly by the great similarity in the quantified features of Mitchell's and Lapham's styles, which belies the actual great difference between their styles. Second, features of writing traditionally defined as aspects of style, such as diction, use of construction schemes, use of tropes, and use of rhetorical sentence
types are more closely related to the self-perceived role of the writer in relation to his message and his audience than to anything else. For example, the widely differing styles of Mitchell, Howells, Martin, and Lapham are reflections of their respective roles as entertainer, authoritative teacher, the boy-next-door, and the national prophet, rather than reflections of their subject matter. Finally, the results of this study show how similar skilled prose writers are even over a span of 130 years. While any study of prose style must necessarily be comparative, it is probably folly to make too much of apparent departures from the norm, as these probably represent a limited part of an author's style.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR A DEFINITION OF GOOD PROSE STYLE

During 130 years, the Easy Chair columnists of Harper's Magazine were considered by educated Americans and by the editors of Harper's Magazine to be among the best American prose stylists. It is interesting, therefore, to find that the good style which they demonstrate matches the usual dictums taught to college composition students.

If one were to turn the general characteristics of the Easy Chair style into recommendations, they would read as follows:
1. Provide plentiful specific, concrete support for general and abstract statements.

2. Plainness of diction does not prevent a formal or graceful style.

3. Try to use mostly short words.

4. Vary sentence lengths a great deal, but keep the average short—25 to 35 words.

5. Craft individual sentences with care. More than a third should be definite rhetorical types, but the natural cumulative sentence should predominate.

6. While not as popular as formerly, construction schemes are still useful and attractive. You may use 25 to 30 per 50 sentences without making your prose seem too fancy or contrived.

7. Tropes, especially metaphors and similes, should be used extensively though unobtrusively.

8. Use mostly active verbs rather than linking or passive verbs. The passive construction is indeed to be largely shunned, though it does not necessarily weaken one's style when used appropriately.

9. Effective prose may be personal but must be built on reasoning and concrete evidence.

It is also interesting to note that some characteristics of prose style occur in association with each other. As a matter of interest, I calculated the possible relationships among a number of quantified features. Only the following pairs of items showed positive correlations. The correlation

1 Rhetorically styled sentences, tropes, schemes, sentence length, words = 1 or 2 syllables, complex sentences, finite verbs, non-linking verbs, linking verbs, and passive verbs.
coefficients are listed for each pair.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Sentences &amp; Tropes</td>
<td>.692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tropes &amp; Words ≤ 2 Syllables</td>
<td>.672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schemes &amp; Words ≤ 2 Syllables</td>
<td>.797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schemes &amp; Mean Words/Sentence</td>
<td>1.000³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Words/Sentence &amp; Words ≤ 2 Syllables</td>
<td>.772</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Several interesting conclusions can be drawn from these data. First, four of these correlations involve aspects of deliberate craftsmanship—rhetorical sentence types, tropes, and schemes of construction. Of these three, however, only two are related to each other—rhetorical sentence types and tropes. In other words, writers who are deliberate craftsmen in that they use one of these devices extensively do not necessarily use all of them, except that the authors who use a large number of rhetorical sentence types also use many tropes. It is especially surprising that each columnist tends to use many tropes or many construction schemes, but not both.

One might expect that use of many construction schemes would correlate with longer sentences as demonstrated by

² To show correlation, the correlation coefficient must exceed .669. The stronger the correlation, the more closely the coefficient approaches 1.000.

³ Rounded to third place.
these data--perhaps it is often necessary to add a phrase or a few words in order to create the repetition and balance that dominate the heavy uses of the construction schemes by these authors. The data, however, suggest that whereas construction schemes require longer sentences, rhetorical sentence types do not, and the author who uses rhetorical sentence types does not necessarily also use schemes of construction. Both of these observations are surprising, since these two devices are so similar, differing only in scale.

It is also interesting that longer sentences are associated with shorter words, especially since uses of both tropes and schemes of construction correlate with use of short words. Apparently, the writer who is a deliberate and skilled craftsman tends to write longer sentences and also use shorter words than does the less deliberate, less skilled writer.

Some interesting absences of correlation must also be noted. My hypothesis that use of many complex sentences leads to longer sentences is disproved. Also, the results above do not link use of many passive verbs with an absence of craftsmanship. Neither sentence length nor number of verbs is associated with number of complex sentences. Apparently, many long sentences are compound or simple rather than complex sentences.
IV. PERIODS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN PROSE STYLE

The variations among the Easy Chair columnists mark off what I have designated as five successive periods in American prose style of the last century and a half:

- The Decorative Period: 1851 to 1853
  D. Mitchell
- The Rambling and Comfortable Period: 1859 to 1892
  G. Curtis
- The Elegant Period: 1880 to 1920
  W. Howells
- The Journalistic Period: 1921 to 1975
  E. Martin, B. DeVoto, and J. Fischer
- The Prophetic Period: 1975 to present
  L. Lapham

The first period is only three years long as shown above, but probably these three years are the last of a longer period that began long before 1851, the date with which my study began. Each of the succeeding periods, up to the present period, lasts 40 to 50 years, and each except the Journalistic Period includes only one writer. These periods are not, however, designations only of individual writers rather than of genuine trends in American prose. The length of each period and the uniformity of style over so many years is evidence of this. Also, the Easy Chair column was carefully monitored by the editorial staff of Harper's; it reflects their styles and outlooks as well as
those of the writers. For instance, the editors decided with the advent of each period what the boundaries and emphases of the column's subject matter should be, and announced these intentions in the magazine. Furthermore, it is unlikely that any one of the columnists would have managed to be very independent of the kind of prose style popular in his day. As to the reason one of the periods contains three writers, I must point out that these writers each took up residence in the Chair at a later time in his life than did the earlier columnists, and simply did not live long enough to occupy it for a longer period.

The five periods in development of American prose style since 1850 designate not only variations in content and prose style but also variations in the way America has felt about itself and the world.

A. The Decorative Period

Donald G. Mitchell, first Easy Chair columnist, wrote the column from 1851 to 1853, during what appears to be the last part of a decorative period in American prose. Mitchell meant his columns primarily as ornate entertainment; he filled them with aimless chitchat and gossipy trivia interspersed between romantic, improbable tales roughly translated from European journals, all presented in long rhetorically styled sentences carrying in them numerous tropes
and construction schemes that amount almost entirely to what the architects call "gingerbread"—excessive decoration. Mitchell's columns express little real interest in public events and issues, and a rather casual, uninterested attitude toward America. By contrast, he feels great enthusiasm for things French.

B. The Rambling and Comfortable Period

The rambling and comfortable period is represented by George William Curtis, who wrote the Easy Chair column from 1859 to 1892. Curtis, unlike Mitchell, demonstrated lively interest in happenings on the American scene, however, he avoided the controversial issues and criticism of national leadership, such as involvement in the abolition versus slavery controversy. Instead, Curtis took a wise grandparent's interest in the more commonplace events, as often as possible drawing a moral from them. In fact, it was a business decision of the Harper brothers to keep the magazine away from current controversy so as not to endanger its large circulation. Editor Henry Mills Alden admits that "the first decade of Harper's Magazine lay under the shadow of this coming Civil war, but scarcely an intimation of it can be found in its pages...." Alden appears proud of "how little partisan predilection affected the
character of their magazine."

Mott, however, quotes Harper's critics in Putnam's Monthly: "Every month it made its courtly bow; and with bent head and unimpeachable toilet, whispered, 'No offence, I hope.'" Mott says that during Mitchell's and Curtis' tenures, the magazine was "anything but a 'journal of opinion,' except when an opinion was almost universally acceptable." Curtis' tone is positive but easy-going, a great contrast with Lapham's earnestness in the current Easy Chair columns. Curtis gives the impression that America and American institutions are basically sound and good, and that the citizenry simply need occasional reminding of their Christian and democratic values.

Matching his content, Curtis sentences are long though not heavily rhetorical, and less often complex than those of any of the other columnists, their length coming more from use of many construction schemes, a left-over from the decorative period. Curtis' pace is slow and his

4 "Fifty Years of Harper's Magazine," Harper's, May 1900, p. 948.


6 Mott, p. 392.
tone easy. He often gives three illustrations where one would do. The effect is a comfortable, rambling style like that of an old family patriarch.

C. The Elegant Period

William Dean Howells, of the elegant period, about 1880 to 1920, sought to demonstrate in his writing the grace he promoted in others. Thus Howells' writing is formal (generally avoiding first person pronouns), somewhat archaic, and dignified—probably in the middle of the plain-to-grand continuum. His prose has a beautiful rhythm none of the others' have. Howells uses an unremarkable number of tropes, but a great number of construction schemes and highly imaginative and varied literary vehicles for presenting ideas, vehicles such as imaginary dreams and after-dinner conversations. His use of the tropes and construction schemes is thoroughly masterful; for him they are unobtrusive essentials in the communication process.

Howells assumes that he has a wealthy and well-educated audience who share the experiences and interests to which he makes frequent reference, like traveling from New York to Boston and back just to see a Greek play presented in the Greek language, comparing and contrasting the many renditions of Hamlet he has attended, and returning to New York City after spending the whole summer in Europe or at a resort,
as a regular thing.

The Easy Chair content in this elegant period ranged among various contemporary issues, but only those of interest not controversy, and it concentrated chiefly on the elegant—the arts. Howells implies that art is really all that is truly important.

D. The Journalistic Period

With the installation of Edward S. Martin in the Easy Chair in 1921 began the period of personal and journalistic prose, carried on by DeVoto and Fischer after Martin, until 1975. In this period the content changed to analysis of current social and political events, the more controversial, the more proper to discuss. And the analysis was given from the point of view of the man-in-the-street offering his personal opinions of the powers-that-be, as an outsider rather than as a recognized authority as Curtis and Howells saw themselves. Martin's columns contained rambling commentary on any and all public goings-on, with special attention to U.S. foreign relations and prohibition. DeVoto and Fischer pursued public issues with the fact-finding bent they had acquired as newspaper reporters, introducing a lighter note now and then with a column of personal anecdote.

During this period, the style of the Easy Chair columns
changed to a journalistic style, with shorter sentences and fewer rhetorical strategies. The tone became critical and factual; America and its leaders were felt to need constant watching and criticism.

E. The Prophetic Period

Lewis Lapham began the prophetic period in 1975. Like DeVoto and Fischer, Lapham came to the Easy Chair as a professional newspaper journalist, but unlike them, he chose to look deeper into American issues, past the facts of this or that issue to the essence of America itself in this modern age. Examining the American character as John the Baptist scrutinized the powerful elite of his day, Lapham makes of the Easy Chair a place from which to denounce the weaknesses and moral disease he sees. His aim is to communicate the precise nature of American inner reality--what is really going on in politics, the press, and the arts. In so doing, he becomes almost poetic in moving from one dominant impression to another, using tremendous rhetorical skill, especially with well-chosen and thoroughly utilized tropes and rhetorical sentence types. Lapham's columns, though varied and personal commentary like Mitchell's first Easy Chair columns, are their opposite in his deep concern for America and his brooding earnestness over her defects and failures. Lapham apparently does not intend his lamentations
for the general public. He presents new and complex ideas with many, far-ranging references to art, English and European literature, and historical scholarship such as would challenge the most well-educated reader. And his language is far more abstract and technical than that of any of his predecessors.

CONCLUSION

The Easy Chair column of Harper's Magazine, through its 130 years, has been a barometer and stimulator of cultural change in America, and this change is seen in the prose styles of the columnists. Most striking is the change from highly artistic prose Mitchell used for elaborate entertainment in the first column to highly artistic language employed by Lapham in the most recent columns to make properly dramatic and penetrating the lamentations of a despair-stricken prophet. The tone of the column began light, almost silly, and has become earnest and damning. As viewed by the Easy Chair columnists, America has been unimportant, then basically good, then in need of careful watching and criticizing, and finally, requiring a Jonah's dreadful warning.

One can grasp particularly well the great change that has occurred in American prose style as exemplified in the
Easy Chair columns by imagining, a few years hence, a chance encounter of the ghosts of Mitchell and Lapham during a coffee break at Harper's. It is difficult to imagine what they could say to each other, how they could find any common ground, or how any genuine communication could take place.
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E. By Bernard DeVoto


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Appendix

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES
OF AMERICAN EXPOSITORY PROSE STYLE

This thesis presents a necessarily limited and tentative description of American prose style development, a description which should be refined by additional studies of several different kinds. One such study should be a more complete analysis of the Easy Chair columnists' styles, one including examination of sentence openers; construction of series; frequencies of adjective, nouns, and verbs; and paragraph styles. Such a study might include other regular columnists writing in American magazines since the advent of Harper's Magazine, especially the columnists in the Atlantic Monthly, which was strongly similar to Harper's, and might compare these columnists to the Easy Chair occupants.

Another useful effort would be to describe American expository prose written before 1850 and compare it with that written after 1850.

Also, expository prose style might be compared with American style in the novel and poetry, which is described by several scholars, most notably Roy Harvey Pearce in The Continuity of American Poetry (1961).

It would be particularly interesting to find out more
precisely what is "American" about American expository prose. Toward this aim, one might compare the styles of the Easy Chair columnists with the styles of the "sages"—the philosophic and moral figures whose prose is analyzed by John Holloway in *The Victorian Sage* (1953). Holloway studies Carlyle, Disraeli, George Eliot, John Henry Newman, Matthew Arnold, and Thomas Hardy. Another such study might compare the Easy Chair columnists with English magazine columnists of the same period.