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MAX BEERBOHM, ESSAYIST

by Henry Raymond Imbleau

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ottawa in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Degree conferred Senate Sept. 6, 1962

Secret.

Ottawa, Canada, 1962.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis was prepared under the guidance of Dr. Emmett O'Grady, Chairman of the Department of English. Gratitude is here expressed for his interest and help.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	INTRODUCTION	v
1.	MAX BEERBOHM, THE MAN	1
2.	THE ESSAY	7
3.	THE SMALL MASTER	17
4.	THE PERSONAL ELEMENT IN BEERBOHM'S CRITICAL ESSAYS	85
	CONCLUSION	98
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	100
	ABSTRACT	

INTRODUCTION

Sir Max Beerbohm died in 1956, and thus his niche in the world of letters has not been completely ascertained. He was an essayist, novelist and a writer of short stories. He was also a dramatic critic and caricaturist with the Saturday Review for twelve years.

However, in literature, it is widely agreed that it is as a familiar essayist that he won most popularity and success. Beerbohm's familiar essays are contained in five different volumes: The Works Of Max Beerbohm; More; Yet Again; And Even Now; Mainly On The Air.

The purpose of this study is, primarily, to examine the personal essays of Max Beerbohm with a view towards ascertaining their artistic value.

It has been deemed necessary to include a short biography of Sir Max Beerbohm. As a familiar and personal essayist, his life is very important to us. In this way, it will be easier to determine the extent to which Beerbohm's essays are autobiographical and how much a pose.

We have stated that Max Beerbohm is a familiar essayist. However, this statement is not self-explanatory, and must be proven. One cannot evaluate without a standard. Thus we must include a short chapter on essays in general in order to obtain a reasonable definition of this rather elusive term, and also to show Beerbohm's literary ancestry.

Sir Max Beerbohm's essays will be examined not only from the point of view of content, but expression as well. Such notable critics

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

As Holbrook Jackson, Louis Kronenberger, and A.C. Ward have described Beerbohm as one of the greatest essayists in the English language. Work of such reputation is worthy of close scrutiny.

It has also been mentioned that Beerbohm wrote dramatic criticisms for the Saturday Review which were collected by him and published in a volume called Around Theatres. It is our intention to show that these pieces are essentially essays because of the personal element which they contain and not articles in the modern sense of that word.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

CHAPTER ONE

MAX BEERBOHM, THE MAN

Max Beerbohm was born in London on August 24, 1872. He was the son of Julius Ewald Edward Beerbohm, a corn merchant who was born at Mamel, Germany, in 1810. Max's father left Germany in 1828 and went to live in France. It is interesting to note that among his Parisian friends Julius was known as a dandy, and, playing upon his name, they christened him 'Monsieur Su-perbe Homme'. In his twenties he went to England and settled down in the City of London, where he was a corn-merchant for many years. He married Constantia Draper on August 9, 1849, and she bore him three sons - Ernest Frederick William, born April 25, 1851; Herbert Draper, born December 17, 1852, and Julius, born June 2, 1854 - and a daughter Constance Marie, born February 16, 1856.

Julius Ewald Edward Beerbohm's wife Constantia died on September 3, 1858 and he married his wife's sister Eliza Draper. There were four daughters - Matilda Helen, born October 10, 1863; Gertrude and Marie Agnes (twins born December 5, 1865); and Dora Margaretta April 16, 1868, and a son later to become Sir Max Beerbohm.

Herbert Draper Beerbohm (later to take the stage-name Tree) and Constance Marie (Max's half-brother and half-sister) became the most illustrious figures in the family next to Max. Herbert Tree was one of the most celebrated actors and stage-managers in London at the end of the century. Constance Marie is known as the writer of a comedietta, called A Secret, and of Charity Begins at Home, a

comedy. In 1897 she published A Little Book of Plays for Professional and Amateur Actors, which consisted of plays adapted from the French.

Henry Maximilian Beerbohm was born at 57 Palace Gardens Terrace, Kensington, on August 24, 1872, three days after his famous friend Aubrey Beardsley was born. Very little is known of his early years. He attended the day school of Mr. Wilkinson from 1881 to 1885. It was he who inspired Max with a love of Latin, a love that was later to be exhibited in his essays with his frequent use of Latinisms. He received his first drawing lessons from Mrs. Wilkinson.

From 1885 to 1890 Max Beerbohm attended Charterhouse. In his essay Old Carthusian Memories, we are informed that there are only two things he really enjoyed: Latin and drawing caricatures.[1] He was not a brilliant student but was definitely singled out by teachers and class-mates as being different from the usual type of boy that went to Charterhouse. V.H. Collins gives us an interesting insight of Max in these years.

> He was only half-way up the school when he left; he got a Third Class in Classical Moderations at Oxford and went down without taking his degree. He was the only boy at Charterhouse in my time who was known never to have changed into football clothes, besides his one and inseparable companion who was lame. He was thought to be eccentric but was not regarded as offensive, in spite of being rather a dandy - always dressed in the latest London fashion, and with his hair parted in the middle and plastered down flat.[2]

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1 Max Beerbohm, "Old Carthusian Memories", in Mainly On The Air, London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1957, p. 138.

2 V.H. Collins, Talks with Thomas Hardy at Maxgate, London, Duckworth, 1928, p. 32.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

The most valuable talent that life at school taught Max was the ability to understand his fellow creatures, an ability that was not to be treated lightly by Max.

> The main thing that I learned and have not yet forgotten, was a knack of understanding my fellow-creatures, of living in amity with them and not being rubbed the wrong way by their faults, and not rubbing them the wrong way with mine.[3]

From Charterhouse Max went to Merton College, Oxford. Little is known of Beerbohm's private life at Oxford apart from the details supplied by his intimate friend William Rothenstein. Among his closest friends at Merton were William Rothenstein, Aubrey Beardsley and Reginald Turner. Through the influence of his brother Herbert Tree he met Oscar Wilde, Charles Conder, Richets and Shannon.

His life at Merton College followed somewhat the same pattern that it did at Charterhouse and substantiates the claim that Beerbohm was a passionate observer of life rather than a passionate player in it as his contemporary Oscar Wilde. He was never seen at the Union and hardly ever at lectures; the only exercise he took was canoeing on the Cher with L.M. Messel, a Merton friend. He avoided the amateur theatricals of the Dramatic Society but there is evidence he attended the meetings of the Debating Society of his College and was a member of an Essay Society.

The most important event of these years was his introduction to Aubrey Beardsley, the art editor of that great new venture, the Yellow Book. Max wrote one of his best known essays for the opening

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3 Max Beerbohm, "Old Carthusian Memories", in Mainly On The Air, p. 137.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

volume of the yellow quarterly, "A Defence of Cosmetics". The essay reflects the influence of the 'fin de siecle' movement on Max, both his attraction for it, and his aversion to it. It is a very controversial satire and caused "Punch" to describe Max as 'the little busy bore'.[4] Frank Harris gives us a delightful glimpse of Max in his undergraduate days.

> When I first saw him, Max Beerbohm reminded me of one of those lunar creatures, visitants from some other planet, with more brains than we, earth-born folk, and no passions. A large round head and goggly, round eyes were accentuated, so to speak, by a very slight, youthful figure of middle height, peculiarly well dressed ... His manners, too, were curiously like his dress: of the best conventional pattern, a little quiet, perhaps, as befitted his youth, and reserved ...[5]

At twenty three, he had the cheek to publish his first collection of essays calling it <u>The Works of Max Beerbohm</u>. The same year also saw the publication of Beerbohm's first gathering of caricatures entitled <u>Caricatures of Twenty-Five Gentlemen</u>. These two publications were to point the way of Max's artistic bent. <u>The Poet's Corner</u> of 1904 offered irreverent drawings of noted writers - their faces easy to recognize, but their situations the product of the artist's fancy. <u>Fifty Caricatures</u> (1913), <u>A Survey</u> (1921), <u>Rossetti and his Circle</u> (1922) and <u>Observations</u> (1925) followed.

He wrote his first short story <u>The Happy Hypocrite</u> in 1897, a story whose theme reveals the strong influence of Wilde's novel, <u>The Picture of Dorian Gray</u>. In 1898 he succeeded Bernard Shaw as

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4 "Aro Cosmetica", in <u>Punch</u>, (London), May 5, 1894, p. 210.

5 Frank Harris, <u>Contemporary Portraits</u>, London, Grant Richards, 1924, p. 127.

dramatic critic of The Saturday Review, a position he was to maintain for twelve years. It is interesting to note here that although Shaw in his valedictory article on May 21, 1898, refers to Max as representing the younger generation it will be proven in this thesis that it was Shaw and not Beerbohm who was the younger spirit.

In 1899 he published another collection of essays called More, and in 1909 Yet Again. In 1910 he married an American actress Florence Khan and went to live in Rapello, Italy. Wars and threats of wars caused him to leave Rapello for England in 1915 and 1935, although every two or three years, he would come to London and give an exhibition at the Leicester Galleries or visit old friends.

He wrote his only novel Zuleika Dobson, or An Oxford Love Story in 1911. In 1912 A Christmas Garland Woven by Max Beerbohm appeared, a series of parodies of contemporary authors. In 1919, Seven Men, a collection of imaginary portraits, or rather memories of six "types" literary and otherwise with the author himself as the unobtrusive though omnipresent seventh. In 1920 And Even Now, possibly his best collection of essays, was published revealing a tender heart beneath the pose. In 1924 Max Beerbohm published the better critical essays that he had written for The Saturday Review, revealing Max as a sound and unprejudiced critic, impressionistic rather than academic. In 1928 A Variety of Things appeared. Beerbohm states that this volume contains 'a fantastic moral tale, essays exist here, and two fairy stories, a play, a parody, a memoir of a friend,

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

a memoir of two imaginary friends, and also a tribute to a third imaginary friend, who is still living (or was six years ago)'.[6]

Decline of creative power in the literary medium is manifest in A Variety of Things. This book contains twelve essays and stories. Of these only four had been written since the last collection was made in 1920, the rest being reprints. The last book to appear was Mainly on The Air, six broadcasts and some other non-broadcast pieces in 1946. The broadcast pieces are simpler and less ornate in style.

Max Beerbohm died on May 20, 1956. Because Beerbohm is an essayist, the most fruitful way to search for Sir Max, the Man, is to scrutinize his writings. Since he is a familiar essayist primarily, his personality obtrudes upon the essay form constantly. Even in the study of his critical essays much is to be gained because of his impressionistic approach. It is these essays that will reveal not only the style of a perfectionist but also the peculiar workings of an uncommon mind, a mind that is at one time satirical and whimsical, at another warm and full of wisdom.

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6 Max Beerbohm, "Note" in A Variety of Things, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1928, p. VII.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

CHAPTER TWO

THE ESSAY

As we are concerned primarily with evaluating the essays of Max Beerbohm, it would seem logical, before going any further, to discuss the nature of the essay as an art form. In this way we will be able to ascertain what works of Beerbohm may be classified as essays. It would also appear to be sound procedure to discuss briefly the literary ancestry of the *genre* in order to see some of the different types existent in English literature and to see into what category Beerbohm's essays may be placed.

The term "essay" is the most flexible and elusive of any *genre* in English literature. This difficulty has been accentuated in the twentieth century (especially when dealing with the familiar essay) because of the short story. In many cases it is no slight problem to distinguish between the two. The particular difficulty in defining the essay is to avoid both a definition so general as to include all prose writings not strictly to be classed as history or fiction and one so restricted as to embrace only one type of essay, the personal or familiar.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines an essay as 'a composition of moderate length on any particular subject, or branch of a subject, originally implying want of finish, an irregular undigested piece but now said of a composition, more or less elaborate in style, though limited in range'. This definition tends to be too inclusive and vague. There is nothing here to distinguish between either the

different types of essays, or the difference between an essay and a short story. Neither is there anything here to suggest the necessity of an author using creative imagination to make an essay.

R.D. O'Leary defines this art form as 'a short piece of prose, expository in general character, literary rather than matter of fact or didactic, and necessarily, therefore, in a style that departs somewhat, from the style of plain assertion'.[1] This definition would seem to imply the necessity of using the creative imagination. Hazlitt, Lamb, Belloc, Chesterton, Macaulay all fall under this definition. These are fairly general features of the essay. To be clear and accurate we must add some word to each individual essayist to elucidate in what way he differs from his fellow-essayist. For example, we usually refer to Macaulay as a critical or historian-essayist, while Lamb is usually described as the giant of the familiar essayists.

Although Theophrastus, Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch wrote essays long before Montaigne, it was the Frenchman who gave the _genre_ its name by publishing his _Essais_ in 1580, and it is he who is usually considered the father of the modern prose essay, because it was he who gave to the world a well-defined literary organ of personality, a new literary _genre_ - the essay. The title meant "attempts", and indicated the tentative and unsystematic nature of

1 R.D. O'Leary, _The Essay_, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1928, p. 28.

his discussions, in contrast to formal philosophical and ethical treatises on the same subjects.

The next important event in the history of the English essay was the publication of the Baconian Book of Proverbs in 1597, consisting of ten essays which were raised in number to thirty-eight in 1612, and fifty-eight in 1625.

It would be instructive at this point to bring to light some of the differences between Montaigne and Bacon in their manner of writing essays; the personal, concrete, familiar essays of Montaigne and the abstract, impersonal essays of Bacon. The essay of the first type is chiefly concerned with some more or less generalized aspect of people or things which, illustrated by a certain amount of significant detail of a commonly personal nature, is discussed in a loosely associative rather than in a strictly logical order while the essay of the second type mostly takes some general ethical, philosophical or psychological conception for its themes and discusses it, more or less logically, with a minimum of illustrative material, such illustrative material as there is being mostly of a non-personal nature.

Consider first the titles that Bacon and Montaigne use for their essays. While Bacon speaks "Of Truth", "Of Envy", "Of Superstition", "Of Travel", Montaigne talks about "Des Cannibales", "Du Dormir", "De l'yvrongnerie", "Des noms", "D'un enfant monstruex" or "Des Coches". Another difference can be seen if we consider the different treatments of the same theme: Friendship. Bacon's essay

"Of Friendship" is a cold, logical, pragmatic, sententious and unembellished discourse on the fruits of friendship, while Montaigne's "De l'amitie" is a moving personal document, with no clear structure at all.

No one will say that Montaigne is a weightier, more profound thinker than Bacon. Bacon's essays reflect some of the best qualities to be found in the English Renaissance. A clear, searching mind which is above all orderly and precise throwing new light and stating profound original data on very old subjects. In other words he has a mind that can perceive the uncommon in the common-place. However in reading his essay on friendship, one wonders if Bacon ever possessed a friend while we are never in any doubt concerning Montaigne. The feelings inspired by the loss of his great friend Etienne de la Boétie provide the key-note to this essay. It is this central mood, which gives unity to Montaigne's essay, instead of the dry light of reason. Montaigne's essay on friendship exemplifies both the personal and the discursive type, which is to become more popular in England than the aphoristic type of Bacon's.

Alexander Smith throws particular illumination on the personal or familiar type of essay.

> The essay as a literary form, resembles the lyric, in so far as it is moulded by some central mood and whimsical, serious, or satirical. Give the mood, and the essay, from the first sentence to the last, grows around it as the cocoon grows around the silkworm. The essayist does not usually appear early in the literary history of a country; he comes naturally after the poet and the chronicler. His habit of mind is leisurely: he does not write from any special stress of passionate impulse; he does not create

> material so much as he comments upon material already existing. It is essential for him that books should have been written, and that they should at least to some extent, have been read and digested. He is usually full of allusions and references, and these his reader must be able to understand and follow.[2]

In other words it is the central mood, the tone, not the substance, that makes the essay. Beerbohm himself states his conception of the essayist's main duty and the primary difference between the essay and the short story.

> ... himself is the thing to be obtruded, and style the only means to this end. Wherever style is, there too is the author. But in a mere story, we want nothing but the story, so soon as the author comes in at the door, illusion flies out at the window. The story-teller must efface himself, therefore, and the only means to this end is the (real or seeming) absense of style.[3]

It is Sir Thomas Browne and not Bacon who carries on the personal essay in England. It would appear that he acclimatized the personal, discursive type to England more by a common natural bent of mind than by direct imitation. The true essayist always plays with his subject 'now in whimsical, now in grave, now in melancholy mood',[4] and this Browne did. He seems to have regarded the essay form as what Hugh Walker called 'receptable for detached thoughts'.[5] Joseph Texte has written an essay on the spiritual kinship between the two.[6]

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2 Alexander Smith, Dreamthorp, A Book of Essays Written in the Country, London, George Routledge & Sons, 1863, p. 30.

3 Max Beerbohm, "At 'Her Majesty's'", in Saturday Review, London, Vol. 36, issue of January 20, 1900, pp. 77-78.

4 Alexander Smith, Op. cit., p. 31.

5 Hugh Walker, The English Essay and Essayists, London, J.M. Dent, 1915, p. 16.

6 Joseph Texte, Etudes de Littérature européenee, Paris, Armand Colin et Cie, 1898, pp. 51-93.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA ~ ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

Browne's "Hydrotaphie" is, as Hugh Walker remarked, 'not the urns found in Norfolk, but the thoughts on mortality suggested by them.'[7]

Since the eighteenth century was primarily a classical period the romantic or intimate Montaignesque type essay did not flourish. This is not to say that romantic elements did not exist in the Neo-Classical period. What it does mean is that this period, like any other predominantly classical period, has a tendency to de-personalize the writer and look outside rather than being concerned with the discursive meanderings of a writer's mind. This was the age of the periodical essayists, of Steele and Addison, of Defoe and Johnson. The motto of The Spectator and The Tatler was "Quicquid agunt Homines", and these writers worked in conformity with this motto.

With the Romantic spirit coming back into literature as a felt force with The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1781, the familiar essayist was once more to loom to an unprecedented height. This is the age of Leigh Hunt, Thomas De Quincy, William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb. While De Quincey and Hazlitt have written familiar essays, they are more known for their critical essays. However Lamb is the giant of the familiar essayists.

> If an attempt be made to discover the secret of this power, it will be found that first and chief among the factors contributory to it is the incomparable sweetness of disposition which Lamb not only possessed but had a unique gift of communicating to his writings.[8]

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7 Hugh Walker, Op. Cit., p. 77.

8 Ibid., p. 229.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA ~ SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Some critics have compared Lamb to Beerbohm and implied that there is a great deal of affinity between the two. Even a superficial reading of the two would reveal two qualities which Beerbohm possesses in an abundant degree which Lamb lacks: satire and irony. Lamb does possess in affinity with Beerbohm a love of out-of-the-way lore - out-of-the-way in distance as well as in time, which often gives a reminiscential note to their work; besides this, both exhibit a confidential, self-revealing and self-critical attitude and both have the same discursiveness in their treatment of subject. Lamb in his essay, "Imperfect Sympathies", reveals the type of mind which is essential for an essayist.

> The owners of the sort of faculties I allude to have minds rather suggestive than comprehensive. They have no pretences to much clearness or precision in their ideas, or in their manner of expressing them. Their intellectual wardrobe (to confess fairly) has few whole pieces in it. They are content with fragments and scattered pieces of truth. She presents no full front to them - a feature or side face at most. Hints and glimpses, germs and crude essays at a system, is the utmost they can pretend to. They heat up a little game peradventure - and leave it to knottier heads, more robust constitutions, to run it down. The light that lights them is not steady and polar, but mutable and shifting: waxing, and again waning. Their conversation is accordingly ...[9]

However we must look to Thackeray for satire and irony for it was he who first elevated these qualities to the dignity of a central mood. While Addison and Steele have used these elements previously, just as there is something of the same urbanity in Beerbohm that exists

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9 Charles Lamb, "Imperfect Sympathies" in The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb, London, Oxford University Press, 1908, 2v., p. 544.

in Addison, these writers use these elements because they are provoked by some outward person or thing while in Thackeray and Beerbohm the mood exists for its own sake and is not subordinate to any other purpose. It must have been these essayists of the centre,[10] as Hugh Walker called the self-revelatory type, that Alexander Smith referred to when he used the simile of the silk worm and the cocoon. There is an ironic detachment in Beerbohm and Thackeray which does not exist in Lamb or Montaigne. In his essay on "Ogres", Thackeray writes: 'To-day my mood is dark. I scowl as I dip my pen in the inkstand'.[11] Beerbohm also speaks of his Elizabethan and Caroline, his Georgian and Early Victorian moments.[12] It is this pervading mood of self-satire and self-irony that distinguishes Thackeray and Beerbohm from essayists like Montaigne and Lamb. Lamb and Thackeray taken together contain the essential qualities of Beerbohm's essays.

As this thesis will contain a chapter dealing with Beerbohm's critical essays as found in his work, Around Theatres, some explanation would seem necessary. Not all of Beerbohm's work in Around Theatres can be described as essays in the strict sense. Some are strictly critical articles that one might find in any of to-day's journals. As many of the contributions to the Saturday Review are not

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10 Hugh Walker, Op. Cit., p.4.

11 William Makepeace Thackeray, "Ogres" in Roundabout Papers, Boston, Aedine Book Publishing Co., 1931, p. 111.

12 Max Beerbohm, "Dandies and Dandies" in Works and More, London, Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1930, p. 17.

criticisms at all but rather genuine essays, dealing with either dramatic, or non-dramatic affairs in a general way, or merely reviews of books connected with the drama, in our opinion many are genuine essays. A mere glance at the pages of Around Theatres will prove that in a vast number of cases the particular play chosen for discussion is nothing but 'a peg to hang some general disquisition on'.[13] It also cannot be denied that Beerbohm brings a great deal of his personality into these essays. It would seem that Riewald in his excellent book on Max Beerbohm in his failure to accept Beerbohm's contributions to the Saturday Review as essays and list them under a separate heading, is really showing a difference in degree and not in kind.[14] Because Beerbohm is a subjective and impressionistic critic he often goes beyond what is criticized into further realms of thought. We have only to read extracts from Coleridge, De Quincey and Thompson to confirm this opinion.

These opinions will be proven in the chapters with which they respectively deal. It is our belief that Beerbohm is at his best when using the essay form; that he is fundamentally and primarily an essayist. In this study, it will be seen that Beerbohm is more interested in revealing his own personality than in

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13 Max Beerbohm, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, London, Hutchinson and Co., 1920, p. vii.

14 J.G. Riewald, Sir Max Beerbohm, Man and Writer, The Hague, Martinus Nighoff, 1953, pp. 147-8.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

examining carefully and objectively any given subject. Thus his works are essentially essays and not articles.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

CHAPTER III

THE SMALL MASTER.

This chapter has two specific objectives: firstly, to study the familiar essays of Sir Max Beerbohm as to their content, and secondly to determine their general and particular stylistic qualities. Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon has stated that 'Le style est l'homme même'. This dictum contains some truth no matter who the writer be nor the medium through which the writer is attempting to express himself. In some literary genres, it is wise for the writer to depersonalize himself as much as possible. This is not true in the case of the familiar or personal essayist. As Max Beerbohm has explained: 'Himself is the thing to be obtruded, and style the only means to this end'.[1] From this statement it is clear that Beerbohm does not want to divorce style from substance; and his assertion, in the same passage, that he was always 'quite happy to sacrifice a story for style'[2] rather strengthens than weakens his case.

After we have studied the content and stylistic qualities of these essays there will be two questions worth asking ourselves: Are his essays the precise expression of his individuality in manner as well as in matter? And, if so, was this individuality or personality worth expressing?

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1 Max Beerbohm "At 'Her Majesty's'" in Saturday Review, London, Vol. 36, issue of January 20, 1900, pp.77-8.

2 Idem.

Before examining Max Beerbohm's essays for matter and form we should remember what Sir Max has stated regarding his own work:

> Well! For my own part, I am a dilettante, a petit maître. I love best in literature delicate and elaborate ingenuities of form and style. But my preference does not keep me from paying due homage to Titanic force, and delighting, now and again, in its manifestation.[3]

Beerbohm, in this instance, and in many instances that we shall see, has the ability to detach himself from his work in order to gain an accurate criticism of it. Furthermore, he is very honest and sincere when he is relating this critical knowledge. Here, he is telling us, in a very succinct way, that he does not possess the profundity and genius of men like Shakespeare and Milton; that he is a <u>litterateur</u> on a much smaller scale, although he can appreciate the talents of a greater man. He proves this in his criticism of drama. Beerbohm once told S.N. Behrman that 'Good sense about trivialities is better than nonsense about things that matter',[4] and Behrman goes on to tell us that what Beerbohm had really formulated was'a Theory of Limits'.[5] This idea is repeated frequently in Beerbohm's work.

Sir Max Beerbohm published his first collection of essays in 1896 under the impudent title, <u>The Works of Max Beerbohm</u>. This book contains seven essays and the subject matter may be grouped in

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3 Max Beerbohm, "Ouida", in <u>Works and More</u>, London, Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1930, p. 228.

4 S.N. Behrman, <u>Portrait of Max</u>, New York, Random House, 1960, p. 283.

5 <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 284.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

two categories. "The Pervasion of Rouge", "1880", and "Diminuendo" show clearly the influence of Oscar Wilde and of the Decadent school in general. The second group, "Dandies and Dandies", "A Good Prince", "King George The Fourth" and "Poor Romeo" reveal the extent to which Beerbohm was attracted by the glamour of the Regency court clique. "The Pervasion of Rouge" was originally published in the first volume of the Yellow Book as "A Defence of Cosmetics"; "1880" was reprinted from the same magazine and "Diminuendo" first appeared in Pageant under the title, "Be it Cosiness".

"The Pervasion of Rouge" is perhaps the best essay and certainly the most famous essay in Beerbohm's first collection. The essay is a parody on the Decadent's notion that Art is superior to Nature and Life. Beerbohm was twenty-one when he wrote this essay. Exactly ten years before this, the ideals of the Decadent school had been formulated by Joris-Karl Huysmans in his famous A Rebours. In England the idea that Art was superior to Life and Nature found its spokesman in Oscar Wilde who claimed that a glorious sunset was simply 'a very second-rate Turner, a Turner of a bad period, with all the painter's worst faults exaggerated and over-emphasised'.[6]

In this essay, Max Beerbohm poses as the defender of artifice and does it with such subtlety that most readers took the essay literally. He was forced to send a letter to the editor explaining

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6 Oscar Wilde, The Works of Oscar Wilde, London, Collins, n.d. Vol. 3, p. 2321.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

true intention. Why did so many readers fail to understand that Beerbohm was poking fun at the excesses of this movement? As the defender of artifice he praises the refined use of cosmetics by the Romans. He also lauds the end of the Victorian era, when, according to him, everything was sacrificed to the fetish Nature. He is glad to usher in the age of rouge.

> For behold! The Victorian era comes to its end and the day of sancta simplicitas is quite ended. The old signs are here and the portents to warn the seer of life that we are ripe for a new epoch of artifice.[7]

It is evident that Beerbohm had assumed his pose with too much gusto. His criticism of the aesthetes' excesses has never placed him beyond the pale of their influences. "The Pervasion of Rouge" which aims at lampooning aspects of aestheticism is itself so completely saturated with the decadent style and spirit that for most readers it loses its ironic intent. There is a definite tinge of decadence in title and treatment but Beerbohm's approach is fundamentally healthy. Beerbohm's true purpose is evident to the shrewd and discerning reader. Up to that time, only women of the streets resorted to rouge. He ironically exclaims: 'Fashion has made Jezebel surrender her monopoly of the rouge-pot'.[8]

Since we will be using the terms satire and humour it would be beneficial to clarify the terms. These are not easy terms to

7 Max Beerbohm, "The Pervasion of Rouge", Op. cit., pp. 86-87.

8 Ibid., p. 105.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

define mainly because both the satirist and the humorist use the same equipment; both use irony, wit, humour and satire for the mockery of their subject.

If we hold Fowler's definition of satire to be true, then Beerbohm is not a satirist in the strict sense of the term. His purpose, evidently, is not to amend hateful morals and manners by holding them up to public ridicule. Beerbohm is mainly intent on evoking a laugh from his readers; he is not interested in striving to amend their ways. Beerbohm feels that a writer should never use his work as a vehicle for propaganda only. Beerbohm feels that Shaw is doing just this: 'He is never at home unless on a platform'.[9]

It would also seem logical that a satirist must be convinced that people can be better than they are at the present time. The humourist on the other hand accepts people as they are. In a thorough reading of Sir Max's work we realize that underlying all his humour and irony is a definite pessimism and fatalism which prevent him from believing that he can change or amend man's state. In his short story "The Dreadful Dragon of Hay Hill", the main theme is that in order for men to live well it is necessary for a danger to affront them. 'Otherwise we grow fat physically and intellectually'.[10] This pessimism and feeling of

9 Alan Dent, "Max Is Eighty", in Saturday Review, Vol. 35, issue of August 30, 1952, p. 21.

10 Max Beerbohm, "The Dreadful Dragon of Hay Hill", in A Variety of Things, New York, Knopf, 1928, p. 61.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

inevitableness is reflected in his essay, "Something Defeasible". It begins innocently enough. Beerbohm is walking along a beach and sights a boy building a cottage of sand. He watches as the waves roll in and destroy it.

> Must is always be thus? Always the same old tale of growth and greatness and overthrow nothingness? I gazed at the cottage, all so solid and seemly, so full of endearing character, so like to the "comf'able" polity of England as we have known it.[11]

While Beerbohm felt that the state of things in general was inevitable there were some things that he liked more than others. This like or dislike can usually be discerned in his tone. Sir Max was an aristocrat, an intellectual dandy, a conservative in outlook. Thus he feared changes. He preferred a leisurely way of life and thus associates himself with the nineteenth century and his choice of subjects shows that he was more interested in this century. Dealing with the nineteenth century, he invariably excites in his readers a feeling of sympathy, reverence or love. This is not the case when he is dealing with the twentieth century. His tone or attitude changes from one of love and reverence to one of disgust and sometimes bewilderment. Since the satirist and humourist often use the same weapons, satire and humour frequently over-lap, and, thus, Beerbohm is very close to being a satirist when he is speaking about the twentieth century because of the difference in tone or attitude. It is our belief that a satirist can lash out at the stupidities and

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11 Max Beerbohm, "Something Defeasible", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, New York, Dutton, 1960, p. 128.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA ~ ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

inconsistencies that he sees around him without feeling that his work is going to amend the incongruities which he sees. Examples in the works of Dryden and Pope, for instance, support this view. There could not have been much hope of bringing about amendment in Dryden's "Mac Flecknoe". This poem, nevertheless, is considered to be one of the highlights of English satire. Alexander Pope's attack on Atticus (Addison) is excellent satire. Here, again, there could not possibly be any hope of bringing about amendment. Addison was dead when the lines were written.

The second essay of the Wildean group is "1880". It is a humourous and sympathetic treatment of the aesthetic movement and on its archetype Oscar Wilde. It singles out the "New Hedonism" especially.

> Quietly and unbeknown, callous of all but their craft, they wrought their poems of their pictures, gave them one to another, and wrought on. Meredith, Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris, Holman Hunt were in this band of shy artificers. In fact, Beauty had existed long before 1880. It was Mr. Oscar Wilde who managed her début. To study the period is to admit that to him was due no small part of the social vogue that Beauty began to enjoy. Fired by his fervid words, men and women hurled their mahogany into the streets and ransacked the curio-shops for the furniture of Annish days. Dados arose upon every wall, sunflowers and the feathers of peacocks curved in every corner, tea grew quite cold while the guests were praising the Willow Pattern of its cup.[12]

The third essay in this group is "Diminuendo" and whereas "A Defence of Cosmetics" is a gentle mockery of the leader of the

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12 Max Beerbohm, "1880", in Works and More, p. 38.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA ~ SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

artificers, Oscar Wilde. "Diminuendo" provides us with Beerbohm's own personal view of these ideals. It is this essay that shows us that Beerbohm was a harmless decadent. Beerbohm believed that the followers of Wilde and Pater were so busy seeking direct, varied experiences that they had no time for thought, the highest energy of man. Sir Max was interested in looking at life from a distance in order to keep a proper perspective. He states that he has been searching for some quiet London suburb where he can devote his time to reading literature 'absorbing the things great men have written'.[13] He doesn't believe, like Pater, that to live life at its fullest, one must be present always at the focus where the greatest number of forces unite in their purest energy. He ends the essay with his famous pronouncement:

> Once, in the delusion that Art, loving the recluse, would make his life happy, I wrote a little for a yellow quarterly and had that succès de fiasce which is always given to a young writer of talent. But the stress of creation soon overwhelmed me. Only Art with a capital H gives any consolation to her henchmen, and I, who crave no Knighthood shall write no more. I shall write no more. Already I feel myself to be a trifle outmoded. I belong to the Beardsly period.[14]

There are many interesting points in this quotation. Sir Max never won any readers by being humble. If anything, he is impudent and defies the reader. He is not afraid to state that he has talent.

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13 Max Beerbohm, "Diminuendo", in Works and More, p. 141.

14 Ibid., pp. 141-142.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

However he qualifies this by saying that he is not a major writer. Here too we perceive a certain affectation in Sir Max when he exclaims that the stress of creation has overwhelmed him. When he states that he shall write no more he is speaking ironically and one mustn't take him too seriously. However it is significant that he identifies himself with the Beardsly period. Some critics claimed that he never escaped the excesses of this period. However we will see that a development takes place in his writings which proves that he was able to look at the Beardsly period with a certain amount of detachment and objectivity. Although Max Beerbohm did not give up the art of writing, his statement was prophetic in that he did spend the greater part of his life in Rapello, Italy, in partial seclusion.

The essays "King George the Fourth", "Dandies and Dandies", "Poor Romeo" and "The Good Prince" complement the Wildean group in exposing the main interests of Max Beerbohm in the mid-nineties. In his first essay "King George the Fourth" he pretends to be defending the debauched King. He claims that Thackeray'made no attempt at psychology',[15] and that Thackeray held up the fourth George 'for reprobation as a drunken, vapid cad'.[16] Again Beerbohm is assuming a pose and we have to be careful in distinguishing between the poseur and the man. While Thackeray treats the subject negatively, Beerbohm treats the same subject positively. Beerbohm's supposed objective is

15 Max Beerbohm, "King George the Fourth", in Works and More, p. 50.

16 Idem.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

'to examine some of the principal accusations that have been brought against him, and to point out in what ways he has been harshly and hastily judged.'[17] He saves this essay from being merely decadent by his use of irony. Treating of Mrs. Fitzherbert, Beerbohm writes:

> It is well, also, to remember that was not ruthlessly and suddenly turning his shoulder upon Mrs. Fitzherbert. For some time before the British plenipotentiary went to fetch him a bride from over the waters, his name had been associated with that of the beautiful and unscrupulous Countess of Jersey.[18]

Beerbohm's interest in the eighteenth century's love of decorum and restraint, and especially urbanity, is reflected in this second group of essays. In "George the Fourth", Beerbohm ironically defends the first man in the kingdom, on the ground that he was an artist realizing his moods through his voluptuous life. The first part of "Dandies and Dandies" is another ironical defence of an artist, but this time an artist in a different medium. Beerbohm's starting point for this essay is Barbey d'Aurevilly's Du Iandysme et de Georges Brummell. Whereas d'Aurevilly considers dandyism as 'une manière d'être',[19] Beerbohm chooses to adhere to the narrower view embodied in Teufelsdrockh's definition of a dandy as 'a Clothes-wearing Man', though he hastily adds that these were about the only true words to be found in Sartor Resartus. Also while d'Aurevilly holds that dandyism is merely the outcome of a certain type of vanity, Beerbohm

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17 Ibid., pp. 61-62.

18 Ibid., p. 65.

19 Max Beerbohm, "Dandies and Dandies", in Works and More, p. 8.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

argues that dandyism is 'one of the decorative arts'[20] whose first postulate is 'a fine ground to work upon'.[21]

Beerbohm's wit is evident in almost every paragraph. Although d'Aurevilly considers the Count d'Orsay to be Brummell's successor, Beerbohm does not even consider him a gentleman, because he has stooped to painting the portrait of the Duke of Wellington.

> That D'Orsay's portraits, even his much-approved portrait of the Duke of Wellington, are quite amateurish, is no excuse. It is the process of painting which is repellent; to force from little tubes of lead a glutinous flamboyance and to defile, with the hair of a camel therein steeped, taut canvas, is hardly the diversion for a gentleman; and to have done all this for a man who was admittedly a field marshal.[22]

Beerbohm's use of euphemism to emphasize how repulsive drawing can be is both very effective and very humourous. It can be seen already that although Beerbohm himself preferred the aristocratic way of life there were many things which he found humourous in it and these he was not afraid to light up for inspection.

Beerbohm's third essay of this group, "Poor Romeo", should be looked upon as a contemporary counterpart to the glamourized Regency World. Romeo Bates strives to be what he is not and cannot be, and this is where the humour lies.

> He had become a prey to the love of absurd ostentation. A lively example of dandyism restrained by taste, he parodied in his person the foibles of Mr. Brummell and the King.[23]

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20 Ibid., p. 11.

21 Idem.

22 Ibid., p. 14.

23 Max Beerbohm, "Poor Romeo", in Works and More, p. 128.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

Beerbohm's technique in this essay is also different. Whereas he takes for his starting-point in "George the Fourth" and "Dandies and Dandies" Thackeray's and d'Aubervilly's interpretations respectively, "Poor Romeo" is an independent interpretation of a case of morbid dandyism, supposedly based on a few torn pieces of a letter and on his own reading of the documents.

The last of these essays "A Good Prince" is a whimsical treatment of the artificial background of the Regent's life. At first the unsuspecting reader believes that the author is playing another of his tricks on the crown-prince, until, towards the end, the word 'perambulator' reveals his super-jest creeping up on the innocent reader.

> He stands alone among European princes - but, as yet, only with the aid of a chair.[24]

In The Works of Max Beerbohm we see that Sir Max is interested in the past. His essays reveal that he is interested in the opening and closing decades of the nineteenth century. This first group of essays is not very impressive either in breadth of insight or in depth of feeling. There is a cleverness and brilliance of style but it tends to be somewhat erudite and strained in places. Beerbohm tends to display his talents too ostentatiously in this first collection of essays.

It should be kept in mind, however, that the undeniable popularity of Beerbohm as a writer in the minds of many eminent practitioners of the writing craft rests not so much on what he had

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24 Max Beerbohm, "A Good Prince", in Works And More, p. 32.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

to say as on the elegance and wit with which he said it. If Spenser is known as a "poet's poet", Beerbohm might well and justifiably be described as a writer's essayist.

In The Works of Max Beerbohm we saw that this writer's subject matter was comparatively limited and narrow in scope. Thus it was simple to deal with his essay straightforwardly, dividing the different pieces into two main divisions. Such a simple classification is impossible with reg ard to his next group of essays: More (1899); Yet Again, (1909); And Even Now (1920). However, while the individual publications defy classification, in a reading of these three volumes together one discerns certain patterns of interest: the same subject is treated more than once and in some cases several times.

The most important and most frequent kind of essay that Beerbohm writes can be called the reminiscential essay. These essays, especially, show that man has a definite yearning for the past, that he prefers the past to the present and that to some extent, at least, he can be called an escapist. The reminiscential essay is fully in evidence in his first volume. In More the period in which he is most interested is the more recent past, the years of his boyhood and youth. In this group can be placed three pieces: "Groups of Myrmidons", "Going Back to School", and "Fashion and Her Bicycle".

"Groups of Myrmidons" is a nostalgic meditation which is occasioned by some old photographs of his Club at Oxford.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

> One suspects that Max was already retrospective in his cradle, and downright reminiscent in his crib.[25]

In this essay Beerbohm reveals the impertinence of his personality which is characteristic of his essays in general. Timidity and meekness are qualities in which Beerbohm is lacking.

> Of all the Myrmidons, there is only one who has achieved great fame. The "group" in which he appeared (prepare, reader, to be disappointed - I could not afford the cheap jest you are expecting) is dated 1870, -[26]

This quotation is also typical of the asides in which Beerbohm so frequently indulges. These asides tend to create a definite bond between the writer and the reader without becoming too familiar and chatty. Although Beerbohm is generally reminiscent in this type of essay, he is above all a student of human nature and as such is never totally particular but rather his observations are of general significance. In a few words he is capable of informing us with the basic differences between the older and younger generations at Oxford and schools in general.

> The lapse of less than a lustre means a new generation in Oxford, and, after the departure of all his comrades' comrades, Oxford is but a hush of barren and bitter-sweet memories to its revisitor. Now and again, however, some wistful, bearded stranger would appear in our midst, revealing himself as one of our own order, and would dine at the house-dinner on Sunday. We respected him as a man of the world; he envied us for what we were. But our jokes were as incomprehensible to him, I fancy, as were his anecdotes tedious to us. We were very polite to him indeed. But "young barbarians" are far too happy to be sentimental, and their hearts do not go out readily to their forerunners.[27]

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25 Louis Kronenberger, "The Perfect Trifler", in Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 30, issue of June 21, 1947, p. 9.

26 Max Beerbohm, "Groups of Myrmidons", in Works and More, p.186.

27 Ibid., pp. 184-185.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

The second essay in this group is "Going Back to School". It is occasioned by Beerbohm's chance meeting with a little boy who was returning to school in a cab. Beerbohm humourously says:

> If Envy was ever inscribed on any face, it was inscribed on the face of that very small, pale boy. "There", I murmured, "but for the grace of God, goes Max Beerbohm."[28]

This 'small pale' boy makes Sir Max reflect on his own days at school. Beerbohm is constantly coming out with the unexpected. In this case he inverts the common-place idea that the happiest days of a man's life are those of his child-hood. He compares his present life to the one he had as a school-boy.

> To-night, I am going to a theatre. Afterwards, I shall sup somewhere and drink wine. When I come home and go to bed, I shall read myself to sleep with some amusing book ... You will have torn yourself from your bed, at the sound of a harsh bell, have washed, quickly, in very cold water, have scurried off to Chapel, gone to first school and been sent down several places in your form, tried to master your next construe, in the interval of snatching a tepid breakfast, been kicked by a bigger boy, and had a mint of horrible experiences long before I, your elder by a few years, have awakened, very gradually, to the tap of knuckles on the panel of my bedroom door.[29]

The last essay in More, dealing with the past, is "Fashion and Her Bicycle". It is a brief essay in which the aristocratic attitude towards bicycles is contrasted with the proletarian. Beerbohm believes that while there is a certain amount of artistry involved in riding a horse there can be none in riding a bicycle. The basic difference is that while the former is live and lovable the bicycle

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28 Max Beerbohm, "Going Back to School", in Works and More, p. 260.

29 Ibid., pp. 264-265.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

is manufactured.

> The one has fine qualities to be quickened, and swift caprices to be curbed, and is petulant or amenable, timid or too greatly daring, a thing of infinite surprises. The other has but one invariable motion, to whatsoever speed you may choose to regulate it.[30]

In Yet Again the interest in the past crystallizes somewhere in between the Regency period and the days of his own youth. In "the Decline of the Graces", the author is interested in the post - Regency age, with its eighteenth-century passion for comportment. It is only natural, that because he is something of an aristocrat and a dandy, he is interested in elegance and restraint. Thus he finds himself 'on the grandmother's side'.[31] It is Beerbohm's contention that to live life properly, art must be included in every phase of it. If children are to be allowed to grow up perfectly natural, they will become animals. Cleverness and brilliance are two qualities that are usually mentioned in connection with Beerbohm's work. However these two qualities are only an aspect, and a minor aspect, of the art of Max Beerbohm.

> First and foremost, he represents a point of view. And, secondly, that point of view is in no sense a novelty in a civilized society. Every age has had its representative of a similar attitude towards life, in one a Horace, in another a Joseph Addison and, again, a Charles Lamb. In our age it is Max Beerbohm. He is the spirit of urbanity incarnate's he is town. He is civilization hugging itself with whimsical appreciation for a conservative end.[32]

30 Max Beerbohm, "Fashion and Her Bicycle" in Works and More, p. 256.

31 Max Beerbohm, "The Decline of the Graces", in Yet Again, London, Heinemann, 1951, p. 95.

32 Holbrook Jackson, "The Incomparable Max", in The Eighteen Nineties, London, Grant Richards, 1950, p. 120.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

In "The House of Commons Manner" and in "Dulcedo Judiciorum", it is the grand manner in Parliament, in the law-courts and in the theatre, of which he regrets the disappearance. In "The House of Commons Manner", his treatment of the subject is similar to many of his other essays. He is sitting at a session of the House of Commons and he is listening to the irregular, inarticulate delivery of the sitting members. Once again, he bemoans the artlessness of the times.

> The day for oratory, as for toping, is past beyond redemption. 'Debating' is the best that can be done and appreciated by so abstemious a generation as ours.[33]

His humourous asides are constantly injected and save the essay from sentimentality.

> (I have no doubt that the custom of wearing hats in the House originated in the members' unwillingness to let strangers spy down on the shapes of their heads.)[34]

Beerbohm leaves no doubt in anyone's mind as to his political allegiance. Being an intellectual dandy, it follows that he is an aristocrat. The masses have little appeal for him and he frequently voices distrust for their opinions and decisions.

> No one supposes that in a congeries of - how many? - six hundred and seventy men, chosen by the British public, there will be a very high average of mental capacity.[35]

In "Dulcedo Judiciorum", Beerbohm bemoans the lack of virtuosity in the law-courts and in the theatre. 'In the courts, as in parliament

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33 Max Beerbohm, "The House of Commons Manner", in Yet Again, p. 189.

34 Ibid., p. 190.

35 Idem.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

and in the theatre, the grand manner is a thing of the past.'[36] It is Beerbohm's tough-mindedness that we admire so much in his essays, his common-sense that we realize stands up so well under examination. In his essay, "Dulcedo Judiciorum", he says that he prefers the law-courts to the theatre, because in the former, it is real life that is being dramatized. He is not interested in the verdict but rather in what manner of man was being tried or was sitting in judgment. This line of thinking can be carried on into painting. When we go to an art gallery we naturally look at the paintings. However if we happen to turn around and look at the expressions on the people observing the paintings we begin to appreciate the limitations of art. In this essay Beerbohm tells us that he is not one of those essayists that strives to be seen as a loveable person.

> It is the natural wish of every writer to be liked by his readers. But how exasperating, how detestable, the writer who obviously touts for our affection, arranging himself for us in a mellow light, and inviting us, with gentle persistence, to note how loveable he is! Many essayists have made themselves quite impossible through their determination to remind us of Charles Lamb - 'St. Charles', as they invariably call him.[37]

In And Even Now, this period interest is definitely narrowed down to the years of his own youth. The three reminiscent essays in this collection are "A Relic", "No.2. The Pines", and "William and Mary". These essays show a marked development, not in breadth of

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36 Max Beerbohm, "Dulcedo Judiciorum", in Yet Again, p. 287.

37 Ibid., p. 278.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

interest, but in depth of emotion and a simpler, less mannered style.

In "A Relic", we see a favourite device of Beerbohm's being used to introduce a story. He accidently finds a fragment of a fan in his attic which reminds him that once he had tried to write a story and failed. He had seen (or half-seen) the end of a quarrel between a woman about thirty years of age and a man approximately fifty-five. The essay is of a whimsical nature but it shows us Beerbohm's ability to vividly portray a scene which for many would possess little significance.

> I heard the swing-door behind me flap open, and was aware of a sharp snapping and crackling sound as a lady in white passed quickly by me. I stared at her erect back and her agitated elbows. A short fat man passed in pursuit of her - an elderly man in a black alpaca jacket that billowed. I saw that she had left a trail of little white things on the asphalt. I watched the efforts of the agonized short fat man to overtake her as she swept wraithlike away to the distant end of the terrace...[38]

Beerbohm's wit relieves the supposed seriousness of the theme. Beerbohm's Muse **fails** to give him the inspiration he needs. He states: 'Or it may be that she was bent on saving M. de Maupassant from a dangerous rivalry'.[39]

"No.2. The Pines" is a commemorative essay on a visit which he paid to Swinburne and Watts-Dunton in 1899. 'It is a miniature masterpiece of biography'[40]. At first, we think that Beerbohm will

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38 Max Beerbohm, "A Relic", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 6.

39 Ibid., p. 10.

40 A.C. Ward, Twentieth Century Literature, London, Methuen, 1951, p. 206.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

fail in his effort to bring this picture to life, because he begins by calling their abode a sanctuary. He describes Swinburne as 'the flammiferous boy of the dim past - a legendary creature, sole kin to the phoenix'.[41] On the whole, it seems, at first, to be too reverent and consequently not sufficiently in contact with reality to be convincing. However, Beerbohm is an acute observer of human nature and saves the portraits by his impish touches and sly sidelights. In describing Swinburne's physical appearance he exclaims:

> But he had the eyes of a god, and the smile of an elf... His hands were tiny, even for his size, and they fluttered helplessly, touchingly, unceasingly.[42]

Beerbohm depicts Watts-Dunton as the ever watchful friend and guardian of the frail Swinburne. Since he didn't revere Watts-Dunton, and consequently does not consider him as great a man as Swinburne, his character is even more life-like. In a few words, he places the man before us vividly.

> He had been dictating, he explained. "A great deal of work on hand just now - a great deal of work"... I remember that on my subsequent visits he was always, at the moment of my arrival, dictating and always greeted me with that phrase, "A great deal of work on hand just now." I used to wonder what work it was for he published little enough. But I never ventured to inquire, and indeed rather cherished the mystery: it was a part of the dear little old man; ...[43]

The last essay which reveals Beerbohm's preoccupation in the past is "William and Mary". If this essay is contrasted with the

41 Max Beerbohm, "No.2. The Pines," in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 35.

42 Ibid., p. 40.

43 Ibid., pp. 38-39.

essay "The Pervasion of Rouge", it illuminates how far Max has travelled emotionally in twenty-six years. This is the one essay in which Sir Max expresses remorse for some irretrievable personal loss. In most of Beerbohm's essays there is a definite glibness. We feel that while he appears to have an acute insight into the human foibles of man, we wonder if he is even deeply touched by what he sees. It is important to remember that Beerbohm thinks that it is good manners and good art to always possess restraint. This essay is the story of a couple ideally happy in a little cottage. He suggests that there is a definite seclusion here from the rest of the world. William is an old Oxford friend of his who was killed in the Boer War and Mary, his wife, died in childbirth. Beerbohm saw something symbolic in this couple and small cottage that was unique. The whole essay is written round the haunting memory of Mary's wonderful laugh - 'that little bell-like euphory; those funny little lucid and level trills.'[44]

In this essay Sir Max, as always, shows a strong common-sense attitude towards life which is as refreshing as it is simple in an ambitiously drilled century such as ours.

> For Mary's sake, and his, I should have liked him to be "successful." But at any rate, he didn't need money. He didn't need, in addition to what he had, what he made by his journalism. And as for success - well, didn't Mary think him a genius? And wasn't he Mary's husband?[45]

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44 Max Beerbohm, "William and Mary", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 153.

45 Ibid., p. 152.

This essay is saved from being a short story by its strong central mood - a mood that haunts us in its effort to bring back into existence something that was so vivid:

> So strong in me now was the wish to see again all those things, to touch them and, as it were, commune with them, and so queerly may the mind be wrought upon in a solitude among memories, that there were moments when I almost expected that the door would obey my will.[46]

The second group of essays, which have similar subject interest, may be categorized under the term urbanity. Although Beerbohm spent almost half his life in a little villa at Rapello, Italy, the spirit of his work remains urbane and may be seen explicitly in many of his essays. He admits that he does not 'know much about rustics, except from novels'.[47] This urban-mindedness which is so prominent a part of Beerbohm's personality is reflected in Beerbohm's interest in architecture and music halls.

Preoccupation with the architectural beauty or ugliness of London shows itself in More, Yet Again, and And Even Now, in each of which it inspires at least one essay. In More, "If I were Aedile", is an essay which postulates the preservation of the old London squares and begs that the Victorian statues be removed. Beerbohm has a strong conservative bent in his nature and therefore is a strong traditionalist. He exclaims: 'A delicate and Tory temperament precludes me from conversation with Radicals'.[48] Brevity contributes

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46 Ibid., p. 157.

47 Max Beerbohm, "Hilary Maltby and Stephen Braxton", in Seven Men, London, Heinemann, 1919, p. 54.

48 Max Beerbohm, "If I were Aedile", in Works and More, p. 209.

to the impact Beerbohm makes on his readers.

> You would rebuild London on some uniform plan, would you not? I daresay then, you admire New York. You have never been there? You should go.[49]

There can be no doubt that Beerbohm is anti-democratic. As an aristocrat he tends to underestimate the basic intelligence of man. Chesterton and he are at opposite poles. Beerbohm sees the things that he loves so much being changed and obliterated, until he doesn't recognize or understand what he sees around him. Beerbohm is not afraid to speak out against the stupidities and crudities of the middle class.

> I am told that you are gradually destroying the tripartite nature of the English people; that you are drawing down the aristocracy, and drawing up the mob, into the middle class. Let me tell you, indeed, you probably know, that the equality of man is an ideal which cannot be fulfilled. Some kind of chaos you may, in time, establish. The laws of contrast, which govern mankind, will very soon reduce that chaos to order. A new tyranny will take the place of the old.[50]

It is said that Beerbohm is a kindly satirist, a satirist with a smile. It is our contention that Beerbohm is a humourist when dealing with past ages. However, when he is criticising the twentieth century or what he considers to be signs of the modern age, his bitterness and distrust cannot be mistaken. It is obvious that because of Beerbohm's subtlety and irony, he does not appeal to the generality of readers. His basic appeal is to the elite in society. Thus it is reasonable that these particular persons would find Sir

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49 _Ibid._, p. 211.

50 _Ibid._, p. 212.

Max, kindly.

Beerbohm says that his role would be mainly negative as an architect. The older buildingswould remain because they represent for him history and romance. His positive measures, as was said, would include the abolishing of all Victorian statues.

"The Naming of Streets" is another essay in which Beerbohm voices his anxiety concerning 'The Rebuilding of London'.[51] It is 'temperamental Toryism' which makes Sir Max fear change because he believes the old is better. In "If I Were Aedile", Beerbohm states that the Victorian statues should be abolished. In "Mobled King", which is found in his book, And Even Now, he suggests that the statues should be veiled since his first suggestions were not heeded. The treatment is much more subtle and imaginative in the later essay. Sir Max accidently sees a veiled statue in Italy of Umberto I and this makes him wonder why the same procedure couldn't be followed in England. Sir Max does not understand why the statue is veiled. He imagines that they are waiting for a particular day on which to perform the unveiling. A year later he returns and to his astonishment the statue is still veiled. He humourously exclaims:

> I was not so old, though, nor so wise, as I am now. I expected more than there is of Italian speed, and less than there is of Italian subtlety. A whole year has passed since first I set eyes on veiled Umberto. And Umberto is still veiled.[52]

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51 Max Beerbohm, "The Naming of Streets", in Yet Again, p. 209.

52 Max Beerbohm, "Mobled King", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 22.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

Although Beerbohm appears to be unconcerned with moral and ethical problems, and one is never certain whether he is an agnostic or an atheist, when he does include the clergy in his essay, it is never as the object of ridicule. In "Mobled King", he mentions the clergy in order to hold up for ridicule the narrow-mindedness and prejudice of civic authorities.

> Presently they became aware that among the poorer classes of the town had arisen a certain hostility to the statue. The councillors suspected that the priesthood had been at work. The forces of reaction against the forces of progress.[53]

"The Blight on the Music Halls" is the only particular essay concerned with that subject in these three collections of essays. However, we will see this interest revived in his last collection of essays "Mainly On The Air" which will be treated later in this chapter. The 'unregenerate'[54] music-hall, which is the subject of "The Blight on the Music Halls", derives at least part of its fascination from the fact that it was already retreating into the near past. Beerbohm thinks that music-halls should be filled with light entertainment but now 'reason, variety, refinement have crept gradually in.' Frank Swinnerton states that Beerbohm is 'first and foremost an ironist'.[55] However his irony is not usually the simple type that says one thing means the direct opposite. Often it is woven through the whole essay. His description of the performers in the Tivoli is typical.

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53 Ibid., p. 23.

54 Max Beerbohm, "The Blight on the Music Halls", in Works and More, p. 237.

55 F. Swinnerton, "Special Genius of Sir Max", in Saturday Review, Vol. 41, issue of August 2, 1958, p. 13.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA — ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

> One knows that every performer is, in private life, a charming and serious person, whose photograph is reproduced in the illustrated papers, from time to time, with a description of his domestic life and his valuable collection of proof-engravings, press-cuttings, and what not. The interviewers have told one that he has a grand piano in his drawing-room and often composes his own songs, and "will sing no words that he could not individually express."[56]

Besides Beerbohm's love of the past and his urban-mindedness, travel would appear to be the inspiration for many essays. Although Sir Max's essays breathe urbanity, he was always happy to leave London and go into the country. In More, the essays connected with this theme are "The Sea-Side in Winter" and "Prangley Valley." In Yet Again we see this theme indirectly reflected in "A Memory Of A Midnight Express", "Povro Unum", and "273". It is directly seen in "Ichabod", "Sympat", and "A Home-coming". In And Even Now this interest is indirectly seen in "How Shall I Word It?"

"The Sea-Side in Winter" is a fine essay on those little towns on the south coast where its author liked to spend a quiet week in the off-season. Beerbohm's discursiveness is always evident but his transitions are accomplished with such skill that the reader is unperturbed. His humourous asides heighten rather than decrease interest.

> I am, like Sir Willoughby Patterne, "not a poet", and so the sea does not move me, as it moves Mr. Swinburne, to superb dithyrambs, nor send me searching, as it sends Mr. William Watson searching, for adjectives long enough to express unqualified approval.[57]

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56 Max Beerbohm, Op. cit., pp. 239-240.

57 Max Beerbohm, "The Sea-Side in Winter", in Works and More, p. 201.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA — SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

His technique sometimes shakes us unexpectedly but this is always planned and never an accident. Sitting on his chair watching a girls' school march by he suddenly exclaims: 'What a grotesque governess backs the procession'.[58] In this essay he contrasts the way an individual feels in a small group, and the way one feels in a large city such as London. One stands out so much more at an off-season sea-resort. In this essay it is obvious that though what he says is true as far as the individual is concerned, Sir Max is assuming a pose.

> My self conceit, so carefully fostered here, has grown out of all bounds, and I, who came here as a mere proprietor, leave like an Imperial Guest.[59]

What he really enjoys at this quiet resort is the leisurely pace which it encourages away from the city and its rushing crowds. Like every aristocrat or cultured man in general, Sir Max felt that life was to be sipped and tasted, not gulped and swallowed.

"Prangley Vally" is an imaginary beauty spot in the suburbs of London. In advertising this beauty spot Beerbohm speculates on the quality which man possesses that makes him want to kill the thing he loves. He develops this theme somewhat more convincingly in his later essay, "Something Defeasible". In "Prangley Valley", Beerbohm uses one of his favourite devices of building 'fantasy upon fact',[60] as

58 Ibid., p. 203.

59 Ibid., pp. 205-206.

60 H.N. Hillebrand, "Max Beerbohm", in Journal of English and Germanic Philology, Vol. 21, issue of April 1, 1920, p. 261.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

Professor Hillebrand suggests. However Hillebrand's position that Beerbohm does this in all his works is overstating the case. "William and Mary" is but one example of this exaggeration. An example of this technique in "Prangley Valley" is Beerbohm's assertion that 'from Kew Gardens one may reach it in less than half-an-hour's walking'[61] and that the stream that bisects it 'was a tributary of the Thames.'[62]

In the essays, "A Memory of a Midnight Express", and "Porro Unum", the influence of travel on Beerbohm is seen in the setting rather than the subject matter. The theme of "A Memory of a Midnight Express" deals with the psychological notion that

> In every one of us the deepest emotions are constantly caused by some trivial thing, or by nothing at all ... We never can depend on any right adjustment of emotion to circumstance.[63]

A passenger joins Beerbohm in a railway compartment and he takes the passenger to be a murderer. Beerbohm portrays with psychological insight how the mind tries to ward off fear. This is combined with an ability to build up suspense.

> It was not till the man turned around, and I met his eye, that I awoke fully-awoke to danger. I had never seen a murderer, but I knew that the man who was so steadfastly peering at me now ... I shut my eyes. I tried to think. Could I be dreaming? In books I had read of people pinching themselves to see whether they were really awake. But in actual life there never was any doubt on that score. The great thing was that I should keep all my wits about me.

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61 Max Beerbohm, "Prangley Valley", in Works and More, p. 244.

62 Ibid., p. 245.

63 Max Beerbohm, "A Memory of a Midnight Express", in Yet Again, p. 37.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

> Everything might depend on presence of mind. Perhaps this murderer was mad. If you fix a lunatic with your eye ...[64]

In "Porro Unum", Beerbohm humourously advocates that the King should visit Switzerland although he slyly remarks that 'All that is worth knowing of her history can be set forth without compression in a few lines of a guide-book'.[65] He never misses an opportunity to mock his object.

> Her one and only hero - William Tell - never, as we know now existed. He has been proven to be a myth.[66]

It has been seen already that Beerbohm has certain pet theories and pet objects of ridicule and in his discursive way satirizes these objects again and again. Royalty is one of these favourite objects of ridicule. Although he dislikes royalty, (not the individuals but the system itself), he believes that it is a necessary myth.

> Human nature being what it is, a monarchy is the best expedient, all the world over. The French or American Republic do not feel awe for their presidents.[67]

"273" is a kind of duplicate of the essay "The Sea-Side in Winter". If someone's nerves are overwrought, Beerbohm suggests that they take a vacation. He ironically remarks:

> Doubtless, the grim, inexorable process of the 'rest-cure' is very good for him who is strong enough and brave enough

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64 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
65 Max Beerbohm, "Porro Unum", in *Yet Again*, p. 42.

66 *Idem.*

67 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

> to bear it, and rich enough to pay for it. I address myself to the frailer, cowardlier, needier man.[68]

This advice is no pose with Sir Max. He did exactly this on many occasions.

Interest in travelling, however, is shown much more explicitly in essays like "Ichabod", "Sympat", and "A Home-coming."

"Ichabod" is the name of a hat-box. Kronenberger calls Beerbohm the Perfect Trifler:

> "The perfect trifler" may seem a slighting way to describe the man who has conceivably written the finest familiar essays in the English language. But I think the phrase fairly suggests, on the most honorable terms, the scale of Sir Max's work and its quite unregrettable lack of "significance." For it does lack significance, in the sense that Peacock and Congreve, not to speak of Rabelais or Moliere, possess it.[69]

Carl Van Doren describes Beerbohm's technique thus:

> Such is Beerbohm's technique - to blow upon a trifling fact or idea until it swells into the dimensions of a swaying, irridescent soap-bubble and finally breaks silently in refined laughter.[70]

While these statements call for qualification they do give us a definite insight into the usual type of essay that Beerbohm writes and "Ichabod" is a perfect example of this type. Certainly a hat-box holds little significance for the world at large. This particular hat-box holds significance for Beerbohm because it is covered with railway labels showing the places to which he has travelled. ~~He~~

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68 Max Beerbohm, "273", in Yet Again, p. 66.

69 Louis Kronenberger, Op. cit., p. 10.

70 Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature since 1890, New York, P. Appleton-Century Co., 1939, p. 283.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

He compares this habit of his to those people who collect stamps or coins. A tragedy occurs when he sends the hat-box to the cleaners and it is returned without the labels. This is a delightful essay in which Beerbohm relates to us the manner in which he tricks the railway attendants. Their usual procedure is to cover the last label with a new one. Beerbohm describes the event with all the intensity of a murderer committing a crime. 'Romance, exhilaration, self-importance, these are what my labels symbolized and recalled to me'.[71] His humour reaches its climax when he describes how he felt when he mistakedly placed the ignoble label Ramsgate 'within an inch of my point d'appui - the trinity of Oxford, Newmarket and Assisi.'[72] He is never afraid to have his audience laugh at him and his misfortunes.

> At length, a too obvious sneer on the face of a fellow-passenger steeled me to a resolve that I would, for once, break my rule against obliteration. On the return journey, I obliterated Ramsgate with the new label, leaving visible merely the final Te, which could hardly compromise me.[73]

There are excellencies and limitations in every good writer and one of the most obtrusive and jarring deficiencies in Beerbohm's work is his frequent use of trite and commonplace statements revealing a definite lack of originality. The following statement is typical

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71 Max Beerbohm, "Ichabod", in Yet Again, p. 133.

72 Ibid., p. 141.

73 Ibid., p. 142.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

of this limitation:

> Happiness, as you know, is our aim in life; and alas! for everyone of us it is the things he does not possess which seem to him most desirable, most conducive to great bliss.[74]

In "Sympat" Beerbohm attempts to elucidate some of the reasons why one doesn't feel as strongly towards a friend that one has met away from home, when this friend visits you at your home. "Sympat" is a coined word which Beerbohm defines in this manner:

> I reserve for that other mutual accident on which subsists a friendship formed in a holiday, formed in the solitude of some place far from home, far from one's relatives and usual friends.[75]

Beerbohm concludes that sympat is but the prelude to antipat. In "A Home-coming", the sentimental traveller describes his return from Paris, after a two months' absense from England, on a dreary, chilly day, sitting at a table in the Buffet at Dover. Again, Max Beerbohm shows that he possessed the power to visualize a scene with astonishing vividness. The scene which Beerbohm vividly puts before us is a large young man in the buffet of Dover Harbour Station, flirting with the barmaid, in the traditional attitude, one elbow sprawling on the counter, one foot cocked over the other.

> I could see the ice of haughty indifference thawing, little by little, under the fire of gallant raillery. I could fix the exact moment when 'Indeed?' became 'I daresay', and when 'Well I must say' gave place to 'Go along', and when 'Oh, I don't mind you, not particularly', was succeeded by 'Who gave you them flowers?'... All in the cold grey dawn.[76]

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74 Ibid., p. 138.

75 Max Beerbohm, "Sympat", in Yet Again, p. 200.

76 Max Beerbohm, "A Home-coming", in Yet Again, pp. 240-241.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

We have seen that Beerbohm is an aristocrat and a conservative. However Beerbohm is also an individualist and is to a limited extent, 'anarchistic'.[77] It is in his attack on royalty and knighthood that we see this tendency. He himself states that he is a 'Tory Anarchist'.[78] In The Works of Max Beerbohm, Beerbohm's interest in royalty was focused in the past. In More, this interest appears to have shifted into the contemporary scene. This is seen in the essay "Some Words on Royalty". It should be observed here that Beerbohm attacks and ridicules not only one segment of life. Beerbohm asks whether we are justified 'in preserving an institution which ruins the lives and saps the human nature of a whole family?'[79] He approaches the problem from a humourous point of view. He defends royalty on the plea that it appeals to that 'popular, idolatrous instinct which is quite unmoved by the cheap and nasty inmates of the Elysée or of the White House'.[80] The solution he suggests is as disarming as it is original: 'royal functions could be quite satisfactorily performed by automata made of wax'.[81] In this essay Sir Max's mockery is light-hearted and indifferent. However, Beerbohm's caricatures of King Edward VII and the Prince of Wales in 1923, leave us in no doubt about his

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77 Max Beerbohm, "Servants", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 106.

78 Idem.

79 Max Beerbohm, "Some Words on Royalty", in Works and More, p. 156.

80 Ibid., p. 155.

81 Ibid., p. 156.

attitude towards royalty.

It is ironical that Sir Max should poke fun at knighthood stating that 'Knighthood is a cheap commodity in these days.'[82] He was to receive his knighthood in 1939. "Arise, Sir - -!" is really a satirist on "Mr. Flimflam, the popular novelist'[83] who loves to give the public what it wants, not caring whether he degrades his own art. Beerbohm is, in this essay, really yearning for the past once more, for those days when a knighthood meant some personal merit.

After 1923, Beerbohm stopped his criticism of royalty. It is reasonable to think that he stopped because of the storm he created. Riewald would seem closer to the truth, when he suggests, that Beerbohm's change in his attitude towards royalty is the increasing influence of Demos which he feared.[84] Beerbohm appears to feel that royalty is a necessary fop in order to make the public behave. As far as he is concerned, man is irrational:

> A state can never be more than a Kindergarten, at best, and he who would fain rule men according to principles of right reason will fare no better than did poor dear Plato at Syracuse.[85]

In "Povro Unum" we see the same thought expressed. However as the twentieth century moves forward, Beerbohm seems to change in his

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82 Max Beerbohm, "Arise, Sir - -!", in Works and More, p. 248.

83 Ibid., p. 249.

84 J.G. Riewald, Sir Max Beerbohm, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1953 p. 80.

85 Max Beerbohm, "Some Words On Royalty", in Works and More, p. 154.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

attitude towards socialism. In "General Elections" his mind is still 'evenly divided'[86]; socialism neither 'affrights or attracts me - or rather, it has both these effects equally'.[87] It is important to realize, that Beerbohm has little or no feeling for humanity in general. Like most human beings, a particular scene is needed in order to evoke a strong emotional reaction.

> When I think of poverty and misery crushing the greater part of humanity, and most of all when I hear of some specific case of distress, I become a socialist indeed.[88]

The emphasis, here, should be placed on the latter part of this quotation. This idea is repeated more explicitly in his essay, "Laughter":

> A public crowd, because of a lack of broad impersonal humanity in me, rather insulates than absorbs me.[89]

In "General Elections" Sir Max's mind is still undecided as to the good or bad effects of socialism. However, in "Something Defeasible", his fear of the country's danger, because of Labour, is very clear.

> We are at the mercy of Labour, certainly; and Labour does not love us; and Labour is not deeply versed in statecraft, But would an unskilled surgeon, however ill-wishing, care to perform a drastic operation on a patient by whose death he himself would forthwith perish? Labour is wise enough - surely? - not to will us destruction. Russia has been an

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86 Max Beerbohm, "General Elections", in Yet Again, p. 150.

87 Ibid., p. 149.

88 Idem.

89 Max Beerbohm, "Laughter", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 169.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

> awful example. Surely! And yet, Labour does not seem to think the example so awful as I do. Queer is this; queer and disquieting.[90]

Beerbohm felt that the Socialist challenge was threatening the security of the class to which he belonged. However in typically Beerbohm fashion, he stops thinking of these disturbing questions and buries himself in the past, in order that he might be happy while he might.

> And I began to ask myself: "Even if England as we know it, the English polity of which that cottage was a symbol to me, were the work of (say) Mr. Robert Smillie's own unaided hands" - but I waived the question coming from that hypothesis, and other questions that would have followed; for I wished to be happy while I might.[91]

There was a rapid development of psychology in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and, consequently, literature was confronted with a host of new ideas, problems, methods and facts. In "Sympat", we see that he isolates and analyses a curious travel experience of which many of us may have been vaguely conscious at one time or another. Sympat is that mutual feeling of friendship which exists between strangers in a foreign land. In his essay, "Pretending", the main theme is 'that every human creature weaves for himself and wears an elaborate vesture of illusion'.[92] However it is in his collection, And Even Now, that this psychological insight is seen best. "Hosts and Guests" is a mock-historical treatise on the egotistic elements in the hospitable instinct. He speaks of the Hebrews, Homeric Greeks,

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90 Max Beerbohm, "Something Defeasible", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, pp. 127-128.

91 Ibid., p. 129.

92 Max Beerbohm, "Pretending", in Works And More, pp. 190-191.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

and the fifteenth century Italians. He attempts to show that 'the hospitable instinct is not wholly altruistic. There is pride and egoism mixed up with it.'[93] Speaking of the Borgia family, Beerbohm ironically states:

> But I myself hold to the old romantic black way of looking at the Borgias. I maintain that though you would often in the fifteenth century have heard the snobbish Roman say, in a would-be-off-hand tone, "I am dining with the Borgias tonight," no Roman ever was able to say "I dined last night with the Borgias".[94]

Beerbohm makes the observation that many hosts like this role because of the dominance it gives one over his fellow-being. The true host gives from a feeling of generosity and the perfect guest receives with a feeling of humility. 'In every human being one or the other of these two instincts is predominant: the active or positive instinct to offer hospitality, the negative or passive instinct to accept it.'[95] Beerbohm states that he is one of the guests. He is an observer of life, rather than an active participant in it. Beerbohm says that he 'would rather read than write any day.'[96] He finishes the essay with a concentrated piece of self-irony:

> If any one hereafter shall form a collection of the notes written by me in reply to invitations, I am afraid he will gradually suppose me to have been more in request than ever I really was, and to have been also a great invalid, and a great traveller.[97]

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93 Max Beerbohm, Hosts and Guests, in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 75.

94 Ibid., p. 77.

95 Ibid., p. 73.

96 Ibid., p. 74.

97 Ibid., p. 85.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

However Beerbohm's psychological insight is not limited to emotions common to the majority of men. In "The Crime" we see him penetrating into the darker and more sinister recesses of the human mind. "The Crime" is a story of a writer's revenge. In this essay he analyses his own emotions and proves, on the whole, that he is a born introspectionist. He is alone in another's cottage and picks up a book by a woman author. He sits down to read it. In personal meetings with this author he had always been bested. Before he realizes what he is doing he flings the work into the fire-place. Unconsciously, he had felt a need to retaliate, to retain some amount of superiority over this woman writer and this was the result. At first he feels that he has triumphed. However he is not sure whether his crime is a complete success:

> Ever and anon my eye would be caught by some sentence or fragment of a sentence in the midst of a charred page before the flames crept over it, " lways loathed you, bu", I remember; and "ring. Tolstoi was right". Who had always loathed whom? And what, what, had Tolstoi been right about? I had an absurd but genuine desire to know. Too late!' Confound the woman! - she was scoring again. I furiously drove her pages into the yawning crimson jaws of the coals. Those jaws had lately been golden. Soon, to my horror, they seemed to be growing grey. They seemed to be closing - on nothing. Flakes of black paper, full-sized layers of paper brown and white, began to hide them from me altogether. I sprinkled a boxful of wax matches. I resumed the bellows. I lunged with the paper. I held a newspaper over the whole grate. I did all that inspiration could suggest, or skill accomplish. Vainly. The fire went out - darkly, dismally, gradually, quite out.
>
> How she had scored again![98]

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98 Max Beerbohm, "The Crime", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 140.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

Beerbohm is at his best when he is interpreting moments of high tension in the lives of men, especially literary men. In And Even Now, we find three essays which show this ability: "No.2. The Pines"; "Quia Imperfectum"; and "A Clergyman". In "No.2. The Pines" it is an incident between Watts-Dunton and Whistler that he elucidates. Watts-Dunton and Whistler had always been friends but Watts-Dunton felt that Whistler had behaved badly towards Swinburne. Whistler had asked Watts-Dunton to influence Swinburne into writing an article about his lecture. It was a favour because Swinburne was extremely busy and didn't enjoy doing this sort of thing. However Swinburne wrote a criticism of the "Ten O'Clock" lecture in which 'he paid courtly compliments to Whistler as a painter, but joined issue with his theories'.[99] Immediately, there appeared in the World, a little letter from Whistler, 'deriding "one Algernon Swinburne - outsider - Putney".'[100] Watts-Dunton was very hurt because of this shabby trick. However, Beerbohm states that Watts-Dunton had never hated Whistler for it.

> He added that of course he "never wanted to see the fellow again after that, and never did". But presently, after a long gaze into the coals, he emitted a chuckle, as for earlier memories of "such a funny fellow". One quite recent memory he had, too. "When I took on the name of Dunton, I had a note from him. Just this, with his butterfly signature: Theodore! What's Dunton? That was very good - very good ... But, of course", he added gravely, "I took no notice."[101]

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99 Max Beerbohm, "No.2. The Pines", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 50.

100 Idem.

101 Ibid., p. 51.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

Beerbohm comments on this unanswered note:

> But I see a certain pathos in the unanswered message. It was a message from the hand of an old jester, but also, I think, from the heart of an old man - a signal waved jauntily, but in truth wistfully, across the gulf of years and estrangement; and one could wish it had not been ignored.[102]

In "Quia Imperfectum", Beerbohm analyses the relationship between Goethe and Tischbein, the great and the little man. Tischbein, for some unknown reason, left his portrait of Goethe unfinished. Max Beerbohm begins his essay by sighing for a museum of unfinished masterpieces. He then goes on to consider the case of Goethe and Tischbein. Behrman says:

> Max dotes on Tischbein. He dotes on him particularly in relation to Goethe. Where life throws the lion and the mouse together, Max's heart is invariably captured by the mouse.[103]

Because Sir Max is a satirist and a humorist, he necessarily sees the inconsistencies in life rather than the consistencies. He would have little use for the imposing Goethe, if he didn't see some crack in the armour. In describing Tischbein and Goethe, he exclaims:

> Wilhelm Tischbein is hardly a name to conjure with, though in his day, as a practitioner in the "historical" style, and as a rapturous resident in Rome, Tischbein did great things, big things, at any rate. He did crowds of heroes in helmets looked down at by gods on clouds; he did centours leaping ravines; Sabine women; sieges of Troy. And he did this portrait of Goethe. At least he began it. Why didn't he finish it? That is a problem as to which one can but hazard guesses, reading between the lines of Goethe's letters. The great point is that it never was finished ... Goethe has more than once been described as "the perfect man". He was assuredly a personage on the great scale, in the grand manner,

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102 <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 51.

103 S.N. Behrman, <u>Op. cit.</u>, p. 8.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

> gloriously balanced, rounded ... Endearing though failure always is, we grudge no man a moderately successful career, and glory itself we will wink at if it befall some thoroughly good fellow ... Of Goethe we are shy for such reasons as that he was never injudicious, never lazy, always in his best form - and always in love with some lady or another just so much as was good for the development of his soul and his art, but never more than that by a little ... Yet in the course of that pageant, his career, there did happen just one humiliation - one thing that, needed to be hushed up. There Tischbein's defalcation was; a chip in the marble, a flaw in the crystal, just one thread loose in the great grand tapestry.[104]

Beerbohm suggests, from a reading of the correspondence that Tischbein left Goethe in order to pursue the young and pretty Emma Hart. Tischbein began to play a tantalizing game with Goethe, which is exactly what Miss Hart was doing with Tischbein. At one point, Tischbein returned to Rome to go on with Goethe's portrait. Goethe, happy, resumed his seat on the obelisk. He was very comfortable on it when Tischbein skipped out on him again to go back to Naples and to Miss Hart. Goethe is dumbfounded. We can almost hear Max laughing behind the scene.

> Incredible! We stare aghast, as in the presence of some great dignitary from behind whom, by a ribald hand, a chair is withdrawn when he is in the act of sitting down. Tischbein had, as it were, withdrawn the obelisk.[105]

The essay, 'A Clergyman', is an attempt to elucidate an enigmatic passage in Beerbohm. Sir Max is extraordinary in spotting an interesting subject which most people would pass over. Beerbohm

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104 Max Beerbohm, "Quia Imperfectum", in And Even Now and a Christmas Garland, pp. 112-113.

105 Ibid., p. 119.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

takes a single question put one day by a poor clergyman to Dr. Johnson, and fixed it, in his essay called "A Clergyman", as an eternal symbol of quenched human aspiration. The essay begins:

> Fragmentary, Pale, Momentary's almost nothing; glimpsed and gone, as it were, a faint human hand thrust up, never to reappear, from beneath the rolling waters of Time, he forever haunts my memory and solicits my weak imagination. Nothing is told of him but that once, abruptly, he asked a question, and received an answer.[106]

Max Beerbohm pictures the clergyman as a curate attached to a neighbouring church. He suggests that the curate should have been content to be there but feels sorry for the man, knowing that all he wanted was to make an impression. Johnson was being asked by Boswell for his opinion of the styles of the various famous preachers of the time, whose deliveries were analysed in the eighteenth century much as we nowadays compare the modern actors. Beerbohm describes the electrifying fantasy of success that went through the vicar's mind as he sat listening:

> He sits on the edge of a chair in the background. He has colourless eyes, fixed earnestly, and a face almost as pale as the clerical bands beneath his somewhat receding chin. His forehead is high and narrow, his hair mouse-coloured. His hands are clasped tight before him, the knuckles standing out sharply. This constriction does not mean that he is steeling himself to speak. He has no positive intention of speaking. Very much, nevertheless, is he wishing in the back of his mind that he could say something - something whereat the great Doctor would turn on him and say, after a pause for thought, "Why yes, Sir. That is most justly observed" or "Sir, this has never occurred to me. I thank you" -

106 Max Beerbohm, "A Clergyman", in And Even Now and a Christmas Garland, pp. 112-113.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

thereby fixing the observer forever high in the esteem of all.[107]

Beerbohm sympathetically relates what did, in fact, happen:

> Johnson: We have no sermons addressed to the passions, that are good for anything, if you mean that kind of eloquence. A Clergyman, whose name I do not recollect: Were not Dodd's sermons addressed to the passions? Johnson: They were nothing, Sir, be they addressed to what they may." [108]

Sir Max goes on:

> The suddenness of it! Bang! - and the rabbit that had popped from its burrow was no more.[109]

Beerbohm's last collection of essays is entitled Mainly On The Air. It was published in 1946. In the main, these essays can be best summed up as memories of Max Beerbohm. Thus these essays are mostly reminiscent essays longing for 'those piping days of yore'.[110] As Riewald remarks,'Mainly On The Air shows us the field after the movements have been completed.'[111] Sir Max proves in these essays, or broadcasts, that he is not oblivious to the present, because almost every essay is fundamentally a comparison. Sir Max's likes and dislikes are illuminated in this volume. Louis Kronenberger observes:

> All the things Max loves - elegance, urbanity, a quill-pen leisureliness, the pleasure to be had of little things, the noiseless flick and delayed smart of irony - are not much valued in our day. All the things he hates - noise, speed, garishness, ugliness, Americanization - are ubiquitous and, as he might say, regnant.[112]

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107 Ibid., p. 133.

108 Idem., pp. 130-131.

109 Ibid., p. 131.

110 Max Beerbohm, "Playgoing", in Mainly On The Air, London, Heinemann, 1957, p. 53.

111 J.G. Riewald, Op. cit., p. 84.

112 Louis Kronenberger, Op. cit., p. 9.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

This volume is a mixture of broadcasts which were spoken from Broadcasting House, and non-broadcast pieces or 'narrowcasts'[113] as Sir Max calls them. These broadcasts were simpler, less ornate in style than those he called his 'narrowcasts', because, in them, the artist could trust 'the inflections of his voice to carry the finer shades of his meaning and of his feeling.'[114]

The first of these broadcasts was delivered on December 29, 1935. In it, Sir Max gives us his impressions of London as it now appears to him. He gives us a good idea of what he abhors.

> London has been cosmopolitanised, democratised, commercialised, mechanized, standardised, vulgarised, so extensively that one's pride in showing it to a foreigner is changed to a wholesome humility.[115]

We have already seen that Sir Max is an aristocrat and an individualist. He hates the new uniform look which London has recently acquired reflecting the utilitarianism and efficiency of the new century. The cathedrals and the large aristocratic homes formerly gave some character and dignity to London. Beerbohm feels that, now, London is too much like other places - 'Chicago, for example, or Berlin, or Pittsburg.'[116]

"A Small Boy Seeing Giants" is another broadcast. Although he took no part in politics, he was always fascinated by statesmen.

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113 Max Beerbohm, "Author's Note", in Mainly On The Air, p. 1.

114 Idem.

115 Max Beerbohm, "London Revisited", in Mainly On The Air, p. 7.

116 Idem.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

This essay is a recollection of the old 'Gladstonian'[117] statesmen of the Eighties. He says that, above all, Lord Randolph is his hero and that we need 'a Gladstone de nos jours'[118] because he feels that we are living in the most threatened age of the world's history.

Though at first sight, the titles of these essays and of this volume, would seem to suggest that Beerbohm is merely escaping, a more exacting examination proves that Beerbohm is also constantly thinking of the present. There is always a comparison running through this volume, between the present and the recent past. Naturally, being a conservative, he is on the side of the past. Like Arnold, Beerbohm was aware of an excessive faith in machinery, and that people were too materialistic-minded, not caring about the hearts and souls of men.

"Music Halls Of My Youth" is another essay which draws a comparison, but which is lighter in tone. Beerbohm prefers the dear old monotonous music-halls of the 'pre-variety' days.

> I had ceased to attend the Halls because the virus of 'Variety' had come creeping in: conjurors, performing elephants, tramps, bicyclists, lightning calculators, and so on, and so forth.. The magic had fled - the dear old magic of the unity - the monotony, if you will - of song after song after song, good, bad, and indifferent, but all fusing one with another and cumulatively instilling a sense of deep beatitude - a strange sweet foretaste of Nirvana.[119]

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117 Max Beerbohm, "A Small Boy Seeing Giants", in Mainly On The Air, p. 29.

118 Ibid., p. 30.

119 Max Beerbohm, "Music Halls Of My Youth", in Mainly On The Air, pp. 40-41.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

In this volume, the three essays which show an explicit aversion and distaste for the twentieth century are "Speed", "Advertisements", and "From Bloomsbury to Bayswater".

In "Speed", Beerbohm criticizes the senseless passion for speed which twentieth-century man possesses. As he has done on other occasions, Beerbohm begins the essay by giving a mock-historical treatise of it.

> The Marathon race was a very popular institution. So were the Roman chariot races. One is probably right in supposing that Adam and Eve used often to race each other round the Garden of Eden, very blithely. Dick Turpin's exploit on Black Bess would have commended itself in any era to the people of any nation.[120]

Beerbohm is doubtful whether one should associate speed with progress. People talk faster and eat more quickly, but unfortunately their brains don't function at an accelerated pace. Speed, for the modern century, like machinery, seems to be an end in itself. Beerbohm longs for the past when roads were safe. Using hyperbole, he exaggerates the truth in order to gain his point.

> We are constantly told by the Press that we must be traffic-conscious. But there is really no need to tell us we must be so. How could we be otherwise? How not be concussion-apprehensive, annihilation-evasive, and similar compound words? When the children of this generation, brought up in fear, shall have become adult, what sort of nervous ailments will their progeny have, one wonders? Many of the present children won't grow up at all. Very old people and very young people form the majority of those who are annually slaughtered upon our roads.[121]

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120 Max Beerbohm, "Speed", in Mainly On The Air, p. 15.

121 Ibid., p. 18.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

He offers consolation to those whom he has just berated for exceeding the speed limit:

> But here is a heartening fact for you. We are all of us travelling at a tremendous rate, and we shall always continue to do so. We shall not, it is true, be able to get rid of our speed-limit. But it is a very liberal one. 1,110 miles a minute is not a limit to be grumbled at. Our planet is not truly progressing, of course: it is back at its starting-point every year. But it never for an instant pauses in its passage through space. Nor will it do so even when, some billions of years hence, it shall have become too cold for us human beings to exist upon its surface. It will still be proceeding at its present pace: 1,110 miles a minute.[122]

In the essay, "Advertisements", Sir Max begins in his usual ironical fashion:

> Early in 1915 I was back in England, for more than the duration of what we ingenuously called the Great War. In the years that followed, considerable strides were being made along the aforesaid coast-road towards modern civilization. The road itself was magnificently asphalted from side to side; the carts and horses were fewer than before; but great plenty of motor-cars and motor-bicycles more than atoned for this fewness; and the heartiness of their hooting and of their mostly open exhausts was a great improvement in the cries of those little boys and little girls who had been wont to run races, and could no longer do so ...[123]

He exclaims half-humourously:

> I wish I could cure myself of the habit of speaking ironically. I should so like to express myself in a quite straightforward manner. But perhaps its as well that I can't; for, if I could, my language might be over-strong for Sunday evening. [124]

Beerbohm shows a knowledge of himself, and also this aside is an explicit statement of his aim, as a writer, when he makes this

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122 Ibid., pp. 20-21.

123 Max Beerbohm, "Advertisements", in Mainly On The Air, pp. 43-44.

124 Ibid., p. 44.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

statement. He reveals an affinity with the eighteenth century writers when he implies that a writer's work should be subtle, and the subtlety, expressed through irony gives the work restraint. His friend, Logan Pearsall Smith, calls Beerbohm the 'Muse of Irony',[125] and Wilmen Cross is more explicit.

> Irony one sees is everywhere. Not that simple irony where words taken literally say just the opposite of what is meant. But a subtle irony which brings truths and half-truths into felicitous relations.[126]

Max Beerbohm disliked ads in newspapers and what he disliked most was the illuminated advertisements which could be seen at night cluttering up the sky. The only thing that Max liked about war-time London was that by night it was no longer 'vulgarised and debased by those loathsome red-hot-coal illuminations, appearing and clumsily spelling themselves out and disappearing and re-appearing on the copings and facades of buildings'.[127]

"From Bloomsbury To Bayswater" is not a broadcast but a narrowcast. In this essay he is bemoaning the substitution of engineering for architecture, and the rise of the intelligentsia - and, generally speaking, the way in which the ease and graces of the past are contrasted with the harsher and more insecure conditions of modern life. We also see in this essay, that Beerbohm possesses little love for the Russian novelists. Sometimes his impudence sneaks up on the reader. Speaking of the intelligentsia in Bloomsbury, he

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125 Logan Pearsall Smith, "Sir Max Beerbohm" in Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 170, issue of November, 1942, p. 89.

126 Wilmen Cross, "The Humor of Max Beerbohm", in Yale Review, Vol. 13, issue of January, 1924, p. 221.

127 Max Beerbohm, Op. cit., p. 50.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

exclaims:

> Dostoievsky, their god, was a man of genius, certainly, and gave beautifully poignant expression to his spinelessness.[128]

Thus, we have seen that Sir Max Beerbohm's final volume of familiar essays, Mainly On The Air, can correctly be summed up as memories of Max Beerbohm's youth. However, these memories are never merely an escapist tactic with him, because each essay is fundamentally a comparison between the more recent past and the present.

We have examined the works of Max Beerbohm in order to throw light on the writer's personality and, in general, his attitude towards life. This was deemed necessary because Beerbohm is primarily a familiar essayist. We have seen that Beerbohm is urbane, aristocratic, sophisticated and dandyish. Moreover, because of these qualities, he prefers the past to the present. However, he is not afraid to mock the inconsistencies in his own circle. We have also seen where Beerbohm is usually humorous when referring to the discrepancies in the past, but satirical, when criticizing the modern century. We have also seen that Beerbohm is much more successful in ridiculing the past, mainly because he understands it better. We feel, too often, when he is dealing with the present, that he is bewildered by what he sees. This question will be examined after we study the general and particular stylistic qualities of Sir Max Beerbohm.

Before discussing these, we will analyse some of the general structural qualities of his essays.

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128 Max Beerbohm, "From Bloomsbury To Bayswater" in Mainly On The Air, p. 129.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

We have already shown that Beerbohm frequently uses asides as a device to create an affinity between the writer and the reader. We have also suggested that Beerbohm doesn't always adhere strictly to the subject. In respect of the quality of discursiveness, Sir Max reveals an affinity with Lamb rather than with Thackeray. Thackeray is less discursive in so far as there is always one central idea. However, in Lamb and Beerbohm, the various subordinate ideas and trends of thought are completely fused into the main argument, so that, in the resulting impression, they are not easily detachable. The transitions and the asides are made in such a way that the different ideas expressed are all intrinsically related. Beerbohm's affinity with Lamb, as far as the quality of discursiveness is concerned, can be seen if we compare the initial lines of the various paragraphs of their essays. In Lamb and Beerbohm these lines, summarizing as they do the contents of the individual paragraphs, generally read like a condensed argument indicating the movement of the essays, while in Thackeray they do not, as a rule, give any direct clue to the line of thought. Lamb's essay, "In Praise of Chimney-Sweepers", may serve as an example:

1. I like to meet a sweep -
2. I have a kindly yearning towards these dim specks -
3. I reverence these young Africans of our own growth -
4. When a child, what a mysterious operation it was to witness their operation!
5. Reader, if thou meetest one of these small gentry in thy early rambles -
6. There is a composition -

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

7. I know not by what particular conformation of the organ it happens, but I have always found that this composition -
8. Now albeit Mr. Read boasteth, not without reason that his is the only Salopian house;
9. This is Saloap -.
10. I am by nature extremely susceptible of street affronts;
11. I am by theory obdurate to the seductiveness of what are called a fine set of teeth.
12. My pleasant friend Jem White was so impressed with a belief of metamorphoses like this frequently taking place -
13. James White is extinct, and with him these suppers have long ceased.[129]

In Thackeray's "De Finibus", the discursiveness, owing to the heterogeneous nature of the illustrative material used, is so great that most of the paragraphs defy summarization. Here the opening lines are a fair index to the rambling course of the argument.

1. When Swift was in love with Stella -
2. Madmen, you know, see visions -
3. Everyman who has had his German tutor -
4. And - such being the state of my mind -
5. Another Finis written.
6. Among the sins of commission which novel-writers not seldom perpetuate, is the sin of grandiloquence -
7. Alexandre Dumas describes himself, when inventing the plan of work, as lying silent on his back for two whole days -
8. They used to call the good Sir Walter the "Wizard of the North".
9. So you are gone, little printer's boy, with the last scratches and corrections on the proof.[130]

Like Lamb, Beerbohm's essays can be followed easily by reading the initial lines of the paragraph. Beerbohm's essay "The Humor Of The Public", which we choose at random, will serve as an example:

1. They often tell me that so-and-so has no sense of humour.
2. Belief in the general humourousness of the human race is the more deep-rooted for that every man is certain that he himself is not without sense of humour.

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129 Charles Lamb, "In Praise of Chimney-Sweepers", in The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb, London, Oxford University Press, 1908, 2 v., pp. 607-613.

130 William Makepeace Thackeray, "De Finibus" in Roundabout Papers, Boston, Aedine Book Publishing Co., 1931, pp. 197-203.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

4. The word 'public' must, like all collective words, be used with caution.
5. This sentence, which I admit to be somewhat mannered, has the merit of bringing me straight to the point at which I have been aiming; that, although the public is composed of distinct units, -
6. It would be impossible for any one of us to define what are the things that amuse him.
7. He will find that I have been there before him.
8. I have gone steadily through them, one by one.
9. You might argue that one week's budget of comic papers is no real criterion -
10. Let us try to find some unifying principle -
11. So far, then, we have found two elements in the public's humour:
12. If they cannot be solved soon, such problems never will be solved.[131]

Sir Herbert Read states that 'in general the essay does not readily yield to analysis - it is most successful when least premeditated'.[132] The first part of Read's statement is true, but in a sense it is true of all art. Alexander Pope puts it more explicitly:

Let not each beauty everywhere be spied,
Where half the skill is decently to hide,
He gains all points who pleasingly confounds,
Surprises, varies, and conceals the bounds.[133]

The latter part of Read's statement, however, is erroneous. A piece of art is most successful when it seems to be least premeditated. Sir Max reveals that he was ever conscious of this aim in art. He says: 'Is not the whole virtue of technique to be invisible, to defy analysis?'[134] In most of Beerbohm's essays the

131 Max Beerbohm, "The Humor Of the Public", in Yet Again, pp. 257-270.

132 Herbert Read, English Prose Style, London, G. Bell & Sons, 1946, p. 77.

133 Alexander Pope, "Of the Use of Riches", in British Prose and Poetry, edited by Lieder, Lovett, Root, Boston Houghton Miffin Co.1951, p. 501.

134 Max Beerbohm, "A Pretty Play Spoilt", in Around Theatres, London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953, p. 223.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

effort to disguise it has always been loyally made'.[135]

It is obvious why it would be easier to analyse the craft of men like Bacon and Jonson as compared to Lamb and Beerbohm. However, in comparison with Lamb, Beerbohm offers even more difficulty. One of the reasons for this difficulty is that Beerbohm works on a smaller canvas. While Lamb writes about "The Old and the New Schoolmaster", about "Imperfect Sympathies", and "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading", Beerbohm writes of "Going Back to School", "Of Sympat", and of "Books within Books". Beerbohm is really what he once styled himself - a petit maitre, or as Desmond MacCarthy says,'a master of the art of turning molehills into mountains'.[136]

In the Rede lecture entitled "Lytton Strackey", Beerbohm insists that 'the beginning is not less important than the end, and that what comes between them is no less important than they.'[137] Beerbohm is here telling us that there is no part of the essay with which an artist can afford to be careless. Every part is equally important.

Beerbohm's essays sometimes have a general beginning. Often this general statement is connected with the subject-matter of the essay. For example, the essay "Golden Drugget" begins in this manner. 'Primitive And Essential Things have great power to touch the heart of the beholder'.[138] The essay "William and Mary" is begun in the

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135 Max Beerbohm, "Habit", in Around Theatres, p. 578.

136 Desmond MacCarthy,"Affable Hawk", in New Statesman, issue of December 18, 1920, p. 339.

137 Max Beerbohm, "Lytton Strackey", in Mainly On The Air, p.182.

138 Max Beerbohm, "The Golden Drugget", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 147.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

same fashion. 'Memories, Like Olives, are an acquired taste'.[139] Beerbohm often employs the purely personal opening. In "Quia Imperfectum" he begins: 'I Have Often Wondered that no one has set himself to collect unfinished works of art'.[140] In "A Letter That Was Not Written", we see the same type of beginning: 'One morning lately I saw in my newspaper an announcement that enraged me'.[141]

Very often Beerbohm opens his essay by employing some arresting device. The most common device is usually some brief, sweeping statement which can be personal or impersonal. In his essay, "Whistler's Writing", it is personal: 'No book-lover, I'.[142] In "273" it is impersonal: 'This is an age of prescriptions'.[143] Occasionally the device may vary, as in the essay "A Clergyman". The effect is achieved by a sequence of haunting words: 'Fragmentary, Pale, Momentary; almost nothing, glimpsed'.[144]

We have not shown all the different types of beginnings that Beerbohm uses. We have shown the most common kinds. The beginnings of Beerbohm's essays are not haphazardly phrased. Neither are his endings. In a great number of cases, the ending is connected with the beginning, either with the title, the opening sentence, or with both. In the

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139 Max Beerbohm, "William and Mary", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 147.

140 Max Beerbohm, "Quia Imperfectum", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 110.

141 Max Beerbohm, "A Letter That Was Not Written", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 55.

142 Max Beerbohm, "Whistler's Writing", in Yet Again, p. 105.

143 Max Beerbohm, "273", in Yet Again, p. 65.

144 Max Beerbohm, "A Clergyman", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 130.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

essay, "On Shakespeare's Birthday", the connection is with the opening sentence. 'My florist has standing orders to deliver early on the morning of this day a chaplet of laurel'.[145] 'Don't listen to my florist'.[146] In the essay, "A Cloud Of Pinafores" the connection is with the title where the last three words of the essay are identical with the title. Beerbohm lòves to employ a surprise ending. In the essay "Prangley Valley", the opening sentence begins: 'All Men Kill the thing they love'.[147] He ends the essay by saying: 'Certainly, all true love has its ogre-ish element'.[148] The function of this device is clearly to surprise the reader by showing the title in the new. Another type of surprise ending which Beerbohm uses is to employ the short, crisp, suggestive, and staccato final sentence. In the essay "An Infamous Brigade", he says: 'It will be filled with oil'.[149] In "A Study In Dejection" he exclaims: 'I hope it has room to rock there'.[150]

It is hoped that the examination of Beerbohm's most common devices in beginning and ending an essay will prove that Sir Max's essays are a result of premeditation and are not the worse for it. As we have already discussed the main ideas and the favourite subjects with which Beerbohm dealt, it is not necessary to discuss 'that what comes between'.

145 Max Beerbohm, "On Shakespeare's Birthday", in Yet Again, p.229.
146 Ibid., p. 234.
147 Max Beerbohm, "Prangley Valley", in Works and More, p. 243.
148 Ibid., p. 247.
149 Max Beerbohm, "An Infamous Brigade", in Works and More, p. 199.
150 Max Beerbohm, "A Study In Dejection", in Yet Again, p. 80.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Many critics have referred to Beerbohm as a born stylist or a natural stylist. What does this mean? It is our opinion that to speak of a man's style in terms of the man's techniques, without referring to the man's ideas, is ridiculous. If a man is capable of using a vast and extensive vocabulary and uses high-sounding phrases to express trite and common-place thoughts, then we usually say that that particular writer has a bombastic style, unless he is trying to mock some particular man or style. However the reverse is not always true. We know that Shakespeare was able to achieve the greatest effects by expressing the most profound thoughts simply. Thus it is very difficult to separate a man's techniques from his subject matter because they are intrinsically related.

As Riewald suggests, 'One of the most striking general qualities of Beerbohm's style is its power to mock'.[151] Beerbohm's mockery manifests itself usually through irony, wit, or humour. It has already been stated that Beerbohm is a master of irony. Added examples will be used here to enforce this truth. In his essay, "How Shall I Word It", he wonders how anyone can urge someone to be original and yet encourage the same person to slavishly imitate:

> But faintly, if we listen hard, is borne up to us a sound of the scratching of innumerable pens - pens whose wielders are all trying, as the author of this handbook urges them, to "be original, fresh, and interesting" by dint of more or less strict adherence to sample.[152]

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151 J.G. Riewald, Op. cit., p. 182.

152 Max Beerbohm, "How Shall I Word It?" in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 12.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

In his essay, "Laughter" he half-seriously states that he is incapable of grasping the fashionable philosophers of his day. He ironically exclaims: 'It distresses me, this failure to keep pace with the leaders of thought as they pass into oblivion'.[153] Speaking about the debasing freedoms, which George the Fourth indulged in, he says:

> Had he passed through the callow dissipations of Eton and Oxford, like other young men of his age, he would assuredly have lacked much of that splendid, pent vigour with which he rushed headlong into London life.[154]

Commenting on the institution of royalty, in general, he states:

> I should be glad if more people would seriously examine the conditions of royalty, with a view to ameliorating the royal lot.[155]

In his essay, "T. Fenning Dodworth" Beerbohm states that he likes best that type of wit which pierces without leaving a wound.[156] He usually adheres to this conception:

> I thought, pardie, of the lurid verses written by young men who, in real life, know no haunt more lurid than a literary public-house.[157]

> There are so many queer things in the world that we have no time to go on wondering at the queerness of the things we see habitually.[158]

However, Beerbohm's wit can be piercing if he wishes it to be. This is especially true when he is speaking about Kipling.

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153 Max Beerbohm, "Laughter", in And Even Now and a Christmas Garland, P. 166.

154 Max Beerbohm, "King George the Fourth", in Works and More, p. 56.

155 Max Beerbohm, "Some Words on Royalty", in Works & More, pp. 156-157.

156 Max Beerbohm,"T.Fenning Dodworth", in Mainly On The Air, p.159.

157 Max Beerbohm, "Diminuendo", in Works and More, p. 138.

158 Max Beerbohm, "The Fire", in Yet Again, p. 3.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

> But many years were to elapse before Mr. Kipling came, combining with an immense gift for verse a mystical adoration of machinery.[159]

Beerbohm's humour appears to exist, usually, in some connection with the incongruity which he perceives around him.

> That anyone who dressed so very badly as Thomas Carlyle should have tried to construct a philosophy of clothes has always seemed to me one of the most pathetic things in literature.[160]

In his essay, "Kolniyatsch", Beerbohm shows a distaste for those people who seem to adore every writer that is foreign. Mocking, he says that he is sympathetic towards these people. He humourously depicts one of these foreign writers. The writer's name is fictitious. He says that many people say he is a pessimist, but he believes that the foreign writer is an optimist.

> On the other hand, his burning faith in a personal Devil, his frank delight in earthquakes and pestilences, and his belief that everyone but himself will be brought back to life in time to be frozen to death in the next glacial epoch, seem rather to stamp him as an optimist.[161]

The subtlety of his humour may be illustrated by the following remark, in which one or two letters suffice to guide a whole school of classical scholarship.

> We know he was fond of quoting those incomparable poets, Homer, at great length.[162]

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159 Max Beerbohm, "Speed", in <u>Mainly On The Air</u>, p. 16.

160 Max Beerbohm, "Dandies and Dandies", in <u>Works and More</u>, p.7.

161 Max Beerbohm, "Kolniyatsch", in <u>And Even Now and A Christmas Garland</u>, p. 33.

162 Max Beerbohm, "King George the Fourth", in <u>Works and More</u>, p. 83.

Sometimes the humour is accompanied with pathos:

> Look! There's a horse drawing a cart!' And Look! There's a quite small house - a lovely little thing that looks as though it had been built by the hand of man, and as though a man might quite pleasantly live in it.[163]

A daintiness or fastidiousness of expression is another general characteristic of Beerbohm's style:

> Round the flower-garden at Sandringham runs an old wall of red brick, streaked with ivy and topped infrequently with balls of stone.[164]

Another general stylistic quality of Beerbohm's is his ability to put before his readers a vivid scene through significant description. His sketch of Covent Garden may serve as an example:

> I see the flash of eager gestures in white kid; I see white shoulders, white gardenias, rouge under lurid veiliads, the quivering of vigrettes, the light on high collars highly-polished, and the sheen of innumerable diamonds, and the rhythmic sway of a thousand-and-one fans. Row upon row, the little dull-red boxes, receptacles of bravery and beauty, are sparkling, also, with endless animation.[165]

In some instances, the quality of liveliness is achieved by his frequent use of colloquialisms:

> I'll be hanged if I haven't a certain mellow wisdom.[166]

> But he is altogether alien to our rough island race; and laborious little imitations of his inspired maunderings cut no ice, and win scant patience from the average reader, even if they are contrived in all deep reverence to the memory of Karl Marx, and in fond though violent indigestion of the theories of Dr. Freud.[167]

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163 Max Beerbohm, "London Revisited", in Mainly On The Air, p.10

164 Max Beerbohm, "A Good Prince", in Works and More, p. 31.

165 Max Beerbohm, "At Covent Garden", in Works and More, pp.286-287.

166 Max Beerbohm, "Laughter", in And Even Now and a Christmas Garland, p. 166.

167 Max Beerbohm, "From Bloomsbury To Bayswater", in Mainly On The Air, p. 129.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA - ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

Another stylistic quality which Beerbohm has in common with any good stylist is the exquisite cadence of many of his sentences. An example of Beerbohm's correct ear for rhythm in prose is seen in his essay, "Laughter", in which he describes Johnson's laugh.

> There he sat, old and ailing and unencouraged by the company, but soaring higher and higher in absurdity, more and more rejoicing, and still soaring and rejoicing after he had gone out into the night with Boswell, till at last in Fleet Street his paroxysms were too much for him and he could no more. Echoes of that huge laughter come ringing down the ages.[168]

These are the most striking general stylistic qualities of Beerbohm's essays. It is our task now to examine some of the particular stylistic qualities of his essays.

One of the most obvious particular stylistic qualities of Sir Max Beerbohm is his frequent use of the aside. Beerbohm's habit of engaging the reader by means of a direct appeal is conspicuous. This habit is the outcome of what he considered to be the chief task of the essayist - the obtrusion of his personality upon the reader. Beerbohm's asides are, for the most part, brief.

> But - I constrain you in the act of rushing off to pack your things - one moment: this essay has yet to be finished.[169]

> I am going to be depressing. Perhaps you had better switch me off.[170]

> "But I rove", like Sir Thomas More. And I seem to think that a cheap literary allusion will make you excuse that vice.[171]

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168 Max Beerbohm, "Laughter", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 173.

169 Max Beerbohm, "Hosts And Guests", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 84.

170 Max Beerbohm, "London Revisited", in Mainly On The Air, p. 4.

171 Max Beerbohm, "In Homes Unblest", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 144.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA - SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

All these examples imply a supposed criticism, on the part of the readers of the tone or structure of the work in hand. However Sir Max goes a step further and actually takes the reader into his confidence about matters of method and technique. These asides reveal that Beerbohm is a supremely confident writer.

> This sentence, which I admit to be somewhat mannered, has the merit of bringing me straight to the point at which I have been aiming;[172]

> One especially would I recall, who - no, personally I admire the plungingly intimate kind of essayist very much indeed, but I never was of that kind, and it's too late to begin now.[173]

> If I were writing in the past tense, I might pause here to consider whether this emotion were a genuine one or a mere figment for literary effect. As I am writing in the present tense, such a pause would be inartistic, and shall not be made. I must seem not to be writing, but to actually be on the spot, suffering. But then, you may well ask, why should I stay here to suffer? why not beat a hasty retreat? The answer is that my essay would then seem skimpy; [174]

Another stylistic quality which is prevalent throughout Beerbohm's essays is his use of aphorisms.

> Most women are not as young as they are painted.[175]

> To make oneself beautiful is an universal instinct.[176]

> It seems to be a law of nature that no man ever is loth to sit for his portrait.[177]

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172 Max Beerbohm, "The Humour Of the Public", in Yet Again, p. 261.

173 Max Beerbohm, "Servants", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 101.

174 Max Beerbohm, "The Ragged Regiment", in Yet Again, pp. 249-250.

175 Max Beerbohm, "The Pervasion of Rouge", in Works and More, p. 89.

176 Ibid., p. 97.

177 Max Beerbohm, "Quia Imperfectum", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 115.

> To say that a man is vain means merely that he is pleased with the effect he produces on other people. A conceited man is satisfied with the effect he produces on himself.[178]

> Pity, after all, is in itself a luxury. It is for the "some" a measure of the gulf between themselves and the "others".[179]

Connected with this frequent use of aphorisms, is Beerbohm's love of paradox. Examples of self-contained paradoxes which are remarkable for their Baconian terseness are:

> For expression is but too often the ruin of a face.[180]

> Only the insane take themselves quite seriously.[181]

Opposed to this verbal economy expressed through aphorisms and paradoxes is Beerbohm's use of periphrasis. Instead of describing things tersely, the figure of periphrasis aims to describe things in a roundabout way. Thus the process of painting is described as 'to force from little tubes of lead a glutinous flamboyance and to defile, with the hair of a camel therein steeped, taut canvas'.[182] Beerbohm does not use different devices merely for variety purposes. Its function, here, is to convey an affected, dandiacal abhorrence of certain physical aspects of life.

When Max Beerbohm became the regular dramatic critic for the <u>Saturday Review</u> in 1898, his famous predecessor, George Bernard Shaw magnanimously introduced him as the 'incomparable Max'.[183] This word

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178 <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 114.

179 Max Beerbohm, "Servants", in <u>And Even Now and A Christmas Garland</u>, p. 97.

180 Max Beerbohm, "The Pervasion of Rouge", in <u>Works and More</u>, p. 104.

181 Max Beerbohm, "Poor Romeo", in <u>Works and More</u>, p. 1[illegible].

182 Max Beerbohm, "Dandies and Dandies", in <u>Works and More</u>, p.1[illegible]

183 George Bernard Shaw, "Valedictory", in <u>Saturday Review</u>, issue of May 31, 1898, p. 682.

has been a favourite with future critics. Few critics writing about Max Beerbohm fail to mention Shaw's famous remark. Many of Beerbohm's critics have added similar adjectives which are equally praiseworthy. Bertrand Russel calls him 'the Faultless Max',[184] while Clair Price calls him the 'Last of the Exquisites'.[185] Why is Beerbohm considered to be such an impeccable stylist?

Much of Beerbohm stylistic incomparableness is due to his skillful handling of some of the old figures of speech. One of these old figures of speech is alliteration. Usually assonance is intermingled with alliteration to achieve the desired effect. In his description of Mary's laugh, the "L" is the centre of the consonant scheme, and this is intermingled with light and heavy, long and short vowels:

> I never tired of that little bell-like euphony; those funny little lucid and level trills.[186]

This is seen again in his praise of the old music halls:

> I am glad to resuscitate their rhythm: bugle-notes to wake sleeping memories in some breasts; more melancholy for me, fainter, than scent of soever long-kept lavender.[187]

The dandiacal quality of Beerbohm's style is also exemplified by his original and sophisticated use of simile, metaphor and personification. Beerbohm's similes are remarkable for their concreteness.

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184 Bertrand Russel,"'The Faultless Max' at 80", in New York Times Magazine, issue of August 24, 1952, p. 18.

185 Clair Price, "Last of the Exquisites", in New York Times Magazine, issue of September 10, 1939, pp.14-15.

186 Max Beerbohm, "William And Mary", in And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, p. 153.

187 Max Beerbohm, "The Blight on the Music Halls", in Works and More, pp. 236-237.

> Whistler's insults always stuck - stuck and spread round the insulted, who found themselves at length encased in them, like flies in amber.[188]

> The King died a death that was like the calm conclusion of a great lurid poem.[189]

> ... young Mr. Brummell could not bear to see all his brother-officers in clothes exactly like his own; was quite as deeply annoyed as would be some god, suddenly entering a restaurant of many mirrors.[190]

The same may be said of his metaphors. This is about Mr. Le V., a contemporary dandy:

> ... his toilet-table is an imperishable altar, his wardrobe a quiet nursery and very constant harem.[191]

Speaking about "My Lord in Court" he exclaims:

> My Lord might be the mummy of some high tyrant revitalized after centuries of death and resuming now his sway over men. Impassive he sits, aloof and aloft,ramparted by his desk, ensconced between curtains to keep out the draught - for might not a puff of wind scatter the animated dust that he consists of?[192]

He handles the figure of personification, or the 'pathetic fallacy' as Ruskin calls it, with equal ability. Sometimes this figure of speech will gleam triumphantly throughout a whole passage:

> Doubtless, when I began to walk, one of my first excursions was to the fender, that I might gaze more nearly at the live thing roaring and raging behind it; and I dare say I dimly wondered by what blessed dispensation this creature was allowed in a domain so peaceful as my nursery. I do not think I ever needed to be warned against scaling the fender. I knew by

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188 Max Beerbohm, "Whistler's Writing", in Yet Again, p. 119.

189 Max Beerbohm, "King George the Fourth", in Works and More, p. 79

190 Max Beerbohm, "Dandies and Dandies", in Works and More, p. 4.

191 Ibid., p. 22.

192 Max Beerbohm, "Dulcedo Judiciorum", in Yet Again, pp. 278-279.

instinct that the creature within it was dangerous - fiercer still than the cat which had once strayed into the room and scratched me for my advances. As I grew older, I creased to wonder at the creature's presence and learned to call it 'the fire', quite lightly.[193]

Sometimes the personification is concentrated:

And all the branches of the tory old elm above them seemed to be quivering with indignation.[194]

Thus we have seen that Beerbohm's style is conscious. This care for style may have its defects, but they are lost in its virtues. He is unable, he says, to begin a piece of writing before he knows just how it will end. He pores, whittles, and polishes in a manner long outmoded. Every sentence and phrase appear to have been examined after it being written, for exactness, aim, color, cadence. His mind is not so capacious as was the mind of Dickens or Thackeray; but within the liberal bounds nature set for it, his art runs close to perfection. Bertrand Russell echoes this sentiment when he says:

Both in writing and in pictures he is, to my mind, the most faultless of my contemporaries. I do not mean by this that he is the greatest; but I do mean that he secures the effects at which he aims, and that these are wholly delightful.[195]

This care for polish and exactness in his style is reflected also in the vocabulary that Beerbohm uses. Beerbohm once confessed that, as a young man, he had been 'immensely keen on the mot juste, that Holy Grail of the period'.[196] This utterance neatly summarizes

193 Max Beerbohm, "The Fire", in Yet Again, p. 3.

194 Max Beerbohm, "A Morris For May-Day", in Yet Again, p. 171.

195 Bertrand Russel, Idem.

196 Max Beerbohm, "Enoch Soames", in Seven Men, London, Heinemann, 1919, p. 6.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

his literary affinity with the Beardsley group in which he grew up. However, we have already seen that Beerbohm has basically a healthy attitude towards the aesthetes mainly because he was acutely aware of their excesses. His awareness of their extravagances in words, as well as ideas, is explicitly stated.

> Too much art is, of course, as great an obstacle as too little art; and Pater, in his excessive care for words, is as obscure to most people as are Carlyle and Browning in their carelessness.[197]

Although Beerbohm is aware of Pater's excessive search for the right word, it is to be noticed that Beerbohm's use of the unique and uncommon word is relatively higher in his earlier works. This practice is, however, never completely dropped. Generally the special vocabulary is used, successfully, to achieve a definite effect. It is not our purpose to categorize here all the uncommon or unique words which Beerbohm uses in his essays. There will, however, be given a few examples of the different types of words which he employs, in order to give us a better understanding of his style.

Riewald[198] in his excellent study of Beerbohm as a man and writer has a helpful classification of the master's use of words. Riewald does not limit himself to Beerbohm essays.

In the following paragraphs, there are included a few of Riewald's examples. These are listed to round out the picture of Beerbohm's highly original style. Readers who are particularly interested in this element of Beerbohm's work are encouraged to consult Riewald.

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198 J.G. Riewald, Op. cit., pp. 206-212

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

For the sake of completeness rather than originality, we refer to the Riewald study now.

One major grouping of Riewald's is entitled "Archaisms":

> cit, eld, leech, plesaunes, puissance, situate, tristful, arride, builded, belike, haply, withal, ere.[199]

Another classification used by Riewald deals with words which he terms 'obsolete'. Again, here is a brief, incomplete listing from his work:

> marcescibility, accrescency, behest, cockowhoop, commorients, empery, immarcescibility, cumulose, desuete, impennuous, clomb, fording, forwearied, mobled, wherewithout.[200]

Another interesting group used by Riewald is entitled 'Rare' words:

> prospection, tabor, unguentarian, cinct, creational, flammiferous, rebarbative, rident, interplicated, secerned, liefer.[201]

The last group deals with Beerbohm's neologisms. In forming his neologisms Beerbohm makes use of derivation and composition. Here is a brief incomplete example of Beerbohm's neologisms by means of a prefix, or suffix, or other endings:

> dissignifications, revisitor, undevelopment, imprescient, irreiterate, betweeded, encylindered, a-swill, ajob, gastocracy, dappledoms, dandyhood, windowhood, autobiographist, ovinity, tausinity, tecnolatry, streetster, wayula, hero-worshipful, motoristic, guestish, carnivalogical.[202]

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199 Ibid., p. 206.

200 Ibid., p. 207

201 Ibid., pp. 207-208

202 Ibid., pp. 208-209

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

One conclusion to be drawn from these various classifications is that Beerbohm is not only a user of old words, but also a creator of new ones. However, the most valuable conclusion is that, in the peculiar structure of his vocabulary, we can recapture something of Beerbohm the man: something of his individualism, dandyism, and love of the past; but also something of his irony, wit, and humour.

It is fully realized that this material is not original. However, for the sake of completeness of characterization and fuller treatment of Beerbohm's style in the familiar essays, it was deemed justifiable and pertinent to include in this thesis a bit more than a passing reference to such a valuable study as Riewald's.

John Middleton Murry states that style is "a quality of language which communicates precisely emotions or thoughts; or a system of emotions or thoughts, peculiar to the author".[203] Thus, perfect style is the exact accomplishment of this communication. After the foregoing analysis, it need hardly be stressed that Beerbohm's technique closely conforms to Murry's ideal of a perfect style. This does not mean that Beerbohm would not have been a greater stylist if he had possessed a greater range of thoughts and emotions. The position of style certainly depends on 'the comprehensiveness of the system of emotions and thoughts to which the reference is perceptible'.[204]

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203 J. Middleton Murry, The Problem of Style, London, Oxford University Press, 1922, p. 71.

204 Idem.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

We have already implied that Beerbohm is not a master on the large scale. This is mainly because of his limited range of ideas and feelings which result in the development of relatively insignificant themes. Beerbohm was aware of his limitations when he wrote in a letter to Bohun Lynch: 'My gifts are small. I've used them very well and discreetly, never straining them'.[205]

However this does not mean that Beerbohm's work is insignificant, in the sense that it is not worth studying or reading.

> "We shall", as W.H. Anden has reminded us, "do poetry a great disservice if we confine it only to the major experiences of life".[206]

This sensible observation of one of the leading writers of English can certainly be extended to prose works as well as poetry. Beerbohm's experiences are minor ones. However his greatness does not lie in the profundity of his thoughts and emotions, but rather in the absolute perfection of their expression.

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205 Bohun Lynch, Max Beerbohm In Perspective, London, Heinemann, 1921, p. viii.

206 A.J.M. Smith, Introduction, in The Book of Canadian Poetry, Toronto, Gage, 1957, p. 1.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PERSONAL ELEMENT IN BEERBOHM'S CRITICAL ESSAYS

Max Beerbohm was dramatic critic of the Saturday Review from 1898 to 1910. During this period, he contributed more than four hundred and seventy pieces averaging between fifteen hundred and two thousand words. Of the nearly five hundred articles and essays written for the Saturday Review in the course of these twelve years about one third were reprinted in the collected edition of his works, where, under the title of Around Theatres, they fill more than five hundred pages.

It is not our purpose here to formulate Beerbohm's theory of drama, or to determine whether he prefers a realistic play to a romantic play. Neither is it our purpose to investigate the soundness of Beerbohm's opinions as to the dramatists of his day.

Since we are primarily concerned with Max Beerbohm as an essayist, naturally the question arises whether Beerbohm's dramatic and non-dramatic criticisms expressed in the Saturday Review are articles or essays in the strict sense. M.H. Abrams in his pamphlet, A Glossary Of Literary Terms, states that 'the formal essay or article, is impersonal; the author writes as an authority on the subject and lays his argument out in orderly and systematic fashion ... The informal essay is personal; the author assumes an intimacy and equality of competence with his audience, and writes in a relaxed, humorous, self-revelatory, and sometimes whimsical fashion'.[1]

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1 M.H. Abrams, A Glossary Of Literary Terms, New York, Rinehart, 1957, p. 33.

It is our contention that Beerbohm is an impressionistic, subjective critic and that most of his critical essays are of a personal rambling, discursive type rather than the objective impersonal criticisms of an objective critic. However, some of Beerbohm's pieces in Around Theatres are basically articles. The article tends to be scientific writing and thus does not make use of the creative imagination. "Mr. Sutro's New Play", may be taken as a fairly representative specimen of what we mean by an article.

Beerbohm begins by saying that he has often wished 'that some satiric playwright would come and prick the bubble - show the homilist annihilated by the proved fact that his diagnosis had been incorrect, his advice absurd, his stratagems clumsy, and his general effect disastrous to all around him'.[2] Beerbohm goes on to state that, because of this, Mr. Sutro's play Mollentrave on Women is very welcome. Beerbohm embarks on an elaborate exposition of the plot. He then proceeds to criticize the plot and the dialogue, after which he generally rounds off the whole with a few critical remarks on the performers.

However, the majority of the pieces in Around Theatres are essentially essays in which the personality of Beerbohm obtrudes. A mere glance at the pages of Around Theatres will show that in a vast number of cases the particular play chosen for discussion, as Beerbohm states, is nothing but 'a peg to hang some general disquisition on'.[3]

2 Max Beerbohm, "Mr. Sutro's New Play", in Around Theatres, London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953, p. 362.

3 Max Beerbohm, "Epistle Dedicatory", in Around Theatres, p. ix.

Most of the plays were written by either Naomi Greckle or Mr. Tompkins - generic names Beerbohm had invented for undistinguished playwrights. However it is difficult to say whether this aided or hurt his work as a whole. Beerbohm says he 'had always preferred Mr. Tompkins, as a theme, to Shakespeare',[4] mainly because he found it easier, because of his satirical temperament to poke fun at an object or person. As most of Mr. Tompkins' work was instantly dismissable, Sir Max was able to devote the rest of his pieces to himself. This is one reason why Beerbohm never transferred the boredom which he felt when seeing these plays, silly plays that differed from one another only in the names of authors and titles. Commenting on this issue John Shand exclaims:

> One reason for this freshness was that he never undertook to review in the formal sense of the word, the entertainments he wrote about. His Saturday articles, like those of his predecessor, George Bernard Shaw, were never reports, garnished with comment. He hardly ever'resumed' a plot or paraphrased a scene. Some point in the play or in the acting would interest him and he weaved his essay around it, not caring if the author might be annoyed at having the rest of his play disregarded, or the mimes angry because their very names were omitted. He was presenting an entertainment of his own.[5]

In selecting the works from the Saturday Review which he intended to publish, Beerbohm reveals that he is ever aware of the importance of the personal element when he says: 'I was what I must bear in mind'.[6]

Beerbohm's first piece in Around Theatres, "Why I Ought Not To Have Become A Dramatic Critic", indicates the tone that his

4 Ibid., p. vii.

5 John Shand, "Max", in Nineteenth Century, London, Vol. 131, issue of August, 1942, p. 85.

6 Max Beerbohm, Op. cit., p. vii.

criticisms will possess. He begins the work by stating myriad disqualifications.

> Frankly, I have none of that instinctive love for the theatre which is the first step towards good criticism of drama. I am not fond of the theatre. Dramatic art interests and moves me less than any of the other arts.[7]

As we have already seen, mockery is Beerbohm's chief instrument in making his essays come alive. In this first essay, we see that he has no intention of leaving this element out of this work. He says that he could not test a theory nor quote a line from Hazlitt, Lamb, Lewes and the rest. Also, he has only a fragmentary recollection of Aristotle's work. However, he ironically remarks:

> Ignorance of the ideas expressed by previous critics is not, I admit, in itself a grave defect. It may even be an advantage, as making cerebration compulsory, and so giving freshness to one's style.[8]

He ends the essay humorously:

> I daresay that there are many callings more uncomfortable and dispiriting than that of dramatic critic. To be a porter on the Underground Railway must, I have often thought, be very terrible. Whenever I feel myself sinking under the stress of my labours, I shall say to myself, "I am not a porter on the Underground Railway".[9]

It is our intention to examine a few of Beerbohm's pieces in Around Theatres, in order to show that these pieces are essentially essays because of the personal element, revealing the rambling and

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7 Max Beerbohm, "Why I Ought Not To Have Become A Dramatic Critic", in Around Theatres, p. 1.

8 Ibid., p. 2.

9 Ibid., p. 4.

discursive type of essay that we have already seen in the last chapter.

The first piece that we are going to consider is called "An Aside", written on April 8, 1899. Beerbohm begins the essay by stating that he saw an extremely dull play during the preceding week in Paris. This is used as an excuse to introduce his main interest or subject which is the difference between a Parisian and a London audience. He states that the Parisian audience loves listening to the declamation of verse:

> A few shabby scenes, a few shabby suppers, are all that the manager need provide, if he has secured a play written in sonorous Alexandrines, and has engaged actors and actresses who can roll out their speeches beautifully, in the grand manner.[10]

However, the London audience prefers a sumptuous production:

> Our public cares not at all for the sound of words, and will not tolerate poetry on the stage unless it gets also gorgeous and solid scenery, gorgeous and innumerable supers. It generally happens that the scenery and the costume for these occasions are hideous and, aesthetically, worse than worthless. But that does not matter. So long as the things look as expensive as the preliminary paragraphists have declared them to be, the public is well satisfied, and will, for their sake, condescend to tolerate a certain measure of poetry. Not a great measure certainly.[11]

His conclusion is obvious: 'In fine, the London public is lacking in that attribute which has been given to the Parisian public: a sense of beauty'.[12] In his typically, rambling manner he begins to talk of the beauty of Paris and London as cities and naturally decides in the

10 Max Beerbohm, "An Aside", in Around Theatres, p. 28.

11 Idem.

12 Ibid., pp. 28-29.

former's favour. Having decided that Paris is beautiful and London hideous, he goes on to say that while the English dramatists have been steadily moving towards realism, and are not particularly concerned with artistic achievement, the French are interested in poetry and romance and are interested in literary beauty primarily. Beerbohm claims that it is only Englishmen who take writers like Balzac, Zola and Maupassant seriously. Beerbohm's tone is light and his mockery is usually subdued by his subtle irony, wit and humour. This lightness of touch changes somewhat when he speaks about Kipling. Beerbohm felt that this writer had genius but was unfortunately not being true to his poetic intuition. Rather, he was playing on the narrow prejudices of the people for whom he was writing.

> Had Mr. Kipling been born a Frenchman his talent would have found no recognition at all. Indeed, it is improbable that he would never have extricated himself from the necessity of journalism, and would at this moment be known to us only as a particularly virulent Anti-Semite, Chauvinist, and fulmination against "perfide Albion"... He was born an Englishman, and thus his talent has expanded to the utmost, and is in no immediate danger of being underrated.[13]

Beerbohm leaves the reader in little doubt as to the side he is on. It is natural that he should feel the way he does, because of his own sense of beauty, his excellent choice of words and carefully polished essays as a whole. However he argues persuasively, mainly because of his sound common sense. Although we have to admit he generalizes rather freely, we feel, that for the most part he is

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13 Ibid., p. 30.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA – ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

right.

> We, in England, are inclined nowadays to care too little for beauty in literature, and to think that the lack of it is no great fault; just as, conversely, the French are inclined to see no great merit in any work of art that does not conform to beauty. Which is the sounder standard - the French or the English? The standard by which a writer like Mr. Kipling would be ruthlessly excluded from the hierarchy of letters, or that by which he is placed promptly at the head of it.[14]

Thus we see that Beerbohm carries on the same personal rambling discursive type of essay that he began in The Works of Max Beerbohm and More. While we must admit that this essay is less personal than the familiar essays, it appears to be a difference in degree rather than in kind. His discursiveness is in this essay reminiscent of his familiar essays. While he does ramble, the different parts are so well integrated and so very closely related that it is almost impossible to remove even one sentence without marring the effect of the whole.

Another essay, in Around Theatres which reflects the personal element and the discursiveness, in which Beerbohm frequently indulges, is the piece "Historic Characters And The Stage". It was written on January 7, 1900. Beerbohm sees a melodrama at the Princess Theatre. In one scene the reigning Queen and two Princesses were represented and Beerbohm finds himself unmoved. He wonders why he had thrilled at the sight of Cleopatra on the stage and not this particular Queen? This question suggests another:

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14 Ibid., p. 30.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA – SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

> How far is it artistically possible to introduce into a play the figures of men or women who are known to exist or to have existed in real life.[15]

Thus we see that the particular play is not important in itself but rather in the questions it raises. Beerbohm believes, that if we have seen the person or know him because of a picture, the physical appearance must be exact. Otherwise, illusion is impossible. He goes on:

> It is (practically) impossible to make on the stage a satisfactory representation of any one who is well known to us by sight; and even if the (practically) impossible feat were achieved we should be not illuded, but merely startled and amused.[16]

Beerbohm's theories are built on his own impressions or reactions to a play. There is no real attempt to be objective. First, he suggests that it is much safer to keep historical figures off the stage because he had seen a play in which the actor who played the Duke of Wellington failed to make him forget that he was watching only an actor. He then proceeds to state that Julius Caesar is believable till he appears. Once on the stage, the illusion is gone. However, he blames this failure on Shakespeare rather than on any theory.

> Why does Caesar leave me cold? It is because Shakespeare has not risen to the conception of him, and has made him a mere shadow.[17]

Beerbohm believes that in most cases Shakespeare has succeeded

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15 Max Beerbohm, "Historic Characters And The Stage", in Around Theatres, p. 55.

16 Ibid., p. 56.

17 Ibid., p. 57.

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA ~ ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

in achieving the proper degree of dramatic illusion in presenting an historical figure. If Shakespeare is capable of achieving this effect, then other dramatists should seek to do this also. Beerbohm has misgivings about present-day dramatists and does not miss this opportunity to ridicule them.

> And if he was great enough, Mr. Stephen Phillips must, presumably, be great enough, also. But I doubt whether there is any other living dramatist whom I would quite readily trust. And so I would lay it down as a general rule for dramatists, that the very illustrious dead had better be let lie, for the present.[18]

This quotation is important because it is typical of Max Beerbohm the essayist. With his usual air of restraint and sophistication Beerbohm pokes fun at what he sees and enjoys himself while doing it. The word 'presumably' allows him to deflate Stephen Phillips and the phrase 'for the present' permits him to round off the thought in a light, mocking, humorous note. It is ironical that Beerbohm, when he discusses the nature of A.B. Walkley's work, should describe his own criticisms so accurately. It must be remembered that both Walkley and Beerbohm are impressionistic, temperamental critics.

> He begins with a phrase, works around his subject, comes back to the phrase, and makes his bow. He is anxious to reveal himself - in other words to show how clever he is, and how amusing. In fact, he is more of an essayist than a critic, though his criticism is always sound and adequate, except when he is dealing with vast, elemental subjects, such as Balzac.[19]

The last piece we are going to examine is the essay entitled "Habit". It is also the last essay which Beerbohm wrote for the

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18 Ibid., p. 57.

19 Max Beerbohm, "William Archer And A.B. Walkley", in Around Theatres, p. 576.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA ~ SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Saturday Review as dramatic critic. It was written on April 16, 1910. Beerbohm begins this essay, which is an essentially familiar essay, by admitting that he has no dread of platitudes. He states:

> What is a platitude but an expression of the wisdom of the ages, the synopsis of a theory that was long ago propounded, tested established, never subverted.[20]

He ironically adds:

> It is good fun to say quite a new thing - marred though the fun is by the certainty that our message has been delivered by forerunners, and forgotten by mankind, times out of number.[21]

Beerbohm says that we are creatures of habit. He reveals his own personality by telling us what these habits are. He tells us that if one reads the same newspaper for many years 'it has acquired a hold on you that none of its contemporaries could now relax'.[22] Certainly, there is nothing original nor profound in this statement. Beerbohm is interested in revealing his own personality. He describes his method of reading the newspaper:

> My own newspaper I approach always through its outskirts, lightly lingering over the reviews of books on the one hand, and the law reports on the other, all the while listening to, but not obeying, the insistent call of the central page, which may or may not contain some tremendous piece of news to stir the very depths of my soul.[23]

Thus we see that Beerbohm's first interest is literature. Although a satirist and humorist, he is not concerned with the large issues of the day. It is interesting that he should mention that he

20 Max Beerbohm, "Habit", in Around Theatres, p. 576.

21 Idem.

22 Idem.

23 Idem.

is interested in law reports. We have already seen that he would rather go to a court of law than a play. This would seem to prove the validity of Bohun Lynch's statement that Beerbohm's affectation is only 'one skin deep'.[24] It is too slight to doubt the fundamental oneness of Beerbohm the writer and Sir Max Beerbohm the man. Beerbohm goes on: 'Habit's Signal triumph is in the power to endear to us even such things as are in themselves repellent'.[25] Again he uses examples from his own life to prove his theory. He had always liked a fire-place but because he was forced to use an oil-stove out of necessity for a week, he was 'stricken with a sense of loss'[26] to see it go. Another example is the fact that he had written criticisms for the Saturday Review for twelve years. It was not the nature of the theme which was repellent.

> Writing has always been uphill work to me, mainly because I am cursed with an acute literary conscience. To seem to write with ease and delight is one of the duties which a writer owes to his readers, to his art. And to contrive that effect involves very great skill and care: it is a matter of technique, a matter of construction partly and partly of choice of words and cadences.[27]

Beerbohm again shows that he is not afraid to take the reader into his confidence. Beerbohm's impeccable prose is the result of painstaking care. This is one of the reasons why it is erroneous to categorize Beerbohm's pieces in the Saturday Review as articles. He whimsically

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24 Bohun Lynch, Max Beerbohm in Perspective, London, Heinemann, 1921, p. 10.

25 Ibid., p. 577.

26 Idem.

27 Ibid., p. 578.

describes how he feels before, during and after this arduous experience.

> On Wednesday I have had always a certain sense of oppression, of misgiving, even of dread. On Friday - the danger past, the sun shining, my feet dancing! And yet (such is habit, and so subtle a thing the human organism), whenever I have let pass a Thursday I have felt uncomfortable, unsatisfied, throughout the day.[28]

He ends the essay by coming back to his main theme 'habit'. He wonders whether he will envy his successor, just as he mourns the abhorred oil-stove. However by the tone of his essay, we feel that he is glad to be finished.

From the essays we have examined it is evident that Beerbohm is an impressionistic critic giving little heed to what his audience would like to read. He never felt that it was necessary to falsify his experiences in order to satisfy the public. The pieces in Around Theatres are essentially essays because of the personal element and because the expression of that personality is more important to him than the subject itself. Carl and Mark Van Doren express this idea succinctly:

> A writer who sits down at his desk with something specific to say in the twentieth century is more likely to call his product an article than he is to claim for it the artistic distinction of being an essay, thus implying that his subject is of more significance than his personality.[29]

Although Shaw refers to Beerbohm as the younger generation, it is really Shaw who is progressive. Beerbohm has no political, social or moral

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28 Ibid., p. 578.

29 Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature Since 1890, New York, P. Appleton, Century Co., 1939, p. 280.

problems to propagate. He has no new axe to grind. As Holbrook Jackson states:

> He was neither new nor old, progressive nor reactionary. He brought to the theatre nothing save his own personality, and advocating no other course, and upholding neither this 'movement' nor that, he contented himself by recording his own dramatic likes and dislikes. And if his penetrating and creative criticism did not always see eye to eye with the upholders of what was called the 'higher drama', it had, in addition to its independence and insight, the lasting charm of good writing.[30]

Sir Max Beerbohm's prose style is as impeccable in Around Theatres, as in his familiar essays proper. With its easy pace-making, the precious labour spent on cadences and meticulous diction, with its light-hearted mockery, its well-timed climaxes and its mischievous, sophisticated manner, Beerbohm's style remains one of the most distinguished aspects of his dramatic criticisms.

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30 Holbrook Jackson, "The Incomparable Max", in The Eighteen Nineties, London, Grant Richards, 1913, p. 119.

CONCLUSION

In our concluding remarks on Sir Max Beerbohm as an essayist, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that Beerbohm's familiar essays are perfect examples of this genre because they are perfect expressions of a unique personality. Also that there is little difference between Sir Max Beerbohm the 'Man' and Max Beerbohm the 'Essayist'.

Sir Max Beerbohm was urbane, elegant, conservative, sophisticated, aristocratic and an intellectual dandy in his private life and these qualities are perfectly reflected in his essays. These qualities taken together indicate why Beerbohm was an escapist. The type of life which Beerbohm loved was a way of life that was rapidly dying out. This is why so many of his essays deal with the past rather than the present. Although Beerbohm criticizes the past, he is essentially a part of it and therefore his criticism tends to be humorous in tone. It is only when he is criticizing the twentieth century that he becomes satirical, because of an intense dislike for things like speed, advertisements, films, standardization and in general the lack of individualism which was everywhere prevalent.

When Beerbohm is reminiscent, self-revealing, self-critical and confidential, he is portraying an affinity with Charles Lamb. His discursiveness is also akin to Lamb's. The quality of urbanity reminds us of that same quality which is such an integral part of the work of Addison and Steele. Although Addison and Steele use satire and irony, Beerbohm rather resembles William Thackeray in his use of these two qualities.

CONCLUSION

In an examination of Beerbohm's dramatic criticisms collected in the volume Around Theatres, it is evident that the personal and rambling elements combined with an impeccable style force us to call them essays instead of articles. This means that the personality is more important than the subject.

Finally, it must be stated that Sir Max Beerbohm's essays do not reveal a writer of the grand scale. Beerbohm's experiences are minor experiences. His thoughts and emotions are narrow in scope and shallow in depth. Beerbohm's claim to fame rests on the assertion that he could perfectly express what he had to say in a unique manner revealing a highly individual personality.

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ABSTRACT

Sir Max Beerbohm died in 1956, and thus his place in literature has not been completely determined. Although he has written one novel and several short stories, it is as an essayist that he has been given the highest praise. The purpose of this study is, primarily, to examine the personal essays of Beerbohm with a view towards ascertaining their artistic value.

Chapter I is devoted to a short history of Beerbohm's life and works. Beerbohm as a writer was found to have been influenced by the decadents but that he was the only aesthete to have escaped the nineties. Beerbohm never considered himself as a professional writer and thus wrote in a leisurely manner. After 1910, he spent the greater part of his time in Rapello, Italy, revealing a definite escapist tendency which is evident in his work.

In Chapter II, the essay as a _genre_ is examined briefly. Beerbohm's literary ancestry is also discussed. Addison, Steele, Lamb and Thackeray are observed to possess qualities which show a marked resemblance to Beerbohm. Beerbohm's essays are seen to fall under the category of familiar essays.

Chapter III considers the familiar essays that are contained in Beerbohm's five published volumes of personal essays: _The Works of Max Beerbohm_; _More_; _Yet Again_; _And Even Now_; and _Mainly On The Air_. Subject matter and technique are both discussed. It is observed that Beerbohm is a humorist when he is dealing with the nineteenth century and a satirist when dealing with the twentieth. Beerbohm is not a

ABSTRACT

writer of literature on the grand scale. His writings do not contain major experiences. His greatest quality lies in the fact that he can express minor experiences perfectly.

Chapter IV contains a study of a few of Beerbohm's dramatic criticisms which are partially collected in a volume entitled Around Theatres. It is observed that while a few of these pieces are articles, many of the works are essays and tend to be familiar essays. Beerbohm is more interested in revealing his personality than discussing any particular subject.

In conclusion it is stated that Beerbohm possesses an impeccable style which perfectly reflects a highly unique and individual personality.