

problems and exceptions is in itself an argument against the theory.

In 1919 I heard a chaplain who had come back from World War I give a lecture on his experiences of the battlefield where shrapnel and shells were flying all around, “and all that sort of thing.” He said he went into a hospital and saw men with broken legs, arms, “and all that sort of thing.” Then he told how in the end they had a victory celebration with banners and people marching, and “all that sort of thing.” In just about every third sentence he said, “all that sort of thing.” You would conclude from his lecture that he had a very distinctive feature of style. But I would not be surprised if most of those who heard him use that expression forty or fifty times in that hour used the same expression themselves at least once or twice in the days immediately following, since it would have been impressed on their minds, and they would use it simply because they had recently heard it repeatedly. I would not be surprised if after he had given about thirty-five such lectures, in which people found this repetition tiresome, somebody might have said how disagreeable it was, and thus made him an enemy for life. Yet, if he was a man with sense, he may have taken it to heart and never used the phrase again as long as he lived. You can break yourself of a habit like that. It is difficult, but it can be done. All who do much speaking tend to fall into such habits if they are not careful, so we should be thankful when somebody points one out to us so that we can correct it. But that is a very poor basis for determining style, because one can change it, go to extremes with it, or even stop it altogether, and the fact that one person does it does not mean that others do not do it as much or even more.

Any argument based on the use of words to prove distinct styles should be used with extreme caution, if it is to be valid. Yet, even taking such evidence as the critics try to do, they do not carry it through consistently. They will tell you that certain parts of a chapter are clearly P style because they use a phrase said to be typical of P. Then you may find that in almost every case where they make that statement it is in the middle of what they call a J passage, and they will have a footnote saying that here the redactor has inserted a P word. Their writings include many such instances.