Happiness, or the art of living, consists in the free and successful expression of one's own personality.

Sir Harold Nicolson:

THE ART OF LIVING
Max Beerbohm is an outstanding twentieth-century essayist. He deserves to be ranked with Sir Thomas Browne, Charles Lamb, Thackeray, and other "essayists of the Centre." In order to justify Max's claim, one ought to know the essay as a literary form. The first part of this chapter, therefore, deals with the form. The other part considers the themes in Max's pure essays. It aims at framing a picture of Max's mind - a mind which duly animates his essays. Having appraised Max's themes, one may properly assess his intention and technique in the essays.

'Essay' has been defined by many eminent scholars like Dr. Johnson. But its nature being vague and scope unlimited, it is still open to discussion; it, in fact, eludes definition. The individual variations in the use of the art-form make the task harder. However, any comprehensive account of the essay entails simply the enumeration of those salient points that are commonly noticed in the leading essays. They may be stated, in short, as its brevity, a quest for style and a wish to entertain. R.D. O'Leary's definition embraces, more or less, these very points.

He considers the essay:

a short piece of prose, expository in general character, literary rather than matter of fact or didactic, in a style that departs from the level of plain assertion.

Now Bacon's essays conform to this description, and so do Montaigne's. But their essays are easily distinguishable

1. Hugh Walker: The English Essay and Essayists (S.Chand & Co., Delhi, 1959) p. 4
from each other due to their spirit, tone, and style. This distinction basically results from their individualities and temperaments. In fact, they are responsible in establishing the two major traditions of the essay: the 'Impersonal' and the 'Personal', respectively. These essays possess the characteristics of their own. Bacon's essay is abstract: it deals, in an impersonal manner, with the subjects of ethical, philosophical, and psychological nature. Its method being usually logical, it employs scanty illustrative material of an impersonal nature. Comparatively, Montaigne's essay is concrete: it usually deals with the generalised aspect of things and people. Its method being discursive, it deals, in a personal manner, with "the external conditions of a subject only as it affects the writer."¹ It employs the illustrative material of personal nature in abundance, usually as outcome of the essayist's introspection. In other words, the central theme in this kind of the essay is the writer himself. Montaigne asserts, "It is not my acts I write, it is I, it is my essence."²

The point may be better illustrated from Bacon's 'On Friendship' and Montaigne's De la Amitie - two essays on a common theme. The former is an impersonal, aphoristic and logical exposition of 'friendship'; the latter is a personal, concrete, and discursive account of the author's grief at the death of his friend de la Hostie. Bacon's 'On Friendship' is a kind of philosophical tract; Montaigne's De la Amitie is a personal document of grief, enshrining the essayist's poignant feelings.

caused by the irreparable loss. In this way, the essayist reveals himself and, thereby, approaches the theme of friendship, a bond of love and mutual understanding. On the whole, the essayist identifies himself with the humanity. Montaigne's personal approach in the essay seems to be a direct outcome of "the primitive need of the writer - to know, to master, to tell ... about himself, to speak his mind by speaking his mind." 1

It is noteworthy that it is Montaigne's French tradition, not Bacon's native one that has flourished in English literature. It particularly suited the English individualistic temperament. Montaigne's experiment proved so fruitful that one notices a long chain of personal essayists right from Sir Thomas Browne and Lamb to Max Beerbohm and others in the present century. Hugh Walker describes them "the essayists of the centre."

In fact, the concrete, personal, and discursive form of the essay has been enriched and perfected to such an extent that it is classed as pure literature. It is treated as the prose lyric - the most subjective literary form. The critics unanimously agree with Alexander Smith's account:

The essay, as a literary form, resembles the lyric in so far as it is moulded by some central mood - whimsical, serious, or satirical. Give the mood, and the essay grows around it as cocoon grows around a silkworm. 2

According to Smith, the primary need of the essay, therefore, is the 'central mood'. It may be whimsical and serious as in Montaigne, Browne, or Lamb; it may be half -

satirical and half-ironical as in Thackeray and Max. The presence of the elements of satire and irony, along with the sentimental and the reminiscential, in the latter, sets them in a class apart from the non-satirical essayists like Lamb and his followers. Riewald regards it as "the splitting up of the 'chatty' tradition" of Montaigne's essay in the present times.¹

The essayist's mood is stimulated by the objects of a very trivial nature. Max's own is set to motion by odd objects, such as an old rocking-horse, the fragments of an expensive fan, an incomplete canvas of Goethe, or a defunct railway-carriage, and a number of imaginary things, say, books within books, unseen faces, or hands etc. The essayist's especiality lies in transmuting the common things into the objects of undefinable beauty. It need not be stressed that he is in no degree lesser than the poet Wordsworth on whose 'inward eye' the daffodils flash 'fluttering and dancing in the breeze.' In short, these essayists have a bent of mind quite akin to the romantic poets. Due to their romantic spirit it is established that Lamb, Hazlitt, Stevenson, Max and others are the romantic poets of the English prose.² It is remarkable that given the mood, the essayist becomes:

a chartered libertine and a law unto himself
a quick ear and eye, an ability to discern
infinite suggestiveness of common things, a
brooding meditative spirit, are all that the
essayist requires to start with; ³

and during the process, he reveals much of his individuality and
temperament. On account of the personal element, Montaigne

2. H.R. Low: *op.cit.*, p. 223
3. Alexander Smith: *op.cit.*, p. 30
calls his essays *Cas imanties* or "these toys of mine"; Browne calls them "diversions";¹ and Max "the creatures of my fancy."²

The 'central mood' also reflects itself on the choice of the illustrative material other than the personal one. In the earlier essayists there is an effusion of the classical and other references. They are suitably incorporated in the texts of their essays. In Max, beside such references, there is an effort to look back at the immediate past. As that of Thackeray, his sentimental attachment to the later Victorian era and the eighteenth century results in an ironical survey of the values of his own age, in contrast with those of the preceding ones.

The central mood comprises two more elements—sentimentality and discursiveness. They are duly noticed in Thackeray's *Roundabout Papers*, and in Max's essays, too. These elements denote the essayist's leisurely state. Alexander Smith points out that the essayist needs a cultured atmosphere to work effectively in. That is why, he comes late in the history of literature.³

The presence of the strong 'central mood' in the essay anticipates the 'obtrusion' of the artist's personality. It can only be done by the means of an appropriate style. In the essay, style, therefore, is the most important factor. Max's own remarks on this point are illuminative:

1. J.C. Riewald: *op.cit.*, p. 93
2. 'Preface' to *More*, First Edition, 1899 (Heinemann, 1922) p. iii
3. Alexander Smith: *op.cit.*, p. 30
Himself is the thing to be obtruded, and style
the only means to this end. Whatever style is,
there too is the author. 1

On this principle essay differs from the story. The
story-teller has to efface himself. So observes that some of
the stories of Stevenson are marred by the narrator's own
presence in them. Max has ingeniously saved his own essays from
falling into the category of the story by introducing to them a
strong central mood and a highly individual style. This is worth
noticing in the pieces like 'Poor Rosal'. 'No.2. The Fines',
'Seeking People Off', and others. Riewald briefly mentions the
significance of style in the essay thus: "It is the personality,
or in other words, the central mood, the tone, not the substance,
that makes the essay." 2 The modern critics, such as P.V.D. Shelly 3
and Ernest Rhys 4, also emphasize the same point in their
definitions of the essay. It has to be admitted that the essay
requires an effective style, casually illuminative of its theme,
and germane to the intellectual mood of its writer. A.C. Ward
has very wisely suggested that the quest for a style should not

1. 'Mr. Anthony Hope's Talent', 'Saturday Review', London,
10 Feb. 1900, pp. 169-70

2. J.G. Riewald: op.cit., p. 86

3. P.V.D. Shelly defines the essay as "a short prose composition,
in which the author writing of himself, or
something that is nearer to his heart, discloses
his personality in an intimate and familiar way."
The Familiar Essay (University of Pennsylvania
Public Lectures 1916-17, Phila. 1917) p. 227

4. Ernest Rhys observes: "There is no form of writing in which the
fluid idiom of language can be seen to better
effect in its change and in its movement. There
is none in which the play of individuality, and
the personal way of looking at things and the
grace and whimsicality of men and women can be
so well fitted with an agreeable and responsive
instrument."

A Century of English Essays (E.L. No. 653) p. vi
result in the neglect of the substance. He remarks: "The most impressive essayists, of course, give equal importance to the matter and manner." 1

Virginia Woolf adds another important rider to the requirements of the essay. To her, an essay must be capable of "giving pleasure". An essayist can achieve the end in case he knows how to write. She observes that the essayist must be able to "draw the curtain around us, but it must be a curtain that shuts us in, not out." 2 It has, however, to be appreciated that the great essayists have genuinely met the demand. Max's essays fulfil the mission perfectly. Ernest Rhys comments that the essay can not neglect the one condition that "it be entertaining, easy to read, pleasant to remember." 3

In short, beside its brevity, the personal essay contains three fundamental characteristics: the central mood, the individual style and the capacity to entertain. An ideal essayist more or less fulfils these conditions. The account of the personal essay may only be summed up with the befitting observation of N.H. Low: The way in which these essayists view life, muse upon its meaning and discover truth and beauty in simple things makes their appeal comparable to that of the poet. They work in the spirit of the creative artist. They deal with the stuff of the imagination and the emotions, and in a manner to give full play to their individuality and temperament. 4

3. Ernest Rhys: op.cit., p. vi
Max Beerbohm has produced four volumes of essays, namely, The Works of Max Beerbohm, More, Yet Again, and And Even Now. Some of the essays are also collected in A Variety of Things. Along with these written essays, some of Max’s essays on general themes are in the spoken form. They are collected in Mainly On The Air—a volume of his broadcasts on the BBC. They are included in this thematic discussion since they disclose the essayist’s uniformity of outlook on life.

In a chronological order, the earliest collection of Max’s essays is The Works of Max Beerbohm. It consists of seven essays. It was edited and published by John Lane, the proprietor of the Bodley Head in 1896. Max wrote these essays, between 1893 and 1895, as an undergraduate at Oxford and London. They had already appeared in The Yellow Book and the other periodicals of the day. These occasional pieces were duly revised before giving them to the slender volume. The title for the meagre work suggests the writer’s impish spirit and of the editor as well who annexed, as if to enhance the mock effect, a bibliography to The Works.

The themes of these essays disclose Max’s keen awareness of the decadent consciousness in the literature of the nineties. The subjects, such as Artifice, Dandyism, Regency revival, and Aestheticism, interested him greatly. Ellen Moers observes: “In fact, it was as a prophet and popularizer of these subjects that his early reputation was made.”¹ These essays betray Oscar Wilde’s influence on the young essayist. One notices that to a fair extent, he was in sympathy with the ‘fin de siecle’ trends. He rather leaves an impression that he is a product of the new

¹ The Dandy, p. 325
sensibility. But at the same time, he adopted a grave 'pose', that baffled the reader in the nineties. In fact, Max's ambivalent attitude to the new movement lends piquancy to his essays. His affected cool poise invited Wilde's witty comment: "The gods have bestowed on Max the gift of perpetual old age."\(^1\)

Of the seven essays in _The Works_, the four are written under the direct influence of Oscar Wilde. They are 'The Pervasion of Rouge', 'Dandies and Dandies', '1880', and 'Diminuendo'. Riewald names them, after the then home of Wildes, 'The Trite Street' group of essays.\(^2\)

'The Pervasion of Rouge' needs specific mention. With it, Max made his debut in the field of writing. It first appeared, as 'A Defence of Cosmetics', in the opening number of _The Yellow Book_ in April 1894. The essay champions the cause of Artifices, and heralds its re-entry into the English life in reaction against Victorian naturalness and simplicity.

> For behold! the Victorian era comes to its end and the day of sancte simplicitas is quite ended. The old signs are here and portents to warn the seer of life that we are ripe for an epoch of artifices.\(^3\)

Max traces the importance of cosmetics to the Roman practice, as described in Ovid's _Art of Love_. He substantiates his arguments with the reminiscential details, such as the reference to Cissy Loftus - a musical hall artiste of the nineties, and his first lady-love, who, despite her natural grace, succumbed to the temptation of rouge. He concludes the essay at an exalted note: "Time of jolliness and glad indulgence!"

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1. See Hesketh Pearson: _The Life of Oscar Wilde_ (Methuen, 1946) p. 182
2. C.G. Riewald: _op.cit._, p. 74
3. _The Works of Max Beerbohm_, p. 85
Artifice sweetest exile, is come into her kingdom... Let us
dance her welcome.  

The essay is of vital importance in Max's history as a
writer. It registers his sympathy with the 'fin de siècle' revolt
against Victorian solemnity and sobriety. It rather appears that
he, himself, is its outstanding manifestation. Some of his
observations seem to be the echoes of Wilde's. Particularly this
one is another version of the maestro's pronouncement that Art is
superior to Life and Nature:

For the era of rouge is upon us, and as only in
an elaborate era can man, by the accrescence of
his own pleasures and emotions, reach that
refinement which is highest excellence, and by
making himself, so to say, independent of Nature,
came nearest to God... Artifice is the strength
of the World.  

In fact, the essay owes its importance not so much to
its substance as to its tone. It is certainly not "the pleasing
'Yellow Book' nonsense", or "a combination of English rowdism
with French lubricity" - as the angry critics denounced it. It
was meant to be a piece of "good jokes", since it aimed at
burlesquing Peter and parodying Wilde. It presents Max as a
humorist in the offfing, who formed a pleasant skit on the
'Precious School'. It did not hit the mark due to its oblique
manner and grave 'pose'. The perfect assimilation of the 'central
mood' with the 'pose' led to the misunderstanding of his tone and
purpose. Due to its method, it may be categorised as a real
caricature in prose. Due to its contents, it may be considered

1. The Works of Max Beerbohm. p. 106
2. Ibid., p. 89
3. Comment in the Times, April, 1894
4. Max Beerbohm: 'Letter to the Editor', The Yellow Book,
July, 1894, pp. 291-4
"an ironical contribution to the culture of the artificial" in line with Baudelaire's *In Praise of Cosmetics* and Arthur Symons' poem, *Maquillage*.¹

However, 'The Pervasion of Rouge' is quite characteristic of a young writer, who took up writing in a transitional period, such as the Edwardian. It reveals an individuality, which combines the qualities—old and new. The new pricked him to support the 'fin de siecle' revolt, the old goaded him to make fun of his decadent friends for their excesses in literature and life. Such an ambivalent attitude to things is traced by Edmund Wilson to the presence of the native and the alien strains in Max's personality.²

If artificiality crept into English life in the form of cosmetics, it also showed itself in the increased love of 'the fashionable dresses'. Max marked the stress of the decade on fashion. The 'modern dress', as a subject, occupied him to the extent that he devoted four essays to its appropriateness. When he decided to give his essays to *The Works*, he skimmed the cream of these essays and wrote 'Dandies and Dandies' afresh. With it, the book begins. It interprets 'dandyism' in the light of the practice of the acknowledged dandies like Whistler, Wilde, and himself. The essay, in fact, is an improvement on Barbey d’Aureville's philosophy of dandyism, who took for his model Beau Brummell, a dandy of the Regency.² In contrast to d’Aureville's

1. Derek Stanford: *op. cit.* p. 211

* The four essays were 'The Incomparable Beauty of Modern Dress' (*The Spirit Lamp*, 1893), 'Dandies and Dandies' (*Vanity, New York*, 1895), 'Notes on Poppery' (*Unicorn, London*, 1895), & 'De Natura Barbatulorum' (*Chap-Book, Chicago*, 1896)

** A. Barbey d’Aureville: *Le Dandyisme et de Georges Brummell* (Paris, 1845)
sartorial dandyism, Max's dandyism is intellectual. "Dandyism", he writes, "is ever the outcome of a carefully chosen temperament, not part of temperament itself."¹ Like Beau Brummell, Max's dandy is not a clothes-wearing man.² His dandyism affects the whole demeanour: it requires a selfless devotion to the art of dressing oneself suitably, a tinge of egoism, and a love of repose. Max pursues the theme to the full in Zuliska Dobson - a burlesque novel on the dandy tradition.

In '1830', Max makes a historical survey of the 'aesthetic movement', started by Whistler and Wilde. He records "the antithesis between art and fashion" in the year. The essay evokes a gentle criticism of the leaders of the movement. On account of such pieces, Max has been described as "albeit loosely the historical conscience of the period."³

While 'Diminuendo' is reserved for the final treatment, the essays, written on the Regency background, may be considered here. These essays centre round the 'Carlton House'. They are 'King George the Fourth', 'A Good Prince', and 'Poor Romeo'.

'King George the Fourth' is an important essay. It is a mock - rehabilitation of the Regent's character. It is a modified version of Thackeray's portrait of the Regent in Four Georges.*

Max accounts for the circumstances that made George a voluptuary, a dandy, and a pleasure seeking monarch. He holds him responsible in introducing to his society the Regency attitudes - gambling,

1. The Works, p. 10
2. ibid., p. 8
3. G. Moore: op.cit., p. 316
* W.H. Thackeray: The English Humorists: Four Georges (L.L.1860)
drinking, debauchery etc. Max's interest in the Regency was awakened by the mode of life of the Prince - Regent Edward Albert. Max saw in him the spirit of his great-grand uncle incarnated. The mock-serious tone of the essay led to an adverse criticism, to which Max replied: "I meant all I said about George, but I did not choose to express myself seriously."

"Poor Romeo!" is written in ridicule of the whims of the Regent and other noblemen of the Regency. The essay centres round 'Romeo Coates' - a Bath hero, who falls prey to the evil designs of the revengeful Miss Emma Tilney Long. Under her pursuit, he enacts 'Romeo' and cuts a sorry figure. Though he is a laughing-stock, he takes himself seriously. Max wits: "Only the insane tell themselves quite seriously."

The comment explains Max's attitude to one's seriousness in personal convictions. He was the sceptic, who did not approve the positiveness of any thought or philosophy. He saw that the tragedy of the decadents occurred due to their seriousness about the personal convictions. Max considered the wisdom of the ages and sense to be the safer guides to life. It has to be appreciated that, due to such an approach, Max survived the 'fin de siecle' without tragedy, breakdown, or scandal. The theme reappears in the essays, such as 'A Case for Prometheus', 'On Shakespeare's Birthday', and 'Laughter'.

"Diminuendo" is the concluding essay of The Works. Originally written as 'Be It Cosiness', it was contributed to The Regent in December 1895. This autobiographical piece is

1. 'An Interview with Ada Lovelace' - cf. David Cecil's Max (1964)
2. The Works, p. 124
'The Tintern Abbey' of The Works. It is Max's solemn and dignified personal manifesto on the future course of his life. Its tone and substance are different from the other essays. Terminating at a quieter note, it provides a natural and musical conclusion to the book.

Like A.C. Benson's hero, the writer resolves to adopt a pattern of life 'out of harm's way'. He opts for a calm and quiet life to be spent in the service of 'thought, the highest energy of man.' He decides to make himself "the master of some small area of physical life, a life of quiet monotonous simplicity, exempt from all outer disturbances." He declares himself to be an 'observer' of life, who revels in musing on human nature. His intellectual life abounds in "the pleasures of imagination." He sets himself to the task of unfolding the mystery of life, since it is "the only mystery, such mystery as besets the eyes of children."²

Such an option in life was an outcome of Max disillusionment of Peter's philosophy. Max found the way of living, as proposed in The Conclusion, impracticable, since it resulted in the tragedy of the decadents. He neither approved the wanton and frivolous life of the upper segment of society in London. The nullity of "the life of action", as that of the decadents and the Rince-Regent, guided him to a faith in the humdrum Victorian ways.³

Max's success, as a writer in the nineties, left him in no illusion about the strain of the creative process. He found it to be overwhelming. The essay ends at a note of Swagger:

1. cf. Max Beerbohm's A Christmas Garland (Harmsworth, 1922) pp. 21-27
2. The Works, pp. 134-5
And I...shall write no more. Already I feel a trifle outmoded. I belong to the Beardsley period... Indeed, I stand aside with no regret. For to be outmoded is to be a classic, if one has written well. I have acceded to the hierarchy of good scribes and rather like my niche. 1

That the essay gives proof of Mar's precocity, and that the prophesies he made about himself, incidentally, came true in his after-life, does not obscure the fact that in the nineties it was treated as a perfect manifestation of a 'pose'. S. Hoare is of the view that the budding essayist was seized with the problem of finding "the fresh subject-matter", and "the young-old" pose could be the "most freshly original" in a decade of poses. 2 It is, however, undeniable that the essay produces, in advance, a picture of Mar's 'genuine self' - the guiding spirit of the mature writings. The 'genuine self' consisted of the qualities, such as scepticism, conservatism, intellectual dandyism, aestheticism, and comedy. And, lastly, 'Diminuendo' reproduces Abraham Cowley's manner, 3 that, in recent times, is anticipated by James Agate. 4

1. ibid., p. 192
2. S. Hoare: The Dandy, pp. 324-5
3. A. Cowley writes in 'On Myself': "I confess I love littleness almost in all things. A little convenient estate, a little cheerful house, a little company, and a very little feast; and if I were ever to fall in love again...it would be, I think, with prettiness rather than with majestic beauty..." Even when I was a young boy at school, instead of running about on holidays and playing with my fellows, I was wont to steal from them and walk into the fields, either alone with a book, or with some companion, if I could find any of the same temper."

Quoted in Hugh Walker: The English Essay and Essayist, pp. 83

4. J. Agate writes in 'Likes and Dislikes': "What I am driving at is that life is never as exquisite as it appears on the surface. I am plagued with the keen appreciation of the tendency of things to find their own level, I see the world through common sense spectacles."

A Book of Essays (Ed.) R. Williams (Penguin, 1965) p. 270
Notwithstanding his announcement that he wished not to write any more, Max continued writing. He published More - the second volume of his essays, in 1899. It, too, consisted of the occasional pieces, contributed to the periodicals after 1896. It is remarkable that Max did not name the book in an independent order. Along with the subsequent volumes of essays, it is conceived as a sequel to the principal work - The Works of Max Beerbohm.

The title More is suggestive. It seems to suggest that the writer has broadened the field of his activity, since, in place of the Regency period, the essays recall the years of his boyhood and youth. It further seems to imply that the writer aims at revealing the more shades of his individuality in the book. In order to materialise his plan, Max has introduced a variety of themes on social, cultural, literary and personal backgrounds. They offered him better opportunity to express himself.

The essays on the social subjects, such as royalty, fashionable crazes of the time etc., reveal Max as an acute social critic, a social historian, and a person of sense and sensibility.

No other subject drew Max's attention greater than 'royalty'. He devoted many essays and caricatures to the subject. His attitude to the royal personages was half-appreciative. In 'Some Words on Royalty', he traces the continuance of the monarchy to man's "idolatrous instinct." In order to avoid the wastage of huge sums of public money on royalty, Max proposes that the "royal function could quite satisfactorily be done by automata made of wax." He takes up the subject in 'Porro unum...'

1. The Works and More (The Bodley Head, 1952) p. 134
too, where he expresses his sympathy with the king rather than with the representative head of a republic. It is indicative of Max's Tory leanings.

'Pretending' is a philosophical essay. Its theme is Baconian, but its treatment is familiar. The burden of the essay is that pretending is a universal phenomena. All of us pretend in order to impress others, not ourselves. The wise Max beseeches us to remain ourselves, but he knows well: "to enjoy, simply, the things that are ours is a philosophy beyond us", and "We are all of us, always in every thing, straining after the contraries."¹ In 'Ichabod', Max reconsiders the theme.

Max was a great critic of the fashionable crazes of the time. One of the crazes was 'bicycling' — especially the women bicyclists invited his severe criticism. In 'Fashion and Her Bicycle', he rails at the 'new woman' who came to prominence in the nineties. He contrasts his aristocratic bent with the proletarian. The rise of the 'feminine sex' alarmed the orthodox Max. He deplores that women were becoming as rare as ladies. Max's views are consistent on the relationship of the 'sexes' right from 'The Pervasion of Rouge' to 'A Crime'. His final overtures to the subject are contained in 'Bloomsbury to Gaiwater.'²

Max was greatly annoyed at the 'vogue for children' in the nineties. He could not agree to the unlimited freedom, given them. The notion of simplicity in every thing did not come home to him. Therefore, the relaxed atmosphere of the Edwardian

2. ibid., p.
nursery did not appeal to him. The moralist looks back with
appreciation to the disciplinary and oppressive Victorian
nurseries, since they equipped the children, mentally, to face
the harsh realities of life. He holds: "Oppression never crushes
natural instincts. All history proves that it does but intensify
them." But the writer is only a detached observer. He knows that
the things take their own course. The detached social critic
concludes 'A Cloud of Pinafores' at a witty and subtle note:

Personally, I like to think that this passion for
simplicity was the sign of a lessening complexity.
But wisdom beget very poor thoughts. I write what
I believe to be true about this Victorian era. Good
has been followed by evil, evil by the love of
simple things. Observe I write no fool's prattle
about la fin du siecle... But we may be allowed to
laugh, when we see that this century, for which
science promised a mature perfection, is vanishing
behind a white cloud of pinafores.

The essay registers Max's approval for the good old
Victorian things and disapproval for the 'fin de siecle' trends
and the modernity. Virginia Woolf praises the essay for its
restrained manner, easy grace, gentle irony, and sheer wisdom.
She considers Max as "the prince of his art." It is Max's sense
and wisdom and the love of the tradition that leads to Jackson's
view that his is 'the representative viewpoint of this century'.

1. Ibid., p. 238
2. The Works and More, p. 239
3. 'Modern Essay' (C.R.I.) p. 46
4. H. Jackson writes: "First and foremost he represents a point
of view. And, secondly, that point of view is in no
sense a novelty in a civilized society. Every age
has had its representative of a similar attitude
towards life, in one a Horace, in another a Joseph
Addison, and again, a Charles Lamb. In our age it
is Max Beerbohm. He is the spirit of urbanity
incarnate; he is the town, he is the civilization
hugging itself with whimsical appreciation for the
conservative end." The Eighteen Nineties, p. 120
'The Case for Prometheus' is a mock-rehabilitation of the Prometheus myth. It is written to illustrate the writer's feeling:

But what most immediately concerns and moves me is the knowledge that a man is still suffering daily tortures for an offence committed in the earliest age of the world's history, for an offence of which, moreover, he may not have been found guilty.

The essay displays Max's individualism, humanitarianism, and the comic talent. It is the concluding essay of More. It foreshadows all those characteristics that may be associated with the 'mellowed spirit' of the mature works.

Max's essays on the cultural background disclose his urban-mindedness, love of refinement and culture. They throw light on his 'civilised sense', which brings him closer to Henry James.

'If I were Aedile' is the characteristic essay of the group. It was written as a plea for the preservation of the historical buildings of London. Max reveals himself as "a sentimental Tory" who feels apprehensive of the "radicals". He fears that the latter meant to abolish aristocracy and all the things associated with it. Their 'town improvement plans' were a part of such designs.

He pleads that the eighteenth century squares of London signified the glorious past. Had he been 'Aedile', the art-minister of England, he would not have allowed, on aesthetic grounds, any tampering with the spacious buildings. Rather he would not have tolerated the 'Victorian statues' that mar the

1. The Works And More, p. 248
2. Max writes: "A delicate and Tory temperament precludes me from conversation with the radicals." The Works And More, p. 177
beauty of the town, but Max finds himself as one of the "glum bystanders" to the work of town improvement, proceeding unabated.1

The subject has been treated in other essays, too, such as 'Club in Ruins', 'Prangley Valley', 'Hobled King', 'A Letter that was not Written', and 'London Revisited'. They reveal Max's love of the past, of the town, and his aesthetic sense.

A section of the essays in More is devoted to literary criticism and art-criticism. These essays expose Max in the role of a creative critic. The 'central mood' in these essays is either of sympathetic criticism, or of satire and irony. While the pieces in literary criticism shall be considered at length in the chapter on Max's critical essays, his pieces of art-criticism may be mentioned here - with a brief comment on the literary pieces.

Max's literary and artistic tastes were in the vanguard of his time. He was an aesthete in tune with Oscar Wilde. He, too, regards 'beauty' as key-principle in any form of art. But he did not give undue importance to 'manner' as the theory of 'art for art's sake' preached. He laid stress on the perfect adjustment between matter and manner in a work of art. With such aesthetic views he set to examine the literary works and Fine arts. He praised wholeheartedly the artists who met his demand, and deprecated those who did not.

'Ouida' is a review of the novels of the French lady-novelist Mlle. de la Ramée. Max admires her works greatly. They are animated by her vitality, vision, and a sense of beauty.

1. *Ket Again* (Heinemann, 1922) p. 201
But her originality lies in the fact that she remains her "natural self" throughout. The regard Max gave Juide's novels may be gauged from the fact that he has dedicated More to her.

In 'The Blight of Music Halls' and 'At Covent Gardens', he states his love of the old-world ditties and the old-fashioned music halls. They gave him a romantic pleasure, transcending him to the old-world magic. Max expresses his admiration for the old-world music in 'The Music Halls of My Youth' and the dramatic reviews, too.

Max's vehement dislike for 'wax-works' forms the theme of the essay, 'Madam Tussaud's'. His contention is that wax-images, like the statues, do not reproduce life's animation. An art, that does not give the illusion of life, can not stimulate the sense of beauty in us. The wax-works, thereby, repulse him. 'Madam Tussaud's', that house of wax-works, seems to him the "morgue of upstanding corpses." The essayist introduces sentiment and feeling to the essay. He heaves a sign of relief at his exit from the establishment. "Ah! it was good to be in the street!" reminds one of Goldsmith's exit from the "Westminster Abbey." Max's mature essay "The Ragged Regiment" illustrates the theme in a finished manner.

1. The Twentieth Century English Critical Essays (OUP, 1954) p.183
2. The Works And More, p. 154
3. Oliver Goldsmith says: "Show me the gate, if I stay longer, I may probably meet with more of those ecclesiastical beggars."

Thus leaving the temple precipitately, I returned to my lodgings, in order to ruminate over what was great, and to despise what was mean, in the occurrences of the day.

'An Account of Westminster Abbey': A Prelude to Prose Pt. I (Ed.) V.K.K.
Millai (Blackie & Sons, Bombay, 1954)p.44
The autobiographical pieces in More commemorate Max's boyhood, or they state his likes and dislikes. These essays are reminiscent in tone, and sentimental in mood, leading usually to philosophic contemplation.

Of these essays, 'Going Back to School' forms Max's post-boyhood reflections on his days at Charterhouse. He recalls how unwilling a student was he there. He craved for greater freedom, as given his at Oxford, which the school did not afford. Max reminisces on his school days in 'Old Carthusian Memories', too. 1

In 'The Sea-side in Winter', Max states his love of peace and quiet. These solitary places restored to him a romantic air of self-importance. In '273', Max recommends 'rest-cure' at big hotels, where one remains a stranger in the crowd. 'Maison Lefevre' recalls sentimentally a small restaurant in Dieppe, France. 2

Lastly, Max emerges from More as an individual, who stresses his individuality and temperament everywhere. From the essays one learns that "Max had already mastered an art, which would serve him for the rest of his career: the art of satirizing, lambasting, insulting with impeccable decorum; the art of getting away with it." 3 Besides, one also gets glimpses of the humorist in making. These qualities come to full fruition in the later writings.

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1. The Works and More, pp. 213-23
2. cf. Letters to Regina Turner : op.cit., p. 302-4
3. E. More : op.cit., p. 321
The gap between the publication of *Nora* and *Yet Again* is exactly ten years. During the interval Max's powers had mellowed. The satirist and the critic of the earlier works merges his identity into a cynical philosopher, a humanitarian, and a humorist. The social critic of the nineties becomes a subtle interpreter of human character in the later years. In this new role the observer turns fairly introspective, and, consequently, becomes a self-critic. The overtures to his own nature are so generalised that they seem to be the overtures to humanity. Max narrows down his field of activity. He limits himself to getting the uninterrupted view of [his] fellow-creatures.¹ The essential features of *Yet Again* are the subtle musing on human nature, the childlike vivacity, and a youthful imagination. Max feels that the author of *Yet Again* is not very far from the author of *And Even Now*. He states: "His outlook on life and his ways of writing are not mine, but they are not unlike mine. He and I are on familiar terms..."² To verify the truth one may turn to the themes in *Yet Again*, and later, to *And Even Now*.

Some of the essays in *Yet Again* take for themes the human emotions and instincts. The prominent essays of the group are 'Fire', 'A Memory of a Midnight Express', 'Sympat', and 'Ichabod'. The main feature of these essays is that they are illustrated in a purely subjective manner - as such they project a vivid image of the essayist.

'Fire', the opening essay of the book, is built round the writer's love of warmth and fireside. Having lauded 'fire'

1. *Yet Again* (1922), p. 103
2. 'Preface' to *The Works of Max Beerbohm*, p. xv
as the augur and sublime element of Nature, Max traces man's love of fire to his negative instinct to destroy. The love of "destruction for destruction's sake" remains undiminished in human breast, despite all these centuries of civilization.\footnote{1} The philosophic Max knows that there is a sense of good and evil in us, but he contends that the world is run by the innate human instincts, not by the acquired sense. His own love of fire is purely aesthetic. He immensely enjoys "the pageant of the fire." His happiness by his fireside is absolute. But it makes him pensive, too. He knows happiness to be too brief: "It is too good to be true."\footnote{2} On the whole, Fire instills in him a noble sense:

I have come down in the world, and am a night-watchman, and I find life as pleasant as I had always thought it must be...\footnote{3}

Such an optimistic view of life earns him the title, according to Hillebrand, of the "Benevolent Maxist."\footnote{4}

By the help of a parable, Max states in "A Memory of a Midnight Express": "We can never depend on any right adjustment of emotion to circumstance."\footnote{5} He observes that the trivial things, such as fear, anger etc., often raise in us great emotions; comparatively, the great tumults of life leave us calm. The inscrutability of human mind prevents the writer, thus, from taking himself, or his fellow-beings seriously.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{1}{Yet Again, p. 7}
\footnote{2}{Ibid., p. 12}
\footnote{3}{Ibid., p. 14}
\footnote{4}{H.N. Hillebrand: 'Max Beerbohm' (Journal of English and German Philology, Urbana, April, 1920) p. 263}
\footnote{5}{Yet Again, p. 35}
\end{footnotes}
'Sympat' is an excursion on 'chance-friendship' and its importance in life. *Sympat* (corrupt form of 'sympathy', as spoken by a Brazilian friend) ought not be allowed in life to be a prelude to *antipat* ('antipathy'). It contains the secret of chance-friendship. There is no harm in striking them, they sweeten our journeys, but they ought to remain only casual in nature. The latter part of the observation may seem to be a harsh counsel, but wiser-wise, Max holds that it is better to suffer one general illusion than to suffer a series of particular disillusionments. In the essays of this nature, Max discloses Bacon-like intellect of a steele quality.

'Ichabod' is a dirge—a prose-lyric, which expresses the writer's grief at the loss of the 'collection of the railway labels'. In fact, these labels symbolised his journeys, made between London and Paris. These labels were assiduously collected on the hat-box during the journeys. The hat-box went for repair, and the trunk-repairers removed them recklessly, despite the instructions not to.

The essayist laments the loss in a sentimental manner. He knows that the labels were of no value to others, but for him they meant much because:

> Romance, exhilaration, self-importance, these are what my labels symbolised and recalled to me. That lost collection 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 pigskin, and the one work I never, never was weary of.  

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1. *Yet Again*, p. 197
2. *ibid.*, p. 128
Recalling the labels, one after another, he gives a vivid account of each travel he made, and re-states his love of travel. During the process of criticismising himself for his mania of collecting railway-labels, Max generalises on all the forms of collecting. He relates our hobbies to the efforts of creating an illusion of happiness. All of us try to be happy, "bluffing". therefore, is a common practice. In fact, the essay produces a fine psychological study of human nature, in reverse gear.

'Ichabod' and other parallel pieces amplify the view that Max the essayist is a 'lyrist in prose'. They disclose his powers, akin to the romantic poets, that result in achieving "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes the poetic faith."

Some of the essays in Yet Again aim at social criticism. They reveal his attachment to the post-Regency period, with its passion for the eighteenth century comportment.

Of these essays, 'The Decline of the Graces' is a plea for good manners. Max deprecates the want of the 'Graces' in modern women, the counterparts of the modern men. Personally, he ranges himself on the grand mother's side:

I take my stand shoulder to shoulder with the Graces. On the banner that I wave is embroidered a device of prunes and prisms. 2

Max observes that, in an artificial civilisation, the social etiquettes are indispensable. Gracelessness is no excuse. But modern girls and boys are neither discouraged of their bad

1. *Yet Again*, p. 134
manners, nor of their unbecoming dress, and utterly objectionable demeanour.

The essay is illuminative of the intellectual strand in Max's dandyism. It looks forward to the practices of Bulwer-Lytton and Disraeli, in demanding a sober dress, graceful manners, and a becoming conduct.¹

In 'House of Commons Manner', Max rails at the poor standard of eloquence in the Parliament. He loves the Victorian 'grand manner', or the eighteenth century standard of eloquence. In 'Dulcedo Judiciorium', Max pays a fine tribute to the 'grand manner' of Sir Charles Russell, that is almost absent from the modern law-courts, and theatre, too. 'A Pathetic Imposture' forms a jibe at ostentatious manner of news-reporting. Max pleads for a manner, plain, lucid, and matter of fact.

A group of the essays in the book stress the writer's love of refinement and sophistication. For instance, in 'A Home Coming', Max expresses his shock at a young man's flirting with a barmaid at the Buffet in Dover Harbour. He is of the view that such an immoral behaviour at public places has brought down the country's prestige. He is as much against prize-fighting as of the public shows of love making. In 'A Parallel', he denounces them as the relics of a barbarous age.

'The Humour of the Public' analyses the popular sense of humour. Max observes that it constitutes of "delight in cruelty, contempt for the unfamiliar".² It is activated by some fixed

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1. J.G. Riewald: op. cit., p. 41
2. Yet Again, p. 259
subjects, such as Mothers in law, Jew, Fatness, Thinness etc. He contrasts it with his own sense which has variety and delicacy as well.

'The Naming of Streets' is a philosophic contemplation of the psychology of naming a person, or a place. Max contends: "The name of a street, as of a human being, derives its quality from the bearer." He resents any move of renaming the streets, because the arrangement brings no change in the character of streets. He, therefore, concludes in a staccato: "the mere plastering of [the] name is no mnemonic."\(^2\)

'A Morris For May-days' is an untimely essay. It relates the history of 'Morris' - a folk-dance popular on May-days. Max finds it "formally expressive of new English optimism."\(^3\) He is moved to tears due to the fervour and animation of the dancers. The essay is a subtle reply to the critics who complain that he possesses no 'heart'.

'On Shakespeare's Birthday' and 'Whistler's writing' are essays on literary themes. The former is a piece of advice to the Baconians, who say that Bacon, not Shakespeare, wrote the plays. He asks them to keep quiet until their hypothesis is proved.

'Whistler's writing' pays rich tribute to Whistler's exquisite talent in writing. He applauds him for "the subtler ramifications of English prose as an art-form."\(^4\) He considers

\(^1\) Yest Again, p. 214
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 216
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 160
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 107
Whistler's letters as his "passport among the elect of literature." Their manner, not the contents, is so delicate and pleasing that Max preserves The Gentle Art of Making Enemies as tenderly as a flower.

Yet Again includes some 'Words For Pictures' articles, written for the Daily Mail. These impressionistic pieces interpret in prose the paintings of the eminent painters, such as Bellini, Hokusai, Conté, and others. 'Harlequin' is one of the pictures. It reconstructs the jester's posture, symbolising the artist's devotion to his art, quite indifferent to his agitated surroundings. It is considered symbolic of Max's own devotion to art, with total indifference to the world wars, and other burning issues of the day.

However, the interpretation of the 'pictures' seems to be a materialisation of Wilde's suggestion of "making prose poems out of paint." A Stranger In Venice is an elaborate 'prose poem'. It commemorates the past 'Byzantine' splendour of Venice. The essay consists of many despatches sent to the Daily Mail in 1905. It puts forth a defence of the "Venetian Decadence."

1. Yet Again, p. 115
4. Max comments: "To us, the mere philosophic, Venice's 'decadence' was a thing that could not be avoided. A city or a nation is like a human being: sooner or later it must decline; no elixir can save it. And on the 'decadence' we can look back quite, calmly, appreciating what in it was graceful and delightful."

A Variety of Things (Heinemann, 1928), p. 188

Max's observation throws a reflex light on his attitude to the English Decadence.
The essay records the impressions of the author's awakened soul to the charm of Venice. It discloses a romantic strain in Max's personality.

These purely aesthetic writings involve a lot of psychological discussion. It is important that, excluding the later writings, they foreshadow the greater psychological interest of many of the essays of And Even Now.

And Even Now is the ripest flower of Max's imaginative sensibility; it is his 'magnum opus.' It was published in 1920. It contains his writings of the past ten years. The book belongs to the final phase of the writer's "human growth." Max's 'original self' illuminates these essays. They display a childlike curiosity, love of mystery and a youthful imagination. Max expresses his comic vision in them in his incisive manner. His interests were exclusively riveted to tapping "the deep dark reservoirs of a character, that had seemed to [him], on the whole, so amiable."¹ It was not a 'character' outside himself. The book produces the specimens of self-criticism. It aims at an impartial self-analysis. Another important feature of the book is Max's love, like Sir Thomas Browne's, or Lamb's, of the enigmatic, non-existent, and the out-of-the-way. On the whole, And Even Now reveals Max's individuality, composed fairly of the nineteenth-century Romantic and the Augustan satirist. Both the strains remain so active in him that the former invariably provokes the latter.

¹. And Even Now (Heinemann, 1922), p. 28
In order to substantiate these general remarks, one may glance at the themes in *And Even Now*. They indicate the writer's subtlety. Some essays try to unravel the puzzling human behaviour.

Of these essays, 'A Relic' is worth mentioning. It is a mock-serious story in Maupassant's vein. The writer comes across the fragments of an expensive fan, which he collected from a French casino in Normandy. It was about twenty years after that they remind him of a quarrel between a couple. And it was during the quarrel that the woman, in fury, scatters the fragments down the floor of the casino. Max did not know the whereabouts of the couple, or the cause of the quarrel. However, there rings in his mind the poetic refrain — 'Down below, the sea rustled to and fro over the shingle'¹ — that possibly tells the tale of the smouldering emotions of anger and hate in human breast. The essay is in the nature of 'emotions recollected in tranquillity'. The writer could not attempt a story, but he was happy that the 'relic' gave him the first impulse to write — to write excellently.

'Quia Imperfectum' is a psychological study. It takes for its subject 'an unfinished canvas of Goethe'. The project was taken up and left by a German painter Tischkbién in Rome. From Goethe's *Memoirs and Letters*, Max tries to build the circumstances, that led to the mishap. He relates it to the poet's egotism. The essayist accounts for Goethe's greatness as well as limitations. He tries to unknot, in his incisive manner, the puzzle of Goethe's and Tischkbién's behaviour. However, he

1. *And Even Now*, p. 3
proposes that a museum of such 'unfinished works of art' be raised, since they cater fully to the inquisitiveness of a genuine student of human nature.

'A Clergyman' is an essay built round a passage from Boswell. It describes how a poor ecclesiast puts a question to Dr. Johnson, and, in return, is rebuffed. The essay reveals the human Max, who has sympathy with the wronged and the suffering. Having reconstructed the imaginary scene, Max concludes: "I like to think that he [Clergyman] died forgiving Dr. Johnson." 1 The essay contains Max's wise remarks on the universality of the current literature.

'The Crime' describes an incident, according to which the writer burns a book by a lady-novelist under the impression that women can not compete with men in the field of literature. It is slightly Nietzschean theme of a literary revenge and the victim's subtly-symbolical retaliation. It is elaborated pseudo-analytically. The essay terminates at a note of self-remonse: I had not remembered the words a wise king wrote long ago, that the lamp of the wicked shall be put out, and the way of the digressors is hard. 2

This section of the essays may very well be summed up with

No. 2. The Pines - a reminiscential essay on Swinburne and Theodore Watts-Dunton, his friend, both of whom lived at No. 2. The Pines' in Putney High Street. In the nineties, the young Max paid many visits to the ageing poet. He wrote the present essay at Edmund Gosse's request. It reveals Max the essayist in essence. It is a fine review of Swinburne's poetic genius,

1. And Even Now, p. 235
2. Ibid., p. 246
a character-sketch of the cronies, and an impressionistic piece, describing the life at The Pines. Like "Ancient Mariner," Max wishes "to impose on the world many tomes about The Pines." ¹

Primarily, he praises Sainburne for his love of the past, rhapsodies, and youthful imagination. He regards him "the flaminiferous boy of the dim past - a legendary creature, sole akin to phoenix." ² In contrast, Watts-Dunton only amuses him. He intrigue Max by his mysterious tag - "A great deal of work on my just now," since he published little enough, not of a high value. ³

Max was struck by the poet's person. He gave him the impression of "something of a well-bred child," whose tiny hands "fluttered helplessly, touchingly, unceasingly." In contrast, Watts-Dunton gave a bethetic impression. There was "something gnome-like about his swarthiness and chubbiness." "Shaginess" seemed to be his permanent feature. ⁴ Both of them were stone deaf, and they shouted conversation at each other.

Max presents a vivid account of the life at The Pines. Of the scenes recalled, the most memorable are those of the dinners. He imagines himself sitting at the dining table between Watts-Dunton and Sainburne. Like Alice, he sat wide-eyed, between, respectively, 'Dormouse' and a fair blend of 'Mad Hatter' and 'Hare'. It has to be appreciated that Max, in the later writings, owns this Alice-like sense of wonder in his

1. And Ever Now, p. 84
2. Ibid., p. 58
3. Ibid., p. 62
4. Ibid., pp. 62-4
disquisitions on the intricacies of human character and things.

This is worth noticing in his first impressions of The Pines. With its mid-Victorian setting, Rossetti Paintings, and the "Tupperrosettine" dining-room, the house gave him "the instant sense of having slipped away from the harsh light of the ordinary and contemporary into the dimness of an odd, august past." It catered suitably to his 'preterit' bent of mind.

The essay displays a balance of reason and sentiment in Max's personality. It further discloses Max's exclusive attachment to the days of his youth in And Even Now.

Some essays in the book express Max's love of the fine and delicate. They take non-existent or trivial objects to hang the writer's musings on.

'Stack within Books' brings out, Max's charm for the unseen. He wishes to have a doorless library of the non-existent books, written by the characters of Henry James. He wishes to preserve them because they are as good as James's own novels. He mystifies:

How my fingers would hover along these shelves, always just going to alight, but never, lest the spell were broken, alighting.

Sometimes the trivial objects occasion philosophic musing.

In 'Something Defeasible', a small play-cottage at sea shore, symbolises the human civilisation, its demolition by sea waves signifies the waste of the human efforts towards civilisation and culture: The castle was shedding its sides, laping, dwindling, landslipping-gone, O Ninevah! And now another - O Emphis? Some? - yielded to the cataclysm.

1. And Even Now, p. 61
2. Ibid., p. 109
3. Ibid., p. 222
The essayist behaves as a poet, a meditator, and an observer of human good in the essay. He reveals his political misgivings saying whether the welfare of English race could be done by the Labour. However, he dismisses such questions for he "wished to be happy while he might."\(^1\)

'Servants' is an essay on a sociological theme. Max behaves cynically as he propostes to get the domestic service abolished. He gives himself out as a "Tory Anarchist." He states that the Compulsory Education Act has done no good. It has given the servants the same mental training as that of the masters. The essay registers Max's distrust of the thinkers, ideas and 'isms'. It discloses his conservatism and scepticism. Lastly, it displays his intense awareness of the sociological and psychological trends of the time.

'Hosts and Guests' is a philosophic musing on hospitality. He finds it not wholly altruistic, since much pride and egoism is involved in it. He knows that "every virtue... is a mean between two extremes."\(^2\) An ideal host or a guest ought to adopt a middle course. But the essayist is certain that perfection is not loved in this imperfect world. He, himself, is no exception.

'The Golden Druggist' is a short, charming essay. It is written to stress that the primitive and essential things will live, man-made may not. The former have ever a charm, the machines do not. "A single light", issuing from the door of an ugly wayside inn as 'The Golden Druggist', inspires in him hope.

1. And Even Now, p. 223
2. Ibid., p. 122
courage, and warmth. Max notices much more in 'the yellow strip of light':

But lingering, but reluctant, is my tread as I pass by it, and I pause to bathe in the light that is as the span of our human life, granted between one great darkness and another. 1

The philosopher sees the 'light' as a symbol of the brevity of human existence - not without a promise, not without an assurance to count on, despite its brevity.

Three essays, namely, 'Going out for a Walk', 'William and Mary', and 'Laughter', belong to three distinct classes. They need specific treatment.

'Going Out for a Walk' is a neat, small subjective piece. Its spirit is remarkably anti-Hazlitt and anti-Stevenson. "Like his peers, a walk does not inspire him. His objection to it is that it stops the brain:

The brain then wraps itself up in its own convolutions, and falls into a dreamless slumber from which nothing can rouse it till the body has been safely deposited indoors again. 2

This matter of fact and logical piece springs from Max's love of repose and drawing-room, which he preferred to outdoor rambling.

'William and Mary' is an exceptional essay in the whole range of Max's literature. It deals with the tragic and the pathetic. William was a London socialist of the nineties; Mary was his wife. Max had paid many friendly visits to their cottage. He was glad to see that their life was idyllically happy.

Unfortunately, Mary died prematurely in childbirth, and after

1. And Even Now, p. 132
2. cf. 'On Going A Journey': Essays of E. Hazlitt (Ed.) C. Calvert (Dent, 1920) P. 40-46
2. cf. 'Walking Tours': Virgilimus Fruerius (Ed.) J. H. Fowler (Macmillan Reprint, 1963) pp. 147-56
2. And Even Now, p. 186
some months William was also killed at war front.

Their once sweet home becomes a deserted and derelict cottage. It reminds him painfully of Mary's wonderful laugh - "that little bell-like euphony; those funny little lucid and level trills."¹ Twenty five years after, on an unusual visit to the cottage, the writer is swayed by emotions. The miserable condition of the cottage provoked melancholic thoughts on the state of human affairs. Out of curiosity he pulled at the bell once, twice. There was a tinkling sound inside. The sound struck his inward ears, and he was transported to the awry world of sensation:

And the rejoinder to it was more than I thought to hear - a whole quick sequence of notes, faint but clear, playful yet poignantly sad, like a trill of laughter out of the past, or even out of this neighbouring darkness. ²

He was spell bound. The laughter became insistent, incessant, so much so that "I must have rung", Max says, "again and again, tenaciously, vehemently, in my folly."³

It appears that Mary's euphonious laugh hints at 'immortality', and the roused emotions in the writer's poetic soul recall Wordsworth's famous lines:

\[
\text{Thanks to the human heart by which we live,} \\
\text{Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,} \\
\text{To me the meanest flower that blows can give} \\
\text{Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.} \quad \text{4}
\]

'Laughter' concludes and even now, Max begins the essay flouting the pedantic theories of laughter by Schopenhaur and Henry Bergson. Max presents his own theory of laughter, which

1. *And Even Now*, p. 268
2. Ibid., p. 276
3. Ibid., p. 276
observes the practices of the great comic talents, such as Dr. Johnson, Falstaff, and Comus (a pseudonym for Max's friend 'Reginald Turner'). Max's theory of laughter shall be treated in detail in the chapter on humour.

However, the main points of the essay, may briefly be mentioned here. He says that the best laughter is the laughter at, not with. ² He agrees with Boswell that fun may be latent in "the fine shades of character; but in imaginative burlesque, and anything that borders on nonsense."³

According to Max, the best laughter is usually spontaneous. In support of his view he quotes instances from Boswell and Moore's Life of Byron. Lastly, he pays tribute to the comic powers of Comus: "Incomparable laughter giver, he is not much of a laugher. He is vintner, not toppor." Max does not wish to change place with him.³

A final look at And Even Now suggests that Max's interpretation of human character is psychological, but amiable rather than morbid. The book belongs to the category of literature which draws life from a writer's 'original self'. It conforms to Gustav Flaubert's ideal:

The finest books are those which have the least subject-matter; the more closely expression approximates the thought, the more beautiful the book is. ⁴

1. And Even Now, p. 297
2. ibid., p. 300
3. ibid., p
Mainly On The Air was published in 1946. It consists of Max's broadcasts made between 1935 and 1952 from the BBC. These spoken essays show "the beginning of the Indian summer of the essayist." These compositions have a uniform pattern of thought. Some of them are on general themes. All of them announce Max's frank disapproval for the twentieth century. The writer's interest centres on later Victorian era - rather it fascinates him. Despite Max's ironical and satiric mood, the atmosphere of the book is idyllic, and its tone is purely reminiscential. He contrasts the ease and grace of the past with the harsher and more insecure, present conditions of life.

In 'London Revisited', he considers modern London as a "salubrious hell." He loves only its the eighteenth century aspect.\(^1\) In 'Speed' he lashes out the present day senseless passion for speed.\(^2\) In 'Advertisement', he resents all the efforts of advertising - especially its obscenity, and the sanction for it, by the Parliament, to be done by illumination at night. In 'Bloomsbury To Belgravia', he laughs an ironical laugh at the increase of the intelligentsia. The rise of the Common Man in the twentieth century does not seem to be a right altar to the aesthete, at which the artist should kneel.\(^3\) And lastly, he feels proud to be called 'an interesting link with the past', since "the past [for him] is a work of art free from irrelevancies and loose ends!"\(^4\) It signified the ease.

\(^1\) Mainly On The Air, p. 7

\(^2\) Max writes: "The main root of the mischief is that great fetish of ours, Speed." Mainly On The Air, p. 14

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 131

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 130
order and elegance, of which Max considers himself a 'relic' in the first-half of this century.

On the whole, Max could not support the hateful aspects of the twentieth century civilisation, such as "commercialism, more machinery, more standardisation, more nullity." 1 They drew his acute critical sense. "Alas, the spirit of the age is one that levels down, not up" 2 is the final expression of his disgust on our century. Mainly On The Air is imbued with the spirit that colours his early writings. It discloses Max's consistency of the standpoint. Giederd observes, more than anywhere else, the book produces him in the role of a critic - "the conscientious critic, or rather the critical conscience of the Twentieth Century." 3

The foregoing discussion aims at establishing that Max is a personal essayist, whose principal theme is 'himself'. The essayist is an individual with a distinct point of view. This point of view is traditional, or it is rather steeped in the wisdom of ages. In common with his predecessors in the field of essay, he possesses an orthodox and conservative bent of mind, the genial wisdom - toned down by scepticism, the warm-hearted humanity, common views on the relativity of human opinion, the unoffending, confidential, self-revealing and self-critical attitude, the love of the part, the intellectual curiosity and sentimentality. Besides, Max's urban-mindedness and the critical

1. Mainly On The Air, p. 9
2. Ibid., p. 142
3. Sir, Max, Cartesian Man and Editor, p. 89
attitude to the foibles and follies of his period associate him with the eighteenth century periodical essayists. Unlike them, he is an aesthete, he has not to amend the morals, or to preach ethics. For him, literature ought to cater to our aesthetic sense rather than to the purely social one. Though he was abreast of the new developments in his period, he had no share in them. In other words, he is not "the angry young men" of the early decades of this century. He is an 'observer' who observes for the pleasure of observation. Page Campbell considers him neither "a born adulator, nor a born iconoclast": he is "the arbiter of taste".

From the grave he whispers blandly to the prophet, "Not yet"; to the visionary, "Perhaps"; to the self-righteous, "You may be wrong"; to the successful, "Are you sure your public adores you?" In today's terms he has an unfashionable voice.

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1. Page Campbell: 'The Unfashionable Artist of Our Age' (Guardian, 17 June, 1969) p. 10