

#132 – The Elements Of Eloquence, Mark Forsyth

BOOK REVIEW

Krauser PUA | 29 December, 2018 | by krauserpua



It's my bet that most of you young yobbos know what **alliteration** is. Perhaps you recognise the sweet scent of **synaesthesia** in my words. And I'll bet you my **hyperbole** has kept made your heart beat a millions times a minute. But, I ask you this....

.... do you know what an epanalepsis is? Or a prolepsis *[I]*? Or a scesis onomaton?

Nor did I but having read Mark Forsyth's *The Elements Of Eloquence* I do now and what is more, I'm very glad I do. You see, this is the *Daygame Mastery* of prose writing. There, I said it. Now I have to explain why.

I've been trying my bestest to become a good writer and thus have approached it with the same mindset I did with Game. The first thing is action – learning through practice – so I've been writing an awful lot. This blog is the obvious outlet of such energies but it's not like I listened to any of those sober heads who warned, "woah Nick! you might want to slow down in churning out them there memoirs." Stephen King in his book *On Writing* advises very strongly to write every single day whether you feel like it or not. It's only through doing that you improve. But that's not all there is to it.

My 2018 book review project was borne partly out of a desire to improve my writing because, it seems, all the good writers recommend reading a lot. So, I dipped into books from all genres, eras, and topics to expose myself to many styles. By writing a short essay on each I converted the reading process into **active learning** both in absorbing lessons from the books but also in teaching myself how to find themes and write about them in short order. Call it a one-year research project. But what else?



I know, it looks like "... teaches pedophilia"

I tried the various *Masterclass* seminar products such as those of Aaron Sorkin, David Mamet, Malcolm Gladwell, and James Patterson. But of every source I tried, *The Elements Of Eloquence* is by far the most useful. That's because it is a toolkit. It's a very specific actionable toolkit on how to improve the literary quality of your prose. Until now, I didn't even realise there were guidebooks for this kind of thing. Imagine the way **Daygame Mastery** and **Daygame Infinite** explain the theory, give practical examples, and then explain how to create your own versions – that's exactly what this book does with the writer's art. It has 39 chapters and each introduces a figure of rhetoric. A what? Mark, you explain it mate:

The techniques for making a single phrase striking and memorable just by altering the wording. Not by saying something different, but by saying something in a different way. They are the formulas for producing great lines.

These formulas were thought up by the Ancient Greeks and then added to by the Romans. As Shakespeare set to work England was busy having the Renaissance. So the classical works on rhetoric were dug out, translated and adapted for use in English.... So Shakespeare learnt and learnt and got better and better, and his lines become more and more striking and more and more memorable.

Ah, I see. So, Mark, I don't suppose you could pick the best of these figures and then patiently guide me through each one so I can begin improving my own prose? What, you already did that, with 39 of them? Smashing! Good lad! But I'm worried that focusing so much on style may hinder the dialectical value of

my work. I'm not looking to become a bloody poet.

A poet is not someone who has great thoughts. That is the menial duty of a philosopher. A poet is someone who expresses his thoughts, however commonplace they may be, exquisitely. That is the one and only difference between the poet and everybody else.

Ah! Gotcha.

Lets give an example, with Chapter 3's **antithesis**. The essence of the antithesis is simple: first you mention one thing: then you mention another. Oscar Wilde used to do it by making the first side of the antithesis something pretty obvious, then begin the second side to lead you into expecting something else equally obvious, but surprise you with an odd turn (making it an epigram). For example:

- 'The well-bred contradict other people. The wise contradict themselves.'
- 'If a man is a gentleman he knows quite enough. If he is not a gentleman whatever he knows is bad for him.'
- 'Journalism is unreadable, and literature is not read.'

It all comes down to plays on the basic formula of X is Y, and not X is not Y. It works as rhetoric because it appears final and certain through the phrasing. For example, compare the same thought expressed first as a philosopher and then secondly as a poet (using antithesis)

- Those who can't write themselves instead instruct other people on how to write.
- Those who can, do: those who can't, teach.

Right then, are we all happy with the basic idea of the book? It's like a To Do list. I imagine myself sitting down with *The Elements Of Eloquence* at hand while a draft manuscript of *Balls Deep* sits open on my laptop. I then proceed to pick a figure of rhetoric and add it in a bunch of times, then pick the next figure and add those in. *Yes, ladies and gentlemen, we'll need to add a **Merism** in here....* A what? A Merism is when you don't say the group/category name but instead name all of its constituent parts. Thus *ladies and gentlemen* is a merism for *people*, because all people are either ladies or gentlemen [2]. Tennyson used merism in his *The Charge Of The Light Brigade*:

Cannon to right of them.
Cannon to left of them.
Cannon in front of them...

Forsyth notes it would've been far more efficient to simply say cannon were in every direction, or "Cannon quaquaversally", but it doesn't have the same rhetorical effect, does it? No, sonny Jim, it does not. I'll give you a few more figures of rhetoric so you get a flavour of just how much is in this book.

Anadiplosis: Taking the last word of a sentence and repeat it as the first word of the next, to create the illusion of a logical connection. See the promotional material for *Gladiator*: "The general who became a slave. The slave who became a gladiator. The gladiator who defied and emperor." Or perhaps Yoda, "Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." That's Anadiplosis.



Well, are you?

Tricolon: Using the magic number three to create a rhythm and implied connection between all elements: "I came; I saw; I conquered" or "Sun, sea, and sex." They have alliteration too, as does, "wine, women and song." [3]

Parataxis and Hypotaxis: These are two poles in sentence length and complexity. Parataxis imitates the short clipped sentences of direct spoken English, and would be described as “punchy” or “crisp” prose. Hypotaxis is the long sentences with many conjunctions and sub-clauses seen in older novels, aimed at a mass readership with a higher overall IQ and level of education. Forsyth explains the style thus:

Hypotaxis was what made English prose so terribly, terribly civilised. It still works. Angry letters of complaint, redundancy notices and ransom notes will, if written in careful hypotaxis, sound as reasonable, measured and genial as a good dose of rough Enlightenment pornography. Yet hypotaxis (along with reason) has been declining for a century or more. Gone are those heady and incomprehensible sentences of Johnson, Dickens and Austen, replaced with the cruel, brutalist parataxes of writers whose aim is to agitate and distress. The long sentence is now a ridiculed rarity [4] usually hidden away in the Terms and Conditions, its commas and colons, clauses and caveats [5] languishing unread and unloved.

I can't recommend this book highly enough for aspiring writers. I come from a martial arts and video games background where I'm used to instructional manuals and seminars where complex chains of action (e.g. a triangle choke to omoplata transition, or a *Dark Souls* boss fight) are broken down into constituent parts that can be analysed and perfected. That is exactly what *The Elements Of Eloquence* does for sentence construction. It's also very humorously written so you'll be chuckling your chubby cheeks as you peruse its precise pages.

*Serious seducers of sexual sentiment should probably purchase my predatory, precise and perfected publications: **Daygame Mastery**, **Daygame Infinite** and **Daygame Overkill**. [Check them out here.](#)*



[1] No, that's not what porno actresses get after too many anal scenes.

[2] There are only 2 genders, and 74 mental illnesses.

[3] As does *Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Fuhrer!* It's powerful rhetoric.

[4] Alliteration

[5] And again. See?

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