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Shakespeare's use of prose

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THESIS

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF PROSE

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Summary
Shakespeare is renowned for his mastery of blank verse in dramatic composition, but he is not as well known as a writer of prose. Blank verse had been perfected to some degree by Marlowe, Peele, and Kyd, and to it Shakespeare added much. "He varied the pauses; he made it at once more flexible and more massive, more perfectly adapted to catch, with exquisite subtlety, the ever-changing phases of thought, more fitted for the expression of character." Equally important, however, is his mastery of prose, the greater part of which was his own creation, "as absolutely his own as the terza rima was Dante's, as the Spenserian stanza was Spenser's." I shall show in what respects he improved upon the prose of the writers who preceded him, and also in what respects his prose was his own contribution to the drama.

One of the Elizabethan dramatists to whom Shakespeare was indebted was John Lyly, who was the first to use prose "with power and distinction in original plays." Lyly wrote his comedies not for the common people, but for the court. His audience was composed of high born, cultivated people, who were alive to every allusion and as keen of wit as the dramatist himself. His plays depended not on character for their interest, but upon

1. J. C. Collins, "Studies In Shakespeare," P. 182
allusions, antheses, puns, conceits, and similes.

Lyly was the inventor of the style known as Euphuism, which he first used in his "Euphues" and "Euphues and His England", and later in his court comedies. The three characteristics which distinguish this particular style are:

First, "an equal number of words in collateral or antithetical sentences, well balanced, the corresponding words being pointed out by alliteration or rhyme;

Second, comparisons taken from nature;

Third, allusions to history and mythology and apothegms from ancient writers." ¹

The qualities at which Euphuism aimed were strength, brilliancy, and refinement. The following is a quotation from "Euphues" which illustrates these characteristics:

"For although the worm entereth almost into every wood, yet he eateth not the cedar tree; though the stone Cylindrus at every thunderclap roll from the hill, yet the pure sleek-stone mounteth at the noise; though the rust fret the hardest steel, yet doth it not eat into the emerald; though Polypus change his hue, yet the Salamander keepeth his colour; though Proteus transform himself into every shape, yet Pygmalion retaineth his old form; though Aeneas were too fickle to Dido, yet Troilus was too faith-

¹ F. Landmann, "Shakespeare and Euphuism", P. 243
ful to Cressida; though others seem counterfeit in their deeds, yet, Lucilla, persuade yourself that Euphues will be always current in his dealings." ¹

Euphuism had both its faults and its excellencies. In natural history Lyly's facts ranged from the obvious phenomena of nature to such impossible marvels as the "fugitive stone in Cyzico, which moveth away if it be not fastened to some post, or the serpent Amphisbena, which, having at each end a sting, hurteth both ways."² These marvels and pretended observations of nature are used without any scientific interest on Lyly's part. Their value to him consists merely in their picturesqueness. Again, in his examples from history, he repeats glibly statements which have been passed on to him by scholars, in order to appear learned. "Learning divorced from serious purpose became, in Lyly's hands, the slave of his own wanton wit."³

In structural technique, however, his style is skillful. His sentences are sometimes long, but rarely involved and periodic. The ideas of which they are composed are definite and compact, which makes his style very clear. One critic sums up Lyly's contribution to English prose in the following way:

1. "Euphues", edited by Croll and Clemons, P. 58
3. " " 357
"For after all is said, any disposition of the style of Lyly, and of this type of writing in general, without a word of commendation would be unfair and historically one-sided. It is true that there is always too much 'workmanship' in it, but it is also true that certain elements of Euphuistic writing were valuable contributions to the development of English style. The main defects of earlier prose and of popular prose writing were formlessness, or when form was consciously cultivated, heaviness. The courtly writers of the school of Lyly developed point and precision, lightness and melody." 1

Shakespeare employed Euphuism sometimes seriously and sometimes satirically. When he used it seriously, he toned down much of the extravagance to be found in Lyly. Although his wit is just as keen as Lyly's, it is seldom forced; his language has all the point and epigram of his model, with very little false imagery. The following speech of Falstaff resembles the style of Lyly in its antithesis, point, and balance:

"Marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art king, let not us that are squires of the night's body be called theives of the day's beauty: let us be Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon: and let us say we be men of good government, being governed, as the

sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress, the moon, under whose countenance we steal." 1

The following is Prince Henry's reply:

"Thou sayest well, and it holds well too; for the fortune of us that are the moon's men doth ebb and flow like the sea, being governed, as the sea is, by the moon. As, for proof, now: a purse of gold most resolutely snatched on Monday night, and most dissolutely spent on Tuesday morning; got with swearing 'lay by', and spent with crying 'bring in'; now in as ebb as the foot of the ladder, and by and by in as high a flow as the ridge of the gallows." 2

In these passages we note all the wit which characterizes Lyly's style, without any of the extravagance of language and forced figures. The style is in perfect balance and absolutely clear.

In his satirical use of Euphuism, Shakespeare recognized the puerility of this style, and imitated it for the purpose of making fun of it. "Love's Labour's Lost" is composed almost entirely of Euphuism, especially the speeches of Don Armado, Moth, and Holofernes. The following passage from one of Don Armado's letters to Jacquenetta is an illustration:

"By heaven, that thou art most fair is most

1. "1 Henry IV", Act 1, Scene 2
2. "    "    "
infallible; true that thou art beauteous; truth itself that thou art lovely. More fairer than fair, beautiful than beauteous, truer than truth itself: have commiseration on thy heroical vessel. The magnanimous and most illustrious king Cophetua set eye upon the pernicious and indubitate begger Zenelophon; and he it was that might rightly say, 'veni, vidi, vici'; which to anatomize in the vulgar, O base and obscure vulgar, videlicet, he came, saw, and overcame; he came one; saw two; overcome three. Who came? the king: why did he come? to see: why did he see? to overcome: to whom came he? to the begger: what saw he? the begger: who overcame he? the begger. The conclusion is victory; on whose side? the king's: the captive is enriched: on whose side? the begger's: the catastrophe is a nuptial: on whose side? the king's? no, both in one, or one in both. I am the king; for so stands the comparison: thou the begger, for so winteseth thy lowliness."

What could be more extravagant and absolutely insincere than such a speech. It is in keeping with the character of the man who wrote it. Don Armado is trying to show how much he knows, and the fact is he doesn't know very much, as shown by the fact that he attributes the famous words of Julius Caesar to the wrong person. His words are as "sounding brass and tinkling symbols, signifying nothing."

1. "Love's Labour's Lost", Act IV, Scene 1
The following passage from one of Falstaff's speeches resembles the references to natural history in Lyly:

"For though the camomile the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears." ¹

Holofernes represents the pedantic scholar of the day; the English-Latin was very fashionable in the court. In the following speech Holofernes is trying to make people think that he is very learned:

"Most barbarous intimation; yet a kind of insinuation, as it were, 'in via', in way, of explication; 'facere', as it were, replication, or, rather, 'ostentare', to show, as it were, his inclination, after his undressed, unpolished, uneducated, unpruned, untrained, or rather, unlettered, or, ratherest, unconfirmed fashion, to insert again my 'haud credo' for a deer." ²

In "Hamlet" young Osric typifies the foppish courtiers, with his hyperbolical language:

"Nay, in good faith; for mine ease, in good faith. Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes; believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great showing: indeed, to speak fellingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry, for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman

¹ "1 Henry 1V", Act 11, Scene 4
², "Love's Labour's Lost", Act 1V, Scene 2
Hamlet purposely tries to bewilder Osric by using language which is even more stilted than Osric's.

"Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you; though, I know, to divide him inventorially would dizzy the arithmetic of memory, and yet but yaw neither, in respect to his quick sail. But, in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article, and his infusion of such dearth and rareness, as, to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror; and who else would trace him, his umbrage, nothing more."  

Two other dramatists to whom Shakespeare is indebted are Robert Greene and Christopher Marlowe. This indebtedness lies in the field of comic prose and also the prose of colloquial dialogue.

In contrast to Lyly, who wrote plays for the court and whose characters were modelled on the ladies and gentlemen of the court, Greene wrote plays in which many of the characters were plain everyday people. He portrayed English country scenes and English country people with a fine fidelity. In the speech of all the rustics, clowns, fools, and vulgar people, Greene used prose rather than verse. Some of his prose is so vulgar that it would not bear repeating.

1. "Hamlet", Act V, Scene 2
2. " " 
In Marlowe's plays there is not very much prose, but when there are prose passages, they are of a comic or colloquial nature. In "The Massacre at Paris", ignoble characters use prose in planning murder; in "Dr. Faustus", much of the prose is of a humorous or satirical nature; in "The Jew of Malta" Ithamore writes to Barabas in prose, asking him to lend him some money.

When Shakespeare began to write, he saw at once that prose was the proper vehicle of expression for characters of this type. His sense of propriety in dramatic art would not allow him to put poetry into the mouths of fools and clowns. In "Hamlet" he says, "--- the purpose of playing --- was and is to hold, as 't were, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." In order to be consistent with this principle, he made his characters speak as they would in real life. He knew that fools and uneducated people never thought or spoke in verse; even educated people in their ordinary discourse speak in prose. Accordingly, he used prose where it was appropriate and reserved his poetry for occasions which called forth great emotions. Even in colloquial and comic expression, Shakespeare is superior to Greene and Marlowe. Shakespeare's prose is never as vulgar as much
of Greene's is, and is much more flexible than either Greene's or Marlowe's. Although Greene was familiar with the people in low life, his genius was not great enough to give him perfect command over the speech of the vulgar or to enable him to reproduce it with exactness, as Shakespeare does.

Shakespeare's colloquial prose is varied, and is capable of expressing the moods of many different characters. Jack Cade, Touchstone, Bottom, Bardolph, Mrs. Quickly, and Dogberry all use it in their humorous speeches. Whenever the rabble appears on the stage, as in "Julius Caesar" and Coriolanus, prose is the vehicle of expression. Prose is used in the wit combats between Falstaff and Prince Henry; in the ordinary conversation of country folks, like Audrey and William in "As You Like It"; in letters and formal documents; and in speeches in which the sole purpose is to give information, as in Casca's account of Antony's offering the crown to Caesar. "The Merry Wives of Windsor" contains much more than prose than verse, because the main characters are humble folks. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream, the chief characters, who are high-born people, and the fairies speak in verse, but Bottom and friends, crude rustics, who furnish the humor, speak in prose. Their prose forms a good background for the stilted verse of their interlude.
In "The Merchant of Venice", when Bassanio asks Shylock to lend him three thousand ducats, Shylock considers the matter in a business-like way. He speaks in good straightforward prose:

"---my meaning, in saying he is a good man, is to have you understand me that he is sufficient: yet his means are in supposition: he hath an argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies; I understand, moreover, upon the Rialto, he hath a third at Mexico, a fourth for England, and other ventures he hath squandered abroad. But ships are but boards, sailors but men: there be land rats, water rats, land theives, water theives, I mean pirates; then there is the peril of waters, winds, and rocks. The man is, notwithstanding, sufficient. I think I may take his bond."  

There is nothing emotional about this speech. Shylock is a sharp business man, and he is considering very carefully how much risk there would be in such a loan. Presently Antonio comes in. Shylock hates him, and the very sight of him arouses the most bitter feeling in Shylock's breast. Shylock immediately ceases to speak prose, and begins to show his feelings in verse:

"How like a fawning publican he looks,  
I hate him for he is a Christian."

This is one instance of the difference between Shakespeare's
use of prose and his use of verse.

Prose is used to express the thoughts of the insane. In "King Lear", Edgar, feigning madness speaks prose, and Lear, after he becomes really mad, also uses prose. In fact the approach of his insanity is indicated by his change from verse to prose. In "Hamlet" Ophelia speaks in prose after she loses her mind. In regard to this use of prose, Mr. Bradley, in "Shakespearean Tragedy", says, "The idea underlying this custom is that the regular rhythm of verse would be inappropriate where the mind is supposed to have lost its balance and to be at the mercy of chance impressions coming in from the outside, or of ideas emerging from its unconscious depths and pursuing one another across its passive surface. There is rather an intense suffering which forces expression in simple, bare diction."

Lady Macbeth, in her sleep-walking scene, also speaks in prose because the state of her mind is very close to insanity:

"Out, damned spot; out, I say. One; two; why then 'tis time to do it: Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie; a soldier and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?---- The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now? No more of that, my lord, no more of that: you mar all with this starting."

1. Page 399
2. "Macbeth", Act V, Scene 1
This disjointed speech shows that her conscience has been bothering her and that thoughts of the murder haunt her mind continually. This is also one proof that she is not as wicked and hard-hearted as one would suppose from what she says at the beginning of the play.

The Porter's scene in "Macbeth" is a masterpiece of comic prose. The murder of Duncan has been committed, and both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth fear to think of what they have done. The Porter relieves the tenseness of the scene with the following speech: (Knocking within)

"Here's a knocking indeed. If a man were porter of hell-gate he should have old turning the key. (Knocking) Knock, knock, knock. Who's there, i' the name of Beelzebub? Here's a farmer that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty: come in time; have napkins enow about you; here you'll sweat for it. (Knocking) Knock, knock. Who's there, i' the other devil's name? Faith, here's an equivocator, that could swear in both scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven: O, come in, equivocator. (knocking) Knock, knock, knock. Who's there? Faith, here's an English tailor come hither for stealing out of a French hose; come in, tailor, here you may roast your goose. (knocking) Knock, knock. Never at quiet. What are you? But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to
let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to everlasting bonfire. 1

This speech, as well as the speeches of the grave-diggers in "Hamlet", shows Shakespeare's power in blending the comic with the tragic. The two are blended in life. There is no such thing as pure comedy or pure tragedy in reality, but life is a combination of both, with one or the other predominating. Here we listen to the puns of the Porter, but behind it all we feel the tragedy of the situation.

Shakespeare uses another form of comic diction, but this is his own creation rather than an adaptation from any other dramatist. I refer to the prose of high comedy. His ladies and gentlemen, when the occasion demands something other than poetry, speak in prose, but this prose is very different from the prose of the common people. Neither has it any of the pompousness of Euphuism. Shakespeare knew all classes of society in Elizabethan England, and he realized that one style of diction was not suitable for all characters. Even in the matter of comic prose he distinguishes between the speech of the lower classes and the speech of the upper classes. This prose of high comedy is the speech of Celia and Rosalind in "As You Like It"; of Beatrice and Benedick in

1. "Macbeth", Act 11, Scene 1
"Much Ado About Nothing"; and of Viola in "Twelfth-Night."
The following is a very apt criticism of this style:

"Though it is occasionally marred by the coarseness which was, in the days of Elizabeth or James, not merely venial but habitual, it is as a rule essentially refined. Its coarseness never degenerates into vulgarity. Its tone and spirit are those of an aristocratic society. It is generally polished and graceful. It abounds in wit and epigram. When it rises, it is never stilted; when it sinks, it is never mean. It reflects every shade and every tone of thought with exact fidelity. As the vehicle of light and playful irony it is eminently happy. Its persiflage is not inferior to the best which can be found in Moliere or De Musset. Its rhythm is sometimes so musical, its cadences are so exquisitely modulated, that it may fairly be questioned whether the most finished paragraphs in Addison could, in point of composition, be pronounced superior to it."

The first example of this style which I will give is from "Twelfth-Night". Viola, dressed as a young page, goes to woo Olivia for the Duke. Neither the Duke or Olivia know of Viola's disguise. Viola, enjoying the joke, addresses Olivia in the most sentimental manner:

"Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty,

I pray you tell me if this be the lady of the house, for I never saw her: I would be loath to cast away my speech; for, besides it is excellently well penned; I have taken great pains to con it. Good beauties, let me sustain no scorn; I am very comptible, even to the least sinister usage."

Rosalind, in "As You Like It, delights in teasing Orlando;

Orl. "For ever and a day".

Ros. "Say a day, without the ever. No, no, Orlando; men are April when they woo, December when they wed: maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives. I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen; more clamorous than a parrot against rain; more new-fangled than an ape; more giddy in my desires than a monkey: I will weep for nothing, like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry; I will laugh like a hyen, and that when thou art inclined to sleep."

Orlando came later than he promised, and Rosalind scolded him good-naturedly:

Ros. "Why, how now, Orlando; where have you been all this while? You a lover. An you serve me such another trick, never come in my sight more.

1. "Twelfth-Night", Act 1, Scene 5
Orl. My fair Rosalind, I come within an hour of my promise.

Ros. Break an hour's promise in love. He that will divide a minute into a thousand parts, and break but a part of a thousandth part of a minute in the affairs of love, it may be said of him that Cupid hath clapped him o' the shoulder, but I warrant him heart-whole.

Orl. Pardon me, dear Rosalind.

Ros. Nay, an you be so tardy, come no more in my sight: I had as lief be woo'd of a snail.

Orl. Of a snail.

Ros. Ay, of a snail; for though he comes slowly, he carries his house on his head; a better jointure, I think, than you can make a woman; besides, he brings his destiny with him."  

The speeches of Rosalind indicate clearly her character. She is bright, witty, well acquainted with the ways of the world, thoroughly refined, and very fond of fun. Like Viola, she loves to play a joke, but her jokes are never coarse or harmful to anyone.

The discussion between Portia and Nerissa about the suitors whom Portia has had savors of the wit so characteristic of high comedy:

Ner. "First, there is the Neapolitan prince.
Por. Ay, that's a colt indeed, for he doth nothing but talk of his horse; and he makes it a great appropriation to his own good parts that he can shoe him himself:
Ner. Then there is the County Palatine.

1. "As You Like It", Act IV, Scene 1
Por. He doth nothing but frown; as who should say, 'An if you will not have me, choose.' He hears merry tales and smiles not; I fear he will prove the weeping philosopher when he grows old, being so full of unmanly sadness in his youth. I would rather be married to a death's head with a bone in his mouth than to either of these. God defend me from these two.

Ner. How say you by the French lord, Monsieur Le Bon?

Por. God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man. In truth, I know it is a sin to be a mocker: but he; why he hath a horse better than the Neapolitan's; a better bad habit of frowning than the County Palatine: he is every man and no man; if a thrrostle sing, he falls straight a-capering; he will fence with his own shadow; if I should marry him I would marry twenty husbands. If he would despise me I would forgive him; for if he love me to madness I will never requite him."

Portia is one of Shakespeare's most admirable heroines. She has many splendid traits of character, and wit is among them.

In "Much Ado About Nothing" Beatrice and Benedick engage in wit combats.

Bene. "Thou has frightened the word out of his right sense, so forcible is thy wit. But, I must tell thee plainly, Claudio undergoes my challenge; and either I must shortly

1. "The Merchant of Venice", Act 11, Scene 1
hear from him, or I will subscribe him a coward. And, I pray thee now, tell me, for which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me?

Beat. For them all together; which maintained so politic a state of evil that they will not admit any good part to intermingle with them. But for which of my good parts did you first suffer love for me?

Ben. Suffer love; a good epithet. I do suffer love, indeed, for I love thee against my will.

Beat. Inspite of your heart, I think; alas, poor heart. If you spite it for my sake, I will spite it for yours; for I will never love that which my friend hates.

Ben. Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably.

Beat. It appears not in this confession; there's not one wise man among twenty that will praise himself.

Ben. An old, old instance, Beatrice, that lived not in the time of good neighbors: if a man do not erect in this age his own tomb ere he dies, he shall live no longer in monument than the bell rings and the widow weeps.

Beat. And how long is that, think you?

Ben. Question: why, an hour in clamor, and a quarter in rheum: therefore it is most expedient for the wise to be the trumpet of his own virtues, as I am to myself. So
much for praising myself, who, I myself will bear
witness, is praiseworthy." ¹

Beatrice's wit is generally more spontaneous
than Benedick's, and shows less reflection. As a rule,
Beatrice gets the better of him.

Another type of prose which is clearly Shakespeare's
own invention, and for which he is indebted to no one is
his rhetorical prose. There are not many specimens of this
style in his plays, because he generally used poetry to
express subjects more elevated than ordinary speech. An
excellent example of this type of prose is Brutus's
speech over the dead body of Caesar.

"Romans, countrymen, and lovers, hear me for my
cause; and be silent, that you may hear: believe me for
mine honor; and have respect to mine honor that you may
believe: censure me in your wisdom; and awake your senses
that you may the better judge. If there be any in this
assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say that
Brutus's love to Caesar was no less than his. If, then,
that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this
is my answer, --- Not that I loved Caesar less, but that
I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living, and
die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead to live all free

¹ "Much Ado About Nothing", Act V, Scene 2
men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him, as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honor him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears for his love; joy for his fortune; honor for his valor; and death for his ambition. Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak; for him have I offended. I pause for reply.

Citizens: None, Brutus, none.

Brutus: Then none have I offended. I have done no more to Caesar than you shall do to Brutus. The question of his death is enrolled in the Capitol; his glory is not extenuated, wherein he was worthy; nor his offences enforced, for which he suffered death. Here comes his body, mourned by Mark Antony, who, though he had no hand in his death, shall receive the benefit of his dying, a place in the commonwealth; as which of you shall not? With this I depart, that, as I slew my best lover for the good of Rome, I have the same dagger for myself, when it shall please my country to need my death."

The question immediately arises, "Why did Brutus

1. "Julius Caesar", Act III, Scene 2
deliver his funeral oration in prose, when Antony delivered his in such exquisite blank verse?" I think that the explanation lies not in the subject-matter of the speech, but in the occasion of it. Brutus had been persuaded, against his will, by Cassius to join the conspiracy against Caesar. Brutus loved Caesar, but he allowed himself to listen to Cassius until he finally believed that Caesar was dangerous to Rome. Brutus preferred patriotism to everything else, even love for his friends. He firmly believed that he had done the right thing, and in this speech he explained to the mob his reasons for the deed. Inasmuch as he was talking to the mob, and inasmuch as he was trying to appeal to their reason rather than their emotions, he delivered his oration in prose. Antony, on the other hand, was incensed at the deed and heartbroken at the death of his beloved Caesar, and he gave vent to the feelings of his heart in poetry, hoping at the same time to appeal to the emotions of the mob. This scene also shows how carefully Shakespeare distinguished between the use of prose and verse.

Another illustration of this rhetorical prose is the description of the shipwreck by the clown in "The Winter's Tale". It is difficult to see why such a powerful
and vivid description should have been written in prose rather than in verse. The reason probably is that the person who spoke these words was of low degree, a clown, and so was the person to whom he was talking, a shepherd. As a general rule Shakespeare made persons of a humble station in life speak prose on nearly every occasion. This was particularly true of the plays written after his experimental period.

Clown: "I have seen two such sights, by sea and by land; but I am not to say it is a sea, for it is now the sky: betwixt the firmament and it, you cannot thrust a bodkin's point.

I would you did but see how it chafes, how it rages, how it takes up the shore; but that's not to the point. O, the most piteous cry of the poor souls; sometimes to see 'em, and not to see 'em; now the ship boring the moon with her mainmast, and anon swallowed with yest and froth, as you'd thrust a cork in a hogshead. And then for the land service,—to see how the bear tore out his shoulder-bone; how he cried to me for help, and said his name was Antigonus, a nobleman. But to make an end of the ship, to see how the sea flap-dragoned it: but, first, how the poor souls roared, and the sea mocked them; and how the poor gentleman roared, and how
the bear mocked him, both roaring louder than the sea or weather."

What could be clearer than the series of word pictures which pass before our eyes? How impressive has Shakespeare made these pictures by his use of active verbs. Such a passage could not be paralleled in the prose of the dramatists who preceded him.

The last type of prose which is essentially Shakespeare's own creation is his highly polished poetical prose. In this style he has raised prose to the loftiest pitch of verse. There are very few examples of this in the plays, but the most excellent illustration is to be found in "Hamlet".

"I have of late---but wherefore I know not--lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appears no other to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is man; how noble in reason; how infinite in faculty; in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like

an angel; in apprehension how like a god; the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals. And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? \(^1\)

The beauty of the passage speaks for itself, with its perfect balance and suggestive imagery. No finer piece of impassioned prose is to be found even in De Quincy, who is a master of that style.

Again, the question presents itself as to why such marvelous words were uttered in prose rather than in verse. I will venture an explanation. Hamlet, when he soliloquized, gave vent to his emotions in blank verse. He was suspicious of nearly everybody at the court, and dared not say what he thought and felt except when he was alone or talking to Horatio or his mother. When he spoke to the others, he did so in prose, partly in order that the King and courtiers might think that he was mad, and partly because he did not feel free to speak his thoughts aloud in their presence. In the scene where he uttered this speech, he was talking to Rosencrantz and Guildernstern, whom he mistrusted. There is another instance of his use of prose in the scene where he was talking to Ophelia. He began to speak to her in blank verse. Suddenly he

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1. "Hamlet", Act 11, Scene 2
saw something that caused him to become suspicious. There is nothing in the text to indicate just what this was, but I think that perhaps he saw the arras move, behind which the King and Polonius were hiding. He mistrusted something, and changed from blank verse to prose.

Summing up the ways in which Shakespeare used prose, I have shown that he improved upon two kinds which already existed, and created three types which were absolutely new. Lyly, writing for the court, used the ostentatious Euphuistic style. When Shakespeare adopted this, except when he used it satirically, he retained all the wit, but rejected all the false imagery. Greene, who depicted country life and tavern scenes, used an awkward prose dialogue. Shakespeare improved upon this type, and made it flexible enough to express the thoughts of many different characters. In addition, he invented three other kinds; namely, the prose of high comedy, the rhetorical, and the impassioned prose. Of all the Elizabethan dramatists, Shakespeare alone could write prose which was suitable for all classes of society and for all occasions. Under him prose rose to the heights and sank to the depths of
human feeling, and acquired a perfect simplicity and purity hitherto unknown.

The stages of development through which his prose passed are as clear as the stages in the development of his verse. Of his earlier plays, there is no prose in "Henry VI", Part 1; nor in "King John"; or "Richard II". It appeared for the first time in the second part of "Henry VI", and here it is as stiff as any of the prose of Marlowe or Greene, as for example:

"Then, Saunders, sit there, the lyingest knave in Christendom. If thou hadst been born blind, thou mightst as well have known all our names as thus to name the several colors we do wear; but suddenly to nominate them all, it is impossible." 1

Of the plays of his second period, "Henry IV" contains about equal proportions of prose and verse, but the prose is confined to comic scenes. In "Twelfth-Night", "Much Ado About Nothing", and "As You Like It", we find prose in excess of verse, and much of this is his delightful prose of high comedy.

In his tragic period, he employed prose in serious as well as comic passages. Here the prose is as

1. "2 Henry VI", Act 11, Scene 1
excellent as the blank verse. It is here that we find that rhetorical and impassioned prose, of which I have already quoted examples.

To quote Mr. J. Churton Collins, "Shakespeare showed for the first time how colloquial prose could be dignified without being pedantic; how it could be full and massive without subordinating the Saxon to the Latin element; how it could be stately without being involved; how it could be musical, without borrowing its rhythm and its cadence from the rhetoricians of Rome. He made it plastic. He taught it to assume, and to assume with propriety, every tone. He showed its capacity for dialectics, for exposition, for narrative, for soliloquy. He purified it from archaisms." 1

In consideration of Shakespeare's power and skill in perfecting both blank verse and prose, we might well say with Hamlet, "What a piece of work is man; how noble in reason; how infinite in faculty; in apprehension how like a god."

When Shakespeare began to write, he found that the prose which Lyly, Greene, and Marlowe had used in the drama was inadequate. The prose of Lyly contained antithesis, point, and balance, but the language was too extravagant. It sounded well, but meant nothing. The prose of Greene and Marlowe was stiff and coarse. Shakespeare improved upon Lyly's Euphuistic style by toning down its extravagance, but retained its balance and epigram. He made the colloquial prose of Greene and Marlowe more flexible and refined.

In addition, Shakespeare created three kinds of prose unlike anything that then existed; namely, the prose of high comedy, rhetorical prose, and impassioned prose. He then had at his command for many kinds of characters and many different situations, suitable prose. The prose which had been used by his predecessors was very limited in scope. Shakespeare recognized this fact, and succeeded admirably in developing a prose style which would be flexible enough to express many shades of meaning. Shakespeare's prose ranges from the jests of the fools and clowns to the poetical prose of Hamlet.
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