MAX BEERBOHM AS A LITERARY CRITIC

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis has been to define Max Beerbohm's critical literary principles, to evaluate his contribution to aesthetic criticism and thereby to determine his place in the critical tradition. The methods of investigation have been: to study the formative influences on the development of his critical principles and to evaluate the results of their application in Max's essays and dramatic criticisms.

From this study it is evident that as a man and as an artist Max was "formed" during the Eighteen-nineties. By nature he was an intellectual dandy who always preferred strong, narrow creative personalities like himself. He was detached, fastidious, witty, and humane, and he was noted for his wisdom and sound common sense, even as a very young man.

Under the influence of the Aesthetic Movement at Oxford, Max turned to Walter Pater for ideas on impressionistic criticism, but he preferred Oscar Wilde for style. He felt that personality was the paramount thing in art and that an exact, witty and beautiful style was its finest expression. His early style was mannered, satirical and superficial. However, Max never belonged to the "precious school" of writers, because he was not satisfied with less than a perfect
synthesis of matter and manner to produce a unified effect of sheer delight. To this end he employed literary principles he had derived from neoclassical "rules" and aesthetic concepts.

When Max became drama critic for the *Saturday Review*, he used his literary standards to form the basis of his dramatic criticisms. Although these standards related almost exclusively to matters of form and style, Max saw their wider application, because they satisfied his requirements for what a work of art should be. Accordingly, they have been examined under four main headings: the illusion of life, an exact and beautiful style, form and the unified effect, ethics and aesthetics.

As a drama critic, Max welcomed the rise of modern realism because it had restored to the theatre the illusion of actual life. However, he did not favour realism for realism's sake or for the sake of social reforms. He believed that art must appeal to the emotions, not to the intellect, and that the impact of the play may arouse either joy or sorrow, but it must be aesthetically satisfying.

Max always tried to be fair and flexible in his criticisms but his extreme fastidiousness and his innate sense of detachment imposed serious limitations. For instance, he was too reactionary to appreciate radical experiments in form. Nor could he admire plays in which the ideas were more important than the emotional conflicts of flesh and blood characters. Inevitably, he failed to appreciate Shaw
because Max was a nineteenth-century man attempting to apply aesthetic ideals and neoclassical principles to the experimental plays of a progressive, analytical dramatic genius of the twentieth century.

Max's value as a critic comes from his important insights in matters of form and style. In his essay on Whistler he revealed the artist in a new light as the author of an exquisite literary style. His essay on Lytton Strachey is also valuable for the careful discrimination Max made between the satirist and the mocker which vindicated Strachey from the charge of malice. However, the fact that his interests were narrow and essentially pertained to small, minor works of art, limits his significance as a critic. Max was an "exquisite" critic of the dying impressionistic tradition, whose critical talents were best suited to minor artists with whom he had some affinity in temperament and style. Consequently, his place is out of the mainstream of the critical tradition.
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CHAPTER I

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF
MAX BEERBOHM'S CRITICAL LITERARY PRINCIPLES

Max Beerbohm patterned his life, as he shaped his art, according to a neoclassical sense of form and decorum. His perfect manners and fastidiousness, his conservatism and preference for the past, his sophisticated detachment, love of artifice, scepticism and subtle wit were qualities he united to produce the effect of polished elegance.

Temperamentally Max was a dandy, although he was by no means a superficial one. He was, rather, a well-disciplined man who applied the principles of proportion and restraint to his unique self-expression. He was a man of high intellect, but low vitality. He knew his talents were small, and he made them exquisite. He used them well and discreetly, winning for himself the reputation of a petit maître not only for his art, but also for his manner of living.

Max needed no discipline to acquire a sense of beauty and the spirit of courtliness. These were part of his family inheritance. His ancestors were of German, Dutch and Lithuanian extraction. His grandfather, Ernest Henry Beerbohm, was accustomed to entertaining Russian and Prussian royalty at his small estate at Memel. His father, Julius Ewald Beerbohm, as a tall, handsome young dandy went to live in Paris, where his
beautiful manners and "divine humour" won him a reputation as "Monsieur Su-perbe Homme."¹

Mr. Beerbohm also possessed an enormous vitality and an insatiable love of learning. Max's father was not scholarly, yet he astonished many by the acuteness of his memory and the extent of his culture. During his lifetime he mastered seven European languages. He also became a successful businessman in London where he moved, and established a trade paper, Beerbohm's Evening Corn Trade List. Once established, Mr. Beerbohm married and, on the death of his first wife, he remarried, thereby raising two families. Max, the youngest, was born when his father was sixty-one.

Between the two families of children there was a marked difference. Those of the first marriage tended to the grandiose, those of the second were contemplative. Max belonged to the latter strain, inheriting his parents' humour and beautiful manners, but not their boundless energy.

It is characteristic of Max that he admired his father's polished manners, cultivated wit and tendency to dandyism more than his astonishing vitality. He once said of his father that he had beautiful manners but was not a remarkable man. To Max there was not special merit in having great vitality unless it was associated with genius, particularly with literary genius; and then it did not need to be on a grand scale. What Max valued was the vitality of a creative imagination, and this he held above any other form of physical or mental energy.

Grandiose schemes, in fact bigness of any kind either
overwhelmed or simply offended him. Generally, Max preferred
the small perfection, something exquisite and under control.
For instance, he infinitely preferred a small house to a large
one, however beautiful. He even preferred a small Rembrandt
drawing to a large Rembrandt painting.²

As a child Max was the joy of his mother. He was also
adored and catered to by the other members of the family,
especially by his sisters. The vast difference in ages be­
tween his brothers and himself necessarily made him turn to
the company of his sisters or to some quiet play alone.

Inherently Max enjoyed solitude. He did not seem to
require the company of children his own age. He often amused
himself by drawing caricatures. It is possible that his own
sense of detachment and the largely feminine environment
fostered Max's tendencies to fastidiousness and dandyism, and
his acute dislike of aggressiveness and vulgarity.

However, Max was not so remote from masculine influence
that he missed the impact of the personalities of his two
famous half-brothers. Both Herbert and Julius had inherited
their father's remarkable vitality and his penchant for
grandiose schemes. Herbert chose the stage name Beerbohm-
Tree and became the most famous actor-manager of the 1890's.
Julius pursued bizarre financial schemes, and wrote a success­
ful travel book Wanderings in Patagonia. Max idealized them
both, but a natural affinity for Julius led him to consider
Herbert a hero but Julius a god.³ For Julius looked like an
older edition of Max. He radiated charm, sophistication and
elegance. Nothing hurried or perturbed him. He was the
epitome of "style" to his small brother. Although Max did
not share his brother's reckless enthusiasm for gambling and adventure, his image of deportment made him look to Julius as to an ideal self. Herbert, on the other hand, was almost the antithesis of Max, yet Max's admiration for him was sincere. They did not fully appreciate each other's talents because of their characteristic differences, but Herbert took as much interest in Max's small career as Max did in Herbert's big one.

Herbert liked big things; Max liked small things. Herbert, to Max's wonder and grief, was a Liberal; Max was a Conservative. Max's natural fastidiousness and restraint made him wary of flamboyance because it inevitably led to vulgarity. Herbert was gregarious; Max was excellent company, but always aloof. Still the delight of Max's Charterhouse days were the holidays, because his heart remained with Herbert at the Haymarket Theatre. There his lively imagination was able to absorb all the mystery and romance it desired. He saw Herbert play in *The Red Lamp* seventeen times with undiminished enthusiasm. However, in later years, when Max's critical faculties had matured under the influence of modern realism, he scorned plays which were written around actor-managers, plays which catered to popular tastes, and which presented lavishly beautiful sets for no special dramatic purpose. Yet Herbert did not hesitate to woo the public, and he built Her Majesty's Theatre on the proceeds of *Trilby*.

As mature artists, Herbert and Max felt the strain of their relationship. As brothers, especially when Max was young, they delighted in each other's wit and humour. Since Herbert was already famous, it added much to Max's prestige
at Charterhouse and later at Oxford that he was permitted to invite his friends to the Haymarket and later to take them backstage to meet Herbert and his illustrious friends. Herbert's friends loved Max's impish wit, but occasionally one mortified him by laughing at his unusual smallness in comparison with the tall, majestic Herbert.

Many factors influenced Max's preference for, or defense of the small perfection, but chief among them were his artistic talents. Early success both as an essayist and caricaturist gave him confidence in the unique quality of his work. Common sense encouraged him to aim within his limitations for the highest perfection of which he was capable. This aim applied to his essays rather than to his drawings, because he drew naturally, with ease and for pleasure, while he wrote with an acute sense of the agony of the essayist's art. However, Max enjoyed the considerable assets of his own natural genius, a good classical education, and the stimulating influence of intelligent, artistic, contemporary books and friends.

It was Mr. Wilkinson, Max's first school master, who taught him the love of Latin which enabled him to write English well. At the same time Mrs. Wilkinson gave him the only lessons in drawing that he ever had. At Charterhouse he continued to enjoy Latin prose, Latin verse and drawing caricatures. Out of the study of Latin grew his habit of writing *egomet* instead of "for myself." He also developed a facility for coining compounds such as 'animatophonograph' (sound film) and 'multi-science' to satisfy his need for the precise word to express his meaning.
From his earliest school days the pattern for his future development was clearly marked. Even as a boy he was somewhat of a dandy. He was modest, good-humoured and very sociable. However, he preferred solitary pursuits, such as reading Miss Braddon's latest book, to organized games and the convention of monitoring.

Max's vitality lay in his creative imagination. Physically he was languid. He disliked any form of exercise and liked neither to order others nor to be ordered. "At school," Max explained, "my character remained in a state of undevelopment.... In some respects, I was always too young, in others, too old, for a perfect relish of the convention."^5

The most important thing that Max learned at Charterhouse was to understand his fellow-creatures. This knack gave him the basis for his satirical work. During his Charterhouse days he liked to caricature men of authority or outstanding achievement. At home he visited the House of Commons to observe the great statesmen, especially Gladstone. At school the subjects of his exacting scrutiny were the dons. Yet Max seldom gave offense because he was not essentially malicious. With few exceptions, he caricatured best what he loved best. His mockery was generally mixed with sentiment. What his drawings mainly revealed was his capacity for acute observation and his ability to amuse himself and others by his subtle insights. Max could capture the one weak point in an otherwise strong character, but he viewed himself and others with light ironic detachment. He had no serious axe to grind.

Although he said that his delight in having been at Charterhouse was far greater than his delight in being there,
those few years stimulated Max's interest in literature and in literary style. He claimed that he enjoyed no writer earlier than Thackeray. It seemed to him there were many live authors worth reading and worth aping, "if only for the sake of learning what to avoid." He believed that Latin prose and Latin verse were essential to the making of a decent English prose style, but his aim was higher. Purposefully he chose models from among the best modern writers, exquisite stylists such as Oscar Wilde, Whistler, George Meredith and Maeterlinck.

Out of this early pursuit of good style came Max's first notable publication. It was a Latin fragment written in elegiacs and elaborately annotated. In a very scholarly fashion, the author carefully explicated points of "Balzacian insignificance." The poem, Carmen Becceriense, was written at Charterhouse, and, on the advice of a don, privately printed. It marked Max's debut as a satirist.

When Max went up to Merton College, Victorian seriousness was out of fashion. He was delighted to find that all the nonsense that had been knocked out of him at Charterhouse was now to be restored to him. He immediately responded to the freedom of Oxford and the atmosphere which was part antique monastery of learning and part aristocratic playground.

Characteristically, Max found a house on Merton Street which was "scarcely bigger than a Punch and Judy Show." His room, blue-papered, was hung with Pellegrini caricatures from Vanity Fair and with some caricatures of his own. This was the pattern of decor for all his future residences, because it exactly suited his taste and temperament, which were already formed.
As at Charterhouse, Max continued to observe his surroundings with detachment. He avoided games and belonged to only one College Society, the Essay Society, which met once a week to discuss "calm little mild essays" written on vast themes. Occasionally he attended the Debating Society of his College, where he once proposed the motion 'That this House views with pleasure the increasing unpopularity of the Drama'. His only club was the select Gridiron Club, which met for luncheon and dinner.

Although all who knew Max liked him, he was fastidious in the choice of his friends. Outside Merton College he was almost unknown, except for his caricatures which were displayed from time to time in a local shop window. However, when Will Rothenstein, the brilliant Paris lithographer, was asked to do a series of Oxford Caricatures, he was so impressed with Max's brilliance that he made him one of his subjects. They were close in age, yet Will found Max's calm assurance and quiet, finished manner unusually mature. He observed that Max seemed to keep to himself, yet he missed nothing that was going on around him. He heard Max declare that he had read nothing - only The Four Georges, Lear's Book of Nonsense, and, later, Oscar Wilde's Intentions, but "unusual wisdom and sound judgment [were] disguised under the harlequin cloak of his wit." "He was delightfully appreciative of anything he was told, seizing the inner meaning of any rough observation of men and of things, which at once acquired point and polish in contact with his understanding mind."

Max was convinced that he could learn more from his observation of men than from books. He preferred the creative
inner life of the imagination to an active life in society, but he required the insights gained from observing the drama of actual life to nourish his thought. During the holidays, his favourite source of "raw life" became the law courts, where he always tried to answer one question about the defendant: What sort of person is this?

During the term, Max seldom went to lectures. The only ones he seemed to enjoy were those given by Dr. William Walter Merry on Aristophanes. The weekly essays he was required to produce for his tutor were remarkable largely for their illustrations. In one drawing, entitled 'The Long Vacation', Max was suspended between two pillars mounted with busts of Aristotle and Plato. Beneath his dangling feet lay a pack of cards, a cigarette case, and a champagne bottle labelled 'Pleasure'.

Outrageous as his drawings were, Max had caught the Regency spirit of dandyism at Oxford. The young aesthetes loved to shock or surprise. It was the prevailing mood among undergraduates to treat light things seriously and serious matters lightly. Max's tutorial essays were always gracefully written, although they revealed no apparent interest in philosophy or ancient history, the subjects of his study. His approach was purely aesthetic. Plato's merit lay in his beautiful style. Herodotus's flaw in constructing what were otherwise delightfully fantastic adventures was that he destroyed the atmosphere of marvel when he openly doubted their truth.

To achieve an exact and beautiful style in literature and deportment became the absolute aim for Max and for all
young Oxonians who came under the spell of the Aesthetic Movement. In 1873, Walter Pater published the Conclusion to his Studies in the History of the Renaissance, making Oxford the source of the Aesthetic Movement. In 1890 it was still the centre, and Max found there an atmosphere exactly suited to his temperament; one that refined his sense of beauty while catering to his intellectual dandyism. Above all, aestheticism gave expression to the many facets of his style and an approach to literary criticism.

As a young freshman at Merton, Max had amused his tutor by his wish to attend Walter Pater's lectures. Beauty of expression had been his aim, but he was early disillusioned both by Pater's unromantic appearance and his tendency to render English as a dead language. Still, that did not hinder him from absorbing the basic principles of Aestheticism. Pater's belief that a work of art should be judged by beauty alone directly appealed to him. And so far as Art for Art's sake implied the autonomy of art and the artist, the rejection of a didactic aim, and the refusal to subject art to moral or social judgments, Max was in accord.

He also followed Pater in taking Flaubert's view of style which required 'the unique word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, essay or song, absolutely proper to the single mental presentation or vision within.' For Max, too, art had to express something other than itself. There had to be a connection between form and substance.

What Max appreciated most in Pater was his concept of impressionistic criticism. In the Preface to The Renaissance, Pater stated that the first duty of the critic was to look for
the pleasurable sensations unique in each work of art, and to determine exactly what that unique impression was. It was not important for the critic to possess a correct abstract definition of beauty, "but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects." After this, the critic was allowed to support his feeling by analysis or to find its causes in history.

As a result of Pater's influence, Max became one of the "Hornerists" of literature whose "pleasure [lay] 'in determining the exact quality of pleasure' derived by them from this or that work," and who, incidentally, helped their fellow-creatures towards a similar pleasure. Max liked best those critics with strong, narrow, creative personalities, the impressionistic or temperamental critics, because they were capable of unique insights. He also preferred the same qualities of personality in literary artists because they were capable of creating strikingly original styles, and to Max, style was the man.

As long as Pater expressed his concept of beauty in relation to style, Max was attentive. However, when Pater began to emphasize the importance of abandoning one's self to a life of experience, Max lost interest. Pater's concept of the moment's experience, "that merging of one's soul in bright waters," seemed to him to be too arduous for a "rigid, complex civilization to gain." Also, to be literally

"Hornerists" of literature - The temperamental critic is a Jack Horner who delights in being the solitary consumer of a perfect literary "pie." It is primarily to please himself that he pulls out his impressionistic plums.
at the focus of all experience made him realize one would have to have the sphere of influence and the resources of the Prince of Wales.

Max was aware that a life filled with experience left no time for thought, "the highest energy of man." And it was to thought that his life was dedicated. Action inevitably warred against the pleasures of intellect, which, for him, must involve the pleasures of imagination. To Max, it was only "the things [he] had not done, the faces or places he had not seen," that charmed him. It was mystery that made things superb. Therefore the problem for him was how he could best avoid "'sensations,' 'pulsations,' and 'exquisite moments' that were not purely intellectual." He refused to attempt to combine both kinds, as Pater thought possible. He preferred instead to make himself "master of some small area of physical life, a life of quiet, monotonous, simplicity, exempt from all outer disturbance where he could shield his body from the world that his mind might range over it, unhurt and unfettered." These words, written when he was twenty-four, proved prophetic, and though they seem to contradict his conservative inclinations, Max's romantic tendencies were always subject to classical control because his aim was perfection.

Although Pater was the father of the Oxford Aesthetic Movement, it was Oscar Wilde who was its leading spirit in the 1890's. Oscar was the ideal of Max's undergraduate days. For sense of beauty, wit and style Max thought him almost beyond reproach. Consequently, his misgivings about Wilde's character which he did not hesitate to caricature in its
grossest aspects, did not quench his enthusiasm for learning from him new concepts of style, and as the English approach to French ideals of decadence. For, like Wilde and others who embraced art for art's sake, Max agreed with Gautier's idea that perfection of form is virtue, but only in the broadest sense. Perfection of form and style that achieved the desired aesthetic effect was Max's aim in literature. However, he could not accept the more extreme idea that the sound and colour of words should take precedence over the meaning, nor could he completely separate art from morality.

Max's aestheticism was of the intellectual kind. The sensuous atmosphere of evil found in French works like Huysman's *A Rebours* appealed only to his satiric sense. In later years he parodied diabolism in his study of Enoch Soames, the Catholic diabolist. At the same time he mocked the use of intensely personal symbolism and strange twists of grammar in the manner of Mallarmé, whose influence appeared in Enoch's poem "To A Young Woman", in the lines:

Nor not strange forms and epicene
Lie bleeding in the dust,....

What Max admired most in English Decadence was its intellectual dandyism. He saw in artifice and the cult of the *mot juste* a manner that was a way of preserving beauty and elegance in art and in society. He also enjoyed pitting the polished, selective 'unnatural' against naturalism, which for him meant great gobbets of unselected, uncontrolled vulgarity. Artifice even made an amusing weapon against Victorian prudery, as Max discovered from the outraged re-action to his satirical essay in defense of cosmetics.
However, in the cult of the mot juste Max found much more than a weapon; he found a means to a more exact and beautiful style. As Arthur Symons expressed it in The Decadent Movement in Literature (1893), it was an attempt 'to fix the last fine shade, the quintessence of things' that was the ideal of decadence. The danger lay in the nearness of fine shades to verbal preciosity; and Max, who loved the exotic, the elaborate or Byzantine style in literature, showed the marks of preciosity in his early essay style.

There were several latent dangers which Max perceived in English Decadence. The French pursuit of beauty in things evil encouraged Wilde and his friends to indulge in spiritual and moral perversity. They deliberately severed Pater's concept of the moment's experience from its moral connections, and freely indulged their sensuality. Max, who was far from perverse, held aloof. He was too conservative, too fastidious and too sensible not to realize that the cultivation of the senses without moral restraint inevitably led to depravity. He chose not to seek the 'soul of goodness' in things evil.

Actually, the English Decadents of the 1890's had only skimmed the exotic surface of French ideas. The moral idealism and transcendental aspects of the greater French symbolist movement were not made clear to them until Arthur Symon's study in 1899. Even so, Max appreciated symbolism mainly as it related to style. For him, the best art was subtly evoked, not directly stated. He liked symbolism for its suggestive qualities.

Certainly Max was not a man to wrestle with great
transcendental ideas. He believed that the mysteries of life were unfathomable, and because of this, any truth about life must be shrouded in the mystery of its inconclusiveness. In truth, there was no answer. Therefore what he came to value in Baudelaire was not the transcendentalist but the perfectionist and craftsman who contrived his effects "in the contrast between the classical, impeccable, final surface and the romantic interior, between his imperturbable aloofness and his matter."  

Baudelaire had accomplished Max's goal - to gain full control of his material in order to achieve his desired effects.

He became a passionate observer of the human predicament like Wilde, and other physically indolent artists. However, it was the intimate study of personalities, and particularly grotesque personalities that appealed to him. His satiric temperament led him to insights which pointed up the weaknesses rather than the strengths in human behaviour; and so acute were his insights that his style revealed qualities in the individual that made him a universal type. In Poor Romeo!, Romeo Coates represented "A lively example of dandyism unrestrained by taste, ..." Max made him a parody of the foibles of dandies such as Beau Brummell and King George IV.

Max was able to write the satiric epitaph to English Decadence and to the Aesthetic Movement as a whole because he did not take aestheticism or himself too seriously. In spite of his strong artistic and sentimental attachments, he sustained a mood of light, sophisticated irony which was
in keeping with the tone of intellectual dandyism set by Wilde and the Oxford Aesthetes. It combined the Regency's emphasis on sartorial elegance and hedonism with a neoclassical passion for 'deportment', and added the characteristic wit of the Nineties which was best expressed in the shocking epigrams and parodies by Oscar Wilde. "Nothing succeeds like excess", said Oscar, and Max caught the mood. In a letter to Reggie Turner he wrote, "If I were not afraid my people might keep it out of the newspapers, I should commit suicide tomorrow."

In the midst of the general trend toward mass uniformity, dandyism provided a last refuge for the pursuit of individuality and the leisurely enjoyment of the aristocratic way of life. Vulgarity became associated in the minds of Aesthetes with mass education, machinery, speed, the rise of Labour; everything, in fact, that was called modern. The new architecture offended the Aesthete's sense of beauty. Max felt the strain so acutely that, in the Wildean manner, he pulled down the blinds of his compartment to avoid seeing the ugliness of the Crystal Palace.

Dandies deliberately emphasized the ideals of beauty and correct conduct in protest against the general ugliness and lack of good manners in modern society. Correctness became a concern in everything they did, even to the lighting of a cigarette. In his sketch of "Harlequin" Max subtly and poignantly captured the dandy's pose in the midst of an alien world. Harlequin was afraid because he had seen the thunder clouds and was aware of what they presaged. All that he knew
and loved best was threatened with destruction. Yet Harlequin danced on, never swerving from his right posture. It was only in the past that Max could find the beautiful life. There was beauty in past ages because of their remoteness from the stress of common life. They were complete and tranquil. The past was like a work of art to Max because it was free from all irrelevancies; and he longed for a more 'formal' world than the one he was born into. He desired a world in which deportment, good manners and even the grand manner were still accepted as social ideals.

Oscar Wilde taught Max to cultivate moods of 'pastness' as he cultivated his dress. As a result he had his Elizabethan, his Caroline, Georgian and Early Victorian moods. He enjoyed the romantic Nineteenth Century moods too. He felt he belonged to the Nineteenth Century rather than to the Twentieth because then society seemed so stable and secure. He thought the Thirties 'that' most amusing of all periods. He admired the Fifties and Sixties because Pre-Raphaelite Aestheticism flourished then, with its cult of beauty and its loathing of machinery. He delighted in the Second Empire in France, partly because his father had been there during that time. He loved the Seventies when the Graces still abounded, and the romantic aura of aestheticism in the Eighties and Nineties. Whenever he satirized these periods, the satires were mixed with sentiment.

For Max, the jewelled facets of dandyism provided the happiest escape from modernism. One of the brightest of these facets was the theory of the mask. Just as the dandy cultivated
his clothes and manner to accord with his ideal of the 'correct' and beautiful style, so he cultivated an ideal personality, or mask, in which to appear before the world. In fact, to the aesthete of the Nineties, the mask was better than the man. It represented his personal ideal of what, taking into consideration his limitations, he could aspire to be. If he retained the mask and consistently acted in character with it, he might actually become the personality he presented to the outer world, as was the case in The Happy Hypocrite.

Max's mask was inspired by Wilde and The Picture of Dorian Gray, but it was designed after the pattern of his brother Julius. It was a dandy's mask which conveyed a personality of calm, cool elegance, and so perfectly did he wear it, that even Oscar found him enigmatic. Indeed, Max's composure was so mature for his years that Oscar decided the gods must have bestowed on him the gift of perpetual old age. Once of a common friend he enquired, "Tell me, when you are alone with Max, does he take off his face and reveal his mask?"

At the same time that the mask amused and impressed others, it protected his natural reserve. Temperamentally he was hypersensitive to the point of withdrawal from all the coarser aspects of life. "Raw" life was something he chose to observe, not to endure, and even then he carefully selected his observation points.

Max did not feel called upon to right the wrongs of mankind. He was too individualistic and too sceptical to appreciate the benefits of a bourgeois democracy, or any
Utopian notions about an ideal Socialist State. Reformers of any kind annoyed him because all they really could offer were opinions and prejudices, not solutions; and he believed, like Maeterlinck, that any dogmatic message about life simply betrayed the ignorance of the bearer.

A delicate and Tory temperament precluded Max from conversation with radicals. What he desired was a kind of Tory anarchism in which he was able to preserve and to express his individuality. His idea of Utopia was to let everyone 'go about doing just as he pleased' but to leave unaltered the things to which he had grown accustomed. In this Max also expressed the attitude of Oscar Wilde and other hedonists of the Nineties.

As a Decadent and an intellectual dandy, Wilde had made an impact on Max, but it was Oscar's genius for crystallizing a brilliant wit in beautiful style which gave Max the model for evolving his own particular genius. He admired the beauty of Wilde's language because it made even his most sinister works splendid. To Max, Oscar was the best stylist since Ruskin, for both were capable of creating spectacular passages of prose which glowed with ornament and pulsed with colour and musical cadence. In 1893, when Max wrote an article praising Wilde for the Anglo-American Times, Oscar responded to the compliment with praise. He encouraged Max to write, saying that he had a style like a silver dagger.

The same year Max wrote "The Incomparable Beauty of Modern Dress" for The Spirit Lamp, an undergraduate journal edited by Alfred Douglas. It was a satirical fantasy about
foppery, deliberately written in a style of extreme preciosity. But Max's sense of fun, his sharp intelligence and precise, vivid sense of language produced a work that was fresh and original. At twenty-one Max was already a mature, if not a finished, stylist.

After the Summer Term in 1893, Will Rothenstein introduced Max to a group of artists and writers who became known as The Yellow Book school of Decadents. It was the intention of John Lane, the publisher at the Bodley Head, to establish a literary quarterly which was recognizably avant-garde, or art for art's sake, but which stressed above all, artistic excellence. Henry Harland, the literary editor, and Aubrey Beardsley, the art editor, invited Max to contribute to the first issue because of his brilliant gifts for parody and caricature.

In his first essay for The Yellow Book, Max posed as the champion of Artifice. With subtle irony, he managed to shock Victorian prudery by his pretense of favouring the use of cosmetics, while he was actually defending the Aesthetic reaction against Naturalism. At the same time, he pin-pointed the weaknesses of the Aesthetic Movement by making "A Defense of Cosmetics" so perfect a parody of Wilde and a burlesque of Walter Pater that Punch maligned him as one of the Decadents. He was also quoted approvingly in The Green Carnation, a play by Robert Hichens which satirized Oscar Wilde and his circle of Aesthetes. Finally, the critics were so incensed that Max felt obliged to write a letter to the Editor unmasking his burlesque on the 'precious' school of writers. It was a style
which he mimicked very well, because of his strong artistic and sentimental attachments. Self-irony was also a means of liberating his ability to assume the very weaknesses he chose to expose.

During 1894, Max also contributed two other essays to The Yellow Book. "A Note on George the Fourth" was a satiric attempt to refute Thackeray's negative approach to the monarch. Max praised the Regent's life as a work of art, because it was so totally dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure. Again Max succeeded in assuming the foibles of a period he loved, the Regency spirit of dandyism, with its presiding spirit, George the Fourth. In 1880 Max focused his satire on the Aesthetic Movement, with Oscar Wilde as its archetype. Beauty existed long before 1880, Max admitted, but she needed Oscar Wilde to manage her debut. 39

In 1896 The Yellow Book collapsed with the arrest of Oscar Wilde. The stigma of Wilde's homosexuality destroyed it in spite of the fact that Wilde had never been a contributor. Max's last essay for the quarterly was Poor Romeo! His next contribution was to The Savoy which began in 1896 and established an even higher aim of literary excellence than its predecessor. For this Max wrote A Good Prince, a masterful hoax which only revealed at the end that the only good prince was an infant.

Among the artists and writers of The Yellow Book School, Aubrey Beardsley made the most profound impression on Max. In Beardsley and in the writer and critic Arthur Symons, Max caught a deeper and more significant meaning of
the fin-de-siecle mood of decadence. From the sinister beauty of Beardsley's illustrations rose an aura of decadence which hovered over the journal and dominated the artistic atmosphere in spite of contributions from such firmly non-decadent writers as Henry James, Arnold Bennett and Edmund Gosse. Again, with *The Savoy*, edited by Arthur Symons, Beardsley helped to establish the atmosphere of decadence not only with his designs but also with his poems and a highly Byzantine prose fragment *Under the Hill*.

Aubrey Beardsley was a recognized artist and the first to appreciate Max's remarkable talent for caricature. Max, in turn, was amazed at the scope of Beardsley's knowledge. Although they were the same age, Beardsley seemed to have read and seen everything of importance in literature and art.

In many respects they were alike. Both were accomplished in drawing and writing. Both loved to make outrageous statements with classic composure. Yet both formed their artistic judgments on the basis of solid common sense. With Wilde they shared the belief that art was the product of passionate observation, not of actual experience. In only one respect did they sharply differ, and that was the dividing line between the decadents and the moral aesthetes. Beardsley followed Wilde's contention that art never expressed anything but itself. Life, to him, was a form of art. Max contended that art had to express something other than itself; it had to express life, and life was not art because 'it had no formal curves and harmonies.' Assuming the classicist's viewpoint, Max objected to art for art's sake as he objected to realism for realism's sake because he believed both art
...and realism should serve life.\textsuperscript{43}

He also could not separate art from ethics as Beardsley did, and that was why Beardsley preferred to create decadent art whereas Max chose to parody it. Beardsley followed in the Whistler-Wilde tradition which placed art outside the pale of morality. Max followed the Ruskin-Pater tradition which appreciated the moral effects of art quite apart from the purpose.

At the end of the summer of 1894, Max left Oxford for the last time. He left without the distinction of a degree because he was absorbed with \textit{The Yellow Book}, and with his new-won reputation. A small private income now gave him the freedom to make his career as a free-lance writer and caricaturist.

Between 1895 and 1898 when he 'went on the streets of journalism' as dramatic critic for the \textit{Saturday Review}, Max's artistic output reached a small, stylish peak. In 1896 his first collection of caricatures was published in book form, \textit{Caricatures of Twenty-five Gentlemen}. The tone was realistic and satiric. He also wrote for various journals while contributing a weekly commentary for the \textit{Daily Mail} on subjects of his own choosing. As in his caricatures, Max's style was elaborate and satiric, always gibing popular heroes and institutions.

He also contributed articles to the \textit{Saturday Review}. For the Christmas Supplement of 1896 he wrote parodies on George Meredith, H. G. Wells, Richard Le Gallienne, Alice Meynell and Marie Corelli. His ability to mimic the authors' styles, especially Meredith's, was astonishing. Max's parod-
ies were in keeping with his approach to aesthetic criticism; only, instead of interpreting and extending the beauties of a writer's style, he subtly distorted the beauties in order to caricature the weaknesses.

In the essays and fantasies he painstakingly created, Max's aim was not to instruct but instead to reveal through the character of a small or large failure some of the absurdities of human nature, and through that revelation to convey the effect of amused aesthetic delight. The subtly ironic tone he generally established was that of his own unique personality.

With the publication of *The Works of Max Beerbohm* (1896) by the Bodley Head, and "The Happy Hypocrite" in *The Yellow Book*, Max's literary career was made. "The Happy Hypocrite" was a sophisticated fairy story in the manner of Oscar Wilde, which playfully mocked a popular theory of the 'Nineties' of living up to one's ideal self or 'mask', as well as the gay and self-indulgent dandyism of the Regency period. In *The Works*, Max evoked the past and praised dandyism, all forms of artifice and frivolity, in his most 'Byzantine' manner*. The seven essays abounded in strange word inventions such as 'silly pop' and 'manywhere', and in the extraordinary use of otherwise ordinary words. However, it was his self-irony, and controlled, sophisticated lightness of touch which helped to make them effective. Max's Byzantine

* Max initially defined 'Byzantine' as "elaborate ingenuities of form and style." He used it to signify an exotic, ornate, or a highly finished style. All nuances of meaning apply in this context.
qualities were held in restraint by his respect for the classical rules of proportion, clarity, unity and sanity. In time he was able to add simplicity, because his desire for the perfect style was greater than his love for an exotic one.

Max was now a literary personality to be reckoned with, and it was Edmund Gosse who opened the door for his entry into the inner temple of men of letters. At twenty-four Max began to meet such important artists as Whistler and Henry James. He also found himself a social success, with weekend invitations to the great country houses. His financial rewards however, lagged far behind his literary and social triumphs. Therefore, much as he disliked the notion of being associated with the authors of facile journalism, and dreaded the thought of weekly deadlines, he was glad that Shaw's retirement brought the opportunity to write drama criticisms for the *Saturday Review*; and he stepped sprightly in for the money.

In his first 'assignment' for the *Saturday Review*, Max announced that he took no intellectual or emotional pleasure in drama and that the only critical principles he possessed were literary. Any others he would have to 'vamp up' as he went along. Actually, his *Saturday Review* articles reveal that his criticisms were generally biased in favour of the literary standards he set for his own development as a stylist. These were: that a work of art must be rooted somewhere in actual life if it is to give the illusion of reality; that the language must be expressed precisely and beautifully; that the structure must be unified to sustain
the mood and produce the desired impact; that art must never serve a didactic purpose, although it may have a moral purpose that is not overt. These principles will be discussed fully and separately in the following chapters.

It is important to note that Max's literary standards had already been established before 1898, when he assumed the official role of drama critic, and that they remained unchanged in 1910 when he resigned his post, married Florence Kahn, an American actress, and retired to partial seclusion in Rappallo. There he continued to write and to be a source of delight to literary travellers and exiles. Notable among his later publications were a novel, *Zuleika Dobson* (1911); two books of parodies, *A Christmas Garland* (1912) and *Seven Men* (1919); a book of essays, *And Even Now* (1920); a selection of drama criticisms entitled *Around Theatres* (1924); *A Variety of Things* (1928) and *Mainly on the Air* (1946).

Max's critical literary principles were predominantly classical and therefore, conservative. As long as he applied them to his criticism of such exquisite stylists as Whistler, Wilde and Henry James, they served him very well. However, when he tried to apply them to criticism of such large-scaled genius as that of George Bernard Shaw, the limits of his critical abilities were revealed. As in his art and manner of living, Max again showed himself to be a petit maitre.
CHAPTER I

SOURCE REFERENCES


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12. Ibid., p. 146.


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CHAPTER II
THE ILLUSION OF LIFE

As an intellectual young drama critic, Max aligned himself with the "advanced" critics of his time in supporting the strong current trend to modern realistic comedy and tragedy. He saw in the modern emphasis on ideas and actual life the basis for significant native drama, not only for the Nineties, but also for the future. However, he took little pleasure in the majority of those plays he was required to review between 1898 and 1910, because there were so few English playwrights who were gifted enough to have any original ideas, and to express those ideas through forceful, dramatic art.

Facts and ideas, however stimulating they might be in modern drama, actually counted for very little in a play which lacked the illusion of life. It was not enough for the dramatist to make Max think if he could not make him "feel." Max wanted to be amused, excited, uplifted. ¹ It was the romantic atmosphere of marvel, or reality made more real by the subtle, evocative power of suggestion working on his imagination, that he desired more than absolute truth to life. Simply, he wanted to be "bowled over."²

However, the artistic qualities which achieved the effect of bowling Max over were not simple to acquire.
Essentially, they had to be innate within the artist. The first quality the artist required was a definite and unique personality to express in his art. On this depended the originality of his ideas as well as the originality of his style. Henry James was such an artist. Although he was nowhere evident as a guide to the understanding of his characters, he was everywhere evident in the unique personality of his style. Max noted this particularly in one line of James' play *The High Bid*: "I mean, to whom do you beautifully belong?" "There," said Max, ... is quintessence of Mr. James;" and the sound of those words sent "innumerable little vibrations through the heart of every good Jacobite in the audience."³ Actually, the quintessence for Max was the quality of the man revealed through his work. It was the revelation of a man of restrained yet deep moral sensibility, "whose outlook on the world seemed ... fine and touching and inspiring"⁴ because it was full of reverence for noble things, for all that was beautiful, honourable and sensitively intelligent, and of horror for ignoble things, for all that was corrupt or vulgar.

As well as a unique personality, the artist needed creative vitality. Without creative power, artistic techniques had little value. Alone, they could not produce the illusion of life. Max believed that artists were inclined to depend on technical virtuosity to the extent that they lacked creative vitality. The reason why modern artists
like Arthur Wing Pinero were so artistic was that they were not overwhelmed with a surplus of emotions and ideas. Those with the greatest creative vitality were, of course, writers of genius, like Shakespeare. Max loved the "careless exuberance," the headlong impatience," the "divinely-overdone poetry," the "mad magic" of his youthful work. He praised *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a "debauch of uncontrolled fancy"; but then, he added, "true lovers of Shakespeare must needs prefer the debauch."  

It seems incongruous that Max should praise the creative power in Ouida as enthusiastically as he praised it in George Meredith and in Shakespeare. However, he did so, not because he thought they ranked as equals in genius, but because these artists possessed the kind of vitality Max most admired—a lavish flow, a veritable cascade of wit and poetry in their styles. There seemed to be no end to the ideas and emotions they were able to express and no end to their ways and means of expression. Such sheer exuberance thrilled him.

A third quality Max felt an artist must have was a sense of life. He believed that art must be somewhere rooted in life; that the artist must learn to accept life as it was presented to his experience or imagination, without using his brain to twist it into the patterns of a purpose; and finally that he must not only observe the surface of things but be able to penetrate to the permanent, elemental passions of humanity, and by interpreting them, get some meaning out of life.
He was impressed with Henry Arthur Jones' play, *The Lackey's Carnival* (1900) because the dramatist chose to make servants the theme for his play. To probe the problems of servants from the servants' point of view was new to drama and Max praised the effort, in spite of some artistic flaws, because Jones succeeded in realizing in a delightful work of art, something that was painful in life.10

Gerhart Hauptmann, the German dramatist, convinced Max that he was a true creator of life. He loved raw life and so he was able to create living human characters. Every character in *The Thieves' Comedy* was real, life-sized, and full-blooded.11 This was also true for Herman Heijermans, the Dutch dramatist who portrayed humble fisherfolk as they were, and "not as every fool knew them not to be."12

The fourth quality Max thought necessary to the artist was a sense of beauty. Like the French, Max was faithful to the classical tradition in which "beauty of subject and beauty of treatment were still held to be essential."13 In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* Max admired what he called a melodramatic novel, because it was made beautiful by Hardy's temperament. He softened and ennobled the melodrama until it seemed like sublime tragedy, by revealing it through a haze of poetry.14 Max also found beauty in Lytton Strachey's prose style. Strachey possessed what Max considered two vital assets to good style: a good grounding in Latin and a keen natural instinct for writing. The beauty of his style came from a perfect merging of the classical
and natural elements so that his style was infinitely flexible, and in accord with every variation of his theme.\textsuperscript{15}

These four qualities which produced an illusion of life for Max were excellent standards for any form of literature, especially for his own ends as a literary stylist; but they presented certain problems for Max the critic, because they were exacting and personal. As an impressionist, Max believed that the highest kind of criticism was "to translate through one's own temperament and intellect, the fine work of another man, to cast new light on its beauties, to reveal things hidden in it, to illustrate and to extend its meanings."\textsuperscript{16} Such a highly personal approach to criticism demanded some temperamental affinity between artist and critic. If the personality of the artist or his artistic purpose were antithetical to Max's ideals, Max's critical judgment was immediately, and sometimes unduly, biased. He met such problems in the outstanding realistic dramatists of the Edwardian era.

As Max defined realism, the word had broad connotations. He saw it as the motivating factor behind the Pre-Raphaelites, the Impressionists, and the major British novelists. In the Saturday Review, he once expressed this viewpoint. "From George Eliot to Meredith and Hardy, all novelists are trying to get nearer to actual life, deeper into it."\textsuperscript{17}

Hardy saw actual life in pessimistic terms because he sensed nature's indifference to man. Meredith viewed the world more optimistically because he believed man's happiness
lay in his submission to nature. Their discoveries were different but their methods were the same. Both were realists and both were constantly inquisitive about life. They "had their ears at the same key-hole, though they ... overheard different things."\textsuperscript{18}

Max thought that the realistic novel was the only kind of novel alive, and that this was just as true of the drama. He saw realism as the motivating factor behind Maeterlinck, just as much as it was for Ibsen. Though Maeterlinck, like the Pre-Raphaelites, wore a "romantic halo," it was still the emotions of men and women as they were that he was seeking to describe.\textsuperscript{19} Obviously, Max did not see realism in the strict sense of a photographic imitation of the human scene. Realism to him meant truth to life and truth to life was achieved only when the artist truly "envisioned his man" from within, creating a flesh and blood character with a life of his own. For Max then the greatest value of modern realism was that it made artists increasingly aware of the importance of realizing the inward "vision" as well as the outward circumstances, for both served life.

As an intellectual aesthete, Max appreciated truth to life conceived with poetic beauty, such as he found in the work of Meredith and Maeterlinck. It was not in Max's nature to relish the grim, intense intellectualism of Ibsen's plays. Nor did he find any pleasure in the even grimmer plays of the naturalists.

Naturalism in any genre offended Max, because it
aimed at perfect truth to life at the expense of art. He realized that life was inimitable, except through limiting conventions. That "the more closely it was aped, the more futile and unreal was its copy." It was not by the accumulation of detail, but by abstracting from it that a work of art inspired us with some illusion. Consequently, realistic plays did not require an overt presentation of suicide. The dullness of peasant minds did not necessitate dullness being drilled into us. This was reality at the expense of realism and it destroyed the illusion of life. What Max looked for was truth by suggestion. When suggestion worked upon the reader's imagination or on the imagination of the audience, in this artful interchange the sense of reality was born.

In Maxim Gorky's play, The Lower Depths, Max found his worst example of naturalistic drama. He described the play as a horror, not because of the horrible subject-matter, but because of the inartistic handling of the subject. It seemed to Max that even if Gorky's characters had been closely observed from life, they were no more life-like than the wax figures in Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors. His "slice of life" was actually chunks and gobbets chucked at the audience, "ungraced by any beauty or nobility of treatment, or ungraced by an idea, and so meaning nothing, leading nowhither, merely affronting us... ."

Essentially Max had no understanding of, or sympathy for the brooding Russian soul. He missed the poetry and humanity in Gorky's play because of his deep-rooted prejudice
against Russian writers and what seemed to him to be their lack of artistic discipline. For Max, who believed in the classical tradition of tragedy, the artist was expected to evoke through art a sense of pity and awe and thereby render aesthetically delightful in art what was actually tragic in life.

Max was never "illuded" by Maxim Gorky, but neither did he sense an illusion of life in the modern realistic plays of Arthur Wing Pinero. Although it is from Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (1893) that the rise of modern British drama is generally dated, Max was a strong dissenting voice in the midst of widespread critical praise. While many praised Pinero's gifts for portraiture, his incisive dialogue and subtlety of thought, Max called The Second Mrs. Tanqueray a failure because it lacked intellectual reality and sincerity. To him it was "only a pastiche of Ibsen grafted on an ordinary commercial melodrama of coincidence, . . ." Max felt Pinero had no original ideas of his own to express, but was merely an adapter of the discoveries of other artists such as Ibsen, Thackeray and Tom Robertson. He admitted that the demands for modern intellectual tragedy were difficult to meet, because the dramatist must delight in watching and portraying life; but it was not enough to be, like Pinero, merely a clever technician.

Actually Pinero was the first of the modern realists to initiate unity of mood in his plays. Under the influence
of Ibsen, he had dropped such artificialities as long soliloquies from his style, and at the same time he joined a comparative naturalness of sentiment to naturalistic dialogue. Max respected Pinero's artistry in constructing his plays, but he disliked the playwright's style. For him, it was generally dull and heavy, and any attempt he made to be "literary" only ended in stilted dialogue. Of course Max welcomed literary graces in artificial comedy and in romance, but he insisted that "in modern realism the only proper 'style' is that which catches the manner of modern human beings in conversation." 27

Max's criticism of Pinero was harsh, but it was no harsher than Shaw's, who looked down on him as one of the pseudo-Ibsenites. However, fifty years later, when Pinero and his plays had taken on the romantic aura of "pastness," Max softened his criticism enough to admit that although Pinero was not outstanding in any one thing, he was generally competent. Still, he did not revoke his judgment that Pinero treated his craftsmanship as an end in itself, rather than a means for expressing his ideas; and that he had no personal force, no unique personality to express in his art, a lack which was reflected in his plodding literary style.

Henry Arthur Jones was a much better dramatist from Max's point of view. Here was a dramatist who could "illude" him. Jones was an originator of ideas for drama such as the servants theme in The Lackey's Carnival. The play had many
technical flaws, but Max praised Jones' sensitive interpretation of a character new to modern drama, Thomas Tarboy, a man who was hopelessly trapped by the accident of birth into a life of servitude.

Max found so few dramatists with any ideas of their own that he rated Jones as highly as Oscar Wilde in being "the only dramatist of any intellectual force, the only dramatist with ideas." Like his contemporary, Pinero, Jones had a strong theatrical sense; but he also possessed a strong sense for actual life, and a vital satiric style. As a writer of "serious, intellectual and satirical comedies of manners," Max ranked him among the best dramatists of his time. In fact, he rated him too highly, probably because he so greatly admired the qualities of humanity, originality, satiric wit and vitality which Jones expressed in his style.

The importance to Max of the quality of the man as revealed in his work was never more evident than in his criticisms of Henrik Ibsen. The Norwegian playwright had made a powerful impact on writers and critics of the Nineties, especially on William Archer, critic and Ibsen translator, and on George Bernard Shaw. He was the great dramatic force which finally killed the taste for conventional comedy and melodrama. After him no writer of realism dared to write naturalistic dialogue expressing artificial sentiments. Art became dedicated to ideas and to moral purpose.

Max, however, was never an "Ibsenite." Although he was fully aware of Ibsen's "volcanic" genius, he sensed
a harsh inhumanity in the man which unduly biased his opinions of Ibsen's motives as an artist. In fact, Max described him as the "perfect" artist; one who would not sacrifice one "intellectual germ" for the sake of friendship. He saw that Ibsen's strength, like Swift's, lay in his intellect and his natural gift for literature, but that his weakness, like Swift's, lay in his harshness, a defect which limited the power of his genius. He considered Ibsen a Titan of literature, but not an Olympian, because he saw him as "an ardent and tender lover of ideas" who could not abide mankind. He thought Ibsen "cared less for ideas as ideas than as a scourge for his fellow-creatures." For this reason Max was convinced that Shaw and the other Ibsenites had misunderstood a most important point about their "master" when they believed that it was Ibsen's sincere desire to reform social evils. Actually, he mistook his blindness for theirs. He missed Ibsen's intense moral concern for his fellow man whom the dramatist urged to assume moral responsibilities and to make ethical distinctions between truth and conventional hypocrisy, because Max could not see through the wall of his personal dislike.

Max realized that Ibsen was primarily an artist, who took an artist's joy in reproducing human character as he observed it. But he also felt that the dramatist took pleasure in the havoc his ideas stirred up; that he misled women into thinking he cared for their emancipation. Max was certain he had never been concerned for the "new woman."
Ibsen once openly admitted that he had never had any such purpose, but, as an artist, had merely portrayed certain tendencies. It was not liberty then, which Ibsen loved, but the fight for it. He seemed, in some respects, to be an amoral moralist whose "inhumanity" necessarily permeated his art, and at times destroyed the illusion of life for Max, who believed that the artist must love "raw life" before he could hope to create living human characters which endured.

The danger for the artist of ideas who did not create characters for their own sake, was that when the ideas became stale, the characters who lived mainly as mouthpieces, also died. In his criticism of The Lady from the Sea, Max described Ellida, the Lady, as being the usual Ibsenist heroine, the propounder of the regular Ibsenist ideas; but because the ideas had become quaint and tedious, so had she. However, had she been conceived as a genuinely human creature, she might have survived the stale ideas she expressed. Ultimately Max predicted immortality for Ibsen as a strange and dominating personality, but not for his art.

Certainly Max thought Ibsen was capable of creating live human characters. He called Rosmersholm a masterpiece in which all the characters were meticulously thought out, and all were full and vital. He marvelled at the veil of poetry that Ibsen had woven around Rosmersholm; the air of mystery that surrounded Rebecca, making her a haunting character, a poetic, tragic figure; the sense of foreboding
suggested in the symbolic coming of white horses. Here was art evoked, not ideas propounded, and out of the unity of poetry and idea came the dramatic effect, at once tragic and beautiful. Even so, for this sense of beauty Max was more grateful to the style of acting than to the dramatist.

It seemed to Max that Ibsen was not a dramatist who appealed to the sense of beauty. He felt that all the dramatist required of his audience was intensity and intellectualism. As an aesthete, Max responded best to the evocative qualities in Ibsen's art, the mystery and poetry which stirred his imagination and awoke the illusion of life. As a moral man, Max detested Ibsen's apparent hatred of mankind, and even of himself. As a classicist, Max could never appreciate the art and realism, even of a genius, when he thought they did not serve life. In Max's opinion, Ibsen created realistic dramas for the sake of the ideas alone.

Max was unduly prejudiced against Ibsen's characters, because he could never accept them simply for themselves. He was always influenced by the attitude he believed Ibsen took towards them. In an almost savage satiric attack directly on the stupidity of audiences, and incidentally, on Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, Max suggested that since Ibsen hated Hedda and meant us to laugh at her, and since she remained as a lively satire on a phase of history that had passed, she ought to be played with a sense of humour. 38

Obviously Max knew that Ibsen could create characters
who were sufficiently alive and individual to deliver an impact all on their own, regardless of what Ibsen thought of them. That he should allow his prejudices to override his artistic judgments suggests that he was so extremely sensitive to "personality" in the artist, that he responded to Ibsen as he would to any Stylist; and for Max, Ibsen's grim realism not only dominated the tone of his plays, but also most of the characters.

As an impressionistic critic, Max could not be successful in his impressions of Ibsen's plays, because he was antithetical to him in temperament. Also, there were other factors which disturbed him. First of all, he disliked translations; especially William Archer's too literal translations of Ibsen's plays. In capturing the original phrase, Archer missed the general tone. Secondly, Max felt that English audiences could never fully appreciate Ibsen's characters because, in spite of the universality of the themes, the characters were Norwegians in Norway. However, when these criticisms are weighed in the balance of his favourable criticisms of other foreign dramatists such as Maeterlinck, Hauptmann and Heijermans, it is obvious that it was not the translations, or the nationality of Ibsen's characters that destroyed the illusion of life for Max, but the grim hard intellectual realism of the dramatist which chilled his aesthetic sensibilities and paralyzed his critical judgments.

It was not in the genius of Ibsen, but in the English
masters of fiction, like Joseph Conrad, that Max placed his hopes for English drama. He blamed the critics for encouraging stupid, artificial drama because they placed such high value on tight, artificial theatrical techniques. Instead of encouraging a literary genius like Conrad, they merely reminded him that he had much to learn in technical construction. But, said Max, "Here is the sort of man that is needed--a man with a wide knowledge of many kinds of life, and a passionate imagination--an essentially dramatic imagination, . . . ." Here was a romantic realist who, like Henry James, loved to reveal the fine consciences of his characters, and through that study, to indicate a moral. In One Day More, Max felt the impact of a terrible and haunting tragedy. It was a tragedy of wasted lives, presented with artistic simplicity and moral sensitivity, in vividly expressive language. It was the pathos of life made noble through art. He felt both the emotional impact of pain, and the aesthetic delight.

What Max wanted from art was "some kind of emotion." Problem plays written for some moral or social purpose, only appealed to him to the extent that the ideas were embodied in live creatures of flesh and blood, and carried an emotional impact. Mouthpieces, he could not abide. If the ideas were all that mattered to the playwright, he was not a true creator. His ideas belonged in social tracts. That was where Max would have put the early plays of George
Bernard Shaw.

That Shaw was a genius, Max never denied. However, his admiration for that genius was marred, not only by Shaw's use of art for didactic purposes, but also by Max's disagreement with almost any view Shaw held about anything. Nothing could have repelled Max more than the statement Shaw contributed to a symposium on the Problem Play (1895), that only in the Problem Play was there any real drama, because literary greatness was not the only criterion for art. There was also social utility. It did not matter to Shaw that Ibsen's *A Doll's House* would in time lose its impact as dramatic art, because it would have done its work in the world, and that was enough for the highest genius.

In his review of Shaw's novel, *Cashel Byron's Profession*, Max was almost as candid as Shaw. He said that he realized Shaw wanted to impress certain theories on his readers, and that the purpose of his art was to convert others to his point of view. However, the true creator desired mainly "to illude . . . with a sense of actual or imaginative reality," and to achieve that aim he was willing to suppress himself and his theories, because they killed the illusion of life. Shaw, who twisted life into patterns of a purpose, was a critic, not a creator.

A true creator had a sense for actual life, which meant he was able to evoke his characters from within. Shaw's characters, far more than Ibsen's characters, who could be
warmly human and alive, bore only surface characteristics. With few exceptions, his characters were mere containers for Shavian ideas. Max thought the failure of his early plays, such as *Widowers' Houses* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, was not only that Shaw lacked Ibsen's gift for dealing seriously with the great issues of life but also that *Mrs. Warren's Profession* failed, because Shaw was a comedian trying to be tragic, and he could not, because he was incapable of creating a flesh and blood character. It was only when Shaw did not attempt to be serious, that his characters were quite delightful and quite real. "Quite" real, because basically all Shaw's characters were himself. He infected them with his own vitality.

In Max's view, Shaw saw the world as a "clean-cut phantasmagoria," in which every phantom was his own unrecognized self. When he described what he had seen, "himself was the one person illuded." However, Shaw made it possible to enjoy his preaching because of the process he took to arrive at his conclusions. He was a serious man who could not help being frivolous, but the combination was so exceptional, that he amused Max as no one else did. Shaw had a genius for paradoxical wit; but he was also a mass of contradictions, and therefore he was never to be taken seriously.

When Max read *Man and Superman*, before he had seen it performed, he compared Shaw's "new dialogues" to Plato's, to Shaw's disadvantage. Plato at least invented characters
of flesh and blood and set them against realistic backgrounds. Shaw was always trying to prove his thesis, with the result that his characters were merest diagrams. He had no sense for life and therefore he had no sense for art. Max believed Shaw chose popular forms of art such as the melodrama and farce merely to get people to listen to him. As a piece of brilliant, witty dialectic, he thought *Man and Superman* Shaw's masterpiece, but as a work of art it was a perfect oral debate, not drama. Max called it the most complete expression of the most distinct personality in current literature.

It is not surprising that Max, like other intelligent reviewers, at the turn of the century, thought Shaw's plays were not drama; nor is it strange that he should find the heavy element of discussion which spoiled the plays as recognized plays was at the same time their greatest attraction. Shaw's plays were good in an unfamiliar way.

Unlike Max, Shaw felt called upon to remedy social wrongs. He believed that Socialism held the answer to society's problems, but he did not make his plays a verbal battlefield of good socialists against bad capitalists. His plays were "primarily about the struggle between human vitality and the artificial system of morality," and he adapted the old Victorian melodrama to his purposes because the conventional ethics involved with melodrama were also the accepted ethics of modern society. The illusions of melodrama were precisely those which men fell victim to in
"real" life. Hence Shaw's plays became inverted melodramas because they were used to reveal the truth of these illusions. At the same time, his vital characters, the ones who were freest from illusions, were used to educate those who were still victims of illusion. As G.K. Chesterton said, Shaw's plays were actually expanded paradoxes.

In exposing the reality of illusion, Shaw was making his plays not only sounding boards for his ideas, but also true interpretations of life. The reason Max did not appreciate his interpreters was that he saw in Shaw's "vital" characters, not men and women who were free from illusion, but the machine-like mind of Shaw, "a marvellous piece of construction--efficient, rigid, unassailable, like steel girders." For Max, Shaw's vitality was purely intellectual because he had no sense of beauty, and no real sense for life. Although he bore no malice, he was basically inhuman, having "no pity for the poor . . . no feeling for father, country, woman. . . ." Of course he was vigorous, witty, original, brilliantly entertaining, but he was generally too insensitive to be able to illude Max.

However, in his review of John Bull's Other Island Max revoked his opinion that Shaw could not create live characters. In Broadbent, Shaw had created an Englishman, "just as he is." Max called the "portrait," full-length and minutely finished. He said that it was Shaw's masterpiece of observation and satire. He especially appreciated the characterization of Broadbent because he, too, loved to
satirize the English. Also, Max liked the play because Shaw's method was more orthodox than usual. It was a recognized type of discussion which emanated from the conflict between persons. Most of the fun came from "a slight exaggeration on the things that the character actually would say."  

Shaw was an expert at writing "verbal duels in which the acerbity and the interest derived not from the questions discussed but from situation and character." This became evident to Max in the production of Major Barbara. In his review he gracefully but completely recanted his belief that Shaw could not draw life or write a play. He admitted he had not had enough theatrical imagination to see the potentialities of Shaw's plays in print. To deny that Shaw was a dramatist because he chose to get drama out of contrasted types of character and thought, without action, and without appeal to the emotions, seemed to him now to be both unjust and absurd.  

Nevertheless, it was just because Shaw did not attempt to appeal to his emotions that Max missed the illusion of life in most of his plays. Precisely what had delighted Max most in Major Barbara was the sense of spiritual beauty Shaw revealed in his characterization of Barbara. Spiritual beauty was not something he had sensed in Shaw before.

Max's dilemma about Shaw was rather poignantly expressed at the end of his review of The Doctor's Dilemma.
He said, "Why have I been carping all this while about the central figure, instead of expressing the joy that the whole brilliant play gave me, and trying to communicate that joy to you? I evidently haven't yet learnt my business." The dilemma for Max was that in spite of his joy in the liveliness of Shaw's characters, and in the brilliant shower of wit... and fun, he was not equipped, either temperamentally or artistically, to judge this new analytical type of drama. The new critic necessary to the new drama was the analytical critic like Shaw himself, not an impressionistic critic like Max.

Max measured a work of art by the ideals of aestheticism and by the time-tested rules of the ancients. When Shaw freely mixed his genres, and made his ideas more important than his characters, Max's sense of form and decorum was jarringly affected. When he showed no interest in expressing the expected emotions of live human beings in conflict, and when further, he evinced no sensitivity and little sense of beauty, Max's refined aesthetic sensibilities were offended. It deeply disturbed him that Shaw could be so gifted, as gifted perhaps as Voltaire, and yet be so totally insensitive, both as a human being and as an artist. As he said in a letter to Henry Arthur Jones, "I never read anything of his without wishing that he had never been born and hoping that he will live to a very ripe old Age!"

Max's ambivalence about The Doctor's Dilemma arose
over a question of artistic sensitivity. He believed that Shaw had erred in showing the art of Louis Dubedat on stage and then in expecting the audience to accept it as the work of a genius. He compared Henry James' Roderick Hudson to Louis Dubedat, to explain his point that it was possible to believe in the artistic genius of Roderick Hudson because James had the gift of imagining and describing works of art so that his readers were infected with his own enthusiasm. Had he illustrated the art, he would have killed the illusion of the reality of that genius because masterpieces of any kind had to be left to the imagination of the audience in order to be made real.

To Max, Shaw was an iconoclast who seemed to be artistically insensitive to anything that did not fit into his scheme of things, and serve his didactic purpose. However, Shaw did possess an unerring sense of theatre; it was part of his genius. It therefore seems unlikely that he would have destroyed a theatrical illusion unless he intended to. Shaw loved wherever possible, to remove the veils of illusion. His primary purpose in The Doctor's Dilemma was to remove the veils of illusion surrounding the practice of private medicine. A secondary purpose could well have been to remove the veil from an illusion of genius.

Obviously, the illusions surrounding the practice of medicine had to be stripped away before the eyes of the characters and the audience; but the illusion of artistic
genius could not have been removed from the minds of the characters because it would have weakened the effect of his attack on doctors who destroy life rather than preserve it. The final disillusionment could only be implied through the actual display of the paintings becoming the crowning paradox that the genius who was actually "murdered" was not only a scoundrel, but also a fraud. If this were not so, Shaw was duped by his own theatrical devices.

That Max did not come to a similar conclusion was due in part to his unfamiliarity with Shaw's theatrical inversions, and substantially to the type of critic he was. First impressions meant more to Max than a detailed analysis of the playwright's ideas. He responded best to the subtle refinements of an exquisite artist like Henry James. The house of paradoxes that Shaw built, although filled with surprise and delight, still made Max uneasy. From his point of view there was no artistic unity and therefore there could be no unified effect. "But" was the most familiar word in Max's criticisms of Shaw. He could never be wholly bowled over.

Shaw's habit of mixing serious and frivolous elements in his plays was also jarring to Max because it destroyed the sense of reality. From a classical standpoint, a serious parody or a tragi-comedy of the real was unthinkable. Max therefore thought The Philanderer should be two plays; one that could be a serious study of philandering, and the other
a "blithe satire on the foibles of the early 'Nineties."
As it was, Shaw had created Leonard Charteris as "a real person in fantastic surroundings." This destroyed the sense of the character's reality and made his inherent unpleasantness seem to be "a mere wanton intrusion of unpleasantness for its own sake." Certainly Charteris would not, in real life, have said to a woman he desired to please that she must marry someone else and that he would then come and philander with her. Max said he would likely have thought it "but a certain grace and fastidiousness in speech are characteristic of the Charteris type."^  

In January, 1908, Max seemed finally to have resolved his inner conflicts about Shaw. In a review of *Arms and the Man* he wrote, "since the time when *Plays Pleasant* and *Unpleasant* were published, I have come to see that much of this seeming fantasy and flippancy was a mere striving after sober reality, and that the reason why it appeared fantastic was that it did not conform with certain conventions of the theatre which the majority of playgoers took as a necessary part of truth to life." However, four months later he reviewed *Getting Married*, Shaw's first disquisitory play, and it was evident that no reconciliation was now possible. 

Shaw's new play dramatized the ideas, not the characters. By making his characters say things they would never say in real life, he was actually dramatizing the truth of their life situations. When Hotchkiss boldly con-
fessed that he was a snob, he was not saying something he would actually say in real life, but his statement revealed the actual truth of his situation, the reality that he would not have been aware of, and certainly would not have expressed under any normal circumstances. For Shaw, the artificiality of the farcical characters was best suited to his artificial manner of expressing the hidden truth.

Max could only suggest that the proper place for Getting Married was the library. He agreed with the critic A.B. Walkley that the play was somewhat like Plato's Symposium, except that Plato's characters were superior in being creatures of flesh and blood. Shaw's characters were only faintly visible to the mind's eye; however, with careful reading, it was possible to invest them with more of a sense of reality, and at the same time to appreciate the "host of valuable ideas" they contained.

Max recognized the resemblance between Shaw's young men and women and those of the old-fashioned commercial drama. However, those creatures were pretty figments whereas Shaw's were merely ugly ones. It seemed to Max that invention should result in something better than life, not in something worse. At one time the newness of Shaw's characters compensated for the ugliness, but now, "these alternately impudent and whining young men, and these invariably priggish and hectoring young women, all of them as destitute of hearts as they are of manners, and all of
them endowed with an equal measure of chilly sensuality," had finally killed in Max the joy he had once taken in the force and brilliancy of their presentation. They were obviously creatures of a journalistic, not a literary imagination.

In *Misalliance*, Max was further disturbed by the total lack of sensitivity Shaw evidenced in reproducing a parody of an actual tragedy in which an illegitimate son had shot his father. Max knew that Shaw was free from malice, but he did not really think he was humane; and without humanity, without beauty, without unity of form, without sentiment, it was no longer possible for Max to enjoy Shaw's art. Familiarity had finally left only a disagreeable sensation.

Max's disagreement with Shaw's principles even entered into his criticisms of other dramatists of ideas whom Shaw, as the leader of the intellectual school, had influenced. In October, 1905, he reviewed *The Return of the Prodigal*, a play by St. John Hankin. He praised the author for creating a delightful comedy which did not "set out to prove anything, or to prove anything." Unlike Shaw, Hankin did not choose to harangue his audience, but rather to communicate with good-natured amusement his original and acute observations of the world around him. Here the arguments were not allowed to distort the illusion of truth to life.

In November, 1905, Max reviewed *The Voysey Inheritance* by Harley Granville-Barker. Again, he praised the author
for "letting his mind range actively over the actual world," and not allowing it to dwell on the theatre world which reflected nothing. He admired the originality of the play's theme on the fraudulent solicitor, and the careful revelation of the solicitor from within, laying bare the whole of the man. He also remarked on the distinct individuality of each of the characters, and the sharp and subtle irony Barker employed in his portrayals. In fact, the only serious flaw Max found in the play was in the heroine, who was obviously patterned after the superficial and unsentimental young women drawn by Shaw. He felt she ought to have been supplied with moral passion as well as passion for her lover. As it was, there was nothing in her soul but abstract ethics which made her as undramatic as she was insufferable. Max reminded Barker that sentiment was not incompatible with real life, and that it could be a very potent thing in the hand of even the cleverest dramatist. In a contemporary play such as this, it was the conflict of flesh and blood characters which produced the illusion of life.

In December, 1905, Max recanted his opinions of Shavian drama, but this was not his final position. It is evident from his continuing ambivalence toward Shaw that the change was a change of mind rather than a change of heart. At the end of his career as a drama critic he was still recommending that writers strive to portray life as it was and not as it suited some didactic purpose.
Galsworthy, like Shaw, used his art to convey a "message," and he also seemed at times to be lacking in humanity, but Max recognized in him the qualities of a true creator: the ability to observe the surface of things, an intuitive sympathy with the soul of things, and the artistic sense of selectivity necessary to create a unified work of art. It was these elements which created the illusion of reality for Max rather than the "photographic realism" which Galsworthy had cleverly conceived in tone and setting, to give the effect of actual experience.

In Max's criticism of The Madras House by Mr. Granville-Barker, rests the clearest summary of his final position on Shaw. Both The Madras House and Misalliance were debates, with a dramatic difference. Barker's debate had unity, not only in the theme but also in the manner of presentation. The characters were true studies created by an observant and sympathetic man. Further, they were all necessary to the development of the theme.

In contrast, Shaw constantly changed his manner in Misalliance. His introduction of an acrobat on an aeroplane had no relevance to the theme, and it seemed to Max that the characters were "mostly comic in order to compensate us for the serious views" they were made to express. However, said Max, it was not possible to take clowns seriously. What Shaw needed to do, if he could, was to "observe men and women accurately instead of inventing in some dark corner
of his soul men and women with whom not all the concentrated forces of his intellect could make him sympathise." It was time for Barker to exchange roles and become a strong influence upon Shaw.

The salient point about Max on Shaw was that Max was a nineteenth century man attempting to apply aesthetic ideals and classical principles to the experimental plays of a progressive, analytical dramatic genius of the Twentieth Century. When Shaw's ideas were made to perform like characters, Max felt no emotion for them as "live" characters because they had no life of their own. Max was too reactionary to appreciate pioneer work in new forms of art, especially if it was not in keeping with his temperament and his concepts of what a work of art should be. He abhorred change, and could best appreciate things with an aura of "pastness" about them. He could appreciate Shaw's intellect and paradoxical wit because he himself possessed these qualities, although to a lesser degree; but Shaw was not a stylist as Max defined one. He was merely an immortal "personality" and "the most brilliant and remarkable journalist in London."74

For Max the illusion of life depended to a great extent on what was familiar to him. He could not be "bowled over" by what was not only strange but also antithetical to his conservative thoughts and delicate feelings. Max was therefore not capable of being illuded by the extravagant changes Shaw had wrought in his discussion plays, which he
claimed were created with "operatic dialogue" on the basis of musical compositions. Shaw's "music," as far as Max was concerned, was that of a nail being pounded into a board.\textsuperscript{75}

Perhaps it was Shaw and Harley Granville-Barker who led Max to conclude that it was more amusing to grapple with ideas in books than in the theatre. It seemed to him that drama ought to cause the excitement of pity and awe, terror or laughter. The theatre surely was meant for thrills like the appearance of the Ghost at Elsinore.\textsuperscript{76}

Romance and fantasy also offered Max a pleasant escape from the ugliness and hard intellectualism he had come to associate with the modern world. He loved the stories and the characters of romance which did not "date" or grow stale, because they were not confined to one period or to one place. Max wanted truth to life idealized, made beautiful. He wanted to be amused and edified, not depressed and brow-beaten for his inadequacies as a citizen and a patriot. He could never reconcile himself to modern notions of art which seemed to insist that art must reform as well as entertain. It struck Max that democracy and socialism had broken down the barriers which had guarded and exalted excellence until excellence in anything was no longer a criterion. He realized now if he desired to hear politics discussed intelligently he would be better off in the theatre than in parliament; and the grand manner which had been the mark of great statesmen like Disraeli and Gladstone, existed now only
in the old melodrama.

Max was not thrilled by art which served its didactic purpose in the world and thereby nobly perished; he wanted the works of genius to last solely on their merits as art. Romantic figures, like those Dumas and Rostand created, meant more to him than Ibsen's creations, for all this powerful and terrifying realism because the romantic characters were created solely for their own sake. Their only purpose was to give pleasure. Max thought Ibsen's characters were already out of date in the 1890's, whereas Cyrano de Bergerac was still vitally alive.

It seemed to Max that the romantic play which survived the test of time was that which contained one central figure to which all else was subordinated. Cyrano was such a figure; and so was the Count of Monte Cristo. They remained alive for him not only because of their basis in reality, but also because the authors, in taking their fantastic characters seriously, truly envisaged them.

Max believed that nothing was impossible in a fantasy that was founded on solid reality, or that was made unerringly logical and realistic from the improbable premise to the fantastic conclusion, because then the meaning and the illusion were sustained. Even so frank a fantasy as The Prisoner of Zenda gave Max the illusion of life because of the manner of Anthony Hope's presentation. Mr. Hope was able to persuade his audience that life would be so much more delightful if
such things could actually happen, and thereby he made his play a direct criticism of life.

Where the characters and situations were wholly artificial the vitality of the play depended upon the style. Oscar Wilde's artificial situations and artificial dialogue gave Max the illusion of life, not so much because life was woven into the farce of *The Importance of Being Ernest*, but because of the magnificence of the absurdity which lay in the style. The vitality was in the language and manner of playing, not in the truth to life. "Throughout the dialogue was the horse-play of a distinguished intellect and a distinguished imagination—a horse-play among words and ideas, conducted with poetic dignity." 77

Fantasy and witty comedy delighted Max more than most plays of modern realism because he was not expected to take them seriously, and because they appealed to his love of the exotic. In *The Admirable Crichton*, James Barrie portrayed impossible people doing impossible things. Certainly there was a serious element in the fantasy, the point that servility was the result of circumstances rather than weakness of character, but happily for Max, the emphasis was on the fabulous elements, and the sheer fun of make-believe.

He also loved the Irish playwrights J.M. Synge and W.B. Yeats, whose plays possessed the pleasurable quality of "something simple and quite strange." 78 He admired the simple, seemingly artless manner in which they carried a
dramatic idea to its dramatic effect. He was charmed by their poetic and evocative use of symbolism, and the beauty of their language. For him, the Irish were an exotic people. Max felt any hope for the future of poetic drama depended on the Irish theatre, and especially on Yeats.

One other "exotic" Max loved was the novelist Ouida; not for that quality of strangeness which the Irish possessed, but for her love of beauty which she displayed in splendid descriptions of exotic places, palaces and jewels. Her characters were the merest abstractions, but they could always "illude" Max. She so passionately believed in them that he was able to believe in them too.\textsuperscript{79} She captured for Max, although in a much cruder manner than George Meredith or Maeterlinck, the mystery, the romance, the beauty and the pathos of life, in her own inimitable style. She delighted him because, innately, Max did not want life stripped to the bare bones of all romantic illusion. He wanted life clothed by a unique, creative imagination which had as much sense for beauty and form as it had for life.
CHAPTER II
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CHAPTER III
AN EXACT AND BEAUTIFUL STYLE

The artistic qualities which Max considered essential to create the illusion of life were also those which were essential to the making of a true style. To create an exact and beautiful style, the artist required a definite and unmistakable personality, the creative power and the technical skills to express his 'self' through his particular vision of life, completely, perfectly and with apparently effortless ease. He also required a sense of inward harmony to express his perceptions beautifully.

To Max, the paramount thing in any art was personality, and because the essay allowed for the most perfect expression of personality, he rated the essayist higher than the romancer. In the essay, he felt the level of artistic achievement depended on how precisely and how delightfully the essayist's words transcribed his thoughts and how fluently his cadences caught the tone of his emotions. "Himself was the thing to be obtruded and style was the only means to that end."¹ In fact style was everything because the manner was the man. Consequently, the stylist had to reproduce not only his perception of truth or his particular emotions, but also the 'infinitely variable pauses' of his own voice.² It was the clear vocal cadence that conveyed the personal quality which
individualized the style.

True style was in every respect a 'personal' matter. It was "not a mere spy-hole to things in general, but a spy-hole to things as they were reflected in the soul of the writer." For this reason the modern stylist faced a more complex task then did his counterpart in the Eighteenth Century. The techniques that were required to express all the fine shades of his thought and meaning in a fresh, colloquial manner directed him as far as possible from natural conversation. Paradoxically, the method for reproducing a colloquial manner was almost its opposite.

In novels and stories, of course, the writer could not obtrude himself if he intended to make his characters' personalities real and individual. However, the artist's personality still revealed itself indirectly through the recurrence of themes and the motivation of the characters. In Henry James, Max found 'heart and manners', qualities which he considered to be the very essence of individuality. It was the 'passion of conscience' which motivated most of Henry James' characters and therefore indirectly expressed the author's own moral fervour. In Joseph Conrad's novels, a deep personal concern for the isolation of man and the idea of fidelity became recurrent themes. However, the characters in Conrad's and James's novels had lives of their own because the authors were able to project their characters from themselves.

Like the novelist, the dramatist also had to project his characters from himself, allowing his personality to
infiltrate his themes and to motivate his characters subtly and indirectly. The style of the dramatist was not the perfect expression of the writer's self, but the perfect expression of various selves. The difference between the novelist's style and that of the dramatist was principally in the matter of dialogue. Literary characters could speak in a literary manner without destroying the illusion of their reality. The words of the dramatist had to be easier, more colloquial and familiar than the words of the novelist or storyteller. Even in poetic drama, there needed to be "a tincture of oral style throughout the speeches"; but in plays of modern realism, the characters had to seem to be speaking in the manner of human beings, and to do this the dramatist had to select, compress and sharpen his dialogues to free them from the irrelevancy that comprised most actual talk. Furthermore, the characters had to speak beautifully. For the dramatist as for the novelist, literary style was the expression of the writer's various selves in an exact and beautiful manner.

Personality was paramount, but creative power was also essential to the artist with true style. The quality of that power lay in his ability to 'envisage his man', particularly if the character were a creature of romance or of parody; and in his talent for evoking person, place or scene out of a full store of love and knowledge of his subject. Max called this true vision because the creative inspiration sprang from within the artist. It was neither faked from without in the manner of most popular, professional novelists and dramatists, nor produced in the manner of a critical rather than a creative intelligence.
Max thought that George Moore possessed a critical rather than a creative genius because that 'vital magic' which rendered love and knowledge into art, and which gave such vitality to his criticisms, was lacking in his novels. He regarded Moore's novels as experiments "made with admirable skill and patience", but for all his technical and scientific knowledge, his novels "somehow failed of that final result for which they were made: the creation of authentic life."

Moore's habit of rewriting his earlier novels after they had been published seemed to Max to be the deadliest criticism they could have, for if the characters did not live unalterably for the author, for whom could they live? In his essay on Moore in Mainly on the Air, he expressed the opinion that once a novel had been published, the characters were beyond the writer's power. Their individuality and the events of their lives were "as unalterable ... as the character and career of the late Queen Victoria."

Certainly there was some justification for Max's contention that Moore's novels were experiments. Temperamentally Moore was easily excited by new ideas and new art forms. In Esther Waters (1894) the theme was experimental in the sense that servants had never before been treated seriously as the principal characters of an English novel. Also, the style was experimental because Moore habitually experimented with a variety of styles from the rough naturalism of Zola to the refined aestheticism of Walter Pater. Style was always more important to him than subject matter. In fact, art interested George Moore more than life. That is why he chose the extreme
position on art for art's sake. In *Modern Painting* (1893) he agreed with Whistler's viewpoint on the unimportance of subject and morality. He believed that since literature was already separated from society, style could be separated from substance.

Actually, it was Moore's interest in perfecting his form and style which prompted him to rewrite his novels, and it is on points of style that most of his changes were made. Even so, he was not above sacrificing the logical development of his narrative, if the result showed an improvement in the quality and flow of the style. Several passages he deleted in *Esther Waters* caused the reader some confusion. For instance, in shortening the account of the servant's ball, he left out the reason for the quarrel between Esther and William. 10

When Moore wrote *Esther Waters* his purpose was to render a servant's lot in purely naturalistic terms. He wanted to make Esther's reactions absolutely plausible as he felt those of Tess in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* had not been. However, by adhering so strictly to plausibility, Moore deprived his novel of the emotional power and tragic beauty of Hardy's masterpiece. It was this loss which made creative critics such as Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf consider *Esther Waters* a fine piece of craftsmanship, but not a great novel, because it lacked the breath of life.

The fact that Moore accomplished what he set out to do makes *Esther Waters* a remarkable achievement. One cannot
blame the author for failing to accomplish what he did not intend, but the realization that even his finest purely creative work showed an absence of emotional power suggests that perhaps Moore did, after all, lack that 'vital magic' which was necessary to project from himself characters that were not only wholly realistic but also wholly alive. Also, his tendency to sacrifice sense to style, as evidenced by his careless deletions, does seem to fit Max's principle that a writer who does not love life for its own sake cannot, in any real sense, create it.

The extent to which literary style could be made exact and beautiful depended upon the degree of the artist's creative power, and his use of it as an amateur or as a professional writer. Whereas the exquisite writer expressed himself best as an amateur writer, Max felt the great writer of genius responded best to 'professionalism'. This distinction will later be explained.

An exquisite writer, like Walter Pater, was a great man in a small way. A writer of genius like Balzac was a great man in a great way. The exquisite writer was one who wrote solely for his own pleasure. Having no deadlines to meet, he lingered over his work, taking with slow, deliberate steps, the way to perfection. Lacking the "cheap ready-made knowledge of 'how to do things'" that hack writers employ, he had to find his own way, even for the easiest and most obvious things. Consequently, his work achieved an aura of distinction, a unique personal flavour and significance—and beauty, because it was finely and delicately made.

Max thought the most exquisite work of his time was
done by Walter Pater. He attributed the peculiar value and beauty of Pater's writing to the fact that he was an amateur, and had always to grope in 'the recesses of his consciousness' to find words to express the simplest thought. Because he searched and was not rushed, his writing gave an exact and vivid presentment of his personality and a quality of beauty that was unique.

Pater's self was 'a sensitive, fastidious, ever-ruminating self.' The quietism, 'the lingering and exquisite melancholy' of his style was genuine in that it came from within the artist. Max admired the distinct individuality of Pater's personality as revealed in his art, and of course, his sense for beauty, but he could not love Pater's style because it lacked a sense for life as Max noted in the Saturday Review (1903), "Life was too harsh, chaotic an affair for the timid and exacting soul of Pater." He preferred to look at life through veils of art. His sense of escapism was just that sort that Max studiously avoided, because he realized that writers who did not passionately observe life could not express it, and art without life was dead art, no matter how exquisitely it was rendered.

The fact that Max singled out Pater's as the most exquisite work of his time is understandable in terms of its Byzantine qualities. Max loved elaborate ingenuities of form and style, and these abounded in Pater's writing. He was a master of gorgeous conceits and jewelled phrases. As father of the Oxford Aesthetic Movement, Pater was also the leading authority on the cult of the mot juste. For Max, as for other intellectual aesthetes of the 'Eighties and 'Nineties,
he was the master of fine shades and the very model of aestheticism.

Max felt that work done by the exquisite writer who was also an amateur could be trivial, but it would never be vulgar in the sense of being purely commercial. This was not true of the professional writer, unless he was a genius. For a genius did not have to invent to keep up with a constant output; his resources were inexhaustible. He was not in danger of that 'fatal Fluency' that professionalism incurred, until the writer was at length robbed of the power to express anything from himself.\(^{18}\)

Professionalism which killed the exquisite talent was of real service to a genius of Balzac's stature. Since he was so powerfully himself, even his hastiest work was recognizably his own. His lack of leisure never seriously affected the quality of his work because, as a great artist, he possessed a constant flow of creative vitality.\(^{19}\) Had he been free from his burden of debts, Max believed he would not have troubled to write more carefully; he simply would have written less.

Much as Max was awed by great genius, it overwhelmed him and made him uneasy. He innately disliked giganticity. He was also too fastidious to overlook unevenness in any work of art, and works of genius were particularly disturbing because at the same time that he marvelled at the brilliance, he saw the flaws in even sharper contrast. Balzac's devouring passion for life, his inexhaustible knowledge of facts, his gift for carefully setting the stage for character and drama, these qualities were favourably contrasted with the
more tiresome aspects of his genius, such as his joy in
digression. Although Balzac's genius was such that in the end, he never lost control, the problem for Max lay in getting to that end. In an amusing tribute to Balzac, he wrote:

For Balzac I have an intense cult....I deem him next to Shakespeare, the greatest creative genius the world has ever known....No ecstasy of praise has seemed to me more than his due. Several times, even, I have tried to read one or another of his books. But I have never been able to wade further than the second chapter....My whole being, as I have protested, bows down to him. Only, I can't read him. 20

Max loved best the style of an exquisite talent because it was delicate, formal and beautiful. Writers of genius were careless of their strength; it was the exquisite writer who laboured to perfect his style to become a master of prose. He learned through infinite pains how to use "that very beautiful medium, the English language." 21

After creative power, it was the technical skills which enabled the stylist to express his vision of life, completely, perfectly and with apparently effortless ease. For good writing was "a thing of infinite formality." 22 Yet the formality could never reveal itself, or the writing would become lifeless. The true stylist needed to present "his ideas in the finest, strictest form, paring, whittling, polishing," 23 but his skill had to be concealed from all but the perceptive few, under a general effect of pleasure. Whistler achieved this. His sentences rang with a "clear vocal cadence" 24 created without visible pains.

Good English, in Max's opinion, was far more difficult to write than good French. The French language, which was
based on Latin and kept free from corrupting influences since the time of Richelieu, had gained over English in lucidity and euphony. Yet the English language, being part Latin and part Saxon, was for the true stylist an even finer medium than the French. The difficulties which had to be surmount-
ed actually enriched the texture of the writing.

The English language was also superior in its powers of suggestion. Max felt it contained mystery. An English poet could be simultaneously expressive and suggestive. Shakespeare, above all poets, gave his phrases wonderful shadows by charging them with "a dim significance beyond their meaning and with reverberations beyond their sound." In *Hamlet* the quality of the theme was such that the shadows were more real and more revealing than the phrases casting them. To Max these overtones not only made the play immortal; they also made it intelligible. For instance, any depth of understanding of *Hamlet's* soliloquy "To be or not to be" depends more on what the speech suggests than on what is actually said.

Max called Latin the bony structure of the English language and Saxon its flesh and blood. Of the two he felt that Latin was the more important element, for without a good grounding in Latin the writer's style tended to be diffuse and sloppy. D. H. Lawrence impressed Max as a poor model for prose in spite of his natural genius because he lacked classical discipline in his style. On the other hand, Max did not favour a Latin element so strong that the style became arid. It was the mean of the extremes that he aimed at; a manner
that was classical and at the same time so flexible that it naturally accorded to every variation of the writer's theme. He believed Lytton Strachey was an example of the 'mean'.

Elegance and flexibility appealed to Max's classical sense of style, but it was not enough to satisfy his love of the Byzantine. He loved the exotic and the highly finished manner in literature. The jewelled phrases and strange conceits delighted him as they had delighted other aesthetes of the 'Nineties. Unlike some aesthetes, however, Max did not love words merely for themselves, but mainly as they added beauty and significance to the over-all style. In fact, it was his desire for stylistic perfection which led him to impose classical restraint. Also, he was aware of the dangers of verbal preciosity.

Writers who lapsed into preciosity failed to create the illusion of life because art mattered more to them than life, and manner more than matter. Walter Pater's preference for art gave his prose the aura of a splendid funeral. Robert Louis Stevenson failed to give an illusion of reality to such novels as *Treasure Island* and *The Master of Ballantrae* because his elaborate technical graces and charming ingenuities distracted the reader from the story to the style. Max enjoyed the highly mannered style in its proper context. Stevenson's gifts for witty and riotous fantasy were best expressed in *The New Arabian Nights* and *The Dynamiters*. In fantasy and romance his Byzantine manner became an integral part of the fun and heightened the humour.

In the end, the important thing was not whether the
vocabulary was ornate or simple but how well the words conveyed the author's meaning, and how successfully they contributed to the overall style. The object for every writer was to find the right words and the right cadence to express his meaning, whether his aim was dignity or ridicule. Max felt The Gentle Art of Making Enemies revealed Whistler's peculiar genius for turning slang into an urbane, if eccentric, style. His style was 'of the maddest motley,' comprising Americanisms, Cockneyisms, and Parisian argot which were "so deftly cut and fitted to the figure, and worn with such an air, as to become a very gracious harmony."

As an aesthete, Max believed that the quality of beauty was not only essential to the making of a true literary style, but also its final goal. It was not vigour or sharpness but beauty of expression which distinguished literature from journalism. He thought the writer must express his meaning so that nobody could miss it or forget it, and further, that his meaning must be expressed in such a manner as to awaken in him "a pious joy in those harmonies of words and cadences which could be found if they were sought for." It was a sense of inward harmony which was the key to beautiful style.

The beauty manifested in Max's style is best defined as a highly civilized sense of order, refinement and exquisite-ness. However, he was able to appreciate the sense for beauty in writers quite unlike himself. Ouida's sense of beauty was neither exquisite nor refined, but it was the result of true vision. From a wealth of love and knowledge of all kinds of beauty in art and nature she was able to convey her sense of
beauty to others.\textsuperscript{32}

Max felt if three conditions were fulfilled, that of exactness, beauty and apparently effortless ease, prose might attain to the dignity of poetry.\textsuperscript{33} Its rhythms might become as magical as the rhythms of poetry. They might even become more magical because they were subtler and more exceptional.

His long apprenticeship in the perfecting of his craft gave Max a sound basis for appreciating the work of other literary stylists, particularly those who approached the art of writing with the same sense of love and dedication. His critical position was frequently narrow, but even so, the insights he shed on matters of style were original, penetrating and just. These insights will be discussed in the following studies of literary stylists in the essay, the novel and the play.

Max's appreciation of the work of Lytton Strachey had encouraged the younger writer at a time when many considered his four essays on \textit{Eminent Victorians} (1918) a "flippant and irreverent attack on the great and noble dead."\textsuperscript{34} He was delighted both with the subject and the 'graceful, civilized and ironical manner' in which it was treated.\textsuperscript{35} At the same time he was delighted to discover such an exquisite literary artist in the midst of the grimness and ugliness of the war. He felt an immediate affinity for Strachey, not only for his flippant and irreverent manner, but also because he "represented a further advance in a movement of which Max had been an originator."\textsuperscript{36} Just as he and other intellectual aesthetes of the 'Nineties had shocked their elders by making fun of
the eminent Victorians, so Strachey was now shocking his father's generation.

In Strachey Max found, in many ways; his younger self. Here was an artist who was "intensely concerned with the ramifications of human character, and greatly amused by them." He was an individualist with an independent mind and a critical ironic temperament. His mockery was "light and lambent, a rather irresponsible thing." He chose to mock the thing he loved and therefore malice was not the basis for his mockery. He was fastidious, and an escapist in the sense that he preferred the past with its freedom from irrelevancies and its quality of being complete and settled.

In his essay, "Lytton Strachey," in Mainly on the Air Max called Strachey an eighteenth century man because he was more at home in an age of wit and reason than in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, and because he was as much at ease in French as in English literature and life. His natural affinity for the eighteenth century however, managed to spoil Strachey's book Elizabeth and Essex (1928). Max felt he was not that sort of 'robustious, slapdash writer' who might have convinced him that he "was in close touch with the souls of those beings whose actions and motives were... as mysterious as those of wild animals in an impenetrable jungle."  

As a biographer, Strachey impressed Max with his gift for construction and his splendid gift for narrative. He was an artist who possessed true vision. He could not only see the thing he had to tell, and the people concerned in it, but
he saw them outwardly and inwardly, in such a way that the reader was able to share his vision. Only in his portrait of Dr. Arnold did Max feel Strachey had failed. The study was not penetrating but was composed in a vein of sheer mockery. It was the only work of his that Max labelled definitely unfair.

As a critic, Strachey again proved remarkably able. In his biographical work, Max found an element of criticism which was both implicit and explicit. He thought that Strachey was the best kind of critic, helpfully interpretive, an almost creative critic who was passive before he became active. "With an intellect of steely quality there was combined in him a deep sensibility and receptivity. He had felt before he thought." Max believed that his critical essays on Racine and Pope had done much to reawaken an appreciation of their merits.

However, what he admired most of all in Strachey was that he was "a delicately effulgent master, a perfect master, of English prose." He found in him the two qualities essential to anyone who would write well in "that very beautiful medium, the English language," a solid grounding in Latin and a keen natural instinct for expressing himself in writing. Max believed that Strachey's perfect knowledge of the Latin and Saxon elements in the language added nobility to his already flexible style. His manner was classical but at the same time it was entirely natural. He was not above clichés or above using a pedestrian style when the material warranted it. His manner always accorded with his theme.
When he wrote of Lord Palmerston Max noted that his style reflected the characteristics of the man, being sharp, brisk, straightforward and lively. When he portrayed the exotic Mr. Disraeli, his style became accordingly, delightfully Byzantine. Obviously here was a born writer, a taker of infinite pains and, above all, a writer of beautiful prose.

In his criticism of Lytton Strachey's work, Max praised the literary qualities even when he disagreed with the ideas. Although he quarrelled with Strachey's portrait of Dr. Arnold, he considered each of the four essays in *Eminent Victorians* a perfect work of art. For him, the literary quality of a work of art was more important than a controversial interpretation of facts, because it was not on the permanence of the ideas that a work lasted, but on its merits as literature.

Max's stand against the popular conception of Strachey as a "debunker" of eminent reputations was well taken. He admired Strachey's independence of mind and judgment. He also recognized the merits of his concern for the many facets of human character; and because he knew that Strachey tried to reveal the truth about his subjects as he perceived it, Max overlooked his imperfect sympathies with such Victorian traits as great strength of character, keen practical sense and efficiency. He also forgave him, because he realized that Strachey did not possess the malice of the true satirist. For the true satirist, life Swift, was fundamentally grim and solely concerned with lashing out at the hypocrisies of his own age. Strachey, on the other hand, made no reference to current events because he was solely concerned
Those who were of the opinion that Strachey chose to attack the Victorians because he held them responsible for the modern condition seem unreasonable in the light of Max's interpretation. For Max, there was great appeal in Victorian times prior to the age of uniformity, with its machinery, science and applied science. In those days, before standardization and mass production, "life was full of salient variety, of idiosyncrasy, of oddity, of character, character untrammeled." He believed that this was what particularly appealed to Lytton Strachey.

In the study of character Strachey was capable of being both tender and profound. Max commended him for restoring Queen Victoria to public admiration. His judgment in her case was eminently fair. He presented her faults which were lessened in the light of her virtues. Still, it was the cumulative effect of his style which thrilled Max. He thought General Gordon's story was narrated with "subtlest strength, oscillating steadily between Downing Street and the Soudan." Each place was described vividly, alternately, repeatedly and with powerful effect. This was the impact that bowled him over.

It is characteristic of Max that he did not dwell on Strachey's purpose to improve biography by making it once more a truthful art. Yet Max's critical appreciation of the man as revealed through his style provided him with an appreciation of the subject matter which seems more just than the judgment of those who believed that Strachey's underlying
malice influenced his selection of the facts, that he preferred to expose rather than to portray his subject.

Max found Lytton Strachey a man younger than himself, with a mind exactly to his taste. Both possessed the classical spirit of elegance, detachment and urbanity. Both had command of the classical virtues of clarity, elegance and wit. Because of their artistic and temperamental affinities, Max's critical impressions of Strachey's art were keenly perceptive in matters of style, and fundamentally sound.

In his initial essay on "Whistler's Writing" in *Yet Again*, Max was once more a perceptive critic. Here the affinity between the two artists was two-fold. Both were exquisite stylists who were masters of small literary works. Both were gifted artists in two mediums, art and literature. These similarities gave Max rare and penetrating insight into the true value of Whistler's writing talent, showing that he was not less an artist in his writing, but rather that he had chosen to make painting his major interest.

In Max's study of Whistler's writing in relation to his painting, he clearly showed that Whistler was actually an amateur in both his arts, and that his very lack of professionalism enabled him to acquire that particular quality of exquisiteness and freshness that lent distinction to all his work. "His very ignorance and tentativeness...forced him to search in his own soul for the best way of expressing his soul's meaning." Out of this search, he was able to create a work which had a more personal and fresher quality and also a more perfect 'finish' than even a professional
artist of genius was able to produce.

Max's critical appreciation was most sensitive in relating the writer "as shown by himself to the style by which himself was shown." A vain man, Whistler showed reverence and a caressing sense of beauty in his painting. It was only in his writing that his vanity and harshness emerged. Yet in his style Max found the same reverent care for words that Whistler had used in selecting his colour-tones, and the same sense of beauty touching his phrases that had enhanced his forms. The fastidiousness and dandy-ism which had marked his painting also came forth in his writing. "His meaning was ever ferocious; but his method, how delicate and tender!"

Just as Max was able to perceive the quality of *Eminent Victorians* as a work of art, quite apart from his disagreement with some of Strachey's ideas, so he was able to appreciate the fine stylistic qualities of Whistler's *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, apart from the irascible nature of the writer. Max tried to be true to the aesthetic position of never judging a work of art on the basis of its purpose or its moral values. If the artist was able to reveal his unique personality exactly and beautifully through his style, that was enough for Max. However, what made it possible for Max to have regard for the personality of Whistler, who was in some respects every bit as harsh as Ibsen, was his wit and dandyism. Max admired a strong narrow personality when it was expressed through a unique and perfect style. He called Whistler an immortal writer as long
as there were "a few people interested in the subtler ramifications of English prose as an art-form."\(^{51}\)

As a stylist, Whistler never faltered. Every sentence rang with a clear vocal cadence, and to Max it was just that vocal quality which met the chief test of good writing. Whistler was rare in being a good talker who could write as well as he talked. In *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, his voice, his face, his gestures were revealed to the extent that the reader could both see Whistler and know him. "He projected through printed words the clean-cut image and clear-ringing echo of himself. He was a born writer, achieving perfection through pains which must have been infinite,"\(^ {52}\) because they were not easily traceable. Like Pope, Max realized that true ease in writing comes from art, not chance.

Out of the sure knowledge of himself Max was able to recognize that an exquisite talent like Whistler's was at its best when playing around a small theme. On a large scale it was inclined to stray from the bonds of structural unity and to destroy the aesthetic effect. Whistler particularly excelled in his letters, which as controversial essays were often in bad taste, but as literature were perfect works of art.

In his subtle and thoughtful study of Whistler's writing, Max demonstrated impressionistic criticism at its best. His insights had the perfect clarity of a critic who was temperamentally and artistically sympathetic to his subject. It was a study in depth, to the point where Max no longer discussed Whistler's style in principle, but in
practice. Finally he did translate through his own tempera­
ment and intellect the style of another man, and the revela­
tion of that man through his style. In perfect mimicry of
Whistler's writing, Max wrote: "The voice drawls slowly,
quickening to a kind of snap at the end of every sentence,
and sometimes rising to a sudden screech of laughter; and,
all the while, the fine fierce eyes of the talker are flash­
ing out at you and his long nervous fingers are tracing
extravagant arabesques in the air." Although Max was not
a poet, he needed no better qualifications for his impres­
sions of Whistler than his gift for perfect mimicry. For
as Oscar Wilde had expressed in The Critic as Artist, the
aesthetic critic did not analyze or tell the history of a
work of art, but on the basis of his impression, and by
exploiting his personality, he created a new and often better
work of art.

Mimicry or parody of the styles of other artists was
a valuable aspect of Max's criticism. Although the method
was creative and indirect, and it revealed the artistic flaws
as in a distorting mirror, the nearer he was in temperament
to the artist, the better he mimicked the style and the more
discerning were his judgments. This was particularly true
of Henry James, whom Max mimicked, parodied and caricatured
throughout his creative life. Yet he loved James both for
his fine character and for the exquisite beauty of his prose.
More than anyone else, James met Max's exacting standards for
art and literature, and this made Max a confirmed Jacobite.

James was an intellectual aesthete of the highest
order. Every page he wrote he invested with aesthetic quality.
Max admired not only his love for his art and his passionate dedication to its perfection, but also the fact that in the face of grave disappointments he yielded nothing for the sake of pleasing his readers. Such dedication brought its rewards in the quality of elegance and beauty in his style. Max thought Meredith deserved first place for poetry and philosophy, but he gave Henry James first place for beauty. Here was an artist who loved beauty in things of the soul as much as in sensual things. He had what Max called a 'passionate eye' for what was fine in sculpture, painting and architecture, and also for what was fine in nature. This was particularly evident in his early and middle writing periods.

Max tended to identify himself with James' early and middle periods because it was then that he saw him as 'that perfect master of a small method; an exquisite artist who did not deal with life on a large scale, with raw humanity or primitive emotions, but with people who were generally highly civilized, sensitive and restrained'. His fine studies of the literary conscience, such as The Death of the Lion, especially impressed Max as being drawn in love and analyzed with cunning.

James' method was subtle, ironic and beautiful. He kept the emotional crisis 'offstage'. What interested him was to study the effects of its aftermath. It was the passion of conscience, "a sort of lyrical conscience, ... raised to the pitch of ecstasy" that preoccupied James and revealed his reverence for all that was noble and refined. Max felt the charge that he lacked human feeling was unjustified. There
were all sorts of human feelings, and they were not all summed up in *Antony and Cleopatra.*

In his later work, Max recognized that James was more than an exquisite artist; he was an original genius of the highest quality who better than anyone else had succeeded in reproducing in words the actual texture of human experience. Then, he thought of James less as a novelist than as an evocative writer who possessed to an extraordinary degree the power to convey not only the visual aspects but also the inmost feeling of the person, place or scene. By using a method that was entirely new and entirely his own, he was able to convey his meaning on several planes at once. It was a method that was much more highly organized than was customary in the novel, one that was intensely dramatic and intensely visual. It was the amazing process of revealing through a fine central intelligence the people and events that affected his life as he grew to understand them. It was a process that convinced Max that James "was not trying to compete with the methods of other novelists, but with life itself."

As an interpretation of life, Max thought James' last novels were his greatest achievement. He particularly admired *The Wings of a Dove* and *The Golden Bowl.* He considered the Pagoda passage in *The Golden Bowl* a unique piece of evocative writing; still he missed the extraordinarily sensitive visual impressions which had been the mark of his earlier style. These had gradually been replaced by subtler insights into the human soul. Max also preferred the early style for its sustained elegance, clarity and insight. In the later manner
He found "crawling broken-backed inarticulate sentences that had to be helped along by the reader."

It was a fault that made Max feel that his great gift for evocative writing was a dubious one.

Still James' flaws were incidents in his novels; it was only in his prefaces that they were able to mar the whole. Max felt that reading *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove* was "like taking a long walk uphill, panting and perspiring and almost of a mind to turn back, until, when you looked back and down, the country was magically expanded beneath your gaze, as you never saw it yet; so that you toiled on gladly up the heights, for the larger prospects waiting for you." It required intensive training, but Max thought it was worth the effort. He trusted James to have followed the logical development of his own particular gifts, because he was so passionately devoted to his art.

It was his love for the Jacobean manner and his natural affinity for elaborate ingenuities of form and style which enabled him to parody James so brilliantly. Just as his love for the ornate and the exotic had enabled him to parody the precious school of writing, so his parodies of Henry James hit their mark with such deadly accuracy that, in one sense, he 'killed' the thing he loved.

Max parodied and caricatured James with a mixed sense of irony and awe. There were never in his drawings the unmerciful stings he aimed at Oscar Wilde. It was James' tendency to excessive exasion to the point of ambiguity that Max loved to parody. In *The Mote in the Middle Distance* he
focused on the fastidious care James took in avoiding the direct approach to any point, even when it involved the simple naming of an object. For his parody, Max made the object a Christmas stocking. He also loved to ravel a long circumlocutory Jacobean sentence and to mock the grand manner by carefully inserting clichés. In the caption to his caricature of "Mr. Henry James Revisiting America," James is supposed to think:

So that in fine, let, without further beating about the bush, me make to myself amazed acknowledgment that, but for the certificate of birth which I have - so quite indubitably - on me, I might...find hard to swallow, or even take by subconscious injection, the great idea that I am - oh, ever so indigenously! - one of them...

For all Max's admiration of James as an interpreter of life, he did once complain that his characters were ghostly in the sense that they seemed incapable of eating or drinking. To some extent this is true. Since James came to focus his art on the study of fine consciences, he related only as much of the physical lives of his characters as was necessary to the development of the inward drama. He also focused on characters who were intuitively perceptive and sensitively aware of one another to an abnormal degree. His intention was to realize each character out of the sum of the impressions he made on the other characters. In this way James gave the major characters a heightened significance which transcended their ordinary, natural states.

In effect all the characters in James' later fiction were the possessors of subtle sensibilities because the style
imposed the necessity of their being so. To the extent that his characters were narrowed to conform to the technical problem he had chosen to solve, they were deprived of flesh and blood reality. However, the fact that Max considered James' last novels to be his greatest interpretations of life suggests that whatever breadth of life was lacking in his characters, it was there in depth, in the style by which they were rendered.

Max had one favourite line of James' in which he intuitively recognized a key to the understanding of the artist. It was "Be generous and delicate and pursue the prize." Max did not think James always lived up to it in his life, for nobody could, but in his art he did. In his work was his ideal self, his mask. Max loved this phrase because it reflected his own ideals of artistic perfection. Like James, he too possessed an acute literary conscience.

Max revered James so highly as an artist that he referred to him as the great Jacobean, and to himself as a Jacobite. It was James who put the high finish upon the lighter, more irresponsible aestheticism Max had learned from Oscar Wilde. However, his affinity for James was deeper than artistic reverence. Both were detached, passionate observers of life. Both tried to be people "on whom nothing is lost." They were classicists in their concept of a balanced, unified form, and aesthetes in their pursuit of a rhythmic, beautiful style. There were impressionistic in their criticism and in their creative work.

His natural affinity for James made him realize that
much of the difficulty in James' style was due to an extreme fastidiousness. He appreciated this problem for James as few critics could. In an essay he wrote on Daudet, James remarked on the French Artist's delightfully free spirit. Max knew that for James, who moved so slowly and carefully from oblique point to subtle insight and who by nature must always wonder if indeed this or that point would do, that the sight of such a free spirit would strike a note in him because it was something he could never be.

James possessed the grand manner both in his life and in his style. In some respects, however, Max preferred the artist to the man. He impressed Max with his enormous vocabulary and delightful literary talk. Here was wit, humour, irony and insight, but one had to wait for it. Also, James never smiled. He was sufficiently appalled by life that he tended to take a tragic view of everybody. This tendency to remote solemnity coupled with his punctilious sense of honour rather overwhelmed Max. It was his sense of awe for the great man which made him prefer James' books to his company. In his books he was the mask of perfection. That is why Max found, "after reading this one and that one" that he felt like turning once more to the novels and stories of Henry James.

In Max's criticism of James, it is possible to come to some reasonable conclusions with regard to his scope and value as a literary critic. It is possible, in spite of the fact that Max did not make anything like a complete critical study of the artist, because what he focused on was what characteristically interested him: the man as revealed through his
Otherwise, he made no reference to James' important contribution to the elevation and development of the novel in an historical sense. Nothing is noted about James' own criticism, either of literature or the drama. Yet James also took the impressionistic approach to dramatic criticism, and his assessments of the stage of the 'Seventies and 'Eighties, of Ibsen, Pinero and Edmond Rostand are almost identical to Max's judgments in the Saturday Review a decade later. 71

Since James' talents were broad as well as brilliant, and since Max's appreciation was focused almost exclusively on his style, and particularly on the aesthetics of his style, it is evident that his scope as a critic was narrow. However, within the limits he set, he served a useful purpose. No one had a finer appreciation of James' early style, for its aesthetic qualities, its flexibility and classical control. Max regretted the gradual lessening of the extraordinarily sensitive visual impressions in his later style because of their aesthetic value. The more James dramatized the inmost thoughts of his characters the less he expressed his refined sense of the beauties in art and nature; and it was the beauty of his prose which more than anything else elevated it to the dignity of poetry.

In James' later style, his genius for evocative writing seemed a dubious gift to Max because genius always was a dubious gift when it ran to excess. Unevenness was one of its marks. However, Max preferred James's earlier, more exquisite style not only because it was aesthetically finer and more perfectly controlled but also because he admired the moral aestheticism of James as revealed in his elegant,
restrained and beautiful manner more than the sensitive psychologi­
cal insights found in his later work.

The value that Max placed upon literary style was
never more pronounced than in his critical appreciations of
literary men who had ventured into drama. In his criticism
of Henry James' play The High Bid, almost the whole was taken
up with his glowing response to the Jacobean manner. His
direct reference to the play itself was brief, for as Max
explained, very little of all that he loved of James' mind
could be translated into the sphere of drama. Even so,
that little revealed how thoroughly Max had absorbed the
Jamesian spirit.

His admiration for the leading actor who had captured
the essence of James' manner was at the same time a rapture
of praise for the author. In the actor's expression of the
line 'To whom do you - beautifully belong?', in his eyes,
his smile, "the groping hesitancy before the adverb was
found, in the sinking tone of the verb, there was a whole
world of good feeling, good manners, and humour. It was love
seeing the fun of the thing. It was irony kneeling in awe.
It was an authentic part of the soul of Mr. James." Max excused the triteness of the plot on the grounds
that it was just the sort of thing that a true man of letters
would choose for his theatrical debut, thinking that it would
be more easily understood. He admitted that James' characters
were puppet-like, yet they moved with a lively grace and dis­
tinction, a bright reality of surface, so that you half for­
got they were unreal. It was James' style that carried
the play, the manner and the mind that James' expressed through his characters that held for Max an 'inalienable magic.' Therefore, as long as there were actors who were able to convey that remarkable manner, Max longed to see more of James' short stories adapted to the stage. Fortunately, The High Bid was not the only story that seemed to have been conceived as a play, and though little of his great art could be brought into the theatre, even that little was something unique.

It was never important to Max that James' plays were unsuccessful, because he considered the novel superior to drama. He felt the looser nature of the novel allowed for greater scope and greater refinements than the play. Not even in later years, did Max reflect upon the valuable contribution James' knowledge of dramatic techniques made to his later novels. As an aesthete, he would have placed a higher value on James' knowledge of the techniques of painting. However, while he was a drama critic, what he considered above all was the desperate need of the theatre for first-rate literary men with essentially dramatic imaginations. Such a man was Henry James.

Among professional dramatists who possessed a literary quality in their styles, Max admired Edmond Rostand and Alfred Sutro. Max thought Rostand's literary instinct was almost as fine as his instinct for the techniques of the theatre. For this reason he found he could read Cyrano de Bergerac with almost the same degree of pleasure as when he saw it played. The Byzantine qualities of the playwright's style appealed
to Max not only because they were beautiful but also because they 'played' well. The player's lines were 'loaded and encrusted with elaborate phrases and curious conceits,' yet the rhetoric never detracted from the speeches. Max was pleasantly surprised to find that not one line was amiss in the theatre. The elaborate manner was perfectly suited to the play, because "Cyrano" itself was stagey.

Alfred Sutro appealed to Max as the most 'literary' of the modern playwrights since Oscar Wilde. He had "a fine sense of words, ... a delicate ear for cadences," and the inward harmony which gave expression to the grace and humour in his style. Unlike literary men who temporarily ventured into playwriting, Mr. Sutro's characters did not unintentionally talk like books. His characters talked in the natural manner one expected from the leisured classes. Not, of course, as they actually talked, because Max was convinced the majority talked little better than costermongers. Mr. Sutro was obliged to create a dialogue that was apparently natural, to be able to preserve the literary classicism of his style. He was able to do this because those barbarians in speech, as Max described them, usually had pretty manners and pleasing appearances, so that the audience could invest them with other graces.

Max loved the literary style best in fantastic comedies of wit and in farces. In farce especially, there was greater scope for the writer's talents. Sutro's satiric farce on the wise, all-knowing homilist delighted Max, not only for its literary qualities, but also because he despised the man
with the ready advice. In Mollentrave on Women, Sutro was able to give full rein to his literary talents. Since his farcical characters did not need to talk in a natural, colloquial manner. The fun was actually increased when the characters did talk like books. There was grace and charm in the dialogue because Sutro knew the English language thoroughly, and he knew how to use it beautifully. In fact, Max was so enamoured of Sutro's literary style that he erred in overrating his abilities as a dramatist.

For Max, this was always the secret of an exact and beautiful style, that the artist must love his medium, the English language, and that he must learn to use it beautifully to express exactly his own unique vision of life. When he applied his tests for good style to the artists of his time, he found few who met his high literary standards; but for those who did, his criticisms attained the value of true insight.

Max's critical appraisals of Whistler and Lytton Strachey were particularly successful. He showed Whistler in a new light as the author of an exquisite literary style; and his appreciation of Strachey was valuable in the sensitive and intelligent analysis of his style, and in the careful discrimination Max made between the satirist and the mocker which vindicated Strachey from the charge of malice.

Sometimes his admiration for a writer's style led him to overestimate the true quality of his talents. His love for the overflowing exuberance of George Meredith's style, for the wit, poetry, beauty and psychological insight, pre-
judiced his judgment to the point where he rated him second only to Shakespeare as an all-around creator. Yet conversely, his dislike of the facile journalistic style of Kipling made him blind to all aspects of his genius.

It was almost inevitable that a strong narrow personality with fastidious literary tastes would be subject to some grave errors of judgment. However, when Max applied his critical intelligence to the works of literary personalities similar to himself, his insights were fresh and valid. Generally, Max took the mean in his criticisms as he did in the perfecting of his style, seeking a wise, just and beautiful balance, and not without humour.
CHAPTER III

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CHAPTER IV
FORM AND THE UNIFIED EFFECT

A master of style, as Max defined him, was inevitably a master of form. He possessed the imaginative power to conceive original plot ideas, and a sense of unity that generally was based on neo-classical principles. It was the unified form, whether it meant unity of story or unity of idea, that was essential to achieve the effect of a real and satisfying emotional impact.

For Max, there could be no aesthetic pleasure without a unified effect, and therefore he learned to submit his romantic delight in the Byzantine to neo-classical restraint. He also reasoned that form should be built on basically neo-classical principles of unity, clarity, simplicity, elegance and restraint because they endured, while popular formulas came and went. The form of essay he preferred was based on a neo-classical pattern: the first part stating the problem, the second developing it, the third relating to the original problem. Unity of effect was the aim; the end was artistic perfection.

Max disagreed with journalists who thought the first sentence was the most important one. He did not object to gripping leads. It was the problem of maintaining them that concerned him. If the lead was not sustained, the reader
was let down. It seemed to him that good poets and good writers of prose, whether in long or short works, had always made quiet beginnings and quiet endings. They knew the reader had to 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."¹

Like Horace, Max believed that a writer should know how he was going to end before he began. In his own essays, he so perfectly related the parts to the whole that he would not permit extracts of one of his essays to be included in an anthology. In declining such a request, he explained:

My essays have many faults, but they have the virtue of being very closely written. Every paragraph in any one of them depends on every other paragraph, and every sentence on every other sentence. This is what gives them the modest quality of life, of movement . . . don't mutilate a live bird.²

There was nothing artificial in the use of literary form; Max felt no writer should despise it because nature herself was an "unashamed formalist."³ He advised every writer to think out carefully what shape his novel, biography, essay or play was going to take before he began to write. He also urged the writer to treat the beginning, the middle and the end as equals in importance. There could be no final impact without a form that was balanced and unified.

In Max's opinion no artist had a finer, stricter sense of the literary form than Henry James. James' concept of the novel as a "fictive picture" led him to relate the parts to
one another and to the whole as the painter would relate volumes, masses and colour values. His use of a Commanding Centre also gave him a powerful unifying element. In an attempt to render the last drop of value from every scene, he set up "a fine central intelligence in terms of which everything in it might be unified and upon which everything might be made to depend." This central intelligence made a compositional centre for art such as life never saw. It presided over everything else, and compelled the story to be nothing but the story of what that intelligence felt about what happened. Max thought James' unique method of gathering "scraps of revelation gradually . . . into one large and luminous whole" was so astonishing a feat of technical virtuosity that the method had to die with him, since only he could handle it.

At the same time it seemed to him that if illusion of reality were the sole aim of fiction, James' "form" would be the only right one. It allowed for no self-assertion. James expressed no opinions about his characters, nor did he expound any philosophies or morals. However, Max realized that it was not the final and inevitable form because in 1909 he saw that it was going out of fashion. Obviously, what he did not see was the inevitable influence of James' new method on Twentieth Century novelists.

During his twelve years as drama critic for the Saturday Review, Max was vexed with the problems he encoun-
tered in the dramatic form. In part these problems arose from the scarcity of good dramatists who were able to conceive a dramatic idea in a suitable form. In part, they were incurred by his own limitations as a critic. Artistically and temperamentally Max was unable to cope with the license that genius took with traditional concepts of form, especially when the artist's aim was not an aesthetic one.

Max emphasized that good form, the unified form, was the essence of good drama, and drama, by his definition, was life seen through conventions of formal beauty. He felt the principal reason for the mediocrity in modern drama was that literary men with dramatic imaginations would not waste their time learning the "thousand-and-one meticulosities of restriction and imposition which had gradually adhered to the art of writing plays." For this reason Max was willing to overlook the technical lapses of any literary artist who ventured into drama, in the hope of encouraging him to further efforts to infuse life and meaning into the least lively of the arts.

Any artist who had mastered the literary form would have no difficulty mastering the dramatic form. Max believed that Joseph Conrad was just the sort of man that the English theatre needed. Here was a literary man with a wide knowledge of life, with acute vision, deep human sympathy and an essentially dramatic imagination. When he first read Conrad's play One Day More in its original form as a short
story, he felt that it had already been conceived in a dramatic form because the action of the story was laid in one continuous scene and was far more "external" than was usual for the author. The only concession the author had to make to the dramatic presentation was to shift his emphasis in the story from two protagonists to one to sharpen the conflict of characters and to intensify the dramatic effect.

Conrad's story of a girl who was pathetically aware of the passing of her youth and the utter emptiness of her life was made into a terrible and haunting tragedy because of the fine humanity and strength he infused into his tragic theme, and because of the dramatic intensity and the beauty of his expression. Conrad's tragic vision of her lonely isolation was so beautifully conceived that Max not only felt the emotional impact but also the aesthetic pleasure. To him the only factor that made the play inferior to the short story was that the dramatic form was inferior to the literary.10

Max realized that a necessary part of the effect of ease and delight in a work of art came from painstaking construction. This did not mean an artificial plot such as "a love-story, split neatly up into four brief acts, with no hint that the characters lived in a world where other things besides this love-story were going on."11 He felt this tight technique and standard formula had become the greatest detriments to good drama at the turn of the century.
What Max admired was the looser and simpler construction found in Continental drama, in which the unity lay not in the plot but in the dramatic idea. In Hermann Heijerman's play on humble fisherfolk, there was almost no love-interest, no one character predominated, and there was practically no story. With absolute simplicity the play represented an ordinary episode in a small fishing village. Hauptmann's \textit{The Thieves' Comedy} was another naturally evolved plot. The play had no really conclusive ending nor a real beginning. The characters revealed themselves naturally. This construction required technical skill, but it was less demanding than the unnatural plot which comprised "a series of sharp climaxes occurring at regular intervals, and with a slick solution to finish up with." 

It is obvious that Max's reaction against the well-made play was not consistent with his neoclassical principles of form and the unified effect. However, it was not the well-made play that he objected to, but the unfortunate circumstances surrounding it. Gifted playwrights had found that the looser form of the naturalistic method allowed greater freedom for the artistic expression of truth to life. For instance, Gerhart Hauptmann had discovered that unity of action was not essential to create unity of impression and he proved his point in \textit{The Weavers} (1892) which had neither plot nor individualized characters. Max was "bowled over" by \textit{The Thieves' Comedy} (1893) in spite of its plotless-
ness because of the wit, the refined and subtle artistry of the style and the unity that Hauptmann had intricately woven into the dramatic idea. It was a perceptive satire on honesty and justice. Also, Hauptmann had none of the clumsiness of language which marred the work of some naturalists. He was temperamentally romantic and poetic and an artist who was highly conscious of style. It is apparent in this instance, as in others, that the admiration Max felt for the looseness and simplicity of the Continental form was governed by his appreciation of the dramatist's style.

Although he encouraged any movement towards looser form in modern drama, Max saw the inherent danger. Looseness of form was one thing; formlessness was another. Obviously there had to be some kind of artistic unity, either of story or of idea. In Hermann Heijerman's play The Good Hope, the playwright had chosen a ghastly theme but at the same time he had an idea which he expressed very beautifully through a coherent story. Consequently he evoked through art a sense of pity and awe. In contrast, in Maxim Gorky's play The Lower Depths, the author had chosen an equally ghastly theme but, in Max's opinion, there was no idea, and therefore the play lacked meaning. It had no unity, nothing but bald, unseemly horror. Actually, had Max understood Gorky's method he still would not have appreciated the Russian's reliance on atmosphere and dissociated dialogue
to achieve his artistic ends. Apart from the characterization, the playwright's aim had been to create an atmosphere or mood which was both poignant and poetic. He had intended his sympathetic study of the down-trodden to leave a bittersweet taste, with none of the cleansing catharsis of classic tragedy. However, it seemed to Max there was neither humanity nor art but mere gutter realism.

Max believed that it was generally out of a dramatic idea that a dramatic effect was produced, and it could be done simply and straightforwardly. He thought the Irish, especially Yeats and J.M. Synge, were more naturally gifted in this than the English because they took time to brood over an idea until they could translate it into some symbolic form, in which the symbolism became not only the source of mystery but also the source of the play's unity.  

Continental dramatists such as Maeterlinck and Ibsen were also gifted in the use of symbolic effects. The quality of mystery in Ibsen's play, Rosmersholm, impressed Max. He loved the subtly controlled plot in which Ibsen used Rosmer as the focal point uniting the two elements of the play, the old and the new order. Little by little the tragedy was unfolded to indicate with growing clearness the appointed end. Mysteriously the children never cried, the elders never laughed, and the coming of death was symbolized by white horses. Through symbolism Ibsen intensified and unified the mood of his tragedy.
In Maeterlinck's plays there was not only symbolism with its double significance, but also the symbolic significance of the silences. It was not his intention to depict physical or psychological action but the "anguish of the unintelligible." Much of Maeterlinck's action occurred in "The Beyond," in the partial lifting of the veil from the mystery of the universe. For this reason doors and windows were important in his settings and in his symbolism. Doors separated the physical from the psychical, and windows seemed to function as the eyes of the soul of the drama.

Structurally, his dramas lacked both plot and character. In fact his people were like somnambulists trying to penetrate the mysteries of life and death in the dream-like atmosphere that pervaded all his plays. However, the plays were not without unity. Under the influence of Richard Wagner, Maeterlinck had learned the value of stylization through synthesis. It was a modern version of the early Greek idea of unity through a synthesis of all the arts in order to bring out the spiritual meaning of the drama. In modern synthesis, special attention was paid to the use of the plastic arts, to colour, light and shade as produced by lighting and the grouping and posing of human beings. Light played an important role in Maeterlinck's plays. He, like Wagner, recognized "the dynamic quality of light and colours which change and dissolve in accompaniment to the spiritual action." 19
In Debussy's musical version of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas* and *Mélisande*, a synthesis of the separate arts was finely balanced. When *Pelléas* and *Mélisande* were watching the ship sail out to sea the dialogue had orchestral accompaniment, but the real impact of the scene came from the communion of the souls of the lovers in the final silence. Aided by Debussy's music, Maeterlinck was able to create a new theatre of peace and beauty, without tears.

Initially, one might wonder what appeal Maeterlinck could have had for Max. The answer lies in the poetic beauty and mystery that permeated the atmosphere of the plays, and in the suggestive qualities of the symbolism. It was a concentrated appeal to the imagination through the senses, toward an end which expressed the inner man or the inner spirit of the drama, truthfully and beautifully. To Max the importance of Maeterlinck's contribution to the theatre was that he once again made it a place to "feel." His ardent support of the Belgian dramatist's deintellectualization of dramatic art opened the way for Max's final declaration that ideas were for books not for the stage.

As in other forms of art, Max believed that the unity of a play depended on the inner resources of the artist, untrammelled by such outward restrictions as a borrowed plot. At the same time he realized that in the act of creating no artist was ever original. Plots were stolen simply for the sake of expediency, not because there was any lack of talent.
Yet it seemed to him a paradox and a tragedy of great literature that a genius of Shakespeare's calibre should have only one plot, *The Tempest*, that was not a proven theft, and that play was the only one that satisfied the modern standard of art because it was more artistically compact than any other of his plays.

It seemed ironic to Max that there could never be "a great writer expressing the full vigour of his greatness in his own way, and with exquisite care." He felt that it was only when Shakespeare was past the peak of his creative power that he was able to create a work as consciously artistic as *The Tempest*. Max called it the most modern of his plays because most modern artists lacked a surplus of creative vitality, and now Shakespeare, no longer overwhelmed with careless, headlong creative exuberance, had time to attend to the formal unities of time, place and action.

Of course the weakness of Max's critical position on Shakespeare is comparable to his narrow appreciation of Shaw. As a nineteenth-century aesthete, Max had no temperamental affinity for what he considered to be those strange and somewhat savage creatures of the sixteenth and, perhaps, of the twentieth centuries. Also, Shakespeare's passionate creative exuberance was antithetical to Max's exquisitely controlled fancy. Artists of great genius were simply beyond the comprehension of a minor artist whose love of stylistic perfection led him to prefer the essay above all other art forms.
As a matter of form Max thought that every play should end in an anti-climax, and that generally speaking, a final act should be devoted to it. It seemed to him that tragedy, especially, should end gradually and inconclusively because it left the imagination free. Even as it was not possible to be excited about matters that were not yet explained, so it was impossible to appreciate the pinnacle in a play if no time was allowed for reflecting upon it.  

Max felt every play should decline from the climax gradually, just as it should rise gradually to that point. An anti-climax that was awkwardly and improbably worked out by the dramatist was the reason why the fourth act so often spoiled the play.  

On the question of the mixing of genres, Max leaned toward the classical position because he believed the artist must always aim at unity of effect. Without unity there could not be any real effect, and to achieve it, he felt there must be unity of method. For instance, he thought Shakespeare's fools were out of place in his tragedies. They may have provided a convenient transitional device between battles, but at the same time they shattered the unity of mood. Max also disapproved of the use of funny characters in a play which was mainly a discussion of a serious theme. When serious elements and frivolous elements were combined the unity of the play was destroyed. However, a play did not need to be wholly serious or wholly frivolous
throughout. "But either the seriousness had to be evidently
the main thing, with frivolity as a mere relief, or the
seriousness had to be a mere make-weight to the frivolity." Because Shaw failed to unify his method, Max thought The
Philanderer was an artistic failure.

Ibsen's influence seemed to Max to be the cause of
Shaw's formal problems in his earliest plays. Because the
form of Mrs. Warren's Profession was inherently serious,
Max found the frivolous moments jarring. He was relieved
when Shaw stopped trying to deal with the great problems in
life in his comedies because he felt that the "frivolous"
method was the artistic one for Shaw. He also noted that
later plays such as Caesar and Cleopatra were "presented on
a large, loose scale which was about as far as anything
could be from the strait, strict form of his early plays.

The value of the looser form was that it allowed
for greater scope and flexibility so that Shaw could give
full expression to his delightfully irresponsible humour
without destroying the formal unity.

Of all Shaw's plays, Major Barbara came closest to
his ideals of unity. Here the author proved he could not
only observe the "rules" but he could also appeal to the
emotions. Of the play's second act Max said it was as cun-
nning and closely-knit a piece of craftsmanship as any con-
ventional playwright could achieve, and further, it contained
a cumulative appeal to the emotions which no other living
playwright had touched.\textsuperscript{26}

For Max form was as necessary to art as it was to life. He totally rejected Shaw's disquisitory plays because the method was unfamiliar and he did not appreciate the value of its uniqueness. Since Shaw's dialogue was no longer bound to the main situations and events, but instead, predominated over them, it seemed to Max that the plays had no structure. However, the action had not been done away with; there was still the interaction between theme and plot, only now the ideas were made more dramatic than the events. The plot was put in the background so that the inner action could be sufficiently vocalized. Even so, to Max the disquisitory plays were mere debates that lacked any sort of recognizable unity. To stand the test of theatre Max felt a debate must be treated as an art-form. "It must have some central point, and it must be progressive; it must be about something, and lead to something."\textsuperscript{27} To him Misalliance was a hodgepodge of Shavian ideas that never progressed but merely sprawled.

Drama critic A.B. Walkley had noted some affinity between Getting Married, the first of Shaw's purely disquisitory plays, and Plato's Symposium. Max agreed, but only to the extent that they both would come off better in the study than on the stage. Of the two he favoured a "run" of the Symposium because there was nothing arid about Plato, his persons being always creatures of flesh and blood, both presentable and actable.\textsuperscript{28} However, Plato's dialogue could
not be dashed through at the pace of spoken dialogue; it
needed to be savoured and reflected upon at leisure; and
this was also true of Shaw's "dialogue."

Max was certain that Shaw's original intention was not
to be frivolous but to make his play a philosophic discussion
of a serious theme, because the fun seemed to be "foisted in"
to keep the audience from being bored. It seemed to him
that the fault lay with the characters who were the shallow­
est figures of fun, and far beneath Shaw's usual comic level.
He could only account for them on the basis that Shaw made
them funny for fear of disappointing his audience. Of course
it was not the fun that Max objected to, but the incongruity
of the handling. A serious discussion could be made delight­
fully amusing so long as the fun arose from the ideas ex­
pressed. Humour sprang from the contrast between the remarks
and their sober presentation. If the persons were merely
farcical, no one could take their opinions seriously. Al­
though amusement could easily be taken under the guise of
instruction, the audience could not be expected to take
instruction under the guise of amusement.

When Max compared the Symposium to Getting Married
he did not actually consider Shaw's intention to be the same
as Plato's. What struck him was that Shaw had sacrificed
true characterization and any recognizable formal unity in
order to present a serious debate on the social problems of
marriage or the necessity of reforming the divorce laws.
In other words, he recognized the philosophic value in Shaw's ideas but not the dramatic value.

In fact, it was not the play that belonged in the study but the Preface. *Getting Married* had its Platonic features, but they were superficial. Both were dialogues, but the *Symposium* had no underlying plot; the dinner party was an episode, a framework for the discussion on love. Furthermore Plato's motive was different from Shaw's. Plato arranged the discussion so that it culminated in the revelation of Socrates' greatness of character as well as the sublime wisdom of his philosophy. It was the whole man that Plato wished to make known, because Socrates represented to him human nature at its highest, the true philosopher in love.

The discussion involved a praise of love with each speaker representing an aspect of love from the most basic physical level to the highest spiritual level where the physical aspects of love were not eliminated but transcended. It was a philosophical idea, not a dramatic one, because the discussion was directed toward the pursuit of the ideal state of man, not toward the resolution of a common social problem which could only be met through compromise.

Shaw's idea was dramatic not philosophical. His aim was to show the effects of the "marriage problem" on English society and his solution was a realistic compromise. He assessed the problems concerning marriage and no marriage, and judged that marriage was the lesser evil. The hope lay
not in an ideal situation but in a more realistic one which would effect a change in the divorce laws. His use of a "Platonic arrangement" first between Reginald, Leo and Hotchkiss and finally between Mrs. George, George and Hotchkiss, was not comparable to Socrates' ideal love relationship between man and man, except paradoxically. Also paradoxical was the homosexual connotation in the name of the confirmed spinster Lesbia Grantham. It was as if Shaw were saying, "This is the British answer to the Greek ideal of homosexual love-sublimate!"

Mrs. George's trance-like speech as the answer to the search for an ideal relationship arose not from the heights of intellectual wisdom but from the deepest yearnings of the human heart. Greater than the physical need was the need for a truly unselfish relationship, a love based on charity rather than passion. It was Shaw's masterpiece of paradox that he arrived at a spiritual or "Platonic" resolution not through the refined masculine mind of a truly wise and celibate philosopher, but through the medium of a woman in a trance, moreover a promiscuous woman who felt that the best way to understand humanity was to lose one's self-control! As "Incognita Appassionata," Mrs. George could only achieve the ideal love relationship with the Bishop because their meeting was meant to be arranged in heaven not on earth. It was Shaw's ultimate irony that in her love letters to the Bishop the high level of her spiritual passion was somewhat undermined by the fact she could not spell.
It took courage for Max to condemn this play, as he admitted in his reivew of it, because Shaw had made perfect fools of the critics over Man and Superman to the point where they were now inclined to accept his plays at his own evaluation. However, this time Shaw had exceeded all previous impertinences in setting Getting Married on a plane with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. It made his comments on his play even more frivolous than the characters in it. Shaw was noted for making statements about his work to provoke interest rather than to enlighten his readers, and consequently Max ignored his claim to a musical form. To Max, as to most other critics, it was Shaw at his most brash and brittle. Also Shaw did not help his case in his note on a point of technical interest when he stated that "the customary division into acts and scenes had been dis­used, and a return made to unity of time and place as observed in ancient Greek drama." The features that bore some connection with the old Greek comedy were superficial. Shaw, like the Attic comedians, dealt with the grotesque and absurd side of things. His characters were also farcical, and he, like Aristophanes, worked out beneath the laughter his more serious motive. However, the form was Shavian comedy, not ancient Greek comedy, which relied on a satirical chorus to address the audience directly on burning political questions of the day.

It was characteristic of Shaw's disquisitory play that
no character predominated over all the others. There was no longer a protagonist because the characters were not revealed through the ideas but were made subservient to them. Shaw dramatized the various viewpoints on marriage to illustrate the truth of his idea that English divorce laws must be changed. Because he wished to make his serious argument more palatable through wit and humour, he dispensed with long and thoughtful arguments to express his meaning through repetition and quick repartée. Any meaning that might be missed in repartée was picked up through repetition and through the variations on the main ideas.

Shaw had deliberately made his characters two-dimensional and farcical in order to dramatize his ideas. Each character was made to represent a particular point of view. Unlike "live" characters there was no real growth in personality, no dynamic change in their outlooks on life. Edith and Cecil almost did not marry, and then, finally they did. Normally their situation would have been the centre of the play's action. Yet in Getting Married it was used merely as a vehicle to arouse the rest of the character-types to express their particular view-points on the social problems which had evolved from the English marital system.

However, Shaw did not intend to write a social pamphlet but a problem play made comic through farce and paradox. His farcical characters were not true to life not only because they lacked depth and roundness, but also because they
told the absolute truth about themselves. When Mrs. George invited Hotchkiss to form a Platonic association with her and her husband, she also told him he was not to marry another woman until George grew tired of him. Much of the humour of these situations arose from the truth. It was the shock of surprise that brought the delight.

However, Max was a perfectionist who could not be an originator of new forms such as the disquisitory method, nor could he appreciate an artist who was, because he believed that the best rules for a unified form were those that had met the test of time. Max had a preterite frame of mind rather than a progressive one, and his own proven mastery of the essay form did not help to broaden his view toward Shaw's radical innovations. Nor did he ever change. Many years later, when Shaw's discussion drama was considered a pioneer effort toward the evolution of the theatre of the absurd, Max still preferred the formal values of the eighteenth century in a nineteenth century setting.

For Max the neo-classical form provided the necessary detached, serious and elegant manner to make a humorous matter all the more ridiculous. Undiluted humour was depressing. A background of seriousness was always needed for contrast because incongruity was the mainspring of laughter. "The more sombre the background the brightlier skips the jest." Max considered Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest the best of farces because of the humorous contrast between the style and the matter. However, of all forms
of humour he liked farce least since, generally speaking, it lacked both wit and humour.

Max admired the comedy of manners, and it occurred to him that Shaw could have created an excellent one in *Man and Superman* if he had only left out the Life Force, Ann Whitefield and John Tanner as prototypes of woman and man! Max also favoured the modern fantasy. For instance, when *The Admirable Crichton* was produced Max thought that as one of the brightest departures from the naturalistic method, it was the best thing that had happened to the British stage since he had known it.

On the question of modernizing Greek drama Max took Plato's stand that "nothing man has projected from himself is really intelligible except at its own date, and from its proper point of view." When Gilbert Murray chose to modernize *Andromache* Max objected on the grounds that the only thing immortal about Greek legends was the form in which they were originally presented. As he explained in an article for the *Saturday Review* (1901):

> Every age has its own beliefs or tendencies, formulable in contemporary art. Presented to posterity in their original art-form, these beliefs or tendencies are (through the imagination which that art-form stirs) as potent, or nearly potent, as ever they were. Aeschylus is a force hardly less accessible (to those who can understand Greek) than Ibsen. Shakespeare is as near to us as Mr. Henry Arthur Jones. But to present Aeschylean things well in modern English form is a task not more hopeless than would be the writing of a good modern English play in Elizabethan blank verse or in Greek rhythms for three actors and a chorus.
Max made one exception to this rule in the comedies of Aristophanes. Unlike the tragic Greek dramatists, Aristophanes was well suited to the modern theatre. Since he was the most intimate of satirists, he could have his place indoors. Also, because he was so completely contemporaneous, his dialogue survived best when given through the current slang.\(^{36}\)

On the subject of Milton's use of Greek models for his tragedy *Samson Agonistes*, Max showed his direct affinity with eighteenth century concepts of classical form and decorum. In essence his objection to "Agonising Samson" was the same as Samuel Johnson's, for Johnson said that the play met Aristotle's conditions for a beginning and an end, but that it had no middle because nothing occurred between these acts that either hastened or delayed the death of Samson.\(^{37}\) For Max, even an ideal performance of the play would be dull because he sensed no dramatic quality in it. He saw only that Milton was more intent on serving large portions of moral platitudes than on providing dramatic thrills.\(^{38}\) He missed some sort of conflict in Samson and in the final scene between Samson and Delila. For him there was no experience of tragedy without a powerful conflict of emotions. Max felt that Samson's total submission to God was edifying, correct, and even admirable, but it was not tragic or dramatic.

The problem for him as for many critics was that Milton had arranged everything for pathos and nothing for
action. His play was actually a spiritual tragedy in which he expected the pleasure to come from watching the disease of passion run its course in Samson and thereby the audience would be purged of pity and fear. This was such an unorthodox view of the Aristotelian principle that it was also questioned in the Seventeenth Century. It made tragedy "a matter of morality and edification rather than primarily of profound aesthetic experience." 39

In his drama Milton had tried to reconcile Greek and Christian elements; but since the play revolved about the Christian concept of sin, the consequent ravages of the human heart, and the need of repentance and reconciliation with God, it was inevitable that many critics, like Max, would find the play untragic. Samson could not satisfy Max's desire for the traditional hero of high tragedy, nor did the play as a whole give him any aesthetic pleasure. Like those who focused on the Greek or Hebrew elements in the tragedy, he missed the essence of Milton. Samson Agonistes was not a Greek tragedy, it was a Miltonic tragedy drawing upon outside materials and fitting them into his ideas for form and metre. For all its unconventionality, the play was basically in the heroic tradition.

In general Max preferred the neo-classical rules to the exceptional cases. Modern experimentalists in form often roused his curiosity; occasionally they stirred his interest, but rarely did they gain his approval. In later years his dislike of modern techniques such as the stream-of-
consciousness method, led him to soften his adverse judgments of earlier craftsmen like Arthur Wing Pinero. Enveloped in an aura of pastness, it seemed to Max that Pinero "not only gave you the good wine but a good goblet to drink from." It is interesting that it was not a dramatist of the loose, simple form of Continental drama, nor one of the expressionistic school of synthesis that he recalled, but a playwright who applied the naturalistic method within the framework of a basically well-made play. Inevitably, what he looked for in other writers were qualities which were somewhere rooted in the "rules" of neo-classicism. The writer he praised was the master of the unified method which made a unified impact upon the reader's mind, his heart and his sense of design.
CHAPTER IV

SOURCE REFERENCES


5. Loc. cit.


7. Loc. cit.


10. Ibid., p. 387.


16. Ibid., p. 304.


22. Ibid., p. 104.


25. Beerbohm, "Mr. Shaw Crescent," Around Theatres, pp. 120-121.


27. Beerbohm, "Mr. Shaw's 'Debate'," Around Theatres, p. 563.


29. Ibid., p. 510.

30. Ibid., p. 512.


32. Ibid., p. 327.


35. Beerbohm, "By-Gones Up to Date," Around Theatres, p. 129.


CHAPTER V
ETHICS AND AESTHETICS

More than anything else, Max's concept of the illusion of life governed his moral and aesthetic values. Whatever threatened individuality or hindered the free expression of creative vitality, whatever fostered hypocrisy or vulgarity, became subjects for parody and caricature or targets for his direct critical contempt.

Artists who chose to edify rather than to delight destroyed the illusion of life because they allowed their purpose to overwhelm their art, and where there was no unity there was no illusion of life. It seemed to Max that moral concerns could be subjects for art only as long as the representation was aesthetically satisfying. As an aesthete he believed that it was not the writer's business to correct or castigate. Moral fervour was acceptable, but it must be handled with artistic restraint. He was firmly against all propagandists, pamphleteers and grinders of axes who chose to make a political or social platform of their art.

He was also strongly opposed to censorship and to critics who judged a work of art within narrow limits of morality. Max believed that writers should be allowed unlimited freedom in their choice of subject matter. The important thing was not the subject but how it was handled.
An ugly theme required serious and skillful treatment. Even horror, when it was used to point to some criticism of life, could purge through pity and awe. But John Masefield's play, The Campden Wonder, was horror for horror's sake. It was morbid whereas life as a whole was not, though life abounded in tragedy.

It seemed to Max that horror or violence conveyed the greatest emotional impact when it was played offstage. When the power of suggestion was allowed to work on the minds of the audience, the effect was greater than the dramatist could hope to achieve by enacting the crime onstage. Max objected to Oscar Wilde's Salome, in spite of the fact that he found it technically beautiful, because the play was too horrible for stage presentation. He thought the act of carrying John the Baptist's severed head on stage was asking the audience to suffer something beyond the rightful tragic thrill in qualms of physical disgust.

Max considered the greatest themes to be the commonplace ones. Abnormally strange themes had not enough relation to life to be good themes for art. Max felt that a unique incident, however factual, did not give the sense of being rooted in life. Consequently, the theme of The Campden Wonder struck him as being too curious to meet the requirements of tragic art. It involved a man's determination to avenge himself on his brother by sending his brother, his mother and himself to the gallows for a crime none of them had committed. Obviously the man, John Perry, was mentally deranged, and Max thought a lunatic should not be used for the pivot of a tragedy because we, unlike the Greeks, did not
believe in "maleficient deities."\(^4\) In modern tragedy there had to be human responsibility.

Perhaps Masefield did not intend his play to be interpreted by the traditional standards of tragedy, but Max's point was still a reasonable one. This cannot be said for his bias against the Russian psychological novelists and dramatists. Max believed it was his respect for sanity and moral responsibility which influenced his criticisms, but obviously this was not so. For instance, Dostoievsky, whom the Bloomsbury 'mental underworld' had exalted, impressed him as a man of genius who "gave beautifully poignant expression to his spinelessness."\(^5\) He also thought that "except for Turgenev and, at times, Tolstoy, too much of what Russian novelists wrote was touched with lunacy."\(^6\) In his parody of Dostoievsky and Gorky in *Kolniyatsch*, the title suggested Colney Hatch, once London's most famous lunatic asylum.

Max's dislike and misunderstanding of Russian Writers of genius was the result of basic temperamental and artistic differences. Max had no sympathy for the brooding, introspective aspects of the Russian nature. He thought the Russian approach to grave psychological problems and the problems of man's relation to the universe was both futile and unhealthy. It seemed to him that modern Russian artists were more interested in sordidness than in art, because there was no evidence that they appreciated a classical sense of unity or the value of artistic restraint. Clearly the problem for Max was that once again he had overstepped his limits as a critic in attempting to cope with the demands of
large scale genius.

Max preferred to make life liveable rather than epical. In his opinion good sense about trivialities was better than nonsense about things that mattered. He considered utopianism to be one of the milder forms of lunacy. He was not only suspicious of 'big' ideas but he felt the effort to force men into 'the strait jacket of a panacea' had caused untold misery and suffering to the human race. Max preferred the attainable, the comprehensible and the small in scale. He was inclined to view any document for ideal socialized living as a warrant for the arrest of individuality. That was one reason why he could never appreciate H. G. Wells.

"I have no great intellect," Max once said. "What I have is intuition and a sense of humour, sense of fun and sense of beauty." Apart from his usual self-effacing manner, there was also a fair degree of truth in his statement. Many times he admitted that to observe humanity was a far greater and more entertaining experience for him than to read about it in the best and rarest of books. Possessed of a highly sensitive creative imagination and a strong satirical sense, he preferred to turn to life itself for his raw materials. The pleasures of scholarship were foreign to his interests. In fact, Max looked upon scholars as very dull people who sometimes devoted a great deal of labour to futile pursuits. He could never understand why certain of them should dedicate years of research to establish 'proof' that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's Works. He did not care about author's theories or theories about authors. He preferred the 'light touch.'
That was primarily why he chose Lord David Cecil to undertake his biography rather than Dr. J. G. Riewald, who had so carefully and intelligently analyzed his work.

The important thing to Max was that art must have an emotional impact; the broader historical and literary inferences that could be drawn from it did not concern him. He could not appreciate the scholar's true value because he was never quite able to determine the difference between scholarship and pedantry. In a parody of a scholarly footnote to his Latin poem Carmen Becceriense he wrote: "The question is, however, trivial - indeed its very triviality is the best excuse I can offer for the space I have devoted to its discussion."¹⁰

Certainly Max had a point about pedantry, as he had about other forms of humbug. He had little patience with critics who raved about plays that were performed in a language they could not understand. Unable himself to be moved by the performances of Eleanora Duse, he marvelled that seemingly suitable gestures and a well-modulated voice were all that the critics and the audience required to go into raptures of praise. Of even so romantic a figure as Duse Max desired more than beautiful word sounds; he wanted to grasp their meaning. Yet translation was not the answer, because the vitality of language depended on form and style, on the original order and rhythm of the words, as well as on the meaning.

Max was against anything which endangered a sense of life and the aesthetic sense. He thought theatres should be
open in the morning because it was our most receptive time. He also appreciated the advantage of the theatre over the cinema. Each performance was fresh and individual because the audience and artists reacted upon one another with ever new effect. He was against machine likenesses because they destroyed the sense of life.

However, it seemed to him that, aesthetically, the keenest theatrical enjoyments came from plays whose power or beauty took the audience by surprise, not, as William Archer claimed, with familiar plays. To Max, plot and situation, character, idea and diction were far more effective when they were new than when they were familiar. There is some merit in his point that the initial reaction to a truly fine play was one of self-forgetful rapture, and since the truest kind of aesthetic emotion lay in being simply "bowled over," this reaction was never again equalled or surpassed. The second experience of the play brought a closer appreciation and discrimination of the details which was also aesthetically pleasurable, but not to the same degree. At the third sight and ever after the principal interest centred on the individual performances because the fineness of the play was taken for granted. Again there was pleasure in the experience but there was also an inherent danger which threatened to destroy the aesthetic effect of the play as a whole, because repeated roles and repeated plays tended to become mechanical. When a play such as Macbeth was so well known for the individual parts that Lady Macbeth became a vehicle for this or that actress's interpretation, Max felt it was time to shelve the
play for thirty years, until it could once again make an impact purely on its merits as a drama.

He also believed that mimes, no matter how excellent, were only important to the extent that their parts contributed to the effect of the play as a whole. The play was the thing, and it had to be created for its own sake to be effective. It could be written around a particular character such as Cyrano de Bergerac, but not around a particular actor, or actor-manager, because, when the play was commissioned to suit the leading actor, it ceased to be a living work of art. The artist, unable to envision his man from within, was forced to assume the role of an adapter. Consequently, the play lacked the illusion of life and failed to be aesthetically satisfying.

Max thought that the plays produced during his term as theatre critic were better than those produced for the previous generation because the development of modern realism had released drama from its commitment to glamour. Now that people were no longer expected to accept anything, no matter how silly, there was hope for the drama's future. However, the fact that there were so many tenth rate productions staged, he blamed on those who made box office appeal the first consideration. On this point actor-managers like his half brother Herbert Beerbohm-Tree were particularly guilty. Max favoured the repertory theatres because they put good theatre first. Here the best modern work was produced because they dared to launch both foreign and British plays of modern realism.
On account of its vitality and progressiveness, Max preferred the repertory theatre, to the Shakespearean and the National theatres. He thought a small theatre for the production of short plays was more desirable than a national theatre because theatre-goers were given all they needed of Shakespeare and other theatre classics. He also encouraged any effort to spark new life on the stage, whether it was by the realistic plays of Heijermans and Henry Arthur Jones, or the modern music hall sketch. He favoured the refined comedies of wit of Oscar Wilde, the fantastic and satiric comedies of Sir James Barrie and the symbolic dramas of J. M. Synge and Yeats. It was not their 'newness' that delighted him but the fact they met his standards for a work of art. Among other things, they were original, vital and aesthetically satisfying.

Any form of art which did not appeal to his sense of beauty or his sense for life he considered an artistic failure. With conviction he wrote, "If a butterfly is not beautiful, it has no right to exist. If a farce is unpleasantly invented, it has no right to exist." He included dialect verse in this category because he found it grotesque, and modern poetic dramas in Shakespearean blank verse since only mediocre talents like Stephen Phillips cared to invent them. Also, he believed Shakespearean blank verse belonged to the Elizabethan era.

Max scorned the public but he did not scorn the public's love for the stupid in music hall entertainment. He believed every human creature was a mixture of stupidity and clever—
ness, and that both qualities required nutrition. It seemed to him that part of the charm of the old-fashioned music hall was that it evoked a sense of the past, of a more leisurely and romantic era. It had a life all its own, and where there was life Max could find room in his heart for monotony, vulgarity and sentiment. They belonged in the music hall and in their proper place they charmed him.

Generally speaking, Max scorned the public because they represented mass uniformity and he was a confirmed individualist. In his opinion there were only two elements in the public's humour, delight in the suffering of others and contempt for the unfamiliar. For public amusement the comic had only to focus his material on popular topics that involved some form of violence. Consequently, Max could never tolerate the 'comic man' either in literature or in society.

Like Shaw, he levelled many satiric blows at the Englishman's self-esteem. He was convinced that the Englishman was born inartistic, with little or no sense of beauty. However, on more than purely aesthetic grounds he pleaded for a return to the old-fashioned system of education which believed that 'manners makyth man.' He felt the passing of Latin in the schools had an adverse affect on the precise use of English, and with the blunting of precision in the language came muddiness in political policy, in morality and in conduct.

Vague thoughts and ambiguous expressions also had harmful affects upon modern journalism. Max thought modern journalists lacked vitality. They merely reflected the absence of the power of concentration in the average modern
mind. He also observed the tricks of editorial writers who, having nothing to say, made up for the lack by pouring forth the longest and most emphatic words "on the simplest subjects so as to give the impression of a weighty and judicious mind."

The aesthetics of fine printing delighted Max but he did not admire a book in which the printing tended to overshadow the work itself. The pseudo-mediaevalism used by William Morris in printing the Kelmscott editions exasperated him. He insisted that the printing prevented the reader from being in direct touch with the author's meaning, and therefore deprived the books of their very life.

He also blamed typographical "monkey tricks" for marring a great many books. The typographical expert cared nothing about writer or reader. He cared only about a handsome page or dignified block of type. As a result all the words were jammed one against another with as little space as possible between the lines, signifying to Max another mark of modern 'progress.'

Max resented the modern world. All its influences seemed bent on shattering individuality and beauty. He felt the lack of modern 'personalities', the sense of elusiveness and complexity that he had admired in such extraordinary nineteenth century figures as Byron, Disraeli and Rossetti. He also missed the great statesmen that used to command respect in Parliament. Now the House of Commons manner was debased to mere 'dufferdom'.

In twentieth-century London there was nothing to delight
his eye either in modern architecture or in sculpture. What he saw he considered both gross and vulgar. And with the ever-increasing emphasis on speed and progress the modern world had lost its capacity for leisure. Most of all he missed civilization in the Victorian sense when the ground was all firm under foot, when children knew their place and the graces were not yet outmoded. That was why he finally 'escaped' to Rapallo, to a place where civilization was still the servant of man and not his master, and where there yet remained an atmosphere of peace and beauty.
CHAPTER V

SOURCE REFERENCES


7. Ibid., p. 283.

8. Loc. cit.


I. Max on Criticism

During his twelve years as drama critic for the Saturday Review, Max recognized in the wide-spread and increasing power of the Press the cause of decay in modern criticism. He was glad that the time had passed when an artist could be "snuffed out by an article." But through the employment of ignorant and stupid writers, bad criticism had become so general that now it was only through his imitators that an artist could be made to suffer.¹

Max's ideal of a good critic fitted into the general concept of aesthetic criticism. Personally, he favoured a strong, narrow and creative personality because he felt it was more important for a critic to be interesting than to be always and absolutely just. One oath roared by W.E. Henley gave him greater joy than the sounder and more consistent judgments of William Archer. For though men like Henley and George Moore were so narrow they were almost invariably wrong, occasionally they were brilliantly right, and they were always interesting.²

He also admired a lightness of touch in criticism. Humour was an asset to the critic because it made his opinions
less arid and because the originality of the criticism depended less on what was said than on the way it was said. Since everything had been said many times before, the important thing was to say it in a new way.\(^3\) Only the individuality of the critic's style could make his point of view seem fresh and unique.

To Max, style was just as important to the aesthetic critic as it was to the artist. It was the lesser creation only because the critic had to be wound up from the outside. Consequently he could not be so creatively a creator as the artist whose work was his theme.\(^4\)

Style also implied a sense of form. Max thought criticism which focused on one or two points of interest was more valuable than that which tried to wrestle with the whole subject. A narrow viewpoint expressed with artistic unity carried greater impact and allowed for deeper insights than one could hope to encounter in a broad and general critical statement.

He believed that the best kind of critic was the helpfully interpretive, almost creative critic who had felt before he thought. It was the emotions that were the important thing in art. Max felt critics should not cultivate their minds at the expense of their emotions. A critic could not read too much but he could remember too much of his reading, and instead of saying things in his own way he might find himself expressing someone else's manner and opinions. As in art, so in criticism, when a critic chose the handiest
ready-made mould for his opinions, critical literature became impoverished.\textsuperscript{5}

It was evident to Max that the finest criticism was always passive, not active, because mastery came only through self-surrender.\textsuperscript{6} He believed that a critic who justly admired all kinds of things simultaneously, was incapable of surrendering himself to any one of them, and therefore, though he might be very admirable he could never really matter.

Finally, Max advocated a firm rock for the critic's ideas. He felt that solidly established critical principles were the best insurance against critical inconsistencies. He blamed his "lamentable vicissitudes" over George Bernard Shaw on the lack of such a rock.\textsuperscript{7}

There were few contemporary critics whom Max admired. Among drama critics there were only two: A.B. Walkley and William Archer. Of the two he preferred A.B. Walkley, and characteristically, it was Walkley's manner he admired. Archer dealt so closely and conscientiously with his subject that the interest in his critical articles faded with the interest in the book or play. Mr. Walkley, on the other hand, took the essayist's approach. He was not a more astute critic than Mr. Archer but he wore better because he expressed the opinions of a strong, narrow creative personality. While he informed his reader, he also entertained him.
Max liked William Archer best during his early days as an ardent Ibsenite. In those days his obvious prejudice made him less just but far more readable. In later years when Mr. Archer became dedicated to the cause of finding "the soul of goodness in things artistically evil," Max still considered him a good critic but he wished he were more amusing and occasionally even more illuminating. That was why it came almost as a relief to him when Archer called Mrs. Warren's Profession a masterpiece. Max attributed this faux pas to the modern notion that unpleasant material made a good play. To find that Mr. Archer too could go wrong pleased him because it seemed to make the man more human.

This was never his problem with A.B. Walkley. Max admired the humour that always pervaded the soundest of his judgments, that made a fantasy of common-sense and softened the dry light of his criticism. His aim was not simply to explain the merits or demerits of this or that work but to reveal himself, to show that he was very clever and amusing.

Actually Walkley's personality was not quite narrow enough for Max. He was too scientific in his method and at times too obviously erudite. Still he had style and an essayist's sense of form. He knew how to construct a theory or indicate a moral with classical control. In these respects he met Max's standards for the aesthetic critic.

Lytton Strachey impressed Max as having the qualities essential to good literary criticism. "With an intellect of steely quality there was combined in him a deep sensibility
and receptivity. He had felt before he thought.¹⁰ Like Max, he had the satiric temperament and his criticism was more often implicit than explicit, with occasional shafts of strikingly original insight.

Critics like George Moore mattered because they were capable of self-surrender. Whenever Moore "discovered" an artist that artist seemed greater to him than any other. He worshipped him exclusively, shutting out all other artistic concerns. His surrender to this one master was so complete that he was able to possess the very essence of his subject. That was why Max felt no one but Ruskin had written more vividly and more lovingly and perceptively about the art of painting, and no one had written more inspiringly or with more infectious enthusiasm about writers whom he loved and understood or more amusingly against those whom he did not understand and despised.¹¹

II. Max on Max as Critic

Max numbered himself among the critics who were aesthetic, temperamental and impressionistic, not the scientific or academic kind. He preferred modern interpretive or temperamental criticism to the older academic method because he believed it was living criticism. The critic was no longer allowed to feel superior to the creative artist. His duty was not to dictate but to understand and suggest. The important development was that now the critic was free to be actively himself and Max felt that it was not only
pleasant to be that, but it was always worth while to watch someone like George Moore being just that.

Owing to his congenial air of detachment, Max was able to evaluate his own contribution to criticism with a fair degree of accuracy. He saw his limitations not in the aesthetic method of criticism but in that very detachment which allowed for self-criticism. He had not the capacity for that self-surrendering love which would have yielded to him the very essence of his subject. At best he illuminated points of critical interest and gave pleasure to his readers. Inevitably, he was one of the critics who did not matter.

Max admitted in his Epistle Dedicatory to Edward Gordon Craig, in Around Theatres, that he had generally made the play he was to review "a peg to hang some general disquisition on," and that in his "seldom-sinking and alas-never-soaring way" he had always preferred Mr. Tomkins as a theme to Shakespeare, because he felt more at home with him and wrote better about him. He believed that his critical inconsistencies stemmed from a lack of basic dramatic principles which he had felt he must "vamp up" at the beginning of his critical career. In fact, it was just for the reason that he did possess such firmly established literary principles that Shaw became a problem to him, because only art that had been created according to time-tested rules gave Max aesthetic satisfaction. He was never happy with formal experiments that freely allowed the mixing of genres. Nor could he admire plays in which the ideas were more important
than the emotional conflict of flesh and blood characters. Obviously, Max's critical principles were never broad enough or flexible enough to apply to any artist of outstanding genius, least of all to a genius of the Twentieth Century.

Also, Max was more critically consistent than he imagined when he admitted that he had completely changed his opinions on many subjects. As the drama of ideas became increasingly motivated by the need for social reforms, Max turned more and more toward romance until, at the end of his career as drama critic, he decided that ideas were for books. What he had looked for in realism was truth to life, not an avenue for social and political concerns. It was not his opinion that changed but the direction realistic drama took. Similarly his opinions on literary and dramatic personalities did not change so much as they softened. For example, he came to regret deeply the actually malicious attacks he had made on Rudyard Kipling, although he never altered his initial opinions. Kipling had represented everything he detested in art when he wrote the vulgar dialect of exceedingly vulgar people in a patriotic vein. However, what had prompted him to abuse was that he saw Kipling as a man of genius who was deliberately debasing his gift.

Max was an artist before he became a critic, and at heart he remained an artist. What he brought to criticism were the principles he had derived from neo-classical "rules" and aesthetic concepts and successfully applied to his own creative work. His position was already established on
critical literary principles when he took the post of drama critic. What the major portion of his criticism amounted to was a mildly satirical defense of a position he had already taken as an artist. He contributed nothing new to the development of modern criticism. His point of view was narrow because his interests were narrow. They were primarily an essayist's concern for form and style. His scope was narrow because his satirical temperament was better suited to minor artists than to major ones.

Max's fastidious reserve and innate detachment made it impossible for him to enter sympathetically into such a complete and self-surrendering love as Shakespeare revealed in his sonnets. He was devoid of passion. His emotions were delicate and aesthetic. In putting the emotions first in his criticism he was not declaring himself to be an emotional man, but a critic of the dying aesthetic tradition. He was in no way sympathetic to the new analytical and scientific approach to criticism and to art. Max was fundamentally a nineteenth-century man, and in particular, an intellectual aesthete of the Nineties.

III. Critics on Max

Few of Max's contemporaries took him seriously as a critic. They saw him much as he saw himself, as a brilliantly witty and urbane essayist and parodist who would never have gone on the streets of journalism had it been merely a matter of choice. They found humanity, acute insight and much
delightful entertainment in his critical reviews, but these virtues existed in all his writings. Generally his contemporaries were more attracted to the subtle wit and humour in his reviews than to its critical values. This was due partly to the fact that his critical viewpoint was the accepted aesthetic position of the Nineties and therefore nothing new, and partly to the fact that he was an essayist with the essayist's desire to reveal himself rather than to divert the flow of critical or literary currents. As Holbrook Jackson noted in his book *The Eighteen-Nineties* (1913), Max's subjects were interesting because he was interesting.

In more recent years some authors and critics have found beneath the light urbane exterior, critical values which are firm enough and consistent enough to weave a pattern through his critical writings. All agree that they are limited in scope and lacking in originality, but when these principles are applied through Max's unique personality, the critical insights that result are fresh and individual. They reveal old ideas in a new way, or they illuminate some small but unusual point of literary interest that had formerly escaped notice.

Mr. John Shand, in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, admired the virtue of Max's unruffled temperament, the fact that he never loudly praised or blamed and that his reviews were always fresh no matter how dull the play had been, because they were not reviews in any direct or formal sense
but essays. Max wrote an entertainment of his own, but Mr. Shand felt that he often gave a better notion of the play than the run-of-the-mill critic who strictly reported on the plot and acting.¹⁵

He also noted Max's remarkable prophetic sense. In 1901, when Shaw was forty-five, Max considered him still a young writer who would have to pass his 58th birthday before critics could fairly assess his theatrical powers. If Shaw's current rate of progress continued Max felt he would inevitably achieve immortality.

Obviously there was also a strong connection between Max's satiric and his prophetic sense because in 1905 he predicted a knickerbocker costuming of Hamlet in 1924. In 1925 Sir Barry Jackson produced it, but not quite as Max envisioned it. Ophelia did not make her entrance by springing off a bicycle. His point was that when Shakespearean tragedy is transplanted from its own setting and its own time, the aesthetic sense of tragedy is destroyed and a macabre form of comedy results. So far he has been right.

Samuel Behrman considered the animating spirit of Max's criticism to be a cultivated common sense. His integrity never allowed him to like what he should like when it happened that he did not like it.¹⁶ Edmund Wilson also remarked on Max's courage and directness in registering unpopular opinions. He encountered in Max's Saturday Review articles the mind that gave the base to the whole of his writing. It was a very flexible mind, very free from
prejudice, confident and capable of revising former opinions. However, Mr. Wilson surmised that his critical faculty was happiest and most at home in his parodies, and of course, this is true. Max was a caricaturist by birth, a writer by choice and a drama critic by accident. That is why his opinions were mainly based upon critical literary principles. It is his parodies, not his reviews, that carry the true mark of his genius.

Max's directness in registering unpopular opinions was more a matter of protest than courage. In an age of steadily increasing mass uniformity, he stood shoulder to shoulder not only with the Graces but also with the standards of integrity and individuality that had been the mark of great Victorian personalities. He loathed the humbug he found among critics who pretended to admire what they could not understand. He despised the low standards of journalism which allowed the widespread influence of uncultivated minds that showed little evidence of having learned to read or write.

Max's mind was not a very flexible one because the range of his "likes" was narrow. It was limited by the conservative and fastidious aspects of his nature, by his exacting standards for correct form and beautiful style. However, he was certainly not inflexible. He was willing to admit in a letter to Henry Arthur Jones (1898) that he had overstated his case favouring observation over experience, and that he had merely meant to suggest that fine works of
art had sometimes been the result of the artist's incapacity for realizing in life the phase of life with which he was dealing.  

Also he made a very genuine effort to be scrupulously fair with authors he did not wholly approve of. He was as fair with Shaw as his fastidiousness would allow. He was generous with John Galsworthy in the sense that he could show warm appreciation for his plays *Justice* and *Strife*, and, in spite of the fact he thought Galsworthy had debased his art to the service of social reform, he valued the originality of the author's ideas and his extraordinary sense for actual life.

Max gave the impression of being very flexible and very free from prejudice because he was too detached and too urbane to permit himself to become ruffled or to take himself, or anything else, too seriously. But though he wore his mask of calm, cool elegance better perhaps than any other personality of the 'Nineties, he was subject to the weaknesses of his virtues in being "strong and narrow."

Even so, it seemed to Phyllis Hartnoll that "for all the enchanting lightness of his critical pen, it ran always to sincerity and often to wisdom." His years of criticism on the *Saturday Review* brought distinction to theatrical journalism.

Phyllis Bottome thought that every sincere and growing writer must have found in Max, the critic, the kindest and clearest of guides, because he despised humbug, worshipped
truth and "never bagatellized the emotions." In her opinion he became a great dramatic critic because he threw light rather than heat upon the emotions.

It seems probable that Max's unemotional detachment was the very reason he could never become a great critic. But certainly a young writer like Lytton Strachey must have been grateful for Max's support at a time when he was generally criticized as a mere iconoclast. Even Shaw, in the early stages of his theatrical career, must have welcomed Max's sincere protest to theatre managers on his behalf, because initially he was considered too intellectual to be a good risk at the box-office.

As a critic, it seemed to Dr. J.G. Riewald that Max generally did not rise above the status of an acutely sensitive and independent, though slightly conservative and even reactionary, interpreter of the signs of the times. He considered Max's failure to see the full implications of intellectual drama to be the cause of his inability to appraise the genius of Shaw. His failure to be progressive in the matter of realism, particularly in the photographic sense, Dr. Riewald attributed to the fact that it was already firmly established when he began to write for the Saturday Review. The reason that Max became more progressive in the matter of the romantic reaction to the naturalistic method was that the reaction was just then coming into its own in plays by Yeats, Synge and Sir James Barrie.

Broadly speaking, these statements are true. Max
became increasingly conservative as he became increasingly aware that modern realism was not serving art so much as social reform. The artist had become the preacher. That was why he finally longed for a return to the theatre of pure entertainment. It seems however, that it was not so much that Max failed to see the full implications of intellectual drama but that he did not like what he saw. The vitality he looked for in drama was not to be found in Shaw's disquisitory plays but in the drama of flesh and blood characters whose emotions were at the root of the conflict. It was the impact upon his emotions, not his intellect, that gave him the illusion of life.

Louis Kronenberger in his essay *The Perfect Trifler* acknowledged that in the perspective of half a century Max gave a sounder estimate of the English theatre of his time than his more knowledgeable and responsive colleagues A.B. Walkley and William Archer. He noted that his temperament had led Max into errors and inadequacies, citing as examples that he had underrated Gorky and overrated Maeterlinck. He also thought there was no gusto in his criticism, but he found much unprofessional shrewdness, some professional observation, mild wit and what he called a mixed blessing in an essayist's emphasis on form.²²

It did not seem to Mr. Kronenberger that Max was an outstandingly good critic, or so superb a journalist and electrical a personality as Shaw. Unlike Shaw, he did not hold up where his subject matter did not, but "he wrote the
sort of antiseptic criticism that, by not succumbing to the moment's emotionalism, had more than the moment's value."

This criticism of Max is in itself a mixed blessing. The general evaluation is excellent. Of course it is true that Max overrated Maeterlinck, as did all the English aesthetes of the 'Nineties who first experienced the suggestive power of his symbolism and the poetic mystery of the silences in this new French symbolist, static drama. It is also true that his essayist's emphasis on form limited the breadth and weight of his critical reviews. However, there are some points that must be reconsidered. For instance, it is true that there was no gusto in Max's style; but he was never an enthusiast. It is not true that the sustained interest in Max's critical articles depended upon his subject matter and not his personality. For one thing, an essay is an expression of the writer's personality and the majority of his reviews were conceived as critical essays. The fact that Around Theatres was reprinted in 1930 suggests that the interest was in Max. Who now talks of Dan Leno or Coquelin? Yet these are even now delightfully readable essays. Who has other than a scholarly interest in Arthur Wing Pinero or Henry Arthur Jones? Yet even where the interest in the subject matter has died, the personality of Max remains as fresh and amusing as ever. Contained in these reviews are penetrating sidelights on matters of form and style that will have value as long as there are readers who appreciate the wise and witty personality Max revealed through his
flexible and beautiful style.

Max wrote highly civilized rather than antiseptic criticism. Admittedly, he was lacking in force of passion, but that was a characteristic of intellectual dandyism. Displays of emotion were not in keeping with the ideals of deportment. His detachment was innate but it was also a necessary backdrop to his wit and humour.

In the final analysis, it is not possible to place Max in the mainstream of the English critical literary tradition. In the first place he neither changed nor substantially added to the critical currents of aestheticism of his time. Ruskin had put forth his challenge for social idealism and the importance of truth to nature. Whistler had declared that the artist was superior to nature and that his sole responsibility was to himself. Pater made the French concept of art for art's sake an English one when he refused to separate ethics from aesthetics or form from matter, but made their perfect unity his aim.

Max looked to Walter Pater for his definition of the aesthetic critic and an impressionistic method of criticism. Like Pater he was more attracted to works with a marked individual flavour than to the main streams of literary tradition. He also believed a work of art must be viewed with critical detachment, and it was Pater's influence that led him to express wishes, leanings and preferences rather than critical judgments.

Like Pater, Max found in the tentative and informal quality of the essay the means of embodying criticism in
artistic form. Perfect unity was as much Max's ideal as Pater's. But Max was never interested in the great theories of art and literature that had absorbed Pater and Ruskin and Rossetti. He was never involved in that major preoccupation of the later Nineteenth Century, the attempt to find a connection between art and religious experience. He shared the fin-de-siècle concern for loosening the bonds between the artist and society, but not in the manner of a pioneer or iconoclast, but as a Tory anarchist, a respecter of the rights of a civilized artist and gentleman.

Pater's literary studies have been criticized for being unsubstantial, for doing little more than to convey an atmosphere and to help illuminate certain points that may have escaped the reader's notice. Max's critical reviews have raised a similar complaint. The case was for more vigorous and decisive criticism like that of Samuel Johnson who served the recognized tradition, or like the criticism of Dryden, Coleridge and T.S. Eliot who cleared the way for contemporary creative work. Nevertheless, Pater marks an important change in the aesthetic tradition he inherited from Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites. That major difference was the severance of art from social idealism. He merits a place in the mainstream of traditional criticism whereas Max does not.

In the Eighteen-nineties it was Arthur Symons rather than Max who carried on Pater's work of examining the aesthetic presuppositions of art. His Symbolist Movement
in Literature (1899) defined, described and made available in England French concepts of poetry which are still influential. In comparison, Max's contribution to the critical literature of the 'Nineties was slight. Even so, it was valid. By virtue of his detachment Max did not succumb to the moment's emotionalism, but left a legacy of illuminating critical insights that have indeed had more than the moment's value.
CHAPTER VI
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3. Ibid., p. 44.


9. Ibid., p. 43.


13. Ibid., p. ix.


23. Ibid., p. 235.


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