

AN ANALYSIS OF JAMES HOWELL'S  
EPISTOLARY STYLE

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English  
University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Anne Hulme Trautwein  
December, 1971

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Twentieth-century criticism of seventeenth-century prose has been dominated by the categorizing of writers' styles into various classifications, a practice which has resulted in misconceptions about what these writers were actually trying to produce. Especially erroneous is the use of these labels as a means of identifying the styles of minor writers, most of whom were not sufficiently attentive to produce one consistent type of prose. The seventeenth-century man of letters was, as a result of his classical education, very conscious of Cicero's "Grand Style" and Seneca's "Plain Style." Careful study indicates, however, that conventional labels such as "Senecan" and "Ciceronian" do not provide inclusive classifications for Howell's epistolary style. He used both Cicero and Seneca as models for his Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae (1645), weaving the rhetorical figures of speech together with a style which was both conversational and amusing.

## FOREWORD

I wish to thank Dr. William A. Linsley for his careful reading of this thesis and his helpful suggestions for its improvement. I am also deeply grateful to Dr. Edward G. Holley of the M. D. Anderson Library who made possible my use of the James Howell collection. Without the encouragement and assistance of Dr. Patrick G. Hogan and Dr. Amy Lee Turner, this thesis could not have been completed.

## CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD . . . . .	v
I. SURVEY OF CRITICAL COMMENTARY . . . . .	1
II. THE ENGLISH EPISTOLARY TRADITION . . . . .	11
III. HOWELL'S SENTENCE STRUCTURE . . . . .	34
IV. HOWELL'S LANGUAGE . . . . .	61
A. Neologisms . . . . .	62
B. Colloquialisms . . . . .	69
C. Tropes . . . . .	77
D. Imagery . . . . .	85
V. HOWELL'S HUMOR . . . . .	100
A. Of Wordplay . . . . .	102
B. Of Criticism of Various Groups . . . . .	105
C. Of His Description of Situations . . . . .	108
D. Of His Observation of Others . . . . .	110
E. From Self-revelation . . . . .	112
VI. HOWELL'S ARTFUL VARIETY . . . . .	118
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	122

#### EDITORIAL NOTE

In this study the long "f" is reproduced as a typographical "f" in excerpts cited from sixteenth-century rhetorics because of my desire to sustain the flavor of the original printed texts and contrary to practice stated in Fredson Bowers, Principles of Bibliographical Research (1949; rpt. N. Y.: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 181.

## I. SURVEY OF CRITICAL COMMENTARY

James Howell (1593-1666), a Welshman educated at Jesus College, Oxford University, who spent an erratic career as a lexicographer, historian, philologist, traveling agent, royal spy, and writer, was one of the first Englishmen to succeed in earning his living by his pen. Though Howell's publications were many, most of his work was "hack" writing. Today he is chiefly remembered for the work entitled Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae, first published in 1645, midway through an eight year confinement at Fleet Prison. When he wrote this work, Howell gave to English literature a collection of letters which far surpassed all earlier epistolary attempts written in the vernacular. His book enjoyed significant success; it was published eight times during the seventeenth century and six times during the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Its popularity waned, however, as the genre of the familiar letter was replaced by the essay.

The familiar letter has been defined by Harold Binkley as a personal, informal composition characterized by a certain amount of rambling from topic to topic, a lightness

<sup>1</sup> William Harvey Vann, Notes on the Writings of James Howell (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 1924), pp. 20-24.

of touch, and a relaxed treatment of the subject. The style of this genre is not supposed to be rhetorical in the sense of persuading its reader, but is rather a spontaneous presentation. Binkley has said that the familiar letter "finds its initial impulse in conversation"; hence the word personal refers to the one to one relationship between two friends.<sup>2</sup> The literary familiar letter differs in that its purpose is to address a larger group by way of being sold for publication. As a result of this purpose, usually the intimacy is lessened, and the writer's artlessness gives way to a more self-conscious style of writing. Spontaneity is still a criterion, however, in the literary letter; and the writer's ability to conceal his art is considered important to his success in this genre.

Prior to the seventeenth century the familiar letter as described above did not really exist. The influence of Seneca's Epistulae Morales and the medieval traditions of the formulary books combined to produce stilted form letters, the main purpose of which was didactic. James Howell was not without predecessors in his use of this genre, but his work comes closer to fitting Binkley's criteria, so much so that he has been called by Douglas Bush, "the supreme

<sup>2</sup> Harold C. Binkley, "Essays and Letter-writing," PMLA, 41 (June, 1926), 345.

epistolizer"<sup>3</sup> of the seventeenth century.

James Howell began writing at a time when English prose style was the subject of much controversy. Cicero had been the accepted model during the Renaissance, but in the early seventeenth century many writers sought new models for imitation. Morris W. Croll was one of the first literary critics to recognize the importance of seventeenth-century writers' imitation of classical models in determining their styles.<sup>4</sup> Croll classified these writers according to the classical writer they seemingly imitated, the main division being between those who imitated Cicero and those who did not.

After this initial modern scholarship by Croll, many critics have followed in his footsteps, generalizing about various schools or movements to which his basic study had pointed the way. The Ciceronian style is characterized by a writer's use of the periodic sentence, the schemes of repetition, parallelism and balance, an impressive vocabulary, and in general, his concern for words rather than matter. Croll divided anti-Ciceronians into two groups: those who used the

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (1945; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 195.

<sup>4</sup> Morris W. Croll, "The Baroque Style in Prose," in Style Rhetoric, and Rhythm, Essays by Morris W. Croll, ed. J. Max Patrick et al. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966) pp. 210-19. This collection of nine essays constitutes his most important work on English prose style.

"curt" style, characterized by asymmetry, asynedeton, and brief members; and those who used the "loose" style, identified by long trailing clauses, horizontal rather than circular structure.<sup>5</sup> Croll's error in defining the anti-Ciceronian style as one which seeks to reproduce the movement of the mind in action was one "in favor of quality" according to John Wallace. Therefore, Croll's definition holds true only for the most brilliant writers who used this style, not for the lesser writers.<sup>6</sup>

These classifications have at various times been applied to most seventeenth-century writers, but critics have not always agreed on which classification best describes some writers. In seeking to refute opposing theories of style, critics have pointed out characteristics of a writer's style which contradict a classification previously applied, but seldom have the critics ruled against the validity of classification in general. Recently, however, Louis T. Milic, along with others, has criticized these classifications which have been applied to writers' styles.<sup>7</sup> Brian

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>6</sup> John M. Wallace, "Foreword to Essay One," in Style Rhetoric, and Rhythm, Essays by Morris W. Croll, ed. J. Max Patrick, et al. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Milic, "Against the Typology of Styles (1967)," in Essays on the Language of Literature, ed. Seymour Chatman and Samuel R. Levin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967), pp. 442-50.

Vickers, for example, objects to the classification of Francis Bacon as a "Senecan" writer who used the curt style.<sup>8</sup> The word typology is defined by Milic as a classification, and the "typology of styles" is "an arrangement of styles into categories, such as periods of time (Elizabethan, Restoration, Victorian, or modern), kinds of influence or derivation, such as Euphuistic, Senecan, Ciceronian, or of impression, such as ornate, formal, learned, simple, plain, and casual."<sup>9</sup> Milic believes that this typology of styles which has dominated stylistic criticism of seventeenth-century prose is invalid since no individual completely adheres to the practice of one group. His theory breaks with that of the earlier critics, who though they for the most part admitted and recognized certain inconsistencies in a given writer's work, still persisted in typing him according to one of the prevailing stylistic theories. Milic asserts that "a selection of passages might be made from the works of any single writer to support the claim that he prefers short sentences or long sentences, few adjectives or many."<sup>10</sup> Examples from James Howell's Letters bear out this assertion, and the classifications formulated by Croll will be used only to describe particular sentences or paragraphs of James Howell's Letters,

<sup>8</sup> Brian Vickers, Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1968), passim.

<sup>9</sup> Milic, p. 442.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

not his style as a whole. Though no one has made an extensive study of James Howell's style, critics have attempted to describe it in passing, and the contradictoriness of these estimates indicates the difficulty of typing Howell's style.

The earliest references to Howell's style are useful in illuminating the criteria of critics of previous centuries. John Evelyn, for example, in writing to Lord Spencer in the late seventeenth century comments on the deficiencies of Howell's style which eliminate him from consideration as a member of the Royal Society:

And now I think on it, I cannot a little wonder that whilst there are extant so many volumes of letters, and familiar epistles in the politer modern languages, Italian, Spanish, and French, we should have so few tolerable ones of our own country now extant, who have adorned the part of elegance, so proper and so becoming persons of the nobility, quality, and men of business, and education, as well as lovers and courtiers of the fair sex. Sir Francis Bacon, Dr. Donne, and I hardly remember any else who have published anything considerable, and these but gleanings: or Cabal men, who have put many things in a heap, without much choice of fruits, especially as to the culture of the style or language, the genius of the nation being almost another thing than it was at that time. James Howell published his "Ho-Eliaae" for which he indeed was laughed at (not for his letters which acquainted us with a number of passages worthy to be known and had never else been preserved) but which, were the language enlightened with that sort of exercise and conversation, I should not question its being equal to any of the most celebrated abroad.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> John Evelyn, Diary of John Evelyn to Which Are Added a Selection from his Familiar Letters, ed. William Bray (London: Bickers & Son, 1906), III, 435.

Evelyn's criterion is "culture" or "refinement," a quality which he finds lacking in Howell's style.

After a century of relative silence concerning Howell's style, Sir Egerton Brydges' comment in the early nineteenth century is far less critical; he calls Howell's Letters, "a work containing numberless anecdotes and historical narratives and forming one of the most amusing and instructive volumes of the seventeenth century."<sup>12</sup> Howell's style is valuable to him because it is entertaining. William Makepeace Thackeray praised Howell's "artless prattle,"<sup>13</sup> while W. B. Scoones contrarily speaks of Howell's "great literary skill,"<sup>14</sup> implying artful writing. In the early part of the twentieth century, J. Howard Masterman calls Howell's style "careless and colloquial,"<sup>15</sup> but Margaret Williamson, writing on the colloquial language used during the seventeenth century, notes that Howell's Letters aimed at "literary polish and ornament"

<sup>12</sup> Sir Egerton Brydges, Censura Literaria (1808; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1966), VII, 232.

<sup>13</sup> William M. Thackeray, Roundabout Papers: English Humorists (Boston: Dana Estes & Co., 1898), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> W. B. Scoones, Four Centuries of English Letter Writing (Harpers, 1881), p. 71, as cited by Joseph Jacobs, ed., Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae, The Familiar Letters of James Howell (London: David Nutt, 1892), p. xix.

<sup>15</sup> J. Howard B. Masterman, The Age of Milton (London: George Bell & Sons, 1904), p. 238.

rather than the effect of "conversational familiarity."<sup>16</sup> George Saintsbury refuses to discuss Howell's style because "his [Howell's] very canon is a pedestrian familiarity."<sup>17</sup> Maurice Hewlett has classified Howell's style as whimsical and "strikingly modern when compared with Donne or Milton,"<sup>18</sup> Tucker Brooke is one of the first critics who has admitted the difficulty of placing "the amusing Welshman" who wrote "in several different styles."<sup>19</sup> William Irving, completely ignoring some rather obvious characteristics of Howell's style, says that he "sticks to the [Senecan] ideal he sets up" in the first letter and "says what he has to say with a minimum of fuss."<sup>20</sup> Irving notes that Howell's new way of epistolizing" is "completely free from frills."<sup>21</sup> One of his most recent editors, Guy Holt, classifies Howell's style

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Williamson, Colloquial Language of the Commonwealth and Restoration (The English Association: Pamphlet No. 73, July, 1929), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> George Saintsbury, A History of English Prose Rhythm (1913; rpt. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 238.

<sup>18</sup> Maurice Hewlett, Last Essays of Maurice Hewlett, Index Reprint Series (1924; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), p. 274.

<sup>19</sup> Tucker Brooke, "The Renaissance (1500-1660)," in A Literary History of England, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 621.

<sup>20</sup> William Henry Irving, The Providence of Wit in the English Letter Writers (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1955), p. 96.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

as "decorum personified" in that "he retailed little scandal."<sup>22</sup> Holt obviously is not using the same criterion seventeenth-century critic John Evelyn had in mind. From the diversity of these comments, one sometimes wonders if these critics read very widely in Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae. The most extensive study of Howell's epistolary style has been done by Graham Cunningham Wilson, who admits, somewhat apologetically, his bafflement in trying to type Howell's style and says that "any general and conclusive statement about the style of James Howell's Letters must necessarily go wide of the mark."<sup>23</sup> He is right only if one tries to be too rigid in his classification.

As distinguished from Wilson's cursory study, three major aspects of Howell's epistolary style will be considered in this study. First will be a study of Howell's sentence structure, which will serve to indicate the variety of sentence types and schemes which he uses. Second, Howell's language will be examined for colloquialisms and neologisms, as well as the construction and design of his imagery. Third, the adjective "amusing," which has so often been used to

<sup>22</sup> Guy Holt, ed., Certain Letters of James Howell, Selected from The Familiar Letters as First Published between 1645 and 1655 (New York: William Edwin Rudge, 1928), p. ii.

<sup>23</sup> Graham C. Wilson, "James Howell: Man and Writer," Diss. Stanford University 1952, p. 203.

describe his style, will be analyzed by breaking down the types of humor which Howell used.

Louis Milic has defined style as an author's "habitual and consistent selection from the expressive resources available in his language."<sup>24</sup> Keeping this definition in mind, this study will be directed toward unearthing the "various selections" which Howell makes for the purpose of establishing his individual style. A writer's selections may or may not be conscious, and his unconscious choices reflect for the most part the education which he has received and the literary fashions to which he has been exposed. A discussion of the epistolary tradition will first be necessary to understand its influence on Howell's style.

<sup>24</sup> Milic, p. 448.

## II. THE ENGLISH EPISTOLARY TRADITION

The English epistolary tradition began in the early seventeenth century and from its beginnings looked backward to the classical models for direction. That James Howell embraced this tradition is indicated by the frontispiece of the first edition of Epistolae Ho-Elianae (1645), where the author is pictured, flanked by portraits of Cicero, Seneca, Julius Caesar, and Marcus Aurelius. In his dedicatory verse, "To the Knowing Reader Touching Familiar Letters," he also praises these classical authors for their epistolary works.

In the second edition of Epistolae Ho-Elianae (1647), James Howell added a letter to the front of Book I, which bears much resemblance to a literary preface. This epistle constitutes Howell's fullest discussion on the subject of style and indicates what he thought the epistolary tradition called for:

It was a quaint Difference the Ancients did put  
'twixt a Letter and an Oration; that the one  
should be attired like a Woman, the other like a  
Man: the latter of the two is allowed large  
side Robes, as long Periods, Parentheses, Similes,  
Examples, and other Parts of Rhetorical Flourishes:  
But a Letter or Epistle should be short-coated, and  
closely couched; a Hungerlin becomes a Letter more  
handsomely than a Gown: Indeed we should write as  
we speak; and that's a true familiar Letter which

expresseth one's Mind, as if he were discours-  
ing with the Party to whom he writes, in  
succinct and short Terms . . . .<sup>1</sup>

Howell is indicating his awareness of the classical use of a simple conversational style for familiar letters as contrasted with the use of a more formal style for orations.

Cicero was by far the most important classical influence on the epistolary tradition. His correspondence consists of a large number of letters consciously written in a conversational style which aimed at revealing the man himself:

What do you think of my style in letters? Don't I talk with you in vulgar tongue? Why, of course, one doesn't write always in the same style. For what analogy has a letter with a speech in court or at a public meeting? Nay even as to speeches in court, it is not my practice to handle all in the same style. Private causes and such as are of slight importance we plead in simpler language; those that affect a man's civil existence or reputation, of course, in a more ornate style.<sup>2</sup>

Cicero is referring in this letter to the doctrine of the three oratorical styles: the Plain, the Middle, and the Grand. The origin of this classification is debated by

<sup>1</sup> James Howell, Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae, The Familiar Letters of James Howell, ed. Joseph Jacobs (London: David Nutt, 1892), Book I, Section I, Letter I, henceforward to be cited for the most part within the text as Book I, Sect. I, I. If the reference is to one of the editor's notes, the designation will be Jacobs. The spelling, capitalization, and italics here and hereafter are all according to Jacobs' edition.

<sup>2</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, The Letters of Cicero, trans. Evelyn S. Shuckburgh (London: George Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1915) III, 139 (CCCCXCV).

scholars, but the recognition of at least two styles dates back to Aristotle who visualized the difference between a style for oratorical purposes and one for written composition but made no attempt to theorize on this difference.

Theophrastus, Aristotle's pupil, is generally credited with having formulated the three styles with the Middle as the "mean," representing the perfect style. As J. F. D'Alton points out, while the three styles originally applied only to oratory, the theory was gradually expanded to include poetry and prose.<sup>3</sup>

The "Plain Style" was thought by the Greeks and later the Romans to be best suited to instruction while the "Middle Style" was somewhat indefinitely characterized as a smooth or charming style and was generally thought to be appropriate for the purpose of persuading an audience or simply entertaining them. The "Grand Style" was always the means for achieving the most serious and elevating effects. Cicero preferred this latter style and was so closely associated with it that the "Grand Style" is often referred to as the "Ciceronian Style." It is important to remember, however, that Cicero gives ample attention to the "Plain Style" in De Oratore, where he defines it as the language of everyday

<sup>3</sup> J. F. D'Alton, Roman Literary Theory and Criticism, A Study in Tendencies (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 74.

speech, and as indicated by the above example, he thus chose it as being most appropriate for letter writing.<sup>4</sup>

J. A. K. Thomson praises the colloquial ease of Cicero's letters and his use of anecdotes,<sup>5</sup> the two characteristics of his style which Howell most frequently emulated. In his remarks concerning epistolary style in Letter I, Howell states that "we should write as we speak."<sup>6</sup> Ian Gordon has noted the "speech-based prose" at which Howell excelled<sup>7</sup> and cites this example (Book I, Sect. 4, V), "Therefore I pray leave the smutty Air of London, and come hither to breathe sweeter where you may pluck a Rose, and drink a Cillibub." This excerpt is one of many which illustrate Howell's preference for a colloquial style. Cicero, the master of the "Grand Style" or oratorical prose, thus set the precedent for the use of the "Plain Style" in letters; and in Howell's use of

<sup>4</sup> D'Alton, p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> J. A. K. Thomson, Classical Influences on English Prose (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955), p. 52. Though Thomson makes no note of a distinction, colloquial is here used according to its first meaning in the Oxford English Dictionary (1933), "of or pertaining to colloquy; conversational," hence its connection with the "Plain Style" as defined by Cicero.

<sup>6</sup> Book I, Sect. 1, I.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Gordon, The Movement of English Prose (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 122. Though he recognizes the colloquial nature of Howell's prose, Gordon does not link it with Cicero's use of this style.

this style he is following one of the earliest classical traditions.

Cicero's use of anecdotes is another important element of style which Howell undoubtedly made use of. Thomson points out that Cicero "has never been sufficiently praised for his skill in anecdotes, his admirers probably considering that he had loftier claims for consideration."<sup>8</sup> Critics of James Howell's style have likewise found little or no praise for what they have called his gossipy, anecdotal style. Extensive use of the anecdote requires no originality of subject matter on the part of an author and is therefore looked down upon; but in looking at this tradition, however, one finds that the anecdotes possessed an important place in Roman education. The classical oratorical training included learning to write the narratio or narrative part of a speech which was little more than an expanded anecdote must concern itself with its effect on the hearer, it requires brevity, clarity, and the simplicity of a style which seems conversational.<sup>9</sup> The story must, furthermore, contain people and actions described vividly enough that they can be visualized by the hearer. Thomson emphasizes

<sup>8</sup> Thomson, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth H. Haight, The Roman Use of Anecdotes in Cicero, Livy, and the Satirists (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), p. 9.

Cicero's ability to strike the right note and handle the requirements of prose fiction, pointing to his technique of alternating explanation and conversation and his non-moralizing conclusion. It is Thomson's belief that "no author who had deeply studied his Cicero, as men of letters did in the Renaissance and long after, could blame anyone but himself if he bungled the telling of an anecdote;"<sup>10</sup> and Howell obviously is no bungler in this field. Joseph Jacobs notes that Howell's Letters contain at least one anecdote for every four letters; and for the most part, these stories are distinguished according to the classical demands of conciseness, simplicity, and subtlety. The following example is typical of Howell's skill in the telling of anecdotes:

There is a flaunting French Ambassador come over lately, and I believe his Errand is nought else but Compliment; for the King of France being lately at Calais, and so in sight of England, he sent his Ambassador, M. Cadenet, expressly to visit our King:" He had Audience two days since, where he, with his Train of ruffling longhair'd Monsieurs, carry'd himself in such a light Garb, that after the Audience the King ask'd my Lord Keeper Bacon what he thought of the French Ambassador: He answer'd That he was a tall proper Man. Ay, his Majesty reply'd, but what think you of his Head-piece? Is he a proper Man for the Office of an Ambassador? Sir, said Bacon, Tall Men are like high Houses of four or five Stories, wherein commonly the uppermost Room is worst furnish'd. (Book I, Sect. 2, I)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Thomson, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> A slightly different version of this anecdote about

Another anecdote, and one which is especially vivid in its use of description, is this story about Sir Walter Raleigh's unsuccessful trip to Guiana in search of gold:

This Return of Sir Walter Raleigh from Guiana, puts me in mind of a facetious tale I read lately in Italian (for I have a little of that language already) how Alphonso King of Naples sent a Moor, who had been his Captive a long time, to Barbary, with a considerable sum of money to buy Horses, and return by such a time. Now there was about the King a kind of Buffoon or Jester, who had a Table-book or Journal, wherein he was used to register any absurdity or impertinence, or merry passage that happened upon the Court, That day the Moor was dispatched for Barbary, the said Jester waiting upon the King at Supper, the King call'd for his Journal, and ask'd what he had observ'd that day; thereupon he produc'd his Table-book, and among other things, he read how Alphonso King of Naples had sent Beltram the Moor, who had been a long time his Prisoner, to Morocco (his own Country) with so many thousand Crowns, to buy Horses. The King asked him why he inserted that; Because, said he, I think he will never come back to be a Prisoner again, and so you have lost both Man and Money. But if he do come, then your Jest is marr'd, quoth the King: No, Sir; for if he return I will blot out your Name, and put him in for a Fool.

The Application is easy and obvious: But the World wonders extremely, that so great a wise Man as Sir Walter Raleigh would return to cast himself upon so inevitable a Rock, as I fear he will; and much more, that such choice Men, and so great a power of Ships, should all come home and do nothing. (Book I, Sect. 1, IV)

Howell, like Cicero, has also alternated his use of explanatory matter with dialogue and his conclusion that the point

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Bacon is noted in Dr. Rawley's Commonplace Book (1661) as published in The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. James Spedding Robert L. Ellis, and Douglas D. Heath (Rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1900), XIII, 410.

of the anecdote is "easy and obvious" indicates that he feels no urge to preach or moralize about the story. Howell thus uses the anecdote in accordance with the classical tradition, conforming to set rules which had been handed down from antiquity, and his work cannot be justly criticized for this characteristic.

The most important treatise on epistolary style was written by an anonymous Greek who lived about the same time as Cicero. This discussion was part of a definition of the "Plain Style" contained in De Elocutione (On Style), a work written either during the first century B. C. or the first century A. D. by an author who may have been named Demetrius.<sup>12</sup> This work deserves attention since it was the first discussion of letter writing and was subsequently used by such seventeenth century scholars as Justus Lipsius, John Hoskyns, and Ben Jonson:<sup>13</sup>

We will next treat of the epistolary style, since it too should be plain. Artemon, the editor of Aristotle's Letters, says that a letter ought to be written in the same manner as a dialogue, a letter being regarded by him as one of the two sides of a dialogue.

There is perhaps some truth in what he says, but not the whole truth. The letter should be a little more studied than the dialogue, since the latter reproduces an extemporary utterance, while the former is committed to writing.

. . . . .

<sup>12</sup> W. Rhys Roberts, Demetrius On Style (Hildesheim, Germany: Georg Olms Verlag, 1969), p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> That Howell was familiar with Demetrius' precepts

The letter, like the dialogue, should abound in glimpses of character. It may be said that everybody reveals his own soul in his letters. In every other form of composition it is possible to discern the writer's character, but in none so clearly as in the epistolary.

The length of a letter, no less than its style, must be carefully regulated. Those that are too long, and further are rather stilted in expression, are not in sober truth letters but treatises with the heading "My dear So-and-So" . . . . .

There should be a certain degree of freedom in the structure of a letter. It is absurd to build up periods, as if you were writing not a letter but a speech for the law-courts. And such laboured letter-writing is not merely absurd; it does not even obey the laws of friendship, which demand that we should "call a spade a spade," as the proverb has it.

A letter is designed to be the heart's good wishes in brief; it is the exposition of a simple subject in simple terms.

Its beauty consists in the expression of friendship and the many proverbs which it contains. This last is the only philosophy admissible in it, the proverb being common property and popular in character.

. . . . . Since occasionally we write to States or royal personages, such letters must be composed in a slightly heightened tone. It is right to have regard to the person to whom the letter is addressed.

. . . . . In general it may be remarked that, from the point of view of expression, the letter should be a compound of two styles, viz. the graceful and the plain.<sup>14</sup>

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for epistolary writing is evident from his own discussion of epistolary style, but whether his knowledge was primary or derived from one of these scholars is not known.

<sup>14</sup> G. M. A. Grube, ed., A Greek Critic: Demetrius on Style (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1961), pp. 111-113 (Sect. 223-235).

Since Demetrius includes this discussion of epistolary style in the section on "Plain Style," he is therefore in agreement with Cicero about the appropriateness of its use in correspondence. He also agrees with Cicero on the subject of amplification, or the process whereby a theme is expanded. Cicero, as pointed out, extensively used the anecdote, and Demetrius similarly recommends the proverb. Demetrius visualizes epistolary style as a mixture of the plain and graceful styles. Apparently, he felt that though the style for letter writing should be basically simple, an element of elegance is required to achieve the heightened tone necessary for the sake of decorum, which he defines above as the "regard" the writer should have for "the person to whom the letter is addressed." According to this principle of decorum, Howell fitted his style to the addressee, a practice which is illustrated by the marked contrast between the following excerpts, the first of which is from a letter addressed to his brother and the second to a business acquaintance:

It hath pleased God, after almost three years' Peregrination by Land and Sea, to bring me back safely to London; but altho' I am come safely, I am come sickly: For when I landed in Venice, after so long a Sea-Voyage from Spain, I was afraid the same Defluxion of salt Rheum which fell from my Temples into my throat in Oxford, and distilling upon the Uuvula impeach'd my Utterance a little to this day, had found the same channel again; which caused me to have an Issue made in my Left Arm for the Diversion of the Humour . . . . My Brother, I thank him, hath been very careful of me in this my sickness, and hath come often to visit me: I thank

God I have pass'd the brunt of it, and am recovering and picking up my Crums apace . . . . (Book I, Sect. 2, I)

Having brought up the Law to the highest point against the Viceroy of Sardinia, and that in an extraordinary manner, as may appear unto you by that printed Cedule I sent you in my last, and finding an apparent disability in him to satisfy the debt, I thought upon a new design, and fram'd a Memorial to the King, and wrought good strong means to have it seconded, that in regard that predatory act of seizing upon the Ship Vineyard in Sardinia, with all her goods, was done by his Majesty's Viceroy, his Sovereign Minister of State, one that immediately represented his own Royal Person, and that the said Viceroy was insolvent, I desir'd His Majesty would be pleas'd to grant a Warrant for the relief of both Parities, to lade so many thousand Sterils, or measures of Corn, out of Sardinia and Sicily custom-free. (Book I, Sect. 3, XVII)

Howell talks familiarly with his father discussing his personal health and the nature of the illness. He refers to "picking up my Crums apace," humorously reassuring his father that his illness had subsided. To his business friend his language is more formal and somewhat stilted.

Like Demetrius, Howell also speaks of the inadvisability of preaching or writing a "tedious tractate." He praises a friend's letters because they "clearly set forth the notions of your mind, and the motions of your soul,"<sup>15</sup> and he apologizes from time to time for a lengthy letter. On the subject of mixing the elegant and the plain styles, Howell

<sup>15</sup> Book I, Sect. 4, XI.

may be again following Demetrius' lead. Demetrius defines an elegant style as one which adheres to "tasteful correctness" in the choice and arrangement of words. An elegant style is important to Howell's appraisal of epistolary writing as shown by this excerpt:

I receiv'd lately one of yours, which I cannot compare more properly than to a Posie of curious flowers, there was therein such variety of sweet strains and dainty expressions of Love: and tho' it bore an old date, for it was forty days before it came safe to hand, yet the flowers were still fresh, and not a whit faded. (Book I, Sect. 3, XIX)

Comparing the letter he had received to a bouquet of flowers, Howell obviously values the dainty imagery he finds therein. His praise stems from the letter's elegance, not from its being written in the "short and succinct terms" he had previously advocated. Another example which indicates Howell's attentiveness to something more than the simplicity of the Plain style is this letter to his friend Richard Altham, "if your well-born thoughts, and the words of your Letters, were echo'd in any place, where they might rebound and be made audible, they are compos'd of such sweet and charming strains of Ingenuity and Eloquence, that all the Nymphs of the Woods and the Valleys . . . would pitch their Pavilions there." (Book I, Sect. 4, XI). Again Howell's praise sounds as if it were intended for an oration garbed in a "long, flowing gown" rather than for a letter ideally

clothed in a "short-coated and closely-couched Hungerlin." This discrepancy between theory and practice is an important consideration which will be dealt with more extensively in the next chapter.

The Roman poet Seneca (4 B.C.-65 A.D.) also influenced James Howell's epistolary style. As noted above in the excerpt from Letter I, Howell differentiates between the letter and the oration in terms that George Williamson has noted "might have described Seneca and Cicero,"<sup>16</sup> Howell expressing a preference for the former. The correspondence of these two Romans is vastly different. Seneca's Epistulae Morales consists of just that, moral letters, treatises or essays rather than conversational letters like those of Cicero. As William Roberts has pointed out, Seneca recommended the use of a colloquial epistolary style as Cicero had, "but he gives us few examples of that familiar style which he commended."<sup>17</sup> Richard Grummere notes that Seneca's letters indicate that the language of the diatribe<sup>18</sup> had influenced the previous informality of

<sup>16</sup> George Williamson, The Senecan Ambler, A Study in Prose Form from Bacon to Collier (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 208.

<sup>17</sup> William Roberts, History of Letter-Writing from the Earliest Period to the Fifth Century (London: William Pickering, 1843), p. 224.

<sup>18</sup> Haight defines the diatribe as "a pedantic successor of the dialogue, a discussion in the form of a monologue delivered by a teacher to a pupil," p. 2.

the epistle.<sup>19</sup> Seneca's epistles are carefully structured, beginning with the introduction of a concrete event used to justify the abstract subject which is then discussed. For the most part they consist of second-hand philosophical lectures drawn from Plato and Aristotle. Despite the heavy subject matter and moralizing tone of these essays, they were immensely popular in England; and Howell borrowed freely from them as has been shown by Joseph Jacobs and other scholars. Even more important for this study is the fact that he also borrowed part of Seneca's theory of epistolary style. Seneca criticized the Ciceronian style as being "wheedling and soft" and "flowery and cloying," "accomplishing mere sound and nothing more."<sup>20</sup> Howell similarly labels this style as being "soft and easy," consisting of finical affected Compliments, "a mere sound and nothing else."<sup>21</sup> Midway through his collection, Howell begins including a number of conventional discussions on such subjects as wine, tobacco, life on the moon, witchcraft and demonology, and the Roman Church. These are more like essays than letters; they are prefaced only by a salutation and imitate the moralizing tone of Seneca's epistles. The following is an excerpt from Seneca's discussion on

<sup>19</sup> Richard M. Grummere, ed. & trans., Seneca Ad Lucilium: Epistulae Morales (London: William Heinemann, 1925), I, x.

<sup>20</sup> Seneca, III, 311.      <sup>21</sup> Book I, Sect. I, I.

the subject of the soul:

Therefore, I say, take care of the soul; for from the soul issue our thoughts, from the soul our words, from the soul our dispositions, our expressions, and our very gait. When the soul is sound and strong, the style too is vigorous, energetic, manly; but if the soul lose its balance, down comes all the rest in ruins . . . . The soul is our king. If it be safe, the other functions remain on duty and serve with obedience, but the slightest lack of equilibrium in the soul causes them to waver along with it.<sup>22</sup>

The author's purpose is didactic, his language is abstract, and his style is formal. Seneca's letter was probably the source for Howell's treatment of this subject, and in addition to using Seneca's subject matter, he also adopts the moralizing tone of the classical model,

For questionless, that He or She are the wisest of all human Creatures who are careful of preserving the noblest part of them, I mean the Soul. They who prink, and pamper the Body, and neglect the Soul, are like one who, having a Nightingale in his House, is more fond of the wicker Cage than of the Bird: Or rather, like one who hath a Pearl of an invaluable Price, and esteems the poor Box that holds it more than the Jewel. The Rational Soul is the Breath of God Almighty, she is his very Image . . . . (Book IV, XXI)

The two men's styles are different, however, and Howell's colloquial effect comes much closer to Cicero's Letters than Seneca's.

Howell's debt to the classical epistolary tradition must be enlarged to include what he inherited from the

<sup>22</sup> Seneca, III, 317.

medieval epistolary tradition. Cicero's correspondence, which has been upheld by most classical scholars as not only representative of his best writing but also exemplary of the epistolary style at its best, was largely unknown to the scholars of the Middle Ages.<sup>23</sup> Their epistolary tradition was based on the classical rules of rhetoric which governed the oration. The three types of letters thus matched the three types of orations, the deliberative, the judicial, and the declamatory; and the parts of a letter were basically the same as those of the oration.

During the Middle Ages the letter served many purposes, the most important being that of a newsletter. As such it was usually directed to more than one person, and indeed was copied and reread by many. Since the writer knew that his letter would probably receive the attention of others than the addressee, he took care in composing it. E. N. S. Thomson has pointed out that "to leave so essential an art uncodified" would have been unthinkable,<sup>24</sup> and so the precepts governing the writing of letters were

<sup>23</sup> John C. Rolfe, Cicero and his Influence (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1963), p. 123. Rolfe states that there is only one mention of Cicero's Epistulae ad Atticum in a medieval library catalogue and only two entries of his Epistulae ad Familiares.

<sup>24</sup> Elbert N. S. Thompson, Literary Bypaths of the Renaissance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924), p. 91.

formulated by the churchmen whose predominance in all phases of medieval government necessitated their mastery of letter writing. Unaware, for the most part, of the rules and examples already set down by Cicero and Demetrius, the churchmen adopted instead the rules of oratory as set forth by Cicero's De Oratore and Quintillian's Institutio. The rules for letter writing absorbed the rules for oratory, as the latter was now of less importance. Many treatises on rhetoric written during the Middle Ages are in fact treatises on letter writing. Charles S. Baldwin points out that of the traditional five parts of ancient rhetoric, inventio dispositio, elocutio, pronuntiatio, and memoria, the first three bear directly on letters.<sup>25</sup> Also adapted were the five parts of a speech: the salutation or introduction of the letter corresponded to the oration's exordium; the captatio benivolentie or "thank you," designed to produce a favorable impression; the narratio or exposition; the petitio or request which corresponded to the proof in the oration; and the conclusion or peroration.<sup>26</sup> This medieval tradition was continued by Renaissance scholars such as Erasmus, Vives, and Macropedius, who based their formularies

<sup>25</sup> Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928), p. 215.

<sup>26</sup> Walter J. Ong, "Tudor Writings on Rhetoric," Studies in the Renaissance, 15, (1968), 43.

on the churchmen's earlier models.<sup>27</sup> The transition from the classical oratorical precepts to the manuals of the medieval churchman to the formulary books of the Elizabethans is perhaps best demonstrated by the following tables:

#### Parts of Letters

<u>Cicero</u> (30 B.C.)	<u>Alberich</u> (1075)	<u>Angel Day</u> (1586)
Exordium (Introduction)	<u>Salutatio</u>	Exordium
Narrative (Stating facts)	<u>Benevolentia</u> <u>captatio</u>	Narratio
Partition (Clarification)	<u>Narratio</u>	Propositio
Confirmation (Proofs)	<u>Petitio</u>	Confirmatio
Refutation (Weakening opponents' arguments)	<u>Conclusio</u>	Conjuratio
Peroration (Summary)		

<sup>27</sup> William G. Crane, Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance, The Formal Basis of Elizabethan Prose Style (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), p. 77.

## Types of Familiar Letters

<u>Alberich</u> (1075)	<u>Angel Day</u> (1586)	James Howell (1647)
Nunciatoriae	Nunciato	Narratory
Jocosae	Jocatorie	Objurgatory
Denunciatoriae	Renunctratorie	Monitory
Aenigmaticae	Objurgatorie	Congratulatory <sup>29</sup>
	Mandatorie <sup>28</sup>	

Epistolary style was thus tightly organized into a rigid system which continued to dominate letter-writing through the Renaissance. Although these scholars adopted the form of the oration, they either ignored or were unaware of the classical tradition of the Plain style. Hansche points out, "Those who have read the letters of the Humanists recognize a constraint never obtained from a direct and unmodified study of the classics."<sup>30</sup> The wide divergence between the original epistolary tradition and this pseudo-classical

<sup>28</sup> Maude Bingham Hansche, The Formative Period of English Familiar Letter-writers and Their Contribution to the English Essay (Philadelphia, 1902), pp. 14, 26-27.

<sup>29</sup> Book I, Sec. I, I.

<sup>30</sup> Hansche, p. 9.

tradition of the Middle Ages is evidenced by Petrarch's reaction to his discovery of Cicero's Letters: he wept because their use of the colloquial style and their spontaneous nature completely spoiled his exalted view of the Roman orator.<sup>31</sup>

During the Renaissance the increasing classical influence reversed this medieval tradition and brought scholars once more to the ideals of brevity, simplicity and perspicuity. The gradual nature of this reformation is indicated by the Elizabethan formulary books which, as the above table indicates, continued to duplicate their medieval predecessors. Angel Day, author of the most popular Elizabethan formulary book, The English Secreterie (1586), was one of Howell's sources; and many of his letters can be classified into one of the categories which he incorporated from Day. The following letter indicates Howell's concern for these categories since, as Jacobs has noted, it was apparently written solely because Howell felt it necessary to include an objurgatory letter:

Sir,  
I am one of them who value not a Courtesy that hangs long betwixt the fingers. I love not those viscose beneficia, those birdlim'd Kindnesses which Pliny speaks of: nor would I receive Money in a dirty Clout,

<sup>31</sup> William Henry Irving, The Providence of Wit in the English Letter Writers (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1955), p. 41.

if possibly I could be without: Therefore I return you the Courtesy by the same hand that brought it; it might have pleasur'd me at first, but the expectation of it hath prejudic'd me, and now perhaps you may have more need of it than--Your humble Servitor, J. H. (Book I, Sect. 5, XVIII).

There are many monitory letters which offer counsel and advice to young cousins in school, to a man addicted to swearing and another addicted to drinking. The style of Howell's letters corresponds to the type of letter he is writing. When he is writing a narrative letter, he is allowed more freedom of content and departs from the model letters. The other categories were dominated by more rigid rules, and his style in these is more reminiscent of the formulary books, though he seldom descends to the oratorical prose of this excerpt from Day: "Albeit good brother I know the matter of my writing will become offensive unto you, and that I am not ignoraunt what heavye adversaries you have, that dayly do go about to supresse the sounds and faithfull advise of those, who without flattery do with hartely wel unto you, and studiouslye are busied at all times for and towardses you."<sup>32</sup>

Though his model letters do not reflect it, Angel Day includes in his directions for epistolary style an emphasis on plainness and simplicity. This variance between his

<sup>32</sup> Angel Day, The English Secreterie, ed. R. C. Alston (1595; facsimile rpt. Menston, England: The Scolar Press, 1967), p. 227.

theory and the style which he practiced is similar to that of Howell and illustrates Renaissance concern for a more classical epistolary style while still operating under the influence of the medieval formulary book. Beginning with Justus Lipsius, the sixteenth-century French author who was the chief exponent of the "curt" or as George Williamson prefers to call it, "the hopping style,"<sup>33</sup> the epistolary tradition was separated from its association with Ciceronian oratory and underwent a reform according to the original tenets laid down by Demetrius. Catherine Dunn points out in her discussion of Lipsius' Epistolica institutio (1575) that this work was an attempt "to define the letter as a literary genre and to determine a prose style fitting to it."<sup>34</sup> Wesley Trimpi also has noted that in the early seventeenth century there was "a tendency among those interested in reviving the Attic, or plain, style to consider the familiar letter as the ideal stylistic model."<sup>35</sup> But though these Atticists upheld their style as the model for epistolary writings and though the letter writers themselves theoretically accepted this model, the letters of James Howell show

<sup>33</sup> Williamson, p. 136.

<sup>34</sup> E. Catherine Dunn, "Lipsius and the Art of Letter-Writing," Studies in the Renaissance, 3, (1956), 145.

<sup>35</sup> Wesley Trimpi, Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 74.

only too clearly that it was an ideal and not a reality. The seventeenth-century epistolary style contained a mixture of the plain and elegant recommended in the first century by Demetrius, but it also contained remnants of the Ciceronian oratorical tradition which it inherited from its medieval and Tudor predecessors. A closer examination of James Howell's use of sentence structure and language will further indicate that his style exemplifies the variety of this heritage.

### III. JAMES HOWELL'S SENTENCE STRUCTURE

As previously noted, the study of seventeenth century prose has been dominated during the twentieth century by the work of Morris J. Croll (1872-1947). Though much of his work has been extensively revised by successive critics, Croll's work has remained the point of departure, and the wide use of his terminology makes it a convenient starting point. Croll basically divided seventeenth century prose into two groups: in one group were the styles which specialized in using schemes of balance and repetition, practitioners of which included Cicero, Isocrates and Lyly; while the other group relied on wit or point and specialized in asymmetry.<sup>1</sup> The first group consisted of the Ciceronian style which relies heavily on symmetry which is achieved by similarity of structure and similarity of sound. It is also characterized by the periodic sentence, a type of

<sup>1</sup> Definition of these terms has teased literary critics since the sixteenth century as William G. Crane notes in his book, Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), p. 2. Since Crane also avoids the problem the dictionary still offers the clearest explanation, "Both wit and humor are associated with amusement, but wit often implies brilliant, pointed, or cutting statement, whereas humor is also applicable to what is kindly or broadly funny." William Morris, ed., The American Heritage Dictionary (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969).

sentence which holds all or part of its main idea until the end. The periodic sentence begins with introductory clauses or phrases or inserts them just after the subject. The second group was subdivided into three styles, the curt, the loose and the obscure, all three of which were modelled after Seneca. Of the Senecan styles, the curt prevailed during the first half of the century and is characterized by brief members<sup>2</sup> or clauses, few connectives, and a progressive order in which the first clause is independent and states the main idea which the remaining clauses simply expand. The obscure style is a form of the curt style in that it is characterized by brief members and few or no connectives, but it carries asymmetry to such an extreme as to make the idea of the sentence somewhat difficult to grasp. In this style the thought is said to be "compressed" so tightly that the reader is forced to supply the omissions in order to understand its meaning. The loose style, however, has longer members and so many clauses that it may well equal or exceed the length of a Ciceronian period. It uses more connectives than the curt style but relies mainly on coordinate conjunctions since because of the little relationship they show between clauses, they join more

<sup>2</sup> The terms member and period will be used throughout this study according to their respective rhetorical definitions of "clause" and "sentence."

loosely. A third characteristic of the loose style is the absolute participial phrase, a construction which is useful in summarizing the thought expressed by the loosely connected members.

Croll's classification for seventeenth-century prose provides the student with useful terminology, but it is much too rigid. Though Croll answers the charges of rigidity, notice the extreme example on which he says his classification must be based,

The difference between the two types [curt and loose] thus described may seem somewhat unimportant; and it is true that they run into each other and cannot always be sharply distinguished. The most representative Anti-Ciceronians, like Montaigne and Browne, use them both and intermingle them. But at their extremes they are not only distinguishable, they serve to distinguish different types, or schools, of seventeenth century style.<sup>3</sup>

His passing reference to the overlapping of styles has been greatly expanded by later critics. George Williamson and most recently, Brian Vickers have pointed out stylistic inconsistencies in the works of even the most "representative" writers. Vickers has particularly encouraged the examination of individual writers' work as a basis for evaluation of their style.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Morris W. Croll, "The Baroque Style in Prose," in Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm, Essays by Morris W. Croll, ed. J. Max Patrick et al (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 207-233.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Vickers, Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1968), p. 14.

An important aspect of any stylistic study is the standard which is used to make the evaluation. Though critics disagree about definitions of English schools of style, for this study Croll's definitions will be used as a framework against which Howell's epistolary style will be examined. Howell's style will be compared and contrasted with what Vickers calls the necessary criteria of "preceding and contemporary theory and practice."<sup>5</sup> Since it is generally true that prior to the eighteenth century, rhetoric was accorded more importance than grammar,<sup>6</sup> Howell's sentences will be discussed in terms of rhetorical types (loose, periodic, balanced, antithetical) rather than grammatical types (simple, compound, compound-complex). The rhetorical devices which are used to achieve symmetry will be chosen from those most frequently represented in sixteenth century handbooks.<sup>7</sup> In addition, it is valuable in examining Howell's style or that of anyone, to look at the use which is made of various devices rather than merely their absence or presence. Thus, this study will attempt

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Croll, p. 231.

<sup>7</sup> Lee A. Sonnino's A Handbook to Sixteenth Century Rhetoric (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1968) will be used as the source for information about these texts. Sonnino has collated definitions and examples of every rhetorical term used in the sixteenth century.

to look at James Howell's epistolary writing with unbiased attention in an effort to understand the components of his style.

As has been noted during the first half of the seventeenth century several styles vied for ascendancy. The traditional Ciceronian style which had reigned supreme during the Renaissance was now attacked by those who advocated a plainer, simpler style. James Howell, as pointed out in the preceding chapter, was sufficiently concerned with this problem of style to append a letter approving the Senecan style to the beginning of his second edition of Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae in order to make his position clear. Despite this firm stand which he took on the subject of epistolary style, he did not practice what he preached. That Howell leaned toward one style but practiced others, however, was typical of many seventeenth century authors. Louis B. Wright notes this diversity of styles in his discussion of the epistolary writings of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, "Fine phrases were by no means discarded in theory or in practice, but gradually the colloquial tone grew stronger to achieve at length a more natural and warmer mode of writing than had earlier been the fashion."<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Highet also points out the inconsistency

<sup>8</sup> Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of N. C. Press, 1935), p. 141.

which prevailed, "most of the anti-Ciceronian authors passed fairly freely from one of these manners to the other loose and curt, according to their subject matter, and some were not averse to an occasional flight of Ciceronian rhetoric, provided they could return to firm ground after it."<sup>9</sup>

Despite his advocacy of the Senecan style, and despite the growth of this anti-Ciceronian movement, Howell never abandoned the Ciceronian education he had received at Hereford Grammar School and Jesus College, Oxford University (1604-1613). Since his education occurred so near the turn of the century, it seems reasonable to assume that Howell studied the sixteenth century rhetorics which were based mainly on the work of Cicero; Quintilian, a Classicist who showed much loyalty to Ciceronian standards;<sup>10</sup> and the pseudo-Ciceronian author of Auctor de Herennium.<sup>11</sup> William Crane admits of Cicero, "no other man's influence was so great."<sup>12</sup> Referring to the power of this training, Vickers says, "such sources of influence will not on their own

<sup>9</sup> Gilbert Highet, The Classical Tradition: Greek & Roman Influences on Western Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957) p. 326.

<sup>10</sup> J. F. D'Alton, Roman Literary Theory and Criticism, A Study in Tendencies (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 333.

<sup>11</sup> Sonnino, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Crane, p. 7.

'account for' the nature, let alone the excellence or clumsiness, of a particular writer, but, given such a style-conscious period as the Renaissance, and one where education was fairly standardised throughout England, with rhetoric playing the dominant part in both schools and universities, it would be foolish not to consider such an important source of stylistic theory."<sup>13</sup> Lee Sonnino also points out the folly of believing that "one can do without a knowledge of the things these writers knew, particularly the things they had impressed upon them repeatedly in their years at school."<sup>14</sup> The typical assignment in the upper grammar school of Renaissance England is vividly described by John Mulder,

Each scholar had to memorize half a dozen verses, then construe the passage verbatim, parse it grammatically, list all the tropes and figures he could find, give the derivations of words, and show the extent of his Latin vocabulary by finding synonyms for them; after that he must scan each verse. So far, the pupil had performed only half of the usual assignment. Next he must turn Ovid's passage into elegant English prose in order to turn it back into proper Latin, "rightly placed according to the rules of rhetorical composition;" finally, he had to unscramble it again into a variety of English verse.<sup>15</sup>

After a fourth grade education such as this, it is easy to imagine that most English schoolboys completely assimilated the Ciceronian rhetorical style. The Ciceronian training

<sup>13</sup> Vickers, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Sonnino, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> John R. Mulder, The Temple of the Mind: Education and Literary Taste in Seventeenth-Century England (New York: Pegasus, 1969), p. 23.

to a large extent shaped Howell's use of the English language.

The figures of speech or rhetoric which are considered characteristic of the Ciceronian style can be divided into schemes and tropes. The schemes are those figures which affect the ordinary pattern or arrangement of words in a sentence while a trope involves a change in the meaning or emphasis of a word. Howell's use of tropes will be discussed in the succeeding chapter. The concern here is for his use of schemes of construction and his use of the symmetries<sup>16</sup> which primarily conform to the Ciceronian style. These consist of the schemes of balance and the schemes of repetition.<sup>17</sup>

Schemes of balance are parallelism and antithesis although parallelism is much broader than this one small subdivision. When parallel elements are also equal in length, they become symmetrical; and though his division does not always hold true, the presence of symmetry or asymmetry divides the Ciceronian and anti-Ciceronian styles according to Croll.

<sup>16</sup> Symmetry is used here to mean "exact correspondence of form." William Morris, ed., The American Heritage Dictionary.

<sup>17</sup> Edward J. Corbett's Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 426-427, is the source for this division. Other critics have divided this subject differently and with every right since there is no clearcut distinction between parallelism produced by structure and parallelism produced by repetition.

One valid question must be asked about James Howell's use of Ciceronian symmetry: Does he use it as a means to handle his subject more logically; or has he, like so many of the anti-Ciceronian writers whom Vickers points out, "abandoned the length, copiousness and expansive movement of a Ciceronian period,"<sup>18</sup> but kept the rhetorical devices? Symmetry often enables writers to divide a subject into large, easily correlated parts and subdivide these into smaller topics; too often these organizational benefits of symmetry are forgotten. Highet has praised Cicero's ability to extend symmetry through a long speech, "balancing clauses in a sentence, sentences in a paragraph, paragraphs in a section, and sections one against another throughout the entire oration."<sup>19</sup> Howell's use of symmetry never approaches Cicero's mastery. One reason is obviously the limited length of the genre of epistolary writing which he used; Cicero, as pointed out in the preceding chapter, seldom bothered to use symmetry in his letters. Howell does use it, however, and the result will be examined in the following discussion.

The most important scheme of balance is the isocolon, also known as compar or parison.<sup>20</sup> This figure is defined

<sup>18</sup> Vickers, p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> Highet, p. 332.

<sup>20</sup> The terminology used in this study will be largely classical as taken from the sixteenth century English rhetorics, but where Anglicized terms exist, they will be included for the sake of clarity.

by John Hoskyns' Direccons For Speech and Style as a comparison in which "the words match each other in rank . . . verbe to verbe, adverbe to adverbe."<sup>21</sup> In other words, this scheme requires that the parallel elements contain the same number of words and even the same number of syllables. Howell's work contains numerous examples of the isocolon as indicated by the following excerpts,

Love is the Marrow of Friendship, and Letters are the Elixir of Love. (Book I, Sect. I, XVII)

If he thinks he is fit for that Office he looks upon himself thro' a false Glass. (Book I, Sect. 5, XXXVII)

Life itself is not so dear to me as your Friendship, nor Virtue in her best Colours as precious as your Love. (Book I, Sect., 2, X)

His use of this device does not appear with any degree of regularity; and in fact, the brief examples given are typical in that he seldom designs elaborate isocolons which extend into triplets like this example from Peacham,

He left the city garnished, that the same might be a monument of victory, of clemency, of continency, that men might see, what he had conquered, what he had spared, what he had left.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Louise Brown Osborn, ed., The Life, Letters, and Writings of John Hoskyns (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), p. 151.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Peacham, The Garden of Eloquence (1593; rpt. Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1954), p. 59.

The other important scheme of balance, the antithesis,<sup>23</sup> can also be seen in Howell's Letters. Howell's most frequent use of antithesis serves to comment on the contrary properties of various aspects of nature. John Lyly had used this type of antithesis so often that Jonas Barish feels it represents a major part of Euphues.<sup>24</sup> The result of Lyly's work is an impression that "nothing is uniformly of one property," and that "everything contains within it the seeds of self-contradiction."<sup>25</sup> Barish cited this sentence as typical of Lyly's use of antithesis involving nature's contradictions, "The foule Toade hath a fayre stoane in his head, the fine goulde is founde in the filthy earth, the sweet kernell lyeth yhe hard shell."<sup>26</sup> The contrary properties are emphasized by the coordinate sentence structure which this type of antithesis utilizes: "as well x as y, both a and b."<sup>27</sup> Howell also used this antithetical structure though his use does not pervade his prose style as Barish believes Lyly's does. The following examples from Howell indicate the similarity of their use of this device,

<sup>23</sup> "Antithesis" means "the juxtaposition of sharply contrasting ideas in balanced or parallel words, phrases or grammatical structures," The American Heritage Dictionary.

<sup>24</sup> Jonas A. Barish, "The Prose Style of John Lyly," ELH, 23, No. 1 (March, 1956), 14-35.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

the Bee, such Honey out of bad as out of good  
Flowers (Book I, Sect. 4, XXV)

the Earth does not always produce Roses and  
Lillies, but she brings forth also Nettles and  
Thistles (Book I, Sect. 6, LVII)

I was, according to your desire, to visit the  
late new married couple more than once; and to  
tell you true, I never saw such a disparity be-  
tween two that were made of one flesh in all my  
life: he handsome outwardly, but of odd condi-  
tions; she excellently qualified, but hard-  
favour'd: so that the one may be compar'd to a  
cloth of Tissue Doublet, cut upon coarse Canvas;  
the other to a Buckram Petticoat lin'd with  
Sattin. (Book II, I)

The first two examples reveal Howell's use of this device to describe what he considered his interminable and unjust imprisonment in Fleet Prison and the disastrous Civil War which was raging in England during this time. As he pondered on the incongruity of God's actions, his mind seems to have naturally sought expression by means of the antithesis.

The schemes of repetition which Howell most frequently used were alliteration, anaphora, and antimetabole. His use of alliteration (alliteratio) was usually restrained to pairs as shown in the following example,

for we have now a most noble new Queen of England,  
who in true Beauty is beyond the long-woo'd  
Infanta; for she was of a fading flaxen-hair,  
big-lipp'd, and somewhat heavy-ey'd; but this  
Daughter of France, this youngest Branch of  
Bourbon . . . is of a more lovely and lasting  
Complexion, . . . she hath Eyes that sparkle  
like Stars. (Book I, Sect. I, XXII)

In this passage there are six examples of alliteration, five are doublets and only one is a triplet. The same tendency is indicated by such phrases as "worth and well-experienced," "roving at random," "Profit and Pleasure," and one of his favority alliterations, to judge from its frequent appearance, "spick and span."

Though Howell has a fondness for this figure as evidenced by his frequent but controlled usage, he cannot be accused of excessive alliteration, an abuse which had already been widely censured by Peacham and Hoskyns in the late sixteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

The anaphora or repetitio is defined in Cicero's De Oratore (III, liv, 206) as a scheme in which "the same word may be repeated at the beginning of a sentence."<sup>29</sup> Howell often used this scheme as indicated by the following examples,

Of all my Friends in England, you were the first I met here; you were the prime Object of my Speculation; methought the very Winds in gentle Whispers did breathe out your Name, and blow it on me; you seem'd to reverberate upon me with the Beams of the Sun. (Book I, Sect. I, XXII)

This beauteous Maid hath been often attempted to be vitiated; some have courted her, some bribed her, some would have forc'd her. (Book I, Sec. 1, XXX)

<sup>28</sup> See Peacham's "Caution" on the use of this figure, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> J. S. Watson, ed., Cicero on Oratory and Orators (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Ill. University Press, 1970), III, LIV, p. 253.

There is no Religion so harsh and difficult to  
Flesh and Blood . . . . There is no Religion  
so purely spiritual . . . No Religion that  
excites man more to the love and practice of  
Virtue. (Book II, IX)

Regarding these examples, the brevity of the first two is more typical of Howell's usage than the expansiveness of the last. The result is therefore a slight patterned effect rather than heavy repetition.

Antimetabole, (commutatio), perhaps, the scheme most frequently used by Howell, is defined by George Puttenham as a figure "which takes a couple of words to play with in a verbe, and by making them to chaunge and fhift one into others place they do very pretily exchange and fhft the fence."<sup>30</sup> Among the many examples to be found in Howell, there are these:

If you are resolv'd to marry, Choose where you  
love, and resolve to love your Choice. (Book  
I, Sect. 4, IX)

Had I been dispos'd to have married for wealth  
without affection, or for affection without  
wealth, I had been in bonds before now. (Book I,  
Sect. 6, LX)

I made an entire sacrifice of my soul to her Maker,  
who by infusing created her, and by creating  
infused her . . . . (Book II, XXIX)

The antimetabole imparts a mechanical sort of rhythm and is a type of rhetorical device which writers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries usually avoided as

<sup>30</sup> George Puttenham, The Arte of English Poesie (1589), ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1936), p. 208.

indicated by Hoskyns' rebuke,

And notwithstanding that this is a sharpe & wittie figure & shewes out of the same wordes a pithy distinction of meaning, very convenient for schoolemen, yet Mr. P. did wrong to tyer this poore figure, by using it 30 tymes in one Sermon, for use this or any other point unseasonably, it is ridiculous as it was in the fustian oration, horse mill, mill-horse &c: but let Discrecion bee the greatest & generall figure of figures.<sup>31</sup>

Howell's relatively frequent use of this scheme certainly contributes to the Ciceronian aspect of his Letters.

Sufficient examples of all the schemes of balance and repetition can be found in the letters of Howell to indicate his retention of these Ciceronian figures from his classical education. These devices are not for the most part used to organize or expand long Ciceronian sentences but rather in a more casual, unplanned manner.

The Ciceronian style is an oratorical style, designed to persuade or impress; and while Howell's use of the devices of symmetry does not always further this purpose, his use of the periodic sentence is generally with this idea in mind. He evidently felt, for example, that the exordium, or benevolentiae captatio, most properly represented an instance involving the need for persuasion and therefore required a periodic sentence. The exordium was the second part of a letter; it followed the salutation and was devoted to

<sup>31</sup> Osborn, p. 129

producing a favorable impression upon the receiver of the letter. In the first three sections of Book I, thirty-two letters have exordiums, and of these over half utilize the periodic sentence. Examples of these include,

Being to take leave of England, and to launch out into the World abroad, to breathe foreign Air a while, I thought it very handsome, and an Act well becomming me, to take my leave also of you, and of my dearly honoured Mother Oxford: Otherwise both of you might have just grounds to exhibit a Bill of Complaint, or rather a Protest against me, and cry me up; You for a forgetful Friend; She for an ungrateful Son, if not some spurious Issue.  
(Book I, Sect. 1, III)

The same observance that a Father may challenge of his Child, the like you may claim of me, in regard of the extraordinary care you have been pleas'd to have always, since I had the happiness to know you, in the course of my Fortunes.  
(Book I, Sect. I, X)

Those many undeserv'd Favours for which I stand obliged to your self and my noble Lady, since the time I had the happiness to come first under your roof, and the command you pleased to lay upon me at my departure thence, call upon me at this time to give you account how Matters pass in France. (Book I, Sect. 2, XIX)

In each case the exordium is obviously striving to compliment or flatter the addressee, a fact which makes Howell's use of the oratorical style very suitable to its purpose. Howell's deliberate choice of the rhetorical style is further emphasized by the successive sentences in each of these letters, none of which are periodic.

The narratio, the third division of the letter which is reserved for telling of various events, is never written

in periodic sentences. Instead much of the narrative portion of Howell's letters are written in a modified version of what Morris Croll called the "curt" style. The curt style is characterized by its brief members which are self-contained or independent. The true curt style gives the effect of hard-hitting or as Croll says "hard-bitten" speech.<sup>32</sup> Ben Jonson, a writer who excelled in this style, described the beneficial strength which results from short periods, "periods, periodi, are beautiful when they are not too long; for so they have their strength too, as in a pike or javelin."<sup>33</sup> An excellent example of this style is the following sentence from Jonson: "Natures that are hardned to evill, you shall sooner breake, then make straight; they are like poles that are crooked, and dry; there is no attending them."<sup>34</sup> The second and third clauses contribute imagery which serves to clarify the first clause, but neither contributes a new idea. Howell's ability for succinct expression does not extend beyond his narrative passages, and even then he is not using the curt style as described by

<sup>32</sup> Croll, p. 212.

<sup>33</sup> Ben Jonson, Discoveries, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1966), p. 125.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

Croll. Truncated members and jolty rhythm such as found in Jonson, "To love money. They wish for it, they embrace it, they adore it; while yet it is possest with greater stirre, and torment, then it is gotten,"<sup>35</sup> do not exist in Howell's straightforward narratives. "Straightforward" prose is defined by Carl H. Klaus as a style which works in terms of simple sentences, simple coordination with a minimum amount of subordination, producing a spontaneous effect.<sup>36</sup> Howell is using the brief member to enable the reader to grasp what Herbert Read has called "the speed of events and the actuality of objects."<sup>37</sup> The following excerpt from Howell's frequently anthologized description of the Duke of Buckingham's death, illustrates this:

The Duke took out the knife, and threw it away; and laying his hand on his Sword, and drawn it half out, said, The Villain hath kill'd me (meaning, as some think Col. Fryer), for there had been some difference 'twixt them; so, reeling against a chimney, he fell down dead. (Book I, Sect. 5, VII)

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> Carl H. Klaus, "Reflections on Prose Style," in Contemporary Essays on Style, Rhetoric, Linguistics, and Criticism, ed. by Glen A. Love & Michael Payne (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1969), p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> Herbert Read, English Prose Style (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952), p. 97.

Howell uses the short simple clauses to achieve quickly moving, clear narration. These clauses are not, however, independent, nor is there the "characteristic order, or mode of progression" which Croll saw as part of the curt style.<sup>38</sup> Description of events is the only instance when Howell reduces his clauses to an absolute minimum. For the most part he seems given to certain degree of subordination, though this subordination is often not expressed in terms of periodicity, but rather the "loose" sentence which was predominant during the second half of the seventeenth century.

As defined earlier, the loose sentence begins with the main statement and is explained or amplified by subordinate or coordinate elements which follow. This pattern is the most commonly used sentence type today,<sup>39</sup> and its predominance in the writing of James Howell probably accounts for the epithets of "readable" and "modern" which critics have attached to his style. Since the loose style consists of accumulated meanings rather than a climactic sentence

<sup>38</sup> Croll, p. 213.

<sup>39</sup> Porter G. Perrin and George H. Smith, Handbook of Current Usage (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Co., 1968), p. 304.

structure, it seems spontaneous and therefore resembles conversation. Robert Burton (1577-1640) was a seventeenth century master of the loose style, and the following example is taken from the second section of The Anatomy of Melancholy:

But our patrons of learning are so far nowadays from respecting the Muses and giving that honor to scholars or reward which they deserve and are allowed by those indulgent privileges of many noble princes that after all their pains taken in the universities, cost and charge, expenses, irksome hours, laborious tasks, wearisome days, dangers, hazards (barred interim from all pleasure which other men have, mewed up like hawks all their lives), if they chance to wade through them, they shall in the end be rejected, contemned, and which is their greatest misery, driven to their shifts, exposed to want, poverty, and beggary.<sup>40</sup>

It is helpful to place beside this an excerpt from Howell's letter on the same subject, a subject which he probably derived from Burton,<sup>41</sup> but one which argues the opposite point of view,

The Chinese (who are the next Neighbors to the rising Sun on this Side of the Hemisphere, and consequently the acutest) have a wholesome Piece of Policy, That the Son is always of the Father's Trade; and 'tis all the Learning he aims at: which makes them admirable Artisans; for, besides the Dextrousness and Propensity of the Child, being descended lineally from so many of the same Trade, the Father is more careful to instruct him, and to

<sup>40</sup>

Robert Burton, "from The Anatomy of Melancholy," in Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry, 2nd ed., ed.

Alexander M. Witherspoon and Frank J. Warnke (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1957), p. 167.

<sup>41</sup> Jacobs, p. 525n.

discover to him all the Mystery thereof. (Book III, VIII)

In the first place both examples use coordinate conjunctions to connect almost every new member, and the subordinate conjunctions that and which used in both, introduce clauses equal in weight to those which precede them. Both examples also contain the parenthetical observations, a second characteristic of the loose style. The effect produced by this type of interruption is one of informality or casualness.

Though not included in the above examples, a third characteristic of this style, as set forth by Croll, is what Croll calls the "absolute participle," otherwise known as "nominative absolute." This construction is not found with great frequency in Howell's Letters, but there are examples such as the following:

Nature having design'd them all for Gold and Silver at first and 'tis Fire can only rectify, and reduce them towards such a perfection. (Book II, XLII)

This ceremony being passed, my Lord fell to business (Book I, Sect. 6, V)

Wheron there stands a strange bridge that ebbs and flows . . . it being made of Boats, whereon Coach and Carts may pass over as well as Men . . . . (Book I, Sect. I, XV)

Croll notes the tendency of writers of the loose style to use this absolute participle construction at the period's end as an easy means of completing a sentence whose length has somewhat gotten out of hand. The following is an

example which Croll cites from Francis Bacon,<sup>42</sup> illustrating this tendency,

For as knowledges are now delivered, there is a kind of contract of error between the deliverer and the receiver: for he that delivereth knowledge desireth to deliver it in such form as may be best believed, and not as may be best examined; and he that receiveth knowledge desireth rather present satisfaction than expectant inquiry; and so rather not to doubt than not to err: glory making the author not to lay open his weakness, and sloth making the disciple not to know his strength.<sup>43</sup>

Bacon uses the absolute participle in parallel phrases to summarize effectively the thought which has gone before. Howell's use of the loose style reveals no such purpose, a fact which points up the different use he makes of the loose style. Croll's discussion is concerned with what he has termed a "Baroque" style, characterized by an opening out of ideas. Ideally the sentence's "motions become more animated and vigorous as it proceeds; and it ends . . . in a vision of vast space or time, losing itself in an altitudo, a hint of infinity."<sup>44</sup> Croll is especially referring here to the loose style of Thomas Browne's Religio Medici,

<sup>42</sup>Croll, p. 220.

<sup>43</sup> Francis Bacon, The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. James Spedding, Robert L. Ellis, and Douglas D. Heath (1876; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, & Co., 1900), III, 403-404.

<sup>44</sup> Croll, p. 228.

I would gladly know how Moses, with an actual fire, calcined or burnt the golden calf into powder: for that mystical metal of gold, whose solary and celestial nature I admire, exposed unto the violence of fire, grows only hot, and liquefies, but consumeth not; so when the consumable and volatile pieces of our bodies shall be refined into a more impregnable and fixed temper, like gold, though they suffer from the action of flames, they shall never perish, but lie immortal in the arms of fire.<sup>45</sup>

Howell, even when discussing a heavenly subject similar to that of Browne's work,<sup>46</sup> never uses his loose style to open either up or out. The following quote is perhaps Howell's most serious attempt at metaphysicality:

Moreover, I began to contemplate, as I was in this posture the vast magnitude of the universe, and what proportion this poor globe of Earth might bear with it: For if those numberless bodies which stick in this vast roof of Heaven, tho' they appear to us but as spangles, be some of them thousands of times bigger than the Earth, take the Sea with it to boot, for they both make but one Sphere, surely the Astronomers had reason to term this Sphere an indivisible Point, and a thing of no dimension at all, being compar'd to the whole World.  
(Book II, L)

Though he is stringing together a number of clauses, the structure possesses no unfolding movement, no "strikingly wrenched" members, no ascending realization as Croll has characterized this style.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>46</sup> Jacobs notes that C. H. Firth suggests certain of Howell's letters were inspired by Thomas Browne's Religio Medici, which appeared in an unauthorized form in 1642.

<sup>47</sup> Croll, p. 228.

One of the problems of rigid classifications then is the skill of the writer. Browne, Burton, and Howell all use the loose style, but the latter writes in a more superficial way. There is in his work never a hint of the "tortuous" quality by which Croll defines the "Baroque."<sup>48</sup> There are two possible ways to account for this difference on Howell's part; and perhaps, as is often the case, the answer lies in a combination of both suggestions. First, since Howell is not the intellectual equal of either, he may not have been capable of composing sentences whose energy and movement could match those of writers of the best examples of loose style. David Rannie very candidly pointed to what he considered Howell's most serious defect as an author of a first rate literary work,

They [the Letters] fall short of the highest literary rank because the personality they reveal (if such glancing off the surface can be called revelation) is, with all its accomplishments, so ordinary. At best they must, as part of the literary expression of the century, find a place with that lighter lyrical work which is unfailingly charming, but which<sup>49</sup> seldom comes from deepest sources of feeling.

Lytton Strachey also provides insight into Howell's lack of profundity as evidenced in his style,

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> David Watson Rannie, Letter Writing as a form of literature in ancient and modern times (Oxford, 1895), p. 15.

He /Howell/ had not a spark of Donne's spiritual fire. He would have quailed before Sidney. He would not have been able to follow Raleigh's argument. But he possessed one accomplishment they lacked--he could prattle.<sup>50</sup>

This "prattle" can be seen from another point of view than Howell's mental deficiency. This point of view concerns the changing society of which Howell was a forerunner. Much of the controversy on style centered during the seventeenth century on the language of the scholar versus the language of the artisan with the Royal Society preferring the latter. As George Williamson notes, however, "by the close of the century the controversy about style was settled in favour of neither the scholar nor of the artisan, but of the gentleman."<sup>51</sup> Strachey sees this change as affecting the genre of letter-writing by altering its previous more serious concerns to lighter, more ephemeral topics. After the seventeenth century letter writers viewed "action as merely a theme for comment and description," and the purpose of stylistic art became the "appearance of colloquial easiness," according to Strachey.<sup>52</sup> He sees the Letters of

<sup>50</sup> Lytton Strachey, Literary Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1949), p. 239.

<sup>51</sup> George Williamson, The Senecan Ambler, A Study in Prose from Bacon to Collier (1951; rpt. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 336.

<sup>52</sup> Strachey, p. 240.

James Howell as forming a transition between these two periods, though his only judgment of Howell's style is its amusing quality.<sup>53</sup> Howell's use of the loose style can also be linked with this transitional stage in that he employed it to express a conversational style which he felt would represent "the better and nobler part"<sup>54</sup> of the writer. Williamson describes the victorious style which emerged at the close of the seventeenth century as developing from the loose unexpected period of Seneca" into a conversational style which dropped the emphasis on brevity which Jonson had advocated and somewhat pruned the excessive unfolding of the loose style of Browne and Burton.<sup>55</sup>

Howell's sentence structure can be seen as a composite of the Ciceronian periodic and the Senecan curt and loose. What might best be termed a modified loose style, predominates in his work. Howell's style undoubtedly borrowed from Burton and Browne, but he never achieved their heights. While there is a great abundance of the rhetorical devices characteristic of the Ciceronian periodicity, these are not used to achieve the expanded oratorical style of which Cicero was master. They are rather attributal to Howell's educational background, remnants of schoolboy lessons. Ian Gordon points out that "Cowley, Congreve, and Dryden, who

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.      <sup>54</sup> Howell, p. 224.      <sup>55</sup> Williamson, p. 341.

capture the required tone of apparently effortless easiness, not Bacon, Burton, and Browne, were to form the starting-point for the next development."<sup>56</sup> Howell's more methodical use of the loose style may have resulted from his intellectual mediocrity or may represent indications of the age to come.

<sup>56</sup> Gordon, p. 129.

#### IV. HOWELL'S LANGUAGE

James Howell's use of language is characterized by much the same variety that typifies his sentence structure. His diction is a curious mixture of neologisms and colloquialisms, and his imagery is both ornamental and illuminative.

When Englishmen first began to use the vernacular for artistic purposes, writers worried about the roughness of their tongue as compared with Cicero's and Quintilian's "elegant"<sup>1</sup> Latin. There was also a practical need to enlarge the English language in order to provide terminology which was needed to describe the many new areas into which the Renaissance and seventeenth-century writer was moving. Richard Jones' treatment of the "inadequate language" cites the many problems involved in correcting this deficiency.<sup>2</sup> In attempting to polish their language, these Elizabethans strove for eloquence above all else. Jones has

<sup>1</sup> When applied to literary style, "elegant" is defined as "tasteful correctness, harmonious simplicity in choice and arrangement of words," Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Foster Jones, The Triumph of the English Language, A Survey of Opinions Concerning the Vernacular From the Introduction of Printing to the Restoration (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1953), p. 68ff.

remarked "the chief key to an understanding of the sixteenth-century attitude toward the English language is to be discovered in the conception of eloquence."<sup>3</sup> He defines the term in its sixteenth-century context as consisting of two characteristics, "classical neologisms and figurative language, the former being more prominent in the first part of the century, the latter in the second."<sup>4</sup> Since Howell praised "eloquence" in several of his letters, it is illuminating to examine his use of the two elements of which eloquence is supposed to consist.

Neologism is defined as "a word newly introduced into a language, especially as a means of enhancing style;"<sup>5</sup> and since during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the English language was thought to be lacking in "elegance," neologizing was at that time a common practice. Albert Baugh discusses this problem of "enrichment,"<sup>6</sup> pointing to Sir Thomas Eliot's conscious use of word-borrowing to polish his "vulgar tongue,"

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature, rev. and enlarged C. Hugh Holman (1936; rpt. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 314.

<sup>6</sup> Albert C. Baugh, A History of the English Language (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1935), p. 262.

Wherefore taking comfort and boldness partly of your grace's most benevolent inclination toward the universal weal of your subjects, partly inflamed with zeal, I have now enterprised to describe in our vulgar tongue the form of a just publicweal. Which matter I have gathered as well of the sayings of most noble authors, Greeks and Latins, as by mine own experiences.<sup>7</sup>

The habit of neologizing was not without classical support as the Romans especially had borrowed from the Greeks in order to enrich their own language. D'Alton points out, however, that though they recognized the use of newly-coined words as an acceptable prose ornament, they still cautioned its overuse.<sup>8</sup>

Elizabethans also disagreed on this subject, and as Baugh notes, not everyone approved of the "wholesale borrowing of words from other languages."<sup>9</sup> The "Inkhorne" controversy, as it was known, involved those who favored neologizing versus those who wished to keep "inkhorne" terms out of the English language.<sup>10</sup> One of the most well-known

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Elyot, "The Proheme," The Thought and Culture of the English Renaissance, An Anthology of Tudor Prose, ed. Elizabeth M. Nugent (Cambridge: At the Univ. Press, 1956), p. 90.

<sup>8</sup> J. F. D'Alton, Roman Literary Theory and Criticism, A Study in Tendencies (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 91.

<sup>9</sup> Baugh, p. 266.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Evans, English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1955), p. 31.

foes was Thomas Wilson who discussed the subject several times in his Arte of Rhetorique (1560):

Albeit peradventure fome fmall admonition be not impertinent, for we finde in our Englifh writers many wordes and fpeeches amenable & yet fhall fee in fome many inkhorne terms fo ill effected brought in by men of learning as preachers and fchoolemafters . . . . Wherefore great heed muft be taken by our maker in this point that his choife be good. And peradventure the writer hereof be in that behalfe no leffe faultie then any other, vying many ftraunge and vnaccuftomed wordes & borrowed from other languages.<sup>11</sup>

After reaching its peak during the sixteenth century, this opposition to neologizing began directing itself toward abuse of the practice rather than the practice itself. Even Thomas Wilson, Baugh notes, in later editions began defending some word-borrowing as well as practicing it himself.<sup>12</sup>

Howell was an enthusiastic advocate of neologizing as indicated in the preface to Lexicon Tetraglotton (1660):

Now the English came to that perfection, & fullnes that fhe is now arrivd unto, by adopting to herfelf the choicft, beft founding, & fignificanft words of other languages, which in tract of time were enfranchizd, & made free denizons as it were of England by a kind of Naturalization, But fhe hath more of the French then of any other becauft of the Norman Conqueft,

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Wilson, The Arte of Rhetorique, ed. G. H. Mair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 145. See also pp. 78, 82, 117, 145-147, 251-252.

<sup>12</sup> Baugh, p. 272.

Infomuch that for the fpeaking of eloquent English, 'tis a great advantage to understand French . . . .<sup>13</sup>

Howell claims three benefits for the English language as a result of this dictionary:

First, because she is put into the front of the civillst languages of Chriftenom, and as it were incorporated with them; Secondly, becauft it will be an occafion hereby to accreditat her the more, & make here expand, & fpread further abroad by mixing with thefe fpacious languages; Thirdly, because it will take off thofe afperfions which ufeth to be caft upon Her, that whereas the Genius, and wit of a Nation is much difcernd in their proverbiall fpeeches, the English tounge is dry & defective in this particular, and thofe Proverbs she hath are but flat & empty.<sup>14</sup>

Howell's work as a lexicographer was probably one source of his interest in word-borrowing. The chief function of the seventeenth-century dictionary was to define borrowed words,<sup>15</sup> and so Howell had not only been exposed to many neologisms but had also been responsible for composing the definitions of some. Many authors used words which were not familiar to their readers, but which were rather what Jones terms, "the expression of their individual learning or individualistic whim."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> James Howell, Lexicon Tetraglotton, An English-French-Italian-Spanish Dictionary (London: Printed by F. G. for Samuel Thomson, 1660), n. pag.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Jones, pp. 272-273.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, p. 273.

Graham Wilson, in a study of Howell's neologizing, noted that his is the first use cited in the Old English Dictionary for the following: confarreations, cruentous, cumble, eloignate, sollecation.<sup>17</sup> Howell is also the first user of these words: piacle, animallios, recarnified, centuplicated, exsiccant, pulpiteer; and the second user noted in the Old English Dictionary for these: deperdition, refulgency, pasquil, aggiutination, belluin, chiquanery, eviscerated. Though Howell had very little success in this field as indicated by the unfamiliarity of the words with which he is credited and their subsequent disappearance from the English language, his use of these chiefly Latinate words produced an effect which is anti-Ciceronian rather than the opposite.

Morris Croll explains the seventeenth-century development of neologizing which produced a blending of the Latin with the vernacular noting that the sixteenth century "Ciceronian purism had tended to keep the two kinds of speech apart from one another believing that the vernacular tongues had already attained their full maturity and were ready to be

<sup>17</sup> Graham Cunningham Wilson, "James Howell: Man and Writer," Diss. Stanford University, 1952, p. 119.

standardized."<sup>18</sup> The anti-Ciceronians, however, believed in a language of change, or what Croll calls "a style to be adapted to the differences of men and times,"<sup>19</sup> much the same idea Howell had expressed in his dictionary preface. Jones had also noted that he considers a change between the neologizing of the sixteenth century and that of the seventeenth,

The Elizabethans borrowed from necessity, vanity, or sheer exuberance. One senses a different spirit, something akin to the metaphysical, a seeking for the strange and out of the way, perhaps a striving for certain imaginative or sound effects, in the borrowing of men like Burton, Donne, Taylor, and Browne.<sup>20</sup>

Howell obviously believes in a theory of linguistic variance such as Croll refers to as "the great modern principle of unending change and development."<sup>21</sup> Howell's letter reads as follows:

Thus we see, that as all other sublunary things are subject to corruption and decay, as the potentest Monarchies, the proudest Republicques, the opulentest Cities have their growth declining, and periods: . . . so the learnedest and

<sup>18</sup> Morris W. Croll, Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm, Essays by Morris W. Croll, ed. J. Max Patrick et al (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), p. 185.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Jones, p. 272n.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

more eloquent Languages are not free from this common fatality, but they are liable to those alterations and revolutions, to those fits of inconstancy, and other destructive contingencies, which are unavoidable incident to all earthly things. (Book II, IX)<sup>22</sup>

The anti-Ciceronians, therefore, loosened some of the previous restrictions on language and "expressed their new-found joy in freedom by indulging in strange caprices of vocabulary. English and French are suddenly deformed by a riot of freakish Latinisms, on the one hand, and expanded at the same time by new and piquant discoveries in the expressiveness of colloquial speech."<sup>23</sup> By "freakish Latinisms" Croll presumably is referring to the harsh cacophonous words selected by Howell and others. These are words which defied the Greek and Roman criteria sonority. Sonority, which Gilbert Highet has seen as a distinctive characteristic of the Ciceronian style,<sup>24</sup> is defined as "the use of impressive and magniloquent words."<sup>25</sup> J. W. H. Atkins notes that the Greeks and Romans "to render composition beautiful sought

<sup>22</sup> Jacobs notes that this passage was accidentally put into italics. It is in ordinary type in the 1647 edition.

<sup>23</sup> Croll, p. 185.

<sup>24</sup> Gilbert Highet, The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), p. 327.

<sup>25</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, William Morris, ed. (New York: The Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969).

out sonorous words, or if a word or syllable was naturally harsh, they endeavoured to mask its harshness by subtly interweaving it with a more melodious sound."<sup>26</sup> Demetrius had advised, "when coining a new word we should aim at clarity and remain within the bounds of usage. The new coinage should be analogous to existing words, for one should not appear to use Scythian or Phrygian expressions when writing Greek."<sup>27</sup> A close examination of Howell's selections indicate that he took no pains to choose words analagous to existing English words, nor was he motivated by a desire for sonority. Cumble, pasquill, cruentous, are strange-sounding words, unpleasing to the ear; and his use of neologisms would, therefore, seem to adhere to the seventeenth century fondness for "freakish Latinisms" rather than the sixteenth century's concern for sonority.

As noted above, Morris Croll makes a passing reference to the seventeenth century writers' use of the "expressiveness of colloquial speech,"<sup>28</sup> and more recently Ian Gordon has devoted a full-length study to the topic of "speech-based

<sup>26</sup> J. W. H. Atkins, Literary Criticism in Antiquity (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1961), p. 97.

<sup>27</sup> G. M. A. Grube, ed. A Greek Critic: Demetrius On Style (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 85.

<sup>28</sup> Croll, p. 185.

prose."<sup>29</sup> Gordon, while recognizing the presence of this type of prose from the beginnings of the English language, states that "what is new in the seventeenth century is the persistent pressure of speech-based prose on prose of more obvious literary pretensions."<sup>30</sup> The three major characteristics of "speech-based prose," as listed by Gordon, are its ordinary vocabulary, its peculiar syntactical structure, and yet its effective result. Noting also the "clarity" and "nonambiguity" which mark this prose, Gordon cites this excerpt from Howell as typical,<sup>31</sup>

I pray you leave the smutty Ayr of London, and com hither to breathe sweeter, wher you may pluck a Rose, and drink a Cillibub. (Book I, Sect. 4, V)

This example clearly adheres to Gordon's criteria, and its inclusion represents no singular example from Howell's work; but as has been shown in the preceding chapters, there are also examples which may be used to illustrate contrary styles. Thus, while Gordon correctly evaluates one aspect of Howell's prose, he is misleading when he leaves the reader with the impression that Howell conforms to this classification. Margaret Williamson notes this contradiction in Howell, pointing out his affirming that "we should

<sup>29</sup> Ian Gordon, The Movement of English Prose (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1966).

<sup>30</sup> Gordon, p. 122.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

write as we speake" (Book I, Sect. 1, I) while practicing a style that seemed "to aim rather at literary polish and ornament than at the affect of conversational familiarity."<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, Williamson has also chosen to note only one aspect of Howell's prose. More balanced in his recognition of Howell's inconsistency is Hugh Macdonald, who cites Howell's Letters as an example of that prose which "corresponded closely to the spoken language,"<sup>33</sup> recognizing, however, Howell's use of an "occasional pedantic word."<sup>34</sup> Macdonald also praises Ben Jonson's even greater mastery of the "conversational element" in his style. By looking at how the critics have analyzed this aspect of his contemporary's style, Howell's efforts can be better evaluated.

Jonas Barish has spent much time studying Jonson's ability to catch the "vitality of live language"<sup>35</sup> in his comedies. In his study Barish notes the elimination of

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Williamson, Colloquial Language of the Commonwealth and Restoration (The English Association: Pamphlet No. 73, July, 1929), p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Hugh Macdonald, "Another Aspect of Seventeenth-Century Prose," The Review of English Studies, 19 (1943), 35.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>35</sup> Jonas Barish, Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 47.

figures of balance, parallelism, and climax which is necessary in order to simulate "live language,"<sup>36</sup> The connection between "live language" and what Barish calls "realistic" comedy is a very important one since the latter relies on the language of ordinary speech in order to say "certain things--chiefly scoundrelly things--never dreamed of by poets, and say them with such rightness and picturesqueness that they become a sort of poetry in themselves."<sup>37</sup>

Though Howell never created dramatic characters, one can still judge his ability to create "live language" in his narrative passages. It has been shown in Chapter Two that Howell observed the requirement of decorum, using different styles as called for. He slips into the language of ordinary conversation, producing a racy realistic prose which is perfectly suited to his gossip stories.

An example of humorous description which utilizes colloquial language is as follows:

It put me in mind of a pleasant Tale I heard  
 Sir Tho. Fairfax relate of a Soldier in  
 Ireland, who having got his Passport to go for  
England, as he pass'd thro' the Wood with his  
Knapsack upon his back, being weary, he sat  
 down under a Tree, where he open'd his Knap-  
 sack, and fell to some victuals he had; but

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Barish, p. 275.

on a sudden he was surpriz'd with two or three Wolves, who coming towards him, he threw them scraps of bread and cheese, till all was gone; then the Wolves making a nearer Approach to him, he knew not what shift to make, but by taking a pair of Bag-pipes which he had, and as soon as he began to play upon them the Wolves ran all away as if they had been scar'd out of their wits; Whereupon the Soldier said, A pox take you all, if I had known you had lov'd Musick so well, you should have had it before dinner. (Book I, Sect. 3, XXXIX)

Not only is the phrasing ordinary and homely--"knew not what shift to make," "on a sudden," "scared out of their wits," but also the conclusion containing the expletive, "A pox take you all," contributes to the informality of the passage.

Howell likewise used colloquial language in his criticism of the Puritans, a favorite topic with the seventeenth century satirists of manners.<sup>38</sup> In the following example the language is again ordinary rather than pedantic; the imagery is concrete, and the description is personal:

Boots and Shoos are so long-snouted, that one can hardly kneel in God's House, where all Genuflection and Postures of devotion and decency are quite out of use: The Devil may walk freely up and down the streets of London now, for there is not a Cross to fright him anywhere; and it seems he was never so busy in any Country upon earth, for there have been more Witches arraign'd and executed here lately,

<sup>38</sup> Stuart M. Tave, The Amiable Humorist, A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 92.

than ever were in this Island since the Creation.  
(Book III, II)<sup>39</sup>

Another example of Howell's critical attitude toward the Puritans expressed in vivid, conversational style is this letter:

Concerning the posture of things here, we are still involv'd in a cloud of Confusion, 'specially touching Church-matters: A race of odd crack-brain'd Schismatiques do croak in every corner; but, poor things, they rather want a Physician to cure them of their madness, than a Divine to confute them of their errors. Such is the height of their spiritual pride, that they make it nothing to interpret every tittle of the Apocalypse; they make a shallow rivulet of it, that one may pass over and scarce wet his ankles; whereas the greatest Doctors of the Church compar'd it to a deep Ford wherein an Elephant might swim. (Book IV, XLIV)

It is interesting to see how Howell reduces complex theological differences to the more concrete language of streams and fords.

One of the most interesting aspects of Howell's letters for seventeenth-century readers was his description of the various scandals about well-known people. Readers are, of course, even today avid for intimate details about the doings of the famous and infamous; and Howell

<sup>39</sup> Maurice Ashley, England in the Seventeenth Century, The Pelican History of England, No. 6 (1952; rpt. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 38. Ashley notes the prevalency of witchcraft beliefs among seventeenth century Puritans, "John Calvin himself was conspicuous in organizing the killing of witches and many of his English disciples . . . accepted their existence."

excelled at presenting this type of information. He covered everything from the Archbishop Abbot's accidental homicide and Lady Howard's murder trial to Ben Jonson's behavior when tipsy, and the possible murder of James I by his favorite. Each time Howell narrated about a particular country, he took care to humanize the ruler by giving various anecdotes about him. George Saintsbury has noted that James Howell was a "journalist born before his time and also he was by anticipation that peculiar and late kind of journalist known as the special correspondent."<sup>40</sup> His presence in Spain at the time of the proposed match between Charles and the Infanta, enabled him to pick up many interesting stories which he converted into very effective descriptive passages such as the following:

There are Comedians once a week come to the Palace, where, under a great Canopy, the Queen and the Infanta sit in the middle, our Prince and Don Carlos on the Queen's right hand, the King and the little Cardinal on the Infanta's left hand. I have seen the Prince have his Eyes immoveably fix'd upon the Infanta half an hour together in a thoughtful speculative posture, which sure would needs be tedious, unless affection did sweeten it: it was no handsome comparison of Olivares, that he watch'd her as a cat doth a Mouse. Not long since the Prince, understanding that the Infanta was used to go

<sup>40</sup> George Saintsbury, "Introduction to James Howell," in English Prose, Vol. II, Sixteenth Century to the Restoration, ed. Henry Craik (1894; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968), p. 235.

some mornings to the Casa de Campo, a Summer-house the King hath on t'other side the River to gather May-dew, he rose betimes and went thither, taking your Brother with him; they were let into the House, and into the Garden, but the Infanta was in the Orchard: and there being a high partition-wall between, and the door doubly bolted, the Prince got on the top of the wall, and sprung down a great height, and so made towards her; but she spying him first of all the rest, gave a shriek, and ran back: the old Marquis that was then her Guardian came towards the Prince, and fell on his knees, conjuring his Highness to retire, in regard he hazarded his Head if he admitted any to her company; so the door was open'd, and he came out under that wall over which he had got in. I have seen him watch a long hour together in a close Coach, in the open street, to see her as she went abroad; I cannot say that the Prince did ever talk with her privately, yet publickly often, my Lord of Bristol being Interpreter; but the King always sat hard by to overhear all. (Book I, Sect. 3, XVIII)<sup>41</sup>

The above passage obviously had enormous appeal for Howell's readers because he is in direct contact with nobility and even more important with an heir apparent who is in love. The whole passage makes much use of informal language such as "sure would needs be tedious, unless affection did sweeten it," and "sat hard by," and such homely expressions as "he watch'd her as a cat doth a Mouse." There is also

<sup>41</sup>

Jacobs states that Howell is the only authority for this episode except a reference by the Venetian Envoy to the Doge, and the following description attests to the popularity of Howell's account: "On the one occasion when Charles circumvented the etiquette of the Spanish court and sought to carry on his courtship in person, he accomplished it only by jumping over a garden wall. He was rewarded by

the dramatic effect of Charles' dangerous attempt to see his love. Howell's narrative reads rapidly indicating the economy which he practiced in his phrasing, such as "he came out under that wall over which he had got in," and "the King always sat hard by to overhear all." Added interest is provided by the chaperon's close surveillance and the protective father's listening to the couple's conversation.

The use of figurative language is the second requirement for "eloquence," according to Jones' definition. The previous chapter indicated the seemingly disparate use which Howell made of the various schemes and resulting sentence structure. He was also quite versatile in his use of the tropes. Sixteenth-century literature had relied heavily on ornamentation by means of tropes. Douglass Mead points out that "external polish, pleasing flow, elaborate decoration-- words and not matter--, these are the ideals which fascinated the sixteenth century mind."<sup>42</sup> The controversy about "words and not matter" is one which concerned many seventeenth-century writers. A. C. Howell has traced seventeenth-century

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the shrieking flight of his intended bride, who made little distinction between this heretic and the gentleman of the cloven hoof," in W. E. Lunt's History of England (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), p. 399.

<sup>42</sup> Douglass Sargeant Mead, The Literary Comparison in Jacobean Prose (New York: Haskell House, 1965), p. 10.

usage of this pair, also known as "words and things" or res et verba.<sup>43</sup> Beginning with Francis Bacon who said "Here, therefore [is] the first distemper of learning, when men studie words and not matter,"<sup>44</sup> many writers denounced the preference for words rather than matter, disapproving of the use of words purely for decorative purposes. The emphasis on matter, not words was used by these writers as a "rallying cry for the new plain style."<sup>45</sup> This idea is best defined in its seventeenth century context as a "tendency to assume that things should be expressible in words, or conversely that words should represent things, not metaphysical and abstract concepts."<sup>46</sup> James Howell hints at this idea when he criticizes the French letter writers, saying that they are like the Echo, "mere sound and nothing else."<sup>47</sup> But a close examination of his own writing illustrates Howell's command of the rhetorical

<sup>43</sup> A. C. Howell, "Res et Verba: Words and Things," in Essential Articles: for the study of English Augustan Backgrounds, ed. Bernard N. Schilling (Hamden, Conn.: Anchor Books, 1961), p. 53.

<sup>44</sup> Francis Bacon, Advancement of Learning, I, in Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. J. E. Spingarn (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1957), I, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Howell, p. 62.

<sup>46</sup> Howell, p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> Book I, Sect. 1, I.

devices and his conventional use of those which were so prized by sixteenth-century writers.

W. G. Crane has pointed to the difficulty of discussing these devices in that so many of them were known by at least two if not three or more names.<sup>48</sup> Lee Sonnino's collation is again helpful in selecting those which were consistently represented in sixteenth-century handbooks. Henry Peacham lists nineteen tropes in his *Garden of Eloquence* (1577).<sup>49</sup> The following table contains seven of these: metonymy, synecdoche, charientismus, conformatio, demptiens, illusio, paroemia. The metaphor and simile are reserved for a fuller treatment. Peacham's definition of the trope is given with examples from Howell's Letters below.

#### A. Metonymy

1. When we put the inuentor for the thing inuented.

"He rails bitterly against Bacchus." (Book II, III)

2. When the conteyner is put for that, that is conteyned.

"Surely God Almighty is angry with England." (Book I, Sect. 6, LI)

3. When that that is contayned is put for the contayner.

"I hold myself abundantly rewarded for my oil and labor." (Book II, LXI)

<sup>48</sup> William G. Crane, Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance, The Formal Basis of Elizabethan Prose Style (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), p. 60. <sup>49</sup> Peacham, p. BIV-EI.

4. When the efficient cause is understood of the effect.  
(When the effect is substituted for the cause)

"In this Island the old Drink was Ale, noble Ale."  
(Book II, LIV)

5. When the effect is gathered up by the efficient, contrary to the next above. (When the cause is substituted for the effect.)

"There lurks a devil in every berry of the Vine."  
(Book IV, XLI)

6. When we put the Authour for the worke.

"By all means understand Aristotle in his own language."  
(Book II, XL)

7. When we put the figure for the thing signified.

"Notwithstanding that the Mitre is so trampled upon."  
(Book I, Sect. 6, LIV)

Howell's use of the metonymy and the synecdoche is quite conventional, in fact, some of his uses of these two tropes match Peacham's examples.

#### B. Synecdoche.

1. When there is more, or leffe, more thinges or fewer understood, and gathered by a word.

"The Neopolitan is accounted the best Courtier of Ladies and the greatest embracer of Pleasure of any other People." (Book I, Sect. 1, XXXIX)

2. The whole of the parte. (The whole is understood by the reference to a part.)

"Venice, a place where there is nothing wanting that heart can wish for." (Book I, Sect. 1, XXXI)

3. By the matter, the thinge made of it . . . .

"Which I shall do as soon as I tread London  
Stones."  
(Book I, Sect. 1, XLIII)

4. The generall kinde, by the fpeciall.

"You know that Anser, Apis, Vitulus, the Goose,  
the Bee, and the Calf, do rule the World; the  
one affording Parchment, the other two Sealing-  
Wax, and Quills to write withal . . . . The  
Quill being the chiefest instrument of Intelli-  
gence, and the Ambassador's prime Tool."  
(Book IV, II)

C. Charientismus

When we mytigate harde thinges with pleasant wordes, or  
thus, when with eafy wordes, matters very harde are  
mollified.

"I know this custom in you yet is but a light  
Disposition, 'tis no Habit I hope; yet we  
therefore conjure you, by that power of Friend-  
ship, by that holy league of Love which is  
between us, that you would suppress it before  
it come to that." (Book I, Sect. 5, XI)

Being a genial, friendly man, Howell used this trope when he  
felt a judgement was too harsh.

D. Conformatio (Personification)

From the lyiing to the luiefeleffe, as to fay, Sea doth  
rage, the frost doth bite.

"Venice the rich, Padua the Learned, Bologna  
the Fat, Rome the Holy, Naples the Gentle,  
Genoa the Proud, Florence the Fair, and Milan  
the Great . . . ." (Book I, Sect. 1, XLII)

Howell used the personification in a traditional way as shown  
by the above examples and his frequent references to "Mother  
Oxford."

E. Demtiens (Hyperbole)

When a faying doth furmounte and reach aboue the truth, the ufe whereof, is a very frequent in augmenting, diminishing, prayfing, and difprayfing of perfons and thinges.

"I have made your Friendship so necessary unto me for the contentment of my Life, that Happiness itself would be but a kind of Infelicity without it: it is as needful to me, as Fire and Water, as the very Air I take in, and breathe out." (Book I, Sect. 1, VI)

"Whenever you fall upon my Mind, or my Mind falls upon you, I keep Holiday all the while; and this happens so often, that you leave me but a few Working-days thro' out the whole year."  
(Book I, Sect. 3, XXXII)

Howell often used the hyperbole in the exordium of his letters, believing it was essential to make a favorable impression upon the person addressed, usually by means of some hyperbolical compliment as illustrated above.

F. Illusio (Ironia)

When the meaning of a passage is contrary to that suggested by the wordes.

"Some Italian Physicians undertook to prescribe a Torment, that should last a constant torment for three days; but he [the convicted] scap'd with only this, His Body was pull'd between four Horses, that one might hear his Bones crack, and after the Dislocation they were set again; and so he was carry'd in a Cart standing half-naked, with a Torch in that Hand which had committed the Murder; And in the Place where the Act was done, it was cut off, and a Gauntlet of hot Oil was clap'd upon the Stump, to staunch the Blood; wherat he gave a doleful Shriek . . . ."  
(Book I, Sect. 1, XVIII)

Howell's use of irony seems to be more naturally related to

his text than his use of other tropes.

G. Paroemia

A faying much ufed, and commonly knowen, and alfo very excellent for the novelty, to which two thinges are requyred, one that it be notable renowned and much fpoke of in a fentence in every mans mouth, called of the Latines, an addage, and of us Englifh men, a proverbe, the other that it be pretty, feate, and witty, that is to fay: that it may be descearned by fome note and marke from common fpeeche, and alfo commended by antiquity and learning.

"You write to me, that T. B. intends to give Money for fuch a place; if he doth, I fear it will be verify'd verify'd in him, that A Fool and his money is foon parted; for I know he will never be able to execute it. I heard of a late Secretary of State, that could not read the next morning his own hand-writing; and I have read of Caligula's Horse, that was made Consul: Therefore I pray tell him from me (for I wish him well), that if he thinks he is fit for that Office, he looks upon himfelf thro' a false Glass; A trotting Horse is fit for a Coach, but not for a Lady's Saddle; and an Ambler is proper for a Lady's Saddle, but not for a Coach. If Tom undertakes this place, he will be as an Ambler in a Coach, or a Trotter under a Lady's Saddle." (Book I, Sect. 5, XXXVII)

Howell's love for and knowledge of proverbs is apparent throughout the Letters, but especially in the "Supplement" where there is a letter with this title, "A Letter of Advice confifting all of Proverbs (running in one congruous and concurrent fenfe) to one that was Towards Marriage."

(Supplement, XVI, p. 665)

Most of these examples reveal Howell as an unoriginal writer. There is, however, an explanation which serves not to justify but to clarify Howell's use of conventional

devices at a time when many writers were putting these aside. John Mulder has pointed out that the aim of the writer is "to light up his matter from a perspective that his audience could also adopt. He must communicate, not himself, but his topic. It followed that in his choice of diction, he put the emphasis on the conceptual core of the word, that is, on the known meaning (s) that he could share with his audience."<sup>50</sup> For such a writer as Howell, this especially holds true. His Letters were presumably composed and published during his eight year confinement in Fleet Prison, and his primary motive at that time was to make money and possibly a name for himself so that he might consequently receive his freedom and a political appointment.<sup>51</sup> He must have been desirous of communicating with the widest audience possible and composed his letters accordingly. Except for his neologizing, his work was undoubtedly intelligible to all middle-class readers, and the fact that he translates most of his quotations from languages is convincing proof of his concern for his reader.

<sup>50</sup> John Mulder, The Temple of the Mind: Education and Literary Taste in Seventeenth-Century England (N. Y.: Pegasus, 1969), p. 80.

<sup>51</sup> Jacobs' Testimonia contains the following entries: "Howell's Letters were purposely published to gain money to relieve his necessities," Anthony a Wood, Athenae Oxonienses (1691) iii, 744; and I. D'Israeli, "This is certain, that he /Howell/ used his pen for subsistence in that imprisonment," Curiosities of Literature (1791).

Rosemund Tuve has carefully dissected the differences between Elizabethan imagery and seventeenth-century imagery, showing that though there are admitted differences, there were also different purposes which explain these.<sup>52</sup> The different purpose revolves around the Elizabethan concept of Imitation which sought the representation less of reality than of a symbol. Tuve has contrasted two schools of art as serving to exemplify these distinctions: the "representational" painter such as Vermeer or Brueghel relies more on his use of "selectivity and accuracy" while the painters of the Byzantine or Sienese schools use "public symbols without equivocation for the conveyance of unmistakable general meanings."<sup>53</sup> Renaissance imagery was concerned with the qualities of artificiality, decorum, and what Tuve calls "relative sensuous imprecision."<sup>54</sup> Imitation to the Elizabethan meant as Douglass Mead explains, "imitation of the external beauties of a chosen model."<sup>55</sup> Thomas Wilson's definition is frequently cited as an illustration for the doctrine of imitation which governed sixteenth-century writing,

Now, before we vfe either to write or fpeake  
eloquently, wee muft dedicate our myndes wholly  
to followe the moft wife and learned men, &

<sup>52</sup> Rosemund Tuve, Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Mead, p. 7.

feeke to fafhion as wel their fpeache and gef-  
turing, as their witte or endyting. The which  
when we eareftly mynd to doe, we can not but  
in time appere fomewhat like them.<sup>56</sup>

Conventionality was expected; originality was not a criteria for sixteenth-century writing.

Howell's use of conventional figures of speech is also explained by the following:

However resolutely he [The seventeenth-century writer] set himself to maintain a predetermined level of mood or taste, he never could resist the excitement of the sudden shift from the homely to the sublime, from the sublime to the grotesque.<sup>57</sup>

Though Howell's shifting is probably not as facile as that of other writers, nor is "excitement" his motivating force, he still does shift. Using virtually all the figures of speech at some time or other, Howell's work lends support to the idea that the "seventeenth-century literary men still kept a good deal of the Renaissance love of magnificence."<sup>58</sup>

Howell's "love for magnificence" is best reflected by his use of abstract imagery, or his concern for words rather than things, while his concrete imagery represents his involvement in the "new philosophy" of the seventeenth

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, p. 188.

<sup>57</sup> Helen C. White, Ruth C. Wallerstein, Ricardo Quintana, Seventeenth-Century Verse and Prose (Volume One: 1600-1660) (New York: Macmillan Co., 1951), I, 21.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

century. Alfred N. Whitehead has described this "new philosophy" as a movement which abandoned "metaphysical analysis of the nature of things, which would thereby determine how things acted and functioned," favoring instead, "the study of the empirical facts of antecedents and consequences."<sup>59</sup> The seventeenth century's answer to the ancient question, "What is the world made of?" was "Matter."<sup>60</sup> The effect of this "new philosophy" on literature was a new concern for substance. As Mead points out, "Men now had ideas to express and cared little for the vain show of formal rhetoric."<sup>61</sup> Theoretically, this is a valid description, but subsequent examples will serve to indicate the presence of the abstract image co-existent with the concrete.

The metaphor and the simile are the two principal tropes which are used to express imagery. The popularity of the similitude in the sixteenth century is indicated by its inclusion in the rhetorics of the time as this example from Wilson illustrates:

A Fimilitude is a likeneffe when two thinges,  
or moe then two, are fo compared & resembled  
together, that they both in fome one propertie  
feme like. Oft entimes brute Beaftes, and  
thinges that have no life, minifter great mat-  
ter in this behalfe. Therefore, thofe that delite  
to proue thinges by Fimilitudes, muft learne  
to knowe the nature of diuers beaftes, of

<sup>59</sup> Alfred N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (1925; rpt. New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 39.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>61</sup> Mead, p. 15.

mettalles, of ftones, and al fuch as haue any vertue in them, and be applied to mans life. . . . Fimilitudes halp well to fet out the matter. That if we purpofe to dilate our caufe hereby with pofes & fentences, wee may with eafe talke at large . . . . For fimilitudes are not onely vfed to amplifie a matter, but alfo to beautifie the fame, to delite the hearers, to make the matter plaine, and to fhewe a certain maieftie with the report of fuch refembled thinges.<sup>62</sup>

Similes were therefore, thought of in the sixteenth century as an important rhetorical device designed to ornament and clarify writing. Phrase books were used as the source of similes, a practice which insured uniformity. Use of the standard comparisons of "mettalls," "diuers beastes" and "stones" enabled one to adhere to the doctrine of imitation, and in case one ran short there was always a source book such as Robert Cawdrey's Treasuerie or Storehouse of Similies (1600) to supply this need.<sup>63</sup> Cawdrey's book consists of eight hundred and sixty pages of similes arrange alphabetically but also containing a subject index at the back. Crane notes that Renaissance school libraries consisted chiefly of thesauri of this kind, along with collections of proverbs, maxims, apophthegms, fables, all of which were considered necessary sources for writing.<sup>64</sup> Mead has gone

<sup>62</sup> Wilson, pp. 188-189.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Cawdrey, A Treasurie or Storehouse of Similies: Both pleafount, delightfull, and profitable, for all eftates of men in generall (Menston, Eng.: Scolar Press, Ltd., 1969).

<sup>64</sup> Crane, p. 64.

so far as to describe the sixteenth century prose as "a prose of ornament rather than thought," and labels the figures as "decorative" rather than "interpretative."<sup>65</sup>

The primary objection to "decorative" similes is that they do not illuminate the subject, and they sound bookish. As shown by the abundance of publications, they were in fact usually taken from one of the source books available.

As Mead has noted, similes were often used to achieve parallelism, alliteration, or parisonic structure.<sup>66</sup>

Howell's usage supports this point as shown in the following examples:

Now the Horizon of Love is large and Spacious,  
it is as boundless as that of the imagination.  
(Book I, Sect. 1, IX)

When the Pope came to be her Rome's Head,  
She was reduc'd to her first Principles;  
for as a Shepherd was Founder, so a Shepherd  
is still her Governor and Preserver. (Book I,  
Sect. 1, XXXVIII)

Methinks your letter was like a piece of Tissue  
richly embroider'd with rare Flowers up and  
down, with curious Representations, and Land-  
skips. (Book I, Sect. 2, X)

In the first example, the second clause is equal in length to the first; in the second example the repetition of end syllables is developed as well as the repetition of Shepherd; and the third example achieves alliteration with

<sup>65</sup> Mead, p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

letter and like and richly, rare, representations. None of these similes contribute a fresh comparison, each is a well-worn image.

But just as these passages show how easily Howell descends to banality, he is also quite capable of using similes which have the opposite effect. Mead has stated that the seventeenth century writer drew his images from "new categories," such as natural history, the commonplaces of his daily life, the practical arts, experimental science, and current history.<sup>67</sup> E. N. S. Thompson has pointed out John Milton's use of "homely English expressions and metaphors drawn from common experience" which serve to link him with the "new age."<sup>68</sup> Milton, Thompson notes, "had all the equipment of the trained scholar, but also the knowledge of a man of the world."<sup>69</sup> This statement is true of many seventeenth century authors, Howell included. Many of his similes do present concrete images drawn from his observation of seventeenth-century life rather than source books. Some examples of comparisons which use the commonplaces of daily life are as follows:

<sup>67</sup> Mead, pp. 36-47.

<sup>68</sup> E. N. S. Thompson, "Milton's Prose Style," Philological Quarterly, 14, (Jan., 1935), 10.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

I cannot make present use of this your great Favour, or Promotion rather; yet I do highly value it, and humbly accept of it, and intend by your Permission to reserve and lay it by, as a good warm Garment, against rough Weather, if any fall on me. (Book I, Sect. 2, VI)

If your lordship hath not present occasion to employ him, he may be about you a'while like a spare Watch, which your lordship may wind up at pleasure. (Book II, XXXIV)

Languages and Words (which are the chief creatures of Man, and the keys of Knowledge) may be said to stick in the memory like nails or pegs in a Wainscot-door, which useth to thrust out one another oftentimes. (Book IV, XIV)

His heart was shrivelled like a leather penny purse when he was dissected, nor were his lungs sound. (Book I, Sect. 6, XVII)

Each of these comparisons succeeds in illuminating the object with which the concrete image is being compared and each certainly avoids an effect of ornamentation and elegance. Howell has here made use of what Mead calls those "common, homely acts and drab articles of use which are beneath the notice of a professed rhetorician or courtly decorator."<sup>70</sup> Such is the warmth of a garment, the handiness of a spare watch, the page in a wainscot-door, or a leather coin purse--all trifling articles the choice of which in no way indicates concern for the dignity of the subject.

Howell's interest in science is not only revealed by the subject he discusses but also by the similes he chooses, as these examples indicate:

<sup>70</sup> Mead, p. 40.

It [your letter] had such a Virtue that it  
 begat new Motions in me, like the Loadstone,  
 which by its attractive occult Quality moves  
 the dull Body of Iron, and makes it active;  
 so dull was I then, and such a magnetic  
 Property your Letter had to quicken me.  
 (Book I, Sect. 6, XVI)

I was glad that you have lighted upon so excel-  
 lent a Lady, as if an Astronomer, by his Opticks  
 had found out a new Star. (Book I, Sect. 6, XXX)

My body was brought so low with all sorts of  
 Physic, that I appear'd like a mere skeleton.  
 (Book I, Sect. 2, XXI)

But these stains are cast upon her by her  
 Enemies; and the Aspersions of an Enemy use  
 to be like the dirt of Oysters, which doth  
 rather cleanse than contaminate. (Book IV, XII)

These images reflect Howell's reading in natural science, a topic which had become increasingly popular during his day. The scientific knowledge of his age is reflected in much of his imagery, but the seventeenth-century writer chooses these images, as Mead points out, "not for a literary effect . . . but because he believes these facts to be demonstrably true."<sup>71</sup> The purpose of imagery has thus changed from one of "decoration" to one of "illumination."

Howell's use of the metaphor reflects this same change, but also the same reliance on the conventional imagery. The use of metaphor to ornament prose was first advocated by Aristotle who said, "It is metaphor above all that gives

<sup>71</sup> Mead, p. 44.

perspicuity, pleasure and a foreign air, and it cannot be learnt from anyone else; but we must make use of metaphors that are appropriate."<sup>72</sup> Howell's work contains

examples of both abstract and concrete metaphors:

You mention there two others /Letters/ that came not, which made me condole the Loss of such Jewels. (Book III, XVI)

Friendship is the Great Chain of human Society, and intercourse of Letters is one of the chiefest links of that Chain. (Book I, Sect. 2, XVIII)

I would not have that fate light upon you, which useth to befall some, who from golden Students, become silver Bachelors, and leaden Masters . . . . (Book I, Sect. 5, IX)

So it may be said of you, that you rule the same way the shole State of that Microcosm of yours, for every Man is a little World of himself. (Book IV, XLV)

These are all examples of metaphors that Howell drew from conventional sources of the sixteenth century. The effect of such terms as "Jewels," "Golden Students," "Silver Bachelors," is one of euphony. No originality is intended; no illumination of the object results. These are simply ornamental metaphors. Note the contrast, however, between the following examples and those cited above:

All businesses here are off the hinges. (Book I, Sect. 3, XXXI)

That to avoid Superstition, some People should be brought to belch out such a horrid Profaneness, as to call the Temples of God, the

<sup>72</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), III, ii, (7-10), p. 355.

Tabernacles of Satan; the Lord's Supper, a Two'pen-ny Ordinary; (Book II, LXII)

I find that Peregrination (well us'd) is a very profitable School; it is a running Academy.  
(Book I, Sect. 2, V)

But tho' your Toes be slugs, yet your Temples are nimble enough. (Book IV, XLV)

Therefore, who taints his Soul, may be said to throw dirt in God's face, and make his breath stink. (Book IV, XXI)

But for our Mountains in Wales, . . . they are Molehills in comparison of these; they are but Pigmies compar'd to Giants, but Blisters compar'd to Imposthumes, or Pimples to Warts.  
(Book I, Sect. 1, XLIII)

Howell's use of concrete metaphors serves to illustrate again the seventeenth-century writers' concern for and choice of homely expressions. Mead believes that the Jacobean writer "is keenly aware of the novelty of his style."<sup>73</sup> Howell may have consciously chosen visual, inelegant images such as slugs for toes and a dirty-faced God, but the intent is not as important here as the presence of these images. Howell's use of the "new categories" of comparison links him with the seventeenth century writer, but it must be remembered that he uses them side by side with conventional images of the "Great Chain of Being" and the "Microcosm."

Howell's Letters contain many examples of the sustained metaphor or conceit. Conceit is defined as a com-

<sup>73</sup> Mead, p. 48.

parison which "designates an ingenious and fanciful notion or conception, usually expressed through an elaborate analogy, and pointing to a striking parallel between two seemingly dissimilar things . . . . In English there are two basic kinds of conceits: the Petrarchan Conceit, most often found in love poems and sonnets, in which the object of the poem is compared extensively and elaborately to some object, a rose, a ship, a garden, etc.; and the metaphysical conceit, in which complex, startling, and highly intellectual analogies are made."<sup>74</sup>

Howell's conceits utilize the standard subjects of the Petrarchan poetic conceit which are rather ineffective prose ornaments. A closer examination reveals that he often, however, shifts to more concrete imagery midway through the comparison, producing a stronger image. In the following example, the soul's eastward movement is compared to the eastward movement of all heavenly bodies, but his soul is waylaid by his sins just as the planets are distracted by the "motion of the tenth sphere." His sins are then blamed for turning the "Temple" of his soul into a "Brothel-house," insane asylum and hospital.

<sup>74</sup> Thrall and Hibbard, p. 103. See also Helen Gardiner, The Metaphysical Poets (1957; rpt. Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 19, which further defines the "metaphysical" conceit as one in which "ingenuity is more striking than its justness."

Thus my Soul still moves Eastward, as all the heavenly Bodies do; but I must tell you, that as those Bodies are over-master'd, and snatch'd away to the West, raptu primi mobilis, by the general motion of the tenth Sphere, so by those epidemical infirmities which are incident to man, I am often snatch'd away a clean contrary course, yet my Soul persists still in her own proper motion. I am often at variance, and angry with myself (nor do I hold this anger to be any breach of charity) when I consider, that whereas my Creator intended this Body of mine, tho' a lump of Clay, to be a Temple of his Holy Spirit, my affections should turn it often to a Brothel-house, my passions to a Bedlam, and my excesses to an Hospital. (Book I, Sect 6, XXXII)<sup>75</sup>

These images are somewhat mixed: the first is reminiscent of the familiar conceit of Anima (Soul) "trying to soar on wings, but held back by a weight tied to her foot;"<sup>76</sup> the second conceit, however, contributes a more concrete image, using the metonymy to represent the results of his excesses. Mead points to a "series of heterogeneous images" as one characteristic of the new use of comparisons which indicate the seventeenth-century writers' "war with rhetorical conventions."<sup>77</sup>

Another example of mixed images is the following

<sup>75</sup> George Williamson has noted the similarity between Howell's use of these motions and John Donne's use in "Riding Westward," in Seventeenth-Century Contexts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 112n.

<sup>76</sup> Mario Praz, Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery (London: The Warburg Institute, 1939), I, 134.

<sup>77</sup> Mead, p. 48.

passage which uses the conventional "wheel of Fortune"

subject:

Touching the Wheelwright you write of, who  
from a Cart came to be a Captain, it made me  
think of the perpetual rotations of Fortune,  
which you know Antiquity seated upon a Wheel  
in a restless, tho' not violent, Volubility:  
And truly it was never more verified than now,  
that those Spokes which were formerly but  
collateral, and some of them quite underneath,  
are now coming up apace to the top of the  
Wheel. I hope there will be no cause to apply  
to them the old Verse I learn'd at School,

Asperius nihil est humili, cum surgit in altum

But there is a transcendent over-ruling  
Providence, who can not only check the rollings  
of this petty Wheel, and strike a Nail into it that it  
shall not stir, but stay also when he pleaseth  
the Motions of those vast Spheres of Heaven,  
where the Stars are always stirring, as like-  
wise the whirlings of the Primum Mobile itself,  
which the Astronomers say draws all the World  
after it in a rapid Revolution. That Divine  
Providence vouchsafe to check the Motion of  
that malevolent Planet, which hath so long  
lowr'd upon poor England, and send us better  
days. (Book III, XI)

From a wheelwright to a cart wheel to a captain's helm,  
Howell moves to the wheel of fortune which has assumed an  
inauspicious position for many who were formerly in high  
places. Providence, which can stop this wheel just as it  
can stop the rotating planets, is appealed to, and Howell  
ends with a plea for this power to stop the wheel of fortune  
which is now metaphorically a planet, hovering over England,  
to send the English better days. By adding concrete imagery  
such as the "Nail" being hammered into the wheel to stop its

motion, to the colloquial phrases, "Antiquity seated upon a Wheel," and "coming up apace," and "lowr'd upon poor England," the entire passage is altered from the ornamental to the illuminative.

Howell again mixes images into a heterogeneous design when he compares translation to cloth and then to wine:

Translations are but as turn-coated things at best, 'specially among Languages that have Advantages one of the other, as the Italian hath of the English, which may be said to differ one from the other as Silk doth from Cloth, the common wear of both Countries where they are spoken. And as Cloth is the more substantial, so the English Tongue, by reason 'tis so knotted with consonants, is the stronger and more sinewy of the two: But Silk is more smooth and slick, and so is the Italian Tongue, compared to the English. Or I may say, Translations are like the wrong side of a Turkey Carpet, which useth to be full of thruma and knots, and nothing so even as the right side: Or one may say (as I spake elsewhere), that Translations are like Wines ta'en off the lees, and poured into other vessels, that must needs lose somewhat of their first strength and briskness, which in the pouring, or passage rather, evaporates into Air. (Book III, XXI)

Here the heterogeneity is probably the result of Howell's inclination to make repeated use of portions of his own works, rather than a conscious attempt to mix his imagery. The use of the Turkish carpet comparison is especially effective because it is so unlike a translation, and indeed this is one of Howell's better conceits, more than likely because he was knowledgeable on the subject of translations.

Howell's use of the conceit produces comparisons which are seldom smooth and never totally abstract. He always moves toward the concrete in his imagery. K. K. Ruthven has stated that by the mid-seventeenth century, "genuinely illuminating" conceits had almost disappeared from literature, and by the end of the century, "anybody writing seriously . . . was well advised to avoid conceits altogether."<sup>78</sup> Ruthven states that the opponents of the conceit were chiefly the advocates of the plain style. Yet Howell was an advocate who still used the conceit, and his use of this device perhaps indicates another way in which the seventeenth-century writer retained his schoolboy rhetoric while embracing the idea of a plain, speech-based prose.

James Howell's language abounds with pedantic neologisms as well as colloquial prose. This variety and the presence of abstract imagery alongside the concrete imagery of the "new comparisons" illustrate all too clearly the extreme difficulty of classifying prose of the seventeenth century. To say that sixteenth-century writers preferred the decorative figures while the seventeenth-century writers preferred those which provided insight or clarity is a generalization which ignores the practice of James Howell.

<sup>78</sup> K. K. Ruthven, The Conceit, The Critical Idiom No. 4, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1969), p. 53.

## V. HOWELL'S HUMOR

As pointed out in Chapter One, an important requisite for the familiar letter is a light touch which is often conveyed by introducing humor. Since, during the seventeenth century the word humor possessed a completely different meaning, its former meaning must first be distinguished from its more recent one. Humor was first a physiological term used to denote the four elements of which the body was thought to be composed. Later the word was used more generally to describe a disposition or temperament. Ben Jonson, Howell's contemporary, extended the word to apply to an overly-obvious personality trait.<sup>1</sup> James Howell's usage of the word humor usually coincides with the physiological definition as when he says to his father:

I was afraid the same Defluxion of salt Rheum which fell from my Temples into my Throat, in Oxford, and distilling upon the Uvula impeach'd my Utterance a little to this day, had found the same channel again; which caused me to have an Issue made in my left Arm for the diversion of the Humour. (Book I, Sect. II, I)

The meaning of the word humor was in the process of changing again, and by 1690 William Temple defined humor as "a

<sup>1</sup> J. E. Spingarn, ed., Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century (1909; rpt. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1957), I, lviii.

picture of particular Life, as Comedy is of general."<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this study the latter definition will be used.

The genre of epistolary writing was in a transitional stage during the seventeenth century, moving from the serious, moralizing type of epistle which imitated the Senecan model, toward a lighter, more entertaining type. Howell's epistolary style, while it reflects a moralizing influence from the popular didactic letter-writing, is best described as amusing or entertaining.

R. Balfour Daniels notes that the familiar letter "should not be too serious," and that "a certain amount of jocularitas is a pleasing spice to a letter."<sup>3</sup> James Howell undoubtedly would have agreed with him, for as Maurice Hewlett has remarked, "of Howell's whimsicality, I find enough examples to drown him in."<sup>4</sup> No aspect of Howell's style has, in fact, been more frequently noted

<sup>2</sup> William Temple, "Of Poetry (1690)," in Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. J. E. Spingarn (1909; rpt. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1957), III, 103. See also William Congreve's essay, "Concerning Humour in Comedy," III, 248.

<sup>3</sup> R. Balfour Daniels, Some Seventeenth-Century Worthies in a Twentieth Century Mirror (1940; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1971), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Hewlett, Last Essays of Maurice Hewlett, Index Reprint Series (1924; rpt. Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), p. 274.

by critics than his use of humor. Critics have not, however, done more than remark in passing that Howell's style is "amusing," "entertaining," or "racy." William Thackeray classed Howell with Montaigne, saying that he liked to "hear them tell their own stories over and over again."<sup>5</sup>

Howell's humor is perhaps best described by Stephen Potter's definition, "the recording of small human traits,"<sup>6</sup> or what Louis Cazamian has called "the endless contradictions and absurdities of human experience."<sup>7</sup>

Potter divides humor into categories, five of which can be applied to James Howell's humor. First is the "humour of release from the bondage of words and syntax,"<sup>8</sup> or the type of humor which results from wordplay. Howell's enjoyment of this practice is indicated by the very title of his Letters, Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae, which was an attempt to incorporate the pronunciation of his own last name into Latin. His Letters contain many anagrams as well as three different types of puns.

<sup>5</sup> William M. Thackeray, Roundabout Papers: English Humorists (Boston: Dana Estes & Co., 1898), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Potter, Sense of Humour (London: Max Reinhardt, 1954), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Cazamian, The Development of English Humor, Parts I and II (1952; rpt. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1965), p. 283.

<sup>8</sup> Potter, p. 84.

Sixteenth-century rhetorics defined the pun, according to it a position with the rest of the schemes. The antanaclesis is the rhetorical term for the most common type of pun and is defined by George Puttenham as "one word written all alike but carrying diuers fences."<sup>9</sup> Howell's puns range from the simple, "for the Destiny (I mean that brave Ship which he built himself of that name, that carry'd him /Raleigh/ thither) is like to prove a Fatal Destiny to him," (Book I, Sect. I, IV), to a more complicated play on the word White.

This great City, I may say, is like a Chess-board chequer'd, inlaid with white and black spots; tho' I believe the white are more in number, and your Majesty's Countenance, by returning to your great Council and your Court at Whitehall, would quickly turn them all white. (Book II, LXIII)

Howell's use of the antanaclesis thus encompassed the mildest pun as well as a more refined type, where in the latter example several meanings of the word white are played upon. The first reference is to the color white on a chessboard; next white is used to denote the loyal supporters, and last the word white is used as a symbol for virtue.

A second type of pun, the paronmasia, is defined by Thomas Wilson as "the chaunging of a letter, or taking away

<sup>9</sup> George Puttenham, The Arte of English Poesie, ed. Gladys Doidge Wilcock and Alice Walker (1589; rpt. Cambridge: At the Univ. Press, 1936), p. 207.

fome part of a word, or adding fometimes a fillable,"<sup>10</sup> to obtain a different meaning. The use of the paronomasia relies for its effect on the similarity of sound whether the two words are related or not. For example, Howell refers to a "foolosopher" and a "pulpiteer," playing on the words philosopher and pulpit. He also devised this example, "'Tis not so tedious to me as to others, to be thus immur'd, because I have been innur'd and habituated to troubles."<sup>11</sup> Another use of paronomasia is his statement that "the Pope hath sent divers Bulls against this sport of Bulling /Bullfighting/."<sup>12</sup>

The third type of pun in which Howell indulged is the equivoque, which is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "an expression capable of more than one meaning; a play upon words often of a humorous nature." Two or more meanings of the word are drawn on by the writer, but unlike the antanaclesis, in the equivoque the word itself is used only once in the sentence. Howell used this type often as shown by his jesting that Elizabeth I gained the enmity of Phillip of Spain "by suffering her Drake to swim to his /Phillip's/

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Wilson, The Arte of Rhetorique (1560); ed. G. H. Mair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), pp. 141-142.

<sup>11</sup> Letters, Book I, Sect. 6, L.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Book I, Sect. 3, XXI.

Indies, and rob him there,"<sup>13</sup> referring, of course, to her condoning and commissioning of "sea dog" Sir Francis Drake. Howell also speaks of his "floundering fit to get some fish for our supper,"<sup>14</sup> and laments the fact that "Beer hopp'd in among us."<sup>15</sup> Howell boasts, "We are now Scot-free, as touching the Northern army [Scottish];"<sup>16</sup> and with regard to his future as an agent for the glassmaking industry, Howell remarks, "My Father fears that this Glass-employment will be too brittle a Foundation for me to build a Fortune upon."<sup>17</sup> Wordplay of all types obviously delighted Howell as these examples indicate.

Potter's second category involves the humor that can result from criticism, and Howell definitely enjoyed playing the role of the humorous critic. His comical description of the Puritans' dress and actions was cited in Chapter Four. He also ridiculed their ministers as shown in the following quote:

Dropping casually into a Church in Thames-Street, I fell upon a Winter-Preacher, who spoke of nothing but of the fire and flames of Hell; so that if a Scythian or Greenlander,

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Book II, XLVII.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Book I, Sect. 5, XXV.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Book II, LIV.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Book II, LXXVI.

<sup>17</sup> Letters, Book I, Sect. 2, V.

who are habituated to such extreme cold, had heard and understood him, he would have thought he had preach'd of Paradise. (Book IV, XXVI)

Though as Douglas Bush points out, "Hell was not the main theme" for sermons,<sup>18</sup> other writers such as John Selden were also ridiculing this Puritan tendency, "To preach long, loud and Damnation is the way to be cry'd up."<sup>19</sup> Howell's humor, directed toward making fun of the Puritans, was undoubtedly appreciated by the Cavaliers of his day.

James Howell also used the Jesuits' reputation for greediness as an object for critical humor:

There died a great rich Duke, who left but one Son, whom, with his whole estate, he bequeath'd to the Tutelle of the Jesuits; and the words of the Will were, When he is pass'd his minority . . . you shall give my Son what you will. It seems the Jesuits took to themselves two parts of the three of the estate, and gave the rest to the heir. The young Duke complaining there of to the Duke of Ossuna, then Viceroy, he commanded the Jesuits to appear before him: he ask'd them how much of the Estate they would have; they answer'd two parts of three, which they had almost employ'd already to build Monasteries and an Hospital, to erect particular Altars, and Masses, to sing Dirges, and Refrigeriums for the Soul of the deceased Duke. Hereupon

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (1945; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 298.

<sup>19</sup> John Selden, Table Talk: Being Discourses of John Selden, Esq., ed. S. W. Singer (London: William Pickering, 1847), p. 56.

the Duke of Ossuna caus'd the Will to be produc'd and found therein the words afore recited, When he is pass'd his minority, you shall give my Son of my Estate what you will. Then he told the Jesuits, you must, by vertue and tenor of these words, give what you will to the Son, which by your own confession is two parts of the three, and so he determin'd the business. (Book I, Sect. 3, XXXVII)

Any situation in which the Jesuits were "bested" was obviously a source of humor for Howell's readers.<sup>20</sup>

Howell also took advantage of his bachelorhood to hold forth occasionally on the subject of "that necessary evil," women:

Nay, some Females are of that odd humour, that to feed their Pride, they will famish Affection: they will starve those natural Passions, which are owing from them to Man . . . . There are some Beauties so strong, that they are Leaguer-proof, they are so barricado'd that no Battery, no Petart, or any kind of Engine, Sapping, or Mining, can do good upon them. There are others that are tenable a good while, and will endure the brunt of a Siege, but will incline to parley at last; and you know, that Ford and Female which begins to parley is half won. (Book II, IV)

His criticism of the opposite sex is good-natured rather than unfair or destructive. The comparison of a fortress's strength to that of a woman was not altogether unflattering,

<sup>20</sup> W. E. Lunt, History of England (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), pp. 342-343, discusses the fact that while hatred against the Jesuits had probably subsided from its fever pitch during Elizabeth's rule, the people of England still looked upon this order as a group of cunning propagandists sent to arouse the Catholics of England against their ruler.

and the familiarity of these platitudes took most of the sting out of his criticism.

The third category consists of the humor of situation, and Howell was a master of the funny story. His commonplace book was undoubtedly a crowded one to judge from the many anecdotes and proverbs he produces in his Letters. W. H. Vann has theorized that Howell's speech impediment, as described by the Welsh Howell in the earlier cited letter, and the fact that English was not his native tongue probably "causes him to talk little and write much."<sup>21</sup> If Vann is correct, the fact that Howell did not tell his stories orally may account for the care he took in writing them down. His skillful use of dialogue and the economy of his narrative prose have been noted in Chapter Three. These talents also contributed to the success of his humorous descriptions. The following narrative relies on the lie to provide humor, the lie in this circumstance being funny because the reader can see what the truth is and therefore can easily detect the deception:

One Night when I was there, he sent his Boy with a Borracha of Leather under his Cloak for Wine; the Boy coming back about Ten a Clock, and passing by the Guard, one asked him whether he carried any Weapons about him (for none must wear any Weapons there after Ten at Night). No, quoth the Boy, being pleasant, I have but a little Dagger, The Watch came and searched him, and finding the Borracho full of good Wine, drunk

<sup>21</sup> William Harvey Vann, Notes on the Writings of James Howell (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 1924), p. 11.

it all up, saying, Sirrah you know no Man must carry any Weapons so late; but because we know whose Servant you are, there's the Scabbard of your Dagger again; and so threw him the empty Borracho. (Book I, Sect. 1, XXXVII)

Another example of Howell's mastery at storytelling is the following "fish story":

This makes me think on a Spanish Captain, who being invited to a Fish-dinner, and coming late, he sat at the lower end of the Table where the small Fish lay, the great ones being at the upper end; thereupon he took one of the little Fish and held it to his Ear: His comrades ask'd him what he meant by that; he answered in a sad tone, Some thirty years since my Father passing from Spain to Barbary, was cast away in a Storm, and I am asking this little Fish whether he could tell any tidings of his body; he answers me, that he is too young to tell me anything, but those old Fish at your end of the table may say something to it: So by that trick of drollery he got his share of them. (Book IV, XXXI)

These narratives can be best described as "nonsense," a type of humor which Milton Wright has defined as occurring when the reader can too easily separate the false from the true.<sup>22</sup> He points out that this lack of subtlety is why "nonsense" is not widely appreciated. Many of Howell's stories admittedly fall into this category; Howell, however, does tell his tale concisely and therefore effectively. The descriptive phrase "in a sad tone" contributed to the droll characterization of the captain.

<sup>22</sup> Milton Wright, What's Funny--And Why, An Outline of Humor (New York: Whittlesey House, 1939), pp. 144-145. See also Carolyn Wells' "Introduction" in A Nonsense Anthology (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1902).

The following example, among many, illustrates Howell's use of "speech-based" prose when telling a story:

With this miraculous accident, he told me also a merry one /story/; how a C ptain that had a wooden Leg booted over, had it shattered to pieces by a Cannon-Bullet; His Soldiers crying, A Surgeon, A Surgeon for the Captain; No, no, said he, A Carpenter, A Carpenter will serve the turn. (Book I, Sect. 3, XXXIII)

The periods are brief and the language ordinary. Howell made good use of the ellipsis (defectio), a scheme which is described by Scaliger as being used "When in an extreme indication of emotion words fail us."<sup>23</sup> He also notes that "ellipsis of a word may lead to ineptness of expression," and that it is rare in poets but used often in comedy."<sup>24</sup> Despite the use of grammatical ellipsis in the example from Howell, the passage is clear and effective.

A fourth category of humor consists of the writer's ability to derive humor from his observations of others. Howell achieved humor in his portraits of the famous and infamous. George Saintsbury has noted that Howell "always had his eyes open and could always describe what he saw."<sup>25</sup> No passage of his writing has been of more interest to

<sup>23</sup>Julius Caesar Scaliger as quoted by Lee A. Sonnino, A Handbook to Sixteenth Century Rhetoric (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1968), p. 67.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>George Saintsbury, "Introduction to James Howell," in English Prose, ed. Henry Craik (1894; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968), II, 236.

readers of succeeding generations than his description of Ben Jonson's behavior when inebriated:

I was invited yesternight to a solemn Supper by B. J., where you were deeply remember'd; there was good company, excellent cheer, choice wines, and jovial welcome: One thing intervened which almost spoil'd the relish of the rest, that B. began to engross all the discourse, to vapour extremely of himself, and, by vilifying others, to magnify his own Muse. T. Ca. Thomas Carew buzz'd me in the ear, that tho' Ben. had barrell'd up a great deal of knowledge, yet it seems he had not read the Ethiques, which, among other precepts of Morality forbid, self-commendation, declaring it to be an ill-favoured solecism in good manners. It made me think upon the Lady (not very young) who having a good while given her guests neat entertainment, a Capon being brought upon the Table, instead of a spoon she took a mouthful of Claret, and spouted it into the poop of the hollow bird; such an accident happen'd in this entertainment, you know . . . be a Man's breath ever so sweet yet it makes one's praise stink, if he makes his own mouth the Conduit pipe of it. (Book II, XIII)

Howell comically portrays the great humorist's pomposity, giving the reader a glimpse of the power of humor to provide better understanding of a subject.

At times Howell's stories are somewhat racy, and the example below illustrates this aspect of his humor:

The dull Hollander (with other North-West Nations, whose blood may be said to be as butter-milk in the veins) is not so frequently subject to such fits of Lust, therefore he hath no such Cloysters or Houses for Ladies of pleasure: Witness the tale of Hans Boobikin, a rich Boor's Son, whom his Father had sent abroad a Fryaring, that is, shroving in our Language; and so put him in an equipage accordingly, having a new Sword and Scarf, with a gold Hatband, and money in his Purse to visit handsome Ladies: but Hans not knowing where to go else, went to his Grandmother's house, where he fell a courting and feasting of her. But his Father

questioning him at his return where he had been a Fryaring, and he answering that he had been at his Grandmother's; the Boor reply'd, God's Sacrament! I hope thou hast not lain with my Mother: Yes, said Boobikin, Why should not I lie with your Mother, as you have lain with mine? (Book IV, VII)

Howell's range of humor properly includes, therefore, a type of joke or story which is generally described as "off-color." Its presence does not dominate his Letters, but it does constitute another characteristic of his humor.

Another example of Howell's ability to describe great men is the letter in which he discusses the offense of swearing, citing examples of various kings' favorite oaths:

I knew a King, that being cross'd in his Game, would, among his Oaths, fall on the ground, and bite the very earth in the rough of his passion; I heard of another King (Henry IV of France) that in his highest distemper would swear by Ventre de St. Gris, by the belly of St. Gris. (Book I, Sect. 5, XI)

Howell's use of the anthimeria,<sup>26</sup> rough used as an abstract noun, produces an effective and vivid phrase. The reader also derives pleasure from his sensation of relief on recognizing his own frailties in the person of a monarch.

A fifth category of humor which Howell utilized is that of self-revelation. Howell was criticized by Saintsbury

<sup>26</sup> Henry Peacham, The Garden of Eloquence (1577; rpt. Menston, England: The Scholar Press, Ltd., 1971), p. Hiil, defines the anthimeria as a scheme whereby "we put one part of speech for another."

for his egotism.<sup>27</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, however, praised Howell's ability in this category, saying "I hope I shall always like to hear men, in reason, talk about themselves. What subject does a man know better?"<sup>28</sup>

Stephan Potter has said that "Introspection is a characteristic of English humour, and imparts an English tinge to our letters and autobiographies."<sup>29</sup> This certainly holds true for Howell's Letters, though his personal style is not always free of that defect which Potter calls a "sort of apology or self-effacement which is an inverted boast."<sup>30</sup> Saintsbury refers to this aspect of Howell's writing as "the Boswellian touch . . . the faculty of making us despise himself."<sup>31</sup>

By looking at examples of Howell's introspection, both those which are free from self-effacement and those which are marred by it, the reader will be able to see the validity of Saintsbury's criticism as well as Thackeray's praise. The humor of the following example is spoiled by Howell's apologizing and self-abasement,

<sup>27</sup> Saintsbury, p. 236.

<sup>28</sup> Thackeray, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Potter, p. 234.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Saintsbury, p. 237.

I have a foolish working Brain of mine own,  
 in labour still with something; and I can  
 hardly keep it from superfetations, tho' oft'  
 times it produce a Mouse, in lieu of a Moun-  
 tain. I must confess its best productions  
 are but homely and hard-favour'd; yet in  
 regard they appear handsome in your Eyes, I  
 shall like them the better. (Book II, XLV)

Another example is also somewhat ruined by the fact that Howell repeats in full the compliments he had received before he denies them,

Whereas, in publishing these Epistles at this time, you please to say, That I have done like Hezekiah when he showed him Treasures to the Babylonians, that I have discovered my Riches to Thieves, who will bind me fast and share my goods: To this I answer, that if those innocent Letters (for I know none of them but is such) fall among such Thieves, they will have no great Prize to carry away, it will be but petty-larceny. (Book II, LXI)

Howell is on occasion, however, able to use light-hearted introspection to good advantage as shown by the following:

If this Letter fall either in point of Ortho-graphy or Style, you must impute the first to the tumbling Posture my Body was in at the writing hereof, being a Shipboard; the second the muddiness of my Brain, which like Lees in a narrow Vessel, hath been shaken at Sea in divers Tempests near upon forty days . . . .  
 (Book I, Sect. 1, XXVII)

He is apologizing for possible defects in his letter, but he does so in an amusing way by vividly picturing his pitiable condition. In another example, the unmarried Howell jocularly boasts of his children,

I would have you know, that I have, tho' never marry'd, divers children already, some French some Latin, one Italian, and many English; and and tho' they be but poor brats of the brain, yet are they legitimate, and Apollo himself vouchsafed to cooperate in their production, I have expos'd them to the wide World, to try their Fortunes; and some (out of compliment) would make me believe they are long-liv'd. (Book I, Sect. 6, LX)

The effectiveness stems from the reader's surprise on learning that he is referring to his writings rather than any illegitimate children. Still another reference to his writing illustrates how Howell is able to laughingly parry a compliment,

But what you please to ascribe to me in point of merit; I dare not own; you look upon me thro' the wrong end of the prospective, or rather thro' a multiplying-glass, which makes the object appear far bigger than it is in real dimensions; such glasses as Anatomists use in the dissection of Bodies, which can make a Flea look like a Cow, or a Fly as big as a Vulture. (Book II, XXXII)

He has avoided dwelling on the compliment he received, and therefore, the comparison between his friend's view of Howell's work and the "Anatomists use" of a microscope is quite effective.

Howell's sense of humor was an active one, but one which he undoubtedly had to struggle to retain during his eight-year confinement in Fleet Prison. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in his comparison of the rapidity of scientific processes and his seemingly interminable imprisonment,

I have been here time enough in conscience to pass all the degrees and effects of fire, as distillation, sublimation, mortifications, calcination, solution, descensions, dealbation, rubification, and fixation; for I have been fasten'd to the walls of this Prison any time these fifty-five months: I have been here long enough, if I were matter capable thereof, to be made the Philosopher's Stone, to be converted from Water to Power, which is the whole Magistery: I have been, besides, so long upon the anvil, that methinks I am grown malleable, and hammer-proof; I am so habituated to hardship. (Book II, XLII)

Despite the circumstances, he can still laugh at his plight, a fact which further indicates his cheerful disposition as revealed on almost every page of the Letters.

A brief survey of Howell's humor thus reveals the additional range of his ability. As William Irving has noted, however, James Howell is not a writer of "wit,"<sup>32</sup> in the restricted sense of that term's definition in seventeenth-century usage, though according to John Aubrey, Howell should have been; Aubrey notes Howell's turned-up whiskers were a sign of "brisque witt."<sup>33</sup> Of the many definitions which can be cited of this word wit, one of the clearest for the purpose of distinguishing it from humor, is Richard Flecknoe's:

<sup>32</sup> Irving, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> John Aubrey, Brief Lives, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1898), I, 421.

And here to speak a word or two of Wit, it is the spirit and quintessence of speech, extracted out of the substance of the thing we speak of, having nothing of the superfice, or dross of words, as clinches, quibbles, gingles, and such like trifles have.<sup>34</sup>

The above definition makes it quite clear that Howell's love of wordplay and nonsense remove him from consideration as a master of wit; he spent too much time on "gingles," and "trifles" to have been considered witty. Samuel T. Coleridge distinguishes the terms wit and humor by their reliance on the impersonal and the personal. Humor, he felt, "always more or less partakes of the character of the speaker."<sup>35</sup> As noted earlier, Howell revealed himself and his attitudes very frequently through the Letters. The result is an amusing and lively store of jokes, puns, and stories which are an important element of James Howell's style.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Flecknoe, "A Short Discourse of the English Stage (1664)," in Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. J. E. Spingarn (1908; rpt. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1957), II, 94. See above, Chapter Three, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> Samuel Coleridge, Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 119.

## CHAPTER VI. HOWELL'S ARTFUL VARIETY

Modern criticism of seventeenth-century prose has largely been directed toward placing writers in the categories devised by the critic Morris W. Croll. The basis for identifying prose writers as "Senecan," "Ciceronian," or "anti-Ciceronian" has been the presence of certain sentence types, particular schemes and tropes, or the construction of imagery. This practice has led, unfortunately to a typology of styles which has seldom taken into account a writer's use of the rhetorical devices and sentence types of more than one style. Or, these variants have been noted and then dismissed as isolated examples. The critics' classifications may, perhaps, be valid for some writers, particularly the more brilliant ones who were more attentive to their style. In the Epistolae Ho-Eliae, however, James Howell defies any attempts at conventional categorizing. The wide range of comments which critics through the centuries have made about Howell's style indicates this difficulty. Varying from elegant, witty, and learned, to racy and pedestrian, these comments have seemingly failed to take into account anything more than a superficial selection of his letters.

Consciously working within an epistolary tradition, Howell took both Cicero and Seneca for his models. His education made him very much aware of the styles used by each of these Roman writers as shown when he adeptly distinguished between the two in the first letter of Book I. In this letter he states his preference for the Senecan style as being more appropriate for epistolary writing, but examination of his letters has indicated that he does not follow his own advice. Instead he combines the Oratorical style preferred by Cicero with the Senecan Plain style. Howell, moreover, used all the popular rhetorical devices and some which were already declining in popularity. His use of the rhetorical devices is not, however, designed to produce Cicero's style, but rather it seems to be more of a holdover from his classical education. The subdivisions of the Senecan Plain style, the loose manner and the curt, were also used by Howell. His use of the loose style, though, was not sufficiently premeditated to produce the tension and spiraling effect which Croll thought characterized anti-Ciceronians. Comparing Howell's use of the curt style with that of others of his age, such as Ben Jonson, indicates the Welshman's unconcern for the tight, "compressed" sentences which are said to characterize this style. Howell thus used all three of the styles outlined by Croll, but the result is seldom, if ever, the effect

which Croll and others have described as typical.

The principle of decorum was probably Howell's motivation in moving from style to style. When he wrote the introduction to a letter, he was usually guided by a desire to impress or please the addressee; and for this purpose he chose the periodic sentence favored by writers of Cicero's style. When he wrote narratives, his purpose was to convey information, and so he used the loose and curt sentences preferred by Seneca and other advocates of the Plain style. This practice is in accordance with the classical concept of decorum, choosing the style which is most suitable for the subject matter.

The schemes and tropes illustrated in the sixteenth-century rhetorics are found in great abundance in Howell's Letters; but along with these, he used many examples of concrete imagery from daily life and the new natural science.

A study of Howell's humor further demonstrates the variety of his style as he skillfully manages wordplay, effectively using the antanaclasis, paronomasia, and the equivoque to produce puns which are amusing even today. Howell also produces humor in his criticism of political and religious groups, in his description of a funny story, and in his observation of the famous and the infamous. He derives humor from introspection. The talkative Welshman has been charged with talking too much about himself; and

while he stands guilty as accused, he still manages to extract humor by laughing at himself. Though he can claim no distinction as a wit, he does provide clearly-stated and quotable puns, jokes, proverbs, anecdotes, and descriptions of well-known men and women.<sup>1</sup>

Howell's epistolary style can best be described as a kind of artful variety. Any attempt to classify conclusively, Howell's style ignores this variety, and an examination of the Letters of this minor writer indicates the difficulty of categorizing a man's style. Some twentieth-century critics are now rightly calling for a broader definition of the word "style." A writer's art may be defined as the way in which he combined the resources available to him through education and the prevailing literary fashions. By an analysis of the epistolary tradition upon which Howell drew, the sentence patterns and rhetorical devices he had been taught in grammar school, the way in which he responded stylistically to the times in which he lived, the present study provides a clearer estimate of the style of Howell's Familiar Letters.

<sup>1</sup> In The Home Book of Quotations, Classic and Modern, ed. Burton Stevenson (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1934) there are fifty quotations taken from the work of James Howell. Though he cannot be said to have originated every one of these, the fact that he is credited with them indicates the impression he left on English prose.

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