CHAPTER VII

STYLIST

Style was his Penelope, his premier mistress, as it was to all the elites of that era.

Derek Stanford
CRITICS OF THE NINETIES
Despite his roots in the aesthetic nineties, Max Beerbohm maintains that a writer's means ought to justify his ends. Max obeys the spirit of the observation. He is an essayist as well as a humorist. In order to fulfill his mission, he developed an appropriate style—a style, informal yet subtle, that expresses each nuance of his thoughts and feelings.

Max is an exquisite talent in literature. "I am," he declares, "a dilettante, a petit maître. I love best in literature delicate and elaborate ingenuities of form and style."\(^1\) His essays disclose a great fastidiousness in the matter of form and style. The study of Max's 'technique', therefore, invites attention to both—the form and the style of the essays.

Max's craftsmanship in the essays is noteworthy. Like those of the acknowledged masters in the field, his essays are compact in form. Usually, the pure essay does not exceed three thousand words. In view of the need of the modern reader, Max has cut down, considerably, the size of his essays. A Maxian essay does not employ more than fifteen hundred words. Virginia Woolf observes: "Where Lamb wrote one essay... Mr. Beerbohm writes perhaps two."\(^2\) Barring a few, the essays in More, Yet Again, and And Even Now conform to the description.

Like his aesthetic friends, Max, too, is a classicist in the matter of the 'form'. Though he is a product of his age, he

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1. 'Quide': op.cit., p. 173
2. 'Modern Essay': op.cit., p. 47
does not abide by the principle of 'art for art's sake'. It does not mean that he does not realize the importance of the 'form' in literature. He points out:

It is the goblet for the wine, as the wine never so good, is not our enjoyment diminished if the hospitable vintner pours it forth on the ground to be lapped by us with our tongues? 1

Max's sensible approach to the matter is not unqualified. He has solid reasons for such a preference. To him, the end of literature is aesthetic. The better the literature, the better it caters to our aesthetic needs:

The reader of it at the outset be rather invited, engaged, allured, than gripped. Indeed I think in all periods good poets or writers of prose, whether in long or in short works, made quiet beginnings, quiet endings, too. The reader... should be lifted gently out of himself, and borne up and up, and along, and in due course be set down gently, to remember his adventure. 2

Conscious of the effect to that extent, Max aims at achieving the perfect organic unity in the essays. Each of them is an organic whole - with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Each of them is a perfect creation of the humorist, for it has an alluring 'beginning', an exalting 'middle', and soothing, delightful 'ending'. He adheres to the rule he lays down for other writers:

I would say to him - quoting another Horatian tag - Respicere finem. Let him before he begins know just how he is going to end. And I would, at the risk of boring him, insist that beginning is not less important than the end, and that what comes between them is no less important than they. 3

On the whole, in the construction of the essays, Max obeys the spirit of the other "Horatian tag" - totus. tandem. Atque rotundus. In order to judge Max's own practice, one may examine the form of the essay 'Seeing People Off'. It opens at

1. *Mainly On The Air*, p. 132
2. Ibid., p. 193
3. Ibid., p. 132
a sly personal note, hitting the subject directly:

I am not good at it. To do it well seems to me one of the most difficult things in the world, and probably seems so to you, too. I

Since it is a personal essay, the essayist illustrates the point in an entirely personal manner. He describes his own seeing a friend off:

And now, here we were, stiff and self-conscious on the platform; and framed in the window of the railway-carriage in the face of our friend; not it was as the face of a stranger - a stranger anxious to please, an appealing stranger, an awkward stranger. 'Have you got everything?' asked one of us breaking the silence. 'Yes, everything,' said our friend with a pleasant nod. 'Everything,' he repeated, with the emphasis of an empty brain. 'You'll be able to lunch on the train', said I, though this prophecy had already been made more than once...there was a long pause. One of us, with a nod and a forced smile at the traveller, said, 'Well! The nod, the smile, and the unmeaning monosyllables were returned conscientiously. Another pause was broken by one of us with a fit of coughing. It was an obviously assumed fit, but it served to pass the time... There was no sign of the train's departure. Release-ours, and our friend's - was not yet. 2

The essayist is a humorist. He observes a sharp contrast between his own dull and prosaic 'seeing-off' and of another man's lively one:

My wandering eye alighted on a rather portly middle-aged man who was talking earnestly from the platform to a young lady at the next window but one to ours... He seemed magnetic, as he pored out his final injunctions, I could feel something of his magnetism even where I stood. And the magnetism, like the profile, was vaguely familiar to me. Where had I experienced it? 3

In short, the essayist provides a thrilling 'middle' to the essay. Ingeniously he describes Hubert le Ross's engaging manner of 'seeing-off' the American lady. He expresses surprise

1. Yat. Grain. p. 17
2. Ibid. p. 19
3. Ibid. pp. 19-20
and delight at the sudden discovery of an old actor-friend. He interests the reader narrating Le Ross's revelations - that he was a paid 'seer-off' from 'Anglo-American Social Bureau', the agency for seeing the American visitors off London; that he, now, 'acted on the platform'; and that he ran the coaching classes for teaching the art of 'seeing people off'. It is evident that the essayist employs the illustrative material of an extremely interesting nature, and, thereby, 'lifts the reader gently out of himself, bears him up and up, and along'. In the end, he 'sets him gently down', so that he remembers that the essay is the creation of a humorist. It terminates at a witty note:

'Teach me!' I cried. He looked thoughtfully at me.
'Well', he said at length... 'I have a good many pupils on hand already... but yes'... 'I could give you an hour on Tuesdays and Fridays'. His terms, I confess, are rather high, but I do not grudge the investment.

It is noteworthy that each Mazier essay moves at ease between the two premeditated ends. But Maz has treated the writing as an act of immense formality. His skill lies in disguising the whole labour of technique. Indeed each of his essays amplifies Herbert Read's view: "[the essay] is the most successful when least premeditated [it is] - or 'when it seems to be least premeditated'.

It has to be appreciated that Maz does not stick to a single pattern in the construction of the essays. He observes the principle of fine contrast between his 'beginnings' and ' endings'. An essay, such as 'A Clergyman', begins with a

1. *Yet Again*, p. 23
sequence of haunting, cadenced words:

Fragmentary, pale, momentary; almost nothing;
glimpsed or gone; as it were, a faint human hand
thrust up, never to reappear, from beneath the
rolling waters of Time, he forever haunts my
memory and solicits my weak imagination;

it concludes in a staccato manner: "I like to think that he died
forgiving Dr. Johnson." 1

Contrarily, an essay, such as 'The House of the Commons
Manner', is introduced in a staccato sentence: "A Grave and
beautiful place, the Palace of Westminster"; it is summed up in
a rhythmic sentence: "All those hun'r and he's mean so many pence
from the pockets of you, reader and me." 2

The most interesting 'beginnings' are half-ironical and
half-humorous. In contrast, the ' endings' are purely comic. For
instance, 'A Club In Ruins' starts thus:

An antique ruin has its privileges. The longer the
period of its crumbling, the more the owls build
their nests in it, the more do the excursionists
munch in it the sandwiches.

It closes thus:

Perhaps I the old member of the ruined club 7
really did go out to Australia. Or perhaps he
induced the workmen to bury him alive in the
foundation. His fate, whatever it was, haunts me. 3

Sometimes, as the subject permits, Max maintains parity
between the introduction and the conclusion. In 'Going out for
a Walk', the title itself forms the opening and the closing
words:

It is a fact that not once in all my life have I
gone out for a walk.

...there is nothing whatever for me to do off my
own premises, I never will go out for a walk. 4

1. And Even Now, pp. 227 & 235
2. Yet Again, pp. 177 & 187
3. ibid., pp. 49 & 60
4. And Even Now, pp. 115 & 122
Lastly, 'William and Mary' is the only exception, that
starts in a plain, matter-of-fact manner, and terminates at a
deep sentimental note:

Memories, like olives, are an acquired taste. William
and Mary... were for some years an interest in my
life, and had a hold on my affection.

...I thought to hear - a whole sequence of notes,
faint but clear, playful, yet poignantly sad, like
a trill of laughter echoing out of the past... It
was so like something I had known, so recognizable,
and, oh, recognizing, that I was lost in wonder...
for I heard the sound often, often. I must have rung
again and again, tenaciously, vehemently, in my folly.

It is worthwhile to comment that Max's essays remind one
of H.A. Treble's fine observation:

The essay is best brief, lightly serious, pleasantly
earnest. It laugh or is sad, reflects sunlight or
shadow, gives back the swift movement of the street
or the quiet of the countryside, is wise or witty,
charitable or touched with all uncharitableness.
Satire, humour, pathos - all these belong to it as
they belong to life, since the essay is the
crystallizing of some tiny fragment of life itself.
Its form must be all the more finely wrought and
perfect in detail for being little - there can be
nothing really 'loose' about the construction of an
essay. Yet no trace of scaffolding must remain. The
essay demands an artist in miniature, who can make
perfect the trifles.

That Max is "a master of the art of turning molehills into
mountains", may be noticed from the complicated and finished
process of the 'middles' in the essays. Usually, he selects some
'odd object' - an old rocking-horse, a hat-box, or a wayside inn,
to hang his reflections on. It serves him, in the words of
Maurice Hewlett, as a "bare column", to turn into a "maypole".

1. And Even Now, pp. 259 & 276
2. H.A. Treble: 'Introduction' to The Threshold of English Prose
(Cambridge University Press, 1930), pp. 1-2
It is significant that Marx's choice of the illustrative material, though made on a small scale, is extremely individual and varied. Often, his fancy seeks pleasure in the pages of literature. He takes a 'passage' from 'Sawall', and reconstructs the complete scene in which Dr. Johnson rebuffs an unimportant 'clergyman' on account of 'Dodd's sermons'. He interprets the puzzling relationship between Goethe and a painter Tischbian on the basis of Goethe's Memoirs and Letters, and so on.

Sometimes, he writes a whole essay making things out of "the illuminative fog of his memory." In No. 2, 'The Pines', he describes the intricate relationship between Hattes-Dunton and Swinburne. He improves upon the contents of a book, such as of "A Complete Letter Writer." Or an essay like 'Books Within Books', is built round the unseen object, such as the novels within Henry James's novels - written by his characters.

In most of the essays, the oddities of the characters of the men of letters, philosophers, politicians, and others, provide an imaginative glow to the 'middles'. For instance, Carlyle inspires the essay 'A Point to be remembered by the Eminent Men'; Peter 'Diminuendo'; and Gladstone 'A Small Boy Seeing Giants'. Sometimes, the 'middles' are enriched with the accounts of the

unimportant men, such as a sinister-looking man in 'A Memory of the Midnight Express', and of the hostler of Hamstead and the butler Brett in 'Servants'.

Max's "subtle point of view"\(^1\) leads to the weaving of an essay round a Beconian theme, such as 'Pretending'. But the 'middle' is occupied with the musings on a fashionable young man. The scheme of using personal or familiar – either real or fictitious – as the starting-point for a flight into the fantastic, the burlesque, or the satirical and the ironical, is one of the sure tricks of the essayist. It comes to best fruition in *Seven Ken*. In 'Going back to School', the pale face of a schoolboy reminds him of his own plight at school.

Lastly, Max's keen "eye for the exquisite detail"\(^2\) results in the scenes of magical power. In 'Diminuendo', a fanciful picture of his own life in a suburban Arcady seems to be a replica of his own after-life at *Villino Chiaro*; in 'A Stranger In Venice', he draws a vivid picture of the Byzantine splendour of St. Mark; and in 'A Relic', he conjures up a mock-picture of an agitated scene between a couple, that took place in a 'Casino' in Normandy.

Rieswald comments on Max's power of visualisation:

Some characteristic feature of a character or a scene is made to stand out in a preternatural light, and by sheer force of its uncanny glamour it will colour the essay so strangely that we cannot detach it from its dominating image. Once met with, it will continue to haunt our thoughts, like the sinister image conjured up by the lines in which the conscience-stricken Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi* anticipates his fate:

> When I look into the fish-ponds in my garden,  
> I think I see a thing armed with a rake,  
> That seems to strike me. (Act V, Sc. V).

\(^1\) J. P. Benson: "Max" (*Spectator*, London, 14 Feb, 1931) p. 144

3. J. G. Rieswald: *op. cit.* p. 104
To substantiate the argument one may refer to 'Peter the Dominican' who, lay dying of Cavina's dagger along high road, will ever be writing 'Credo in Dominicum' in dust, and will ever be haunting our imagination.¹ The 'Wax-Images' of the illustrious dead in the Chapel of Abbot Islip in Westminster make us sick, for the writer himself feels: 'Catalepsy! Death! That is the atmosphere I am breathing.'² And who can forget Mary's euphonous laugh, that rings throughout 'William and Mary', that, ultimately, becomes an echo out of the past - 'a whole quick sequence of notes, faint but clear, playful, yet poignantly sad.'

On the whole, Max's essays may be described, like Browne's, as 'the hunting birds of literature.'³ On account of their compactness of form, Edmund Gosse treats them as 'sonnetes.'⁴ Max calls them the 'live birds.' He wrote a lady:

My essays have many faults, but they have the virtue of being very closely written. Every paragraph in any of them depends on every other paragraph; every sentence on every other sentence. This is what gives them the modest quality of life, of movement. ⁵

Besides, the element of discursiveness yields another advantage: it provides the organic unity to the essays. Like Lamb, Max too subordinates each detail to the central theme, so that it becomes an intrinsic part of a 'conceived whole', giving it a sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph unity. For instance, if one scans the first sentence of each paragraph in an essay, one makes out the essayist's line of approach. One may

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1. _Yet Again_, p. 293
2. _Ibid._, p. 239
3. _Ibid._
4. _The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse_ (Heinemann, 1931) p. 261
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notice it in 'A Good Prince':

1. I first saw him one morning of last summer,
in Green Park.
2. I do not wonder the people idolise him.
3. On the one action that were well obliterated
from his record I need no long insist.
4. Suave and simple his life is!
5. In this our day...it is too early to predict
what verdict posterity will pass upon him. I

Littel Philip considers Max to be a 'miniatuрист'.

Comparing him with Jane Austen, he observes that he too works on
his "little bit (two inches wide) with so fine a brush as produces
little effect after much labour."²

²

'The modest quality of life, of movement', that Max's essays
possess, is given them by 'the delicate ingenuities of style'.

For the sake of style, Max preferred the essay to any other
literary form as the medium of self-expression. He insists on
the need of a 'good style' in the essay thus:

The essayist's aim is to bring himself home to his
reader, to express himself in exact terms. Therefore,
he must find exact words for his thoughts, and
cadences which express the very tone of emotions.
Himself is the thing to be obtruded, and style the
only means to this end. ³

Max stresses on the need of an individual style, which, on
the carefully chosen subjects, aptly expresses a writer's thoughts
and feelings. In short, it ought to reflect faithfully a writer's

1. The Works of Max Beerbohm, pp. 29-32
2. L. Phillips: op. cit. p. 347
3. 'Mr. Anthony Hope's Talent' - (Saturday Review, London,
   10 Feb., 1900) pp. 169-70
personality. Max's own does. It describes a personality - "subtle, impish, aristocratic, and urbane; conservative and elegant; dandyish and sophisticated; and, above all, mocking, ironical, witty, and humorous." Max's style is absolutely a personal matter, and like any other modern style, it is not "a mere spy-whole to things in general, but a spy-whole to things as they are reflected in the writer's soul." Maxwell's style was subject to evolution. It marks a journey from the early 'rococo' to the later 'familiar' one. The movement is a happy one - from affectation and brittle wit, however brilliant, to an engaging and more persuasive naturalness of expression. If the earlier ebullient manner is the more delightful, the later one is the more satisfying, because the more subdued.

It is interesting that the 'rococo' style of *The Borks* and *Mora* is quite in tune with the artistic equipment of his own age. The impact of the 'precious school' on Max seems to be evident from his immense keenness on words - "the not-juste, that Holy Grail of the period," in 'seeking the phrase', cultivating the 'purple patches', and striving after the 'arabesque.' The following passages, quoted from *The Borks* and *Mora*, display the characteristic features of Max's 'early style':

Loveliness shall sit at the toilet, watching her oval face in the oval mirror. Her smooth fingers shall flit among the prints and powder, to tip and mingle them, catch up a pencil, clasp a phial, and what not and what not, until the mask of vermeil tinct has been laid aptly, the enamel quite hardened. And, heavens, how she will charm us and ensorcel our eyes!...And as in other period of great ecstasy, a dancing wanton, la belle Aubrey, was crowned upon a

1. J.G. Riwalda: op.cit., p. 181
2. David Cecil: op.cit., p. 146
3. *Seven Men*, p. 6
Church's lighted altar, so Arsenic, that 'greentress'd goddess', ashamed at length of skulking between the scoop of the unpopular and the test-tube of the Queen's analyst, shall be exalted to a place of consummate honour upon the toilet table of Loveliness. 1

I have often wondered whether it was with a feeling that his influence would be lifelong, that George allowed Carlton House, that dear structure, the very work of his life and symbol of his being, to be rased. I wish we could still walk through those corridors, whose walls were 'crusted with ermelin', and parquet-floor was 'so glossy that, were Narcissus to come down from heaven, he would, I maintain, need no other mirror for his beauté'. I wish I could see the pianoglasses and the girandoles and the twisted sofas, the fauns foisted upon the ceiling and the rident goddesses along the wall. These things would make George's memory dearer to us, help us to a fuller knowledge of him. 2

The modest appendage of Beauty in her barouche is not a spaniel, nor, but a child. The wooden wicket which, even in my day, barred the top-most of the stairs, has been taken off its hinges, and the Jewels roll down into Cornelia's drawing-room at will. Cornelia's callers are often privileged to a nursery-tea. The bread and butter is not cut thick, as in their day, and that old law, which made it precedent of cake, seem to have been rescinded, Nor is any curb set on little tongues. Cornelia and her callers grow glad in the frolic of artless anarchy. They are sick of givings and scandals. Only the fresh air of nursery can brace their frail bodies and keep up their eyelids. 3

Examining the intricacies of Max's style, E. Wilson detects in his personality an interplay of the two strains: the alien and the native. To the 'Byzantine' strain, he relates the gaiiness, the artificiality, the excrescences of grotesque fancy of Max's 'rococo' style:

It was the Byzantine that pricked him to cultivate his early preciosity of style, the Englishman taught him the trick, exploited through his whole career, of letting his preciosity down, with deprecating or comic effect, by a descent into the flatly colloquial. 4

1. The Works, pp. 105-6
2. Ibid., pp. 81-2
4. 'An Analysis of Max Beerbohm', p. 83
Wilson's scrutiny does not, however, bar him from acknowledging Max as a "great linguist," who, in his sensitivity to language, was next to his teacher Alfred Rolfe. He admits: "Such connoisseurs as Max Beerbohm and Rolfe experienced the words in an intimate way and seemed to care for cadences."

The ease, the grace, the lucidity, and the vigour of Max's style in the later works developed through the process of the hard and rigorous twelve-years journalism on the Saturday Review. It provided him a kind of workshop, where he apprenticed himself to the craftsmanship in the trade of writing. He admits that he wrote the dramatic articles in a "seldom-sinking and alas-never-soaring" style. They disclose his painstaking efforts to write exactly and beautifully.

During the period, Max dropped his early preciosity and introduced to his style the 'vocal quality'. He grew skilled in using the words - "the writer's only and the slendour means", that fully aped the infinitely various pauses of the human speech. They were fitted into the sentences that expressed his meaning capably, as he himself as a talker could do through his voice and face and hands. That is to say, if a good style has a voice of its own, Max's certainly has one. It is the voice of an interesting individual, who loves to talk, in golden ease, about the things of his own choice; it reproduces the cultured talk of a 'civilised man', and, at the same time, intones "the richer laugh of mind and heart." Like Whistler's style, Max's projects "the clean-cut image and clear-ringing echo of himself."³

1. 'A Miscellany of Max Beerbohm' (The Kit Between My Teeth, New York, 1966) pp. 44 & 47
2. 'Epistle Dedicatory': Around Theatres I, p. vii
3. Yet Again, p. 113
Max's 'later style' may be defined as an 'impeccable style'—its lawful elements being subtlety, precision, and distinction. In order to appreciate the point properly, the general properties of Max's style may be considered here.

Primarily, Max aims at writing in faultless, lucid, and graceful manner. The following passage from 'Whistler's Writing' is illustrative of the point:

I...whenever human company is denied, have often a desire to read. Reading, I prefer cut edges, because a paper-knife is one of the things that have the gift of invisibility whenever they are wanted and because one's thumb, in prizing open the pages, so often affects the text. Many volumes have I thus mutilated, and I hope that in the sale-rooms of a sentimental posterity they may fetch higher prices than their uncut duplicates. So long as my thumb tatters merely the margin, I am quite exquisitely. If I were reading a First Folio Shakespeare by my fireside, and if the matchbox were ever so little beyond my reach, I vow I would light my cigarette with a spill made from the margin of whatever page I were reading. I am neat, scrupulously neat, in regard to the things I care about; but a book, as a book, is not one of these things.

Of course, a book may happen to be in itself a beautiful object. Such a book I treat tenderly, as one would a flower. And such a book is, in its brown-papered boards, wherein gleam little italics and a gilt butterfly, Whistler's Gentle Art of Making Enemies. It happens to be also a book which I have read again and again—a book that has often travelled with me. Yet its cover is as fresh as when first, some twelve years since, it came into my possession. A flower, freshly plucked, one would say—a brown-and-yellow flower, with a little gilt butterfly fluttering over it. And its inner petals, its delicately proportioned pages are as white and dishevelled as though they had never been opened. The book lies before me, as I write. I must be careful of my pen's transit from inkpot to MS.

Max's style possesses the simple 'elegance' of the narrative prose, he gives the effect of LaFontaine's impeccable

1. Yet Again, p. 104
manner of writing. One may notice it in 'A Relic':

I did once see her, and in Normandy, and in moon-light, and her name was Angélique. She was graceful, she was very beautiful. I was but nineteen years old. Yet even so I cannot say that she impressed me favourably. I was seated at a table of a café on the terrace of a Casino. I sat facing the sea, which I had crossed this morning... I heard the swing-door behind me flap open, and was aware of a sharp snapping and crackling sound as a lady in white passed quickly by me. I stared at her erect, thin back and her agitated elbows. A fat short man passed in pursuit of her... 1

Since Max is a humorist, his style runs from impeccability to 'naughtiness', as he seeks sly comparisons for the lady's furious speed:

with every moment they became more distinct, and the prospects that they would presently pass by me, back into the Casino, gave me that physical tension which one feels on a way-side platform at the imminent passing of an express. 2

Max is a disciple of Edmund Gosse, in whose style 'naughtiness' is a dominant feature. 3 A.K. Tarl comments on Max's prose:

One is often reminded of French prose in that supple touch, light-fingered, neat— with the characteristic excellence of surface. It is prose cherished as prose too seldom is in English, as an art in itself, prose of an English writer who has dared to say in English that for style's sake he prefers prose to verse, and in prose the essay to the novel or romance. 4

Max's style has 'supplesness', it stretches according to his need. It is a plausible medium for the expression of his various mental states. How ast a medium is it, may be seen in 'A Memory of a Midnight Express'. The writer is frightened by the entry of a sinister-looking man into his compartment at midnight. The

1. And Even Now, p. 4
2. Ibid., p. 5
3. Max Beerbohm: 'Mr. Gosse's Insen' (A review, Last Throats) p. 352
4. 'The Prose of Max Beerbohm', p. 198
wariness of the situation is described thus:

The train rushed on, noisily swaying through the silence of night. I thought of the series of placid landscapes that we were passing through, of the unconscious cottagers snoring in their beds, of the safe people in the next compartment to mine—to him. Not moving a muscle, we sat there, we two, watching each other, like two hostile cats. Or rather, I thought, he watched me as a snake watches a rabbit, and I, like a rabbit, could not look away. I seemed to hear my heart beating time to train. Suddenly my heart was at a standstill, and the double-beat of the train receded faintly. The man was pointing upwards... I shook my head. He asked me, in a low voice, whether he should pull the hood across the lamp.

The style reproduces precisely the writer's mental state. Max provides a movement to the expression in order to establish an identity between his feverish train of thought and the speedy movement of the train. But the very next moment there comes a glimmer of amusement to his eyes, seeing the man's 'bald patch':

He took off his hat, laid that beside him. I was surprised (I know not why) to see that he was bald. There was a gleam of light in his bald-round head. The limp black thing was a cap, which he slowly adjusted with both hands, drawing it down over the brow and behind the ears. It seemed to me as though he were, after all, hoodying the lamp, in his feverish fancy the compartment grew darker when the orb of his head was hidden.

In Max's style, humour is inseparable from the general expression. 'Gaiety' and 'sense' are, therefore, the integral parts of his style.

In order to depict a mental state, Max does not hesitate in using the flatly 'colloquial':

I find an inalienable magic in my bedroom fire when I am staying with friends, and it is at bed-time that the spell is strongest. 'Good night', says my host, shaking my hand warmly on the threshold, 'you have everything you want?' 'Everything', I assure him; 'good night'. 'Good night'. 'Good night', and I close

1. And Even Now, p. 29
2. ibid., p. 31
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He took off his hat, laid that beside him. I was surprised (I know not why) to see that he was bald. There was a gleaming high-light on his bald round head. The limp black thing was a cap, which he slowly adjusted with both hands, drawing it down over the brow and behind the ears. It seemed to me as though, he was, after all, hooping the lamp, in my feverish fancy the compartment grew darker when the orb of his head was hidden.

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1. And Even Now, p. 29
2. Ibid., p. 31
my door, close my eyes, heave a long sigh, open my eyes, draw the armchair close to the fire (my fire), sink down, and sit at peace, with nothing to mar my happiness except the feeling that it is too good to be true. 1

'Wit', too, is inseparable from Max's style. It results in a brevity of expression, straightforwardness of manner, and in epigrams and puns:

Credulity is but a form of inaction. 2

... 3

It is risky to offer sympathy to the proud and sensitive.

... 4

In an age of fringes, [Mary's] brow was severely bare. 3

... 5

Yes, his [King George's Fourth] life was a poem, a poem in the praise of pleasure. 4

Max justifies that 'brevity is the soul of wit'. Sometimes, his wit leads to a sustained faintness, or fastidiousness of expression. It achieves a 'classical equipoise'. The following quote is the typical example of the characteristic of Max's style:

Round the flower-garden at Sandringham runs an old wall of red brick, streaked with ivy and topped infrequently with balls of stone. 5

Not the less important feature of Max's style is 'irony'. It lends to it the general nature of 'incisiveness':

It seems to be a law of nature that no man, unless he has some obvious physical deformity, ever is loth to sit for his portrait. A man may be old, he may be ugly, he may be burdened with grave responsibility to the nation, and that nation is at the crisis of its history, but none of these considerations, nor all of them together, will deter him from sitting for a portrait. 6

1. Yat AGAIN, p. 12
2. Ibid., p. 8
3. AND EVEN NOW, pp. 121 & 131
4. The Works, p. 78
5. Ibid., p. 31
6. AND EVEN NOW, p. 201
Max's best subtlety is simple. Such an expression as this implies much more:

Remember that a Great Personage, like a great genius, is dangerous to his fellow-creatures. 1

Max's power lies in the restrained use of irony. That is to say, 'restraint' is another important feature of his style:

But that she should be habitual, professional author, with a passion for art, and a fountain-pen and an agent, and sum in advance of royalties on sale in Canada and Australia, and a profound knowledge of human character, and an essentially sane outlook, is somehow incongruous with my notions - my mistaken notions, if you will - of what she ought to be. 2

Robert Lynd speaks highly of Max's "perfect manners" in writing thus:

Perfect manners in literature are rare nowadays. Many authors are either pretentious or condescending; either malicious or suspicious. Max has all the virtues of egotism without any of its vices. 3

Another important characteristic of Max's style is 'the skill in parody'. Throughout his work, a whip of parody lashes out gently. For instance, in 'Aesthetic Impostures', he reproduces the tricks of 'weightiness and erudition' in the news-reporting thus:

A leader-writer would not, for instance, say:

Lord Rosebury has made a paradox.

He would say:

[Whether intentionally or otherwise, we leave our readers to decide. Or, with seeming conviction, or, doubtless giving rein to the playful humour which is characteristic of him, he has expressed a sentiment, or, taken on himself to enunciate a theory, or, made himself responsible for a dictum, which:] we venture to assert, or, he has little hesitation in declaring.

1. The Works, p. 79
2. And Even So, p. 242
3. Essays on Life and Literature. op. cit., p. 155
is nearly akin to
Dr. not very far
removed from
the paradoxical. 1

Lastly, Max's style is marked for 'vigour' or 'force'. It results from the poetic quality of his prose. Its effectiveness depends on such expressions as these:

Every street in London is being converted into a battlefield of styles, all shrieking at one another, all murdering one another. 2

...  

Eminent, amorphous, mysterious, there she stood, immobile, voluminous, ghastly beneath the moon.

...  

[Swinburne's] hand were tiny, even for his size, and they fluttered helplessly, touchingly, unceasingly. 3

The effectiveness of a style depends on a writer's efficient use of his linguistic resources. Max exploits all the resources of the English language - the referential, the emotive, and the colloquial. Apart from the general characteristics, he processes them through 'the delicate ingenuities of style', and, thereby, produces the example of how 'living English' can be written. The comprehensive study of Max's style, therefore, requires the appraisal of Max's Vocabulary; use of Figures of speech and Imagery; the syntactical peculiarities; and the Cadences.

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1. Yet Again, p. 33
2. Ibid., p. 205
3. And Even Now, pp. 32 + 64
Max's Vocabulary indicates his prolificity. Well-grounded in Latin and Greek, and well-verbed in French, Max chose the words of classical origin. But his text abounds in the common words, uncommon words, alien words, colloquials and slang, and his 'coinsages'. On the whole, his vocabulary testifies that there was in him ever a restrained anxiety for the 'words' - "not just a, that Holy Grail of the period."

Max's common words show his Anglo-Saxon vigour. Since he aims at writing exactly and beautifully, he matches the monosyllabics with the polysyllabics, as the occasion requires:

In its sleepy, chilly, shell my soul was still shuddering and whispering. 1

But it has often struck me that Italian nights, whenever clouds do congregate, are somehow as much darker, than English nights as Italian days are brighter, than days in England. They have thicker magnitude. They shut things out from you impenetrably. They enclose you in a small pavilion of black velvet. This tenement is not very comfortable in a strong gale. It makes you rather helpless. 2

Like Churchill, Max incorporates in his text words from everyday speech:

Ladies and Gentlemen, or - if you prefer that mode of address - G'deavning. 3

Most of the elder actors have petted me on the head and given me six pence when I was "only go high." 4

For many years to come, it will be the fashion among the critics to pooh-pooh Whistler. 5

Further, like him, he does not hesitate to insert a longer or more word for a shade of meaning lacking in a common word -

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1. Kat Again, p. 223  
2. And Even Now, p. 119  
3. Mainly On The Air, p. 33  
4. A Round Theatre I, p. 5  
5. Kat Again, p. 103
either for its contribution to rhythm, or for contrast with the plain setting of words:

So fresh was the nosegay that he must have kept it in water during the passage! Or perhaps these vegetables had absorbed by mere contact with his tweeds, the subtle secret of his immateriality. 1

Max's uncommon words are either archaic or obsolete, rare. Such words are used by him mostly in the early writings. They are introduced to the style for creating a jocular effect:

Here is the resupinate sex. In her coach she is a goddess, but so soon as she put her foot to the ground — lo, she is the veriest little sallypop, and quite done for. 2

Max's "fascination for archaisms" is notable in the later works, too. For him, Swinburne is "the flamboyant boy of the dim past"; 3 he hopes to rebuild the glory of his 'hot-box', as Carlyle "built still a nobler monument on the tragic ashes." 4 To some extent, Max's practice of using the uncommon words corresponds with Lenl's. In order to conjure up the scenes of the magical past, they make a deliberate use of the archaic words.

Max's vocabulary discloses his tendency to Latinism. He uses the Latin words - 'dulcedo', or 'diminuendo', the expressions - Respicere Finem, or Cedo junioribus. He writes the Greek script - "Books within books" must... be classed as Ἐβλατα Ἐβλατα. 5

As a common feature of the literature of the nineties, Max's text too abounds in the French words - mot juste, or petit maître; the expressions -... and a huge number of others.

2. The books, p. 91  5. And Even Now, p. 99
3. And Even Now, p. 58
In case Max does not find an exact word of the classical origin for an expression, he may tap the other resources of the English tongue. He uses the colloquial — "it wouldn't be cricket"; the Slang — Peter and Anatole France, the critics, may be nicknamed as "the Hornerists of literature"; the local dialects — "It went all agley"; and so on. Max does not refrain from using the imitative sounds — pithon's '—r—r—', bull's 'Hi-o-o', 'clink clank' of the train, and others.

Max's sensitiveness to the new vocabulary results in the use of a large number of words of 'un-English' origin. He writes "a strange sweet foretaste of Nirvana", or "Allah's glory." He uses the sl v words, such as chukote for 'cell', the Russian, such as Putchki velkotein for the 'white captive'.

Max is no less sensitive to the new scientific vocabulary, that sprang up with the industrial advancement in the later nineteenth century. Of Goethe's knowledge in science and art, he writes:

He had ever been patient in pouring over plants botanically, and fishes ichthyologically, and minerals mineralologically. And now, day by day, he studied carnival from a strictly carnivolological standpoint.

Evidently, the 'carnivolological' is one of Max's 'coinages' — the most interesting category of his words. He had set principles of coining the words. Prefixing or suffixing a Latin, or a Greek member he assembled a new one. He did it either to complete a rhythm — "very well, Vagula, have your own wayula" or to create
an effect - "a pell-mell of citizens...hussa-ing and hosanna-ing, mostly looking back over their shoulders and shading their eyes".\textsuperscript{1} or often, to mock at - Kipling's 'manlidom' or 'Kiplingese'. He derives the words, such as 'nowanights' (from 'nowadays'), 'hotel-y', or 'a-wing', or 'Jeromism'. He does backformation like 'playgoing', or does shortening, such as 'sympet' (from 'sympathy'). Max's text abounds in the 'nonce-words' of various kinds. An exhaustive list can be drawn of his formations. In fact, they are the creations of his playful mood. Max's vocabulary is not so important as its use. He uses the words in quite an unconventional manner, in case they add to the effectiveness of the expression:

The unrestful, well-organised and minatory sea had been advancing quickly. 2.

\begin{itemize}
\item Her soul was a flower in its opiate.
\item Those eyes which hawks, that nose which eagles.
\item Parted somewhere at the middle (Zulieka's hair) fell in an avalanche of curls upon one eyebrow. 3
\end{itemize}

In order to be compact and precise, he writes 'mimes' (instead of actors and actresses); "basic principles of Relativismus" (instead of 'Relativity'); "Our proseists" (instead of the 'Prose-writers').\textsuperscript{4}

N.L. Clay is of the view that the great masters of English prose, like Churchill and Max, cannot be restrained from making a daring use of words, else the English language will be impoverished.

He treats "the different classes of the English words as keyboards

\begin{itemize}
\item 1. \textit{And Even Now}, p. 153
\item 2. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 221
\item 3. \textit{Zulieka Dobson}, pp. 1, 24 & 26
\item 4. \textit{Mainly On The Air}, pp. 126 & 197
\end{itemize}
on an organ", and wishes that a writer ought to be encouraged "to use all the keyboards if and when he wishes." Max is undoubtedly a master in the art. In his case, "the Vocabulary is the man."

Max's stylistic excellence is an outcome of a skilful arrangement of words into a definite pattern. One of the devices that Max adopts, is a perfectly refined use of the Figures of Speech and Imagery. He uses several Figures of Speech - Alliteration, Simile, Metaphor, Personification, Hyperbole, and others. Along with imagery, they lend exactness and beauty to his style. Hence their appropriateness.

Since 'Alliteration' introduces the poetic quality to Max's prose, its appreciation will be made with the 'prose cadence'.

Max's use of 'Simile' is conspicuous. His similes connote originality, freshness, beauty, and variety. They are the means of the humorist:

[Colniyatsch's] eyes were like two revolving lamps, set very close together;

and

[Winburne's] were of a god and the smile of an elf. 2

[Cissy Loftus] was like a daisy in the window of Solomon's;

and

[Zuliska's] would was as a flower in its epitaph. 3

Some of the examples of Max's similes, which show his ironical and comic powers, may be quoted thus:

[Enoch Gosses] stood patiently there, rather like a dumb animal, rather like a donkey looking over a gate. 4

1. N.L. Clay: op.cit., p. xvi 3. The works, p. 100
2. And Even Now, pp. 54 & 64 4. Zuliska Robinson, p. 24
She...He then ate kedgeree in silence. He looked like some splendid bull, and she like some splendid cow, grazing.

Nightly I revisited the café, and sat there with an open mind—a mind wide-open to catch the idea that should drop like a ripe golden plum. The plum did not ripe.

Showing the modern London, one feels rather as Virgil may have felt in showing Hell to Dante.

The subtle irony and sly humour are equally characteristic of Max's Metaphors. They are introduced for creating the aesthetic pleasure:

That lost collection [of the 'railway-labels'] was a running record of all my happiest hours; a focus, a monument, a diary. It was my humble Odyssey, wrought in coloured paper on pig-skin.

Max's metaphors are fresh and original:

If one liked the father (and I liked Sethab all the more in this capacity), one couldn't help liking the daughter: the two were so absurdly alike. Whenever he was looking at her (and it was seldom that he looked away from her)...the effect was...that of a vain man before the mirror.

Such metaphor as this is striking for its compactness and subtle irony:

In Royalty we find our Bacchus, our Venus.

Max's metaphors appeal to us for their compactness as well as for elaborateness. They are limited to a short sentence and stretched over a whole essay. One sees that "the balsam of another love" was poured into the wounds of 'Romeo Coates'; the frustrated 'Duke' is "Marius sitting on the ruins of Carthage".

1. Seven Men, p. 88  
2. And Even Now, p. 11  
4. Yet Again, p. 128  
5. Seven Men, p. 123  
6. The Works, p. 74  
7. Abid., p. 122  
8. Julieta Do...son, p. 214
Adam Tussaud's is "a morgue of the upstanding corpses", and so on. An elaborate metaphor covers a whole essay like 'A Clergyman' - Dr. Johnson is seen through as "a roaring lion", and the Clergyman as "the popping rabbit."

The newness, the satiric fancy, the subtle irony, and humour, the saturate Max's metaphors, saturates his "Personification" or "Anthropomorphism", too. The following example illustrates the point:

And I dislike to be master of things that are not mine. 'Be careful not to break us', says the glass and china. 'You'd better not spill ink on me', growls the carpet. 'None of your dog-sitting, thumb-marking, back-breaking tricks here!' snarl the books.

Max's use of 'Hyperbole' is also remarkable. Though its effective use has been made in the parodies, it is to be found in the essays and other writings too. Usually, it is used to create a ludicrous effect:

In those days it was the fashion for young ladies to embroider slippers for such men in holy orders as best pleased their fancy. 'I [Zulieka's grandfather] received hundreds - thousands - of such slippers, but never a pair from Laura Frith."

Tens of thousands. I hoarded them with a fatuous pride. On the evening of my betrothal I made a bonfire of them, visible from three counties. I danced round it all night.

Paradox - "that dandified jugular of ideas" - has been handled by Max with equal skill. He has drawn each man in Seven Ion as a paradox. For instance, notwithstanding that 'Soames' is hungry for fame, for recognition as a writer, he poses to be indifferent to it all the while. Max's subtlety in handling

1. Hora, p. 40
2. And Many More, p. 239
3. Zulieka Dobson, p. 325
'paradox' is worth seeing in such observations as this:

'But by that time', I would say, 'you'll probably be married, and your wife mightn't quite -' whereas he would hotly repeat what he had said many times: that he would never marry. Marriage was an antisocial anachronism. I think its survival was in some parts due to the machinations of Capital. Anyway it was doomed. Temporary civil contracts between men and women would be the rule 'ten, twelve years hence', pending which time the lot of any man who had civic sense must be celibacy, tempered perhaps with free love.

Long before that time was up, nevertheless, Bertram was married. 1

Max's ingenious use of paradox gives him an edge on G.K. Chesterton, to whom paradox was a matter of serious occupation, but whose tricks were, comparatively, facile. 2

Max was skilled in both - brevity as well as 'periphrasis'. He knew well how to express things in a devious manner. He begins the essay 'Ichabod' thus:

It is not cast from any obvious mould of sentiment.
It is not a memorial urn, nor a ruined tower, nor any of those things which he who runs may weep over.
Though not less deplorable than they, it needs, I am well aware, some sort of explanation to enable my reader to mourn with me. For it is merely a hat-box. 3

Max handles quite skilfully the 'parable' too. By parable, he explains his moral outlook in the tales. In the essays, too, Max uses it aptly. In 'A Memory of a Midnight Express', Max elucidates by the help of parable: "he never can depend on any right adjustment of emotion to circumstance." 4

Max uses 'Epiphanism' and 'Sethos' too. The former comes to its best effect in such observations as Zuliska makes about

1. And Even Lo... pp. 261-2
2. cf. ibid. Stowald: op.cit., p. 187
3. ibid. p. 119
4. And Even Lo... p. 35
herself: "I am an inspiration, not an obsession; a glow, not a 
blight." 1

Lastly, 'Sethos' is a sure trick with the sly humorist. In 
contrast to the drowning of the undergraduates, he describes, in 
a bathetic manner, 'Uliaka's drowning herself in a bath-tub thus:

her face lay upturned on the watery surface and 
round it were her dark hair half-floating, half-
submerged. Her eyes were closed and her lips were 
parted. 2

Extracting efficient 'imagery', he lends objectivity to his 
style. His imagery makes a verbal appeal to a reader's aesthetic 
as well as comic sense. Each of his images seems to be "one of 
the best balls in a jester's cap." He is deft in painting the 
verbal-pictures of the real and the fictitious characters. 
Producing the concrete impressions, he compares and contrasts 
'altby' and 'Brenton', thus:

Dapper little altby - blond, bland, diminutive 
Altby, with his monocle and his gardener; big 
black brenton, with his lanky hair and square blue 
jaw and square sallow forehead, canary and crow.

'E. V. Beider' impressed him thus:

A shock of white hair, combined with a young face 
and dark eye brows, does somehow make a man look 
like a charlaton. 3

Here is a picture of 'Tennyson':

Spare and straggling though the gray hair was that 
fringed the immense pale dome of his head, and 
venerably haloed though he was for me by his greatness, 
there was yet about him something - boyish? girlish? 
childish rather; something of a beautifully well-bred 
child. 4

1. Zulileka Robson, p. 94
2. Ibid., p. 299
3. Eavan Boland, pp. 55 & 144
4. And Even Now, p. 64
Through imagery, Max seeks to recreate within his reader’s mind his own fleeting visions of truth, his own perception of reality:

but the silence that in Venice wakes you does not rouse you...Here is the dead of day. The sunlight is the yellow moonlight, and you, but that you are wide awake, are only mine...

Max expresses his perception of reality in the abstract images. On seeing the faded Byzantine splendour of Venice, Max feels ecstatic. She seems to him as unreal as a dream. Hence “Impalpable Venice! Frail vision!”.

In contrast, he seeks concrete images for the abstract things. Max treats the leaving of Goethe’s painting, unfinished as Rheinius’s defalcation. It was the only blot on the great poet’s unblotted face. It was, therefore, “a chip in the marble, a flaw in the crystal, just one thread loose in the great grand tapestry.”

Often Max expresses his subtle musings in the colour images:

1. I would wear on my conscience the white rose of theft and the red rose of arson.

2. The one-but-consumed binding shot forth little tongues of bright colour - flameslets of sapphire, amethyst, emerald.

There is freshness and unconventionality about Max’s images. For instance, his actor-friend Iat Goodwin possessed “a flower-like simplicity of soul”; in old age, King George’s crimson face was like “some ominous sunset”; in describing a storm-scene in English Channel, Swinburne’s head “swayed...like the wave-rocked boat itself”; or the Duke’s first full look at Julieka’s face was
seeing suddenly at close quarters some great bright
monument that one has long known only as a sun-caught
speck in the distance. 1

Virginia Woolf observes that a modern writer’s main
occupation is “the significant instant” – both the ‘Instant’ and
the ‘significant’. In order to give them shape he takes recourse
to imagery – the only means for assembling “outwardly the
scattered parts of the vision within.” 2 Max is deaf in giving a
distinct image to ‘the significant Instant’. On reading “Time,
Sarah Bernhardt’s Memoirs”, he communicates his excitement thus:

I wish I had read this book before I left London. In
a very small and simple village on the coast of Italy
I find it over-exciting. Gray and gentle are the olive-
trees around me, and the Mediterranean mildly leaps the
shore, with never a puff of wind for the fishermen,
whose mothers and wives and daughters sit plying their
bobbins all day long in the shade of the Piazza. In
mellow undertones they are gossiping, these women at
their work, all day long, day after day. Gossiping of
what, in this place where nothing perceptibly happens?
The stranger here loses his sense of life. A trance
softly envelops him. Imagine a somnambulist seeking to
find himself peering down a crater of a volcano, and
you will realise how startling Time, Sarah Bernhardt’s
book has to me. 3

For its effectiveness, the impressionistic writing depends
on both – the ‘descriptive’ as well as ‘symbolic’ imagery. Often
the impressionist seeks help of the ‘image-clusters’, such as
employed by Max to describe Goethe’s ‘posture’ in the paintings:

But the impression of the face is perfectly,
epitomically, of a great man surveying a great alien
scene and gauging its import not without a keen sense
of its dramatic conjunction with himself – Marius in
Carthage and Napoleon before the Sphinx, Northworth
on London Bridge and Cortez on the peak in Perien, but
most of all, certainly, Goethe in Campagna. 4

Quite often Max expresses his subtle ironical observations

1. Zuliska Pohson, p. 31
2. cf. S.H. Burton: Criticism of Prose (Longmans, 1973) p. 54
3. Around Theatres II, p. 329
4. And Even Now, p. 212
in the images of deep emotional appeal. For instance, he expresses his disgust for the veiled statue of King Umberto in an image thus:

eminent, amorphous, mysterious, there she stood, voluminous, ghastly beneath the moon. 1

Max's images of things and men become the symbols of his own idiosyncrasies. For an instance, the 'play-cottage' in 'Something Defeasible' is a symbol for the fragile "English Polity", and, thereby, signifies Max's misgivings about the Labour. 2 For the child Max, the setting in of Spring was not marked by the daffodils, but by the fact that the police-men wore, suddenly, "short tunics with steel buttons"; of Autumn by the fact that they wore "long thick frock-coats with buttons of copper." 3 Evidently, the uniform of the police-men symbolises Max's fascination for the 'dress' and the 'town'.

The most memorable images Max erects are those of the real and fictitious characters. W.B. Yeats' first impression - "a white streak of shirt-front, and above that a white streak of...Author's face...partly...obscured by...a lock of Author's raven hair" - symbolises his "insubstantiality." 4 Henry Irving, the great actor, was a magnanimous personality, and his humbleness, at times, gave Max the impression of "some mighty cardinal stooping to wash the feet of the pilgrims at the altar-steps." Ellen Terry's bow to the crowds seemed to him "the emotion of a wood-symph about to take her first plunge into the sea" - an image which symbolises Max's deep admiration for the Olympian beauty and the genuine artist. 5

1. And Even Now, p. 32
2. Ibid., pp. 220-3
3. Mainly On The Air, p. 23
4. Ibid., pp. 97-8
5. Around Theatres II, pp. 178 & 410
Lastly, Max's subtle caricatural images of the characters in *Seven Men* symbolise one or the other aspect of the literary nineties. For instance, Emoch Soames is:

a stooping, shambling person, rather tall, rather pale, with longish brownish hair. He had a thin vague beard — or rather, he had a chin on which a large number of hairs weakly curled and clustered to cover its retreat. He was an odd-looking person, but in the nineties odd apparitions were more frequent, I think, than they are now...I decided that 'dim' was the mot juste for him. 1

Soames's 'odd apparition' and 'dim' image symbolises a decadent poet, who failed to impress himself upon his age, though he asserted his modernness in life as well as literature.

Unless Max's 'syntactical peculiarities', which lend the inimitable conversational grace and ease to his style, are taken into account, any stylistic appreciation of his work will be incomplete. His 'special construction' of the sentences may truly be described as the 'Maxian':

Yet, sooner or later, write about him. I must.


Max's 'special constructions' depend on "word-order and certain hard-and-fast symbols of punctuation." Primarily, they depend on his favourite trick of 'Inversion' or 'Anastrophe'. Usually, in his sentences the predicate, or a part of it, precedes the subject:

*Us! that was the final touch of beauty.*

*Him! I guessed to be English. 3*

1. *Seven Men*, p. 6
2. *Ibid.*, p. 4
3. *Ibid.*., p. 62
In the arrangement of his sentences 'Comma' plays a significant part. It serves as a halting point, for Max wishes either to lay emphasis on something, or to introduce an ironic touch, or to strike a sharp, brisk note of playfulness:

No book-lover, I.

Release - ours, and our friend's - was not yet. 1

Came in, mark you.

His pride was in the castle, wholly. 2

The coincidence was curious, very.

...by the listless droop of it, his.

To be cut - deliberately cut - by him! I was, 3 I still am, furious having had that happen to me.

In order to drive his point home, Max changes the order of 's' or 'es' in the verbs:

But the writer? He can express a certain amount through his handwriting, if he write ( ) in an elastic way.

It matters not what title he receive,... 4

Or, he may write: "Carlyle...built a still nobler monument on the tragic ashes."

Like Henry James, for the sake of emphasis, Max, too, writes the verbs or the adverbs with the unusual 'capitals', or may italicise a word, or an expression:

I admire detachment.

I am not good at it. 5

I first saw him... 6

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1. Yet Again, pp. 103 & 19
2. And Even Now, pp. 151 & 175
3. Seven Men, pp. 43, 150 & 165
4. Work, p. 123
5. Yet Again, pp. 112, 140, 143 & 17
6. The Works, p. 29
Is? I mean you. But then, I mean also will be.

I shall not forget. I

The use of the 'elliptical expressions' is also a favourite trick of the humorist. Such an elliptical word as "...had not King Edw., I mean King Owaine" hints at Max's subtlety, for he aims at exposing W.B. Yeats' hurt feelings at not getting due acclamation, from King Edward the Seventh, for his fine play, The King's Threshold. Often Max uses ellipsis for reproducing the vague mental impressions:

And one day I know not how, there dawned on me a suspicion that he was - who? - someone I had known - some writer - what's - his - name? Something with an H - halfhy - Hillary halfhy of the long ago! 3

Ellipsis aims at describing the passing of fear and hope in the human breast:

And how about mere robber and cut-throat? Suppose - but look! that streak, yonder, look! - The Golden Nugget. 4

Or, at suggesting a turn of thought:

Does Mr. Shaw mean that the idealist must necessarily... Peace, peace! There is no meaning. 5

Max is quite daft in producing the crisp, short, impressionistic phrases and the 'staccato' sentences, followed either by a 'question-mark', or the 'sign of exclamation':

Life-like? They? Rather do they give you the illusion of death.

Catalepsy! Death! That is the atmosphere I am breathing.

Why do we call the collectors of current coin a miner? Stretched? He? 6

1. And Again, pp. 111 & 25
2. Around Theatres II, p. 36
3. Seven, p. 62
4. And Again, pp. 120-1
5. Around Theatres II, p. 344
6. Yet Again, pp. 138 & 239
Anarchist? Yes; I have no defence to offer...I am a Tory Anarchist.

It has to be appreciated that the arrangement of the 'staccatoes' depends on the proper placing of 'the signs of punctuation.' Max imparts a natural flow to his sentences by an apt use of 'Comma,' 'Colon,' 'Semi-colon' etc.

He was very sound on the subject of Mary, and so was I...

He stands a mock to the pious, a shame and incumbr to the emancipated; received, yet hushed up; exalted, yet made a fool off; taken and left; a monument to fate's malice. 1

He did not sue; he invited; he did not invite; he commanded. 2

Very well: what island shall we go to? and what boat shall we sail by? 3

In fact, the racy, breathless 'staccato' is a modern invention. Any stylist like Max tries, in the written words, to cope up with the stimulus of the increased pace, at which we live at present. The modern style remains alert to the little things rather than to the big ones. The staccato aims at reflecting the writer's complex mental state. And it draws sustenance from the marks of punctuation. Max's fastidiousness in the matter of punctuation was as great as Wilde's. A misplaced 'Comma' on the page 124 of The Lorka made him wretched for his whole life.

There are a few more 'syntactical peculiarities, that impart an absurd brilliance to Max's style. Usually, he omits an introductory 'There' in such sentences as:

Ever was so absolute an obsession. 5

1. And Even Now, pp. 191 & 269 & 42
2. Women's P. 4
3. Around Theatres, II, p. 490
4. The Lorka, p. 133
5. 'St Cover's: The Saturday Review, 20 Aug., 1898, pp. 232-3
In Max's text such playful constructions are not infrequent as: "No shock is more severe than the shock of seeing naked a face hirsute hitherto." 1

Max's other pet trick is to drop 'to do' from the sentences: She saw it, but heeded not.
But skill came not to her. 2

He often applies double or triple 'negatives':
She did not work for no wages at all.
The whole notion of domestic service has never not seemed to me unnatural.

Max's use of the 'Passives', too, yields happy results:
The pond waded through by cart-horses...barked around by excitable dogs and cruised on by toy boats. 3

The use of the 'Comparative' adverbs, such as "rarerlier", or "quicklier"; and the 'Superlatives', such as "grimliest" or the unrecognised adjective "littliest". 4 are not uncommon in Max.

Max's stylistic excellence results from his 'Neologisms', too. For instance, he may coin the expressions, such as "She knows herself by hearsay and readwrite"; 5 "This, surely, it to go two better than Endymion"; or "It passes recedes". 6 and so on.

In a playful mood, Max breaks the idiomatic expressions, for instance:
Bolts that cannot be dodged strike us kindliest from the blues; 7
Or
The self-appointed task of cutting certain capers.

1. *Around Theatres II.* p. 291
2. *Zuleika Dobson,* pp. 5 & 64
3. *And Even Now,* pp. 166 & 174 & 180
4. *Zuleika Dobson,* p. 5
5. 'Parlour Melodrama.' *The Saturday Review,* 19 Oct. 1901, pp. 494-6
6. *Yet Again,* pp. 126-7
7. *Ibid.,* pp. 27 & 139
Lastly, there are some less important tricks, or the 'mannerisms' of Max's constructions. One of them is "repetition" - "I quailed, I quailed", or "but, but I felt it did not want to be spoken to," The other is 'compound expression' - "my seldom sinking and alas - never - soaring way", or "A neck-to-neck race", and so on.

Max's style is distinguished for both - its familiar tone and its rhythmic effect. He not only had an "unusually fine 'feel' for the shape of the sentence", but was gifted, too, with an "unusual ear for the sound of words." They led to his especial construction of the sentences and the exquisite 'cadences', which express the very tone of his emotions. Max is as skilled in devising the cadences as many a poet is. They are short and long; they limit to a short sentence, or to a 'purple patch', or spread over a whole essay like 'Mangled King'.

Max creates a rhythmic effect by 'parallelism':
They went away, I suppose, next morning; jointly or singly; singly, I imagine. 5

He bows, and we bow; subsides, and we subside...

Though Max pretends not to alliterate, he often alliterates for creating a rhythmic effect:
The fire blanches and blanches, covers, crumbles and collapses. 6

I never tired of that little bell-like euphony:
those funny little lucid and level trills. 7

1. And Even Now, pp. 180 & 67
2. 'Epistle Dedicatory': Around Theatres I, p. vii
3. Seven Men, p. 58
4. N.L. Clay: op.cit., p. xiv
5. And Even Now, p. 7
6. Yet Again, pp. 269 & 10
7. And Even Now, p. 268
Max's alliterative words follow different patterns. They may be 'parisyllabic' - "aloof and aloft"; they may be 'assonating' - "language...landscape"; they may be 'non-assonating' - "chancer and changes"; or two members may be connected etymologically - "vivid and vital", and so on.

In fact, Max's cadences gather much effect from 'assonance'.

He was unequalled in the management of the vowel sounds:

When first the little battlement rose about the red-rose roof of his mouth. 1

Can he behave as though nothing had happened?
Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe tried to do so. 2

'Homophony' is the sure means of Max the poet in prose:
I address myself to the frailer, cowardlier, needier men. 3

Very well, Vagula, have your own Wayula! 4

Lastly, Max achieves a rhythmic effect by contrasting the monosyllabics with the polysyllabics; the short sentences with the periods:

In its sleepy, chilly shell my soul was still shuddering and whispering. 5

The flames had been surrounded, driven back, stricken, at length, as they lay cowering and desperate, in their last embers. But as they died, there leapt from my heart's core a great residuary flame of indignation. It is still burning. 6

The setting of such sentences adds a lyrical quality to his prose as:

I should clutch nothing, he wasn't tangible. He was realistic. He wasn't real. He was opaque. He wasn't solid. 7

1. The Works, p. 32
2. And Even Now, p. 207
3. Yet Again, p. 64
4. And Even Now, p. 188
5. Yet Again, p. 228
6. None, p. 58
7. Seven Men, p. 83
In the prose rhythms, Max follows the rule laid down by De Quincey: "Flux and reflux, swell and cadence, that is the movement for a sentence." In them, one marks a keen interplay of the 'pitch' and the 'stress' elements - along with the 'syntactical' perfection. Max, thus, draws the cadences to express the very tone of his emotions. This one, for instance, aims at expressing his sense of pity for the poor 'clergyman':

Fragmentary, pale, momentary; almost nothing; glimpsed and gone; as it were, a faint human hand thrust up, never to reappear from beneath the rolling waters of Time, he forever haunts my memory and solicits my weak imagination.

He sings out his deep appreciation for Swinburne's poetic genius thus:

He was not a thinker: his mind rose from reason to rhapsody; neither was he human. He was a king crowned but not throned. He was a singing bird that could build no nest. He was a youth who could not afford to age.

He gives a poetic expression to his keen sense of utter waste of 'good' in this world thus:

Might it always be thus? - always the same old tale of growth and greatness and overthrow, nothingness?

The castle was shedding its sides, leaping, dwindling, landslipping - gone. O Nineveh! And now another - O Memphis? Rome? - yielded to cataclysm.

Max gives a rhythmic expression to his ironic sense, such as to the notion of the 'National Theatre':

Oh wooden bricks! Oh sand! Oh permanence of the imaginary faculty! Oh fuss! Oh pomp!

He may communicate the sense of movement of a 'rocking-horse' thus:

Forward! Backward! Faster, faster! To Floor! To Ceiling!

1. cf. C. I. Burton: The Criticism of Prose, p. 79
2. And Even Now, p. 227
3. ibid., p. 58
4. ibid., p. 221
5. Around Theatres II, p. 434
6. Yet Again, p. 77
Or, lastly, Max is equally capable of expressing his deeper human feelings. For instance, he intones his sorrowfulness in 'William and Mary' thus:

"The tinkle of bells" was so like something I had known, so recognisable, and, oh, recognising, that I was lost in wonder. And long must have I remained standing at that door, for I heard the sound often, often. I must have rung again and again, tenaciously, vehemently, in my folly. 1

Max was of the view that a writer's prose might attain to the dignity of poetry, in case he expresses himself exactly and beautifully and with effortless ease. "Its rhythm might become as magical as the rhythms of poetry. They might be even more magical, inasmuch they were subtler and rarer." 2 According to Riewald, the latter part of the utterance is suggestive of Max's insistence on the "slight exaltation of prose at the cost of poetry." He adds further:

"It shows Max as the child of his age, i.e. of the Nineties, and I think he may very well have been among Richard Le Gallienne's 'young punks', who, in the Nineties, declared that prose was the greater art of the two." 3

To a modern critic, Max's view may seem 'unfashionable', for the present-day 'norms' require the prose to be 'close', 'naked', positive, clear, and easy. According to Arthur Clutton-Brock, the musical quality of prose is a virtue on the wrong side. 4

The great prose-makers - Logan Pearsall Smith and Max, seem to him 'unfashionable'. However, 'every virtue' for Max, is the mean between two extremes. The fact, that he liked to write exactly as well as beautifully, and loved in the creative work a bit of imaginative glow, a bit of poetry, cannot be ignored. Therefore,

1. And Even Now, p. 276
2. 'A Needed Rend' (Academy, London, 8 Feb. 1902) pp. 149-50
3. J.G. Riewald: op. cit., p. 174
he supports F.L. Lucas's view:

"Prose in poetry is a blemish like ink on a swan; but prose without poetry becomes too often as drab and lifeless as a Sunday in London."

It has to be admitted that Max is a 'born stylist' — a direct descendant of G. Flaubert, Peter, Wilde, Whistler, and Garsell Smith.

Max has the double distinction of a writer and a broadcaster. He not only excelled in the 'written' English, but in the 'spoken', too. Apparently, there seems no difference between these two modes of the language. But the speaker composes for the 'ear' of the listener, he, therefore, uses "a series of sounds which symbolise 'meanings'". His is a bit different procedure from the writer's, who composes for both — the 'eye' and the 'ear' of the reader. His language, therefore, is the "series of letters which symbolise sounds, which themselves symbolise 'meanings'."² Max's 'spoken essays' are composed for the 'ear' of his listener. His sentences are notable for a bit of looser construction, and for more compound structure. In short, they imitate a talker's manner. He chooses words, and fits them into the sentences which intone the modulations of his own voice. The following quote from 'London Revisited' illustrates the quality of Max's spoken English:

"London is a bright, cheerful, salubrious hell, certainly. But still — to my mind — hell... Cavalcanti's soul was shocked by it; and then Dostoevski's; and presently Monsieur Ludovic Halévy's; and in due course Mr. Henry James's. I too am human... Had I been acting as guide to those distinguished visitors, I should have...

1. F.L. Lucas: op.cit., p. 140
2. L.H. Burton: op.cit., p. 67
tried to convince them that no such places existed, save in the creative alien fancy. But I ask myself: suppose those distinguished visitors rose from their graves to-day and asked me to show them round the sights that would best please their aesthetic sensibilities in the London of this year of Grace, what should I say, what do, in my patriotic embarrassment? I suppose I would, with vague waves of the hand, stammeringly redirect them to their graves.

On the whole, Max's efficient and sensible use of English language in written as well as spoken form, brings him credit as a writer and talker of universal appeal. In fact, the voice of the essays and the broadcasts is not only a gentlemanly voice, but the voice of 'a friend in one's room'.

"Style", Middleton Burry remarks, "is a quality of language which communicates precisely emotions or thoughts, peculiar to the author." Max's style is the appropriate medium of self-expression. He is an aesthete, and it serves as 'means' to his 'ends'. He justifies that 'style is the man'.

1. Mainly On The Air, pp. 7-8
2. The Problem of Style (OUP, 1922), p. 71