

Chapter Fourteen - Rene Wellek

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"With some works and some authors, such a task will be comparatively easy. The sound-schemes and similes drawn from the bestiaries in Lyly's Euphues are unmistakable. Spenser, who, according to Jonson, wrote "no language," uses an easily analyzable set of archaisms, neologisms, and provincialisms.¹⁷ Milton not only uses a Latinized vocabulary, in which English words have the sense of their archetypes, but also has his own peculiar sentence structures. The diction of Gerard Manley Hopkins is characterized by its Saxon and dialectal words, its studied avoidance of the Latin vocabulary, prompted by theory and backed by a movement of linguistic Teutonizers, and its peculiar word formations and compounds.¹⁸ It is not difficult to analyze the style of such pronouncedly "mannered" authors as Carlyle, Meredith, Pater, or Henry James, or even of authors who, though of little artistic importance, cultivated their idiosyncrasies.

"In many other cases, however, it will be far ~~more~~ more difficult to isolate and define the stylistic characteristics of an author. A delicate ear and subtle observation are needed to discern a recurrent trait, especially in writers who, like ~~many~~ many Elizabethan dramatists or eighteenth-century essayists, use a uniform style. One must be skeptical of such claims as J. M. Robertson's that certain words or "idioms" are the exclusive signatures of men like Peele, Greene, Marlowe, and Kyd.¹⁹ In many of these investigations, stylistic analysis is indiscriminately combined with study of content-links, sources, and other matters such as recurrent allusions. When that is the case, stylistics serve only as a tool for a different purpose: the identification of an author, the establishment of authenticity, a detective job at most preparatory to literary study.